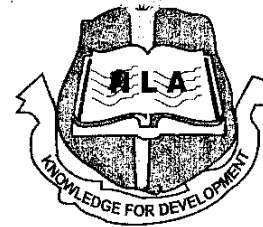


MIDDLEBELT JOURNAL OF LIBRARY AND INFORMATION SCIENCE Vol. 13, 2015



MIDDLEBELT JOURNAL OF LIBRARY AND INFORMATION SCIENCE

Published by:
Nigerian Library Association,
Kwara State Chapter, Ilorin.

VOLUME 13, 2015

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COMPETITIVE INTELLIGENCE: A NECESSITY FOR QUALITATIVE LIBRARY SERVICE DELIVERY IN 21ST CENTURY ACADEMIC LIBRARIES IN NIGERIA

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ABSTRACT

The paper looks at the importance and duties of libraries generally and that of academic libraries specifically. It goes on to do an exposition on Nigerian academic libraries and it discovers that Nigerian academic libraries are faced with challenges. The concept of information needs and academic libraries services in the 21st century is also considered and it is concluded that if Nigerian academic libraries are to function effectively, there is the need to infuse business intelligence into the information business in Nigerian academic institution then will the academic libraries have what it takes to meet the information needs of Nigerians that go through these institutions in the 21st century for their individual and national development.

Keywords: Competitive intelligence, Library service, Information needs, Academic libraries, Nigeria

Introduction

A library could be described or defined in various ways but for the purpose of this write up a library will simply be defined as an establishment that selects, acquires, processes, preserves and disseminates information contained in various formats to its users. There are different types of libraries conventionally identified according to their ownership, location, collection, and client etc. hence they are named as follows: national, academic, special, public and school libraries. However the computer age has made it possible for some other types to come into existence like the virtual library, digital library and hybrid library which could also be domain focused. Irrespective of the type, libraries are of great importance to the society as they contain valuable information on all areas of life (depending on the type). They also aid teaching, learning, research and recreational activities (Makinde &

Shorunke, 2013).

The library is also seen as providing vital information needed for decision making and showing the way forward in societies (Unagha & Okon, 2006 in Jain and Nfila, 2011). Further, Islam (2004) in Adio and Olasina (2005) opined that the library is useful for self education as it is a place where one can obtain knowledge, factual information and relax in the course of perusing certain information materials not meant for academic purpose all of which will culminate in a personality with sharp mental well-being, noble character generally refined and civilized in all areas of life. Mchombu and Cadbury (2006) in Magemba (2011) contributing to the role of the library in national development aver that libraries makes it possible for people to be responsible for their own development by empowering them through information obtained from the library to militate against poverty, deprivation and illiteracy. It is the opinion of Nkiko and Yusuf (2008) cited in Magemba (2011) that the library contains information that is needed for socio-economic development, they go on to assert that a society without developed library is like a person 'without brain and memory'. According to Yali (2013) competitive intelligence is an overall detection process for the whole competitive environment. In this progress, the information on the strengths, weakness and purpose of commercial activities in business competition is collected and analyzed through legal means. Currently, competitive intelligence has already become the internationally recognized fourth production factor following the technology, capital and talent.

Competitive intelligence of libraries is the intelligentization activity process in which, in the drastically competitive survival and development environment, in order to maintain and win the competition advantages. The libraries thus legally collect, choose, analyze, synthesize, forecast and assess the information on the environment of competition, competitors, and themselves, so as to form innovative, value-added and monopolistic intelligence information products and provide decision foundation for the library to formulate strategy and tactics (Aiqin, 2012; Yali, 2013). It is vitally important to note that the library contain resources that help individuals to grow in the information business intelligence and also academically, economically, socio-politically, psychologically and in all facets of life which lead to societal development.

Academic Libraries

According to Makinde (2006) Academic libraries are those libraries found in universities, polytechnic, mono-technics, and research institutions of higher of education and any other institutes of higher learning. They are particularly useful to the staff and students of their parent organizations but some of them allow external users. Their functions are similar to all those mentioned earlier on for libraries generally. However, they, like some other libraries, make provision for teaching-learning process. In accordance with the various courses being offered in specific institutions; they provide conducive environment for reading or studying; they help

to widen the horizons of staff and students; they also help in developing great thinkers, future leaders and technocrats; the academic libraries also perform socio-cultural and economic roles by making it possible for staff and students of the parent institutions to read about the culture of other people and reducing the money that its patrons would have expended on teaching/reading materials respectively, like some other libraries they also perform recreational role (Makinde, 2006).

Apart from the roles being performed by academic libraries they render various services to their clientele like reference service (digital and non-digital), information resources loan like lending out books and other formats containing information, selective dissemination of information, current awareness services and library education. In order to perform its roles and render its services, the academic library goes through the processes of selection of relevant information materials, acquisition of such, cataloguing and classifying them and shelving or displaying them in order to make them easily accessible to its patrons. In addition to the afore mentioned processes, the services of human resources known as librarians are also engaged to take care of the various processes and rendered services to the academic library users. Generally speaking, academic libraries as partners in business with their parent institutions are supposed to be responsible for the success of individuals and societies, however, it has been observed that as noble as library work and services are, there are various challenges that will not make it possible for some academic libraries in Nigeria to perform up to expectation in this twenty first century.

Challenges Facing Nigerian Academic Libraries

A cursory look at the literature on Nigerian academic libraries (Ifijeh, 2011; Onatola & Oduwale, 2006; Popoola, 2003) revealed stubborn challenges of Nigerian academic libraries which include lack of adequate funding insufficient information resources, poor infrastructure, obsolete equipment and lack of enough technical-know-how staff, poor maintenance culture and imperfect administration. On the inadequate funding, this stems from the fact that the budget of libraries has decreased (Popoola, 2003) therefore Nigeria academic libraries are not living up to expectation as money is needed in all areas of library operations. Ifijeh (2011) is also of the opinion that Federal Government of Nigeria's allocation for education is discouraging. Another major problem stemming from poor funding is that of poor infrastructure. In some instances, one finds that an academic institution that has doubled in population of staff and students over the years is still using the same small library building it was using with facilities that cannot adequately sustain its increasing population. In addition to the problem of poor infrastructure is the use of obsolete equipment as adequate money is not being provided to acquire new technology (Onatola & Oduwale, 2006).

Further, the inability to acquire adequate information resources in both print and non-print form as been a persistent challenge of academic libraries in

government owned institution. As a consequence of this, one finds old unused books that ought to have been weeded from the library collection still sitting comfortably on the shelves because enough current and useful books have not been acquired to replace them (Ozowa, 1992). The absence of a preservation policy and lack of maintenance culture is another major challenge militating against Nigerian academic libraries. This problem rears its ugly head in various areas of Nigerian life and the library building is no exception, with unusable toilets, a lot of damaged furniture and information resources. Related to this is the fact that there are still many information workers in Nigerian academic libraries who lack the necessary technological skills needed to operate fully in automated library environment (Onatola & Oduwale, 2006). This must have made Agboola (2000) submit that information communication technologies application to library work in Nigeria is at a low pace.

Epileptic electricity supply in Nigeria is also affecting the operations of library services in many academic libraries as many libraries cannot afford to fuel their generators regularly for internet operations and conducive atmosphere in the libraries through the use of electric fan and air conditioners (Oluseye and Abraham, 2013). From the fore going it is very glaring that academic libraries in Nigeria are facing great challenges as they try to fit into the 21st century information society. The resultant effect is that many of the staff and students of the parent institutions of these libraries (especially public institutions) see the library as not being effective and efficient in meeting their users' information needs in the areas of teaching, learning and research (MacArthur, 2005). Expanding further, the report of MacArthur foundation in 2005 on developing strong university libraries in Nigeria, also worrisomely note that the academic libraries that used to be referred to as the "power house", "heart beat", "center force" and "brain of academic institutions" in the past. They are now seen as mere auxiliary service providers that may be done away with in these academic institutions. This grievous situation calls for intervention that will help to revamp these citadels of learning from their state of disrepute to be at par with their counterparts in the developed nations of the world. There is therefore the need to see the concept of information needs and provision in the 21st century in order to determine how Nigerian academic libraries can be helped to function perfectly in the 21st century.

Information Needs and Provision in the 21st Century

The twenty first century has been variously described as the information age. Okebukola (1997) views it as the age of technological development. Nwalo (2009) submitted that the twenty first century is a period of great expectations especially in the area of development for individuals, establishments and countries. He is also of the opinion that it is also a period of hope for African nations by way of restoration of all that national disasters and various evil acts of men have robbed the continent of. Thus he sees it as having much in store for Africa in various areas of life, like socio-

political, economic, health education and technological development among others. However, Nwalo (2009) further opined that Africa cannot achieve her lofty dreams if her nations do not invest in generating collecting, processing, disseminating and using actionable, relevant, accurate and timely information.

According to Macgregor (2005) the 21st century is the era overloaded with information to the point of explosion which is being controlled by the activities of the information profession like the internet. He goes on to say that, information has to be properly managed in order to sift the wheat from the chaff so that information users can have access to quality information. He did not forget to add that a major challenge posed to information provision and usage in the 21st century is in the area of digital information. The fact that information is an asset that will play a role of equal importance with other economic resources in the 21st century is also greatly emphasized. If information is then going to take the center stage alongside other resources as it has also been observed by other scholars like Berry and Krishna (2009) who say effective use of information leads to innovation, cost-cutting, profit making and generally achieving the desired results that will give an establishment a competitive edge. Hingson and Waltho (2009) also believe that information by way of business intelligence leads to greater achievements in all areas of operations in an establishment.

From the foregoing, it is concluded that information is a great asset for any establishment or organization that wants to be in the lead in the 21st century and that library and information centers have great responsibilities to provide quality information as described by Lucey (1997) which is information that is relevant, timely, accurate and complete for its purpose from a right source and communicated through the right channels. For the library and information centers to provide qualitative services that will yield quality information they too must in-put quality information into every aspect of their operations. In other words, libraries and information centers especially those in academic institutions, where human resources are being churned out for various fields of knowledge for the 21st century, which is a period of accelerated scientific and technological development with information overload and explosions must infuse business information also known as business intelligence and competitive intelligence into information business, more especially those in Nigeria where there are some deficiencies in the provision of information services.

Competitive Intelligence for the 21st Century Academic Libraries in Nigeria

Competitive intelligence (CI) involves the legal collection of information on competitors and the overall business environment. The knowledge gained from this information is then used to enhance the organization's own competitiveness (Weiss, 2002). The Society for Competitive Intelligence Professionals (SCIP) defines

competitive intelligence as a systematic and ethical program for gathering, analyzing and managing external information that can affect your company's plans, decisions and operations (SCIP, 2001). Therefore, competitive intelligence deals with the legal collection of information about a particular business environment to the level of having competitive advantage over competitors in the same industry. Rubin (2004) observes that intelligence gathering takes place in different areas which include information on competitors, newly discovered scientific and technological developments, new products, services, regulations mergers, acquisitions, information on customers, suppliers and experts. Gathered intelligence has to be located where it will be of optimal benefit to an establishment therefore one finds that competitive intelligence is being applied to various sections of organizational work for competitive advantage.

Havenga and Botha (2000) observe that it assists management in making decision, searching out new opportunities and to identify external threats to the future of the organization. Moon (2000) says CI is important in understanding competitors activities and customers' needs. Saracevic (2000) in Magemba (2011) notes that it performs social and economic roles. Generally speaking, CI is essential for the survival of an establishment as well as giving it a competitive advantage (Magemba, 2011) as its impact is seen in strategic and product planning, benchmarking, investing, marketing, sales and some other areas of a business (Haliso, 2014). According to Haliso (2014) CI is very useful in library and information work where it is seen as "the process of ethically collecting, analyzing and disseminating accurate, relevant, specific, timely, foresighted and actionable intelligence regarding the implication of business environment, competitors and the organization". Hence CI can be applied to libraries for best performance in the 21st century.

Academic library work in Nigeria involves managing human, information and technological resources, identifying, selecting and acquiring information materials that will meet the needs of the library users based on their courses in the parent institution; cataloguing and classifying the information resources, preserving them and making them available for dissemination of information to the library users. CI can be applied to all the afore-mentioned in the following ways:

- i. In the area of library management, the benchmark for library and information work in academic libraries in developed nations can be obtained through intelligence gathering and Nigeria academic libraries can use such intelligence to take decision that will move their libraries forward. This can be done through gathering information on the library school website, following the publication of their professional association and following the research publication of the approved library and information science department.
- ii. Competitive intelligence can be deployed in the selection and acquisition of current and relevant information resources authored by renowned scholars

and experts in the various fields of knowledge relevant to Nigerian academic libraries and other general reading materials.

- iii. Cataloguers of the various library information resources can also get to know the best practices in that area through competitive intelligence.
- iv. Competitive intelligence will also inform the academic librarians about the best way to conserve and preserve information resources.
- v. In the area of dissemination of information CI will come in very handy in rendering quality services to the clientele of Nigerian academic libraries in the area of the place, people, product and services, price, process, and promotion.
- vi. The knowledge of CI can assist managers of Nigerian libraries to know about the trends of librarianship in the developed nations and thus apply the knowledge to their own library environment.
- vii. Competitive intelligence can also help libraries in Nigeria academic institutions to segment their reading public and target them with the best offering in the areas of products and services relevant to their information needs.
- viii. In the area of price, the libraries can get competitive intelligence that will enable them to understand the actual cost of using the library to the library users. This should help them to access the information contained in the library in the best way possible through electronic and virtual libraries. Additionally, libraries can also be located in each department and halls of residence.
- xi. Some processes can be cumbersome in some Nigerian libraries like the processes of registering users, borrowing and returning books and giving reference services. Libraries and information workers can get competitive intelligence of the best practices being used in libraries in the developed nations in handling their routines to the best advantage of their users. This can be done through gathering information on their website and following research publication on such libraries.
- x. Through competitive intelligence, academic librarians in Nigeria can get informed about the various promotional activities the libraries can engage in in order to make library practice attractive to their reading public.
- xi. Competitive intelligence can also aid in solving the problems of epileptic power supply, inadequate information resources and poor infrastructures as the Nigerian academic librarians can get to know what libraries and information centers in advanced nations are doing to recover cost or even make profit for the benefits of library services.

As earlier noted, academic libraries thus legally collect, choose, analyze,

synthesize, forecast and assess the information on the environment of competition, competitors, and themselves, so as to form innovative, value-added and monopolistic intelligence information products and provide decision foundation for the library to formulate strategy and tactics. Apparently, the core problem of academic libraries' competitive intelligence is how the libraries seek favourable competitive position relying on the strength, clarify their own competition goals and policies and identify their own competition strategy so as to guide the libraries in winning in the competition. However, there would seem to be a role for organisations such as NLA, LRCN and library/information departments to play here in terms of influencing education, training and perceptions. Generating a professional qualification and thus recognition of CI may buttress the provision of resources, acceptance of CI and integration of information's performance into the mainstream academic librarianship in Nigeria.

Conclusion

It is very glaring that academic libraries in Nigeria are central to the academe. However, they are yet to maximize their potentials as the work environment is becoming increasingly complex and competitive. However, the application of the tenets of competitive intelligence that is business information of inestimable value to the area of academic library service delivery in Nigeria. The whole environment will be qualitatively transformed and the academic libraries will be well equipped and positioned to effectively and efficiently play their expected roles of meeting the information needs of their sophisticated users in the 21st century.

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