SCHOLARLY COMMUNICATION AND RESEARCH VISIBILITY: BUILDING DIGITAL IDENTITIES FOR AFRICAN SCHOLARS IN THE GLOBAL KNOWLEDGE ECONOMY

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Abstract

This paper examines the evolving role of digital scholarly identity in the contemporary academic environment. It argues that the ability of researchers to create and manage their online presence has become a crucial determinant of visibility, credibility, and impact within the global knowledge economy. Drawing on the literature on scholarly communication, open access, digital identifiers, and social media, the study explores the strategies that enable scholars to establish coherent digital identities, including the adoption of ORCID and Scopus Author IDs, participation in open access publishing, engagement with institutional repositories, and the use of scholarly networking platforms. The analysis also highlights challenges, such as inequitable access to digital infrastructures, commercialisation of academic networks, and overreliance on metrics that privilege visibility over substance. Recommendations are provided for individual scholars, universities, and policymakers, with particular reference to the African and Nigerian contexts. The paper concludes that digital scholarly identity is both an individual responsibility and a systemic imperative for integrating African scholarship into global circuits of knowledge.

Keywords: scholarly communication, digital identity, online presence, open access, research visibility, altmetrics.

Introduction

In the contemporary academic environment, the concept of scholarly communication has undergone a profound transformation. Traditionally defined as the system through which research and other scholarly writings are created, evaluated, disseminated, and preserved for future use (Association of College and Research Libraries [ACRL], 2003), scholarly communication now operates within a digital ecosystem where visibility and discoverability are mediated by online platforms. The proliferation of digital technologies, coupled with the global push toward open access, has created new opportunities and challenges for researchers seeking to establish and sustain their academic reputation.

Central to this shift is the emergence of digital scholarly identity, which refers to the curated online presence of academics encompassing their publications, research interests, teaching activities, and professional achievements. A researcher's online identity can be deliberately managed—through platforms such as ORCID, Google Scholar, or Scopus—or can evolve passively through digital footprints and shadows left across the web (Spicer, 2014). The way scholars are represented online significantly influences how they are perceived by peers, students, funding bodies, and potential collaborators.

The urgency of cultivating a credible digital identity stems from several factors. First, the sheer volume of scholarly output has increased exponentially, making visibility a prerequisite for impact. Walters (2011) demonstrated that platforms like Google Scholar significantly affect how

research is discovered, recalled, and cited. Similarly, Swan (2010) found that open access publications consistently receive higher citation counts compared to paywalled articles, suggesting that accessibility directly enhances scholarly influence. Second, the shift toward digital platforms has reconfigured the metrics of academic success, with citation indices, altmetrics, and online profiles now central to shaping careers (Beitzel, Jensen, Chowdhury, Frieder, & Grossman, 2007).

The democratization of knowledge through the open access movement has further underscored the importance of digital presence. Open access literature—defined as scholarship that is digital, online, free of charge, and free of most copyright and licensing restrictions (Suber, 2004)—has transformed accessibility, particularly for researchers in the Global South. Digital identity, therefore, is not merely about self-promotion but about ensuring equitable participation in scholarly discourse.

Despite these advantages, managing a digital scholarly identity is not without challenges. For-profit platforms such as Academia.edu and ResearchGate have sparked debates about data ownership and sustainability (Jordan, 2019). The increasing reliance on digital metrics risks reducing scholarly worth to quantitative measures, potentially sidelining qualitative contributions (Wilsdon et al., 2015). Thus, while online presence offers significant opportunities for visibility and collaboration, it also necessitates critical reflection on the ethics and implications of digital scholarship.

This paper explores the creation and management of digital scholarly identity, highlighting strategies to enhance visibility and impact while acknowledging the associated risks. The paper provides insights for researchers navigating academic life in the digital era.

Literature Review

The literature on scholarly communication and digital identity has expanded significantly in the last two decades, reflecting transformations in how knowledge is created, disseminated, and preserved. Scholars increasingly agree that academic reputation is no longer determined solely by traditional publication channels but also by online presence, metrics, and visibility (Sugimoto, Work, Larivière, & Haustein, 2017). This section reviews key debates in five thematic clusters: (1) the evolution of scholarly communication, (2) digital scholarly identity, (3) open access and visibility, (4) social media and alternative metrics, and (5) African and Nigerian perspectives.

Evolution of Scholarly Communication

Historically, scholarly communication was mediated by journals, books, and conferences. The Association of College and Research Libraries (2003) defined it as the system through which research is created, evaluated, disseminated, and preserved. The advent of digital technologies in the late 20th century disrupted this model by accelerating dissemination and enabling new forms of collaboration (Borgman, 2007).

Digital platforms now shape how scholarship is discovered and assessed. Walters (2011) compared recall and precision across Google Scholar and other databases, showing that search tools profoundly affect visibility. Beitzel, Jensen, Chowdhury, Frieder, and Grossman (2007) similarly demonstrated how search engine algorithms structure access to knowledge. These findings underscore that visibility in the digital age is not simply about producing knowledge but also about being discoverable in algorithmically mediated systems.

The implications for scholars are significant. Metrics such as citation counts,

h-index, and journal impact factors have become proxies for academic value (Wilsdon et al., 2015). While these metrics are imperfect, they shape hiring, promotion, and funding decisions. Hence, understanding the evolving infrastructures of scholarly communication is essential for managing one's digital identity.

Digital Scholarly Identity

Digital scholarly identity refers to the intentional projection of an academic persona online. This includes curated profiles, publications, research interests, and affiliations (Spicer, 2014). Scholars may build this identity deliberately—through ORCID, Google Scholar, or Scopus—or leave it to evolve passively via digital footprints and shadows (Walters, 2011).

Persistent identifiers such as ORCID have been central to identity consolidation. Haak, Fenner, Paglione, Pentz, and Ratner (2012) described ORCID as a global infrastructure that uniquely distinguishes scholars and links their outputs. As of 2024, ORCID reported over 16 million registered users (ORCID, 2024). Its integration into journal submission and grant application systems makes it indispensable for academic visibility.

Google Scholar and Scopus Author IDs further strengthen digital identity. While Google Scholar is inclusive, it has been critiqued for errors in attribution and lack of transparency (Halevi, Moed, & Bar-Ilan, 2017). Scopus and Web of Science, by contrast, are curated but often underrepresent outputs from developing regions, reinforcing epistemic inequalities (Onsongo, 2021). The literature thus suggests that scholars must use multiple tools to balance inclusivity with credibility.

Networking platforms such as ResearchGate, Academia.edu, and Mendeley add another dimension to digital identity. Jordan (2019) reviewed their evolution from networking spaces to quasi-publishing platforms. ResearchGate, for instance, provides metrics such as reads and RG scores, enabling informal evaluation. Yet Nentwich and König (2014) warned that their for-profit models raise concerns about data ownership and long-term sustainability. While these platforms boost short-term visibility, institutional repositories and open access platforms provide more secure foundations for long-term scholarly presence.

Open Access and Research Visibility

Open access (OA) literature has reshaped the visibility of research globally. Suber (2004) defined OA as scholarly communication that is "digital, online, free of charge, and free of most copyright and licensing restrictions." Swan (2010) synthesized evidence showing that OA articles consistently attract more citations, a finding corroborated by Piwowar et al. (2018) in a large-scale study.

Björk (2017) distinguished between Gold OA (publishing in OA journals) and Green OA (self-archiving in repositories). Both pathways expand accessibility, though debates persist around sustainability, business models, and equity (Pinfield, 2015).

For developing countries, OA is particularly critical. Chan, Kirsop, and Arunachalam (2011) argued that OA addresses structural inequalities by allowing scholars in resource-constrained contexts to access global knowledge. Ezema and Onyancha (2017) observed that OA has advanced visibility for African research, though challenges remain in adoption and infrastructure.

In Nigeria, institutional repositories have been promoted as vehicles for OA. Christian (2008) identified challenges including poor internet infrastructure, lack of policy frameworks, and limited faculty engagement. Ezema (2013) further argued that Nigerian

repositories often suffer from low deposit rates, undermining their potential. Despite these barriers, repositories remain central to building African digital identities by connecting local scholarship to global databases.

Social Media and Alternative Metrics

Social media has emerged as a powerful tool for scholarly dissemination. Terras (2012) showed that tweeting and blogging about publications significantly increased downloads and readership. Sugimoto et al. (2017) noted that platforms like Twitter, LinkedIn, and YouTube are increasingly integrated into academic practice.

Altmetrics, measures of online engagement such as downloads, tweets, and blog mentions, have complemented traditional citation-based indicators (Priem, Taraborelli, Groth, & Neylon, 2012). Ortega (2020) compared altmetric providers and found that while accuracy varies, they capture dimensions of impact often missed by traditional metrics, particularly societal and policy influence.

However, scholars warn against overreliance on social media metrics. Veletsianos (2016) cautioned that networked scholarship blurs boundaries between professional and personal identities. Moreover, algorithmic platforms privilege virality, which may not align with scholarly quality. Thus, while social media expands influence, it must be used judiciously alongside formal scholarly communication.

African and Nigerian Perspectives

African scholarship has long faced visibility challenges due to limited infrastructure, low representation in indexing services, and systemic biases in global knowledge systems (Czerniewicz, 2015). Onsongo (2021) reviewed barriers to OA in Africa, highlighting financial, technical, and cultural obstacles.

Initiatives such as AJOL have attempted to redress these inequities by providing a platform for African journals. Nwagwu and Onyancha (2015) observed that AJOL has significantly improved access to regional research, though quality control and sustainability remain issues.

In Nigeria, digital identity is closely tied to the adoption of repositories and OA policies. Ezema and Onyancha (2017) argued that Nigerian universities must institutionalize OA to integrate their scholarship globally. However, engagement remains low, with many faculty members unaware of repository benefits (Ezema, 2013).

Recent studies have also noted the role of digital identity in African research visibility. Ajuwon and Olorunsaye (2020) highlighted that Nigerian academics increasingly use Google Scholar and ResearchGate but underutilize ORCID. This indicates gaps in awareness and training, underscoring the need for institutional support. The reviewed literature reveals consensus that digital identity is no longer optional but essential for academic visibility and credibility. Global studies underscore the advantages of OA, social media, and identifiers, while African scholarship highlights persistent inequities in infrastructure and indexing. Together, these strands show that digital scholarly identity is a dynamic construct shaped by both individual agency and systemic structures.

Conceptual Framework

The conceptual framework guiding this paper is built on the understanding that digital scholarly identity emerges at the intersection of three interrelated constructs: scholarly communication, scholarly identity, and digital visibility. Together, these concepts provide the lens for analyzing how academics can strategically

engage with digital infrastructures to enhance their reputation, collaboration, and impact.

Scholarly Communication

Scholarly communication has been classically defined as "the system through which research and other scholarly writings are created, evaluated for quality, disseminated to the scholarly community, and preserved for future use" (Association of College and Research Libraries [ACRL], 2003, p. 1). In its traditional form, this system revolved around peer-reviewed journals, monographs, and academic conferences. However, the emergence of digital technologies has reconfigured each stage of this cycle. Creation now includes not only articles and books but also datasets, software, blog posts, and preprints (Borgman, 2007). Evaluation has expanded beyond peer review to include altmetrics and post-publication commentary (Priem, Taraborelli, Groth, & Neylon, 2012). Dissemination has shifted from paywalled journals to open access repositories and digital platforms (Suber, 2004). Preservation has become both easier and more precarious: while digital repositories extend access indefinitely, commercial academic networking platforms often lack long-term sustainability (Jordan, 2019). Thus, scholarly communication in the digital age is best understood as a participatory, networked, and multidirectional process where scholars actively shape their visibility through the platforms they engage with.

Scholarly Identity

Scholarly identity refers to the projection of a researcher's professional persona, encompassing their publications, teaching, research interests, collaborations, and service to the academic community. In the digital context, it takes the form of online profiles that consolidate and present this information to global audiences (Spicer, 2014).

Digital identity is both intentional and residual. It is intentional when scholars curate profiles on ORCID, Google Scholar, or Scopus to present themselves accurately. It is residual when traces of one's work—citations, mentions, or uploaded PDFs—circulate online without direct author control. Walters (2011) highlighted the importance of managing both footprints (deliberate contributions) and shadows (external portrayals). Identity management also intersects with academic evaluation. As institutions increasingly rely on digital metrics to assess productivity and impact, maintaining coherent online profiles has become vital. Haak, Fenner, Paglione, Pentz, and Ratner (2012) emphasized that persistent identifiers such as ORCID not only solve problems of name ambiguity but also provide infrastructures for transparent evaluation and global recognition.

In African contexts, the issue of identity is complicated by underrepresentation in global indexing systems. Onsongo (2021) noted that many African scholars remain invisible in Scopus and Web of Science despite significant contributions, making the proactive cultivation of digital identity even more crucial.

Digital Visibility

Digital visibility is defined here as the degree to which a scholar's work can be discovered, accessed, and engaged with online. It is distinct from scholarly identity: while identity is about self-presentation, visibility is about discoverability and recognition within networks.

Visibility is shaped by multiple factors:

i. Open Access: Publishing in OA journals or self-archiving enhances global discoverability (Piwowar et al., 2018).
ii. Indexing: Inclusion in databases such as Scopus, Web of Science, and AJOL determines whether scholarship is recognized in global rankings (Nwagwu & Onyancha, 2015).
iii. Metrics: Citations, downloads, and altmetrics affect how work is evaluated and circulated (Wilsdon et al., 2015).
iv. Social Media: Platforms like Twitter and LinkedIn amplify reach to both academic and non-academic audiences (Sugimoto, Work, Larivière, & Haustein, 2017).

Importantly, visibility is not equally distributed. Czerniewicz (2015) highlighted that global knowledge production remains skewed toward the Global North. Nigerian scholarship, though growing in volume, often lacks visibility due to infrastructural barriers, limited repository uptake, and exclusion from indexing systems (Ezema, 2013).

Intersections and Dynamics

The relationship between these three concepts can be illustrated as follows:

i. Scholarly communication provides the infrastructure (journals, repositories, platforms).
ii. Scholarly identity reflects how individuals project themselves through that infrastructure.
iii. Digital visibility is the outcome: the extent to which the projected identity is discoverable and impactful.

This framework emphasizes that digital scholarly identity is not static but a dynamic process of negotiation between individual agency and systemic structures. A Nigerian academic, for example, may publish in an international open access journal (communication), curate an ORCID profile (identity), and share outputs via Twitter and ResearchGate (visibility). However, systemic barriers—such as exclusion from Scopus or lack of repository support—may still limit their global presence.

Research Methodological

This study adopts a conceptual and analytical approach, drawing primarily on secondary sources to explore the role of digital identity platforms in enhancing scholarly visibility and research communication. Rather than generating new empirical data, the study synthesizes insights from existing academic literature, policy documents, and grey literature in order to map the contours of scholarly identity in the digital age. Conceptual papers of this nature are increasingly recognized as valuable within the social sciences and information studies because they help clarify evolving theoretical constructs and provide frameworks for practice and policy (Grant & Booth, 2009; Snyder, 2019).

The sources used in this study include peer-reviewed journal articles, books, and institutional reports published between 2000 and 2024. This time frame was selected because the early 2000s marked the emergence of Web 2.0 technologies and the consequent rise of platforms such as Google Scholar, Academia.edu, and ResearchGate, while the last five years have seen a consolidation of digital identity frameworks through ORCID integration, altmetrics, and institutional repositories. In particular, emphasis was placed on works that address scholarly communication, open access, digital identity management, and the African

context, where issues of visibility and infrastructural inequality are especially pronounced (Chan et al., 2011; Czerniewicz, 2015; Nwagwu & Ojemeni, 2015).

The review process was narrative rather than systematic. Databases such as Scopus, Web of Science, and Google Scholar were consulted using search terms including "digital scholarly identity," "research visibility," "ORCID," "Google Scholar," "ResearchGate," "Academia.edu," and "open access in Africa." Reference lists of key works were also mined to identify additional sources. While this approach does not claim the exhaustive rigor of a systematic literature review, it allows for flexibility and breadth in capturing debates across library and information science, higher education, and communication studies.

The analytical method employed is thematic. Sources were examined to identify recurring themes such as visibility, credibility, research impact, and digital equity. These themes were then used to structure the discussion around major platforms — ORCID, Google Scholar, ResearchGate, Academia.edu, and institutional repositories — with attention to how each can be harnessed to strengthen the digital presence of scholars. The paper also highlights challenges, including data privacy concerns, digital divides, and the dominance of commercial platforms in shaping scholarly communication.

Discussion and Analysis of Findings

The deliberate creation and management of digital scholarly identity has become a defining feature of twenty-first-century academic life. Beyond producing knowledge, scholars must ensure their research is visible, accessible, and correctly attributed. A well-curated digital presence offers several benefits. It enhances visibility, ensuring that research outputs are easily discoverable across search engines and databases. It strengthens credibility and attribution, reducing the risks of misidentification while consolidating a scholar's intellectual contributions under a unified profile. It supports networking and collaboration, enabling researchers to connect across disciplinary, institutional, and geographic boundaries. It also provides career and evaluation advantages, as citation metrics and digital footprints are increasingly used in recruitment, promotion, and funding assessments (Sugimoto & Larivière, 2018; Wouters et al., 2019).

Recognising these benefits, scholars now engage multiple platforms that serve complementary roles in building and sustaining digital identity. These can be grouped into five broad categories: unique identifiers (such as ORCID); bibliometric databases (Google Scholar, Scopus Author ID, and Web of Science ResearcherID); academic networking sites (ResearchGate and Academia.edu); institutional and professional repositories (university repositories and subject-based repositories); and social media platforms (LinkedIn and Twitter/X). Each of these categories contributes distinctively to the visibility, credibility, and engagement of scholars in the digital age. The following discussion introduces each platform, highlights practical uses, and examines associated limitations, with attention to both global best practices and the contextual challenges in Africa.

1. Unique Identifiers: ORCID

ORCID (Open Researcher and Contributor ID) provides scholars with a persistent digital identifier that distinguishes them from others with similar names and ensures correct attribution of their work (Haak et al., 2012). It enables automatic linking of publications, datasets, and peer-review activities across platforms, thereby reducing duplication and error in the scholarly record. Universities,

publishers, and funding agencies increasingly require ORCID iDs during manuscript submission and grant application processes.

Practical use: ORCID is used to integrate research outputs seamlessly across databases, enabling automatic updates to researcher profiles and CVs. For example, when a paper is indexed in CrossRef or Scopus, it can be automatically linked to an ORCID profile, reducing administrative burden for the scholar.

Limitations: Despite its utility, uptake in many African institutions remains low due to limited awareness, poor ICT infrastructure, and the absence of institutional policies mandating ORCID registration. This hampers visibility for African researchers compared to their peers in the Global North.

2. **Bibliometric Databases:** Google Scholar, Scopus Author ID, and Web of Science ResearcherID

Google Scholar is one of the most widely used academic search engines, indexing a vast range of publications and providing metrics such as h-index and citation counts. It is free, user-friendly, and offers automatic indexing, making it highly accessible (Martín-Martín et al., 2021). Scopus Author ID and Web of Science ResearcherID, by contrast, are integrated into subscription-based bibliometric databases and provide curated, higher-quality citation data. These platforms are widely used in global university rankings and research evaluations.

Practical use: Scholars use Google Scholar to increase visibility and track citations, while Scopus and Web of Science IDs help consolidate publication records, reduce author disambiguation problems, and provide robust metrics for institutional evaluations. Many grant funders and accreditation bodies prefer Scopus and Web of Science data because of their stricter indexing standards.

Limitations: Google Scholar's openness can result in inflated or erroneous citation counts, as it indexes non-peer-reviewed materials. Meanwhile, Scopus and Web of Science are behind paywalls, limiting access for many African institutions. This reproduces global inequalities in bibliometric visibility (Mongeon & Paul-Hus, 2016).

Google Scholar remains an accessible entry point to global visibility, but it should be complemented by Scopus or Web of Science where institutional access exists. Strategic use of both platforms ensures maximum visibility and credibility, especially when competing in international academic arenas.

3. **Academic Networking Sites: ResearchGate and Academia.edu**

Academic networking sites such as ResearchGate and Academia.edu allow scholars to share publications, follow colleagues, ask questions, and build professional networks (Thelwall & Kousha, 2015). ResearchGate, in particular, has become one of the most popular platforms globally, boasting millions of members and acting as a hybrid between a repository and a social network.

Practical use: These sites enable scholars to upload preprints, share datasets, and engage with global peers in real time. Features such as "reads," "recommendations," and question-and-answer functions encourage dialogue beyond formal publications.

Limitations: The platforms are privately owned, commercial enterprises. Their sustainability is uncertain, and their metrics (e.g., ResearchGate score) lack transparency and are not widely recognized in formal evaluations. Furthermore, uploading publisher PDFs may violate copyright agreements, exposing scholars to legal risks.

For African scholars with limited access to indexed journals and expensive bibliometric

databases, ResearchGate and Academia.edu provide a low-cost avenue for visibility and networking. However, their use must be balanced with caution on copyright issues and complemented by more stable institutional or subject repositories to safeguard long-term accessibility.

4. **Institutional and Professional Repositories**

Institutional repositories (IRs) and subject-based repositories (e.g., arXiv, PubMed Central, AfricArxiv) provide open access to scholarly outputs, reinforcing universities' research visibility (Pinfield et al., 2014). They ensure compliance with open access mandates, preserve long-term access, and reflect institutional productivity.

Practical use: Scholars can deposit accepted manuscripts, datasets, theses, and grey literature, making them openly available without violating copyright. This enhances local visibility and allows institutions to showcase their intellectual capital.

Limitations: Many African institutions lack well-developed repositories, and where they exist, usage is hampered by low staff capacity, poor funding, and weak integration into academic promotion systems (Ezema, 2011). This results in underutilization despite their potential to democratize access to African scholarship.

For African researchers, institutional repositories are vital tools for decolonizing knowledge production by making local scholarship visible globally. Participation in both local and subject repositories helps African scholarship gain legitimacy and influence in global debates.

5. **Social Media Platforms: LinkedIn and Twitter/X**

Social networking platforms such as LinkedIn and Twitter/X are increasingly used for scholarly engagement, science communication, and public visibility. LinkedIn allows academics to showcase qualifications, publications, and professional networks, while Twitter/X has become an important tool for sharing preprints, engaging in policy debates, and reaching non-academic audiences (Van Noorden, 2014).

Practical use: Scholars can disseminate research quickly, join topical conversations, and connect with practitioners, journalists, and policymakers beyond academia. Research communication through social media often leads to broader societal impact and increases the likelihood of citations.

Limitations: Social media platforms can blur professional and personal boundaries, expose scholars to trolling, and contribute to attention-driven rather than content-driven engagement. They also require sustained effort to be effective.

For African scholars, these platforms provide crucial visibility where institutional repositories and bibliometric databases remain weakly developed. Strategic use of LinkedIn and Twitter/X can amplify research from underrepresented contexts, bridging global inequalities in knowledge flows.

Conclusion

The digital transformation of scholarly communication has fundamentally altered how academics build reputation, disseminate research, and participate in the global knowledge economy. In this environment, digital scholarly identity has emerged as both a strategic necessity and an ethical imperative. No longer is a scholar's reputation defined solely by publications in prestigious journals or appearances at conferences. Instead, visibility, discoverability, and engagement within digital ecosystems now shape how research is valued, accessed, and applied.

This paper has demonstrated that deliberate management of digital scholarly identity is not optional but essential. ORCID provides the foundation for consolidating identity across fragmented systems. Google Scholar ensures inclusivity and reach, while Scopus Author ID and Web of Science ResearcherID contribute credibility within global evaluation frameworks. ResearchGate and Academia.edu offer immediate but informal visibility, though they must be complemented with sustainable infrastructures such as institutional repositories. Open access publishing represents the most powerful pathway for democratizing visibility, while social media and altmetrics extend scholarly impact into the realms of policy, practice, and public discourse.

At the same time, the analysis underscores that the benefits of digital identity are unevenly distributed. Scholars in Africa, and Nigeria in particular, face systemic challenges: poor digital infrastructure, limited repository uptake, underrepresentation in indexing systems, and low institutional awareness of ORCID and altmetrics. These inequities perpetuate epistemic imbalances in the global academy, marginalising African scholarship despite its relevance to pressing global challenges. Thus, digital scholarly identity is not only about individual branding but also about collective visibility and participation in shaping global knowledge.

The implications are clear: individual effort must be matched by institutional commitment and policy reform. When individual scholars create profiles, share outputs, and engage with digital tools, they increase their visibility. But without supportive policies—such as university mandates for repository deposits, ORCID adoption, and open access publishing—these efforts remain fragmented and unsustainable. Similarly, policymakers must address structural inequities by investing in digital infrastructures, advocating for inclusive indexing systems, and supporting regional platforms like African Journals Online (AJOL).

Recommendations

The following recommendations are proposed for individual scholars, universities and research institutions, as well as policymakers and funding agencies, to strengthen digital scholarly identities and enhance research visibility.

For Individual Scholars

1. Adopt Persistent Identifiers: Register for ORCID and link it to Google Scholar, Scopus, and institutional profiles to consolidate identity.
2. Curate Digital Profiles: Regularly update Google Scholar, ResearchGate, and LinkedIn profiles with publications, projects, and keywords that reflect expertise.
3. Publish Open Access: Prioritize OA journals listed in the Directory of Open Access Journals (DOAJ) or AJOL to maximize readership and citations.
4. Deposit in Repositories: Self-archive articles, theses, and datasets in institutional repositories to ensure long-term preservation and accessibility.
5. Engage with Social Media Strategically: Use platforms like Twitter/X and LinkedIn to share research updates and reach interdisciplinary and non-academic audiences, while maintaining professionalism.

For Universities and Research Institutions

1. Institutionalise ORCID. Adoption: Make ORCID registration mandatory for faculty and integrate it into academic assessment systems.
2. Strengthen Institutional Repositories: Provide technical

infrastructure, policy frameworks, and incentives for faculty to deposit publications.
3. Reward Digital Engagement: Recognize open access publishing, repository deposits, and social media engagement in promotion and tenure criteria.
4. Offer Training: Provide workshops on managing digital identity, using altmetrics, and engaging with global indexing systems.
5. Collaborate Regionally: Partner with platforms like AJOL to amplify the visibility of African research.

For Policymakers and Funding Agencies

1. Mandate ORCID for Funding: Require ORCID identifiers for grant applications to ensure accountability and discoverability of funded outputs.
2. Support National Repositories: Develop national and regional digital repositories to aggregate outputs from universities and research institutes.
3. Invest in Digital Infrastructure: Improve internet connectivity, repository software, and indexing capacity to bridge the digital divide.
4. Promote Inclusive Indexing: Advocate for reforms in global indexing systems to recognize African and Global South scholarship.
5. Advance Open Access Policies: Adopt national OA mandates, provide funding for APCs (article processing charges), and incentivize Green OA practices.

Collectively, these actions will not only strengthen the digital scholarly identities of African researchers but also ensure their work achieves the visibility, credibility, and impact it deserves in the global knowledge ecosystem.

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