What Suggestions Do *Google Autocomplete* Make About Children?

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Abstract

Google autocomplete quickly displays suggestions for the search one is attempting before the person finishes typing. While it is designed the help searches make easier, it sometimes offer suggestions that are controversial or it may end up funneling the individual to other searches that were not intended initially. In this study, the author typed some keywords related to children and childhood and found out some interesting results due to Google autocomplete. When the author typed, "do children deserve" one of the suggested search appearing was "do children deserve respect." Some of the other interesting suggestions were noted. These suggestions offered by the Google autocomplete reflect the frequent searches conducted by other people all around the world. Such suggestions can funnel some people into very biased and harmful perception for childhood. Findings of this study are discussed and the suggestions are made.

Keywords: Google, autocomplete, Google autocomplete, children, childhood.

Google Otomatik Tamamlama Çocuklarla İlgili Neler Öneriyor?

Öz

Google otomatik tamamlama hızla, kişi yazısını tamamlanmadan yapılan arama için öneriler sunar. Yapılan aramaları kolaylaştırmak için tasarımlanmasına rağmen, bazen tartışmalı öneriler sunmakta ya da kişiyi istemediği arama sonuçlarına yönlendirebilmektedir. Bu çalışmada yazar, çocuklar ve çocukluk ile ilgili anahtar kelimelerle arama yaparak Google otomatik tamamlama vasıtayla bazı ilginç sonuçlara ulaştı. Yazar "çocuklar hak eder mi" diye yazdığında önerilen aramalardan biri şuydu: "çocuklar saygıyı hak eder mi." Daha başka ilginç öneriler de tespit edildi. Google otomatik tamamlama tarafından sunulan bu öneriler dünyanın dört bir tarafında yapılan aramalara göre belirlenmektedir. Bu tür öneriler bazı insanları çocuklukla ilgili oldukça ön yargılı ve zararlı algılamalara itebilmektedir. Çalışmanın sonuçları tartışılmış ve bazı önerilerde bulunulmuştur.

Anahtar Kelimeler: Google, otomatik tamamlama, Google otomatik tamamlama, çocuklar, çocukluk.

Introduction

Google autocomplete quickly displays suggestions for the search one is attempting before the person finishes typing. According to Google, the autocomplete function is design to help the searchers in many ways. Suggestions provided by autocomplete may prevent lengthy typing, replace misspelled search terms, display a repeated favorite search, and find other relevant information. While it is designed to make internet searches more efficient, Google autocomplete

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sometimes offers suggestions that are very controversial or may end up funneling the individuals to other searches that were not intended initially.

In order to find out about an important topic, the coverage of the children and childhood on Google, the current study aims to:

- to provide what Google autocomplete suggests searchers in terms of children and childhood.
- to discuss the significance of Google autocomplete for searchers
- to provide suggestions for Google to solve this issue

It is important to find out the coverage of the children and childhood on Google as it is the most commonly used search engine. To the author's knowledge, there is no empirical academic study that has been conducted on this subject to this date.

Theoretical Framework

The theory of social construction of reality provided the framework for this current research. According to this theory, the reality is a process in which the individuals innovatively form reality via collective interactions (Berger & Luckmann, 1991), in this case virtual interactions. Treatment of children in any given society is closely related to how the concept of childhood/children is constructed by the society. When understanding how individuals' perceive childhood and children, it is important to look at the process of creating such realities. When considering childhood as a socially constructed reality rather than just an individual's own perception of what childhood is, it becomes clear that internet search engines can shape this socially constructed reality by offering certain types of suggestions that would lead to different formations of realities with regard to childhood. Google, or any other search engine for that matter, can easily funnel a naïve person who is conducting an internet search by providing suggestions that are not neutral. This person's reality (how he or she perceives the certain concept) would be socially constructed by Google autocomplete's suggestions made available over time in a virtual environment. Namely, Google autocomplete function may shape the reality of childhood/children by offering certain search suggestions that are not impartial in their nature.

Method

In this study, the author conducted Google search by using certain words related to children and childhood and then, Google autocomplete suggestions were recorded for each search entry. Data collection took place on November 19, 2013 between 8:23 a.m.-9:29 a.m. Central Time.

When typed "Do children deserve" the following suggestions were made available (see Image 1):

do children deserve **respect**

do children deserve **privacy**

do children deserve **any special consideration**

do children deserve **rights**

When typed "Are children" the following suggestions were made available (see Image 2):

are children **born with autism**

are children **smarter because of the internet**

are children **born gay**

are children **worth it**

When typed "Do children" the following suggestions were made available (see Image 3):

do children **need id to fly**

do children **need passports**

do children **inherit debt**

do children **go to hell**

When typed "Children are" the following suggestions were made available (see Image 4):

children are **a gift from the lord**

children are **a blessing**

children are **our future**

children are **the future**

When typed "Are kids" the following suggestions were made available (see Image 5):

are kids **allowed in casinos**

are kids **born with autism**

are kids **worth it**

are kids **free on cruises**

When typed "does a child" the following suggestions were made available (see Image 6):

does a child **need a passport**

does a child **need id to fly**

does a child **need id to fly delta**

does a child **need both parents**

When typed “does a child” the following suggestions were made available (see Image 7):

does a kid **need a passport to go to Canada**

does a kid **need a fishing license**

does a kid **need id to fly**

how does a kid **make money**

When typed “does childhood” the following suggestions were made available (see Image 8):

does childhood **abuse affect adulthood**

does childhood **psoriasis go away**

does childhood **asthma return in adulthood**

does childhood **trauma affect childhood**

When typed “is child” the following suggestions were made available (see Image 9):

is child **support taxable**

is child **support tax deductible**

is child **support considered income**

is child**birth painful**

When typed “is childhood” the following suggestions were made available (see Image 10):

is childhood **obesity a disease**

is childhood **a proper noun**

is childhood **obesity abuse**

is childhood **a right**

When typed “is early childhood” the following suggestions were made available (see Image 11):

is early childhood **education beneficial for later development**

is early childhood **education capitalized**

is early childhood **education he same as elementary education**

is early childhood **education hard**

When typed “children should” the following suggestions were made available (see Image 12):

children should**n’t play with dead things**

children should **be seen and not heard**

children should **not**

children should **not be tried as adults**

When typed “children shouldn’t” the following suggestions were made available (see Image 13):

children shouldn’t **play with dead things**

children shouldn’t **have to sacrifice**

children shouldn’t **be tried as adults**

children shouldn’t **do chores**

When typed “children should be” the following suggestions were made available (see Image 14):

children should be **seen and not heard**

children should be **neither seen nor heard**

children should be **taught how to think not what to think**

children should be **seen and not heard origin**

When typed “children must” the following suggestions were made available (see Image 15):

children must **have books**

children must **listen lyrics**

children must **be seen and not heard**

children must **be supervised sign**

When typed “children must be” the following suggestions were made available (see Image 16):

children must be **taught how to think not what to think**

children must be **ready to learn motor skills**

children must be **seen and not heard**

children must be **supervised sign**

When typed “children are the” the following suggestions were made available (see Image 17):

children are the **future**

children are the **future quote**

children are the **future song**

children are the **heritage of the lord kjva**

Discussion

It is clear from the findings of the current study that even though there were some positive suggestions made available, there is a disproportionate negative coverage/suggestions with regard to children/childhood provided by Google autocomplete. For instance, the following suggested searches clearly imply positive views on children and childhood or say something positive or helpful with regard to children: Children are a gift from Lord, Children are blessing, Children are our future, Children should not be tried as adults, Children should not have to sacrifice, Children should be taught how to think not what to think, and Children must have books.

Despite these positive suggestions, the majority of the suggestions made by the Google autocomplete were either negative or simply disturbing. For instance, when the author typed, "do children deserve" one of the suggested searches was "do children deserve respect." Some of the other interesting suggestions were as follow (the part typed by the author are in quotation marks and the rest are the suggestions by the Google autocomplete): "Do children deserve" respect, "Do children deserve" privacy, "Do children deserve" any special consideration, "Do children deserve" rights. These suggestions made by Google autocomplete certainly give a very negative impression of children/childhood as if children are inferior or subspecies of humans. Asking such demeaning questions about children are simply not unacceptable, regardless of how these suggested questions are answered if someone chooses to go for such inquiries. Another disturbing finding was whether or not children are worth it. This is a question that is not only senseless but also a question that attempts to undermine society. In any given society, if there is a debate about the value of children and whether or not children are worth it, this is clearly a very bad sign for any society.

As an early childhood professor, there was another result that I found appealing: "Is early childhood education hard." I am hoping that nobody chooses early childhood education just because they think it is not hard. This result reminded me about the long and hard journey of telling people that early childhood education is not a baby-sitter education or it should not be a last-stop major for those who fail other majors. We, early childhood educators, must continue to educate people on the importance of early childhood education and the value of childhood.

Just the following suggested inquiry on whether or not children go to hell should be good enough reason for the suggestions made by the Google autocomplete to be re-examined by Google. It is our responsibility to make sure that we do not contribute to spreading very negative and unfair view about children. Google should remove such negative inquiries from its autocomplete database as children are the most vulnerable population in any given society and the last thing children (and adults) need is to have a negative campaign against children. It should be noted that the author does

not suggest that Google promotes to this negative campaign against children intentionally. Autocomplete function blindly suggests mostly searched Internet inquires. It is unfortunate that there are such frequent inquiries that take place on the Internet. However, any responsible company like Google should take action to remove such totally unfair inquiries about children from the autocomplete function.

The educational importance of this study is at least twofold. First, the results reported in this study may provide helpful hints for researchers to have a better understanding of the coverage of the children and childhood on the Internet. Second, the data reported in this study may raise some awareness to stop spreading such negative impressions about children on the web.

Reference

Berger, P. L. & Luckmann, T. (1991). The social construction of reality: A treatise in the sociology of knowledge. Harmondsworth: Penguin.

Image 1

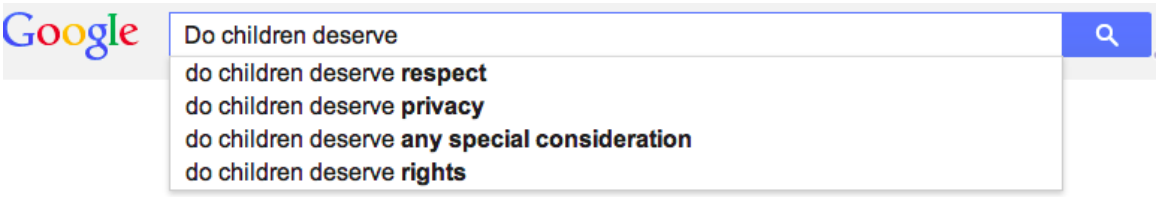
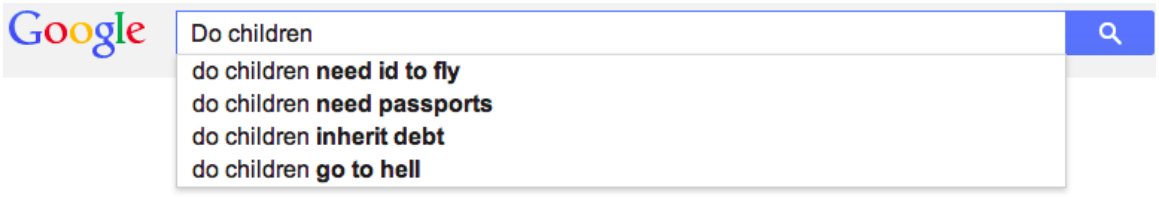


Image 2

Image 3



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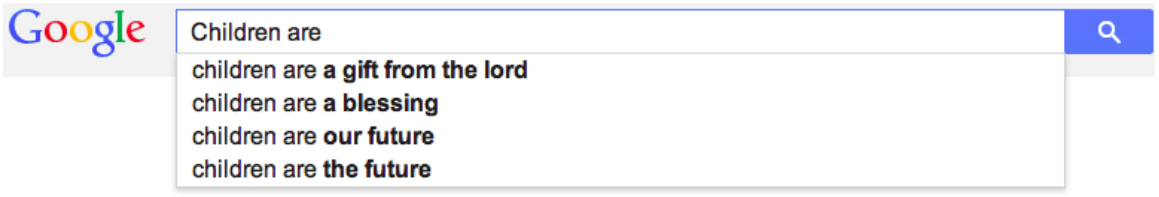

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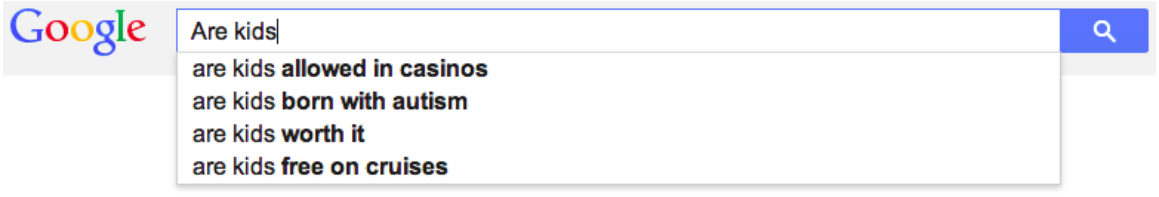

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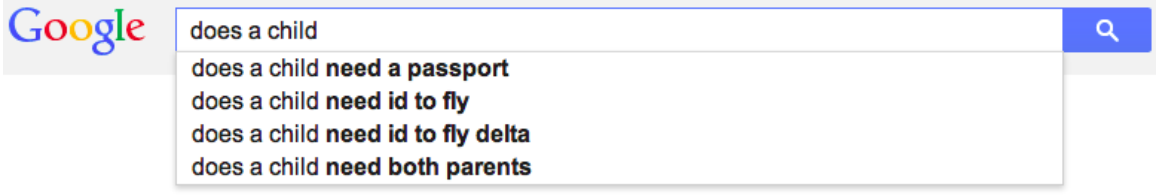


Image 7

Image 8

Image 9

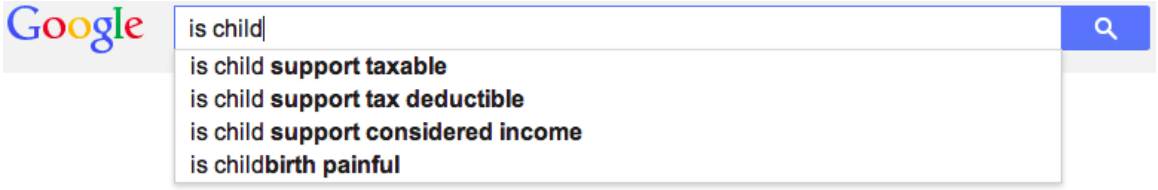
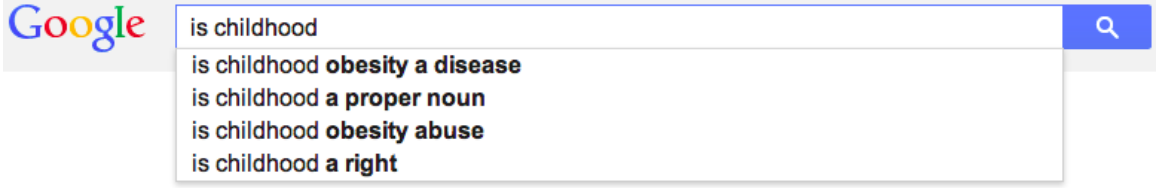


Image 10



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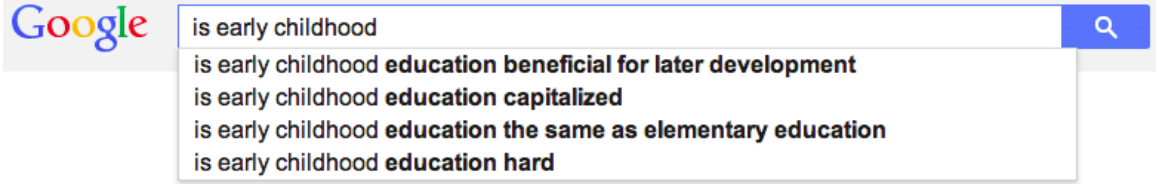

Image 12

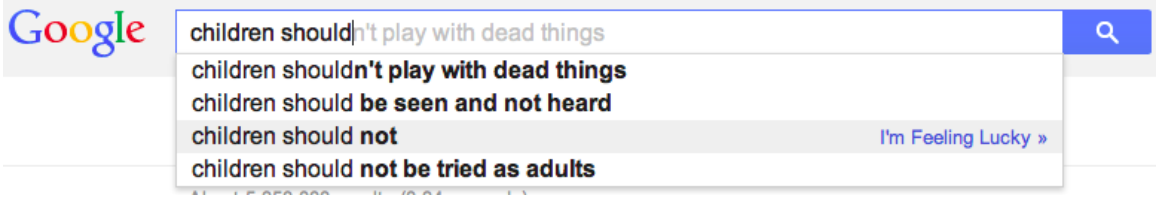

Image 13

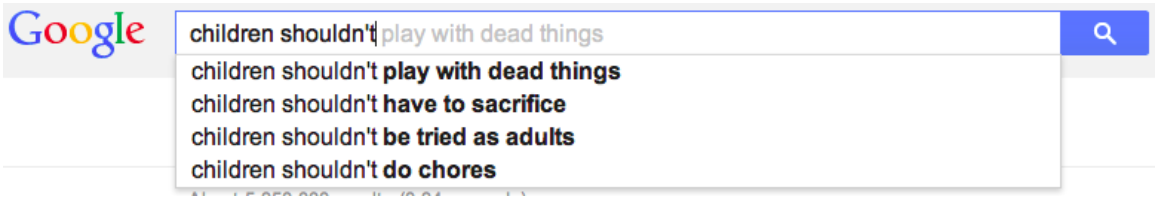

Image 14

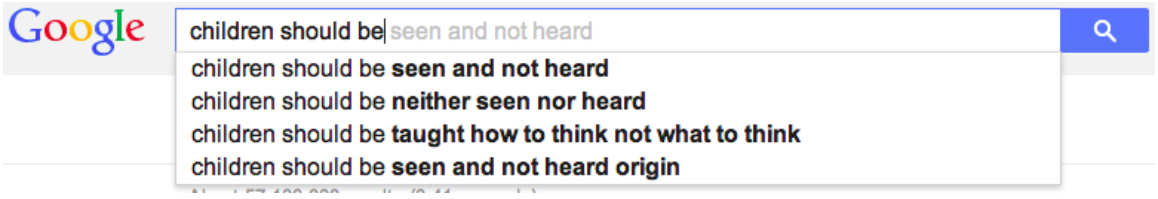

Image 15

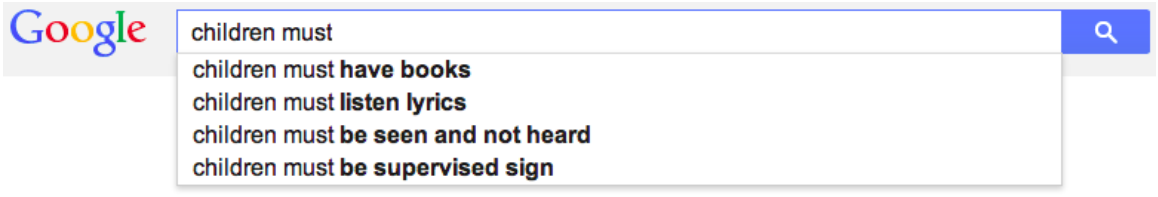

Image 16

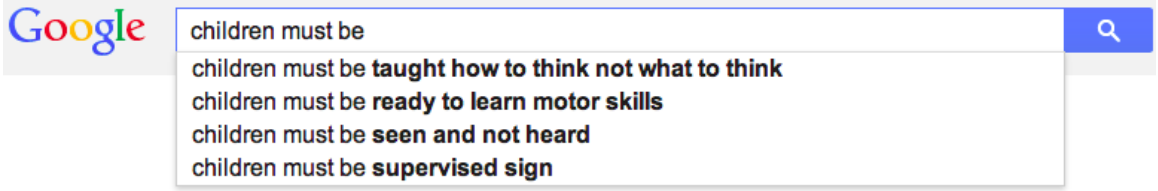
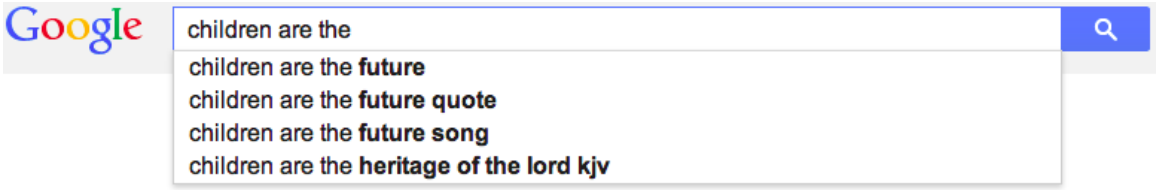
Image 17