Web Search Analysis

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Search Results

I chose to look into Jo Jorgensen for my candidate search and determined that her number one PAC was Microsoft Corp via OpenSecrets.

Looking into Microsoft Corp itself on the OpenSecrets led to a minor lean towards Republican party candidates for most election years, with a major bump to Republican donations over some years. Extremely little of their donation history went towards any third-party candidates.

A Google search for "Microsoft PAC" brought up primarily a bunch of brand-new news articles about an announcement from the company saying that they were freezing contributions temporarily while the Microscoft PAC is renamed and will reorient their organizational goals towards the culture their stakeholders want. Additionally, the results were from almost all left-learning news sources, which align with my personal political views, and focused on a portion of the announcement stating the PAC will shift away from any candidates in 2022 that voted against certifying the 2020 presidential election results. Also included in these first page Google results were the Microsoft PAC site and the blog post referring to this new change in direction for the group, and the OpenSecrets page as the top hit.

Bing is a Microsoft-owned search engine, so I was curious how my results would differ. The first thing I noticed is that the Bing engine highlighted the same news articles that came from left-leaning sources, but also included half of the hits from Microsoft-owned website and did not include OpenSecrets at all. The second page of Bing results were entirely Microsoft blogs and publications.

Moving on to other search engines, on Baidu there was only one link to a news article with the same information as both Bing and Google referenced above, and all the rest of the first page hits were how-to programming websites and software downloads. On DuckDuckGo, the first page had many of the same news hits as both Google and Bing, but after the first page it goes entirely into Microsoft support and download pages, without even including the "pac" part of the search string in most of the result text. Interestingly, the Wayback Machine only shows the current Microsoft Corp PAC site as existing since 2019, and not before.

Reflection

Because I was researching a major company, I felt like I wasn't going to find anything particularly shady or obvious from a deep dive into their web presence. Most of the search results were the same across multiple search engines, but it was interesting that the Chinese search didn't seem to care about American politics at all, and DuckDuckGo's neutral stance on web hits was similar. From a worldly view, it seems like this change in tack from the PAC was not important enough to include in results – and the websites weren't getting enough hits to make it up into the first pages. Instead, the PAC protocol that is used in Microsoft applications was more important and more widely-searched for.

I had never consciously dove into the funding breakdown for politicians or how to dig out more information online before this project, so this was an interesting experiment in acknowledging my own search engine bias (Google is king) that I can connect to how I was raised and all the things my teachers told me about searching for information online across my entire education continuum. From the very beginnings of Google, the interface was interesting and easy to work with, and the results always seemed to be more applicable to what I was trying to do at the time. As I grew older, my teachers spoke about how to break down URLs and choose websites that

were more or less "good" sources of information, much of which I still use today. But as I

continue to learn more about rapidly-developing web technologies, I now have the knowledge

that something like a .edu or a .org can be easily bought up by any third party and those things

are no longer an adequate way to tell if a website is going to be truthful or not. So instead, I go

back to Google and search that website and see what other websites have to say about its

validity. There is definitely a reliance on Google showing me the most accurate results, and also

a reliance on Google to show me whether I can rely on other sites or not. To me, this puts me at

the mercy of any Google result bias based on the aggregate of my search and purchase history,

and is also an indicator that I should find other tools and methods to confirm the validity of sites

and information that extend beyond Google.