Academic Libraries have the Most Trusted Resources, but their Tools are Hard to Use

**iii** innovative

Executive Summary

Every year, more than 2 trillion searches take place on Google. From there, many people—and more students than would probably admit—end up on Wikipedia, which is edited by random people all over the world at an average of 1.8 edits per second. Others might order a book from Amazon, which ships over 5 billion items a year. Still others might download some of the over 80 million pirated papers from Sci-Hub or from networks like Library Genesis.

The scale of these numbers is almost incomprehensible, but the reality is that academic researchers and professors have countless sources of information at their fingertips. For centuries, libraries have been the authority on knowledge, and a new survey finds that professors and academic researchers agree—they view their campus libraries as offering the most trusted, authoritative information. **But they also say that libraries' search tools have not kept up with the online world and rank libraries the lowest for "ease of use" compared to commonly used research tools.**

LIBRARIES
RANK LOWEST FOR
EASE OF USE

88% of professors trust resources from the library a great deal—more trusted than any other resource they use for research—but only 36% say they're easy to use. Compare that to Google, which only 8% trust, but 88% say is easy to use.

Academic Libraries vs. Search Engines

● **EASE OF USE**   ● **TRUST**

Academic Libraries
— 36%
— 88%

Search Engines
— 88%
— 8%
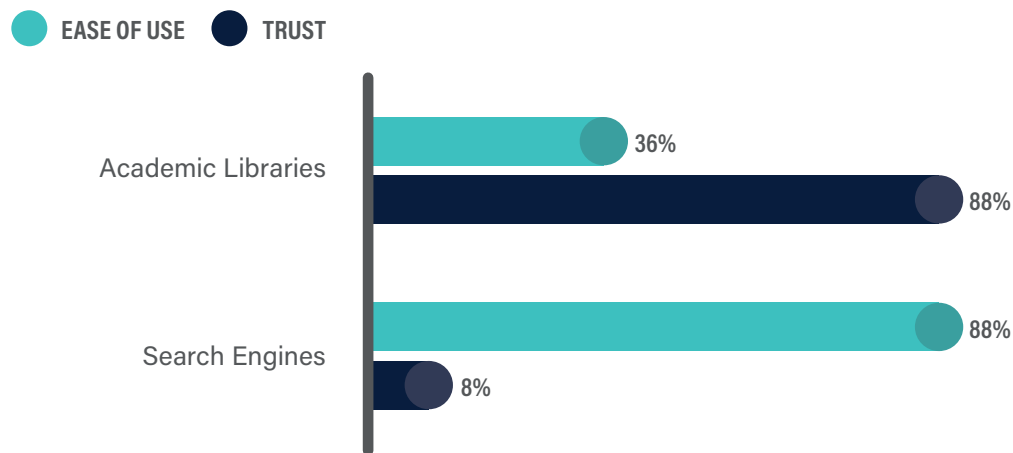
The result is that libraries risk losing attention and mindshare by not offering experiences congruent with the digital world. **This puts academic researchers in a double bind: Being too difficult to locate materials through existing library tools, they might end up using the online sources that they do not trust.** In the first study of its kind, academic professors and researchers share their personal experiences conducting and supervising research in a world of online information abundance.

Key Takeaways From the Survey

01

Researchers throw out wide nets as they start a project.

- 94% of professors say they use online sources, such as Google, Bing, Google Scholar, ResearchGate, and the like.
- 86% say they use the campus libraries in their early research.

02

Researchers are checking so many sources because they struggle between ease of use and authoritative information.

- 88% of professors find general search engines easy to use, but only 8% have a great deal of trust in the information.
- For libraries, it almost flips: 88% say they have a great deal of trust in the information, but only 36% say libraries are easy to use.

03

Researchers highly mistrust online resources due to prolific misinformation.

- Two-thirds of researchers—(65%)—say they have come across false, misleading or otherwise deceptive information through various online sources that they use for academic research.
- Of those who have seen such false information, almost nine in ten (88%) say that they could imagine a colleague or student unwittingly citing the false information in their research.

04

The impact of academic libraries having high trust, but low ease of use, cuts across the researchers' views and actions:

- As online research has become easier, academic researchers' visits to campus libraries have declined. In fact, 64% of survey respondents reported that they visit the campus library less often now compared to five years ago. This could mean that the opportunity for researchers to access library resources or consult with a librarian to locate trusted information is less frequent today than in the past.

05

The full breadth and depth of library resources are not easy to see.

- When searching the library catalog online or in person, 74% of respondents say they think they can see everything available from the library. However, 59% report that they have been unable to find specific resources using the library search tools. When academic researchers can't find a resource, they are turning to a general search engine like Google or Bing to find the information (59%) at about the same rate as they would ask a librarian (63%) for help.

06

Research methods and people's expectations have changed, but library tools have not kept pace.

- Seven in ten professors say the way they conduct research—the tools they use, the sources they search, the way they gather information— has changed in meaningful ways in the last five years. Professors were asked in an open-ended fashion why these changes have taken place, and the answer is that so much is available online.

The Power of "Easy to Use"

In the era of Google and Wikipedia, where do academicians begin their research quests? The answer is pretty much everywhere. Researchers throw out wide nets as they start their research, using both libraries and other traditional sources as well as many of the countless online sources available.

Early in their research, 94% of professors say they use online sources such as Google, Bing, Google Scholar, ResearchGate, ERIC, Sci-Hub, and the like. Almost as many—86%—say they use the campus libraries in their early research. An identical 86% use their own books and files and their own academic journal subscriptions and materials they buy online and elsewhere.
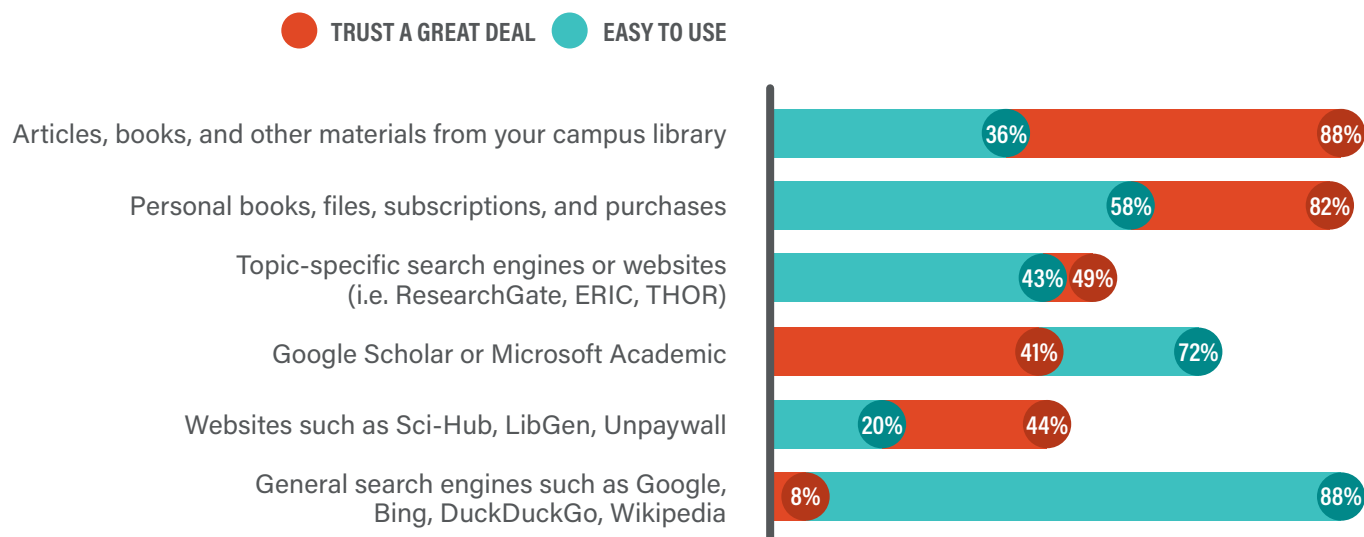
94 PERCENT

94% of professors say they use online sources, such as Google, Bing, Google Scholar, ResearchGate, ERIC, and the like.

86 PERCENT

86% say they use the campus libraries in their early research.

AND WHY USE SO MANY SOURCES?
THERE IS A STRUGGLE BETWEEN EASE OF USE AND TRUSTED INFORMATION.

Libraries have the Most Trusted Sources but are Hardest to Use

● **TRUST A GREAT DEAL**   ● **EASY TO USE**

Source	Easy to Use	Trust a Great Deal
Articles, books, and other materials from your campus library	36%	88%
Personal books, files, subscriptions, and purchases	58%	82%
Topic-specific search engines or websites (i.e. ResearchGate, ERIC, THOR)	43%	49%
Google Scholar or Microsoft Academic	72%	41%
Websites such as Sci-Hub, LibGen, Unpaywall	20%	44%
General search engines such as Google, Bing, DuckDuckGo, Wikipedia	88%	8%

IT IS CRYSTAL CLEAR WHY THE ONLINE SOURCES ARE USED SO OFTEN.
THEY ARE JUST EASY TO USE.

Easy to Use

88 PERCENT

Looking at Google, Bing, and Wikipedia together, 88% of the professors say they are the easiest to use.

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Compare that to the hardest-to-use on the list: Only 36% say articles, books, and other materials from their campus library are easy to use.

Almost three-quarters (75%) of those who used Google Scholar or Microsoft Academic Search said the same. Additional sources include 44% that use websites such as Sci-Hub, LibGen, and Unpaywall and 43% for topic-specific search engines or websites such as books, ResearchGate, ERIC, or THOR. More traditional offline sources are middling on ease of use: your own files and books, 52%; your subscription to an academic journal, 51%; and materials you buy, 48%.

Trust

8 PERCENT

Only 8% say they trust Google, Bing, DuckDuckGo, or Wikipedia a great deal.

If online sources are so easy to use, why does anyone go to the library or turn to an old-fashioned book? Again, the answer is crystal clear: trust.

The runaway winner in trust is materials from the campus library: 88% of the researchers said they have a great deal of trust in those materials, and almost all the rest (11%) say they have some trust in the materials. The combination of one's own files and books, one's own academic journals and materials one can buy are also well trusted, with 82% saying they trust those a great deal.

But the general search engines do poorly in the trust department: Only 8% say they trust Google, Bing, DuckDuckGo, or Wikipedia a great deal.

Interestingly, some online sources have trust, but nowhere near the stratospheric dimensions of the libraries, and the online sources that have some trust are those specifically geared toward research audiences. For example, nearly half of the professors (49%) said they have a great deal of trust in topic-specific search engines or websites (i.e. ResearchGate, ERIC, or THOR). And 39% say they have some trust. Google Scholar and Microsoft Academic Search do relatively well, with 41% saying they trust them a great deal and 55% evidencing some trust toward those sources.
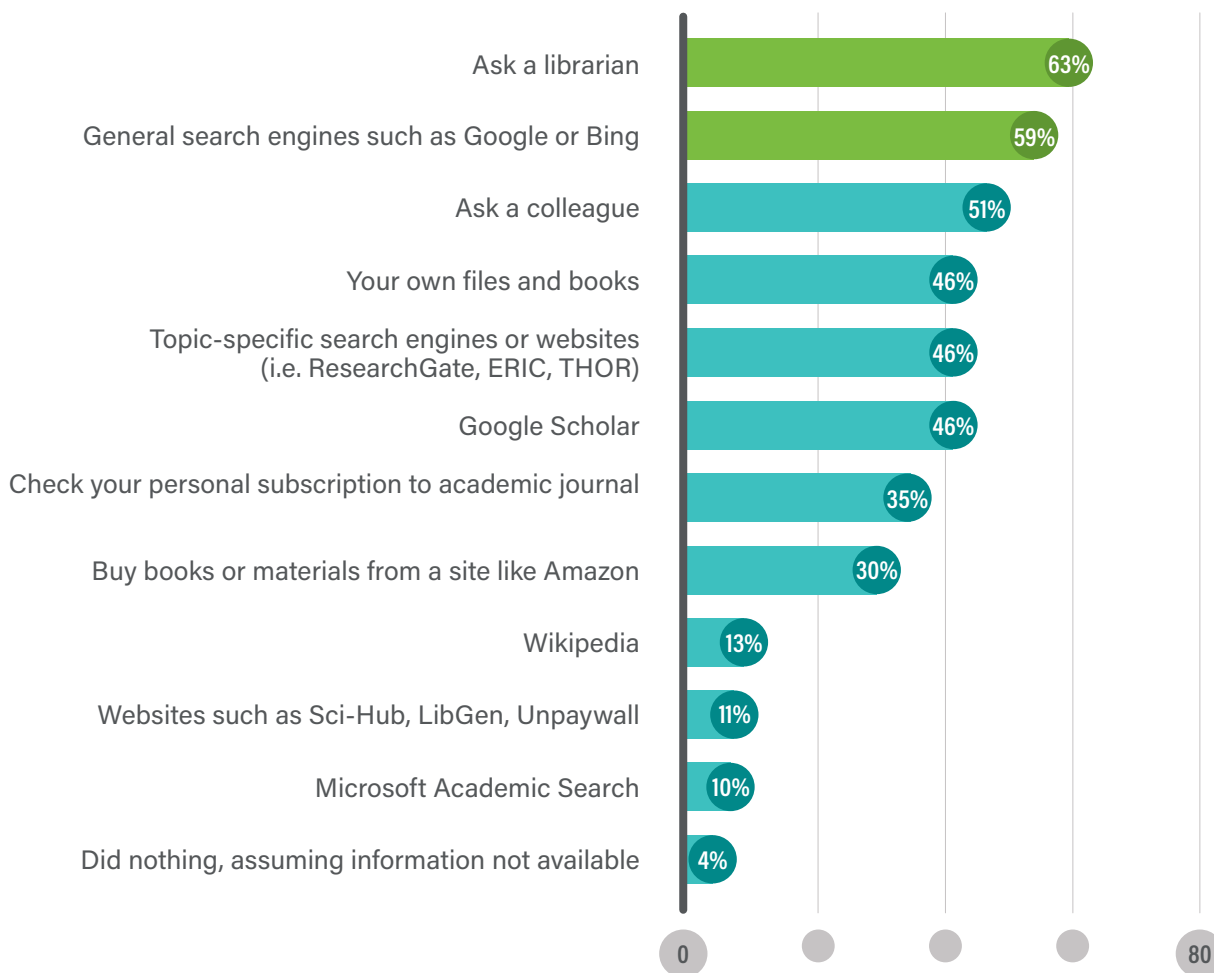
There is a clear push and pull between ease of use and trust: The more trustworthy the source, the harder it is to use. The easier the source is to use, the harder it is to trust the information you find there.

Finding What They Seek...or Not

Professors believe that library search tools, whether used at the library or remotely, do a pretty good job of showing them everything that is available from the library. Almost three-quarters (74%) say the tools show them everything, while 26% disagree.

However, three in five professors (59%) also say that there have been times they looked for specific information for their research at the campus library but could not find it using the library search tools. Of those who have failed to find what they need using the libraries' search tools, many researchers ask a librarian, but they almost equally turn to a search engine like Google or Bing.

When you can't find the data...

Category	Percentage
Ask a librarian	63%
General search engines such as Google or Bing	59%
Ask a colleague	51%
Your own files and books	46%
Topic-specific search engines or websites (i.e. ResearchGate, ERIC, THOR)	46%
Google Scholar	46%
Check your personal subscription to academic journal	35%
Buy books or materials from a site like Amazon	30%
Wikipedia	13%
Websites such as Sci-Hub, LibGen, Unpaywall	11%
Microsoft Academic Search	10%
Did nothing, assuming information not available	4%

WHEN RESEARCHERS CAN'T FIND DATA, THEY ALMOST EQUALLY TURN TO A SEARCH ENGINE AS THEY DO A LIBRARIAN FOR HELP

Going to the library is a rarer event.

As online research has become easier, academic researchers' visits to campus libraries have declined. Today, visits to the campus library are far less frequent compared to five years ago. Nearly two-thirds (64%) say they go to the libraries less often than they did five years before. Only 3% say they go more often now, and 33% report no change in the frequency of their library visits. About half of professors (52%) say they visit their campus libraries several times a year and 26% say several times a month.

Going to the library more or less?

80

64%
less often

33%
no change

3%
more often

0
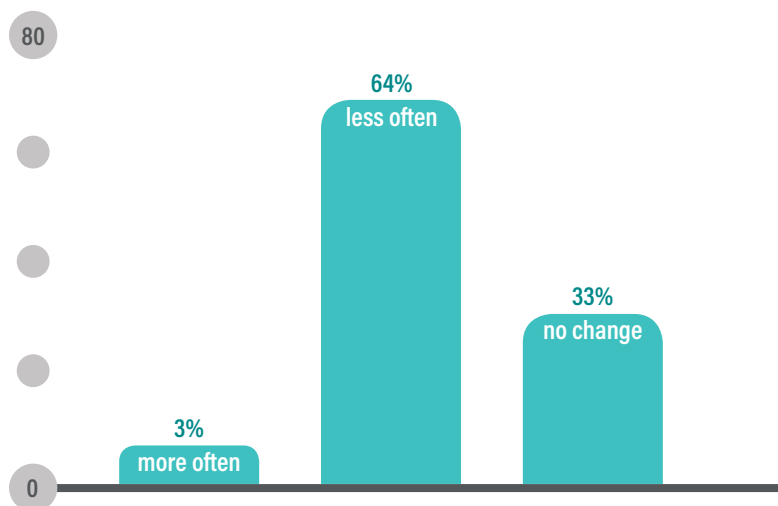
The Pros and Cons of Remote Library Access

One reason that professors are spending more time at their desks and less time in the campus libraries is that they can access library holdings remotely. More than three in five (62%) say that for most of the information they need from their campus library, they can access it remotely without needing to visit the physical library. Thirty-two percent say they can access some of the information remotely, while 3% each say they can access only a little of the library information or none of the information.

However, when academic researchers cannot find what they're looking for, they are highly likely to turn to the internet, and it's not hard to imagine that the likelihood of that happening grows exponentially if they do not have access to talk to a librarian for help—either in person or through tools like live chat.

Why are Online Sources Less Trustworthy?

As discussed earlier, online sources are widely used but viewed as providing less trustworthy information than more traditional, offline sources.

Online sources fall in the trust department in part because they are not reliable. Nearly two-thirds of researchers (65%) say that in the last five years, they have come across false, misleading or otherwise deceptive information in various online sources for their academic research. Only 35% say they have not.

Among those who have seen false information online, most are seeing it more often now. Fifty-seven percent say they are seeing more instances of false data online than five years ago, compared with 43% who say they are not seeing more instances of false information online.

And the researchers said that not only is the information bad, it is information that could get into research papers and work. **The great majority of researchers who have seen false information online as they conduct their academic work (88%) say they could imagine a colleague or student unwittingly using false information in their work.**

88%

88% of Professors Could Imagine False Online Information Being Cited by Colleagues or Students

The Past and Future of Research

Seven in ten professors say the way they conduct research—the tools they use, the sources they search, the way they gather information—has changed in meaningful ways in the last five years.

Professors were asked in an open-ended fashion why these changes have taken place. The answer is that so much is available online.

To quote a few professors:

"I use what I can get at my computer and my desk rather than physically have to go to the library."

"Every journal article is online, so I do not need to leave my office to search and obtain the journal articles I need."

"Increasingly, I don't need to go to the library. Instead, I can access what I need through online resources through my library's website."

And most expect academic research to continue changing:

"Much more will be driven or affected by AI. New and different search engines and databases are likely to become available. The variety and number of materials on databases that I use will likely increase."

"More references will be available online. I also expect that more books will become eBooks for immediate use."

"More and more, I expect that I will be able to get what I need for research via the web—specifically, through my library's access to these web resources."

Conclusion

If one goal of the library is to expose new ideas and resources, how can they better help researchers find what they want and add even more value by exposing what people don't even know they're looking for? When the information so easily available today isn't trusted, the challenge for academic libraries is to create experiences that re-engage professors, students, and researchers by making it as easy as possible to access the most trusted and authoritative information.

With the expectations people have for frictionless experiences and immediate information, it will take bold changes in tools and technology to keep academic researchers using the library. But the challenge is that library tools are stuck in the past. Most technology solutions currently available to academic libraries are based on the MARC standard created in the 1960s, which is not easily compatible with web technologies. Academic libraries must provide professors, students, and researchers with modern tools that are built to be fast, comprehensive, and intuitive. This is the opportunity before Academic Libraries—to insert themselves back into the lives of students and researchers with tools and experiences that are interesting, contextual, and easy to use to keep them coming back to the library.

ACADEMIC LIBRARIES MUST PROVIDE MODERN TOOLS
THAT ARE FAST, COMPREHENSIVE, AND INTUITIVE.

Survey Methodology

The survey for Innovative was conducted online with interviews completed from March 6–21, 2019. The surveys were conducted in English via SurveyMonkey. Witt Associates LLC designed and executed the project.

The sample for the survey was provided by KPI Analytics of Austin, Texas. A total of 3,985 college and university professors were invited to participate in the survey via email. The sample was divided into four replicates, and each replicate was sent separately. A total of 1,465 emails were opened. 194 sample members clicked through to the survey from the introductory email. A total of 164 college and university professors began the survey by answering the first question. Of those, 141 said they currently do research in their academic field or supervise students doing research and qualified to continue the survey. According to the AAPOR Response Rate calculator for web surveys of named respondents, the Response Rate 3 is 3.4%. Response Rate 4 is 4.1%. See https://www.aapor.org/Standards-Ethics/Standard-Definitions-(1).aspx.

About Witt Associates LLC

G. Evans Witt is CEO and principal of Witt Associates LLC, an independent research firm that specializes in studies of elections, policy, and the news in the United States. For more than forty years, Witt has designed, executed, and analyzed surveys on public policy and politics. In more than 20 years at Princeton Survey Research Associates International, he led the company in the design and execution of groundbreaking research designs. He is a longtime consultant to NBC News and was a senior analyst on the NBC News decision desk each election night from 1998 to 2018.

Witt played a key role in directing large-scale surveys that have laid down the benchmarks for action nationally and at the community level. This includes work at the Knight Foundation, Pew Internet and American Life Project, Hofstra University, Public Agenda, and with major universities.

In a 22-year career with The Associated Press, he helped lead the wire service in the use of public opinion polls and social science research methods and cofounded the AP/NBC News Poll in 1977. He was a national political writer, director of election planning, and assistant chief of the AP Washington bureau. In 1996, Witt directed the creation of two award-winning political websites for ABC News, The Washington Post, and National Journal and was executive director of Voter News Service from 1997 through 1998. A Morehead Scholar and graduate of the University of North Carolina at Chapel Hill, Witt was a National Endowment for Humanities Fellow at Stanford University in 1981–82. He has written books and numerous articles on public opinion and lectured widely on the use of polls by the news media.

About Innovative

Innovative (www.iii.com) provides leading technology solutions and services that empower libraries and enrich their users worldwide. Innovative offers one of the most comprehensive portfolios of library automation products on the market today, serving academic, public, national, corporate, and special libraries and consortia. Headquartered in Emeryville, California, Innovative has a global presence—serving thousands of libraries in 66 countries and offices worldwide.

Innovative recently introduced a new, revolutionary library platform, Inspire™. Inspire transforms the physical and digital experience of the library to keep people engaged. Inspire offers library users—staff, patrons, researchers, and students—frictionless and sticky experiences that matter to them and help give people the resources they need, when and how they need them. Built from the ground up with a modern microservices architecture, the Inspire platform has cutting-edge technology to quicker-than-ever build, test, and deploy applications to library staff and end users and allows multiple reimagined products to live on one cloud-based platform.

Inspire Discovery, a new search and exploration solution, is the first module debuting on the new platform. Discovery transforms MARC records to BIBFRAME revealing contextual, multidimensional relationships between resources, people, and concepts. By providing intuitive experiences for librarians and patrons that uncover new, unexpected connections and ideas and easy access to the depth of library resources, Discovery empowers libraries to realize the full potential of their collections. This helps drive ROI and reinforce the value of the library to patrons as one of today's most credible and engaging digital experience providers.

For more information on Inspire™ Discovery
or other library solutions from **Innovative**,
visit **www.iii.com**.

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