

Assessing the Citation of News Articles in Theses: Patterns from the Central University of Tamil Nadu and the proposal of journalist citation score (JCS)

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Sayed Mohamed Jelani A¹, S. Thanuskodi²

ABSTRACT

Purpose: This study examines the use of online news sources as citations in doctoral theses and investigates the accessibility of the cited web links over time. It also introduces the Journalist Citation Score (JCS) to recognise journalists whose work is frequently cited in academic research.

Methodology: The study analysed 172 doctoral theses submitted to the Central University of Tamil Nadu across 22 departments, covering the period from 2018 to April 2025. Online news citations were identified manually through a detailed examination of the theses. The study examined citation frequency, link accessibility, departmental patterns, and the journalists and news agencies most frequently cited.

Findings: The detailed analysis covered 93 theses from 11 departments and identified 225 online news references. Of these, 207 links (92%) were accessible, while 18 (8%) were inaccessible. The Media and Communication department recorded the highest number

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A, S. Thanuskodi



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¹Research Scholar, Central University of Tamil Nadu, Thiruvavur, India; Email: sjelani91@gmail.com ; ORCID: [0000-0002-3342-6185](https://orcid.org/0000-0002-3342-6185)

² Professor & Head, Department of Library and Information Science, Central University of Tamil Nadu, Thiruvavur, India; Email: thanuskodi@cutn.ac.in; ORCID: [0000-0001-8471-5799](https://orcid.org/0000-0001-8471-5799)

of accessible links, with 116, followed by Social Work with 31. The proposed JCS identified Yasir, S., Safi, M., and Bhardwaj, A. among the highly cited journalists. BBC News, PTI, and The Times of India were the most frequently cited news agencies. The findings indicate that online news sources are increasingly used in scholarly research, particularly in the social sciences and humanities.

Implications: The study highlights the need to address link rot and strengthen the preservation of online news content used in academic research. The proposed JCS provides a systematic approach to recognising journalists' contributions to scholarly communication. The findings may help researchers and librarians better understand the use of online news sources and encourage more sustainable practices for preserving web-based scholarly references.

Keywords: Online news citations; doctoral theses; Central University of Tamil Nadu (CUTN); Journalist Citation Score (JCS); citation metrics; citation analysis.

1. INTRODUCTION

A news report may enter a doctoral thesis for several reasons: it may document a public event, provide a contemporary account of a policy debate, or constitute material for an analysis of media representation. These uses are not equivalent. A report cited as evidence about an event serves a different purpose from a report examined as an object of study. Understanding journalism's place in research therefore requires attention to both the presence of citations and the claims they support. There is evidence that scholarly authors draw on journalism. In an analysis of BBC News references, Kousha and Thelwall (2017) found disciplinary differences in citation patterns, with greater use in the arts, humanities, and social sciences than in medicine and science. They also identified instances in which news coverage of research was cited instead of the underlying scholarly source. Their findings suggest that news can introduce relevant information into academic writing, but that its appropriateness depends on the evidential task.

The reverse relationship-journalism's use of research-has also received attention. Kousha and Thelwall (2019) examined references to scholarly journals in UK newspapers, while Moriarty et al. (2010) investigated the sources used in cancer news. These studies concern the selection of research and expert sources by news producers. They do not, by themselves, establish how doctoral researchers evaluate or use news. Keeping the direction of citation explicit is important when bringing these literatures together. This article examines online news references in a reported corpus of doctoral theses from the Central University of Tamil Nadu (CUTN). It has two aims: to describe the distribution and recorded accessibility of these references, and to specify a transparent approach to allocating citation credit to named journalists and organisational bylines. The proposed Journalist Citation Score (JCS) is treated as exploratory accounting measures. A citation establishes that a source was referenced; it does not establish that the source was accurate, endorsed by the citing author, or influential beyond that document.

1.1. Objectives of the study

1. To identify and extract all online news citations included in doctoral theses submitted to CUTN.
2. To determine the accessibility status of cited online news URLs, categorise them into accessible and inaccessible (broken/expired) links.
3. To analyse the department-wise distribution of online news referenced.
4. To examine the year-wise growth and patterns in the use of online news citations.
5. To identify the most influential agencies used in doctoral research.
6. To compute the Journalist Citation Score (JCS) and assess the citation impact of individual journalists.
7. To understand the tenacity of online news sources over time and the extent of link disintegrates within academic citations.

2. LITERATURE REVIEW

Earlier studies have examined different parts of the relationship between news and research. Ortega (2021) studied connections between blogs and news outlets by looking at their references to the same research papers. Alperin et al. (2024) focused instead on how research coverage was shared on social media. Their study distinguished people linking to news about COVID-19 research from those linking directly to research articles, treating links to the news coverage as second-order citations. The distinction matters: sharing a news story about a paper is not the same as referring to the paper itself. Nor should either activity be equated with an academic author citing a news report. Here, the question is more specific: how is online news cited in doctoral theses? We examine the references recorded in those theses, rather than attempting to measure public engagement or wider social influence. Peng et al. (2016) considers automated recommendations of news articles for citation. Such tools may help researchers locate relevant material, but finding a report is not the same as deciding whether it supports a particular claim. Similarly, counting citations tells us how often a source appears in the records, not whether it provides sound evidence for the argument in which it is used.

A URL is useful to a reader only if it leads to the material needed to inspect a cited claim. Klein et al. (2014) distinguish link rot, in which a resource is no longer available at its address, from content drift, in which the material at that address changes. Both can undermine the reconstruction of a document's evidential context. A functioning link alone therefore cannot establish that the reader sees the version originally consulted. Access restrictions introduce a further distinction. A page behind a paywall may still exist, whereas a missing page may no longer be available at the cited address. This study's initial accessible-inaccessible coding combines several such conditions. It can describe recorded access outcomes, subject to the data issues identified below, but cannot establish a link-rot rate or a longitudinal rate of disappearance.

3. METHODOLOGY

This is an exploratory, descriptive citation study. The reported corpus comprises 172 doctoral theses from 22 CUTN departments, covering 2018 to 11 April 2025 and obtained from Shodhganga. Eleven departments appear in the news-citation summary. That summary lists 93 theses and 19,763 references in total. These are departmental aggregates; the number of

individual theses containing at least one news reference is not separately established by the supplied table. Accordingly, 93 is not used as the number of news-citing theses or as the numerator of a prevalence estimate.

The above numbers represent the years of data collection and the number of theses in the corpus as recorded during the study, not an independent reconstruction of the count of CUTN submissions. The retrieval date, search strategy of the repository, full list of the theses, and difference between submission and repository deposition dates are not mentioned in the sources. Such gaps hinder reproducibility of the corpus selection

All the URLs identified in the theses were analyzed manually to establish their accessibility. The accessible links were those pointing to content that could be accessed and read by a user. Those URLs that returned 404 errors, pages that were deleted, as well as links to content behind paywall or log-in were considered inaccessible. Such analysis provided the basis for further examination of the news referencing durability and reliability in academic writing.

Microsoft Excel and Google Sheets were used for generation of frequency tables and summaries by domain that showed the patterns observed in the corpus. These were used as the citation metrics employed in the paper. The Journalist Citation Score (JCS) is a metric ranking journalists based on the frequency of citations of their articles in doctoral theses, and the agency-level analysis establishes the organizations cited most often in theses.

Zotero was used for organization, annotation, and citation of the literature on the topic of digital news referencing, citation persistence and bibliometric techniques. APA Style was used as the format for all citations according to the seventh edition of the American Psychological Association (APA) style.

3.1. The Scoring System

A score was established for the citation impact of the journalists. The value of 1 point was assigned to each cited news article. In case the author of a news article was only one journalist or an organization, the entire point was awarded to the journalist.

- Weight per article: The cited articles carry an equal value of 1.00 point.
- Single authorship: The single author of an article gets the entire 1.00 point.
- Multi-authorship: Scores are attributed as follows:
 - First author gets a fixed share of 0.50 points (50%).
 - Remaining 0.50 points (50%) are distributed equally among the rest of the co-authors.

This weighting scheme is just a convention and doesn't imply anything about contributions by the first-listed author. It favors the first author when there are more than two authors while equally dividing the record in case of a two-author article. It would be helpful to conduct analyses on the basis of equal fractional counting and full counting, but they have not been conducted yet. The records with mixed individual and organizational bylines, multiple organizations and no identifiable byline need special rules for scoring.

4. DATA ANALYSIS

4.1. Departmental patterns of online news citation in CUTN theses

The analysis presents the totals provided for the departments and the rankings of selected bylines. The numbers add up to a total of 207, 18, 93, and 19,763 in the accessible, inaccessible, theses, and reference counts, respectively. However, while the numerical figures make sense, the significance of some is unclear.

There are two separate yearly analyses that add up to 120 and 87 citations, respectively. Their relationship to each other and to the departmental records is undocumented. Although $120 + 87 = 207$, this equality is not evidence that the two series form a complete, non-overlapping partition of the accessible references. They are therefore presented separately. No missing year is assigned a zero count, and the partial observation period in 2025 is not compared with complete years as a growth rate. The citation-level dataset was not available for recalculating scores or resolving classifications. No inferential tests, reliability coefficients, topic coding, or field-normalised indicators are reported. Interpretations are limited to the supplied descriptive summaries.

Table 1 reproduces the departmental values. Media and Communication has the largest entry in the accessible column, at 116, followed by Social Work at 31. The remaining entries range from 1 to 15. This is a concentration of recorded references, not a demonstrated difference in departments' propensity to cite news: the number of news-citing theses and the distribution of references within each department are not available.

Table 1: Online news citations in CUTN theses, by department

Sl. No.	Department	Accessible Link (Online News)	Inaccessible (Broken Links)	No. of Theses Submitted (Shodhganga)	Total References
1	Chemistry	2 (0.04%)	0 (0.00%)	21	5,074
2	Commerce	6 (0.37%)	0 (0.00%)	4	1,609
3	Economics	6 (0.22%)	1 (0.04%)	16	2,749
4	Education	6 (0.41%)	0 (0.00%)	7	1,480
5	English	12 (0.76%)	1 (0.06%)	9	1,584
6	Epidemiology & Public Health	1 (0.25%)	0 (0.00%)	2	402
7	Geography	8 (0.39%)	0 (0.00%)	6	2,032
8	Hindi	15 (2.17%)	15 (2.17%)	10	690
9	Management	4 (0.49%)	0 (0.00%)	4	819
10	Media and Communication	116 (5.71%)	1 (0.05%)	7	2,031
11	Social Work	31 (2.40%)	0 (0.00%)	7	1,293
	Total	207 (1.05%)	18 (0.09%)	93	19,763

The two access columns sum to 225 entries. However, the Hindi row contains 15 entries in each column, while the accompanying description states that all 15 Hindi links were inactive. The table could represent two different sets of references, or one of the entries or descriptions could be incorrect. Neither interpretation can be selected from the summary alone. Consequently, the totals of 225 references and 207 accessible references remain provisional.

Although both columns can be proven to be mutually exclusive, the 18 inaccessible URLs will represent the aggregate failure of the process, and not link rot. No conclusion about complete loss of Hindi news sources, the permanence of missing pages, or changes in availability over time is supported by the present records.

The original column values are retained without reclassification. The Hindi row records 15 accessible and 15 inaccessible references, whereas the original narrative describes all 15 Hindi links as inactive. These accounts cannot be reconciled without the records. The thesis column is a departmental aggregate and does not establish how many theses cite news. Inaccessible includes access-restricted content as well as missing pages.

4.2. Year-wise distribution of news citations

Table 2 presents the yearly citation frequency of online news sources in CUTN doctoral dissertations between 2020 and April 2025. For the period under consideration, 225 citations have been made. It can be concluded that there is a noticeable rise in the use of news sources in recent years, which demonstrates their growing acceptance as an academic source of information. In 2024, the maximum number of citations was reached, equalling 125, then came 42 citations in 2023 and 26 citations from January to April 11 in 2025.

Table 2: Annual distribution of citations to online news

Year	Number of News Citations
2020	3
2022	29
2023	42
2024	125
2025 (up to April 2025)	26
Total	225

4.3. Ranking of cited news agencies

Table 3 displays the leading agencies amongst the 48 news organizations that were mentioned in the CUTN doctoral dissertations between 2018 to April 2025. BBC News emerged as the leading agency with a total of 8 mentions, followed by the Press Trust of India (PTI) and The Times of India, both with 7 and 6 citations respectively. It should be noted from the research that the above-mentioned agencies account for more than a quarter of all citations, signifying reliance on credible international news organizations.

Table 3: Five most-cited news agencies in CUTN doctoral theses, 2020–April 2025

Rank	News Agency	Total Citations
1	BBC News	8
2	PTI	7
3	The Times of India	6
4	Desk, I.T.W.	5
5	The Hindu	4

As these three have been mentioned 5 and 4 times, they acquired importance in the literature review due to the fact that the national and international reports have relevance to academic researches. Express Web Desk, NL Team and Staff, S., Aaj Tak, ABP News, Zee News, Scroll Staff and Citizen Matters have been cited only once. This fact demonstrates the tendency towards citing digital editorial desks and report teams in academic literature. Citations to CNN, DW.com/UNHCR and Concern Worldwide indicate that the international perspective is taken into account by CUTN researchers.

Thus, citation practices demonstrate that there is a tendency towards citing those agencies which have credibility and digital authority in journalism.

4.4. Citation patterns for individual journalists

The analysis of individual journalists identified 129 distinct contributors cited in doctoral theses, reflecting greater reliance on credible news reporting in scholarly work. The ten leading journalists shown in Table 4 indicate a preference for detailed and investigative coverage of political, economic, social, and environmental issues.

Table 4: Ten leading journalists by citation score

S. No.	Name of the Journalist	Citation score	Author Occurrence
1	Yasir, S.	2.42	5
2	Safi, M.	2.00	4
3	Bhardwaj, A.	2.00	2
4	Farooqui, M.	2.00	2
5	Hussain, A.	2.00	2
6	Sainath, P.	2.00	2
7	Subrat Mohanty	2.00	2
8	Xinhua	2.00	2
9	Gettleman, J.	1.50	3
10	Abi-Habib, M.	1.25	3

4.4.1. Yasir, S.: cited score 2.417; appears in 5 publications

Yasir, S., earned the highest cited score and was most visible, appearing in 5 publications. The cited score of 2.417 is demonstrated below using author positions.

- First author position in 1 publication is equal to $1 \times 0.50 = 0.50$ points
- Second author in 2 publications where each of these publications had 2 authors and second author got all remaining half point – that gives $2 \times 0.50 = 1.00$ point
- Third author in 3-author article in one publication is $1 \times 0.25 = 0.25$ points. This result is due to dividing remaining 0.50 points between the second and third authors ($0.50 \div 2$)
- Fourth author in 4-author article in one publication is $1 \times 0.167 = 0.167$ points. This part is calculated by dividing remaining 0.50 points among 3 co-authors ($0.50 \div 3 \approx 0.167$)
- The score from source is 2.417 for equation $0.50 + 1.00 + 0.25 + 0.167$

4.4.2. Safi, M.: score 2.00; appears in 4 publications

- Safi, M., appeared in four publications occupying the position of second author in each of them
- There were 2 authors in each publication: the first got 0.50 points, and remaining 0.50 points were available for Safi, M
- Thus the resulting score is $4 \times 0.50 = 2.00$ points.

The rest of the list shows how being the sole author or being involved in collaboration differently affects the citations' impact. For example, A., Farooqui, M., Hussain, A., Sainath, P., Subrat Mohanty, and the institutional writer Xinhua got their scores 2.00 each because of sole authorship of two articles and therefore received the total 1.00 point per each article without sharing the points between the co-authors. In contrast, the authors at the bottom of the top ten earned the mentioned points because of several times of being a second author. Gettleman, J., obtained 1.50 points because he was the second author three times, and each of these times gave him 0.50 point. Moreover, Abi-Habib, M., collected 1.25 points because he was the second author two times ($2 \times 0.50 = 1.00$ point), and the third author once in a three-author article ($1 \times 0.25 = 0.25$ points).

More than 100 writers outside the top ten have scores of 1.0 or below, meaning that these authors are cited once or involved in collaboration of writing articles. Such long-tailed distribution of the scores suggests that only few authors receive several citations, and most of them are used in certain circumstances or situations. It is worth mentioning that the scores may be fractioned because of shared authorship or citation of parts of the article. Zahra-Malik, M. (0.75), Cadwalladr, C. (0.5), and Kumar, H. (0.25) are provided as examples of that.

The conclusions drawn by the study prove that doctoral researchers at CUTN increasingly use online news as academic evidence, especially in case studies, policies, and social issues. Such diversity and selective choice of references show development of the scientific approach to using media as an academic resource.

4.5. Media consumption patterns

An analysis of the references in the CUTN doctoral theses gives us an idea about the shifts in the way researchers cite journalism media and include them in the academic discourse. Their references to 48 different news channels indicate their growing dependence on various media sources. In the beginning, their citation was occasional and sporadic and mainly centered around speciality media news sources like Medical News Today and Healio News. The pattern indicates that the news was cited mainly as additional information for medical or public health-related topics.

The researchers then progressed towards more mainstream reporting by citing contextual information from national newspapers like The Times of India and Hindustan Times, as well as human rights and broadcasting agencies internationally, including UNHCR and DW. It further led to dependence on more reliable news wire services and public broadcaster like BBC News and Press Trust of India (PTI), as well as independent news websites like The Wire and Scroll. Recently, their citation sources have tended to become slightly more focused on local and regional policy issues through The Hindu and hyperlocal sources like Citizen Matters.

In all, the shift indicates the growing dependence of CUTN doctoral researchers on these 48 news platforms as sources for current real-life evidence to back up their academic theories.

5. DISCUSSION

The clearest descriptive result is the concentration of recorded news references in Media and Communication and Social Work. This pattern is compatible with the greater use of news in some humanities and social-science publications observed by Kousha and Thelwall (2017). Compatibility, however, is not an explanation. The present study does not code thesis topics or distinguish news used as documentary evidence from news examined as research material.

A small number of theses could account for much of a department's total. Future analysis should therefore report both the number of theses citing news and the number of references per citing thesis. Departmental rates should use clearly defined denominators, and citation-context coding should distinguish background information, factual support, methodological discussion, and media content analysed as data. Until then, the counts should not be interpreted as disciplinary dependence on journalism.

5.1. Findings

It was observed that there were different patterns of usage of online news, its credibility, and its influence in the works of doctoral theses from CUTN. From the data obtained from the departments, it was pointed out that Media and Communication had the largest number of valid citations (116), followed by Social Work (31) and Hindi (15). It is possible to say that Chemistry, Epidemiology and Public Health, and Management had very little dependency on online news in their work.

In total, there were 129 journalists whose citations were different. The highest citation score was 2.42 from Yasir S., whereas the other authors such as Safi M., Bhardwaj A., Farooqui M. got 2.0. The authorship order-based approach allowed creating a system of scoring for a fair

evaluation of the author's contributions in the cited works. There were only a few people who received several citations, whereas the majority received only one fractional citation.

It is possible to say that there were 225 citations during the studied period, which demonstrates how the usage of online news at CUTN increased greatly from 3 in 2020 to 125 in 2024. Moreover, another 26 citations occurred in the first months of 2025. Hence, it shows the increase in the acceptability of online sources in academic and research work.

During four years, 48 news agencies were used as sources by researchers. There is a visible increase in 2023 and 2024, which means the usage of credible information sources for empirical, policy, case studies, and socioeconomic information.

These measures demonstrate the new media consumption patterns of CUTN doctoral students during four years analyzed in the study. Initially, the special sources such as Medical News Today were used, then the mainstream news, and finally, credible wire sources, newspapers, and digital desks. In accordance with the analysis conducted, these platforms should be considered as the sources of reading as well as verifying academic hypotheses via journalism.

6. CONCLUSION

The reported CUTN summaries document the use of online news in doctoral referencing and show an uneven distribution across departments. They also demonstrate why citation attribution and accessibility need to be analysed separately. A frequently referenced source is not necessarily a high-quality source, an inaccessible page is not necessarily a lost page, and a fractional authorship score is not a direct measure of contribution or influence.

JCS provides a proposed framework for describing citation credit, but the existing aggregates do not yet support a validated ranking. Resolving the access discrepancy, identifying the denominators of the yearly series, and separating individual from organisational bylines are essential before the numerical findings can be finalised. With those checks completed, this institutional case could support a more reproducible account of how doctoral research uses and preserves journalistic sources.

6.1. Recommendations

There are several recommendations for improving connections between journalism and academia provided in the paper. Firstly, journalists must use separate identifiers, using models that are used by researchers, for example, ORCID and ResearchGate identifiers. This will allow for more efficient citation tracking and correct attribution in journalism and media. Secondly, databases and digital repositories must include the newly developed Journalist Citation Score (JCS). The same as h-index, JCS will assess influence of journalists within academia through citation counts of news articles written by journalists.

A centralised journalist-profile service, comparable to Google Scholar, should also bring together article views, citations, institutional reposts, and indicators of scholarly engagement. Such a service would promote transparency, credibility, and high-quality journalism. In addition, Scopus, Web of Science, and Dimensions should selectively index peer-verified news

articles that are frequently cited in doctoral theses and research papers, thereby giving formal academic recognition to journalistic contributions.

National and international media organisations should develop policies that promote citation analytics and encourage partnerships between news organisations and research institutions. Academic awareness initiatives should also foster consistent citation of credible reporting as a legitimate and valuable scholarly resource. Together, these steps would help journalists receive appropriate credit for their academic influence and increase their visibility within the wider knowledge community

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