Innovation in research infrastructure

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IDRC Roundtable on Policy Research Environment

Galle, January 21, 2009

LIRNEasia
www.lirneasia.net

Agenda

- What is research infrastructure?
- Which components can be improved using new technologies?
  - No formal study conducted
  - Lived experience mostly
- Thoughts to initiate discussion

What is research infrastructure?

- Infrastructure = what one cannot self-supply, technically or economically

- Elements
  - Well-prepared human resources [higher education system]
  - Prior knowledge [libraries, abstracting and indexing services, document delivery services, bookstores]
  - Large data sets, statistics [government]
  - Environment for generating new ideas [colleagues knowledgeable of the subject, colleagues in cognate areas, opportunities for interaction, art, coffee shops, bars . . .]

What is research infrastructure?

- Elements
  - Specialized knowledge services, e.g., statistics consulting [networks, formal or informal]
  - Quality-control mechanisms [colloquia, conferences]
  - Dissemination mechanisms for multiple audiences [policy makers, other researchers, media, etc.]

Well-prepared human resources

- Sources
  - Local universities
  - Foreign universities
- How to find
  - Interns and employees
    - Advertisements
    - Networks
- Barriers
  - Labor rules
  - Immigration rules

Use of the Internet

We use Comminit.org to advertise; as well as our own website; thinking of using Google ads

Prior knowledge

Pure Internet territory

- Libraries, abstracting and indexing services, document delivery services, bookstores. . . .
- Google is pretty good as an A&I service
- Google also gets you to some fulltext, enough to get by for quite a lot of policy research, depending on the field
- IDRC's e journal collection (still has huge gaps such as the lack of Elsevier/Science Direct); few pure online/open access journals
- Document delivery services (by the time you get the article, you sometimes wonder why you ordered it)
- Amazon can be very quick even if expensive (mostly because of postal costs), but can lose speed at Post Office
  - Tortured by security regime around credit cards
- But, offer for researchers to go hang out at university libraries is always on the table

ICTs complemented by transportation

Payment mechanisms, enabled by ICTs

Large data sets, statistics

- Nationally representative surveys that can only be done by governments; International Government Organizations (IGO) data sets
- In Sri Lanka, easier to get access to National Statistical Organization (NSO) datasets than in India, for example
  - Electronically available, but layers of bureaucracy
- IGO datasets tend to be available electronically and more accessible, but are not the most up to date

Environment for generating new ideas

- Colleagues knowledgeable of the subject, colleagues in cognate areas, opportunities for unplanned interactions around art, coffee shops, bars . . .

- Main Internet contributions are in locating colleagues and communicating with them: Internet presence is a necessary condition, as shown in our research
- Do we need more interactions among PROs?
  - What is the line between schmoozing and being creative?
  - Balance between work and pleasure?
- Planning meetings are best held face-to-face, but video conferencing has significant value
  - Used on two occasions in 2005
  - Not used more because of cost and inconvenience; skype is more flexible
- In addition to being a good dissemination vehicle, blog has certain qualities conducive to generating new ideas: we have found ideas as well as partners though blog comments

Significant online-only journal

MIT Press Journals - Information Technologies and International Development - Abstract - Mozilla Firefox

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http://www.mitpressjournals.org/doi/abs/10.1162/itid.2008.00019

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Internet Presence as Knowledge Capacity: The Case of Research in Information and Communication Technology Infrastructure Reform

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Gamage & Samarajiva, Internet presence as knowledge capacity: The case of research in ICT infrastructure reform

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Done

Specialized knowledge services

- E.g., statistics consulting

- Networks, formal or informal
  - Need not be proximate; Internet allows utilization of distant resources
    - Following difficulties with statistical expertise in Sri Lanka, we now work with an expert in South Africa

- Internet, especially Scholar.google can help to locate and assess expertise, though we have so far used our networks in the old fashioned way
  - Successful with statistical consulting, not with gender expertise

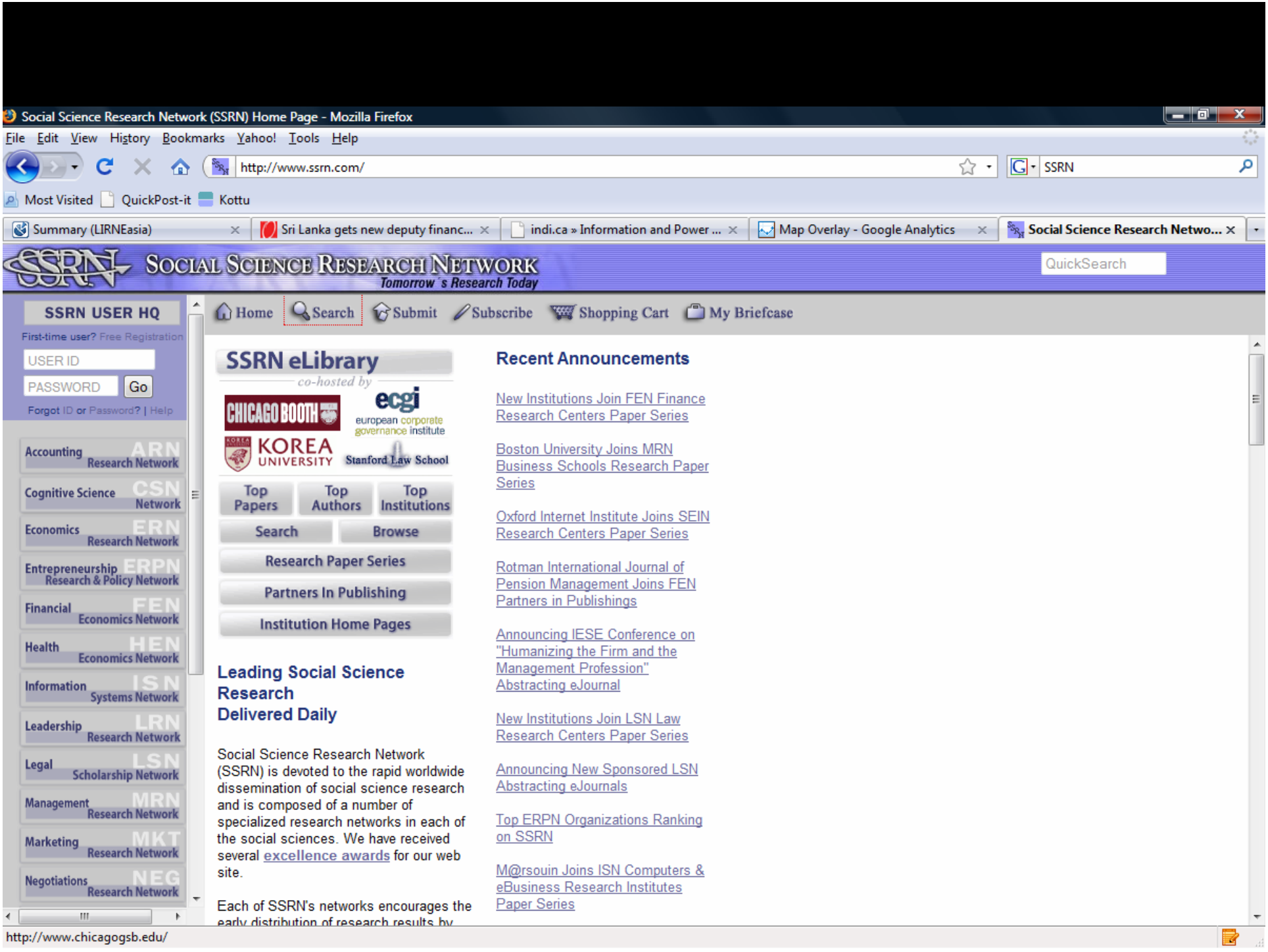
Quality-control mechanisms

- Colloquia, review, conferences

- We hold virtual colloquia
  - Bandwidth inadequate for skype videoconferencing, yet
  - Realtime blogging and skype audio, with questions and comments sent as chat or email
  - Known people, works relatively well
- Conferences are about serendipitous meetings and networking
  - Internet is not the best, though some advocate virtual conferences
- If we can get Cisco Telepresence™ in place and affordable, may replace f-to-f (requires 5 Mbps for simplest link, 15 Mbps for the complex forms; we are lucky to get 1 Mbps consistently here)

Dissemination mechanisms for multiple audiences

- For a Policy Research Organization, not only scholarly peers; policy makers, corporate leaders, media, etc. must also be reached
- Scholarly peers (peer review; quality control; but not most important)
  - Most scholarly journals have moved to online submission and review management systems
  - SSRN as a possible vehicle for reaching scholarly audiences
- Policy makers and corporate leaders (push; on our schedule)
  - Direct presentations
  - Short magazine type pieces/policy briefs
  - Media
- Just-in-time access for policy makers, corporate leaders and media (pull; on their schedule)
  - Web (do they come to your site? do you come up on Google searches?)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http://www.chicagogsb.edu/

“Googlability”

- Good test: are you on the first page when keywords are searched?
  - Tip 1: Google seems to favor blogs
  - Tip 2: You need to produce a lot of webposts, even if it’s the same thing in different forms
  - Tip 3: Unique and exclusive is not the way the game is played; the more other people carry your stuff, the better
- Can we predict what will rise on the web? No
- Can we improve the chances of rising? Yes

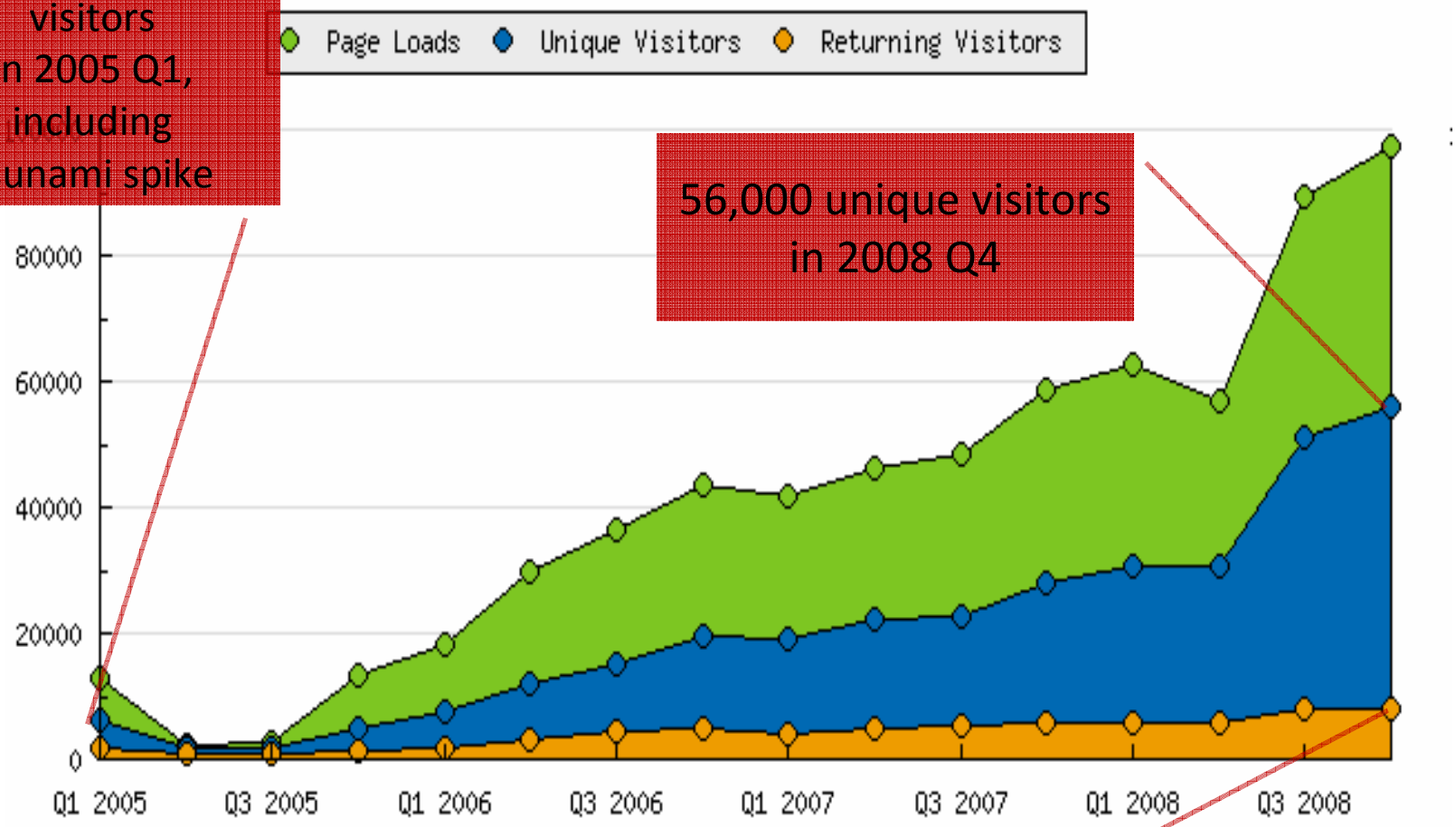
Necessary condition: A website that is visited

Quantity (and some quality) data

From StatCounter (2005 Q1 to 2008 Q4)

Traffic on lirneasia.net, 2005-2008 (blue = unique visitors)

6,300 unique visitors in 2005 Q1, including tsunami spike



56,000 unique visitors in 2008 Q4

8,200 returning visitors (returned 1 hr or later) in 2008 Q4 (high quality)

LIRNEasia
www.lirneasia.net

Who visits? For LIRNE*asia*, prime audiences = South Asia, Southeast Asia and East Asia

From Google Analytics, for month ending Jan 17, 2009

Quality indicators for site:
Average time on site = 00.01.37
Bounce rate (person leaving from entry page) = 71.61%

High quality; long stay

Poor quality; most leave w/in seconds

Sub Continent Region		Visits	Pages /Visit	Avg.Time on Site	% New Visits	Bounce Rate
1.	Southern Asia	**18,776**	2.06	00:02:05	76.48%	66.36%
2.	Northern America	**4,195**	1.37	00:00:30	91.82%	84.79%
3.	Northern Europe	**1,280**	1.51	00:00:40	90.86%	80.31%
4.	South-Eastern Asia	**1,041**	1.54	00:01:22	86.46%	78.10%
5.	Western Asia	**817**	1.70	00:01:05	88.37%	75.76%
6.	Western Europe	**561**	1.46	00:00:42	92.51%	83.60%
7.	Eastern Asia	**490**	1.56	00:01:20	86.53%	77.76%
8.	Australia and New Zealand	**403**	1.84	00:01:01	86.85%	75.93%

Surprise, Expats?

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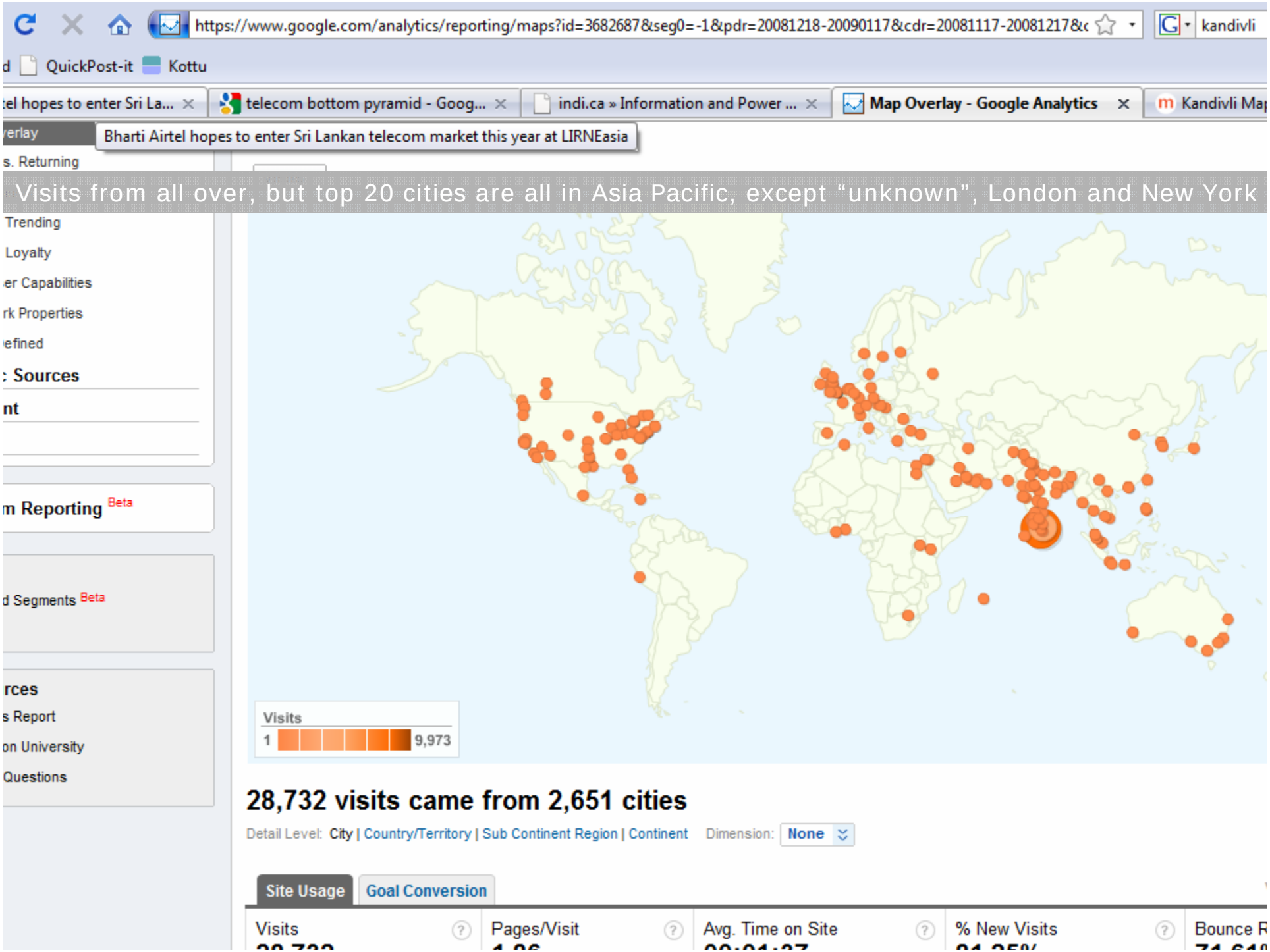
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indi.ca » Information and Power ...
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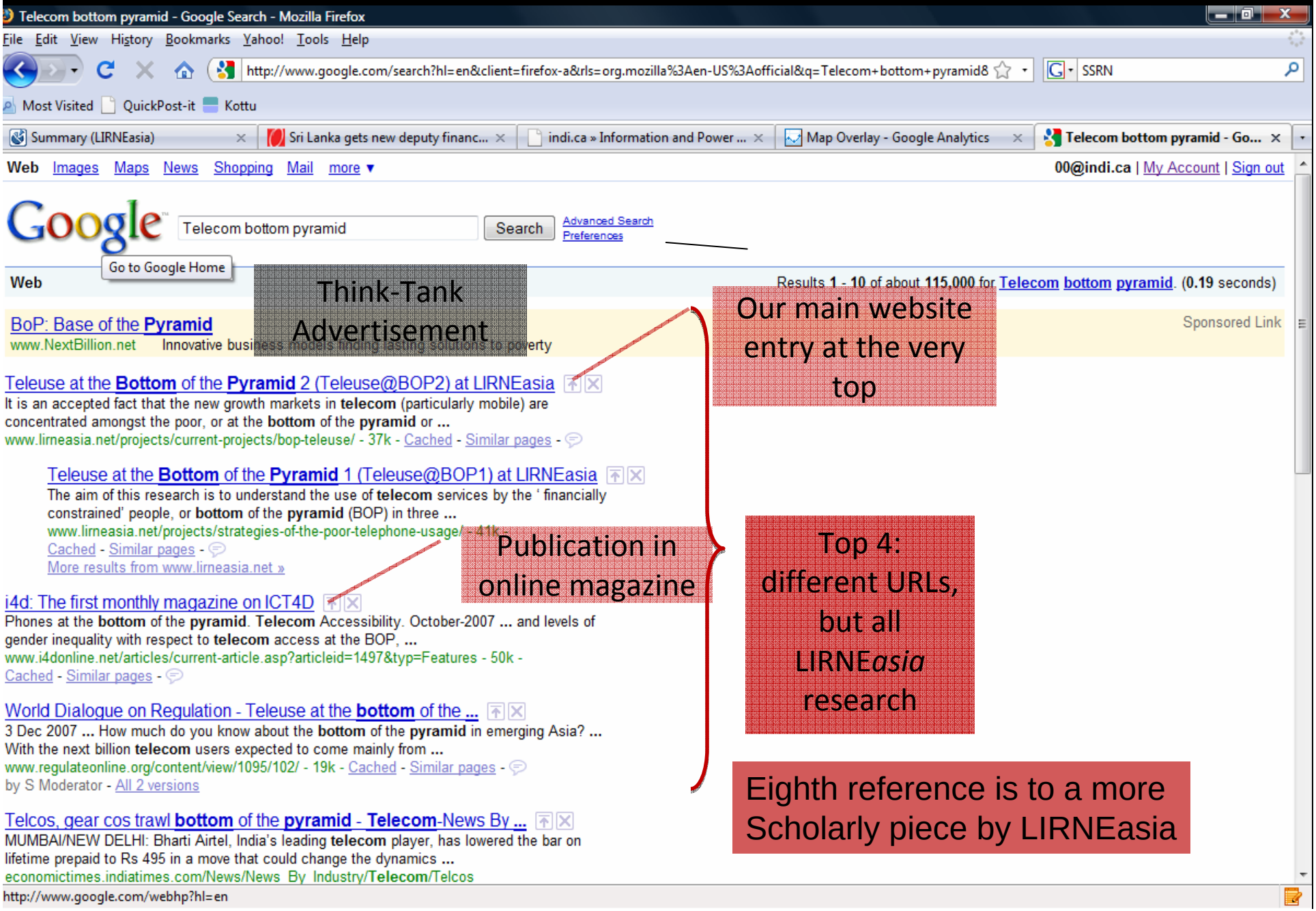
Kandivli Ma
Bharti Airtel hopes to enter Sri Lankan telecom market this year at LIRNEasia
Visits from all over, but top 20 cities are all in Asia Pacific, except “unknown”, London and New York
Trending
Loyalty
Sources
Reporting Beta
Segments Beta
Report
University
Questions
Visits
1
9,973
28,732 visits came from 2,651 cities
Detail Level: City | Country/Territory | Sub Continent Region | Continent
Dimension: None
Site Usage
Goal Conversion
Visits
Pages/Visit
Avg. Time on Site
% New Visits

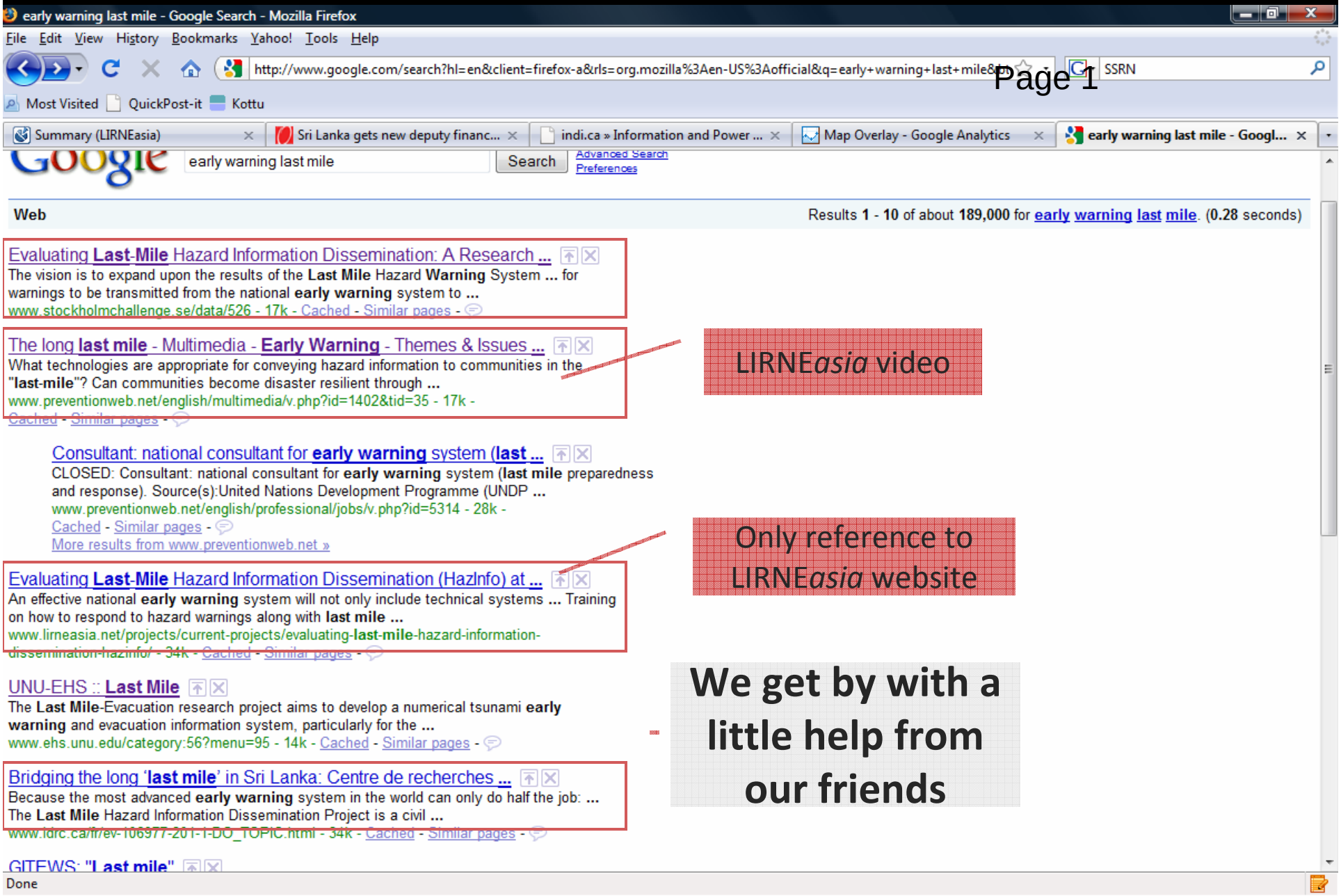
Sufficient condition: First-page test

Search term: Telecom bottom pyramid



Search term: early warning last mile

Good presence on first page of Google search, but only one of top references from our website



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LIRNE*asia* video

Only reference to LIRNE*asia* website

We get by with a little help from our friends

Thoughts for discussion

- Necessity was the mother
  - Blog innovation driven mostly by resource limitations
- Need to think differently about the use of the web
- Incremental changes add up to very different ways of doing things and a radically different cost profile
  - LIRNE*asia* has no library, no PBX, no webmaster, no receptionist, no desktop computers; no wires except for electricity
  - Our communication costs may appear high (per capita telecom/month = USD 39.55; per capita broadband/month = USD 15.08 in 2-4Q 2008) but think of what they replace and their yield
  - Per capita journals & books/month = USD 3.00; not controlled; should/could be higher
- Can you live with "open" forms of control? E.g.,
  - Blogs don't work with excessive moderation
  - If you want to pay ONLY for official calls, mobile-centric strategy may not work

www.lirneasia.net (can see the traffic data: StatCounter is an accessible button)

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