

Dominance of Institutions vs. Individuals in Search Engine responses to Queries

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Submission: March 04, 2025; **Published:** March 10, 2025

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Keywords: Search engine bias; Google search ranking; Independent research visibility; Prominence-based search results

Introduction

When you make a query on a search engine, the returns often miss important sources and often produce fluff. The search engines prioritize the returns toward institutional sources and prominent people. Any institution, whether a government agency or a foundation, or any significant organization or prominent person is weighted heavily in the front pages of Google returns to a query – just because of who they are. It seems clear that Google does not look inside sources, but rather concentrates on the prominence of the source. Yet, I find that many, indeed most of these institutional returns present the “common narrative”, which often misses important work by individuals. The work of most individuals is prioritized very low compared to institutions and organizations. So, when you query Google on any topic, you will get many responses, most of which repeat the common narrative, and mainly ignore work by individuals that often contain interesting and innovative analyses or views that might differ from the common narrative. It is like going to the ice cream parlor with 37 flavors and always getting vanilla.

I will briefly report on a few of my own recent experiences.

The Greenhouse Effect

Most of the world is vitally concerned about global warming due to CO₂ emissions. It is widely accepted that adding CO₂ to the atmosphere warms the Earth by the “greenhouse effect”. But what is the mechanism by which adding CO₂ warms the Earth? Just what is the “greenhouse effect”? Institutions that respond to a Google query on the greenhouse effect claim that it is due to a “thermal blanket” that restricts IR radiation from the Earth’s surface. They say that adding CO₂ increases the thickness of the thermal blanket, thus warming the Earth’s surface. That is incorrect. The thermal

blanket is already so thick that it is essentially saturated and adding more CO₂ hardly changes the blanket.

The actual mechanism for warming by adding CO₂ is a more complex process that is mostly independent of the thermal blanket. [1] The Earth’s surface loses energy to the lower and middle atmosphere by convection and thermals, independent of the thermal blanket. At high altitudes, energy is propagated by IR radiation and CO₂ is the main carrier of that energy. There is a range of altitudes from which the Earth radiates the energy it receives from the Sun to the vacuum of space. When the CO₂ concentration increases, IR radiation is propagated to higher altitudes where it is cooler, thus reducing the ability of the Earth to radiate out to space. I would venture to guess that most climate alarmists, including most climate scientists, don’t know that, and they won’t easily find the right answer through Google. We have the current situation where climate alarmists, climate scientists, and billions of people believe the adding CO₂ to the atmosphere warms the Earth, yet very few understand the mechanism for how it works. Does Greta Thunberg have a clue how CO₂ warms the Earth? How can a world send trillions to fight a process they don’t understand? The answer is that the institutions, organizations, government agencies were led astray by the simplistic notion that adding CO₂ to the “thermal blanket” make the blanket thicker, and that is how CO₂ works, which is simple to comprehend, but it simply isn’t so. The search engines provided the interconnections to spread the false common narrative through the world.

SpaceX Mission to Mars

Around 2016, Elon Musk claimed SpaceX would land a human crew of twelve on Mars in 2024. This was widely heralded in the

press and blogs. Search engines led you there if you asked about Mars. As the years passed, the 2024 date was serially pushed back to 2028, and the press and the blogs continued to take this seriously at each step of postponement. The search engines conformed. Now SpaceX seems to be hedging toward 2031. Glossy press releases provided only minimal specific data on how they would carry out such a mission. In 2024, a German team of engineers analyzed the mission and declared it to be impossible. [2] I also published a detailed analysis from a different point of view that showed that it would take about twenty years and many billions of dollars to prepare for such a mission, and even then, it might not be possible in that time frame. [3] In a Google query “SpaceX mission to Mars”, the German article came up 17th in the queue of responses and my paper was invisible. The mission as described by SpaceX is clearly impossible. Our papers are buried under a plethora of commentaries on Google such as “Elon Musk says ...” or “SpaceX plans to ...”

NASA's Moon Mission and the “Gateway”

Several years ago, NASA embarked on a new initiative to establish a human presence on the Moon. Included in the mission plan is establishment of a space station near the Moon called the “Gateway” that would serve as a rest stop and assembly point on the way to (or from) the Moon (or possibly other destinations). However, Robert Zubrin, a prominent space system engineer published a paper (I also published a paper) showing that there is no need for the Gateway because modern rockets can take the crew or cargo directly to the lunar surface, saving billions of dollars, greatly reducing complexity and risk and speeding up the schedule. [4] Yet Google provides myriad links to sites that think that the Gateway is just fine because NASA supports it. One NASA site is entitled “Gateway: Up Close in Stunning Detail – NASA”. However, there is a wrinkle. One of the top Google responses to almost any query on the Gateway is the Wikipedia – which usually presents the common narrative. However, in this case, the Wikipedia, after several pages of description of the Gateway, reported on twelve criticisms of the Gateway by prominent space experts and managers. I don't know who wrote that Wikipedia article or how he (or she) found those negative evaluations – because Google can't find them.

NASA also intends to acquire water on the Moon from ice embedded in the regolith in polar craters where sunlight does not reach. This will be a very challenging (read: expensive and risky) endeavor. I have shown that it would be simpler, less risky and cheaper to just bring the water from Earth. [5] But the NASA view (being an institutional view) dominates in Google responses. Some within NASA advocate that propellants produced on the Moon be used to fuel Mars-bound spacecraft at the Gateway. My published papers (well-hidden by Google) show that it is far more economical and straightforward to go directly from Earth orbit toward Mars with propellants supplied from Earth. [4] Sending a spacecraft to the Gateway to be fueled by propellants derived from

the Moon is far more complex, far more risky, far more expensive and doesn't make any sense. But Google links you to NASA sites that support this labyrinthian concept.

Revisiting Ice Ages

Ice ages provide a source of endless fascination. The last ice age peaked a mere 20,000 years ago, and so much water was tied up in the giant ice sheets that the oceans were lower by about 100 meters. Those ice sheets began to disintegrate about 18,000 years ago and were mostly gone 8,000 years ago. The Earth has passed through alternating ice ages and warm interglacial period over the past few million years. There is ample evidence that these cycles are somehow tied to periodic variations in the Earth's orbit as well as periodic variations in the tilt of the Earth relative to its orbital plane, and these variations produce cyclical variations in the solar energy falling on high northern latitudes which that control the ice age cycles. Google will lead you to institutional sources that tell you that. And these sources are correct. But why do the ice sheets build up at specific dates, and why do they end at other specific dates? The sites that Google takes you to have no answers. In fact, Google returned sites don't even ask the question.

The first thing to do is examine the data. You can look at the estimated yearly Earth orbit and tilt over the last two million years and from that, estimate solar energy falling on high northern latitudes every year for the past two million years. Solar energy input to high altitudes varies up and down cyclically over the years. Then you can compare the cycles of solar energy input to high latitudes to the cycles of ice level over say, the past two million years. The first thing you notice is that every start of an ice age occurs at a downtrend in solar, and every end of an ice age begins at an uptrend in solar. However, not all solar downtrends create a new ice age and not all solar uptrends end an ice age. You might never know this from Google but the real question is why, and as Miyagi said in *The Karate Kid*, “Answer only matter if ask right question”. The answer to this question is complicated. My paper offers rationales for why ice ages begin and end at only some solar uptrends and downtrends. You won't find much on this topic from a Google query. [6]

Take it or make it on Deep Space Missions

Historically, missions to deep space (e.g. Mars and beyond) were designed to minimize the amount of mass that had to be launched to low Earth orbit (LEO) because launch costs were a significant part of the total mission cost. Space missions were designed to reduce the mass of the spacecraft as a high priority. With the advent of great reductions in cost to send cargo to LEO by innovative launch vehicles developed by SpaceX, the need to reduce mass in LEO is now greatly relaxed, and instead one can do quite the opposite: use mass to reduce complexity and risk. However, NASA has not moved with the times and reduction of mass in LEO remains a major driver for NASA missions. In my paper subtitled “take it or make it” I discuss the alternatives

between bringing resources from Earth which once would have been prohibitive, vs. attempting to produce them on Mars, entailing complexity, risk and expense. [5] The scales are tipping toward bringing resources from Earth. However, you will mainly find the NASA view in Google searches.

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DOI: [10.19080/OAJELS.2025.02.555600](https://doi.org/10.19080/OAJELS.2025.02.555600)

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