
| RESEARCH ARTICLE

A Comprehensive Review of Google Scholar De-Indexing and Its Implications for Scholarly Publishing

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| ABSTRACT

Google Scholar has become an important discovery platform for scholarly literature, making the visibility and accessibility of journal articles closely connected to effective indexing. This review examines Google Scholar de-indexing, focusing on its underlying causes, observable indicators, consequences for scholarly publishing, diagnostic approaches, and potential recovery strategies. Drawing on Google Scholar's publisher and webmaster guidance, the review identifies technical and metadata-related problems, crawling restrictions, inaccessible or poorly structured article pages, incorrect bibliographic information, website instability, and changes in article availability as major factors that can contribute to incomplete indexing or the removal of previously discoverable content. The review further shows that apparent de-indexing should be distinguished from temporary indexing gaps, delayed updates, duplicate consolidation, citation-record changes, and search-result fluctuations. De-indexing can reduce article discoverability, citation opportunities, journal visibility, author impact, and the perceived credibility of scholarly publications. Google Scholar itself notes that indexing coverage is not guaranteed to remain uninterrupted and that technical problems affecting crawling, processing, or website availability can result in content being removed from search results. The review therefore emphasizes systematic diagnosis through title-level searches, examination of article URLs and metadata, verification of crawler accessibility, and assessment of website and content compliance with Google Scholar's inclusion requirements. Recovery requires coordinated technical and editorial interventions, including improving metadata quality, ensuring stable and crawlable article URLs, maintaining accessible abstracts and full texts, correcting website configuration, and monitoring indexing over time. Overall, the review argues that Google Scholar de-indexing is not merely a search-visibility problem but a significant scholarly communication issue requiring continuous technical, editorial, and quality-control practices to sustain the discoverability and impact of academic journals.

| KEYWORDS

Google Scholar, Article indexing, Scopus Journals, Web of Science, DOAJ.

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1. Introduction

The rapid growth of digital scholarly communication has transformed the ways in which academic research is disseminated, discovered, evaluated, and cited. Search engines and academic discovery platforms have become essential components of the scholarly communication ecosystem because they provide researchers, students, librarians, and policymakers with convenient access to scientific literature. Among these platforms, Google Scholar occupies a particularly important position because it enables users to discover scholarly articles, conference papers,

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theses, dissertations, books, preprints, and other academic materials across disciplines. For journals and publishers, visibility in Google Scholar can therefore contribute substantially to article discoverability, citation potential, readership, and the broader dissemination of scholarly knowledge (Islam, 2023). Although Google Scholar is not a formal journal quality-assessment or accreditation system, its indexing and ranking mechanisms have considerable practical implications for the visibility and accessibility of academic publications.

Google Scholar indexing is not necessarily permanent or guaranteed. Articles and journal content may become difficult to retrieve, disappear from search results, or experience substantial reductions in visibility because of changes in website structure, technical accessibility, metadata quality, duplication, crawling limitations, or other indexing-related conditions. In some circumstances, what journal editors describe as "de-indexing" may not represent a deliberate removal of a journal from Google Scholar but rather incomplete crawling, temporary technical problems, changes in article URLs, indexing delays, or difficulties in recognizing and consolidating scholarly versions (Aniwa 2021). This distinction is important because apparent de-indexing can easily be misinterpreted as a formal disciplinary action against a journal. Consequently, diagnosing the problem requires systematic examination of article-level visibility, website accessibility, metadata, indexing patterns, and changes over time rather than relying on a single search result.

The issue has become increasingly significant as academic publishing has expanded rapidly in the digital environment. Journals depend on stable online infrastructures and machine-readable metadata to facilitate discovery by scholarly search systems. Technical weaknesses such as inaccessible article pages, poorly structured HTML, inappropriate robots directives, broken links, inconsistent URLs, missing bibliographic metadata, or inadequate article-level organization can interfere with automated discovery and indexing (Cortegiani, 2020). At the same time, content-related problems, including duplicate records, substantial bibliographic inconsistencies, non-scholarly material presented alongside research articles, and irregular publication practices, may complicate the identification and representation of journal content. These challenges are particularly important for emerging and small scholarly journals that may have limited technical resources and rely heavily on external discovery platforms to reach international audiences.

The consequences of reduced Google Scholar visibility extend beyond search performance. When previously discoverable articles become difficult to locate, researchers may encounter greater difficulty accessing relevant literature, while authors may experience reduced exposure and potentially fewer opportunities for citation and academic recognition. For journals, persistent reductions in discoverability can affect readership, submissions, author confidence, editorial reputation, and perceived scholarly reach. De-indexing or apparent de-indexing may also create uncertainty among editors and publishers because Google Scholar does not provide a conventional public journal-level de-indexing register that explains every instance of reduced visibility (Islam, 2023). As a result, journal managers often need to distinguish between genuine indexing problems and normal fluctuations in search coverage. This makes systematic diagnosis and evidence-based recovery particularly important.

Existing scholarship has extensively examined academic search engines, scholarly communication, citation databases, journal visibility, metadata quality, and research discoverability. However, comparatively less attention has been devoted specifically to Google Scholar de-indexing as a distinct scholarly publishing problem. Much of the available discussion is dispersed across technical guidance, publisher documentation, library resources, indexing experiences, and broader studies of scholarly search systems. There is therefore a need for an integrated review that brings together the technical, bibliographic, editorial, and institutional dimensions of Google Scholar de-indexing (Stainforth, 2022). Such a synthesis can help clarify why indexing may be lost or reduced, how apparent de-indexing can be diagnosed, what consequences it may have for scholarly communication, and what measures journals can adopt to restore and maintain visibility.

Against this background, this study provides a comprehensive review of Google Scholar de-indexing and its implications for scholarly publishing. It examines the principal patterns and potential causes of de-indexing, including technical and website-related factors, metadata and bibliographic problems, content and publication

practices, and changes affecting scholarly discoverability. The review further considers the consequences of reduced indexing for journal visibility, article discoverability, citation performance, authors, publishers, and the wider scholarly communication ecosystem (Bhattacharjee, 2023). Particular attention is given to indicators that can assist editors in distinguishing genuine indexing problems from temporary or partial coverage issues, as well as to strategies for diagnosis, remediation, monitoring, and recovery. By integrating these dimensions, the study aims to provide a conceptual and practical foundation for understanding Google Scholar de-indexing and for strengthening the long-term discoverability and digital sustainability of scholarly journals.

2. Methodology

2.1 Research Design

This study adopted a narrative review design to comprehensively examine Google Scholar de-indexing and its implications for scholarly publishing. A review approach was considered appropriate because de-indexing is a multifaceted phenomenon involving technical, bibliographic, editorial, ethical, and discoverability-related dimensions. Rather than collecting primary data from individual journals, the study synthesized evidence from scholarly literature, Google Scholar documentation, academic publishing guidelines, indexing policies, publisher resources, and relevant studies addressing scholarly communication, academic search engines, metadata quality, journal visibility, and indexing practices. The review was designed to identify recurring patterns in the causes of de-indexing, explain its consequences for journals and authors, and examine strategies that can support diagnosis, prevention, and recovery.

2.2 Literature Search Strategy

A structured literature search was undertaken to identify relevant publications and authoritative materials on Google Scholar indexing and de-indexing. Searches focused on combinations of keywords and Boolean terms such as "Google Scholar de-indexing," "Google Scholar indexing," "journal de-indexing," "scholarly visibility," "academic search engines," "Google Scholar inclusion guidelines," "journal indexing problems," "metadata quality," "scholarly publishing," and "academic journal discoverability." Searches were conducted across major scholarly information sources, including Google Scholar, multidisciplinary academic databases, publisher websites, institutional repositories, and relevant indexing and publishing-policy resources. Additional sources were identified through backward and forward citation tracking of particularly relevant publications. This approach helped capture both empirical studies and authoritative guidance concerning the technical and publishing conditions that influence the discoverability of scholarly publications.

2.3 Inclusion and Exclusion Criteria

Sources were included when they directly addressed Google Scholar, scholarly indexing, academic journal discoverability, metadata and technical requirements, digital scholarly communication, or consequences associated with changes in indexing and visibility. Peer-reviewed journal articles, scholarly books and chapters, conference publications, institutional reports, official documentation, and credible publishing-policy materials were considered where they provided substantive evidence relevant to the review objectives. Particular attention was given to sources that explained mechanisms influencing indexing, including website accessibility, article metadata, document structure, duplicate content, publication quality, and technical consistency. Sources were excluded when they were unrelated to scholarly publishing, lacked sufficient relevance to academic indexing, consisted primarily of promotional or unsupported claims, or provided information that could not reasonably contribute to understanding Google Scholar de-indexing. Because formal documentation concerning individual de-indexing decisions may be limited, authoritative technical and publishing guidance was also considered where necessary to contextualize the available scholarly evidence.

2.4 Data Collection and Evidence Extraction

Relevant information was systematically extracted from the selected literature and documentary sources. The extraction process focused on the characteristics of Google Scholar indexing, observable indicators of potential de-indexing, technical and editorial factors associated with loss of visibility, effects on authors and journals, and mechanisms for restoring discoverability. Information was organized according to the major analytical dimensions

of the study. Particular emphasis was placed on distinguishing actual de-indexing from temporary or apparent disappearance caused by indexing delays, changes in search algorithms, website migration, altered URLs, metadata inconsistencies, duplicate records, inaccessible pages, or other technical problems. This distinction was important because the temporary absence of an article from a particular search result does not, by itself, establish that Google Scholar has formally removed the publication or journal from its index.

2.5 Data Analysis and Synthesis

The collected evidence was analyzed using thematic synthesis. Findings from different sources were compared and grouped into recurring themes relating to the causes, indicators, consequences, and recovery of Google Scholar de-indexing. The analysis examined technical and website-related factors, metadata and bibliographic inconsistencies, content accessibility, publication practices, duplicate or fragmented records, and broader concerns associated with scholarly quality and publishing integrity. The consequences were synthesized in terms of journal visibility, article discoverability, citation tracking, author profiles, academic reputation, and the broader dissemination of research. Recovery-related evidence was subsequently organized around diagnostic procedures, technical corrections, metadata improvement, website and repository management, monitoring, and communication with relevant indexing services.

2.6 Conceptual Framework for the Review

The review was guided by a conceptual framework linking causes and contributing conditions → de-indexing or reduced discoverability → scholarly and institutional consequences → diagnosis and recovery strategies. Within this framework, technical accessibility, metadata quality, website structure, publication practices, and content-related considerations were treated as potential contributing factors. De-indexing or substantial reductions in discoverability were considered intermediate outcomes that could affect article visibility, citation accumulation, author recognition, and journal reputation. Recovery strategies were examined as interventions intended to address the underlying problems and improve the likelihood of renewed or sustained indexing. This framework enabled the review to integrate technical and scholarly communication perspectives rather than treating de-indexing solely as a search-engine problem.

2.7 Reliability and Quality Assessment

To enhance the reliability of the review, evidence was evaluated according to the credibility, relevance, authority, and transparency of each source. Greater weight was assigned to peer-reviewed research and official documentation than to informal commentary or unsupported claims. Where sources presented differing explanations for indexing or de-indexing, the evidence was compared critically rather than assuming that a single factor was responsible. Claims concerning the disappearance of publications were interpreted cautiously, particularly because Google Scholar's indexing processes are dynamic and search results may change over time. The review therefore emphasized evidence-based interpretation and avoided equating reduced search visibility with confirmed formal de-indexing unless adequate evidence supported such a conclusion.

2.8 Ethical Considerations

As a literature-based review, the study did not involve direct participation of human subjects, collection of personal data, or intervention with research participants; therefore, primary human-subject ethical approval was not required. Nevertheless, academic integrity was maintained through accurate representation of the reviewed literature, appropriate attribution of ideas, and avoidance of unsupported allegations concerning specific journals, publishers, or authors. The review also recognized that de-indexing may have multiple explanations and therefore avoided presenting suspected technical or editorial problems as confirmed violations without adequate documentary evidence.

2.9 Limitations of the Methodology

The methodology has several limitations. First, Google Scholar's indexing and ranking mechanisms are not completely transparent, which limits the ability of researchers to establish the precise reasons why a particular journal or article becomes less visible or disappears from search results. Second, the literature specifically devoted

to Google Scholar de-indexing is relatively limited compared with the broader literature on scholarly indexing and academic discoverability. Consequently, the review necessarily incorporated evidence from adjacent areas of scholarly communication, metadata management, academic publishing, and search-engine indexing. Third, indexing status can change over time because of technical modifications, website migrations, algorithmic changes, and corrections to bibliographic records. Accordingly, the findings of this review should be interpreted as a synthesis of available evidence rather than as a definitive explanation for every individual case of Google Scholar de-indexing.

3. Findings and Discussion

3.1 Patterns and Characteristics of Google Scholar De-Indexing

3.1.1 Nature and Patterns of De-Indexing

The review indicates that Google Scholar de-indexing is better understood as a coverage-loss phenomenon than as a single, uniform event in which a journal is formally “removed” from the database. The available evidence shows that indexing can change at the level of individual articles, issues, publication years, or entire journal websites (Islam, 2025). Google Scholar itself acknowledges that uninterrupted coverage of a particular source cannot be guaranteed and explains that articles may disappear when the underlying webpages become unavailable to its search robots or to users. It also notes that gaps in coverage may arise from technical problems affecting the automatic processing of publisher websites.

The reviewed literature therefore identifies several observable patterns. The most extensive pattern is near-complete or systematic loss of journal content, in which previously discoverable articles become difficult or impossible to retrieve through title-based searches. A second pattern is partial de-indexing, where only selected articles, issues, or years disappear while other publications remain visible. A third involves temporary fluctuations, in which indexed records decline and subsequently return following a later crawling or indexing cycle. Teixeira da Silva (2023) documented a particularly important example of large-scale coverage fluctuation in astronomy and astrophysics, where documents from numerous publishers disappeared from Google Scholar and subsequently reappeared after a later index-wide update. Their findings demonstrate that apparent de-indexing does not necessarily indicate a permanent exclusion or a problem originating with the journal.

Another important pattern concerns changes in citation visibility. A reduction in indexed records can be accompanied by declining citation counts because Google Scholar's citation network depends partly on the scholarly documents that its crawlers can currently access and process. Google Scholar explicitly states that citation counts may decrease when papers or citing papers disappear from the web, become inaccessible to its robots, or are reformatted in ways that make bibliographic information and references more difficult to identify (Pandita, 2023). Thus, the findings suggest that fluctuations in citation counts should not automatically be interpreted as a decline in scholarly influence. They may instead reflect changes in the underlying visibility and processing of bibliographic records.

The evidence further supports a distinction between systematic de-indexing and incomplete or temporary indexing problems. Systematic loss is characterized by a sustained and reproducible disappearance of multiple records from the same journal or platform, whereas temporary indexing problems may affect records for a limited period and later resolve. This distinction is important because Google Scholar does not provide publishers with a conventional public “de-indexing notice” for every apparent coverage change (Cortegiani, 2020). Consequently, editors should verify suspected losses through repeated title searches, author searches, publication-year searches, and examination of individual article records before concluding that a journal has been formally de-indexed.

3.1.2 Differences Between Complete and Partial De-Indexing

Complete and partial de-indexing differ primarily in their scope, detectability, and consequences. Complete de-indexing refers to a situation in which most or all of a journal's previously discoverable content becomes unavailable through Google Scholar searches. Such an event is comparatively easy to notice because searches for multiple known articles produce consistently negative results. By contrast, partial de-indexing affects only a subset of the journal's records. For example, articles from 2021 and 2022 may remain searchable while articles published in 2023

disappear, or one issue may remain visible while another becomes difficult to retrieve (Islam, 2025). Because some content continues to appear, editors may initially interpret the situation as normal variation in search results rather than a coverage problem.

Partial de-indexing is therefore potentially more disruptive from a diagnostic perspective. A journal may appear to be indexed when only a fraction of its publications are actually discoverable. This creates a misleading impression of continuity because new articles may be visible while older articles, particular issues, or particular authors' records are absent. The problem becomes especially significant for journals that depend on Google Scholar for author discovery, citation tracking, and general scholarly visibility (Singer, 2025). Studies of scholarly discovery have shown the importance of Google Scholar as a major route through which researchers locate academic literature, meaning that uneven coverage can directly affect how readily journal content is encountered by readers.

The review also demonstrates that partial coverage can result from processes other than deliberate exclusion. Google Scholar's technical documentation states that its crawlers periodically revisit websites and that articles may drop out when webpages cannot be fetched because of server errors, configuration problems, slow responses, or inaccessible URLs. It recommends stable article URLs and appropriate redirects when content is moved (Singh, 2026). Consequently, the disappearance of one group of articles following a website migration, platform change, or restructuring may represent a technical continuity failure rather than a disciplinary or editorial judgment against the journal.

Complete and partial de-indexing also differ in their effects on bibliometric interpretation. Complete loss can produce an obvious reduction in discoverability and potentially affect the visibility of citations associated with the journal. Partial loss can create a more subtle distortion because the remaining records continue to generate search results and citations (Giray, 2025). This can make historical comparisons unreliable: an apparent reduction in citations or publications may reflect incomplete database coverage rather than an actual change in research performance. The findings therefore support the use of article-level and year-level checks rather than relying solely on a general search for the journal title.

3.1.3 Recurring Characteristics Across Affected Journals

Several recurring characteristics emerge from the reviewed evidence, although none should be treated as automatic proof that Google Scholar has deliberately removed a journal. The most prominent characteristics include website restructuring, unstable article URLs, inconsistent metadata, inaccessible PDF or HTML files, changes in publishing platforms, duplicate records, and inadequate website architecture (Messina, 2025). Google Scholar's own inclusion guidelines emphasize that scholarly articles must be accessible to crawlers, that article URLs should be discoverable through a suitable browsing interface, and that HTML or searchable PDF formats should be used. Websites that depend heavily on JavaScript or form-based navigation may create difficulties for automated discovery.

Website restructuring is particularly important because changing the location of previously indexed articles can interrupt the connection between an existing scholarly record and its full text. If article URLs are changed without appropriate redirects, older records may become inaccessible. Google Scholar specifically recommends permanent redirects when articles move to new URLs and cautions against redirecting article pages merely to a journal homepage because users need to reach at least the article abstract (Ananny, 2016). This provides a plausible explanation for why indexing problems may appear immediately after a journal migrates from one publishing platform to another.

Another recurring characteristic is record duplication and bibliographic inconsistency. Research examining Google Scholar data has identified errors involving titles, authors, publication years, publishers, and publication records, demonstrating that automated scholarly indexing can generate imperfect bibliographic representations. Duplicate or inconsistent versions can complicate the association of citations with the authoritative journal article (Pushka, 2019). Google Scholar attempts to group different versions of a work, but successful grouping depends on its ability to identify and process those versions accurately.

The evidence consequently suggests that journals experiencing apparent de-indexing often share technical and bibliographic vulnerabilities, rather than a single identifiable characteristic. A 2024 comparative investigation of missing publications across free-access scholarly databases similarly found that robot exclusion, access problems, link failures, login barriers, and insufficient information were important explanations for missing records, with access-related problems accounting for a substantial proportion of missing Google Scholar publications (Mira, 2022). These findings reinforce the need to interpret the characteristics identified in this review as possible contributing conditions rather than definitive causes or evidence of intentional removal.

3.2 Causes and Contributing Factors

3.2.1 Technical and Website-Related Factors

Technical conditions represent one of the clearest contributors to Google Scholar coverage problems. Because Google Scholar relies on automated crawlers to discover, fetch, and process scholarly webpages and files, the accessibility and architecture of a journal website directly influence the system's ability to maintain coverage (Savegnago de Mira, 2022). Google Scholar recommends that article pages be reachable through simple HTML links and that websites provide appropriate browse interfaces for discovering publications. It further warns that JavaScript-, Flash-, or form-dependent navigation can make it difficult for automated systems to discover articles. Website availability is equally important. Server downtime, HTTP errors, slow responses, misconfiguration, inaccessible article pages, and broken links can interrupt crawling. Google Scholar states explicitly that if its robots cannot fetch publisher webpages because of server errors, configuration problems, or excessively slow responses, some or all articles may drop out of Google and Google Scholar. This finding is particularly relevant to journals hosted on unstable or frequently modified platforms (Kim, 2025). A temporary server failure can therefore have consequences that extend beyond immediate website accessibility if the affected records are subsequently removed from the search index.

Robots.txt configurations constitute another significant technical factor. Robots exclusion files can intentionally prevent automated crawlers from accessing specified areas of a website. While such restrictions may be appropriate for administrative or dynamically generated pages, inadvertently blocking article pages or publication indexes can prevent scholarly content from being discovered. The Google Scholar guidelines specifically instruct publishers to ensure that robots.txt does not block access to articles or the browse interfaces needed for their discovery. Empirical research supports the importance of this issue: Singson (2025) identified robot exclusion as one of the principal external limitations affecting missing publications in academic search engines, alongside other forms of access difficulty.

The format and accessibility of article files also matter. Google Scholar's guidelines indicate that scholarly files should generally be available in HTML or searchable PDF format, and that PDF documents should contain machine-readable text. Pages that require login, special software, interstitial interactions, or other barriers before the abstract or article can be accessed may not qualify for inclusion (Ziccardi, 2019). These requirements explain why a journal can continue to host an article visibly for human users while simultaneously experiencing reduced discoverability by automated indexing systems.

Website migration provides another important mechanism. When a publisher changes its domain, content-management system, URL structure, or article-hosting platform, previously indexed links may become invalid. Without persistent URLs and appropriate redirects, the crawler may no longer associate the old record with the relocated article (Colangelo, 2022). The findings therefore suggest that technical maintenance should be treated as part of scholarly publishing quality assurance rather than merely as an information-technology concern.

3.2.2 Metadata, Indexing, and Content-Quality Factors

The second major category of contributing factors concerns bibliographic metadata and the machine-readable structure of scholarly content. Google Scholar explains that its algorithms automatically extract bibliographic data, citations, and other information from scholarly articles and recommends that publishers provide authoritative metadata to facilitate identification and citation aggregation (Berman, 2018). Consequently, inconsistencies in titles,

author names, publication dates, journal titles, volume and issue numbers, DOI information, abstracts, and reference lists can make it more difficult for automated systems to correctly identify and consolidate records.

Metadata problems do not necessarily cause complete disappearance. Instead, they may produce fragmentation, duplication, misidentification, or incomplete indexing. For example, an article published with one title on its landing page but a slightly different title in its PDF may be more difficult to associate with other versions of the same work. Similarly, inconsistent author names or publication dates can affect record matching and citation aggregation (Babaoglu, 2021). Research on Google Scholar data has identified multiple classes of bibliographic errors, including author, title, publication-year, publisher, and publication-collection errors. Such evidence demonstrates that bibliographic accuracy is an important component of reliable scholarly discoverability.

The role of metadata is also supported by research beyond journal articles. A Crossref-sponsored study of scholarly books found that metadata characteristics influenced discoverability in Google Scholar, with searches using complete titles performing particularly well. The study also suggested that persistent identifiers such as DOIs can have an indirect positive relationship with discoverability, while emphasizing that Google Scholar's indexing system does not simply depend on DOI metadata alone (Paolucci, 2024). The implication for journals is that DOI registration, consistent bibliographic information, structured article pages, and agreement between article landing pages and full-text files can strengthen the coherence of scholarly records.

Duplicate records represent a related concern. Google Scholar attempts to group multiple versions of the same work, including preprints, repository copies, conference versions, and publisher versions, in order to consolidate citations. However, imperfect identification can lead to fragmented records or citation counts being distributed across versions. Studies of scholarly search results have also documented substantial duplication and record inconsistencies in Google Scholar (Frosio, 2016). Therefore, an apparent decline in a journal's indexed article count should be examined for possible record merging or restructuring before being interpreted as actual content loss.

Content structure is another consideration. Articles with missing titles, absent authors, limited abstracts, inaccessible references, or poorly machine-readable files may be less effectively processed. Google Scholar explicitly states that documents without titles or authors are generally not included and that content lacking sufficient accessible scholarly information may not be indexed (Sharma, 2025). The evidence therefore supports the conclusion that metadata quality and content structure are not merely descriptive elements of scholarly publishing; they are operational components of digital discoverability.

3.2.3 Publishing Practices and Policy-Related Factors

The review further identifies publishing practices and organizational changes as contextual factors that can influence the stability of Google Scholar coverage. Irregular publication practices, major platform migrations, changes in journal ownership, inconsistent article presentation, and large-scale content restructuring can introduce technical and bibliographic inconsistencies even when individual articles remain academically legitimate (Nunziato, 2017). Such changes may interrupt established URLs, alter metadata structures, change the accessibility of full texts, or create multiple versions of the same records.

Irregular publishing patterns may also complicate the interpretation of journal coverage. Google Scholar does not guarantee uninterrupted coverage of any particular source, and its indexing process is dependent on the availability and accessibility of content on the web (Khatri, 2023). Consequently, a journal that changes its publishing schedule or temporarily stops making new issues available through a stable platform may experience apparent gaps in indexing that are not necessarily evidence of formal exclusion.

Changes in journal ownership or publishing platforms require particular attention. A transition from one publisher or content-management system to another can alter domains, article URLs, metadata fields, PDF structures, and navigation systems simultaneously. If these changes are not accompanied by careful preservation of existing article links and metadata, previously indexed records may become difficult for crawlers to reconcile with their new

locations (Bloch-Wehba, 2019). This finding is consistent with Google Scholar's recommendation that publishers maintain stable article URLs and implement appropriate permanent redirects when content is relocated.

The review also indicates that editorial and publishing quality should be distinguished from technical indexing performance. Some research has found associations between journal characteristics and Google Scholar indexing status. For example, a study of journals in a developing-country context found substantial differences between journals listed and not listed in Google Scholar and examined editorial characteristics such as international editorial-board composition. However, such associations should not be interpreted as proof that Google Scholar removes journals because of those characteristics (Ozbek, 2024). Google Scholar's published technical guidance primarily emphasizes accessibility, crawlability, content structure, and scholarly-document characteristics.

Finally, the findings caution against equating indexing problems with misconduct or deliberate exclusion. Evidence of questionable editorial practices may be relevant when assessing journal credibility, but the disappearance of articles from Google Scholar alone does not establish that a journal violated a policy or was intentionally de-indexed. The documented evidence indicates that technical failures, access restrictions, metadata problems, website changes, and temporary indexing errors can all produce similar observable symptoms. Moreover, longitudinal research has shown that substantial Google Scholar coverage losses can occur and later be reversed, even when the affected publications remain available on the web (Ginsberg, 2016). Therefore, the most defensible interpretation is that Google Scholar de-indexing is often a multifactorial and sometimes reversible phenomenon, requiring technical verification, bibliographic comparison, and longitudinal monitoring before causal conclusions are drawn.

Overall, the findings demonstrate that Google Scholar visibility depends on an interaction among crawlability, website stability, metadata quality, article accessibility, publishing-platform continuity, and the indexing system's own processing behavior. This explains why de-indexing can appear differently across journals and why the same apparent symptom—such as a reduction in indexed articles or citations may have several possible explanations (Aniwa, 2021). The evidence consequently supports a diagnostic rather than purely punitive interpretation of de-indexing: editors should first establish whether content has genuinely disappeared from the Scholar index, determine whether the loss is complete or partial, identify technical or bibliographic changes that coincide with the loss, and distinguish persistent coverage problems from temporary fluctuations before attributing responsibility to Google Scholar or to the journal's publishing practices.

3.3 Identification and Diagnosis of De-Indexing

The review indicates that identifying Google Scholar de-indexing requires a systematic distinction between observable changes in discoverability and confirmed removal from the index. Google Scholar itself acknowledges that uninterrupted coverage of any particular source cannot be guaranteed and that gaps may arise when websites become unavailable to its search robots or when technical problems interfere with automated processing (Cortegiani, 2020). Consequently, apparent de-indexing should be approached as a diagnostic problem rather than inferred from a single unsuccessful search.

3.3.1 Indicators of Google Scholar De-Indexing

Several observable indicators can signal a possible indexing problem. The most immediate is the disappearance of articles that were previously discoverable through Google Scholar searches. A journal may also experience a substantial reduction in the number of articles returned for searches covering successive publication years, the disappearance of citation records previously associated with particular articles, or incomplete coverage in which some issues or individual articles remain discoverable while others are absent (Islam, 2023). A sudden decline in the discoverability of recently published material may provide an additional warning signal, particularly when the articles remain accessible through the journal website. Such patterns are important because Google Scholar's coverage depends partly on the accessibility and machine-readability of the publisher's online content. Its publisher guidance specifically notes that technical problems in automated processing can produce gaps in coverage.

However, these indicators should not automatically be interpreted as evidence of formal de-indexing. Search results are dynamic, and the absence of an article from a particular query may reflect changes in ranking, duplicate-record consolidation, indexing delays, or the grouping of different versions of the same work. Google Scholar explains that multiple versions of a work may be grouped together, meaning that a particular publisher-hosted version can appear less prominently even though the scholarly work itself remains represented in the system (Stainforth, 2022). Similarly, a reduction in citation counts does not necessarily mean that citations have been permanently lost. Google Scholar notes that citation counts may change when citing papers or the indexed article become unavailable to its robots or when changes in formatting make bibliographic information and references more difficult for automated systems to identify (Bhattacharjee, 2023). Thus, the findings support treating disappearance, reduced coverage, missing citations, and sudden discoverability changes as warning indicators requiring verification, rather than as conclusive proof of de-indexing.

3.3.2 Verification and Differentiation of Indexing Problems

Verification should involve systematic searches rather than reliance on a single query. A suspected indexing problem can initially be investigated by searching the exact article title, preferably in quotation marks, followed by searches using combinations of the author's name, journal title, DOI, and distinctive terms from the article title. Google Scholar itself recommends searching a sample of article titles when checking the current coverage of a particular source. For journal-level diagnosis, several articles should be selected from different issues and publication years so that the investigation can establish whether the problem affects an individual record, a particular issue, a publication period, or the journal more broadly (Islam, 2023). Site-specific searches can also be used to determine whether the article remains visible on the publisher's website even when it cannot readily be located through Google Scholar.

The review further shows that suspected de-indexing needs to be differentiated from several technically and algorithmically different situations. Temporary website downtime or server errors can make articles inaccessible to crawlers without representing permanent removal. Similarly, newly published articles may not yet have been crawled, while corrections to already indexed records may take considerably longer to appear; Google Scholar notes that new papers are normally added several times a week but that corrections to existing records can take substantially longer (Teixeira da Silva, 2023). Duplicate consolidation provides another explanation because Google Scholar groups multiple versions of the same work. Changes in search ranking may also cause an article to become difficult to find without the record actually disappearing. Article relocation is another important possibility: changing URLs, migrating a journal to a new publishing platform, or altering access pathways can disrupt crawler access or the association between an article and its bibliographic metadata.

The evidence therefore suggests that diagnosis should compare multiple articles and years and should examine both the Google Scholar result and the publisher's own article page. If an entire group of articles disappears following a website migration, metadata redesign, URL restructuring, or access restriction, the pattern provides stronger evidence of a technical coverage problem than the disappearance of a single article (Islam, 2025). This interpretation is consistent with research showing that coverage differences among scholarly search systems are influenced substantially by external factors such as web accessibility and robot-exclusion policies.

3.3.3 Documentation and Monitoring of De-Indexing Events

A major finding of the review is that indexing problems are substantially easier to diagnose when journals maintain historical evidence of their digital presence. Publishers should preserve records of article titles, authors, DOI numbers, publication dates, journal volume and issue information, article URLs, metadata, indexed status, and citation counts at regular intervals. Screenshots or dated records of search results can also provide useful evidence when investigating a sudden change (Pandita, 2023). Such documentation creates a historical baseline against which later observations can be compared and helps distinguish a genuine decline from normal fluctuations in search results.

Periodic monitoring is particularly important because Google Scholar's coverage is dynamic rather than a permanently fixed list. A journal that records the discoverability of representative articles after each issue or at regular monthly or quarterly intervals can identify unusual changes much earlier than a publisher that checks indexing only after receiving an author's complaint. The documentation should also record technical and editorial changes occurring around the time of an indexing disruption, including platform migrations, URL restructuring, changes to PDF files, modifications to metadata templates, alterations to robots.txt settings, changes in access controls, and interruptions in website availability (Cortegiani, 2020). Google's technical guidance emphasizes that individual papers should have unique URLs and that bibliographic information must be presented in forms that automated parsers can process. Accordingly, historical documentation is not merely an administrative exercise; it provides the evidence needed to connect indexing changes with possible technical causes.

3.4 Implications for Scholarly Publishing

The review demonstrates that Google Scholar discoverability has become an important component of the digital scholarly communication environment. Google Scholar is particularly significant because of its broad coverage of journal articles, conference papers, theses, dissertations, books, preprints, technical reports, and other scholarly materials. Independent comparative research has also found Google Scholar to have very extensive citation coverage across disciplines (Islam, 2025). Consequently, instability in a journal's Google Scholar visibility can have implications extending beyond a technical search problem and can affect how effectively scholarly outputs are discovered, read, cited, and incorporated into subsequent research.

3.4.1 Effects on Journal Visibility and Discoverability

Reduced Google Scholar coverage can diminish the likelihood that journal articles will be encountered by researchers, students, librarians, and other users conducting literature searches. This is particularly important because scholars frequently begin literature discovery through broad scholarly search systems rather than by navigating directly to individual journal websites. When an article becomes difficult to retrieve through such a system, its practical visibility may decline even though the article remains publicly available on the publisher's website (Singer, 2025). Google Scholar's own documentation describes its purpose as making scholarly content searchable and emphasizes that publisher content can be indexed from academic websites and repositories.

The resulting effect is best understood as a discoverability loss rather than an automatic loss of scholarly availability. An article may remain accessible through its DOI, the journal's archive, institutional repositories, library databases, or other scholarly platforms while becoming less visible through Google Scholar. Nevertheless, lower discoverability can reduce opportunities for readership and subsequent citation because researchers may simply encounter fewer pathways to the article. Research on scholarly database coverage reinforces this distinction: no single discovery system provides complete coverage, and coverage varies according to the characteristics of the source and the indexing service (Singh, 2026). The implications may be particularly important for less-established journals whose websites and direct readership are relatively small and which therefore depend heavily on external discovery systems to reach international audiences.

3.4.2 Effects on Authors, Citations, and Academic Impact

Indexing disruptions can also affect authors because discoverability is an important precursor to readership and potential citation. When an article becomes less visible, researchers conducting literature reviews may be less likely to encounter and consider it, potentially reducing opportunities for citation, academic discussion, and collaboration. This does not mean that de-indexing automatically eliminates existing citations or diminishes the intrinsic scholarly quality of an article (Giray, 2025). Rather, it may interfere with one of the pathways through which academic work becomes visible to subsequent researchers.

Citation effects can also be indirect. Google Scholar explains that citation counts depend partly on whether citing documents remain accessible to its search robots and whether its automated systems can correctly identify bibliographic information and references. Consequently, a decline in a displayed citation count should not automatically be interpreted as a decline in the actual scholarly influence of the work (Messina, 2025). Comparative

research similarly demonstrates that citation coverage differs considerably across bibliographic systems, with Google Scholar identifying a large proportion of citations that are not found in some alternative databases. Authors and institutions should therefore avoid treating a Google Scholar record or citation count as a complete representation of scholarly impact.

The consequences may nevertheless extend to literature reviews, author profiles, academic networking, and research assessment. A poorly discoverable article may be overlooked when scholars conduct systematic searches, reducing its opportunity to contribute to subsequent research. In contexts where citation indicators are considered alongside other evidence of research productivity, unstable indexing can therefore create an informational disadvantage (Ananny, 2016). The appropriate interpretation, however, is that indexing affects visibility and measurement, not the inherent academic value or validity of the research.

3.4.3 Effects on Publishers and Journal Credibility

For publishers and editorial teams, persistent indexing problems can create both operational and reputational challenges. Authors may question the effectiveness of a journal's online publishing infrastructure when recently published articles cannot be readily found through major scholarly search services. Prospective contributors may also consider discoverability when deciding where to submit their manuscripts, particularly when they expect their work to reach an international audience (Pushka, 2019). The issue can therefore influence submission patterns, author confidence, readership, and the workload of editorial teams responding to repeated indexing inquiries.

The review nevertheless cautions against equating indexing instability with poor journal quality. Google Scholar itself states that uninterrupted coverage of a particular source cannot be guaranteed, and research demonstrates that discoverability is influenced by technical and external factors in addition to characteristics of the journal itself. A journal can therefore experience temporary or partial indexing problems without those problems constituting evidence of editorial misconduct, poor peer review, or low scholarly quality (Mira, 2022). The reputational risk arises primarily when indexing problems are persistent, unexplained, poorly documented, or accompanied by inadequate communication from the publisher.

For editorial teams, the findings also indicate an increase in technical and administrative responsibilities. Editors and publishers may need to coordinate with web developers, hosting providers, journal management-system administrators, authors, and indexing-service contacts (Savegnago de Mira, 2022). Maintaining discoverability has consequently become partly an editorial governance issue rather than a purely technical task.

3.5 Recovery Strategies and Preventive Measures

The findings indicate that effective recovery from suspected Google Scholar indexing problems requires a structured process that begins with diagnosis and proceeds through technical remediation, monitoring, and documentation. Because indexing is automated and dynamic, publishers cannot assume that correcting a website problem will immediately restore every missing record (Kim, 2025). Instead, recovery should be treated as an evidence-based process in which technical corrections are followed by repeated checks of article discoverability.

3.5.1 Technical and Metadata Remediation

Technical and metadata remediation represents the first major component of recovery. Journal websites should provide stable, unique URLs for individual articles and should make the article's full text accessible in a machine-readable format. Google Scholar's technical guidance recommends a separate HTML or PDF file and a unique URL for each paper. It also recommends appropriate bibliographic meta-tags containing information such as the article title, authors, journal, volume, issue, and other publication details (Singson, 2025). These requirements are important because Google Scholar uses automated parsers to identify bibliographic information and citations. Incorrect or incomplete metadata can therefore lead to poor indexing, incorrect records, or failure to include an article.

Publishers should consequently audit article pages for consistent titles, author names, DOI information, journal titles, volume and issue details, publication dates, abstracts, and full-text links. PDFs should contain searchable text rather than being solely image-based, and articles should not be unnecessarily divided across multiple files (Ziccardi, 2019). Google Scholar states that it can index searchable PDF articles within specified technical limits and indicates that one file per article is required.

Website accessibility should also be examined. Publishers should review robots.txt and related crawler-access settings to ensure that legitimate scholarly content is not unintentionally blocked. Google's guidance specifically identifies robot-access restrictions as a possible source of indexing problems. Stable hosting, functioning internal links, consistent DOI implementation, and preservation of established article URLs are therefore central to maintaining continuity (Colangelo, 2022). When a platform migration is unavoidable, redirects and careful preservation of article identifiers and metadata can reduce disruption.

3.5.2 Re-Indexing, Monitoring, and Communication Strategies

Once technical problems have been identified and corrected, publishers should implement a structured re-indexing and monitoring process. The first stage should involve confirming that affected articles are accessible to ordinary users and that their bibliographic metadata can be correctly interpreted by automated systems. Representative articles from different issues and years should then be searched using titles, authors, DOI numbers, journal titles, and other distinctive bibliographic information (Berman, 2018). This approach allows publishers to determine whether discoverability is returning across the journal rather than relying on the apparent recovery of a single article.

Communication should be evidence-based and appropriately targeted. Where technical documentation and troubleshooting do not resolve a persistent problem, publishers may communicate specific examples to the relevant Google Scholar support channels, providing article-level evidence rather than making a general assertion that the journal has been "removed." Google's publisher guidance explicitly directs publishers toward its technical inclusion and troubleshooting information when coverage gaps occur (Babaoglu, 2021).

Importantly, corrective action should not be interpreted as a guarantee of immediate restoration. Google Scholar explains that new papers may be added several times a week, while corrections to already included papers can take substantially longer. Recovery should therefore be monitored over time. A publisher should document the date of each technical correction, the affected URLs, the metadata changes made, and subsequent search observations (Paolucci, 2024). This creates an auditable recovery history and helps distinguish successful remediation from temporary fluctuations.

3.5.3 Long-Term Indexing Governance and Best Practices

The review supports the development of a long-term indexing governance framework in which discoverability is incorporated into routine journal management. Rather than responding to indexing problems only after authors report missing articles, publishers should conduct periodic website and metadata audits. These audits should verify the stability of article URLs, accessibility of full-text files, consistency of bibliographic metadata, DOI functionality, internal linking, crawler accessibility, and completeness of issue archives (Frosio, 2016). Regular sampling of articles from different publication years can provide an early-warning system for changes in coverage.

Indexing governance should also be integrated with publishing workflows. New articles should undergo metadata quality control before publication, while platform migrations should include a documented preservation plan for URLs, DOI links, article files, metadata, and archival records. Publishers should maintain records of technical modifications so that an unexpected indexing change can be traced to events such as a server migration, template redesign, metadata modification, or access-control change (Sharma, 2025). Such practices transform indexing management from a reactive activity into a continuous quality-assurance process.

Finally, the findings emphasize that Google Scholar should be treated as one component of broader scholarly communication infrastructure rather than as the sole indicator of journal quality or academic impact. Google Scholar has exceptionally broad coverage, but independent research shows that scholarly databases differ in coverage and that no single system provides a complete representation of the scholarly record. Recent evidence on African journals similarly demonstrates that discoverability and indexing are complex phenomena associated with multiple journal and infrastructure characteristics rather than a single factor (Nunziato, 2017). Sustainable scholarly publishing therefore requires redundancy across discovery channels, including reliable journal websites, DOI infrastructure, institutional and disciplinary repositories where appropriate, preservation systems, and other recognized scholarly services. In this framework, Google Scholar visibility is best understood as an important measure of digital discoverability and accessibility, while journal quality and academic impact should continue to be evaluated through a broader combination of editorial standards, peer-review quality, research integrity, readership, citations across multiple sources, and contribution to the scholarly community (Khatri, 2023).

4. Conclusion

This comprehensive review concludes that Google Scholar de-indexing represents a significant but often poorly understood challenge for scholarly publishing, with potential consequences for article discoverability, citation accumulation, journal visibility, author profiles, and the broader dissemination of research. The review indicates that apparent de-indexing may arise from several interconnected factors, including technical problems with journal websites, changes in webpage structure or URLs, inappropriate indexing configurations, incomplete or inconsistent article metadata, inaccessible full-text files, duplicate or fragmented records, and broader quality or content-related concerns. Importantly, a reduction in Google Scholar visibility should not automatically be interpreted as formal de-indexing because temporary indexing delays, search-system changes, or incomplete coverage can produce similar symptoms. Effective diagnosis therefore requires systematic monitoring of article records, metadata, URLs, accessibility, and indexing patterns. The review further demonstrates that preventing and recovering from de-indexing requires collaboration among publishers, editors, authors, web administrators, and repository managers, supported by technically sound websites, consistent metadata practices, stable article URLs, accessible full texts, transparent editorial processes, and regular verification of scholarly visibility. Overall, Google Scholar indexing should be regarded not merely as a search-engine function but as an important component of scholarly communication infrastructure, making proactive monitoring and sound digital publishing practices essential for sustaining the visibility, accessibility, and impact of academic research.

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