

Information Needs and Gathering Behaviour of Lecturers in Faculty of Law, Imo State University, Owerri

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Abstract

Purpose: The study was carried out to investigate the information needs and gathering behaviour of lecturers in the Faculty of Law, Imo State University, Owerri.

Design/Methodology/Approach: Survey research design was adopted for this study. Five objectives and five research questions were formulated to guide the study. Instruments used for data collection were structured questionnaire and observation check list. A sample of 22 lecturers out of the 28 full-time permanent lecturers of the Faculty of Law, Imo State University, Owerri were purposively chosen for the study. Twenty-two copies of questionnaire were distributed to the respondents with a 100 % return rate. For the analysis of the data collected, frequency counts and simple percentages were adopted.

Findings: The findings of the study revealed that the lecturers need information to prepare lecture notes, write articles for publication, carry out administrative functions, prepare for court cases, and out of curiosity to gain knowledge. The findings further revealed that the lecturers consulted the following information sources: professional and academic journals; law reports; databases; colleagues; textbooks; e-books and e-journals; as well as conference papers. Furthermore, some factors influenced the lecturers' choice of information resources and they include: currency and relevance of resources; ease of use; quality, accessibility, availability and affordability of resources. Also the findings revealed some challenges the lecturers encounter in efforts to satisfying their information needs and they are: outdated books and journals; inadequate information resources; disjointed series of law reports; unreliable internet services and expensive resources.

Implication: Recommendations were made as a way of improving access and affordability of information resources, and satisfying the information needs and gathering of lecturers in the Faculty of Law, Imo State University, Owerri.

Originality/Value: The researcher recommends that access to Tertiary Education Trust Fund (TETFund) facilities will empower the lecturers towards reducing the high cost of purchasing the costly information resources. The University management should eliminate bottlenecks to accessing TETFund facilities for the lecturers.

Keywords: Information needs; Gathering behavior; Lecturers; Faculty of Law; Imo State University.

Introduction

The scenario was a typical boardroom meeting. An important but contentious matter was on the floor. Arguments for and against alternative options were being given, some repetitive and some refreshingly different. The argument had gone on for some time without any prospect of reaching some argument in sight. Soon the argument became heated, as every member wanted to be heard at the same time without bothering to listen to the other. Suddenly, a lone but powerful voice rose above the, clatter and noise – ‘point of information’. The embattled boardroom surprisingly turned into a seemingly graveyard with absolute silence as if in obedience to a divine voice. The chairman could

have overruled this lone voice considering the heated atmosphere but thought otherwise. ‘Point of information upheld’, he said. The mover of the motion took the floor and in a matter of minutes reeled out some vital and authentic pieces of data, which were they available to members could have rendered the more than twenty-five minutes acrimonious and wasted debate unnecessary. The production of the data signaled the end of the meeting and within minutes the ‘combatants’ on both sides of the imaginary divide were seen hugging each other and later ended up in their usual rendezvous once more as friends.

Such is the power, the influence, the magic of the phenomenon information, that the timely

production of it could stop combatants dead on their heels, bring calm to frayed nerves, reduce or even clear uncertainties, distrust and suspicion, remove embarrassment, save time and other economic resources and generally make the world a much better place to live in. Information is power and without information, we cannot make accurate and meaningful decisions. Information is an important factor in any society be it a profession or for any other purpose. Information has become the most important element for progress in society. To thrive in this era, one needs a variety of information, no matter how well versed one is in a field of profession. Information plays a significant role in our professional and personal lives. People need information to work properly in their fields.

Objectives of the Study

The major purpose of this study is to identify the information needs seeking behavior of lecturers in Faculty of law, Imo State University, Owerri. The specific objectives are to:

1. Identify areas of information needs of the lecturers in Faculty of Law, Imo State University, Owerri.
2. Determine sources of information consulted by the lecturers.
3. Identify types of information materials consulted by the lecturers.
4. Determine what influences their choice of information materials.
5. Find out problems encountered by the lecturers in satisfying their information needs.

Research Questions

1. What are the areas of information needs of lecturers in Faculty of Law, Imo State University, Owerri?
2. What are the sources deployed by these lecturers in gathering information?
3. What types of information materials do they usually seek for in meeting their information needs?
4. What are the factors that influence their choices of information materials?

5. What problems do they usually encounter in efforts to satisfy their information needs?

Literature Review

The term information needs has been defined in a variety of ways. Elikhamenor (1990) defines it as the extent to which information is required to solve problems as well as the degree of expressed satisfaction or dissatisfaction with the information. In their work, psychology and information retrieval, Rees and Schultz (1967) stressed the point that information needs vary in relation to the subject fields of users, educational background, amount of experience and functions performed. They further stressed that these variables may affect a person's interest in the kind of information he seeks and how he gathers the information. Thus, the need for information may arise from various aspects of a person's interest. Contributing to the factors that influence information needs, Chin-Chin and Hernon (1982) posit that information needs arise whenever individuals find themselves in a situation requiring knowledge to deal with issues as they deem fit. Wilson (2000) opines that information needs are influenced by variety of factors such as the range of information sources available, uses to which the information will be put, the background, motivation, professional orientation and individual characteristics of the user.

Information seeking behavior is defined by Krikelas (1983) as any act of an individual that is undertaken to identify a message that satisfies a person's need. According to him, information seeking begins when someone perceives that the current state of possessed knowledge is less than that needed to deal with the problem at hand. Pettigrew, Fidel and Bruce (2001) in their own study of information seeking behaviour gave the opinion that it is the study of how people need, seek, give and use information in different context including the place of work and everyday living. Mohammadi (2002) in his study on the factors influencing information-seeking behavior of extension workers in Zanjan province, Iran discovered that there was significant relationship between age, level of education, years of experience, and the worker's level of job-related information with information-seeking behavior. Saleh and Lasisi (2011) posit that identifying information needs based on the activities of individuals helps in

attending to their needs as it relates to health, agriculture, social, political, entertainment, as well as other public affairs.

A good number of academics depend on libraries and colleagues for their information needs. This is the view of Ajayi (2005), in a study on information seeking by nurses at the Obafemi Awolowo University Teaching Hospital. The findings of the study emphasized that nurses use a variety of information services, both formal and informal including the use of public libraries, private purchase of journals and contact with colleagues.

Methodology

This study adopted the survey research method. It is survey because of its tendency to gather information and data from individuals. The individuals were the units of analysis and constituted the respondents of the study. Being a survey method, the instrument adopted for data collection was questionnaire. The variables in the study were identified and used in structuring the questionnaire bearing in mind information needs, information types, sources of information, influence on choice of materials and problems encountered in gathering the information.

The face validity of the instrument was first ascertained before it was used for data collection. The data collected were analyzed using the mean score to answer the research questions. Appropriate statistical procedures for description like frequencies, percent, and tables were used.

Population and Sample of the Study

Table 1: Needs that Trigger Information Search

Category	Most of the time	Occasionally	Sometimes
Preparing lecture notes	18 (81.8%)	3 (13.6%)	1 (4.5%)
Writing article for publication	20 (90.9%)	1 (4.5%)	1 (4.5%)
Orientation to solve problem	8 (36.3%)	10 (45.4%)	4 (18.1%)
Carrying out administrative tasks	3 (13.6%)	2 (9.0%)	17 (77.2%)
Preparing for court case	2 (9.0%)	5 (22.7%)	15 (68.1%)
Exploring an idea for a seminar	7 (31.8%)	8 (36.3%)	7 (31.8%)
Curiosity to gain knowledge	16 (72.7%)	4 (18.1%)	2 (9.0%)
N = 22			

Table 1 show that 18 (81.8%) respondents indicated that the need to prepare lecture notes triggers them most of the time to seek for information. Also 20 (90.9%) of the respondents indicated that writing articles for publications triggers their information search most times. Another need that triggers the information

The population of the study consists of all full-time academic and research staff working in Faculty of Law, Imo State University, Owerri. They are 28 in number. Of the 28 faculty members, 2 are on sabbatical, 3 are on study leave and 1 could not be reached. Therefore, the actual population of the study consisted of 22 potential respondents. The 22 potential respondents were chosen as the sample for the study. The reason is that the total size of the actual population can be managed. The questionnaire was then personally distributed among the sample of the study.

Results and Discussion of Findings

Demographic Characteristics of Respondents

The findings of the study showed that majority, 18 (82%) of the respondents were male, while only 4 (18%) were female. The findings also showed that the respondents have all attained certain level of educational background as follows: 10 (45%) of the respondents are PhD holders, out of which 3 of them are Professors, the remaining 12 (55%) of them are Masters Degree holders. For their years of experience in teaching, 6 (27%) of the respondents have had over 20 years of experience, 5 (23%) have up to 15 and 19 years, 8 (36%) have between 10 to 14 years of experience, while the remaining 3 (14%) have teaching experience of 9 years and below.

Areas of Information Needs

The respondents were asked to indicate areas of need that led them to seek for information. Table 1 below shows their responses.

search amongst the lecturers most of the time is curiosity to gain knowledge as 16 (72.7%) of the respondents indicated. However, carrying out administrative tasks and preparing for court cases sometimes trigger information search amongst the lecturers as 17 (77.2%) and 15 (68.1%) respectively indicated so.

These findings corroborate the findings of Rees and Schultz (1967) who stressed that information needs vary in relation to the subject fields of users of information, their educational background, amount of experience and functions they perform.

Sources of Information Consulted

The respondents were asked to indicate sources of information they consult. The findings are shown in table 2.

Table 2: Sources of Information

Source	Number of Resp.	%
Professional Journals	22	100
Academic Journals	22	100
Law Reports	22	100
Colleagues	18	81.8
Database	10	45.4
Internet (e-books and e-journals)	8	36.3
Conference Papers	12	54.5
Textbooks	22	100
N = 22		

The findings from table 2 show that all the 22 (100%) respondents source their information through professional journals, academic journals, textbooks and law reports. Also 18 (81.8%) respondents preferred the method of consultation and conversation with their colleagues, just as 12 (54.5%) respondents indicated conference papers as the source of their information. However, a marginal number of the respondents, 10 (45.4%) make use of database as their source while 8 (36.3%) respondents browse the internet for e-books and e-journals sources.

Aforo and Plampley (2002) in their study stressed that law lecturers consulted law reports because these are series of books in the teaching process and this also corroborates the finding of this study. The finding of this study was also corroborated by the study of Majid and Kassim (2000) on information-seeking behavior of international Islamic university of Malaysia Law Faculty members. The study reveals that the respondents prefer printed format to electronic format.

These findings are supported by Wilson (2000) who stated that information seeking behavior is the purposive seeking for information as a consequence of a need to satisfy some goals.

Types of Information Resources Sought

A question was asked to ascertain the type of information resources usually consulted by the respondents in meeting their information needs. The results are shown in table 3.

Table 3: Types of Information Resources Consulted.

Type	Often	Sometimes	Rarely	Never
Academic textbooks	21 (95.4%)	1 (4.5%)	-	-
Academic Journals	22 (100%)	-	-	-
Law reports	22 (100%)	-	-	-
Online resources	12 (54.5%)	9 (40.9%)	1 (4.5%)	-
Databases	8 (36.3%)	9 (40.9%)	4 (18.1%)	1 (4.5%)
Reference Information	16 (72.7%)	5 (22.7%)	1 (4.5%)	-
N = 22				

Table 3 shows that 22 (100%) respondents often consult academic journals and law reports. 21 (95.4%) respondents consult academic textbooks often as only 1 (4.5%) respondent sometimes consults academic textbooks. For reference information resources, 16 (72.7%) respondents often consult this type whereas minority 5 (22.7%) respondents sometimes consult this type of information resource. Online resources and

databases are also types of information resources consulted by the respondents. 12 (54.5%) respondents often consult online resources while 9 (40.9%) sometimes do. 8 (36.3%) respondents consult databases often just as 9 (40.9%) respondents sometimes consult databases. The results show that the types of information resources often and sometimes consulted by the respondents are academic textbooks, academic

journals, law reports, reference information materials, online resources and databases.

The respondents gave the factors that influence their choice of any information resources. The results are shown in table 4.

Factors Influencing Choice of Information Resources

Table 4: Factors that Influence Choice of Information Resource.

Factors	Highly Influential	Moderately Influential	Least Influential
Currency of resource	18 (81.8%)	4 (18.1%)	-
Relevance of resource	20 (90.9%)	2 (9.0%)	-
Ease of use	14 (63.6%)	6 (27.2%)	2 (9.0%)
Quality of resource	19 (86.3%)	3 (13.6%)	-
Accessibility of resource	20 (90.9%)	2 (9.0%)	-
Affordability of resource	8 (36.3%)	10 (45.4%)	4 (18.1%)
Availability of resource	19 (86.3%)	2 (9.0%)	1 (4.5%)

N = 22

Table 4 shows respondents reactions to the factors that influence their selection of information resources. As shown in the, majority of the respondents, 18 (81.8%), stated that currency of the resource highly influences their choice of any resource. Also 20 (90.9%) respondents indicated that such factors as relevance and accessibility of the resources highly influence their choice. In the same vein, 19 (86.3%) respondents stated such factors as quality and availability of the resources as very high influencing factor of their choice of information resources. The result from the table further shows that 14 (63.6%) respondents saw ease of use as very high influencer of their choice just as 10 (45.4%) believed that

affordability of the resource moderately influences their choice of information resources.

These findings support the evidence given by Tackie and Adams (2007) in their study of information needs and seeking behavior of engineers in Ghana: A case study of the Volta River Authority where they identified three major information source influencers as quality reliability and relevance of the information source.

Problems Associated with Satisfying Information Needs

The respondents were asked to identify problems they encounter in the bid to satisfy their information needs. Table 5 shows their responses to this question.

Table 5: Problems/Challenges of Satisfying Information Needs.

Problems	Frequency	(%)
Outdated books and journals	22	100.0
Inadequate information resources	20	90.9
Unreliable Internet services	14	63.6
Non renewal of subscriptions to online resources/databases	12	54.5
Disjointed series of law reports	19	86.3
Information sources being very expensive	13	59.0

The findings as shown in table 5 reveal that outdated books and journals constitutes the major constraint to meeting the information needs of the respondents as all the 22 (100%) respondents testified to this. The second most constraining factor is inadequacy of information resources as indicated by 20 (90.9%) respondents, just as 19 (86.3%) respondents maintained that disjointed series of law reports is another big challenge to meeting information needs of the respondents. Some other problems identified by the respondents are: unreliable

internet services by 14 (63.6%) respondents; information sources being very expensive by 13 (59.0%) respondents; and non-renewal of subscriptions to online resources and databases by 12 (54.5%) respondents.

These findings are supported by Tackie and Adams (2007) who identified, in their study of information needs and seeking behavior of engineers that prominent on the list of problems in information acquisition are unreliable internet services and delay/time constraints in getting information.

Conclusion

This study investigated and presented findings of a survey of information needs and gathering behavior of lecturers in Faculty of Law, Imo State University, Owerri. It was found that the lecturers need information to write articles for publication in peer-reviewed journals, prepare their lecture notes, and out of curiosity to gain knowledge. It was found that the following information sources are vital to meeting these information needs of the lecturers: Professional journals, academic journals, Law reports, textbooks, conference papers, colleagues and databases.

The types of information resources sought by these lecturers are journals, textbooks, law reports, reference information resources, online resources and databases. From the findings of the study, the characteristics of information sources that influenced their choice of information resource ranges from currency of the resource, relevance of the resource; accessibility of the resource, quality of the resource, availability of the resource and ease of use of the resource. However, there are challenges to information gathering most of which include out-dated books and journals, inadequate information resources, disjointed series of law reports, unreliable internet services, information sources being very expensive and non-renewal of subscriptions to online resources and databases.

Recommendations

Following the findings and discussion arising from this study, the following recommendations are made:

1. Acquisition of up-to-date or current textbooks and journals. Current textbooks and journals are indispensable companions to research and learning. It is recommended that the faculty library should review the selection policy to accord priority to the acquisition of current and up-to-date textbooks and journals.
2. Up-dating the Law reports in the library. This recommendation is related to the first one. The library should ensure that law reports in the library are up-to-date. As practicable as possible all back issues of the law reports in the library should be bought to bring the law reports up-to-

date. Law reports are vital resources for lawyers, whether practicing or teaching. It is therefore highly recommended that efforts should be intensified to eliminate gaps in law reports collections.

3. There should be improvement in the internet services provision for faster and easy access to online resources and databases. The broadband access and bandwidth should be increased. It is equally recommended that all the computer terminals should be cabled in addition to the wireless access, and connected to the main server to ensure high speed, reliable and easy access to resources in the internet.
4. Regular renewal of databases and online resources subscriptions. Databases and online resources are veritable sources of information. They require subscription to gain access to them in order to derive their benefits. The faculty library should therefore maintain regular renewal of subscriptions to all their databases and online resources such as LexisNexis, Westlaw UK and Westlaw International, Legalpedia and Law pavilion.
5. Access to TET Fund facilities. Access to TET Fund money will empower the lecturers financially towards reducing the high cost of acquiring some of the costly textbooks and journals. The University management should eliminate all bottlenecks to accessing TET Fund facilities for lecturers.

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