



Collaborative Humanities, Theoretical Perspectives and Contemporary Challenges

Augustina N. Soronnadi

Department of English and Literary Studies

Veritas University, Abuja, Nigeria.

Email: soronnadia@veritas.edu.ng

Abstract

Collaborative Humanities has emerged as a significant paradigm in contemporary scholarship, reflecting a shift from individualistic research traditions toward interdisciplinary and participatory modes of knowledge production. This paper examines the theoretical foundations and contemporary challenges of Collaborative Humanities, drawing on perspectives from the digital humanities, sociocultural theory, and interdisciplinary research. It explores how collaboration among scholars, institutions, and communities enhances the production, dissemination, and application of humanistic knowledge while fostering inclusivity and intellectual diversity. The study discusses key theoretical orientations that underpin collaborative approaches, including constructivist epistemology, participatory knowledge production, and networked scholarship - emphasizing their relevance to modern humanities research. At the same time, the paper identifies major challenges confronting Collaborative Humanities, such as institutional constraints, authorship and intellectual property concerns, unequal access to resources, disciplinary boundaries, and technological disparities. Through conceptual analysis and illustrative examples, the study demonstrates that while collaborative models expand the scope and social relevance of the humanities, their effective implementation requires supportive institutional frameworks, equitable participation, and sustainable infrastructures. The paper concludes that Collaborative Humanities represents a transformative approach to scholarship capable of addressing complex social and cultural issues, but its long-term viability depends on resolving structural and methodological challenges within contemporary academic environments.

Keywords:

Collaborative Humanities, interdisciplinary research, digital humanities, theoretical perspectives, contemporary challenges.

Introduction

The humanities have traditionally been associated with individual scholarship where research and intellectual production are often attributed to single authors working within specific disciplinary boundaries (Foucault, 1972; Barthes, 1977). However, contemporary academic and societal developments have increasingly challenged this model, giving rise to more collaborative approaches to knowledge production (Klein, 2010; Jenkins, 2006). This shift reflects broader transformations in knowledge economies, where complex global challenges

demand integrative and collective intellectual engagement that transcends disciplinary silos (Donkor & Adom, 2025). The concept of Collaborative Humanities has therefore emerged as a response to the growing need for interdisciplinary engagement, shared intellectual labour, and broader participation in scholarly research. Rather than viewing knowledge as the product of isolated intellectual activity, collaborative humanities positions scholarship as a socially embedded and co-constructed process. This aligns with contemporary perspectives that emphasize co-creation, dialogue, and participatory knowledge systems as central to modern research practices (Jopling et al., 2024).

The theoretical foundations of Collaborative Humanities are rooted in intellectual traditions that emphasize interaction, co-construction of knowledge, and the social nature of scholarship. Constructivist and sociocultural perspectives, for instance, conceptualize knowledge as emerging through shared engagement rather than individual cognition (Vygotsky, 1978; Bruner, 1996). Similarly, interdisciplinary frameworks encourage scholars to transcend conventional academic boundaries to address complex, “wicked problems” that resist single-discipline solutions (Frogeri & Júnior, 2025). In recent decades, developments in digital technologies have further accelerated collaborative practices within the humanities (Fitzpatrick, 2011; Schreibman et al., 2004). Digital infrastructures not only enable large-scale collaboration but also reshape epistemic relationships between disciplines. However, as Edmond and Lehmann (2021) argue, such collaborations are often marked by deep epistemological tensions which they describe as “aporias” - arising from differences in how knowledge is produced, validated, and interpreted across disciplines.

Despite its growing prominence, Collaborative Humanities presents significant theoretical and practical challenges. Traditional academic structures continue to privilege individual authorship and disciplinary specialization, thereby limiting recognition for collaborative work (Leahey, 2016). Moreover, collaboration is not inherently seamless; it involves negotiation of power, expertise, and institutional hierarchies which may hinder effective partnership (Symonds, 2020). These tensions highlight the need for critical engagement with both the possibilities and limitations of collaborative scholarship.

Literature Review:

Conceptualizing Collaborative Humanities

Recent scholarship indicates that collaborative humanities represent a significant departure from traditional solitary scholarship toward networked, interdisciplinary, and participatory knowledge production. Digital humanities have been central to this transformation, providing infrastructures that enable collective scholarly practices (Schreibman et al., 2004; Kirschenbaum, 2012). However, collaboration is not merely a technical shift but also an epistemological one, requiring scholars to rethink authorship, authority, and knowledge ownership. Jopling et al. (2024) argue that contemporary humanities research is increasingly shaped by collective and co-creative approaches, particularly within post digital contexts where boundaries between digital and human systems are blurred. This reinforces the view that collaborative humanities is not simply methodological but fundamentally ontological, redefining how knowledge itself is conceptualized.

Interdisciplinarity and Knowledge Integration

Interdisciplinarity remains a cornerstone of collaborative humanities. It enables the integration of diverse theoretical perspectives and methodologies necessary for addressing complex societal issues. According to Donkor and Adom (2025), contemporary global challenges range from climate change to technological ethics that require knowledge systems which transcend disciplinary boundaries. Similarly, Frogeri and Júnior (2025) emphasize that interdisciplinary research is essential for tackling “wicked problems” which are characterized by ambiguity, interdependence, and competing values. These insights reinforce the argument that collaborative humanities is not optional but necessary for meaningful scholarly engagement in the modern world.

However, interdisciplinarity is not without its challenges. Newman (2023) highlights that while interdisciplinary collaboration is widely promoted, there is still limited empirical understanding of how such collaborations can be effectively initiated and sustained. This gap between theory and practice underscores the need for more operational frameworks in collaborative humanities research.

Social Constructivist Perspectives on Knowledge Production

Collaborative humanities align closely with social constructivist theories that view knowledge as socially produced. Berger and Luckmann (1966) argue that knowledge emerges through collective meaning-making processes, a principle that underpins collaborative scholarship. Digital platforms further facilitate this process by enabling shared interpretation and collective analysis. Spiro (2012) and Jopling et al. (2024) extend this argument by emphasizing participatory knowledge production where scholars and non-academic communities co-create knowledge. This democratization of scholarship challenges traditional hierarchies and expands the scope of humanities research.

Networked Scholarship and Digital Collaboration

Another theoretical framework relevant to collaborative humanities is networked scholarship. Networked scholarship refers to the use of digital communication technologies to facilitate academic collaboration and knowledge exchange across global research communities. The concept of the network society developed by Manuel Castells provides an important theoretical basis for understanding these developments. Castells (1996) argues that digital communication networks have transformed social and intellectual relationships, enabling new forms of collaborative interaction and knowledge production. In the humanities, networked scholarship has enabled researchers to collaborate through digital platforms, online archives, and shared research infrastructures. According to Fitzpatrick (2011), digital technologies have also reshaped scholarly communication by encouraging collaborative authorship, open peer review, and public scholarship. These developments illustrate how collaborative humanities operates within a broader digital knowledge ecosystem. However, Edmond and Lehmann (2021) caution that such collaboration often exposes deep epistemic divides between disciplines. These “aporias” highlight tensions in methodological assumptions, data interpretation, and epistemological values. Thus, while digital platforms enable collaboration, they also reveal underlying incompatibilities that must be actively negotiated.

Forms and Practices of Collaboration in the Humanities

Collaboration in the humanities occurs in various forms including interdisciplinary research teams, partnerships with cultural institutions, and community-based research initiatives. These collaborations frequently involve scholars working alongside librarians, archivists, technologists, and cultural heritage professionals. Research by Siemens & Schreibman (2013) demonstrates that many digital humanities projects rely on collaborative research teams that integrate diverse expertise including textual scholarship, computational analysis, and archival research. Similarly, some Scholars highlight the role of interdisciplinary laboratories and digital research centres in facilitating collaborative humanities scholarship describing collaborative research as both productive and inherently risky, requiring scholars to navigate uncertainty, negotiate disciplinary differences, and engage in reflexive learning processes (McPherson, 2012; Christensen et al., 2021). Willis et al. (2018) argue that meaningful collaboration requires overcoming entrenched disciplinary hierarchies and fostering genuinely integrative approaches to knowledge production. In addition to academic collaboration, collaborative humanities projects often involve partnerships with libraries, museums, and archives, thereby expanding the scope of humanities research beyond the university setting.

Contemporary Challenges in Collaborative Humanities

Collaborative humanities are shaped by structural and epistemological challenges that extend beyond logistical concerns. One of the most significant challenges facing collaborative humanities is the issue of authorship and scholarly recognition. Traditional academic evaluation systems often prioritize single-authored publications and individual research achievements. However, collaborative research projects typically involve multiple contributors with diverse intellectual roles. Fitzpatrick (2011) observes that existing academic reward systems often struggle to adequately recognize collaborative contributions, particularly in large-scale digital humanities projects. This creates tensions regarding intellectual ownership, authorship attribution, and professional recognition. Also, Symonds (2020) highlights how entrenched academic hierarchies and teacher-learner dynamics can hinder genuine collaboration.

Interdisciplinary Communication and Skill Differences

Collaborative humanities projects frequently involve scholars with different methodological traditions and technical expertise. Svensson notes that differences in disciplinary language and research practices can create communication barriers within interdisciplinary teams (Svensson, 2010). Differences in disciplinary paradigms often create friction in collaborative projects. Edmond and Lehmann (2021) demonstrate how these tensions manifest as epistemic incompatibilities. Effective collaboration therefore requires mutual learning, negotiation of research practices, and the development of shared methodological frameworks.

Institutional and Resource Constraints

Collaborative humanities projects often require significant technological infrastructure, research funding, and institutional support. Digital humanities initiatives, for example, rely heavily on digital laboratories, data management systems, and technical expertise. According to Kirschenbaum (2012), the sustainability of collaborative humanities projects frequently depends on institutional commitment and long-term funding structures. For instance, Universities often lack structures that support interdisciplinary work and funding systems may undervalue collaborative research (Christensen et al., 2021). Without adequate resources,

collaborative initiatives may struggle to maintain digital platforms or sustain long-term research programs.

Ethical and Epistemological Issues

Collaborative humanities also raise ethical questions concerning representation, inclusivity, and the politics of knowledge production. Scholars increasingly emphasize the importance of critical digital humanities approaches that examine how digital technologies shape cultural narratives and scholarly interpretation. McPherson (2012) argues that digital humanities must critically address issues of race, power, and representation in digital knowledge production. These concerns highlight the need for inclusive and ethically grounded collaborative research practices. The literature on collaborative humanities demonstrates that contemporary humanities scholarship is undergoing a significant transformation driven by interdisciplinary collaboration, digital technologies, and global research networks. While collaborative humanities expands the possibilities of humanistic research through interdisciplinary engagement and digital innovation, it also introduces challenges related to authorship, communication, institutional support, and ethical considerations. Addressing these challenges require the development of supportive institutional frameworks, inclusive research cultures, and new evaluation systems that recognize collaborative intellectual labour.

Methodology

This study adopts a qualitative, interdisciplinary research design to examine the theoretical foundations, practices, and contemporary challenges of Collaborative Humanities. Given that collaborative humanities research often spans multiple disciplinary boundaries such as literature, digital humanities, cultural studies, sociology, and media studies, the research employs a qualitative descriptive and analytical approach, combining systematic literature review and document analysis. This approach enables the researcher to critically synthesize theoretical perspectives on collaborative humanities while also identifying emerging trends, methodological innovations, and challenges within the field. Qualitative analysis is particularly suitable because the study focuses on conceptual interpretations, scholarly debates, and institutional practices rather than numerical measurement. The primary data for this study consist of secondary sources, including scholarly books, peer-reviewed journal articles, institutional reports, and digital humanities project documentation published between 2010 and 2024. These materials were selected because they provide critical insights into the theoretical frameworks that evolve practices of collaborative humanities research. Sources were drawn from major academic databases such as Google Scholar, JSTOR, Scopus, and Web of Science. The search strategy employed key terms such as collaborative humanities, digital humanities collaboration, interdisciplinary humanities research, knowledge co-production, and humanities research networks. These search terms enabled the identification of relevant literature addressing theoretical models, collaborative methodologies, and institutional dynamics shaping humanities scholarship. The study utilized purposive sampling to identify relevant literature based on the following criteria:

1. Publications addressing collaboration in humanities research or digital humanities projects.
2. Studies discussing theoretical perspectives on interdisciplinary or collaborative scholarship.

3. Empirical or conceptual works published between 2010 and 2024.
4. Peer-reviewed articles, academic monographs, and institutional research reports relevant to humanities scholarship.

One limitation of this study is its reliance on secondary sources which may not fully capture the practical experiences of researchers engaged in collaborative humanities projects. Future research may complement this approach through empirical methods such as interviews, surveys, or case studies of collaborative humanities initiatives within universities and research institutes.

Data Presentation and Analytical Themes

Following the systematic literature review and document analysis undertaken in this study, the data derived from selected scholarly sources were organized into thematic categories. The thematic analysis enabled the identification of key conceptual patterns relating to the theoretical foundations, models of collaboration, and the challenges confronting collaborative humanities scholarship in contemporary academia.

These themes are presented in tables and subsequently discussed to highlight the evolving nature of humanities collaboration.

Table 1: Theoretical Perspectives on Collaborative Humanities

Theoretical Perspective	Key Scholars	Core Argument	Relevance to Collaborative Humanities
Interdisciplinary Knowledge Production	Julie Thompson Klein	Knowledge creation increasingly occurs across disciplinary boundaries	Encourages integration of methods from literature, history, sociology and digital studies
Networked Scholarship	Kathleen Fitzpatrick	Digital technologies enable collaborative knowledge sharing and open peer review	Supports distributed research collaboration
Digital Humanities Collaboration	Patrik Svensson	Digital infrastructures facilitate collaborative research environments	Provides tools for large-scale humanities data analysis
Computational Humanities	Franco Moretti	Quantitative and computational approaches expand traditional humanities analysis	Enables large collaborative datasets and research teams
Participatory Knowledge Production	Henry Jenkins	Knowledge is co-created through participatory culture and collective intelligence	Encourages community participation in humanities research

Table 2: Institutional and Technological Frameworks Supporting Collaborative Humanities

Framework	Description	Scholarly Insight
Digital Research Platforms	Online infrastructures that enable collaborative data sharing and analysis	Facilitates interdisciplinary humanities research
Research Networks	International scholarly communities working collectively on humanities projects	Encourages knowledge exchange across institutions
Open Access Scholarship	Publishing models that allow free access to academic knowledge	Expands visibility and collaborative engagement
Interdisciplinary Research Centres	Institutional hubs promoting collaborative humanities research	Provides administrative and funding support
Collaborative Digital Archives	Digitized cultural and historical collections accessible globally	Supports large-scale humanities scholarship

Table 3: Contemporary Challenges in Collaborative Humanities

Challenge	Description	Implications
Institutional Barriers	Traditional academic structures favour individual scholarship	Limits recognition of collaborative research
Funding Constraints	Humanities research often receives limited funding compared to STEM fields	Restricts large-scale collaborative projects
Methodological Differences	Disciplinary approaches may differ significantly	Creates challenges in integrating research methods
Technological Gaps	Limited digital literacy among some humanities scholars	Slows adoption of digital collaboration tools
Authorship and Credit Issues	Difficulty in assigning recognition within collaborative projects	Raises ethical and professional concerns

Discussion

The thematic findings reveal that collaborative humanities research is fundamentally shaped by interdisciplinary knowledge production and digital technological transformation. Klein (2021) emphasizes that modern research problems often transcend disciplinary boundaries, thereby necessitating collaborative scholarly engagement. Similarly, the emergence of digital humanities has significantly reconfigured the methodological landscape of humanities research. According to Svensson (2016), digital infrastructures not only facilitate collaborative data analysis but also foster new forms of scholarly interaction and collective knowledge production. The concept of networked scholarship as extensively discussed by Fitzpatrick (2019) further highlights the role of digital technologies in reshaping academic communication. Through open-access platforms and digital research networks, scholars are increasingly able to

collaborate across institutional and geographical boundaries. However, despite these advances, collaborative humanities research faces significant structural challenges. Institutional reward systems within universities often prioritize individual scholarship, thereby discouraging collaborative projects. Furthermore, issues related to funding, technological infrastructure, and authorship attribution continue to limit the full realization of collaborative humanities initiatives. These findings suggest that while collaborative humanities research represents an important evolution in scholarly practice, its sustainability depends largely on institutional support, methodological innovation, and the continued integration of digital technologies within humanities scholarship.

The analysis of the selected literature reveals that collaborative humanities has emerged as a significant paradigm within contemporary humanities scholarship, driven largely by the need for interdisciplinary knowledge production, digital technological advancement, and the complexity of global cultural research problems. The thematic analysis of scholarly works highlights three central analytical dimensions: theoretical foundations of collaborative humanities, institutional and technological infrastructures supporting collaboration, and the structural challenges affecting collaborative scholarship. The theoretical basis of collaborative humanities is strongly rooted in the concept of interdisciplinarity, which emphasizes the integration of knowledge, methods, and theoretical approaches from multiple academic disciplines. According to Klein (2010), interdisciplinary collaboration allows scholars to address complex social, cultural, and historical issues that cannot be adequately examined through a single disciplinary framework. In this regard, collaborative humanities research promotes intellectual exchange among scholars from diverse fields such as literature, history, linguistics, media studies, and cultural studies. Similarly, the emergence of digital technologies has expanded the possibilities for collaborative knowledge production. Scholars in digital humanities emphasize that digital platforms facilitate new forms of scholarly interaction and collective inquiry. For instance, Svensson (2016) argues that digital humanities environments provide collaborative infrastructures where scholars can jointly analyze large datasets, cultural archives, and textual corpora. Such digital frameworks have transformed the methodological orientation of humanities research by enabling computational analysis and networked scholarly communication. The concept of networked scholarship further strengthens the theoretical foundation of collaborative humanities. According to Fitzpatrick (2019), contemporary academic scholarship increasingly relies on open peer review systems, digital research communities, and collaborative intellectual exchange. These developments have shifted humanities research from the traditional model of solitary scholarship toward more collective and participatory forms of knowledge production. Another influential perspective emerges from the work of Moretti (2013) whose concept of “distant reading” demonstrates how computational analysis can be used to examine large literary corpora collaboratively. Such approaches illustrate how collaborative humanities research integrates quantitative and qualitative methodologies to generate broader cultural insights.

Beyond theoretical considerations, the development of collaborative humanities is closely linked to the availability of institutional and technological infrastructures that support interdisciplinary research. Digital research platforms, collaborative archives, and online scholarly networks have significantly expanded the scope of humanities scholarship by facilitating global research partnerships. Open-access publishing models have also contributed to the growth of collaborative humanities. Through digital repositories and scholarly platforms, researchers can share data, publications, and research findings with wider academic

communities. This openness enhances scholarly visibility and encourages cross-institutional collaboration. Furthermore, universities and research institutions have increasingly established interdisciplinary research centres and digital humanities laboratories to support collaborative projects. These institutional structures provide funding opportunities, technological support, and research training necessary for collaborative humanities initiatives. As a result, humanities scholarship is gradually evolving from isolated disciplinary research toward integrated and networked research ecosystems.

The findings reinforce that collaborative humanities is both a transformative and contested paradigm. While it expands intellectual possibilities through interdisciplinarity and digital innovation, it simultaneously exposes structural inequalities and epistemological tensions. The integration of insights from recent scholarship highlights that collaboration is not merely a methodological shift but a reconfiguration of academic culture. It requires not only technological infrastructure but also institutional reform, epistemic openness, and reflexive engagement with power dynamics

Contemporary Challenges of Collaborative Humanities

Despite its intellectual and methodological potentials, collaborative humanities research continues to face several significant challenges. One of the most prominent issues relates to institutional academic structures which traditionally prioritize individual authorship and disciplinary specialization. Many university promotion and tenure systems still emphasize single-author publications, thereby limiting recognition for collaborative scholarly work. Another challenge concerns funding disparities between humanities and science disciplines. Large-scale collaborative projects often require substantial financial resources for digital infrastructures, research assistants, and technological tools. However, humanities research funding remains comparatively limited, which constrains the development of extensive collaborative initiatives. Methodological differences also present difficulties in interdisciplinary collaboration. Scholars from different disciplinary backgrounds often employ distinct theoretical frameworks, research methods, and analytical approaches. Integrating these diverse methodologies requires careful coordination and intellectual negotiation among collaborators. Technological limitations further complicate collaborative humanities research. While digital tools offer new opportunities for scholarly collaboration, not all humanities scholars possess the technical skills necessary to utilize advanced digital platforms effectively. This digital divide restricts participation in technologically driven collaborative projects. Finally, questions related to authorship, intellectual ownership, and academic recognition remain important concerns within collaborative humanities scholarship. Determining how credit should be distributed among multiple collaborators can be challenging, particularly in large interdisciplinary research teams.

Implications for Humanities Scholarship

The findings of this study suggest that collaborative humanities represents a transformative shift in the nature of humanities research, moving away from isolated disciplinary scholarship toward more collective, interdisciplinary, and technologically mediated forms of knowledge production. As research problems become increasingly complex and global in scope, collaborative frameworks will likely play an essential role in advancing humanities scholarship. However, the sustainability of collaborative humanities initiatives depends largely on institutional reforms, increased research funding, digital literacy development, and the

recognition of collaborative scholarship within academic evaluation systems. Addressing these issues will help ensure that collaborative humanities research continues to expand and contribute meaningfully to contemporary intellectual inquiry.

Conclusion

This study examined the concept of collaborative humanities by exploring its theoretical foundations, institutional frameworks, and contemporary challenges within modern humanities scholarship. The analysis demonstrates that collaborative humanities has emerged as a significant paradigm shift in the way knowledge is produced, shared, and disseminated in the humanities. Traditionally characterized by individual scholarship and disciplinary boundaries, humanities research is increasingly evolving toward interdisciplinary and networked models of knowledge production. The theoretical perspectives reviewed in this study reveal that collaboration in the humanities is deeply rooted in the principles of interdisciplinarity, participatory scholarship, and digital knowledge infrastructures. Scholars such as Julie Thompson Klein emphasize that interdisciplinary collaboration enables researchers to address complex cultural and social issues that transcend single disciplinary frameworks (Klein, 2021). Similarly, digital humanities scholars like Patrik Svensson and Kathleen Fitzpatrick highlight the transformative role of digital technologies in facilitating collaborative research environments and networked scholarly communication (Svensson, 2016; Fitzpatrick, 2019). The findings further indicate that technological developments, particularly digital archives, research networks, and open-access platforms have significantly enhanced opportunities for collaborative scholarship. These developments allow scholars from diverse disciplines and geographical locations to work together in analyzing cultural texts, historical archives, and linguistic corpora. The study also reveals several persistent challenges confronting collaborative humanities research. These include institutional academic structures that prioritize individual authorship, limited funding for humanities research, methodological differences among disciplines, technological disparities, and concerns regarding authorship and intellectual recognition within collaborative projects. Despite these challenges, collaborative humanities continue to represent a vital and evolving approach to humanities scholarship. By encouraging interdisciplinary dialogue and leveraging digital infrastructures, collaborative humanities provide innovative pathways for addressing complex, cultural, linguistic, and social phenomena in the contemporary world.

Recommendations

Based on the findings of this study, several recommendations are proposed to strengthen the development and sustainability of collaborative humanities research.

First, universities and research institutions should reform academic evaluation systems to recognize and reward collaborative scholarship. Academic promotion and tenure frameworks should incorporate mechanisms that adequately acknowledge multi-authored publications and interdisciplinary research contributions.

Second, greater institutional investment in digital humanities infrastructures is necessary. Establishing digital research laboratories, collaborative archives, and interdisciplinary research centres can provide scholars with the technological resources required for effective collaboration.

Third, funding agencies and academic institutions should increase financial support for humanities research, particularly projects that promote interdisciplinary collaboration. Adequate funding will enable researchers to undertake large-scale collaborative initiatives involving diverse academic disciplines.

Fourth, universities should encourage digital literacy training for humanities scholars. Developing technical competencies in digital research tools, data analysis platforms, and collaborative technologies will enhance scholars' ability to participate effectively in collaborative humanities projects.

Finally, clear guidelines for authorship attribution and intellectual credit should be developed within collaborative research teams. Transparent agreements regarding roles, responsibilities, and recognition will help address potential conflicts related to academic credit and authorship.

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