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Editorial

User Engagement Trends for a Scholarly Publication Hosted on AJOL: A Case on Journal of Advocacy, Research and Education

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Abstract

This editorial briefly analyses user engagement trends for a scholarly publication hosted on African Journals Online (AJOL) between August and November 2024. Using data on abstract views and article downloads, we explore geographical patterns of academic engagement across continents and regions. The analysis revealed that North America, particularly the United States, is the leading download contributor. At the same time, Africa and Asia exhibited significant growth in abstract views based on AJOL's data. The editorial discusses these trends, highlighting the implications for global academic dissemination and suggesting strategies to enhance accessibility, visibility, and impact in underrepresented regions.

Keywords: African Journals Online, Hosted, Journal of Advocacy, Research and Education, Scholarly Publication, Trends, User Engagement.

1. Introduction

The Journal of Advocacy, Research and Education (JARE) began open-access publishing in 2014 to advance unrestricted dissemination of scholarly research, especially in Africa. After a decade, the JARE was indexed in African Journals Online (AJOL) in 2024. In the contemporary academic landscape, digital platforms like AJOL have become essential and valuable in disseminating scholarly knowledge. These platforms connect researchers, practitioners, and policymakers worldwide, breaking geographical and institutional barriers. Nevertheless, the extent to which this global reach is realised varies across regions, influenced by factors such as the quality of papers, thematic areas of papers, internet access, institutional subscriptions, and cultural engagement with academic literature (Sarfo, 2023a; Sarfo, 2023b).

Previous studies on scholarly engagement have highlighted disparities in access and usage, with regions like North America and Europe often dominating metrics such as downloads (Gurib-Fakim, Signé, 2022; Sarfo, 2019; Tarkang, Bain, 2019). However, emerging African and Asian economies are gradually increasingly engaging with academic content, driven by expanding

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internet penetration and a growing emphasis on higher education. For example, Africa's contribution to global research output has historically been underrepresented despite its growing academic and research capacity (Gurib-Fakim, Signé, 2022; Tarkang, Bain, 2019). Platforms like AJOL are crucial in amplifying African scholarship, providing visibility for locally relevant studies and fostering international collaborations.

This editorial seeks to contextualise these developments by analysing engagement data, focusing on the distribution of abstract views and downloads across continents and regions. Understanding how users interact with academic content – through abstract views and article downloads – offers a lens into the dissemination and impact of research. This editorial examines engagement data from AJOL over four months in 2024 [following its indexing] to identify trends, challenges, and opportunities for enhancing global academic participation.

2. Methods

Engagement data were collected from AJOL for the period August to November 2024. Metrics analysed included:

1. Abstract Views: The number of times article abstracts were accessed, reflecting preliminary interest.

2. Article Downloads: The number of times full-text articles were downloaded, indicating deeper engagement.

Data were categorised by continent and further divided into regions (e.g., West Africa, Southeast Asia) for a granular analysis. Trends were identified by comparing monthly variations and examining high- and low-performing regions. Key patterns were highlighted to inform targeted strategies for enhancing academic engagement.

3. Country-Specific Engagement Metrics

Table 1 summarises a scholarly platform's engagement metrics over four months, focusing on abstract views and article downloads. Abstract views increased steadily from August (130 views) to November (204 views), totalling 680 views over four months. This growth suggests a rising interest in the platform's content. Ghana consistently ranks as a leading contributor to abstract views, with the highest cumulative total (97 views). Also, the Philippines shows significant engagement, especially in November (38 views), leading to a cumulative total of 106 views, the highest overall. Other notable contributors include Nigeria, Kenya, and Iran, indicating diverse regional interests.

Table 1. Engagement Metrics for August, September, October, and November 2024

Metric	August 2024	September 2024	October 2024	November 2024	Total
Abstract Views	130	151	195	204	680
Top Countries (Abstract Views)	Ghana (26), Nigeria (17), Philippines (15)	Ghana (19), Philippines (26), Kenya (14)	United States (30), Philippines (27), Ghana (20)	Ghana (32), Philippines (38), Iran (19)	Ghana (97), Philippines (106)
Article Downloads	553	366	367	781	2067
Top Countries (Article Downloads)	United States (313), Ghana (28), Nigeria (16)	United States (93), Nigeria (53), Ghana (17)	United States (93), India (83), Ghana (25)	United States (375), India (66), Ghana (49)	United States (876), Ghana (118), India (232)

Source: AJOL Stats

Regarding the number of articles downloaded, there is a fluctuating pattern, with a dip in September (366) and October (367) followed by a sharp increase in November (781). The total downloads over the period reached 2,067. This trend suggests varying levels of deeper engagement, where the United States dominates article downloads throughout the period, with a cumulative total of 876 downloads, reflecting its robust academic infrastructure and demand for scholarly

content. India emerges as a significant contributor in October (83 downloads) and November (66), totalling 232 downloads, the second-highest overall.

Concerning abstract views in Africa, West Africa led with 140 views, reflecting strong regional interest, while Southern and East Africa contributed modestly. Also, Southeast Asia (160 views) and South Asia (61 views) showed significant engagement, with Vietnam and the Philippines as key contributors. In North America, the United States accounted for 89 views, consistently maintaining interest in abstracts, while Eastern Europe (35 views) and Western Europe (40 views) demonstrated moderate engagement. Nevertheless, Oceania showed limited engagement, with only a few views from Australia and New Zealand.

Regarding article downloads, North America was the highest contributor, with the United States dominating with 874 downloads, underscoring its position as a primary audience. This is followed by Africa, where West Africa (219 downloads) is the leading sub-region, followed by Southern Africa (31). The next contributor is Asia, where South Asia (190 downloads) outperformed Southeast Asia (120), with India contributing significantly. The remaining contributors to the downloads of articles were Europe, where Eastern Europe (119 downloads) exceeded Western Europe (59) and Oceania, where downloads remained low, with minimal engagement from Australia and New Zealand.

Conclusion and Implications

The engagement data analysis from August to November 2024 provides valuable insights into the global reach of scholarly publications hosted on AJOL. While North America remains a dominant audience, the growing interest in Africa and Asia signals a shift toward a more inclusive academic landscape. However, the disparity between abstract views and downloads highlights persistent access challenges that must be addressed to ensure equitable dissemination of knowledge.

Generally, the balanced engagement in Europe, where there was a consistent engagement, with Eastern Europe emerging as a significant contributor to downloads, is interesting. Additionally, North America's Dominance, where the United States continues to lead in downloads, reflects its robust academic infrastructure and high demand for scholarly content. Also, the increasing abstract views in West Africa and Southeast Asia highlight the growing interest in academic research, driven by expanding educational initiatives and digital access. These findings underscore the need for region-specific strategies to address access barriers and enhance engagement, particularly in Africa and Asia.

This editorial emphasises the importance of leveraging engagement data to create a more inclusive and impactful academic ecosystem. By addressing the challenges and opportunities highlighted, stakeholders can contribute to a global scholarly community representing diverse perspectives and priorities.

6. Declarations

Ethics approval and consent to participate

Not applicable.

Consent for publication

Not applicable.

Availability of data and materials

Data is available via the AJOL Stats Platform and will be available upon reasonable request.

Conflict of interest statement

The author reports no conflicts of interest.


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