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Issues In Citing Internet Resources: What Nigerian Authors, Librarians, and Information Seekers Must Abide In

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Issues in Citing Internet Resources

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Introduction

The Internet links educational, commercial and non-profit organizations, the military, as well as individuals (Williams & Sawyer, 2007). Internet use in Nigeria started in 1991 when a few pioneering groups began to offer limited e-mail services (Eshekels Associates, 2001). In July 1995, the regional information network for Africa (RINAF) commenced Internet services at the Computer Science Department of Yaba College of technology, and through the Nigerian postal service (NIPOST), in a collaborative effort with Rose Clayton Nigeria Limited (Adomi, 2005).

The world wide Web (WWW) became available in Nigeria in 1996, while full Internet services became available in 1998, and number of NCC (Nigerian Communications Commission) licensed Internet service Providers rose to over 150 by 2001 (Adomi, 2005).

With an estimated total population of over 140 million people (National Population Commission, 2006), Nigeria is the most populated black nation in the world, with Internet hosts as low as 1,094 (Adomi, 2005).

In late 2003, Nigeria had a total of 750,000 Internet users and 60 users per 10,000 inhabitants representing 0.5 percent of the population (International Telecommunications Union, 2004). Nigeria had a total of 853,000 PC's and 0.71 pc's per 100 inhabitants as at 2003 (ITU, 2004).

Internet use in Nigeria has for long been linked to research. This is because the adoption of the Internet in Nigeria has leveraged access to information and communication by providing un-reserved access to e-mail messages, Web boards, online services, e-publication and so on. However, Internet use came with it the problem of citation. This is because unlike the print sources which the average Nigerian researcher is aware of, Internet resources are quite peculiar and grey.

This issue must be addressed at this point in time because Krause (2007) posited that citation is one of the key elements that distinguish academic research writing from other kinds of writings. Moreover, Researchers are eagerly interested in

knowing where the writer found his/her evidence, so that they can retrieve that evidence and read it themselves.

Besides, academic writers are also very interested in giving credit to other writers' ideas. Krause (2007) pointed out that quoting and paraphrasing in research do not give proper credit to another writer's knowledge or ideas. The goal of citation therefore, is to explain to the readers or information users where the writer found the evidence that he/she used to support his/her point. This must not be taken for granted.

Internet Resources

There are diverse resources on the Internet. They include:

Electronic Books (e-books)

Electronic books or e-books are digital texts, which are issued as individual works and designed to be accessed by using special software for text navigation and ease of reading. E-books are digital versions of a traditional printed book designed to be read in a personal computer or an e-book reader. The e-book reader is a software application designed for use in a standard-sized computer or a book-sized computer used solely as a reading device. There are large array of electronic books on the Internet. Some are designed for reference purposes while others are prepared to be read like textbooks.

Electronic Journals (e-journals)

Electronic journals are scholarly journals or intellectually magazines that can be accessed via the World Wide Web. E-journals are fashioned to be like the print journal. E-journal articles usually contain metadata that can be entered into specialized databases ass well as the databases and search engines for the academic and discipline concerned. Some e-journals are Internet-only, while others are Internet version of printed journals.

The World Wide Web

The world wide Web is a global network of Internet servers providing access to document written in a script called the hypertext mark up language (HTML) that allows content to be interlinked, locally and remotely (Reitz, 2005). The Web consists of websites and Web pages.

Websites

A website is the location on a particular computer on the Web that has unique address called the uniform resource locator (URL). The URL is a string of characters that point to a specific piece of information anywhere on the web. In other words, it is the unique address identifying a resource accessible at a particular location on the Internet (Reitz, 2005). The URL consists of protocol, domain name or Web server, the directory or folder of that server, and the file within the directory, perhaps with an extension such as the html, pdf, doc, php, etc. (Williams and Sawyer, 2007).

Web Protocols

The Web protocol is a set of communication rules for exchanging information. The Web protocol, called the hypertext transfer protocol (http) was developed by Tim Berners-Lee. The http appears at the beginning of a Web address. It is the protocol that enables the browser to connect with Web servers.

Domain Name or Server Name

This is the location of a particular Web server on the Internet. Domain names tell the location and the type of address. The domain name components are separated

by periods (called dots). According to Williams and Sawyer (2007) the last part of the domain name, called the top level domain, is a three-letter extension that describes the domain type. For example, .gov stands for government, .int stands for international organization, .org stands for organizations, .edu stands for educational institution etc.

Notwithstanding, some top level domain names also include a two-letter code extension for the country. For instance, .us stands for the United Sates, .ng stands for the federal republic of Nigeria, .ca for Canada, etc.

Directory Name

This is the name on the server for the folder from which the browser needs to pull the file that contains the information.

Filename

This is the particular page or the document containing the information found on the Internet. The extension (such as pdf, html, php etc.) informs the browser the type of file to retrieve.

Web Pages

A Web page is a document on the World Wide Web that can include text, pictures, sounds and videos called multimedia. Web pages make up a website. The first page you see on a Web site is like the title page of a book (Williams and Sawyer, 2007). This first page is called the home or welcome page, which identifies the website and contains the links to other Web pages at the Web site.

Email

An e-mail refers to an Internet protocol that allows computer users to exchange messages and data files in real-time with other users, locally and across networks (Reitz, 2005). Users of web-based e-mail can send messages to a single recipient at a specific e-mail address or multicast to a distribution list or mailing list without creating a paper copy until hard copy is desired. Faster and more reliable than the postal service, e-mail can also be more convenient than telephone communication, but it has raised issues of security and privacy (Williams and Sawyer, 2007).

Twitter

Twitter is the most popular micro-blogging application, with almost one million users called twitterers, who can send and receive messages via the web, SMS, instant messaging clients, and by third party applications. Posts are limited to 140 text characters in length. Micro-blogging is a collaborative technology with a growing interest from users coming from different domains.

Similarly, it can also be seen as a social networking and micro-blogging service that enables its users to send and read messages known as tweets. Tweets are text-based posts of up to 140 characters displayed on the author's profile page and delivered to the author's subscribers who are known as followers. Senders can restrict delivery to those in their circle of friends or, by default, allow open access. Since late 2009, users can follow lists of authors instead of following individual authors (http://help.twitter.com/forums/10711/entries/76460; http://blog.twitter.com/2009/10/)

Micro-blogging is a Web2.0 technology, and a new form of blogging that let the users publish online brief text updates, usually less then 140-200 characters, sometimes images too. The posts can be edited and accessed online, or sent as SMS, e-mail or via instant messaging clients. Usually the micro-blog authors embed its posts as a widget on blogs.

All users can send and receive tweets via the Twitter website, Short Message Service (SMS) or external applications. Since its creation in 2006 by Jack Dorsey,

Twitter has gained notability and popularity worldwide. It is sometimes described as "SMS of the Internet (http://www.alexa.com/siteinfo/twitter.com). Twitter is not only a social network, but also an information network. It tells people what they care about as it is happening in the world (http://blog.twitter.com/2009/10/theres-list-for-that.html)

Facebook

Facebook is an Internet site used as a means to connect with friends or fans (often featuring customizable profile pages).

Facebook was created in 2004 by Harvard student Mark Zuckerberg. The website was intended to be an online version of the University's printed Facebook, which is a directory of new students. At that time, membership to the website was limited to Harvard students only. By the end of 2005, Facebook expanded to include, first, a network of 800 colleges and universities, then high schools, and then international students. Facebook was designed for students and its primary users are still students. The basic profile in Facebook includes the following:

- A place for a profile picture
- Contact information and "About You" space
- The Wall-- a place where friends can publicly post comments (a digital bulletin board)
- Status update-- where one can tell his/her friends how he/she is or what he/she is doing
- News Feed-- regularly updated information about friends as well as the groups they have joined, applications or friends they have added, changes to their profiles.
- A space for uploading photos and videos.

Facebook, like many social software sites, is customizable and there is no end to the number of applications you can add to your Facebook account. Applications are additional tools and features-- some are created by Facebook, but many more have been created by third party developers.

Citing Internet resources with APA style

The goal of citation is to enable information to be retrieved again. Thus, reliable Internet information must provide information that will allow the reader to retrieve information that was consulted while writing the work (University of Vermont, 2010). Information obtained from the Internet must be correctly referenced. Such references should contain information for the particular document version that was retrieved such as:

- The name of the author or editor.
- The title of the work.
- The date of the copyright or date of last update.
- The source of information e.g. e-journal, Web page etc.
- The date the information was accessed.
- The full Internet address.

According to Deakin (2010) all materials used from all sources should be referenced in the body of the paper each time a fact was used, a conclusion was drawn, and an idea or finding on another person is used. This practice helps other researchers and information users to know the actual source of information. It also helps the author to acknowledge those whose works were consulted. The APA system of citation consists of two elements:

a. In-text citation;
b. Reference listing.

In-text citation

This refers to the citation of an authority inside the body of a work. It usually includes the name of the author and the date of publication or date of last update. When an author is referred to in the body of a work, the element should include the author's family name (surname) and year of publication using one of the following styles shown in the example below:

1. Anyira (2010) stated that information should be evaluated before use.
2. It was stated that information should be evaluated before use (Anyira, 2010). American Psychological Association (APA) (2001) noted that if a work is cited more than once in one paragraph, only the family name should be cited. That is, there may be no need for the date since the citation is in the same paragraph. Further, when citing a work with 2 or 3 authors, cite all the authors with their family name. but, if the authors are more than 3, cite only the first author followed by et al (which means "and others"). Monash University (2010) stated that the rule is same for print and Internet materials.

Reference List

The purpose of a reference list is to enable readers to locate sources (Deakin, 2010). Reference details must be correct and complete if information could be located. Therefore, each in-text citation and the related reference must be identical in spelling and date (APA, 2001). A work should be referenced once in the reference list, regardless of the number of times it was cited in the body of the work. Works not cited in the text should not appear in the reference list, while all the works cited in-text must appear in the reference list (Deakin, 2010).

Besides, while compiling a reference list using APA style, references are double-spaced and the start from a new page with a centered heading title "References". The list may include books, journal articles, Internet resources such as Web materials, e-mail messages, e-journals etc., in one alphabetical listing by author's family name. Works without authors are listed under the first significant word of the title. Furthermore, the first line of each reference is left-justified, while subsequent lines are indented 5-7 spaces.

Basic Formats

The formats for citing the various Internet sources are as follows:

a. Citing an article in an Internet-only journal (not from database)

In an Internet-only journal, page numbers may not be provided and volume and issue numbers are often not relevant. In the reference list entry, only details that could be determined should be provided.

Example:

Author family name, Initial (year, month day). Title of article. Title of journal, volume number (issue number), page numbers. Retrieved month day, year, from Web address.

b. Citing electronic copy of a journal article, authored from a database

Example:

Author family name, Initial (year, month day). Title of article. Title of journal, volume number (issue number), page numbers. Retrieved month day, year, from database name, on the World Wide Web: URL.

c. citing Internet document with no author and date

If a document has no author or date, the reference should begin with the title, while the abbreviation n.d. (for no date) should be used in place of the date.

Example:

Title of document (n.d.).Retrieved month day, year, from Web address

d. Citing online newspaper article

Example:

Author family name, Initial (year, month day). Title of article. Title of newspaper. Retrieved month day, year, from Web address.

e. Citing an e-book (text book)

Example:

Author family name, Initial (year, month day). Retrieved month day, year, from database name on the World Wide Web: URL.

f. Citing an e-book (reference book)

Example:

Author family name, Initial (year). Title. Retrieved month day, year, from database name on the World Wide Web: URL.

g. Citing a Web site/ Web page

Example:

Author of page or site (date of last up date). Title/ name of page/ site. Retrieved month day, year, from Web address.

h. Citing Facebook

Example:

User name or group name (date). Title. In facebook [page type*] Retrieved month day, year, from Web address.

*note: page type could be private page, fan page, group page or profile information. The group should be noted in square bracket.

i. Citing Twitter

Example:

Author or twitterer (year, month day). Title of tweet. [Twitter post*] Retrieved month day, year, from Web address.

*note: twitter post implies that the information was obtained through twitter post.

j. Citing Wikipedia

Example:

Title (year or n.d. if no date). In Wikipedia. Retrieved month day, year, from Web address.

k. citing email

E-mail is a personal communication and should not appear in the reference list. When citing an e-mail message in the body of a work, it should appear in a

parenthetical citation.

Example:

The Internet is vital in education (I. Anyira, personal communication, March 10, 2010). Or. Internet sources should be cited properly (P.G. Hugbo, e-mail to author, March 10, 2010).

Conclusion

Citation is very important in research. Without it, there may not be any other means of obtaining clarification or additional information when needed. Sources used as evidence in writing a piece of information should be clearly cited and referenced accordingly. Citation is a basic skill that is required of every writer and information user especially in the Internet age.

Recommendations

1. There is the urgent need for writers and information users on the Internet to acquire the basic skills necessary for citing Internet resources in line with acceptable styles or formats ;
2. All the sources consulted while preparing a work should be cited in the body of the work (in-text citation), and be fully referenced in the reference list.
3. Only the works cited in-text should be included in the reference list.
4. Information that does not show the sources consulted should be considered unauthoritative.

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