

INFORMATION NEEDS AND SEEKING BEHAVIOUR OF LAWYERS IN NIGER STATE MINISTRY OF JUSTICE, MINNA

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Abstract

The purpose of this study was to investigate the information needs and seeking behaviour of lawyers in Niger state Ministry of Justice, Minna. In carrying out this study five research questions were posed. The population for this study consisted of all the 91 lawyers in the ministry of Justice Minna, the entire population was used because of the smallness of the population size. Research questions were answered using frequency and percentages. The major findings of the study revealed that lawyers need information for case preparation, service and professional requirements, for improvement of their personal competencies and for research work. The lawyers also require information for current awareness, workshops and seminar presentation. The study further elaborated that the lawyers consult different types of information resources such as bulletin, yearbook, bibliography, encyclopedia, law books and manual. The study further discovered that lawyers seek information for the purpose of improvement on their work, for execution of specific task, for handling of difficult cases and for presentation of law reports. It was therefore recommended that more fund should be allocated for purchase of necessary ICT tools and databases, that lawyers should be trained on the use of ICT and that law libraries should be stocked with current materials.

Introduction

The concept of life is vague without information. Information has enabled a man to perform his routine activities in an efficient way. For decision-making, we need the support of information. Modern society depends on information for all its activities. Every person has the need for information. Without valid and up-to-date information, it is impossible for one to progress in any field of life Abubakar (2010). Understanding of information needs and information-seeking behaviour of various professional groups is essential as it helps in the planning, implementation and operation of information system and services in the given work settings (Abdulsalami, 2013).

Legal information is basic to all, both lawyers and non-lawyers. The law is supposed to be understood and used by every citizen (Hearest, 2009). Lawyers are individuals who have a wide range of responsibilities and duties when it comes to their profession. Their role in society is even more important as they are acting as a voice for others (Exforsys, 2010). In today's world, legal issues spring up almost always on a regular basis. Most probably, one does not have the time to handle all of them. Having a lawyer to take care of one's legal affair is highly of imperative and it is one sure way to get free from unnecessary headaches (Hood, 2006). Lawyers are the protectors of the people. They play a very important role in maintaining order in a society. In addition, a number of positions in government are being held by lawyers. They in no small measure play a great role in ensuring that truth prevail in a society (Buzzle, 2010).

Lawyers are the knowledge workers. They are professionals who have gained knowledge through formal education and through learning on the job (Gottschalk & Karlsen, 2009). The system of legal literacy though it started as far back as 15th century, its scope was narrow,

its appeal limited and its effect minimal. This was brought about by inter alia, the syllabus of the school. It taught the penal code, civil procedure ordinance, constitutional and administrative law, evidence ordinance, Nigerian land law, construction law, law of tort and statutory interpretation.

Lawyers need large variety of information at one time, and needed sources that were structured to enable extensive exploration. These lawyers held that print sources helped the construction process better than computerized sources; as a result, they expressed a desire to have hardcopy material computerized to improve access. Abimbola (2014) observed that the sources used for complex tasks by their user group were paper, computer, and finally people. Complex tasks were defined as those involving considerable thinking and formulation of ideas using legal terms indicating a need for construction of a new approach to be worked out over time. Because this observation was not backed up by any empirical study, the researchers decided to investigate the information need and seeking behavior of lawyers in Niger State Ministry of Justice, Minna.

Objectives of the Study

The general objective of this study was to find out the information needs and seeking behaviour of lawyers in Niger State Ministry of Justice, Minna. Specifically, the study was designed to:

- (i) Identify the information needs of lawyers.
- (ii) Identify the various types of information resources.
- (iii) Identify the sources of information
- (iv) Find the purpose for seeking information.
- (v) Find out constraints to information needs and seeking behavior of lawyers

Research Questions

The following research questions guided the study:

- (i) What are the information needs of lawyers?
- (ii) What are the different types of information resources?
- (iii) What are the sources of obtaining information by the lawyers?
- (iv) What are the purposes of seeking information by lawyers?
- (v) What are the constraints to information needs and seeking behaviour of lawyers?

Literature Review

Many authors have written on information need and gathering behaviour. Information is a valuable resource of today's information society. And acquiring, using and implementing information is a critical activity. This process is known as information seeking process. Information seeking is a broad term, which involves a set of actions that an individual takes to express his information needs, seek, evaluate and select information, and finally uses it to satisfy his information needs. Various factors affect the information seeking behaviours of an individual or a group of individuals, i.e. purpose for information, channels and sources of information and barriers to information. Information seeking is a basic activity of an individual (Tahir, Mohamood & Shafique, 2008).

Wilson (2008) explains that in the 1990's alone the number of publications that was carried out on information seeking behaviour were more than ten thousand. This shows that there are growing number of individual having interest in conducting such research.

Renate (2010) explored the information search process of lawyers. Their findings revealed that these lawyers were frequently involved in complex tasks and to accomplish these complex tasks, they preferred printed texts over computer databases. UNISA (2012) pointed

out that seventy-eight percent of the lawyers agreed that the internet improves their productivity. Eighty-eight per cent of respondents indicated that the internet is useful as a communication tool, whilst 76 percent of the respondents considered the internet to be very important for obtaining information.

The study of Mustaffa and Ahmed (2012) revealed that 57.69% respondents read newspapers daily and 33.33 read occasionally. However, 58.33% of users consulted general magazines, 14.73% read magazines on films, while 16.67% has read magazines related to various competitions. The use of Internet by law students in rural area was very low. There were only sixteen respondents out of one hundred fifty-six, which used the Internet.

The most common information sources are legal publications, whether online or print, and people. The attorneys have many different human resources to call upon, usually beginning with the client, but extending to witnesses, partners, professional groups, subject matter experts, and even people on the street. One attorney sometimes asks people in the elevator or at the grocery store how they feel about an argument she is considering. Less common sources include whistleblowers, court records, arrest records, related lawsuits and list serves. (Renate, 2010). Law is an information - intensive profession, in which there has traditionally been great reliance on external information, calling for a need to identify and access the right sources. The variables of information sources include source credibility - and the dimensions underlying it, such as competence and trustworthiness; homophily - with audience; opinion leadership; and centrality to formal and informal communication networks (Okello - Obura, et al., 2008).

A legal information source that is trusted by its users creates confidence in decision - making in all aspects of the legal activity and will be visited or used, repeatedly. As Utor (2008) observes, an important determinant of the impact that is made by information providers and processors is the trust that users place in the information they provide. Authority is an important determinant of trust. Information users take a number of things into account when assessing the information, they receive. These include the —standing of the information provider; the extent to which it can be seen to be objective; its motive in providing the information, and the likelihood that it will get things right.

Legal sources can be divided into primary and secondary sources. Primary sources are authoritative records of the law made by law making authorities. Secondary sources pertain to the law, but are not authoritative records of the law (i.e. they are not official texts).

Primary materials are the statements of the law itself. Primary materials include acts of parliament, subordinate legislation and reputed decisions of courts and tribunals Renate (2010). The primary frequently consists of two categories of material: legislation (the law made by the legislature or parliament), and the decisions of the Courts of Laws: case or judge made law. There is sometimes a third category of primary material; codes, principles and standards of practice, possibly approved by bodies outside the legislature, parliament or Courts which are recognized as guides to practice. Practicing lawyers need access to statutes, acts and decrees that are legislation passed by the government and are basically arranged according to years accompanied with an index. The most common forms of primary legislation are acts of parliament also known collectively as the statutes. In their draft form, before they have been approved by parliament and received the royal assent, Acts are known as Bills of parliament. There are two types of Acts of Parliament; public general acts containing matters of public policy and which are of general application, and local and personal acts (sometimes referred to as private acts).

Renate (2010) notes that important secondary sources for lawyers include: textbooks, legal journals (which include a variety of both practical and academic articles) and commentary materials (which summarise the law related to particular legal areas). Generally, they include all types of legal literature that are formal records of law such as encyclopedia, digests, cases, textbooks, formats, dictionaries, indexes and bibliographies. According to Renate (2010) law text books are very useful starting point when trying to understand the meaning and effect of major primary sources in an area of law. Reonate (2010) note that some law publishers are starting to provide texts in electronic format. Butterworth has launched books on screen in which selected paper texts have been placed on CD along with electronic versions or related legislation and case law. Users are able to search for information quickly, annotate the text with personal notes and create bookmarks making it possible to return quickly on another occasion to a particular part of the text.

The changing nature of ICT applications in the library setting has brought about different ICT equipment such as network, digital library etc. The digital libraries' collections are either locally stored in digital format or can be remotely accessed through computer networks at various locations. The information contained in such a digital information source can be full-text or bibliographic by nature (Akpoghome and Idiegbeyan-Ose 2010) argued that digital libraries will make the task of legal research more challenging and interesting. He emphasized that the judicial officers (judges), lawyers and or law students in academic work record success in their ability to locate digital sources in the library, especially when retrieved at the time needed. The channels for service delivery in most law libraries in Nigerian universities include electronic databases, internet services, computer system, etc. The application of ICT in Nigerian university libraries has impacted on service delivery in areas such as storage, retrieval and dissemination of information resources.

Research Methodology

Descriptive survey research method was used to carry out this study because the study is interested in describing the information needs and seeking behavior of lawyers. Benard (2012) attested that descriptive research surveys are those studies which aim at collecting data on, and describing in a systematic manner, the characteristics, features or facts about a given population. The target population was the entire 91 lawyers in the Niger state ministry of Justice. For some studies, according to Ifidom (2007), the group of items to which the study relates (i.e the population) may be small enough to warrant the inclusion of all of them in the study. Based on this, no sampling of this population was carried out. The entire population was therefore used because of the smallness of the population size.

The instrument used for data collection in this study was questionnaire. Benard (2012) is of the view that the questionnaire is widely used and is a useful instrument for collecting survey information, providing structured; often numeric data, being able to be administered without the presence of the researchers and often comparatively straight forward to analyze. The instrument before use was face validated by presenting it to three senior colleagues in the field of Library and Information science. These experts were requested to examine the clarity of expression used as well as the appropriateness of language. The researchers administered and collected the questionnaire from the respondents. Thus there was 100% rate of return. The data from the retrieved questionnaire are therefore analyzed using simple statistics like frequencies and percentages

Data Analysis**Table 1: Frequency Distribution of Sex of Respondents**

Sex	Frequency	%
Male	55	60
Female	36	40
Total	91	100

Table 1 above showed that 55 (60%) of the lawyers were male while 36 (40%) were female.

Table 2: Frequency Distribution of Working Experience of Respondents

Years of Working Experience	Frequency	%
5-15	18	20
16-25	20	22
26-35	28	31
36-above	25	27
Total	91	100

Table 2 above revealed that lawyers with highest years of working experience were between 26-35 years with 28 (31%) followed by those from 36 years and above with 25 (27%), those that acquired between 16-25 years of working experience were 20(22%) while those with 5-15 years of working experience were 18(20%).

Table 3: Information Needs of Lawyers

Information Needs	Frequency	%
For service and professional requirement	16	17.58
For improving their personal competencies	15	16.48
For current awareness	13	14.28
For research work	15	16.48
For workshops and seminar presentation	14	15.38
For case presentation	18	20
Total	91	100

From the above table, it shows that 18 (20%) of the lawyers seek for information to be utilized for case presentations, 16 (17.58%) of the lawyers affirmed that they need information to be used for service delivery and for professional requirements, 15 (16.48%) of the lawyers each needed information for improvement of their personal competencies and for their research work, 14 (15.38%) of the lawyers need information for workshops and seminar presentation while 13 (14.28%) lawyers confirmed that they need information for current awareness services.

Table 4: Different Types of Information Resources

Types of Information Resources	Frequency	%
Dictionaries	7	8
Encyclopedia	10	11
Law handbook and manual	9	10
Bibliography	8	9
Newspaper	7	8

Newsletter	7	8
Bulletin	9	10
Journals	7	8
Textbooks	10	11
Internet	8	9
Yearbook	9	10
Total	91	100

From table 4, 10 (10%) lawyers each indicated that encyclopedia and textbooks are the major types of information resources they consult. 9(10%) of the lawyers each stated that yearbook, law handbook and manual are the types of information resources they utilize, 8(9%) of the lawyers each indicated that the types of information resources they normally use include: bibliography, internet and yearbook while 7(8%) lawyers elaborated that dictionaries, newspapers and journals are also types of information resources they normally consult.

Table 5: The Sources of Information

Sources of Information	Frequency	%
Law journals	15	16.48
Textbooks	21	23.07
Law reports	14	15.38
Conference proceedings	10	11
Law databases	20	22
Newspapers	11	12.08
Total	91	100

From the above table, it shows that 21(23.07%) of the lawyers indicated that they relied mostly on textbooks as sources of information, 20(22%) of the lawyers got their information from law databases, 15(16.48%) of the lawyers obtained their information from law journals, 14(15.38%) of the lawyers acquire their information from law report, 11(12.08%) of the lawyers obtained their information from newspapers while 10(11%) of the lawyers acquire their information from conference proceedings.

Table 6: The Purpose for Seeking for Information

Purpose for seeking for information	Frequency	%
To improve on work roles/duties	10	11
To be updated on current trends/development in law	11	12.08
To execute a specific work/task	21	23.07
To handle difficult cases	15	16.48
To learn how to use modern ICTs for obtaining of current law information	20	22
To prepare law reports	14	15.38
Total	91	100

As is evident from table 6, a very high proportion of the lawyers 21(23.07%) seek information for the purpose of executing a specific task. 20(22%) of the lawyers seek information on how to use modern ICTs for obtaining current law information, 15(16.48%) seek for information on how to prepare law reports. However, the other two purposes why lawyers seek for information is for them to be updated on current trends/development in law and for improvement on their work roles/duties received significant number of lawyers and percentages of 11(12.08%) and 10(11%).

Table 7: The Constraints to Information Needs and Seeking Behaviour of Lawyers

Constrains to Information	Frequency	%
Lack of current materials on law	7	8
lack of information search skills	8	9
Lack of internet service in remote working areas	9	10
High cost of accessing vital information from existing system	12	13.18
Reliability of credibility of an existing information source	7	8
Lack of awareness of existing information sources	8	9
Delay in accessing desired information from existing system	10	11
Inadequate training of lawyers in the use of information resources	11	12.08
Lack of users' study/survey to ascertain the information needs of lawyers	6	6.09
Law information is tucked away in files marked "secret" or confidential	13	14.28
Total	91	100

Table 7 revealed that the major constraints facing lawyers' access to desired information is that law information is tucked away in files marked "secret" or confidential 13(14.28%), this is followed by the high cost of accessing vital information from existing system 12(13.18%), inadequate training of lawyers in the use of information resources 11(12.08%), delays in accessing information from existing system 10(11%), lack of internet services in remote working areas 9(10%), lack of information search skills and lack of awareness of existing information sources each 8(9%), lack of current materials on law 7(8%) and lack of user study/survey to ascertain the information needs of lawyers 6(6.09%).

Conclusion and Recommendations

From the outcome of the findings, it is established that lawyers in Niger state ministry of justice need information for case preparation, service and professional requirements, for improvement of their personal competencies and for research work. The study also revealed that the lawyers require information for current awareness, workshop and seminar presentations.

The study further elaborated that the lawyers consult different types of information resources such as bulletin, yearbook, bibliography, encyclopedia, law handbook and manual. The study also discovered that other sources of information utilized by the lawyers include law textbooks, databases, law journals and law reports. The study also revealed that lawyers seek information for the purpose of improvement on their work, for execution of specific task, for handling of difficult cases and for the preparation of law reports.

From the findings of the study it was discovered that some constraints deprive the lawyers from obtaining adequate information, such constraints include: Lack of internet services in remote working areas, high cost of accessing vital information from existing system and lack of awareness of existing information sources.

Based on the findings of the study, the following recommendations are made:

- (i) Niger state government should encourage the use of law library through provision of the adequate funds to enable library managers purchase the necessary ICT tools and law databases.
- (ii) Lawyers should be trained on the use of ICT.
- (iii) Law libraries should be stocked with current materials.
- (iv) There is need for automation of law libraries.

- (v) Lawyers should be encouraged to attend conferences and workshops on effective use of information materials.
- (vi) There is need for identification of information needs of lawyers.

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