



# The Importance of Newspapers in Scholarly Research

Highlights from a study from the Oxford Internet Institute on the scholarly impacts of newspapers



## About this study

Eric T. Meyer, currently the Dean of the School of Information at University of Texas, Austin, and formerly a Professor of Social Informatics and Director of Graduate Studies at Oxford Internet Institute, conducted the data collection and analysis.

Four newspaper titles were selected for evaluation and analysis in this report:

- *The New York Times*
- *The Wall Street Journal*
- *The Washington Post*
- *The Guardian*

Scopus was used as the source for the data examined.



## Newspapers are an important part of the academic publishing landscape

**The data in this report conducted in partnership between ProQuest and the Oxford Internet Institute** reveals a clear story: newspapers are an important part of the academic publishing landscape, and their use is growing, both in absolute numbers and when measured by the proportion of academic publications that cite one of these well-known titles.

This study examines the frequency of newspaper citations in scholarly journal articles and also reveals the disciplines in which scholars most often use newspapers as a source for academic research.

**This summary highlights four key findings. The complete study is available here:**

Meyer, Eric T., *The Scholarly Impacts of Newspapers: The Guardian, Washington Post, Wall Street Journal, and New York Times* (May 2, 2018). Available at SSRN: <https://ssrn.com/abstract=3194632> or <http://dx.doi.org/10.2139/ssrn.3194632>

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# Four Key Findings

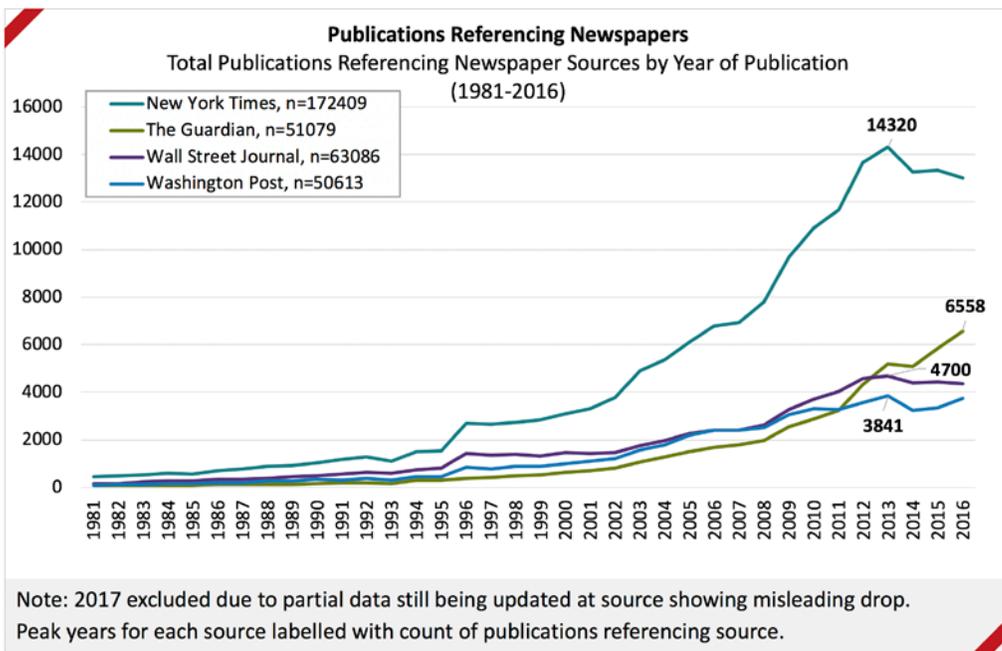
## ONE: The use of newspapers in research is on the rise

The chart in Figure 1 indicates the number of published scholarly articles that include citations of the newspaper titles included in this study. Here we see a rise in absolute numbers, with an uptick beginning in the mid-1990s and then significant growth in the early-2000s as newspaper content becomes available in online and digital forms.

High usage occurs around 2013, with a plateau or slight dip in the more recent years reflecting the potential pattern of newspaper content moving behind paywalls. *The Guardian* is a notable exception where its use has consistently continued to trend upward.

The study also shows that all four newspaper titles displayed upward trendline growth when normalized across the publications in Scopus that reference these newspapers.

Figure 1



Note: 2017 excluded due to partial data still being updated at source showing misleading drop. Peak years for each source labelled with count of publications referencing source.

Figure 2 Comparative Scatter Graph of Journals Citing Newspapers, 2000-2017



## TWO: Newspapers are cited by scholars in every discipline

It comes as no surprise that newspapers are frequently cited in research related to the arts and humanities. However, the subject areas that most commonly include newspaper citations include the social sciences, health and medicine, business and the hard sciences.

The comparative scatter graphs in Figure 2 demonstrate hot spots where newspapers are most cited within academic disciplines.



## The five disciplines that most frequently cite newspapers in research, 2000-2017

For the newspaper titles analyzed in this study, Figure 3 shows the top five subject areas, the number of total articles published for the years 2000-2017 and the number and percent of articles that cited one or more of the newspaper titles as a source.

Figure 3

Rank	Subject Area	Total Publications	Publications Citing Newspapers	Percentage of Publications Citing Newspapers
1	Social Sciences	3,229,141	182,386	5.7
2	Arts & Humanities	1,660,377	79,287	4.8
3	Economics, Econometrics and Finance	691,481	30,882	4.5
4	Business, Management and Accounting	1,080,391	42,988	4.0
5	Psychology	872,023	14,341	1.6



### THREE: Each newspaper title shows distinctive patterns across disciplines

A distinct pattern of usage for each of these newspaper titles emerges in reviewing scatter graphs and the underlying data.

For example, *The New York Times* is influential in research across the broadest range of academic disciplines, with the heaviest concentration of citations in scholarly articles on topics from international and diplomatic studies, psychology, culture, technology, business and health and medicine.

*The Guardian* has also been cited in journals across diverse fields, including sociology, journalism, international studies, business and the environment.

In comparison, citations from *The Wall Street Journal* are clustered around areas of business, finance and management, while *The Washington Post* is most frequently referenced in topics related to politics, global relations, security and regional studies.



### FOUR: All four titles are cited by researchers around the globe

This study also reveals the geographic distribution of institutions of the authors who have cited these newspapers.

As expected, most of the researchers citing these newspapers represent majority English-speaking countries. Each of the four titles were most frequently cited by scholars from universities in North America, Europe, Australia, Asia and Africa. However, in some instances we see that the subject area is more important than the geographic region. For example, in the case of *The Wall Street Journal*, five Hong Kong institutions are among the top 20 universities that cited the publication in scholarly research.

## The challenge for libraries

Libraries need to ensure that their researchers have access to essential, in-demand news sources—historical, contemporary and breaking news—in one place, on one platform that can be cross-searched with related content, enriched with metadata and user tools and where it supports targeted and serendipitous discovery for better research outcomes.

## The importance of newspapers in scholarly research

Previous research\* quantifying the impacts of investments in humanities archives indicated that when looked at as a scholarly resource, *The New York Times* had a broader influence across disciplines than other resources examined (Early English Books Online and The House of Commons Parliamentary Papers). Scholarly journals that included citations of *The New York Times* spread across a standardized overlay map of publications in a wide variety of fields—not just the humanities as one might have assumed.

This updated report provides new information on those earlier findings along with evaluations of other newspapers selected to provide a comparative view of well-known U.S. newspaper titles (*The New York Times*, *The Washington Post*, *The Wall Street Journal*) and United Kingdom publications (*The Guardian*), but also between newspapers with different target audiences.

Because coverage is so diverse, newspapers are invaluable to all researchers. They contain a breadth of content that is relevant to just about every subject matter, across the curriculum. Spanning topics in history, politics, the arts, business, science and so much more, newspapers are an essential primary source for student and scholars—from beginning to advanced—seeking information on current issues and historical events.

\* <https://media2.proquest.com/documents/jisc-research-highlights.pdf>



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