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A Study on the Information Environment of National Youth Service Corps Members in Kwara State, Nigeria

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Abstract

The investigation focused on the information environment of National Youth Service Corps (NYSC) members in Kwara State with emphasis on their information needs, sources, seeking behaviour and perceptions of libraries and the profession of Library and Information Science (LIS). It adopted survey research method with a self-constructed questionnaire as the tool for data collection, which was administered and retrieved from 170 respondents. Descriptive statistics of frequency count and percentages were used in reporting the findings. It was found out that the information needs of the NYSC members are centred on job opportunities and vacancies, business and entrepreneurial opportunities as well as scholarship for postgraduate education; their information seeking behaviour and major source of information is the Internet; and they have positive perception of libraries and LIS profession in the society. Recommendations were made on measures to put in place to address the information needs of NYSC members in Kwara State, Nigeria.

Keywords: Information Environment, Information Needs, NYSC Members, Kwara State, Nigeria.

Introduction

The society exists with various classes and groups of individuals such as farmers, teachers, civil servants, researchers, traders, artisans, corps members, and the like. These individuals operate in different directions and dimensions based on their missions, aims and objectives, thereby contributing their various quota towards the growth and development of the society. Their contributions, however, largely depends on their access to relevant, timely, accurate and precise information, thus necessitating investigations on their information environment.

Information environment is a concept that has to do with factors surrounding availability, access to and use of information by these different categories of individuals in the society. These factors include information needs, information sources, information seeking behaviour, perceptions of information systems, and the challenges of accessing and utilizing information and its resources. According to Mooko & Aina (2007), investigations in the context of information environment includes not only the information needs, but also the information seeking behaviours, access to information and sources of information used for meeting the information needs of users, which could either be heterogeneous like rural inhabitants and artisans or homogenous like students, professionals, policy makers, researchers and lecturers. Uhegbu (2007) posits that understanding a user's information environment will help to place the information provider in a better stead to appreciate the psychology of a user in relation to his information seeking behaviour. Diagrammatically, Uhegbu sees information environment of users as follows:

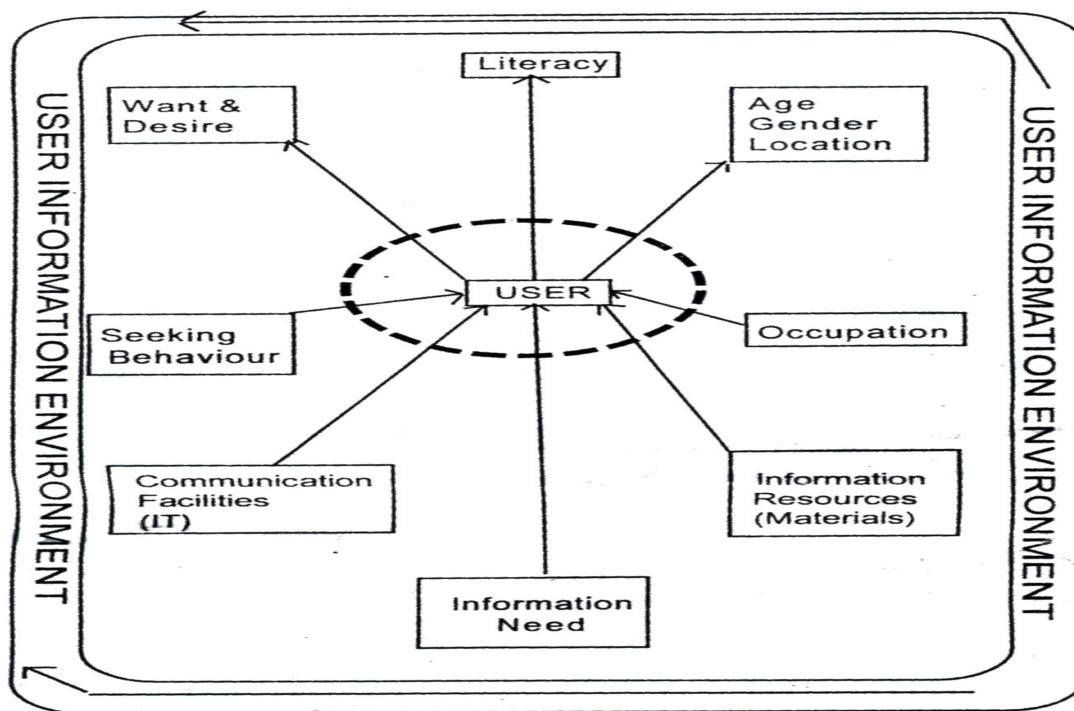


Fig. 1. Information Environment of Users. Source: Uhegbu, 2007.

A study on the information environment will investigate issues surrounding pattern of information seeking, use and perceptions of information sources in the society. Information environment of National Youth Service Corps (NYSC) members in the case of this study are limited to their information needs, sources, seeking behaviour, challenges of accessing information as well as their perceptions of libraries and library and information science (LIS) as a field of study.

The need for information brings about information seeking behaviour in search of reliable sources for the satisfaction of the information needs. Ajiboye and Tella (2007) see information seeking behavior as the way and manner people gather and sought for information for their personal use, knowledge update and personal development. Users may be limited by the organization they work for, by the nature of their work or profession, by age sex or other social groups. An understanding of the users' nature and information seeking patterns will assist in the prescription, improvement and efficiency of information services when necessary. The information seeking behavior and pattern of using information retrieval systems depends on a number of factors. Some of the general points that affect the information environment of users are: the users' awareness and ability to access other sources of information; the users' relationship with the information unit (may be a library) concerned; the information unit's ease of accessibility; the users working conditions; the time available to the users for consulting information sources; the amount of competition that exist in the user's field of activities; the user's past experience or knowledge; how friendly, knowledgeable and efficient are the members of the information unit; and the various products and services of the information unit (Onwuchekwa, 2012).

According to Tahir & Mahmood (2008), the study of information environment as it relates to information needs and gathering behavior dates back to 1948 when Bernal and others presented a paper on scientific information at the 1948 Royal Society conference. During the past 30 years or so, a considerable body of literature has been produced dealing with information needs and information-seeking behavior of both individuals and groups in a variety of contexts (Anwar, Al-Ansari, and Abdullah, 2004). Also, many studies have been conducted to investigate the information-seeking behavior of library users based on their information environment, subject interest, occupation, and geographical location. Information needs and information-seeking behavior of academics have also been a popular area of research for the information scientists for decades (Majid & Kassim, 2000).

In Nigeria, some investigations have taken place on the information environment of various classes of individuals in the society such as lecturers and library users in various tertiary institutions (Adekunmisi, 2005; Odusanya & Amusan, 2003; Oyediran - Tidings, 2004; Nnadozie & Nnadozie, 2008; Adigun, Mohammed & Temboje, 2010); educational administrators and medical doctors (Gbadamosi, 2005); farmers (Otolo, 2006; Ofuoku, Emah & Itedjere, 2008); artisans (Mooko & Aina, 2007); agricultural engineers (Igbeka & Atinmo, 2002); students (Ajiboye & Tella, 2007; Etubi, 2011, Ossai, 2011); law makers (Folorunso & Haruna, 2005; Ibrahim & Olorunfemi, 2008); policy makers (Nwagwu & Iheanatu, 2011); public library patrons (Issa, Abdulkareem, Isah & Kupolati, 2011), but yet to be carried out on NYSC members. Thus, resulting to a necessity and justification for the study to fill the identified gap.

The NYSC scheme was created by Decree No. 24 of 22nd May 1973 in a bid to reconstruct, reconcile and rebuild the country after the Nigerian civil war. The Decree No. 24 was later repealed and replaced by Decree 51 of 16th June 1993. The scheme was established with a view to encourage and develop common ties among the youths of Nigeria for the promotion of national unity. In addition, the purpose of the scheme is primarily to inculcate in Nigerian youths the spirit of selfless services to the community, and to emphasize the spirit of oneness and brother-hood of all Nigerians, irrespective of cultural or social background. The scheme operates with orientation camps in all the 36 states of the federation including the Federal Capital Territory (FCT), Abuja.

Members of the NYSC are a segment of the society that is making significant contributions to the development of Nigeria. Meanwhile a careful perusal of scholarly literature reveals that NYSC member were neglected in various studies on information needs, sources, seeking behavior and other factors associated with information utilization. In other words, there is no literature or documentary evidence on the information environment of NYSC members. There is therefore a need for such investigation so as to ascertain issues surrounding their access to and use of information, and possibly integrate them in planning information dissemination strategies of libraries and other information providers. It is as a result of this problem and indentified gap that led to this study. Thus, the specific objectives of the study are to:

- a. Investigate the information needs of NYSC members.
- b. Ascertain the information seeking behaviour(s) of NYSC members.
- c. Find out the sources of information used by NYSC members.
- d. Discover the perceptions of NYSC members to libraries and the profession of library and information science (LIS).

Methodology

The study adopted survey research design with a structured questionnaire as the tool for data collection. The self-structured questionnaire has part A, which is on the demographic data of respondents and part B, which deals with the study objectives, with an aspects on modified four-point likert scale. A sample of 170 was purposely used for the study. The questionnaire was administered to Corps Members on several occasions at various locations in Kwara State such as Offa, Ijagbo, Ajasse-Ipo, Omu-Aran and Ilorin, mainly on Thursdays during their community development service (CDS) meetings. This was done with the help of research assistants.

Data Analysis

The 170 questionnaire were properly filled, returned (100%) and used for data analysis. The table I below shows the demographic characteristics of respondents.

Table I. Demographic Characteristics of Respondents

Demographic Characteristics of Respondents	Frequency	Percentage
Gender		
Male	108	63.5
Female	62	36.5
Total	170	100
Field of Study/Profession		
Humanities, Arts, Law and Social Sciences	37	21.8
Education	22	12.9
Business and Management Sciences	46	27.1
Engineering, Agriculture and Environmental Sciences	32	18.8
Physical and Applied Sciences	24	14.1
Medical and Health Sciences	9	5.3
Total	170	100
Place of Primary Assignment (PPA)		
Primary and Secondary Schools	61	35.9
Tertiary Institutions	40	23.5
Local and State Government Headquarters	48	28.2
Corporate Establishments and Organisations	12	7.1
Others	9	5.3
Total	170	100

Table I above shows that out of the 170 respondents, (108 or 63.5%) are males that studied business and management sciences (46 or 27.1%) as well as humanities and social sciences (37 or 21.8%) in their respective tertiary institutions. The table also indicates that majority of the respondents are serving their fatherland in pre-tertiary schools (61 or 35.9%) and government headquarters (48 or 28.2%).

Table II. Information Needs of NYSC Members

Information Needs	Frequency	Percentage
Information on Job Opportunities and Vacancies	109	64.1
Information on Business and Entrepreneurship Opportunities	99	55.2
Information on how to venture into Commercial Agriculture	25	14.7
Information on Education and Scholarships for Postgraduate Studies	67	39.4
Information on Socio-Political and Economic Issues	38	22.4
Information on Medical and Health Issues	45	26.5
Information on Sports and Entertainment	40	23.5
Information on Cultural and Religious Issues	23	13.5
Information on Scientific and Technological Inventions	49	28.8
Information on Legal Issues and Human Rights	38	22.4
Information on Global Issues and International Affairs	36	21.2

N=170

As revealed in Table II above, the information needs of the respondents are centred on job opportunities and vacancies, business and entrepreneurship opportunities, as well as scholarship for postgraduate studies. Just few indicated interest in information on how to venture into commercial agriculture.

Table III. Information Seeking Behaviour of NYSC Members

Variables	Frequency	Percentage
Ask and Contact Colleagues and Friends	89	52.4
Visit the Internet/cyber café and search for it	128	75.9
Visit Libraries and Information Centres	56	32.9
Watch Television and Listen to Radio	65	38.2
Read Newspapers and Magazines	67	39.4
N = 170		

The behaviour usually exhibited by NYSC members while seeking for information is to visit the Internet and cybercafes. This can be seen in Table III above.

Table IV. Information Sources used by NYSC Members

Information Sources	Frequency	Percentage
Libraries and Information Centres	47	27.6
The Internet	125	73.5
Television and Radio Stations	25	14.7
Newspapers and Magazine Vendors/ News Stands	78	45.9
Colleagues and Friends	78	45.9

N=170

The Table IV above shows that the major information source consulted and used by the respondents are the Internet, newspaper vendors and colleagues. This is related to the information seeking behaviour of the respondents.

Table V. Perceptions of NYSC Members about Libraries and the Profession of Library and Information Science in the society.

Statements	Strongly Agree	Agree	Undecided/ Neutral	Disagree	Strongly Disagree	Total
I am aware that there is a field of study called Library and Information Science.	108 (63.5%)	55 (32.4%)	9 (2.4%)	3 (1.8%)	0 (0)	170 (100)
I am aware that Library and Information Science deals on the organization of information resources, knowledge management, information behavior, information retrieval and satisfaction of information needs of individual	66 (38.8%)	85 (50%)	17 (10%)	1 (0.59%)	1 (0.59%)	170 (100)
Absence/lack of standard libraries with information resources in our schools and communities are contributing to the poor reading habits of students.	97 (57.1%)	51 (30%)	11 (6.5%)	7 (4.1%)	4 (2.4%)	170 (100)
Library & Information Science in a good profession, and in the future I may encourage my child to study the course.	39 (22.9%)	69 (40.6%)	45 (26.5%)	10 (5.9%)	7 (4.1%)	170 (100)
I am aware that librarians have an association called the Nigerian Library Association (NLA)	52 (30.6%)	61 (35.9%)	32 (18.8%)	21 (12.9%)	4 (2.4%)	170 (100)

A look at Table V shows that majority of the respondents agreed and strongly agreed on the variables presented. In other words, NYSC members have knowledge of the existence of library and information science as well as Nigerian Library Association. They also concurred with the statement that absence/lack of libraries in primary and secondary schools as well as community libraries are contributing to the poor reading habits of students.

Discussion of Findings

The study has shown that information needs of NYSC members are centred on job opportunities and vacancies, business and entrepreneurship opportunities as well as education and scholarship for postgraduate studies (see Table II). This may be attributed to the fact that they want to get prepared and start doing something immediately after their service year. However, it is sad to note that it is only a few that indicated interest on how to venture into commercial agriculture, not knowing that there are so many opportunities in agriculture and allied fields.

The major information source used by the NYSC members which correlates to their information seeking behaviour is the Internet, the domain of online resources. This can be seen in Table III and IV. This is in line with the findings of Obuh (2009) that the attitudes of information users are focused online for desktop access to information, as well as that of Ajala (2007) who opines that information users resort at a much greater cost to the Internet and cybercafés to satisfy their information needs, because they are aware of what the Internet provides.

The Table V is on the perceptions of NYSC members to libraries and the profession of LIS. Their response is in favour of the statement that ‘absence/lack of standard libraries in schools and communities are contributing to the poor reading habits of students, thus resulting to poor acquisition of knowledge and mass failure in examinations. This

is in line with the findings of Adetoro (2004), Ajegbomogun & Salaam (2011) and Gbadamosi (2011). In addition, the NYSC members are to a greater extent aware of LIS profession and what it teaches, as well as knowledge of the existing of the professional body, the Nigerian Library Association (NLA). This is in contrast with the findings of Uzuegbu & Onyekweodiri (2011) which sees NLA as a non-visible association in Nigeria. However, this may be attributed to the fact that the NYSC members may have friends that studied LIS in their undergraduate days or having LIS graduates as colleagues in the service year.

Conclusion and Recommendations

The information environment of NYSC members as it relates to their information needs, sources of information, information seeking behaviour and perceptions to libraries and LIS profession has been revealed by the study. Of note is that it was discovered that they have various information needs mainly on jobs openings, business ventures, entrepreneurial opportunities and desire of scholarship for postgraduate education. In addition, it was revealed that their information seeking behaviour and source of information is focused on the online environment – the Internet. Meanwhile, the required attention now is on how to gear up to satisfy their information needs so that after their service year, they will remain relevant, productive and continue their contributions to the societal development.

It is in view of the foregoing, that the researchers put forward the following recommendations. States and Local Governments as well as non-governmental organisations and donor agencies should partner to establish functional libraries in schools and communities with Internet facilities and up-to-date resources, and the services of professional librarians. This will serve as an information source for NYSC members, as majority of them are usually posted to schools to teach.

The National Poverty Eradication Programme (NAPEP) and the National Directorate of Employment (NDE) should be properly funded by the federal government so as to provide better opportunities for graduates after NYSC. The two agencies of government should be repositioned with functional state branches so as to be proactive in rendering reasonable and encouraging entrepreneurship opportunities/packages for the graduates. In addition, the Youth Enterprise with Innovation in Nigeria - YouWiN (www.youwin.org.ng) project of the Federal Government, aimed at job creation by encouraging and supporting entrepreneurial youth in the country to develop and execute business ideas, should be strategically expanded with state chapters led by citizens with good antecedents for easy accessibility by graduates. Such will bring out the creative abilities of the graduates for business development and job creation.

The Federal Government should expand the scholarship programmes for first class honours graduates to include those with second class upper division and distinction in Higher National Diploma (HND) from the polytechnics. State governments should follow same to encourage brilliant graduates to acquire postgraduate education, both locally and internationally. Also, a greater percentage of the constituency allowance of the representatives of the people and communities – senators, Honourable members of the Federal House of Representatives, and members of states houses of assembly should be channeled towards provision of scholarships for postgraduate studies, entrepreneurship development and empowerment opportunities for NYSC members after their service year.

Tertiary educational institutions – universities, polytechnics, colleges of agriculture and others should intensify more effort towards entrepreneurship training for students so as to channel their minds towards job creation instead of job search after graduation.

Various indigenous production and manufacturing industries that are moribund in the country such as paper mills should be resuscitated so as to provide opportunities for graduates. The report by Ajayi (2012) that over 50% of industries and companies operating in Nigeria is ailing is unacceptable for a country that is battling with unemployment and intends to be among the top 20 developed economies by the year 2020. This is because it is only a thriving manufacturing industry that can guarantee sustainable employment generation, substantial boost to Gross Domestic Product (GDP) growth, and restoration of economic activities to enhance the living standards of the majority of the populace.

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