

OVERVIEW

History scholars in the 21st century face a vastly different research environment. The growth in online research tools, along with unprecedented access to archival materials through digitization, present a host of possibilities and challenges. Yet few empirical studies have explored how these technological changes have impacted research practices in archival settings.

This poster reports on a research study exploring how U.S. academic historians search for, access, and use primary source materials.

RESEARCH QUESTIONS

- What **methods** do historians use most frequently to **search** for materials?
- Do they **access** materials **online** or **in-person**?
- What **types** of documents are they most likely to **use**?
- How are historians **using digitized sources**?
- What **factors** do they consider in their decision to use (or not use) online materials?

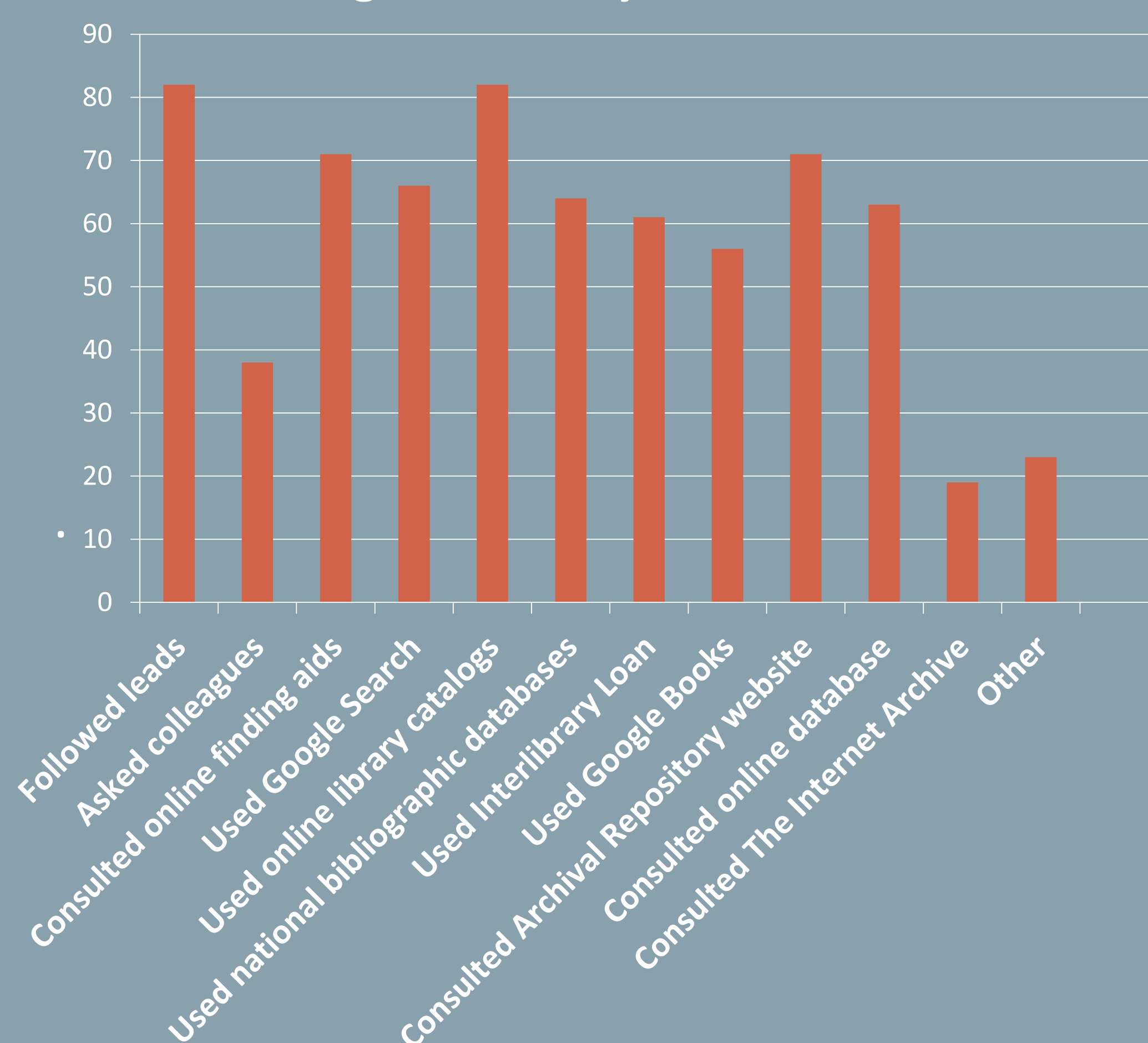
METHOD & SAMPLE

An online survey questionnaire was designed and sent to academic historians studying U.S. history. Participants were recruited from 10 mailing lists selected from the Humanities and Social Sciences Net Online (H-NET).

- 86 historians completed the questionnaire.
- The majority ($n=58$) were female.
- Half of all respondents identified as associate or assistant professors ($n=43$)

FINDINGS

Searching for Primary Source Materials



Factors In Evaluation and Use of Online Archival Sources

"I'd really need to know that I was getting the **entire collection** ...*and* the process of using the collection would need to simulate 'live' **archival conditions** in that I'd need **full information on the collection**, be assured that the collection wasn't 'edited' and the like." - Participant 12

"I can imagine going to primary sources because of **bad reproduction quality**, which is an ongoing concern with online sources. And there is nothing like the **real thing for a historian**, giving immediacy to one's relationship with documents and images created by historical actors." - Participant 32

CONCLUSION

- On average, respondents used **at least 8 different methods** (both electronic and print) in their search for primary source materials.
- **Online tools** helped respondents **assess** the research landscape.
- Most respondents ($n=80$) had used **digitized primary sources** in research endeavors.
- **Quality of digital surrogates** was an ongoing concern for respondents.
- Respondents wanted to see **entire archival collections** digitized, not just select items.