



Description

A quick Google search on virtually any topic yields a list of sources of information on the search engine's first page. Traditionally, scholarly publishing has always relied on the peer-reviewed journal articles as references in research and academic writing. A fair and rigorous peer-review process guarantees credible and verified content. However, a new dichotomy has emerged in the reference definition, impacting its categorization. "Reference", according to a new study by Oxford University Press, has been divided into two categories, [factual information and exploratory resources](#).

Understanding Factual Information and Exploratory Resources

Resources for scholarly publishing have evolved over the years, especially with the use of the internet as a research tool. [A white paper published by Oxford University Press](#) first drew attention to exploratory resources, which are seemingly ambiguous yet rich sources for scholarly reference. These references can include encyclopedias, research guides created by librarians in universities or institutions, JSTOR Topic Pages, Oxford Bibliographies, Credo References, and YewNo Discover, among others. These resources have decreased the use of journals and monographs as the first references that early stage researchers use when looking for information that can lead them to specialized research areas.

The focus on the function of exploratory research rests on the [increasing emphasis on interdisciplinary studies](#). While academic journals offer highly specialized information, often difficult to interpret for researchers not from that field, exploratory resources allow several disciplines to converge on a given topic. It offers researchers both general information to better understand a subject area, and appropriate specific information to encourage them to explore other content for specialized information, hence its name. On the other hand, information, available through dictionaries, gazetteers, and almanacs, are often accessed online.

The Death of Factual Resources?

[Out of 18 users interviewed](#), 11 stated that their initial step in the research process is to look for publications in scholarly journals. The remaining respondents first turned to factual resources found in dictionaries and almanacs. The shift away from these sources of information comes at a time when the objective of the modern research journey is to look for contextualized information rather than a

collection of facts. While dictionaries are good starting points for understanding *words*, they are much less useful as resources for scholarly publishing. Factual resources are [considered tertiary resources](#) and are not acceptable for use in scholarly publications. In contrast to exploratory resources, factual resources are less preferred because of their mode of delivery, content, and lack of context. These, however, do not signal the end for dictionaries and other tertiary sources.

Scholarly Research in the Digital Age

The preference for exploratory resources is comparatively higher. The dissemination of original research depends on the ecosystem surrounding the scholars: libraries, other scholars, and publishers. This rests on factual information and exploratory resources that provide researchers with the appropriate tools to further scholarly publishing. In the digital age, most academic researchers access publications through online databases. Exploratory resources are largely accessed online through open access platforms. The future of scholarly research seems to be geared towards open access publishing, with STEM disciplines having different requirements and protocols.

Navigating research in today's world requires an evolving approach to infrastructure, publication, and workflow. Before digitalization, manuscripts were held as primary resources and factual information was highly regarded. Today, digitalization and the access to data support the fact that researchers are looking for context rather than collections.

Category

1. Career Corner
2. PhDs & Postdocs

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