A STUDY ON THE USE OF ELECTRONIC INFORMATION RESOURCES AND SERVICES AMONG LIBRARY AND INFORMATION USERS IN AHMADU BELLO UNIVERSITY, ZARIA

in

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ABSTRACT

Electronic Information resources and services are popular among information seekers in Nigerian Universities. This study used survey method of research to determine the use of these resources and services among the academic community within Ahmadu Bella University, Zaria. It identified computer as the major resource for using electronic publications. This is because the computer is the device required to operate. view and receive electronic data and communications. The main purpose of the study is to determine extent of use of electronic resources and services among the community in Ahmadu Bella University with a view to discovering the demands for the resources services and plan on how to provide them. It established that there is strong reliance on these sources among the community in Ahmadu Bello University and there is significant increase on the expenditure on these resources within the University.

It concluded that for any university to make significant contributions in teaching. learning and research it requires modern technology in all its activities. Indeed, technology provides advantages to information seekers and is cost saving and an efficient means of communication, searching, storage and retrieval of information.

Introduction

The Encarta Encyclopaedia (2005) reported that book publishing industry has changed dramatically over the centuries. Early technological innovations led to developments such as movable type, mass production, and the manufacture of paperback books. The 20th century brought the invention of audio books, the computerization of the book production process, the emergence of the Internet as a pathway for booksellers to reach readers, and continuing improvements in the quality of computerized electronic books. In the late 20th century publishers produced books in new formats, and technological advances had a large impact on the book publishing industry. Audio books, which had been produced and marketed since the 1950s, exploded in growth in the 1990s. Audio books offer readers the option of listening to a book that has been narrated and recorded onto a cassette or compact disc. They are especially valued by people who are blind or have low vision. Another new form for books was CD-ROM. Many saw CD-ROM as the perfect means of publishing books, especially reference works, because searching databases could be made so easy for readers, and because writers and editors could incorporate images, sounds, and videos into their products. But many publishers struggled with changing technical standards and a widespread reluctance by users to read off a computer screen for long periods of time. In the late 1990s several companies introduced electronic books, or e-books. These computerized devices display the text of books on a small screen designed to make reading easy. Booksellers and publishers sell e-books over the Internet in the form of computer files. A reader makes a purchase, and then downloads the text to a personal computer or a personal digital assistant (PDA), or directly to a specially designed e-book device.

To play these modern Information resources we require special facilities and equipment to play and capture the data in them in order to provide the information seeker with access to the needed information. Electronic resources are needed to facilitate information flow and to offer new and improved services within the universities, and to deal with cost crisis affecting information services. Dreams of computer-based information services have been around for decades, and many universities are now spending a lot of money on electronic resources than on paper

based items of information. Meanwhile, many universities in Nigeria are beginning to find it impossible to maintain traditional information practices within the constraints of their institutional budgets and are eagerly looking forward to the new technology for solutions.

In the present era there seems to be more sources of information on electronic format which could support educational and research activities of our Universities. The resources required or used by the academic community in Ahmadu Bello University, as well as, the type and format of presentation of the information resources and or the services favoured by the community within the University is yet to be determined. Perhaps these could be determined from the assessment of the use of these resources. It is from such assessment that we would be able to say whether these resources are relevant or not in the activities of a university.

However, modern information technology utilises these resources and services to communicate and disseminate information to users. University libraries in Nigeria are supposed to acquire both print and electronic copies of information resources to be relevant in our campuses. Moreover, the present trends in information service provision in Nigerian universities favours the use of electronics resources in teaching, learning and research. Perhaps this is due to the enormous advantages of electronics over the old paper and ink. It could also be due to the newness of electronic resources as sources of information around the campus which is making it fashionable to use and cite such items in researches. Indeed, traditionally there could be many reasons why electronic information resources are more favoured than the printed sources.

The present economic conditions and other factors working against the information resource development efforts of many Universities is making it difficult for universities to provide all what their community may want or demand. Indeed, there should be no limit to what a university could provide to its community but there should be limit to what the university can afford to provide. Moreover the money for books and other information resources is not always available and where it is made available it is not always enough to provide for all needs. Perhaps this could be why university libraries all over the world and particularly in Nigeria are turning to electronic

information resources as means of satisfying their community with information of their choice.

Review of related literature.

According to Creth (1996) the information environment of libraries in higher education includes discussions on issue around cost of access to instructional materials on electronic format. The cost of access to instructional hardware and software are high on information users in universities in developed countries where market forces apply to information services. This means in developing countries like Nigeria if information seekers are to pay for the services they are getting from libraries certainly many would be disadvantaged. This would probably create serious problem in the education of the poor who can not afford the fees for information services. It would deny the poor the vital information they need for learning and personal development.

Belcore (2006) reported that between 1970 and 2000 many academic research institutions in the United States of America (USA) have lost their purchasing power because of increase in monograph and journal prices, currency shift, and increase in the number of new publications appearing daily. But electronic information resources are now being used as solution to this problem of resource development. It is in line with this that a typical U.S university spends about a third of its budget on purchases and of this only about 30% goes to the publisher and author. The rest goes to the printer and the distribution chain. Electronic information resources then are solution to some of the problems in information provision in universities. Therefore Nigerian university could borrow a leaf from their U.S counter part to solve their problems.

Cameroon (2005) suggested four principles to be followed in acquiring electronic items for a university. The first principle according to him relates to identification and linkage to the original source of material to enable judgement on the authoritativeness and currency of the material. The second principle is to identify reliable mirrors where a mirror refers to archive at one end of a network that produces an original archive at another site. This is important as it enable us to provide efficient means of access and serve as alternative source for materials when the original site is

lost or is not available. The third principle is to implement value added features which helps to set links and mirrors for items in the collection and to provide additional information on related topics. The fourth and the last is to maintain links as electronic communication requires regular maintenance of links to ensure up to date service. Link monitoring is conducted to check for broken links, correct, repair, replace, or to delete broken links. Thus, if our systems are properly designed it could perform better than the manual set up.

Schmidt (2005:360) maintained that collection development activities in the era of electronics are not different from the old times. The collection of print and paper in any type of information systems is what attracts users to the system. Therefore, in the midst of change from print to electronics it should not be difficult to see that we are on a continuum which is advancing us from a place we know to a place we are in the process of creating electronic collection; and that which may appear to conflict with our values as information providers and history and is part of the same family and a natural step forward. The comfort of the known past seems perfect and the unknown future tense. Indeed collection development process is changing with changing needs and means of access to information of ones choice. Universities today do not require judging the success based on number of items they have but should see their success in teaching, research and community service based on access to variety of information resources.

Hughes (2000) identified the implications of the shift to electronic items on learning and learners within our educational institutions to be how the new services affect the individual users who were once used to free information services. "As technology matures opportunities present themselves to people who always wish to sustain their role as providers of the common good in an environment becoming more heterogeneous and competitive." Similarly, Gorman (2000:1) argued that "services paid by users are legal and valid as this could only help to offer more choices than ever before." The present environment of libraries presents changes that bring private and public sector together. This partnership does not violate the enduring values of

Librarianship rather it helps to qualify Rang Nathan's fourth law- "save the time of the reader.

Stoffle...et al (2000:894) and Campbell (2000:223) respectively agreed that information professionals need to take urgent steps to be able to accomplish their goals in an environment characterised by fast paced technological changes and deep rooted changes in user preference. Staff needs to strategize on how to sustain their organization and its services in a competitive environment. However, this requires a lot of effort and energy backed by in-depth knowledge on user preference. The information specialist also needs to understand the changes beings faced by his organisation in order to be able to grapple with ambiguity and complexities of daily interaction within the society. Information service scene is changing but the values of an academic culture especially within our universities are enduring with limitless opportunities for growth. The knowledge industry is also giving innumerable chances to educators and students to access information from anywhere in the world via networks and computers and it is now possible to retrieve mass data from a database within twinkle of an eye.

The use of electronic resources was reported by Fatoki (2004:21) where he noted that more researchers in our universities are relying on electronic resources for information. He maintains that the printed sources of information are still the most consulted sources. Despite this, most information seekers in universities use electronic resources obtained from cyber cafés for research purposes. He concluded that universities should be incorporative in arrangement among themselves to facilitate access to electronic resources, develop self sustaining model for electronic resource services and design information literacy programme to develop information skills in searching, management and retrieval of information for life long learning. Information systems within our universities have obligations to sustain the university system by providing the much needed information to academic community.

Methodology adopted for the study

90 (ninety) sets of questionnaire were distributed to staff of the university within Ahmadu Bello University to determine their views on the information services they are receiving from the information systems within the university. It also distributed 90

questionnaires to students who visited the information cafes around the campus in February 2006. In the university there are many information systems: library, Internet cafes, and databases, etc which are being used by the users within the campus.

From discussion the researchers had with some information seekers from the library and the Internet cafes around the campus; keen interest was shown on use of electronic information sources and services. This made a study in the area to be relevant and timely as it can assist information managers within the university to understand the electronic resource requirements of the university and hasten computerisation processes and tasks within the university to make electronic resources operational. It could also be used to evaluate the resources and services derived by the community with a view to improving the services.

Findings of the study

The major resource for a library with electronic items is computer and its accessories. Table 1:1 below lists range of electronic items available in Ahmadu Bello University Libraries

Table 1:1 Types of Electronic Resources Available in the Ahmadu Bello University.

Type of Resource	Frequency	%
Computer	62	34.72
Internet	48	26.88
OPAC	24	13.44
CD-ROM	22	12.32
Scanner	10	5.6
Printers	10	5.6
Fax machine	4	2.2
TOTAL	**180**	**100.00**

The range of electronic items available in Ahmadu Bello University Libraries is given in table 1.1 above. Computers have been indicated to be the major electronic item as recorded in the response of 62 (34.72%). However, the computer can not give the

information desired unless the data to facilitate this have been put in to the system. It is only a medium of conveying information as the paper. The least electronic item is the fax machine as indicated in the response of 1(7.2%). This low score may be attributed to the fact that scanners connected computers could serve the same function as the fax machine, hence, the 6(2.7%) response rate for scanner.

Vicker and Martyn (1993:12) identified the typology of electronic resources and these include items which require the user to employ an electronic device for reception and display or reading. He described electronic resource as a "picture which requires a receiving apparatus based on a string of instructions in binary digits to decode and express". The ranges of items which fall under this description include: fax machine, scanners, and computers. Others are CD-ROM, telex, fax services, on line database, and electronic mail, and internet services. All these are forms of electronic resources which the universities require to provide to be up to date in terms of technology and information services. The Ahmadu Bello University is supposed to explore the opportunities being offered by technology in information communication and dissemination services to members of the academic community.

Table 2: Preference of Electronic Resources over other Types of Information Resources among Information Seekers in Ahmadu Bello University
NO=180

Measure	Very Frequent	Frequently	Not Very Frequently	Not Frequently	Undecided
Computer	86	30	38	20	19
Internet	41	48	30	33	16
OPAC/ Data base	4	3	20	97	53
CD-ROM	84	51	27	18	
Data base	6	65	28	13	22

It is obvious that that there should be differences in the preferences of items probably based on user experiences with each item. Electronic information resources could also be preferred based on the same scale. This is probably due to the advantages one type of electronic resource has over the other in terms of their use. It could also be

based on individual user needs. Table1.2 above presents the scale to which electronic items are preferred by the information seekers in Ahmadu Bello University. Computer and CD-Rom are indicated to be in very frequent demand perhaps due to their popularity among the users or are commonly found within the university community. Database is the also frequently demanded perhaps due to access to internet services to most of the users. Other items being demanded are internet and OPAC which are all useful sources of information.

Mclean and Lynch(2004:19) maintained that the content of electronic resources are organised based on supplier interest on what product he wants to present to users and also based on the capital base of the supplier. Items are not supplied based on their scholarly value or user preference within the information system but based on the income it could bring to the supplier. In this regard the supplier is only concerned with the profit his product could bring and that is why he always ensures that his products are protected and made available to anyone who can pay. Most information systems could be placed at a disadvantage when attempting to satisfy every need of the users due in part to copyright restriction and scarcity of funds. This means the library has to go in co-operative ventures with suppliers and libraries to ensure access to needed information.

Table1.3 Extent of Use of Electronic Information Sources Services among Information Seekers in Ahmadu Bello University

Information Resource/ Information Service	**Frequency**	**%**
Computer/ internet	51	28.56
Printed sources	48	26.88
OPAC / Data base	23	12.88
Printer	21	11.76
CD-ROM	19	10.64
Diskette	7	3.92
Scanner	6	3.36
Fax machine/copiers	5	2.80
TOTAL	**180**	**100**

The use of any information source or, service depends on how the, source or service is satisfying the need of the user in terms of access, variety and ease of use. Table 1.3 above presents data on the use of information sources and services by the information seekers in Ahmadu Bello University. It shows that 51(28.56%) of the users used computer/ Internet services while 5(2.80%) used the fax machine/copier. This corroborates the earlier findings that the users favour electronic resources over printed resources. It means therefore, that universities should intensify the automation of their systems and should also acquire more electronic based information resources since they are in much demand. Moreover, the electronic resources may have been offering the users more advantages in terms of currency, speed and ease of use than the printed resources.

Ferguson (2000:100) posited that information users of today are more in control of the process of choosing items of information of their choice based on its speed, convenience, anonymity and lack of personal contact as in face to face reference interview which is being conducted within the physical space in libraries. People do not wish to constrain their time by spending hours in searching for information.

Table1.4 Effects of Electronic Information Sources/Services on Information Service Provision in Ahmadu Bello University

Effects Produced on Library	**Frequency**	**%**
Increased spending on electronic resources/services	58	32.48
Increased patronage of services offered through ICT	48	26.88
Increased revenue accruing to the library from the use of electronic based information services	36	20.16
Increased demand for electronic resources/services over printed/traditional library services	34	19.04
Increased access to information	4	2.24
TOTAL	**180**	**100**

It is believed that technology is supposed to attract more users to any information system. But in Ahmadu Bello University the situation seems to lead to

increase in fund allocation for electronic resources and services. This is indicated in the response of 58(32.48%) while 4(2.24%) of the respondents indicated increase in information/access. However reduced patronage is observed in the patronage of library services which is based on traditional method of providing services using the print sources of information. It means then that there is strong reliance on technology among the information seekers within Ahmadu Bello University.

Creth (1996) agreed that the scope and magnitude of the changes occurring in information service in universities today are both exciting and daunting particularly when we consider the many technological innovations in the market and the networked information world. The change is not only technologically based but it is also directed towards reassessment of our values and implementation of the values in to networked and electronic format.

CONCLUSION

From the findings it is evident that if the universities are to influence and shape the future of their educational systems they need to change their focus by changing knowledge and skills of the individual within their community to be in line with the changes in service provision. Information seekers in the universities need reorientation in searching and in use of the new information system. Every member of the academic community requires information for teaching, learning and research or for other personal needs. Therefore, there should be visible and well planned integrated information systems to enhance teaching, learning and research activities of the universities. The system should contribute to quality educational services and should work to reduce costs of educational information services. They are supposed to take critical or evaluative approach to providing information within the University to avoid taking decision based on intuition or experience which could be detrimental to quality. The important thing to strive for is to help the staff to claim their place within the university.

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