Dissertation data discovery and dissemination:
linking users to the datasets behind doctoral research

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We concur with the conference planners: “There has been an explosion of data sources and topics; vast changes in compilation and dissemination methods; increasing awareness about access…” Therefore, we offer a glimpse into the latest trends and best practices in research and scholarship by investigating recent doctoral dissertations across four disparate fields of study.

1. Do abstracts accurately indicate the use of data (primary or secondary)?

2. Do titles or tables of content adequately reflect the use and availability of data?

3. What is the nature of the collected data?

4. Are there disciplinary differences regarding dataset use, reuse and sharing?

Conclusions

Very few dissertation abstracts indicate the use or availability of data or data resources.

Dissertation datasets tend to be unique, and are configured to serve only the immediate need of the dissertation; this points up tough choices for archiving and preservation.

Cultural and ethical imperatives of disciplinary groupings may influence the use and reuse of data.

The increase in data-driven inquiry presents an opportunity for research libraries to enhance their relevance and institutional reach. The library can avoid becoming marginalized by fully serving the needs of data-seeking users.