

INFORMATION NEEDS AND SEEKING BEHAVIOUR OF AGRICULTURAL STUDENTS IN NIGERIA.

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ABSTRACT

This study conceptualizes the information needs and seeking behaviour of agricultural Students in Nigeria. Information is an important tool used in the realisation of any objective or goals of every individual or the library. Information is an important factor in any library because they are needed by users. Every library user needs information for increasing variety and diversity of levels, frequencies, volumes and with ease. Therefore, information needs stems from vague awareness of something missing and as culminating in locating information that contributes to understanding and the meaning. Information needs is the amount of positive information an individual or group of users need to have for their work, recreating, and many others, like satisfaction. Understanding the information needs and seeking behaviours of college students is paramount for college libraries. It influences resource allocation, service design, and educational outcomes while fostering a supportive learning environment. Proactive engagement with these aspects not only enhances the academic experience but also prepares students for lifelong learning and information literacy beyond their college years. The study therefore recommends that understanding these needs and behaviours can help educators and institutions better support students in their learning journeys.

Keywords: Information Needs, Behaviour, Seeking, Agricultural Students.

Introduction

Information seeking behaviour differs among user groups. The meaning of information could be deduced either from commonsense or from social perspective. It could be viewed as a free gift that is always available and within the reach of every man, it could mean stories, news and rumours people circulate. The commonsense concept believes that information does not require any special mechanism for sourcing and communication, irrespective of its content and frequency. The general or social concepts view information as a unique critical factor necessary for man's existence. Under this concept, information has a locus in dynamic and driving force for change in the behaviour of the receiver as a medium for transmission and could be obtained at a cost (Uhegbu, 2017). Information is critical in the management of both human and material resources. As a result, accurate, timely, up to date and relevant information is necessary for effective and efficient decision-making process (Wilson, 2005).

According to Imeremba (2025), information is knowledge acquired or derived, it is the interpretation we give to data elements, or data processed for useful purpose. It is data communicated from one person to another. The receivers which can help the recipient reduce his level of ignorance, clear uncertainty and make rational decision. He further stressed that information is defined as data structure to be of value in planning, decision making, in the execution of project or monitoring of programmers' evaluation of public and private sector programmes of any nation. In the same vein, Igbokwe (1998) submits that information is the basic resource and at the same time the end product of data in isolation which when placed in a meaningful context by data processing operation allows inference to be drawn, in order to collect information, raw data must be processed so that they can be understood by the user.

Gupta (1990) regards this age as the age of information and went on to say that information is power. Imeremba (2025) citing Belkin (2000) opines that information is a physical surrogate of knowledge or of a particular thought used for communication. He further explains that "information is only the external element available as a physical object in the communication chain but it does not by itself relate the originator to the effect of such communication on the recipient". According to Wyatt and Sullivan (2005), information is an ethereal commodity and it is the data and knowledge that intelligent system (human or artificial) uses to support quality decision. It is important to have the right information in order to bring about appropriate and desired transformation in every facet of the society through the activities of a healthy workforce. Therefore, information is needed not only to inform but also to aid learning that could push to positive behavioural and attitudinal modification changes. According to Aguolu and Aguolu (2002), information is a message of human

experience; which is transmitted as a signal or stimulus. The message be made on any subject in any language and in any medium, while Aina (2013) states that information as accumulation of knowledge by human beings in all area of endeavour is used to solve problems and reduce uncertainty.

Information Needs and the Library.

Information is an important tool used in the realisation of any objective or goals of every individual or the library. Information is an important factor in any library because they are needed by users. Every library user needs information for increasing variety and diversity of levels, frequencies, volumes and with ease. Therefore, information needs stems from vague awareness of something missing and as culminating in locating information that contributes to understanding and the meaning. Library patrons seek information because they needed information resources to survive in all sector of life. Need has been defined by the Oxford Advanced Learner's Dictionary of current English as the circumstance in which something is lacking or necessary or enquiring some course of action. Information is utilized for different purposes in satisfying the needs of people. Generally, it is for basic need in different levels, at every stage, particular set of information is required to perform the functions which are essential for the life of an individual. Uhegbu (2017) observes that information needs can be expressed in the question, what information would further this job or this research and could be recognized as doing so by the recipient. On the other hand, Belkin and Chinaka (2008) submit that a search begins with a problem and a need to solve it. The information needs of clients differ depending on the situation at hand. According to Uhegbu, (2017) information need is the recognition of the existence of uncertainty in decision making. Information needs of individual in the society are influenced by the purpose at hand. The more urgent of the information need, the more desperate the search for it.

Information needs can therefore be said to be the amount of positive information an individual or group of users need to have for their work, recreating, and many others, like satisfaction. Thus, information need arise wherever individuals find themselves in a situation requiring knowledge to deal with the situation as they see fit. In other words, lack of information needed to accomplish a task result in the information need which several authors have variously described and explained the behaviour of the person in need of information, (Singh and Satija, 2006). Information ranks next to the basic human needs, as information needs are diverse and constantly changing and not amenable to generalization. Information needs can be social, economical, political, cultural or educational. However, information needs characterized mostly by the information seeking: air, water, food and shelter. The collection, transfer and use are all pervasive and universal activities. Information needs of individual researcher and

educational institution in Agricultural sector where information is an essential ingredient for development had not so far been the subject of serious discussion in African countries. Kennedy, (2007) argues that the concept of information need is similar to the physiological need for food and water. He added that information seeking is dependent upon the problem situation for which the need for information arises. In the view, information need is a situation or task which depends on many factors and changes as the person goes from one stage of task to the next. Information need is often understood as evolving from a vague awareness of something used and as culminating in locating the information that contributes to the understanding and meaning. According to Kuhlthau, (1993), because the root of any information seeking is believed to be the concept of information needs, which fall into various categories as need for raw information, need to expand or clarify the information obtained; and need to confirm. The concept needs can be known through the various terms such as want (a state or fact of being without or having an insufficient, absence or deficiency of necessities, desire (an unsatisfied longing or craving, demand (to require, asking for what is due or asking for something and requirement) and a need. Information need is the amount of position information an individual or group of people need to have for their work, recreation and many others like satisfaction. This however implies that lack of information needed to accomplish task results in information need. Their concept of information need also means the need for information whenever individuals are faced with situation that requires knowledge to handle such situation. Therefore, information need is a gap in persons knowledge, when experienced at the conscious level as a question, gives rise to a search for an answer (Uhegbu,2017).

According to Safahieh (2007), people essentially need information for five broad functions and these functions are the fact-finding functions, which provide answer to specific questions, the current awareness function; which keeps information up-to-date, the research function, which investigates a new field in-depth, the briefing function, which obtains a background understanding of an issue, and the stimulus function, which provides ideas to obtain stimulus. Owolabi, Jimoh and Okpen (2010) in the study of information seeking behaviour of Polytechnic students discovered that 285 (59.4%) of their respondents need information related to academic. It shows that students use information primarily for academic purposes. The study concluded that students at the polytechnic seek information to improve their academic performance. In a different study carried out by Chinaka (2008) in her empirical research on information needs and seeking behaviour of library users reveal that greater percentage of the respondents usually seek for information concerning their courses. To her, is not unexpected because the quest for

certificate in their respective field of study forms their primary aim of being in the College. Thus, there is need for user studies directed at different user segments to enable information practitioners deliver the right kind of services to users. This is because information needs vary considerably from one person to another and this depends on a whole lot of intervening factors including personal and work-related information requirements. Increase in the volume of scientific publications and the complexities of libraries and their operations especially in the area of organization and dissemination of information makes an understanding of the characteristics or features of the information user an important exercise. The importance of knowing the information needs and the way clients go about seeking for information in any library arises from the necessity of libraries to satisfy such need to give effective assistance to the clients as regards information provision. The holistic approach to studying information needs of users in the context of research activities not only enhances and understanding of information seeking behaviour, it also assists the researcher to advance his knowledge (Bello and Musa, 2003). Chinaka (2008) citing Uhegbu (2001) opines that every human being no matter his level of education, sophistication, affluence and location needs and select information from the solution of a problem or satisfaction of a want as the case may be.

“Information needs can be expressed in the question, what would further his job or this research and could be recognized as doing so by the recipient”. Need is a basic concept in information studies but the only one which is difficult to define is satisfaction. According to Uhegbu (2017), the concept of need runs through the terms "want", "desire", "wish" and "requirement" and closely related to the idea of motivation. As individuals, we have primary needs, the need for shelter, food, physical security. We also need the esteem and regard of other members of the society. Information needs are closely bound up without cosmology of life. Those information needs that show close relationship to the solution of the matters at hand are considered relevant. For instance, if you are looking for a formula to solve mathematics problems or recipe for preparing super for your family, then cookery books are of closer references than say Economics and Biochemistry. Information needs of people differ either from their individual characteristics, their workplace, nature of profession or even educational qualification for instance, while a farmer needs most practical information to solve specific problem at hand in respect of farming, the consumer may only be interested to know the price of commodities, the quality and contents of the commodity and its effects on the health of an individual. The technologists on the other hand needs information on new products, new manufacturing techniques, authoritative and unbiased information about the behaviour of new systems being marketed

and likely data that contain process are expected to pass from development to production stage.

Herbert Landau observes "within an organization the need for information has a dynamic quality to ensure that this need for information is satisfied, the organisation management must identify specific information requirements, weigh them against existing information services and devise solution to problem areas where the information demands are being met. He pointed out that the focal point of any user empirical survey is in three folds; to establish the type of information different clientele need, to determine sources of satisfying their information needs and to uncover modalities for acquiring such sources and their behaviour and uses made of them.

Chinaka (2008) defines need as a state of lack of desirable requisites or commodity necessary to deal with a situation as an individual sees it. He stated further that information needs vary with users, time, purpose, location, alternatives available and so on. According to him, the necessity for seeking a better understanding of the information needs of either a group or groups of persons is to assist them to design better systems and provide information to meet their needs. He further stated that Agricultural Researchers in Africa have a variety of information needs which must be met in order to conduct quality research and thus generate appropriate information to enhance development.

Information Needs and Seeking Behaviour

In College libraries, Information need generally refers to the kind of information a particular library user is looking for at a specific point in time. Information needs come up when an individual identifies a problem or information gap and develop a desire to solve the problem or bridge the information gap. Such information identified may lead to information seeking and formulation of request for information, (Igweson and Jarvelin, 2025). Hence, information needs simply means requirement for information. It can also be seen as a demand and want. While, Haruna and Mbawunku (2001) as cited in Igweson and Jarvelin (2025) asserted that information need is diverse and consistently changing and not agreeable to generalisation. Thus, it varies among groups, individual and society. Perhaps (Wilson 1999), asserted that information need is influenced by a number of factors such as the range of information sources available, the use, background, motivation, professional, orientation among others, surrounding the user and consequence of information.

Information seeking occurs when a person realizes that the current information, he/she possesses is not sufficient for him/her to solve some problems or issues. Human beings naturally seek information when the need arises. Afolabi, (2013) while citing Ronke, (2005) stated that information seeking behaviour is an attitude, such as utterance, gesture, anger, anxiety, eagerness, reluctance, zeal among others portrayed by information user in his effort to

acquire any information that may add to his knowledge. He further stressed that information seeking behaviour is influenced by users' age, occupation, level of literacy, sex, level of enlightenment and culture. Wilson, 1999, asserted that information seeking behaviour is indulged by people and manifested through a particular behaviour in course of his individual interaction with sources of information. Thus, it is seen that there is need to understand the users' requirement because the root of any information seeking is believed to be the concept of information needs, which fall into various categories as need for new information to expand or clarify the information obtained and to confirm (All, 1996). Academic libraries must understand the information needs of each department and students in order to address those needs. The concept of information seeking is basically the consequences of a felt information need by a user who may then make demand upon formal and informal sources or services in order to satisfy their needs is another term that has been discussed and approach from many different perspectives. Much of the discussion has been oriented towards the clarification or other relocated concept, such as want, 'request, demand, and so on.

Information seeking is a personal and situation dependent activity that is underpinned by access to information and the strength of the information source. Information seeking is a process in which participant can act as both receiver and sender. It is defined as a purposive process, in which the individual attempts to find information needs, Brystrom (1999) and Uhegbu (2017). Uhegbu (2017) refer to information seeking as the way an information user conducts the search when seeking for information or acquiring information. They also reported that information seeking is innate in human being and it is a very necessary process in human. It is a process which human engages in to changing their state of knowledge. In the same vein, to seek information to satisfy some goal using information system like library or newspapers in addition to using computer aided system like the internet in information seeking. It can be deduced that a common feature in all of them is the way and means or manner which people adopt in seeking information to satisfy a goal with the aim of changing their state of knowledge or awareness before seeking the information. Information seeking behaviour is however, a broad term which involves the ways individuals put together their information requirement, search for it, select and use it. It must be pointed out, that, it is the need for information to solve a given task that leads the information seeker to Find information purposefully or un-purposefully, intentionally or unintentionally. According to Meho (2003) information seeking, therefore result from the perception of the user that information is required for a particular purpose. In searching for information, the user approaches system such as library or even

newspaper in addition to using computer aided system like the internet.

Importance of Information Needs and Seeking Behaviour of Agric. Students in College Libraries.

The information needs and seeking behaviours of agricultural students in college libraries are critical areas of study and practice that impact educational outcomes, library services, and the overall academic experience. Understanding these dynamics is essential for several reasons:

- A. Enhancing Academic Success: i. Tailored Resources: Adequate understanding of student information needs helps libraries provide relevant resources, such as books, journals, databases, and digital content that directly support curriculum and coursework. ii. Information Literacy: By recognizing how students seek information, libraries can design effective information literacy programs that equip students with the skills needed to efficiently locate, evaluate, and use information.
- B. Improving Library Services: i. User-Centred Design: Knowledge of student behaviours allows libraries to create user-friendly spaces and services, including study areas, technology support, and instruction sessions that meet students' preferences and needs. ii. Feedback Mechanisms: Understanding the information-seeking behaviour encourages the implementation of feedback systems that enable students to express their needs, which can guide service improvements.
- C. Supporting Diverse Learning Styles: i. Variety of Resources: Different students may have varying preferences for information formats (e.g., texts, videos, podcasts). A thorough understanding of how students seek information helps libraries cater to these diverse learning styles. ii. Personalized Learning: By recognizing that students approach research and learning differently, libraries can offer personalized research assistance and consultation services.
- D. Facilitating Research Skills Development: i. Structured Programs: Colleges can implement targeted training workshops that address specific information-seeking behaviours identified in students, such as using academic databases, citation management, and critical evaluation of sources. ii. Collaborative Learning: Libraries can encourage collaborative study and research practices that align with how students prefer to obtain and process information, fostering better engagement and learning outcomes.
- E. Promoting Mental Well-Being: i. Supportive Environment: Libraries that understand student needs can create supportive

environments that reduce the stress often associated with academic research by offering clear pathways to information.

ii. Resource Accessibility: Ensuring that resources are easily accessible (both in physical formats and digitally) promotes better time management and reduces anxiety related to finding necessary materials.

- F. Responding to Emerging Trends: i. Technological Integration: As students increasingly use digital tools and platforms for research, libraries must adapt their resources and services to meet these evolving behaviours. This might include mobile access to resources, virtual reference services, and social media engagement. ii. Ongoing Assessment: Regular assessments of student information needs and behaviours can help libraries stay in tune with emerging academic trends, ensuring they remain relevant to student needs.
- G. Strengthening Community Engagement: i. Building Relationships: Understanding the information-seeking behaviour aids in creating programs and resources that foster connections between the library and campus community, enhancing student involvement and support. ii. Diversity and Inclusion: Recognizing that student populations are diverse allows libraries to tailor their offerings and outreach efforts to better serve underrepresented groups.

Factors Influencing Information Needs and Seeking Behaviour

Adelani (2022) reveals that there are spectrums of factors affecting information needs and these include; age, educational level and linguistic ability of the user as well as other job-related factors such as rank and length of experience, the nature of work (i.e. management, research or teaching), the subject field, the stage that a project has reached, size of the immediate work team, nature of the Institution which the user work (Academic, industrial), size of the Institution and the communication structure within the Institution including Federal Colleges of Agriculture. One thing that is clear from analysis on information need and seeking behaviour of undergraduates is that there is low level of information utilisation. If the undergraduates are adequately sensitised and properly mobilized, they possess the potential that can make them active users of information resources in the libraries. Uhegbu (2017) describes the factors affecting choice of information, particularly among students which include course of studies, level, age and religion. Many studies have been conducted to investigate the information seeking behaviour of library users based on their subject interest, occupation, information environment and geographical location.

Sources of Information

Sources of information according to Nnadozie (2024) are physical objects or platforms on which information is recorded for easy preservation, management, dissemination and utilisation. They can be described as the conveyors (media or carries) of information. They are the “resources/materials from which people receive idea, meaningful messages, enlightenment and direction that will enable them to accomplish tasks, take decision and solve problems”. Adomi, (2012) in the same vein submits that information sources represent the vehicles through which ideas, news, facts among others are stored and transported across time and space. They appear as various documents and records for the dissemination of knowledge. He further stated the information sources convey different information products, organised for the purpose of providing a memory in numerical, textual, sound and their correct application promotes overall literacy and enhance research. Montviloff (1991), states that the sources of information have been on the increase over the epochs of human evolution. The early man created records and other information sources because of the knowledge in the mind or brain. In the same vein Nnadozie (2024) states that this realisation, inevitably gave rise to writing on the caves, walls and clay tables which were the earliest forms of records hence sources of information. He further stated that this brought about the writing in papers reed, parchment/codex and paper in that order. Thus, the introduction of printing by movable type by Johannes Guttenberg in the 15th century gave impetus to the expansion of information source as more information materials in diverse formats were produced through mechanical processes. However, the most profound impact on information sources have occurred since 20th century following the perfection of publishing skill discovery of computers and the creating of various multi-media technologies. Information sources support the pursuit of literacy, research and scholarship. They are the pivot which education and other social interaction rotate. This is because information sources are the purveyors of both old and new knowledge. It is from information sources that teachers, writers and scholars distil ideas and information if it preoccupies. The most widely used sources of information are the printed medium, which is commonly referred to as the literature. Such information represents records of the achievement of the human race (Kumar, 2010). Referred those printed information sources as books, journals, newspaper and monograph which are the most frequently used information sources that support literacy and research programmes.

Categories of Information Sources

There are several ways by which information sources may be categorised. The exact method of classification may actually depend on the purpose intended by such differentiation. Ojedokun (2007) explains that information sources may be grouped

based on how they originated (who did the original work), does it comment on other work and their proximity (is it the first-hand account or after the fact). However, sources of information can be loosely, sorted with four categories namely: Documentary and non-documentary sources, Formal and informal sources, Primary, secondary and tertiary sources and Automated sources.

Sometimes, this classification overlaps because these groups and information sources are closely related for instance, when an information source is categorised as formal it usually means that the source is documentary on the hand, when it is informal, it normally signifies that the material is non-documentary. It must be emphasised that a formal or documentary sources of information has higher utility value and more creditability than the informal sources of information. This is based on the fact that the formal may have gone through either editorial assessment or blind peer review before publication and circulation. Documentary sources like text books, reference materials, journals, articles, pamphlets among others are most frequently used in education, research and allied literacy activities, (Ojedokun, 2007). Primary sources are simply defined as the original information materials from which other information sources are generated. The present original thoughts on topic/subjects, report, new research or scientific discovery in a discipline or share new information from any area of scholarly investigation. Primary sources have been described as “The first published record or original research and development or description of new application or new interpretation of an old theme or data”. Primary sources of information include; Periodicals, theses, research reports, research monographs, patents, trade literature and unpublished sources among others. Secondary sources do not purvey new knowledge or original information, rather they contain knowledge that has been reworked, digested and re-packed before re-publications. Secondary sources are more easily and widely available compared to primary sources. Secondary sources serve as bibliographic guide to primary sources of information. Secondary sources include the following: Abstracting periodical, indexes, bibliographies, review journal/periodicals, treaties/monographs, textbooks and reference materials. Others include dictionaries, encyclopaedia, handbooks, biographical work, commentaries, cultism, histories, articles (especially in non-science disciplines), newspaper and magazine article/reports. Tertiary sources are those materials which contain information distilled from primary and secondary sources. They are created as a result of the increasing complicity, diversity and size of primary and secondary publications. This kind of information sources compile, index and arrange citations to aid or show how to use the other sources that is why tertiary sources are sometimes called surrogating of secondary sources (Opara, 2006). The basic responsibility of

tertiary sources is to assist the searcher of information in the location and use of primary and secondary sources. The sources include: Bibliography of bibliographies, directories, guides to the literature, almanacs, chronologies, fact books, guide books and manuals among others while Automated information sources have further wider sources from which information could be obtained. As a result, in addition to the documentary and non-documentary sources discussed earlier must be included the series of new technologies designed for storing information. Automated information sources refer to electro-mechanical devices used to acquire, process, preserve and disseminate different types and volumes of information. The automated sources of information appear in different physical size and levels of sophistications which include; audio visuals, microforms, CD-ROMs, data bases and internet.

CONCLUSION AND RECOMMENDATION

Information needs and seeking behaviours of agricultural students are essential components of their learning processes and academic success. In conclusion the key aspects are stated;

Information Needs:

- i. Academic Requirements: students often require information to complete assignments, projects, and exams, seeking resources such as textbooks, research articles and online databases.
- ii. Personal Development: Information can be sought for personal growth, career guidance, and skill development, focusing on topics like internships, job placement, and networking opportunities.
- iii. Social Interaction: Students often need information related to social activities, campus life and extracurricular opportunities for holistic development and peer interaction.
- iv. Health and Well-Being: Information about mental health, wellness resources and support services on campus is vital for their overall wellbeing.

Seeking Behaviour:

- i. Information Sources: Students utilize various sources, including libraries, online search engines, academic journals, social media and peer recommendations, depending on their information needs.
- i. Research Skills: Many students exhibit diverse levels of information literacy, affecting their ability to locate, evaluate and apply information effectively.
- ii. Technology Use: Digital tools and platforms have transformed how students seek information, with an increasing reliance on mobile devices and online

resources for convenience and accessibility.

- iii. Collaboration and Networking: Students often engage in collaboration learning, seeking information through group discussions, forums and study groups, leveraging the knowledge of peer.
- iv. Feedback and Evaluation: Their information-seeking behaviour evolves through feedback from instructors and peers, adapting strategies based on what has proven effective in the past.

The study therefore recommends that understanding these needs and behaviours can help educators and institutions better support students in their learning journeys and information search tools should be set for the users before embarking on research activities to enable the student maximize the use of library resources during their research.

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