

# Influence of Competitive Intelligence among Information Professionals in Selected Nigerian Organisations in Ado-Ekiti

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## **Abstract:**

**Purpose:** This study was carried out to find out the influence of competitive intelligence among cell phone providers in Ado-Ekiti, Nigeria. Focus was on MTN, Airtel, Etisalat and Globacom.

**Design/Methodology/Approach:** Descriptive design of a case study type was used for this study. Random sampling was used in selecting two out of four companies above while purposive sampling was used in selecting participants for the survey. Thus, out of population of twenty, only twelve were selected. Data was collected using structured interview guide while it was analysed and interpreted using qualitative method of data analysis. Dervin's 1983 theory of information behaviour was used as framework for the study. The approach was library research and secondary sources used to discuss research findings.

**Findings:** Results revealed that information professional (IPs) intentionally embark on actions that assist in gathering of information by using their field sales team designated at different locations in the state. They were also found to gather information from retailers and dealers in telecom products; customers and employees of their rival companies. Information gathering was found to be carried out when: there is decrease in revenue, low performance, on weekly basis and sometimes two or three times annually. Participants were found to intentionally monitor their rivals to find out new competitive call, data rates or tariff. Every staff was found to be involved in information gathering while the analyses of information were done centrally at the national headquarters. Recommendations were proffered on the way forward.

**Keywords:** Competitive Intelligence; Information Providers; Cell Phone Providers; Ado-Ekiti; Telecommunication.

## **Introduction**

There has always been seen in every sphere of life the urge to stay in charge, be better than others and have a competitive edge above others. Therefore man, even when he is not conscious of it, is interested in information regarding those that pose threats to him. According to Sun Tzu (Kahaner, 1997), wars were won or lost because the stakeholders were either knowledgeable or unknowledgeable of themselves and their enemy.

According to SCIP (1999, p.2), competitive intelligence (CI) is defined as “the legal and ethical collection and synthesis of data and information to enhance business decision making”. It is the product of analysed data or information that was systematically and legally collected from the external environment in support of business decision making for achieving organisational goals. Those involved in the gathering, organisation, analyses and

dissemination of competitive intelligence are information professionals (IPs). They have their specialty around information gathering, processing, analyses, dissemination and strategic planning. According to SLA (2014) and Mason (2015), IPs have diverse degrees and qualifications; they are also trained to strategically wield information as an asset to advance the strategic goals, missions and visions of their organisation. The roles they play as IPs in CI is assumed to influence them into taking certain actions. Therefore information professionals in Ado-Ekiti, especially those in telecommunication business would have actions they partake in order to have an edge above their competitors.

In Nigeria, there are different types of organisations. There are public and private organisations. Private organisations are those ones that are not under the control of the government and do their business only to make

money. While public organisations are those ones that provide public services, control public funds and are regulated by government policies (The Institute of Internal Auditors, 2011; The Nigerian Freedom of Information Act (S.2 (7))). This study focuses on private organisations; specifically on cell-phone providers in Ado-Ekiti.

Ado-Ekiti is the capital of Ekiti State. It is the heart of business activities. There are four cell phone service providers in Ado-Ekiti viz: Globacom, MTN, Airtel and Etisalat. These organisations are also dominant cell phone providers in Nigeria (Afolabi and Ojo, 2015). Thus it is assumed that there would be competitions among them. Cell phone providers are private organisations that provide services of a global system mobile communication networks. Their presence in Ado-Ekiti has been observed to attract the attention of customers as each person has a reason for preferring one cell phone provider to another.

This study uses Dervin's 1983 (Wilson, 1999) theory of sense making as a framework for this study because influence as defined by Meyer (2009) is what makes a person to behave in a certain way. Dervin's 1983 theory of sense making is based on the fact that there is always a gap which leads to information seeking; and that the information seeker in trying to navigate the gap makes senses as he gathers information which he needs. He determines the type of information he wants thus he accepts certain information and uses them; destroys some; pretend certain information he got does not exist and disputes some information or takes mental notes(through analysing the information) (Godbold, 2006 and Wilson, 1999, pp.253-254). It is assumed that organisations that are into cell phone provision would be making senses in the way they gather, analyse and utilise information needed for competitive edge over others.

### **Objectives of the Study**

This paper investigated the influence of competitive intelligence on Information Professionals in Nigeria. It specifically sought to:

1. Find out the actions information professionals take while carrying out competitive Intelligence (CI).
2. Ascertain the factors responsible for actions taken by information

professionals with regards to competitive Intelligence.

3. Determine how information sourced by information professionals is used.

### **Statement of the problem**

Cell phone providing companies require intelligence to excel in the midst of many competitors; especially if the competitors are in the same location with them. Though there has been literature on how competitive intelligence (CI) is used in organisations, there is dearth of literature on how CI influences cell- phone – providing information professionals in Nigeria This study sought's to take actions in order to stay relevant and competitive.

### **Research questions**

Questions of concern in this study include:

1. What are the actions taken by information professionals while carrying out competitive Intelligence (CI)?
2. What are the factors responsible for IPs embarking on competitive intelligence?
3. How are information sourced for competitive intelligence used by information professionals?

### **Review of Literature**

A lot of literature has shown that information professionals (IPs) are relevant in every organisation that makes strategic decision (Cronin, Over felt, Fouchereaux, Manzvanzvike, Cha & Sona, 1999; Choo, 2002; Jin, 2011; Yap & Rashid, 2011). The type of information resource needed by varying organisations differ according to their goals, missions and visions. This diversity among organisations makes IPs to bear different names and carry out different actions in line with the goals of their organisation (Cheong, 2008; Jin, 2008; Yassen, 2009 and 2011; Williams 2011 and SLA, 2014).This is not far from the finding that organisations employ and train staff from different disciplines into providing certain CI roles for them (Langton, 2005; Tyson, 2011). Thus while employed staff carry out their normal roles, they as well strategically position themselves to get actionable information for their organisation. This exists despite the fact that there are departments assigned by different organisations to carry out certain duties under competitive intelligence (CI) (Sutton, 1998,

Information professionals in a bid to compete favourably carry out actions geared towards a goal (Choo, 1996). According to Case (2007), they use personal knowledge from scanning their environment more than they do with secondary sources. Though, Yap and Rashid (2011) found that both primary and secondary sources were used by IPs for CI. However the type of source used for competitive intelligence is attached to organisational goals and objectives (Iyamu & Moloi, 2013).

SCIP (1999) defined Competitive intelligence as the legal and ethical collection and synthesis of data and information to enhance business decision making. Legal and ethical means of information gathering has been differentiated from espionage as the later is an illegal, tricky and unethical means of collecting information about a competitor (Crane, 2005:234). Nigeria Information professionals in cell phone business have been found to be involved in intense competition to have a competitive edge over their rivals (Olatokun & Nwonne, 2012). Though they have been found to indulge in CI on a consistent basis however, the impact of their CI has been termed as a “copy cat” thing by Akintola Salami who opined that immediately one strategy is employed by one cell phone providing company, others immediately follow suit on the same thing without bringing up their own innovation (Logbabycom,2013). This could be because they want to prevent customers’ switch to other networks by providing equivalent of services advertised by other companies. Omotayo and Joachim (2008) have observed that customers easily switch to other service providers at no cost as a result of promos advertised. These promos, according to Omotayo et al are geared towards attracting customers to their companies (Ijewere & Gbandi, 2012). As a result of this ingrained attitude, cell phone

providing companies are consistently involved in gathering information on the next step their rivals intend taking so that they would counteract timely before their customers are taken. Thus their CI gathering seems to be more focussed on their rivals than on their customers. This study would focus on cell phone providing information professionals and the actions they take towards staying relevant.

## Research Method

Descriptive design of a case study type was used for this study. This was necessary in order to get in depth data that would act as base for subsequent studies. A structured interview guide was used as an instrument for data collection. Random sampling technique was used in selecting two cell phone providing organisations out of four. Purposive sampling technique was used in administering interview guide to six respondents, each from the two organisations; out of a population of twenty. Thus, it was only those directly involved in intelligence gathering that were used. Twelve participants were therefore purposively selected for the survey which was administered by hand delivery. Data was gathered, organised and broken down into manageable units that were later coded. The codes which were alike were harmonised under a theme; this was done for every coded data while connections among data was made. The number of participants who responded to each question was also noted. More selection was carried out from the organised data; but this time to select like responses from the same issue. The numbers of persons that responded alike on the same issue were noted and evidences of findings were selected.

## Result Presentation and Interpretation

### Sample characteristics of the respondents

**Table 1: Sample characteristics of the respondents**

Type of Organisation (No)	Department	Population	Sample	Responses
Telecommunication(MTN)	Customer Care Relations(CCR)	12	6	4
Telecommunication(Airtel)	Sales officers	8	6	3
Total		20	12	7

**Actions taken by IPs while carrying out Competitive intelligence**

**Table 2:**

<p>Que.1: What are the actions you take in order to get information to support your Organisation?</p>
<p>When participants were asked the actions they take in order to get actionable information, three participants out of seven said that they constantly interact with other employees in other telecommunication companies. For example:                  “Constant interaction with employees in other telecommunication companies”                  However four out of seven participants said they ask questions and carry out research about other telecommunication companies; while three out of seven said they keep up to date with competitors’ new packages and promos. For example:                  “Asking questions and researching”                  “Keeping up to date with competitors new packages, promos etc”                  When participants were asked if they have requested information from the government based on freedom of information act, only three responded positively.</p>

The above evidences of findings provide additional knowledge to earlier findings by Ijewere and Gbandi(2012); and Akanbi and Ajagbe(2011) which showed that there is competition among telecommunication

companies in Nigeria. It also buttressed earlier opinion by Akintola(Logbaby.com,2013) that cell phone providers are copy cats as their focus is on their rivals and not on their customers.

**Table 2b: Sources used in gathering information**

<p>Que.1b: Please which sources do you use to gather information?</p>
<p>When participants were asked the sources they use for gathering information, three out of seven said they use Field sales teams. For example:                  “Field Sales Team...retailers and dealers in all kinds of mobile and telecom products...”                  However the remaining four from a different company said they use customers, ask questions and use the internet. For example:                  “Secondary sources(internet) &amp; Primary sources(asking direct questions from people with adequate information)”                  “Customers and through internet...”                  “Customers with competitor’s products”                  Three out of seven said they depend on their field sales teams, retailers and dealers in telecom products; while the remaining four participants from a different company said they gather info from customers with competitor’s products. For example:                  “Retailers and dealers in telecom products because they interact directly with customers...”                  “Field sales team because they are designated territories and can give intelligent feedback peculiar to each location...”                  “Customers with competitor’s products...”</p>

This supports earlier findings by Yap and Rasheed(2011)that IPs carry out intentional activities towards competitive intelligence while also reiterating both earlier findings by Yap and

Rashid (2011)and Case(2007:293) by showing that both primary, secondary sources and field sourced data are used for CI

**Table 2c: Type of information generally sought for**

<p>Que.1c: What type of information do you generally search for?</p>
<p>When participants were asked the type of information they normally seek, responses from four participants showed that their company seek information which would tell them the satisfaction level of customers and their competitors’ actions. This is the first time the need to satisfy “customers” is mentioned. For example:                  “Competitors’ performances...”                  “How to meet customers’ needs...”                  However, three participants from a different company said that their company seek to get information on: where to carry out innovations, customers and competitors. For example:                  “New competitive call or data rates or tariffs...”                  “Network availability and strength of different locations...”                  “Potential areas where competition is yet to have a fort hold...”</p>

**Section B: Factors responsible for involvement of information professionals in competitive intelligence.**  
**Table 3: Factors responsible for competitive intelligence (CI) in your organisation**

<p><b>Ques. 2a:</b> Please what makes you embark on CI actions?</p> <p>When participants were asked what makes them embark on CI, three out of seven said they do it when there is decrease in revenue and also when there is low performance based on KPI. For instance:                  “Decrease in revenue...”                  “Low performance based on KPIs...”                  However two respondents said that CI is embarked on in order to know their organisation’s strength or weaknesses when compared with that of their competitors while a respondent said that it is done based on direct orders. For example:                  “For my organisation’s improved services...”                  “To know what edge the competition has over us and what our Strength may be...”                  “direct orders”</p>
<p><b>Que.2b:</b>How many times is competitive intelligence (CI)carried out in a year?</p> <p>It was the evidence of findings from three participants that information gathering for competitive intelligence is carried every week. For instance:                  “...CI is carried out on a weekly basis, in our company we have a report we send to them every Friday...”                  However, other participants from another company said it was as often as possible; on further analyses, it was found from evidences of two other participants (from the same company) to be two or three times in a year. For example:                  “As often as possible...”                  “ 2 or 3 times [in a year]”</p>
<p><b>Que. 2c:</b>Please what was the rationale behind your employment and what degree did you have before being employed (the intention behind this question is to know the gap you were employed to fill and the skills/degrees you had before and after you were employed )?</p> <p>When participants were asked the above question, only one person answered it. For example:                  “I had shown the desire in previous job roles to learn and quickly adapt and apply new skills to enhance productivity”                  However, it was the evidence of finding that all the participants had additional degrees after employment, and also had degrees from different disciplines. For example                  “[From] B.tech, Pure and applied Maths [to] MBA”</p>

From the above evidences of findings, it has been shown that while information gathering is routine (every week) in one organisation, in the other, it is not. However it has also shown that employment of staff was not based on any particular qualification as staff came from different backgrounds and is trained to carry out

their duties. The above evidences of findings supports previous finding by Elliot and Jacobson(2002)which showed that information gathering is routine and occasional; and Ahmed and Yassen(2009) which showed that information professionals (IPs) came with different degrees.

**Section C: How information sourced for Competitive intelligence (CI) are used**  
**Table 4: How information sourced for Competitive intelligence (CI) are used**

<p><b>Que. 3a:</b> Please what function do you perform in the CI process? (Do you gather information? organise it, analyse it, disseminate it and others?)</p> <p>When this question was asked, only two (branch managers of different companies) out of seven responded by saying they only gather and send to their national headquarter. For example:                  “Gather it...organise it”</p>
<p><b>Que.3b:</b> How is the information you gather used? (We intend to find out the processes it passes through and how it is analysed; if accepted totally, if changes are made, if it is not used, and others)?</p> <p>The above was also responded by two participants above as a continuation of previous question(Que.3a); for instance:                  “information is arranged by territory, state and zone and then sent to the business analyst in the region for further action”                  “We only gather information and send to them... every analysis is done centrally in Lagos...”</p>
<p><b>Que.3c:</b> Please what are the reasons related to how information gathered are used?</p> <p>The above question was also not fully responded as participants did not know reasons behind the use of information gathering. However one of the participants (a State manager) said that information gathered was used in determining how to design potential packages and products. For example:                  “...they are used in determining how to design potential packages and products...”                  However the second branch manager said it is only the HR (Human resource manager in Lagos that would answer it. For example:                  “I want to be able to answer that, the HR, he’s the one that can do that and he’s not in Ado”</p>

The evidences of findings from the above section has confirmed previous finding in Jin(2008) by showing that it is not all IPs that are involved in the processing(analyses) of information gathered. As this study has shown that information gathered are sent to national headquarters where a person designated as the analyst analyses the data gathered. However, it has discountenanced earlier findings in Jin which found that IPs were unhappy since they did not know what their roles were and how they fit into the CI process. The findings from this study showed that IPs were aware of what their roles were and were also happy about it.

### Conclusion

Analyses of data from this study has brought out findings which show that information professionals in cell phone providing companies are not utilizing their skills well as much focus is on competitors and not necessarily on how to provide innovative services to customers. The act of also analysing information centrally while carrying out uniform strategy might not augur well as there are different geographical locations inhabited by certain kinds of persons viz: rural areas(the poor) and urban areas(the rich). Thus cell phone providing companies in Nigeria should desist from replicating services that has been initiated by others; but rather provide variety so that there would always be a reason why a company stands out above others. The uniqueness of every location should be considered while analysing data; and the professionals that interact with each locality should be included during processing of information since they would understand better, the information they gather.

### Recommendation

Based on the above findings, the following recommendations are proffered:

1. Each Cell Providing Company should provide uniqueness to its service provision.
2. Information professionals in each locality should be allowed to analyse data from their locality as they interact with the locality and know the type of intelligence and strategy that would boost productivity.

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