African Humanities Research & Development Circle

Journal of AFRICAN HUMANITIES RESEARCH AND DEVELOPMENT (JAHRD)

Volume 2, 2025
Published by The African Humanities Research and Development Circle (AHRDC)

E-ISSN: 3115-5375

RESEARCH AND THE INTERNET

Ozioma Onuzulike[*]
University of Nigeria, Nsukka
ozioma.onuzulike@unn.edu.ng

Abstract
This general-interest article calls attention to the shifting terrain of contemporary academic research engendered by Information Communication Technologies (ICTs), especially the computer. It addresses the need for Africa-based scholars, who operate in difficult and challenging socio-economic circumstances, to take advantage of a wide range of Internet resources that can make their work much faster and easier. It specifically discusses the usefulness of on-line library catalogues, Google and other search engines, academic social network platforms (such as Academia.edu and ResearchGate), journal websites and digital libraries (such as JSTOR, AJOL, Bookfi and Library Genesis) to finding materials that help researchers fully explore the state of knowledge in their fields of research interest so as to be able to make "new" and informed contributions to it. This article also highlights the how-to of these online resources.

Introduction: "What is Your Basic Argument?"

We keep encountering this question in academic meetings. The substance of our answer to that inquiry usually will determine the fate of our journal articles, and even book manuscripts, especially when dealing with reputable publishers. The implication is that research is an on-going academic dialogue, debate or conversation which researchers are expected to be familiar with so as to be able to make "new" and informed contributions to it. This "new contribution" is our own "argument" put forward in an existing academic discourse in our field of study using a wide range of Information Communication Technologies (ICTs) available to us today. It may be by way of modifying existing knowledge, challenging them with new findings based on, very significantly, fresh studies/research, or expanding their frontiers with new interpretations.

Since research is a form of academic dialogue, we do not dialogue or argue with ourselves; we do so with others. In doing this, we need to familiarise ourselves with the academic positions, findings and propositions of other scholars and researchers. To listen to their perspectives, we search out their voices, which are frozen on the pages of books and academic journals, many of which are now accessible online. What are the kinds of online resources available to us today, which enable us to grapple more easily and effectively with our tasks in research and writing? How do we access them more efficiently and maximise limited research time and financial resources available to us in a challenging socio-economic environment, such as we find ourselves in most African countries? In this short article, I seek to provide some leads to enable further discussions of these questions well beyond this platform.

* To view Ozioma Onuzulike's art collection, please visit oziomachukwu.blogspot.com

© African Humanities Research and Development Circle (AHRDC) 2025—www.ahrdc.academy

Research and the Internet

The Internet provides a wide range of essential platforms and channels through which information is made available for researchers. These are in the form of online library catalogues, online search tools or engines (such as Google and Google Scholar), academic social network platforms (such as Academia.edu and ResearchGate), journal websites and digital libraries (such as AJOL, JSTOR, Bookfi, and Library Genesis), and, most recently, Artificial Intelligence-powered tools (such as Semantic Scholar, Connected Papers, Research Rabbit, Elicit, and Scite.ai).

Online Library Catalogues

Many libraries now have online catalogues to enable users to search through their collections for materials or resources relevant to their research. The platform usually provides search options (such as "Title", "Author", "ISBN" and "Call Number"), which enables online users to look for important materials you have already identified, perhaps through the reference lists or bibliographical information provided by previous authors or researchers. If researchers have no specific material in mind, the search engine enables them to use keywords to find materials through the "subject" option. This tool helps them to cast their nets wide. Yet, they need to learn how to cast the net in the right direction for valuable results. Thinking of a variety of keywords or phrases that approach their area of research interest from different directions is usually the most effective way to arrive at valid results.

In all cases, when functional materials are located through the online library catalogue, it displays the location of the material within the library or collection of libraries, the number of copies available, the publisher and place of publication and (for well organised data bases) the Call Number of the material with which it can be easily located and retrieved from the shelve or repository. Good libraries provide a guide to searching their online catalogues and how to get to the needed material from the bookshelves. Where there are no call numbers assigned to the online materials, users can put down the materials and their locations (in the case of the University of Nigeria (UNN) library, this could be the main Library, Africana, Serials, and others) and approach library assistants in that area for assistance.

Google and Other Search Engines

General search engines, such as Google, assist researchers in finding materials of general interest and sometimes other materials useful for their understanding of scholarly matters. However, these are often very inadequate as scholarly sources and should be complemented with indexed academic resources. Google Scholar (scholar.google.com) is one of them. Here, scholars also volunteer to make their publications available to others across many online platforms. What to do? Simply go to the website, such as scholar.google.com. You will find a search box in which to key in your search request (using key words or phrases related to your research topic or area of research interest). It will generate results, which you can examine for their relevance on the basis of which you can further fine-tune your search strategies. A number of articles are usually available for free download on such platforms.

Academic Social Network Platforms

Many academics, professionals and research students have created profiles on academic social network platforms (such as Academia.edu, LinkedIn and ResearchGate) but they do not fully understand how such networks can help with their research and career growth. There are

others who do not as yet know what these networks are and how to use them to up their game. For those who do not know, Academia.edu, LinkedIn, ResearchGate and their kinds are "the Facebook of scholars!" They help scholars, professions and research students to network with others in their field, and even beyond, follow research and researchers of their interest, find and download papers of research interest to them and even get alerts and updates when their own paper or other scholars' papers in their area(s) of research interest are uploaded, bookmarked, read, or downloaded. This helps "serious" scholars to stay abreast of current debates and knowledge production in their field or areas of research interest.

Academic social networking has the potentials to make better project supervisors by way of enabling them to stay ahead of their research students in terms of the state of knowledge in their area of research. On the other hand, it also helps a research student to be able to work independently (if the need arises) or with minimum supervision, and in the right directions too. By networking with other scholars on these platforms, a scholar is able to build productive academic relationships, find collaborators for academic research projects, discuss on-going projects or receive peer-review ahead of formal reviews by journals and book publishers. Getting feedbacks on your writing before sending them out for publication enriches your work and makes your contribution to knowledge in your field gain greater impact, especially within scholars in your network who are likely to be the first to recommend you to others in their wider network.

Interestingly, one can also ask research questions on the platforms and receive answers from experts in the field. Should you be interested in a new job that matches your profile, you are also likely to find it easily on such platforms! For full information about Academia.edu, what it really is, and what it can do, both for academics, professionals, and research students, visit libguides.uml.edu/academia. For similar information on ResearchGate, visit explore.researchgate.net/display/support/Getting+started. These sites will also guide you through setting up an account, as well as how to maximise the resources and opportunities they offer.

Journal Websites

These days, most reputable journals have websites where current issues are displayed and in which previous publications are archived (most of which are available for free download). Searching a journal's website helps you to easily locate materials of interest for your study instead of wading through piles of volumes of publications accumulated over many years. They, indeed, make life easy for today's scholars.

Similarly, journals in the arts and humanities (the websites of which you can easily find by searching the journal title on Google) have archived articles published over the years in their databases. These journals include *The Journal of the Historical Society of Nigeria, African Arts*, *Africa*, *African Economic History, African Affairs, African and Asian Studies*, *African Studies, English Studies in Africa, International Journal of African Historical Studies, Journal of African Archaeology, Journal of African Cultural Studies, Journal of African History, Journal of African Languages and Linguistics, Journal of African Media Studies, Research in African Literatures, African Archaeological Review,* and many others. Articles useful to your research can easily be searched out on the websites of such journals. Although you need to pay to download many of the current articles, the abstracts are usually readily available for free, and a few of the full-length articles are deliberately left downloadable for free. However,

finding relevant materials (whether for free or for purchase) is the first step towards research success. The good news, however, is that many of these journals can be readily accessed through JSTOR!

Digital Libraries

There are a number of digital libraries, accessible online, for researchers. These include JSTOR, AJOL, Bookfi, and Library Genesis, among numerous others.

JSTOR (Short for "Journal Storage")

While researchers are encouraged to take advantage of all available digital libraries, JSTOR is important and resourceful because it represents one of the largest digital libraries. It contains thousands of academic journals, books and other research materials. It is also readily available to researchers in many academic institutions. The fascinating feature of JSTOR is that it can take your search in a very flexible manner through the many books and journals in its holding and deliver your search results seamlessly. JSTOR has provided a helpful guide for effective search on its site (visit https://guides.jstor.org/howto-search/basic. You will also find a PDF version of the guide there). This guide is essential and should be explored.

What to do? If you have not personally subscribed to JSTOR and are outside of the campus of a university that has a valid subscription, you may simply connect to the Internet and go to www.jstor.org. You can find materials of your choice from the search box, which you will see immediately the site opens. Although you will not be able to download most current publications free of charge from off-campus locations, you will at least be able to locate materials useful to your research and be able to download older public-domain content, free of charge. When on your university campus (if your university has a subscription), use your e-mail password (i.e. your IP Address) to access the library platform and then the JSTOR link. You will then be able to download (for free) materials you find through the search engine.

Interestingly, you do not currently need a subscription to download all the content (from "Front Matter" to "Back Matter") of each volume of this journal (*The Journal of the Historical Society of Nigeria*) available on the JSTOR platform. They are currently accessible for free through the current journal editor's affiliation to the University of Nigeria, Nsukka. To freely access the journal's content from the 1950s to 2010s, go to www.jstor.org/journal/jhistsocnige. For each article, as in every other material on JSTOR, you have the option of reading online, downloading (in PDF format), saving or citing it (in this case you are provided with the citation information in there different referencing styles – MLA, APA and Chicago).

To secure access to a wide range of contents beyond those of the *JHSN*, you may personally subscribe to JSTOR for some fee and simply use your modem to access and download materials at the comfort of your home, office or elsewhere. Interestingly, some scholars in both developing and developed countries bypass paid platforms such as JSTOR by downloading materials for free through activist websites (such as sci-hub.se), though there have been debates and litigation surrounding such services.

African Journals Online (AJOL)

AJOL is an important electronic database for Africana scholars because it indexes Africa-based journals and Africa-content. Researchers in arts and humanities will find it useful. The AJOL

website www.ajol.info is worth exploring. A researcher can easily find materials on the site because it is powered by Google Search. What to do? As soon as you enter the AJOL website at www.ajol.info, you will find a search box at the extreme right. Type in your keywords or phrases. Articles relating to your search request will be displayed.

Bookfi and Library Genesis

Bookfi is another e-library from which one can download books of interest for free. (Library Genesis also provides a similar service.) What to do? To enjoy the resources on Bookfi, type in **en.bookfi.net** on your browser. A search box opens in which you can type in keywords or phrases related to the material you are looking for. You will usually find the PDF link to each book that appears. Download a book or books you are interested in. You may either read them on your computer or print them out. Similarly, materials from Library Genesis are accessible using **gen.lib.rus.ec**.

Regarding availability of the materials you might be looking for, be mindful of the fact that only the materials uploaded online become available and accessible to users. So, it should not be a surprise when you do not find what you are searching for. Yet, if you are creative with your search strategies, you are likely to find related materials. So, explore! But the good news is that Artificial Intelligence tools have now made your exploration even easier and less time-consuming.

Using Artificial Intelligence (AI) Tools

Technologies keep evolving, including those that aid academic research. Today, there are many AI tools that help you find relevant papers, books, and other research sources very quickly using semantic or natural-language queries or prompts. These are summarised as follows:

Semantic Scholar (https://www.semanticscholar.org) uses AI to understand meaning (not just keywords) and recommend relevant, high-impact papers for a researcher.

Connected Papers (https://www.connectedpapers.com) builds visual maps of related research papers based on shared citations and themes.

Research Rabbit (https://www.researchrabbit.ai) creates interactive "research trees" showing how papers connect through authors, topics, and citations.

Elicit (https://elicit.com) is an AI research assistant that finds papers relevant to a question, summarises key findings, and extracts data points.

Scite.ai (https://www.scite.ai) goes beyond citations by showing how papers are cited (supporting, contrasting, or mentioning).

Scholarcy **(**https://www.scholarcy.com**)** summarises research papers, highlighting key points, methods, and findings.

ResearchGPT / Scispace - formerly Typeset.io **(**https://www.scispace.com) reads and explains research papers, identifies key concepts, and answers questions about them.

There are numerous educational YouTube videos that provide detailed tutorials on how to use these AI tools not only to find scholarly sources for one's research but also to analyse, and even reference, them within minutes! Take advantage of the free tutorials and you will catch up with the latest AI tools for academic research and documentation.

Conclusion

Research is essentially an academic dialogue, which seeks to provide new knowledge based on existing ones. It has been described as a word of two parts "Re" and "Search", meaning "to search again", to look backwards as a basis for taking an informed forward-look. A wide range of Internet resources enable us to easily find streams of these on-going dialogues so as to join them from informed positions. In other words, they help us in the task of gaining access, in a faster and up-to-date manner, to existing knowledge on the basis of which we can make significant contributions of our own. A wide range of Information Communication Technologies (ICTs), especially the computer, enable us to not only articulate our own contributions, but also document and present them with greater speed and effectiveness. Thus, we must train ourselves on the ICTs available today so as to make our research and writing less cumbersome. These must include Artificial Intelligence (AI) tools that are fast becoming the new normal.

© African Humanities Research and Development Circle (AHRDC) 2025—www.ahrdc.academy