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Barriers to the Adoption of Online Journal Management Systems in Nigerian Universities

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Abstract

This study investigates barriers to adopting Online Journal Management Systems (OJMS) in federal universities of Northwestern Nigeria, where digitization promises efficiency but adoption remains partial and hybrid, blending OJMS with email workflows. Employing a descriptive survey of 175 journal editors across 10 institutions, it assesses OJMS use across submission, peer review, decisions, communication, and dissemination via Likert scales, alongside dichotomous barriers (funding, infrastructure, capacity). Moderate adoption prevails (means 2.82–3.15), but email dominates submissions (M=4.10) and reviews (M=3.97), linked to high barriers: funding (72.0%), internet (61.1%), skills (58.3%), computers (50.9%), and power (50.3%). Resistance factors like features (18.9%) or security (28.6%) are low. Findings reveal constraint-conditioned adoption per Diffusion of Innovations theory, with structural limits mediating implementation despite receptivity. Policy must target funding, ICT infrastructure, and training to enable full transitions, boosting Nigerian journals' visibility and global impact.

Keywords: online journal publishing, journal management system, university based journals.

Introduction

The increasing digitization of scholarly communication has positioned Online Journal Management Systems (OJMS) as essential infrastructure for modern journal publishing. These systems streamline editorial workflows, enhance transparency in peer review, and improve the visibility and accessibility of scholarly outputs. Many universities particularly in developing regions have taken advantage of open source OJMS to support the management and dissemination of institutional journals. Despite this growing availability, evidence suggests that the adoption of OJMS in Nigeria remains uneven and often incomplete (Kanu & Ibiwoye, 2020).

In many cases, journals continue to rely on manual or email-based processes for core editorial functions such as manuscript submission and peer review, even where OJMS platforms have been deployed. These make journal publishing expensive and inefficient in addition, it limits the performance and overall visibility of Nigerian journals (Ezema, 2011a, 2011b). On the other hand, the adoption of OJMS remains insufficiently understood within the context of Nigerian universities, and particularly in the North-Western region. That is to say, there is limited empirical evidence explaining how institutional barriers shape actual adoption outcomes across editorial workflows. As a result, the persistence of hybrid systems combining OJMS and email-based processes remains unexplored. This raises an important question: *what are the barriers towards adoption of OJMS in Nigerian universities despite the recognized benefits of these systems?*

Therefore, this study addresses this gap by examining the barriers that inhabit full OJMS adoption in federal universities in Northwestern Nigeria. Rather than focusing solely on whether OJMS is adopted, the study investigates how adoption varies across different editorial functions and the extent to which identified challenges constrain this process. Specifically, the study analyses adoption patterns in key workflows submission, peer review, editorial decision-making, communication, and publication and how institutional barriers such as financial support, infrastructural, and capacity building training play role in hindering the adoption. By integrating adoption levels with an analysis of institutional challenges, the study advances a constraint-based explanation of how OJMS use is shaped less by perception or system characteristics and more by the availability of enabling resources. In doing so, the study contributes to a more nuanced

understanding of OJMS adoption in resource-limited academic environments and highlights the need to move beyond behavioural models toward frameworks that account for implementation capacity and structural conditions.

Literature Review

An Online Journal Management System (OJMS), also known as an Electronic Journal System (EJS), automates the complete editorial and publishing workflow for scientific journals through functions such as manuscript management (Rohman et al., 2024), peer review (Luparenko, 2020; K. E. Okon et al., 2023), production and publishing (Elizarov et al., 2014; Kim et al., 2018), and archiving/indexing (Luparenko, 2020; Rohman et al., 2024). These web-based platforms, which evolved from traditional print processes involving physical mail, desk rejections, and in-person coordination (Academy of Science of South Africa, 2024; Morris et al., 2013), now rely on backend databases to store manuscript files, metadata, and editorial histories (Ware, 2005).

OJMS streamlines communication by automating email alerts to authors, editors, and reviewers at key workflow stages like submissions, assignments, and decisions, while providing editable templates and secure deep links to minimize login burdens and manual tracking (Chandran, 2012; Constantinescu & Vlădoiu, 2010; Kharbat et al., 2013; Kim et al., 2018; K. E. Okon et al., 2023; Wrzesinski et al., 2021; Zhao, 2017). However, in less developed publishing environments, however, email still prevails for receiving manuscripts (44% of journals) and managing reviews (48%), often alongside Excel, with higher reliance in fields like agriculture (70%), humanities (61%), and medicine (48%) (Grigas et al., 2023). It is remarkable to note, email dependence risks spam filtering, overlooked messages, formatting disruptions, and manuscript losses, unlike the structured, collaborative memory offered by OJMS (De La Hoz Suárez et al., 2024; Imre, 2015; K. E. Okon et al., 2023; Wrzesinski et al., 2021; Zhao, 2017)

These systems drive administrative efficiency, cost savings, credibility, remote collaboration, and improved metrics like citations and website views (93% growth post-adoption in one South African case), while enabling indexing in Scopus/Web of Science (Em & Pen, 2024; Fick, 2024; Fillmore, 2015; Grigas et al., 2023; Kara-Junior, 2023; Klus & Dilger, 2020; Singla et al., 2024; Zhao, 2017). There are several OJMS now available for journals to adopt. The leading OJMS

options include open-source systems like OJS, the most widely used, with tens of thousands of installations (Baker, 2020; Grigas et al., 2023; Kim et al., 2018); Janeway, Ambra (for PLOS), and Lodel, alongside proprietary ones such as Editorial Manager, ScholarOne Manuscripts, and Elsevier EVISE (Chang & Kong, 2018; Grigas et al., 2023). Luparenko's (2020) typology classifies them into commercial/proprietary, open-source (OJS dominant globally but limited in Sub-Saharan Africa at 1.7%; (Khanna et al., 2021)), and in-house developments.

In Nigeria, journal numbers surge increasingly yet automation lags, with persistent email use despite basic web presence (Abdu, 2023; Kanu & Ibiwoye, 2020; Limb, 2024; O. D. Okon et al., 2023). Persistent challenges include infrastructure shortfalls (erratic power and internet), funding deficits, ICT skill gaps, policy absences, and resistance to digital shifts, yielding low OJMS uptake including custom solutions like AKSUJMS (Bekoe et al., 2025; Ekanem, 2020; Ezema et al., 2019; Kanu et al., 2021; Kanu & Ibiwoye, 2020; Limb, 2024; Mills et al., 2023; Murray & Clobridge, 2014; Ndege et al., 2025; Zubair, 2022). Recommended solutions involve mandatory standards, training, and institutional investment (Edewor & Ejitagha, 2019; Zubair, 2022). Therefore, the present study is an attempt to determine the intensity of the challenges constraining OJMS adoption in federal universities of Northwestern Nigeria after analyzing the level of adoption in relation to using email in the journal editorial workflows.

Methodology

This study adopted a descriptive survey design to examine the intensity of institutional barriers influencing the adoption of Online Journal Management Systems (OJMS) in federal universities in Northwestern Nigeria. The design was appropriate as it enabled the systematic collection of data on both adoption patterns and associated challenges from journal editors across ten federal universities in the region. The universities include Ahmadu Bello University Zaria, Air Force Institute of Technology Kaduna, Bayero University Kano, Federal University Birnin-Kebbi, Federal University Dutse, Federal University Dutsin-Ma, Nigerian Defence Academy Kaduna, Nigeria Police Academy Wudil, and Usmanu Danfodio University Sokoto.

The population of the study comprised of 242 editor-in-chiefs of academic journals published in the ten federal universities studied. Out of the number 175 editors responded to the questionnaire of the study. Editors were selected because they are directly involved in the management of journal workflows and are therefore best positioned to provide informed responses on the use of OJMS and the challenges associated with its adoption. Data were collected using a structured questionnaire consisting of two key sections relevant to this study. The first was level of OJMS adoption which was measured using Likert-scale items (1–5) assessing the extent of OJMS use across editorial workflows, including:

- Manuscript submission
- Peer review
- Editorial decision-making
- Communication
- Publication and dissemination

Secondly, the questionnaire collected data about the various challenges that were measured using dichotomous (Yes/No) items, capturing the presence of specific barriers such as:

- Funding constraints
- Internet and electricity challenges
- Human capacity limitations
- Organizational support

The use of both scales allowed for the examination of adoption levels alongside the prevalence of constraints. The instrument was subjected to content validation by experts in library and information science and research methodology to ensure clarity, relevance, and alignment with the study objectives. Reliability of the Likert-scale items was established using Cronbach's alpha, which yielded a coefficient of 0.880, indicating high internal consistency. The dichotomous items were analyzed using frequency distributions, which are appropriate for binary data.

The questionnaire was administered to journal editors across the selected federal universities. Responses were collected and collated for analysis, ensuring that participants represented a range of journals and editorial experiences within the study area. Data were analyzed using descriptive statistics, consistent with the study's objective of examining patterns and relationships at an

aggregate level. Adoption data were analyzed using mean and standard deviation, with interpretation based on predefined thresholds:

- 1.00–1.80 = Very Low Adoption
- 1.81–2.60 = Low Adoption
- 2.61–3.40 = Moderate Adoption
- 3.41–4.20 = High Adoption
- 4.21–5.00 = Very High Adoption

Challenges data were analyzed using frequencies and percentages, with interpretation based on the proportion of "Yes" responses:

- 0–20% = Very Low Challenge
- 21–40% = Low Challenge
- 41–60% = Moderate Challenge
- 61–80% = High Challenge
- 81–100% = Very High Challenge

Presentation of Findings

Level of Adoption of Online Journal Management Systems

The level of adoption of Online Journal Management Systems (OJMS) was assessed across key editorial workflows using Likert-scale measures. Given the modular structure of OJMS, adoption was evaluated for specific functions including manuscript submission, peer review, editorial decision-making, communication, and publication. In addition, the use of email for submission and peer review was measured as a contrasting indicator of low OJMS utilization.

Table 4.9: *Level of Adoption of OJMS*

S/N	Item	Mean	SD	Interpretation
1.	*Submitting article via email*	4.10	1.29	High email usage; low OJMS adoption
2.	*Submitting article via OJMS*	2.83	1.48	Moderate adoption
3.	*Peer review via email*	3.97	1.38	High email usage; low OJMS adoption
4.	*Peer review via OJMS*	2.87	1.55	Moderate adoption
5.	*Editorial decisions via OJMS*	2.85	1.50	Moderate adoption
6.	*Messages and notifications via OJMS*	2.82	1.48	Moderate adoption
7.	*Publication and dissemination via OJMS*	3.15	1.56	Moderate adoption

The results (Table 1) reveal a functionally uneven pattern of adoption, characterized by the continued dominance of email-based processes alongside moderate use of OJMS modules. Email-based submission recorded the highest mean score (M = 4.10, SD = 1.29), indicating that manuscript submission is still predominantly conducted outside OJMS platforms. Similarly, peer review conducted via email also showed a high mean (M = 3.97, SD = 1.38), suggesting that core editorial workflows remain largely detached from OJMS environments. In contrast, OJMS-based activities recorded only moderate levels of adoption across all measured functions. Manuscript submission via OJMS (M = 2.83, SD = 1.48), peer review via OJMS (M = 2.87, SD = 1.55), editorial decision-making (M = 2.85, SD = 1.50), and messaging/notifications (M = 2.82, SD = 1.48) all fall within the moderate adoption range. This indicates partial integration of OJMS into editorial workflows rather than full system utilization. Relatively higher adoption was observed in publication and dissemination activities (M = 3.15, SD = 1.56), suggesting that OJMS is more frequently used at the final stage of the publishing process than in earlier stages such as submission and peer review.

Overall, the findings demonstrate that OJMS adoption is not holistic but fragmented across workflow stages. While some level of system use is evident, particularly in dissemination, critical editorial processes remain heavily reliant on email. This pattern reflects a hybrid operational model, where traditional and digital systems coexist rather than a full transition to OJMS-based management. The dominance of email in submission and peer review, combined with only moderate adoption of OJMS modules, indicates that the implementation of OJMS is partial and function-specific rather than systemic. This uneven adoption pattern provides an empirical basis for examining the structural and institutional barriers that may be constraining full integration of OJMS in university journal publishing.

Barriers to the Adoption of Online Journal Management Systems

The challenges associated with the adoption of Online Journal Management Systems (OJMS) were examined using ten dichotomous items, where respondents indicated the presence or absence of specific constraints. The analysis is based on the proportion of "Yes" responses, reflecting the prevalence of each challenge among journal editors. The findings are presented in Table 2;

Table 2: *Challenges Associated with Adopting Journal Management Systems*

S/N	Challenge	Yes		No	
		Freq.	%	Freq.	%
1.	*Limited features to support journal objectives*	33	18.9	142	81.1
2.	*Electricity challenge*	88	50.3	87	49.7
3.	*Internet challenge*	107	61.1	68	38.9
4.	*Insufficient computers*	89	50.9	86	49.1
5.	*Lack of skilled manpower*	102	58.3	73	41.7
6.	*Workload Challenge*	70	40.0	105	60.0
7.	*Cooperation from the university management*	60	34.3	115	65.7
8.	*Cooperation from the editorial board*	35	20.0	140	80.0
9.	*Fear of hacking/piracy*	50	28.6	125	71.4
10.	*Insufficient funding*	126	72.0	49	28.0

Table 2 indicates that barriers to OJMS adoption are uneven in intensity, with a clear concentration around financial and infrastructural constraints, while attitudinal and system-related barriers are relatively minimal.

Two challenges emerged as the most critical constraints to OJMS adoption. Insufficient funding was identified by 72.0% of respondents, making it the most pervasive barrier. This suggests that financial limitations significantly restrict the ability of journals to deploy, maintain, or scale OJMS platforms. The absence of stable institutional funding mechanisms might have constrained both initial adoption and sustained system use. Internet connectivity was also widely reported as a major constraint, with 61.1% of respondents indicating it as a challenge. Given that OJMS platforms depend on reliable and continuous internet access for manuscript processing and communication, this finding highlights a fundamental infrastructural limitation affecting system functionality.

Constraints with moderate intensity include lack of skilled manpower which was reported by 58.3% of respondents, indicating a notable gap in the technical competencies required to manage and operate OJMS effectively. Insufficient computer availability (50.9%) and electricity challenges (50.3%) were also identified as moderate barriers. These findings suggest that even where systems are available, their effective utilization is constrained by inadequate access to essential hardware and unstable power supply.

Other factors were identified as relatively less significant constraints. These include workload, which was reported by 40.0% of respondents, indicating that while editorial responsibilities are substantial, they are not the primary limitation to OJMS adoption. Management cooperation (34.3%) and security concerns such as hacking or piracy (28.6%) were also reported at low levels, suggesting that institutional resistance and perceived system risks are not major deterrents. Furthermore, two factors were found to have negligible influence on adoption. Only 20.0% of respondents reported lack of cooperation from editorial board members was a challenge, indicating strong collegial support for OJMS use. Similarly, limited system features was identified by just 18.9% of respondents, suggesting that available OJMS platforms are generally perceived as functionally adequate for journal operations.

The overall pattern of results indicates that the primary constraints to OJMS adoption are structural rather than behavioural or technological in design. Financial limitations, unreliable internet connectivity, and gaps in technical capacity constitute the most significant impediments, while

factors related to user resistance, system functionality, and organizational cooperation play a comparatively minor role. This distribution suggests that journal editors are generally receptive to OJMS and do not perceive the systems themselves as problematic. Instead, adoption is constrained by resource availability and infrastructural conditions, which limit the ability of institutions to fully implement and sustain digital journal management systems.

Discussion

This study examined the extent to which institutional barriers shape the adoption of Online Journal Management Systems (OJMS) in federal universities in Northwestern Nigeria. The findings reveal that OJMS adoption is partial, functionally uneven, and strongly conditioned by structural constraints. A central insight from the study is that OJMS adoption is constrained, where the depth and scope of system use are determined by institutional capacity. The dominance of email-based workflows for manuscript submission and peer review, alongside only moderate adoption of OJMS modules, indicates that journals have not fully transitioned to integrated digital management systems. This pattern suggests that adoption might have not been limited by reluctance to use OJMS, but by the conditions required to sustain its use. In this context, partial adoption reflects adaptive behaviour, where editors incorporate OJMS into specific aspects of the workflow while maintaining parallel systems that are less resource-dependent.

The findings demonstrate that financial and infrastructural barriers are the most significant determinants of adoption outcomes. Insufficient funding and unreliable internet connectivity emerged as high-intensity constraints, while lack of skilled manpower, inadequate computer access, and unstable electricity supply further limit effective utilizations. These constraints directly explain the observed adoption pattern. OJMS platforms require continuous access to electricity, stable internet connectivity, and technical support. Where these conditions are inconsistent, journals are unable to rely fully on system-based workflows, resulting in continued dependence on email and other manual processes. Importantly, the results show that technological functionality is not the problem. The low reporting of limited system features indicates that available OJMS platforms are generally considered adequate. Similarly, low levels of concern regarding security risks and strong editorial cooperation suggest that user resistance is minimal. This reinforces the interpretation that adoption is primarily constrained by resource limitations rather than behavioural factors.

The study also highlights the emergence of hybrid editorial workflows, where OJMS and email-based processes coexist. This hybridization is particularly evident in the differential adoption of system modules. While publication and dissemination show relatively higher levels of OJMS use, earlier stages such as submission and peer review remain dominated by email. This selective adoption can be explained by the operational demands of different workflow stages. Submission and peer review require sustained interaction, coordination among multiple actors, and reliable system access, making them more vulnerable to infrastructural disruptions. In contrast, publication and dissemination are more centralized and episodic, making them easier to manage within constrained environments. The persistence of hybrid workflows therefore reflects a pragmatic adaptation to resource limitations, rather than incomplete awareness or resistance to innovation.

The findings of this study provide important implications for the application of Diffusion of Innovations theory in resource-constrained institutional contexts. Traditional interpretations of the theory emphasize the role of innovation attributes such as relative advantage, compatibility, and complexity in influencing adoption decisions. However, the present study demonstrates that even where an innovation is perceived as useful and compatible with existing workflows, adoption may remain limited due to external constraints. This suggests that the explanatory power of the theory is reduced when structural conditions necessary for implementation are not met. In this regard, the study extends the application of Diffusion of Innovations by highlighting the importance of implementation capacity as a mediating factor between adoption intention and actual system use. Adoption in this context is not purely a matter of decision-making, but a function of whether institutions possess the resources required to operationalize the innovation.

The findings have clear implications for policy and institutional practice. Efforts to promote OJMS adoption should move beyond awareness creation and training alone, and focus on addressing the structural conditions that enable sustained system use.

Conclusion and Recommendations

Overall, the study demonstrates that OJMS adoption in federal universities in Northwestern Nigeria is might have not primarily been constrained by perception, system functionality, or organizational resistance, but by resource-dependent structural barriers. The findings reposition adoption as a capacity-driven process, where institutional readiness must extend beyond willingness to include the material and technical conditions necessary for full implementation. The

findings show that adoption is neither absent nor complete, but instead characterized by partial and uneven implementation across editorial workflows. While OJMS is used to some extent particularly in publication and dissemination core processes such as manuscript submission and peer review remain largely dependent on email-based systems. The analysis demonstrates that this pattern of adoption is closely linked to the presence of structural constraints, particularly insufficient funding, unreliable internet connectivity, and gaps in technical capacity. These barriers limit the ability of institutions to fully operationalize OJMS, resulting in hybrid workflows that combine digital and manual processes. Importantly, the study finds little evidence that non-adoption is driven by lack of cooperation, or system inadequacies, suggesting that the primary limitation lies in institutional capacity rather than user disposition. Overall, the study concludes that achieving full integration of OJMS in university publishing requires a shift from focusing solely on adoption awareness to addressing the institutional and infrastructural realities that determine implementation success.

Therefore, it is recommended that universities in Nigeria need to prioritize sustainable funding models, improved ICT infrastructure and electricity, and capacity development for editorial teams. Without addressing these foundational issues, efforts to promote OJMS adoption are likely to yield only incremental and fragmented outcomes. Without such interventions, adoption is likely to remain partial, with journals continuing to rely on hybrid workflows that limit the efficiency gains associated with OJMS.

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