

DEFINITIONAL REVIEW OF GREY LITERATURE

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ABSTRACT:

In the detailed study of the literature on the topic of research, attempt is made to comprehend the basic concepts and definitions of Grey Literature, including its importance, types of grey sources, institutional repositories and research papers published in the field of study. While covering the literature in a comprehensive way, various sources available in print as well as, digital formats have been accessed and referred. The web sources, especially the aspects that project trends and developments in the field of study have been highlighted in brief. The programmes and services of the professional organization called Grey Net International, Amsterdam, are explained highlighting the popular publications, annual conferences and who's who in Grey Literature. This chapter, in the end provides summaries of several important publications relevant to the field of study under following broad headings.

1.1 HISTORY AND DEFINITIONS:

Grey literature was for many years synonymous with 'report literature'. Documents evolving from research and development, especially from the aviation and aeronautics industries, were very important means of communicating research test results. One such report prepared in 1915 was NASA's first report. But it was World War II's onslaught that had the greatest impact on report literature, making it "a major means of communication" (Augur, 1989). The hallmark of that war was the development of advanced

technological weapons, ranging from sophisticated tanks to the nuclear bomb. These breakthroughs in science made it necessary to communicate accurately and quickly. The technical report was widely used to disseminate information (Adams, *et al*, 2016).

The decades that followed saw the continuation of staggering amounts of accumulated scientific and technological research to enhance both military and communication systems. One thing that made grey literature so attractive and important as a separate communication medium was the initial need for classifications of security or confidentiality that prevented the publication of documents in a conventional way... Grey literature is a term used to describe information products which are created and distributed in order to disseminate knowledge (ideas, facts, opinions) rather than to sell for a profit. In practice, and for that reason, grey literature is known as information which is not marketed and distributed by commercial publishing organizations. The term 'grey' stems from the fact that such information is not publicised and not available through the traditional channels of publishers and booksellers. Grey does not imply any qualification; it is merely a characterization of the distribution mode. In fact, a large proportion of grey literature is distributed in both modes: 'grey' in the form of pre-prints, 'white' in the form of a published article. The quality is often identical; the main difference being that 'white' literature has a quality stamp provided by the publisher and its embedded peer review process (Cossette, P. 2004).

Grey literature is a term that is probably

not widely understood outside the world of librarians. In the science and social sciences and even within this circle, there are varying degrees of agreement and consensus on what grey literature is. Firstly even the spelling 'grey' or 'gray' is upon for debate, the distinction tends to be based on the origin of location of the literature or country of publication, with gray being favored by countries using US English spellings. The next difficulty is in defining grey literature, there have been a number of attempts at definitions, both formal and informal.

The term ' gray literature' brings to mind connotations of darkness, apathy, indifference, and doubtful authority. This is far from true after investigation, unless you find papers on sea grass from eminent scientists to be boring. Well, it's all different. To these writers, the ' gray' in gray literature is more likely to have some connection with the ' gray matter' of the brain as much of it appears highly intellectual and is important for research and development in many subject areas. An article published on the Internet in Information World Review calls "the unsung hero, the foot soldier, the foundation of the building" grey literature ; it is literature that is usually not accessible through conventional channels. Charles P. Augur (1989) writes in his informative book on grey literature that this is not a new late twentieth-century phenomenon but something that has been considered a genre since at least the 1920s, especially among the scientific circles in Europe. The 4th international conference on gray literature held in Luxembourg defined gray literature as: "Information produced in electronic and print formats at all levels of government, business and industry, not controlled by commercial publishing, i.e. where publishing is not the main activity of the producing body" (Tillett,2006).



Figure 1.1: Grey Literature Typology

Whereas the US Inter-agency on gray literature working group (1995) defined it as; "foreign or domestic open source material that usually is available through specialized channels and may not enter normal channels or systems of publication, distribution, bibliographic control of acquisition by book sellers or subscription agents." These definitions have been accepted by some of the leading practitioners in grey literature, but there are more informal definitions and descriptions including two particular favorites which sum up grey literature succinctly. Anything that won't stand up on a shelf on its own, and when you are cataloguing new material, it is the stuff that keeps being shuffled to the bottom of the pile. Grey Literature, therefore is : Not primarily produced for commercial publication - producers of grey

literature have traditionally been non-commercial publishers. Major suppliers include government organizations, universities, think tanks etc. for whom the publication of reports, newsletters etc. is a means of getting the message across, rather than publishing as a commercial venture, for profit (Schöpfelet *al*, (2005).

Difficult to acquire – not part of major distribution channels, example. not routinely available via booksellers or subscription agents. No bibliographic controls – material is not necessity subject to bibliographic controls, example, lack of ISBN or ISSN (Lawrence *et al*, 2014).

- Not peer reviewed.
- Transient or ephemeral in nature
- Difficult to find – historically, not included in commercial abstracting and indexing database or individual items not included in library catalogues.

Van der Jeij (Auger, 1989) has pointed out that some synonyms for the word grey used in the professional press are non-conventional, informal, informally published, fugitive and even invisible. He also reminds us that documents may be unconventional in many ways, and that many conventionally published documents show grayish aspects.

Why then, if grey literature is difficult to define, awkward to deal with and hard to find, is so important and why does the British Library collect it? While considering examples of the type of material that are hidden by this obscure term it is quickly evident how important and widely used grey literature is. A lot of valuable and useful information is never published in the conventional sense. Some examples include (and this is by no means an exhaustive list): conferences, theses, technical reports, official publications, standards, newsletters, preprints, web pages and so on (Mahoodet *al*, 2014).

The Library's collection development objective is to collect "worthwhile" grey literature, "defined as that which might be of use to the higher educational, research and industrial communities" (Wood, 1982). Material is sourced from many outlets and by various means including purchased material, deposit arrangements, donations and exchange services. We also aim to take the mystery out of the term grey literature for our customers and potential customers by referring to the material by format and content, e.g. conferences, reports and theses rather than generically as grey literature and therefore improving accessibility. As we have already mentioned one of the defining characteristics of grey literature is that is often hard to find. It is hard to find for researchers but also for libraries and others who wish to build up holdings of collections. It is fortunate that the British Library has been consistently collecting the material (Tillett, 2006). They have built up considerable expertise in the area of special acquisitions over time and have been able to develop relationships with producers and suppliers of grey material. Owing to the specific characteristics of the different types of grey literature, they do not have a "one size fits all" approach to acquisitions - it varies for different material (Barczak, G. 2013).

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