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INFORMATION NEEDS AND MOST PREFERRED SOURCES OF INFORMATION OF UNDERGRADUATE STUDENTS IN A NIGERIAN UNIVERSITY OF TECHNOLOGY

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Abstract

This study was carried out to investigate the information needs and most preferred source of information of undergraduate students in a Nigerian university of technology. Students in their second and third years of study in the departments of Estate Management and Architecture both in the school of Environmental Technology in Federal University of Technology Akure (FUTA) were surveyed. An adopted questionnaire was used to gather data for this study. The questionnaire was randomly distributed to the students in these departments thereby giving equal opportunity of being selected as part of the survey. Two hundred and fifty seven (257) copies of the questionnaire were distributed, two hundred and twenty (220) were returned but two hundred and three (203) representing response rate of 80% were found usable for data analysis. The result of the findings was analysed using simple percentages and is represented in charts. The study found out that the undergraduate students'

information needs are mainly centred on academic and allied social issues, and they mostly preferred to use the Internet to address their information needs. It was recommended that the library put in place a 24 hour internet service so as to combat the challenge of having long queues at the media centre and cyber cafes.

Keywords:

Information Needs, Information Seeking Behaviour, Sources of Information, Undergraduate Students, Academic Libraries

Introduction

Every human being at one point in time or another needs information. Despite the nature of their jobs, stipulated assignments, careers, businesses or researches, information is sine qua non, if success is to be recorded in any field of endeavour. It has been established that information bridges the gap between knowledge and ignorance. It has also been described as the fifth factor of production (Onu, 2005). The popular slogan that “information is power” hints at the fact that once information is available, then any task or assignment can be accomplished. It is very important for an individual to recognize what his or her information needs are. Once the information need has been ascertained, the problem is half solved. Meanwhile, it is a fact that academic environment is dynamic owing to emergence of new field and discoveries. Likewise, technological advancement which is volatile in nature has captivated attention of young people who incidentally are greater percentage of undergraduate in most of Nigerian universities; hence the need to investigate the information needs of undergraduate students and their most preferred source of information.

Miranda and Taraponoff (2008) defined information need as a state or process that begins when one perceives that there is a gap between the information and knowledge available to solve a problem and the actual solution of the problem. Addressing the needs require various information competencies, which are the capabilities developed to reach the solution of a problem by searching for new information or knowledge that could fill the perceived gap. Information needs according to Kuhlthau, (1993) stems from a vague awareness of something missing and then culminate in locating the right information that will contribute to understanding and meaning. Every individual has information needs no matter how well versed the person is in his or her area of specialization. Aina (2004) posited that every individual has information need irrespective of the individual's level of literacy. He reiterated that information could be for recreation, leisure, meeting tasks that are critical to survival or information that can meet day to day activities, common good of the neighbourhood, community or a nation. Information needs always creates a lacuna that must be addressed using the right sources. Information needs differ from one individual to another. Wilson (1994) noted that information needs vary in relation to subject fields of users, their educational background and years of experience or function performed. Kumar (2008) averred that

information needs vary from function to function, environment to environment, discipline to discipline and from age to age. This is the basis why Adetoro (2011) added that useful, relevant, and timely information is crucial to purposeful living and survival.

According to Fiankor and Adam (2004) most individuals seek information from their friends, neighbours, colleagues, they only consider visiting the library if the information required is complex or when they are not able to get a solution to their needs. Joel-Ikokoh (2009) posited that library serves as a tool of excellence and in the provision of lifelong learning by the provision of learning environment which integrates reading places, information technology and materials for study and research. This present age is the information age and information seeking behaviour of individuals depends on what information they are actually looking for, the sources they consult and how they utilize the information they get. Wilson (2000) described information seeking behaviour as the totality of human behaviour in relation to sources and channels of information, including both active and passive information-seeking, and information use. He further described information seeking behaviour as purposive seeking of information as a consequence of a need to satisfy some goal.

Meanwhile, the Federal University of Technology Akure (FUTA) was established in 1981 and is specialized in producing graduates with practical and theoretical knowledge of technologies for the benefit of man. It has six faculties and thirty departments. It has a functional library that caters for teaching learning and research needs of the university community. The library became functional on a temporary site the same year the university was established and moved to its permanent ultramodern building in April 2006. The building is made up of three floors. The Reading areas and offices are evenly distributed within the building complex. The Library presently has over 67,847 volumes of books and more than 1,500 journal titles. The opening hour is 8.00 a.m. – 9.00 p.m. on Monday to Friday, while Saturday is 9.00 a.m. - 6.00p.m. Sundays opening hours is 4.00 p.m. – 9.00 p.m.

Objectives of the Study

The need to investigate the information needs of undergraduate students and their most preferred source of information cannot be over-emphasised. Thus, the study specific objectives are to:

- i. identify the information needs of undergraduates
- ii. highlight their preferred source of information and,
- iii. ascertain the reasons for which some information sources are preferred.

Literature Review

Information needs of undergraduates and preferences for use have been influenced by a number of factors as captured in the literature. Kim and Sin (2007) studied undergraduate students' perception and preference for different types of resources using a survey method. They found that undergraduates preferred information sources like search engines, Websites, books, online databases and journals. Also, students believed that books, encyclopedia, OPACs

and librarians were trustworthy sources, while search engines, Websites, and friends/family were easy to use. Chang (2006) investigated the use of e-books among undergraduate students and found that these information materials were less frequently used than e-journals. Despite their increased popularity, e-books were not frequently selected for undergraduates' academic tasks

Dilevko and Gottlieb (2002) studied the use of print sources by undergraduate students and found that these resources were still regarded as vital owing to their nature of completeness, accuracy and in-depth content, though most of these undergraduates typically relied more on online sources. Mill (2008) analysed citations in undergraduate research papers for intermediate and advanced courses. He found that journals were cited more frequently than books, in particular, students used electronic journals more than printed ones.

Information seeking behaviour in the words of Ahmed and Vinayagamoorthy (2013) is an individual way and manner of gathering and sourcing for information for personal use, knowledge updating and development. According to them, the need for information seeking behaviour arises due to information needs and the seeker makes demand on both formal and informal information sources and services. Kim (2001) opined that we live in an era of information explosion and with the development of a wide variety of technologies, the amount of information available to people is growing rapidly. Kim further asserted that through different channels, the same information is diffused in various forms and this accelerates the speed of information growth.

Johnson (2007) posited that the process of finding information to address problems that arise in everyday life situations is complex. Individuals are influenced by many factors when the information need occurs, including their social, psychological, political, economic, physical, and work environments. According to Lee, Paik and Joo (2012), the selection of information resources is one of the most essential steps during the process of an information seeking task. He further identified a variety of factors that influence the selection of information sources and these are: characteristics of the sources, search purposes, users' preferences, users' knowledge and information literacy. However, Prasad (2000) opined that the ultimate aim of any information retrieval system is to supply and deliver the information which can precisely match the information requests or requirements. Lee, Paik and Joo (2012) attributed three factors to information source selection and these are – availability, accessibility, convenience and ease of use while Prasad (2000) is of the opinion that matching of information needs to sources has to be based on the careful assessment of information needs.

Congruent to information accessibility and usability is the user's perceived ease of use which accommodates the need to investigate users' most preferred source to meet their information needs. Xie and Joo (2009) identified seventeen reasons related to information source selection in analysing sixty information-seeking episodes of 31 participants: accessibility, ease of use, comprehensiveness, interactivity, useful results, task type, familiarity with source, and many others, were identified. In addition, document format also acts as a factor influencing resource selection. Information is a fundamental factor for all

human activities, most especially human capital development which pivots on teaching, learning and research.

Deluge of information and sources has created wider options for preferences among undergraduate students who are also technology savvy. Popoola (2008) emphasized the cardinality of accessibility to information in most desired format and sources. Meeting users' preference for information accessibility is very paramount if user satisfaction is the aim of information services provider. Majid and Tan (2002) investigated the information needs and information seeking behaviour of computer engineering undergraduate students at Nanyang Technological University, Singapore. The purpose was to identify the types of information sources used by the students, their preferred information formats and the use of various electronic information sources. It was found that the use of databases and electronic journals was quite low.

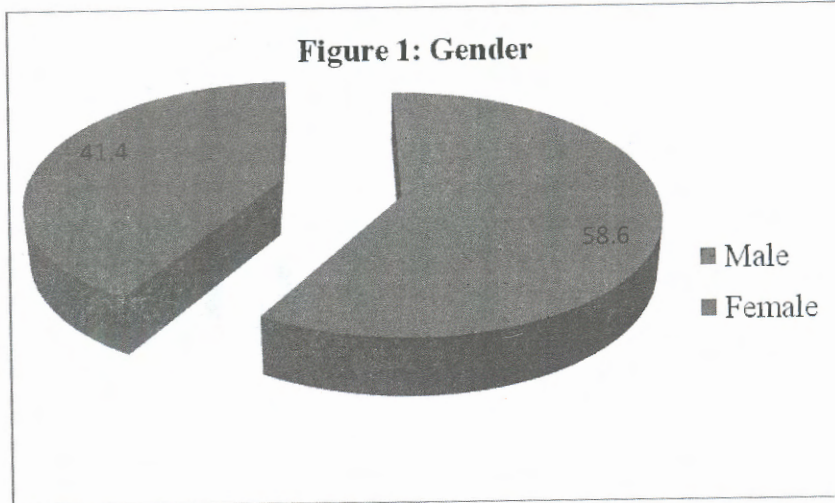
A study by Friedlander (2002) investigated the use of electronic information sources by students from different subject areas. It was found that over 62.9% of the business students preferred using electronic information resources, while this preference for other subjects was less than 50%. However, Baro, Onyenania, and Osaheni (2010) pointed out that in addition to books, journals and the Internet, students also heavily use human resources for meeting their information needs.

Methodology

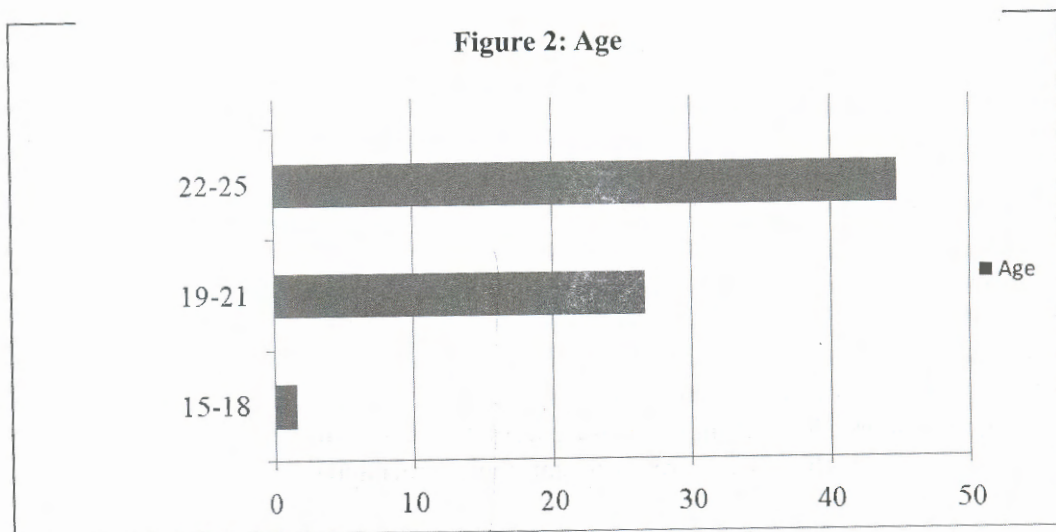
The sampling design used for this study was the simple random sampling technique where every 200 – 300 level students in the department of Estate Management and Architecture both in the school of Environmental Technology had an equal chance of being selected. The questionnaire used for this study was a modified version of the instrument used in a study carried out by Aiyebilehin (2012). Proper permission was taken and granted before the questionnaire was used.

A total of 257 respondents were chosen to represent the minimum students in the departments under study. The questionnaire was randomly distributed to the students. In order to forestall the incidence of a respondent filling the form more than once, an identification number was assigned to the entire questionnaire during the survey. Data was collected within a period of three weeks. A total of 257 were distributed, 220 were returned but only 203 were found to be useful for this study. 17 copies of the questionnaire were not usable because of incomplete data.

Analysis and Discussion



In terms of their gender, 63.9% were male respondents while 32.5% were female. However, 3.6% of the respondents did not indicate their sex..



Most of the respondents (44.8%) were in the age group 22 to 25 while (1.5%) belongs to the age group of 15 to 18 years.

Research question 1. To identify the information needs of undergraduates

Figure 3: Information Needs of Undergraduates

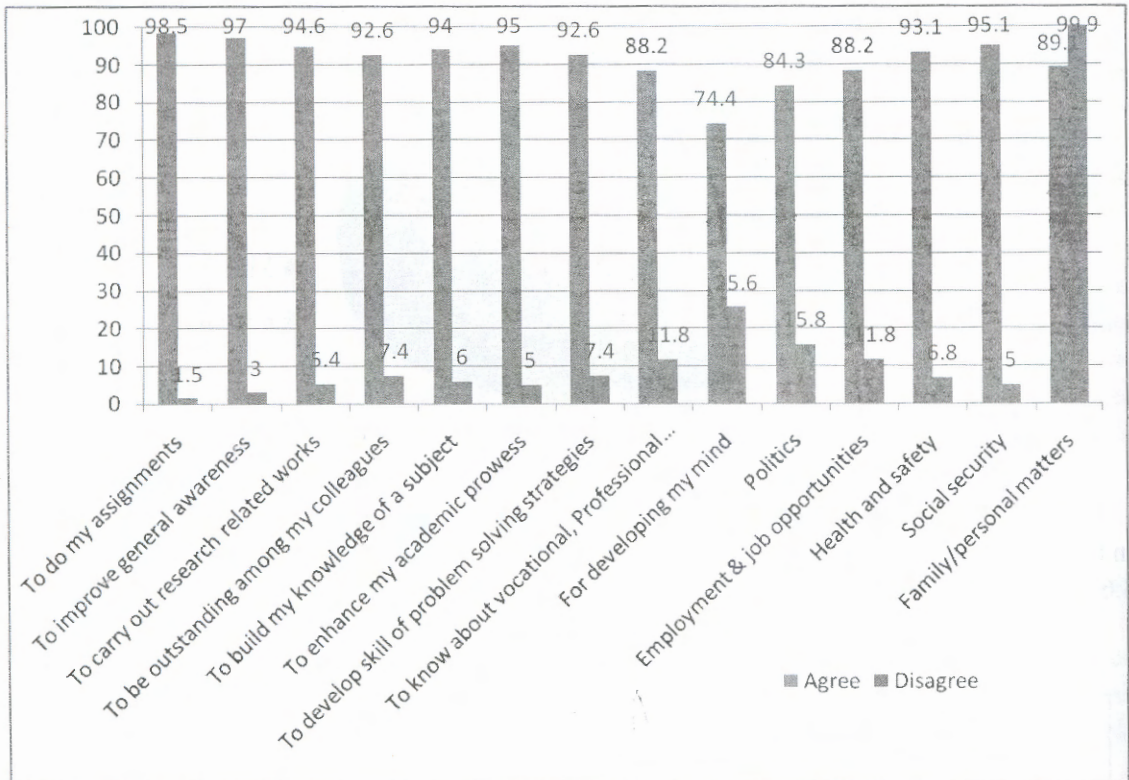
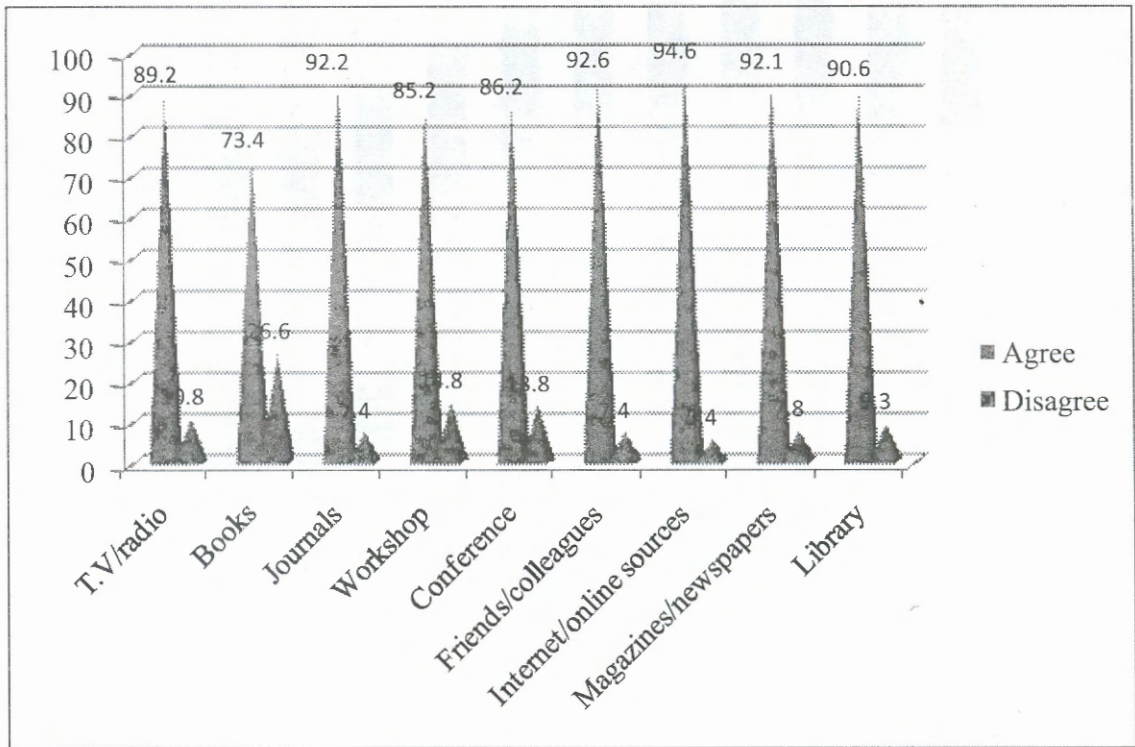


Figure 3 shows the information needs relating to undergraduates; to know about educational opportunities (98.5%), to do my assignments (97%), to build their knowledge of subjects (95.0%), to improve general awareness (94.6%), to be outstanding among their colleagues (94.0%), to carry out research related works (92.6%) and to enhance their academic prowess (92.6%) indicated their predominance. While a total 151 (88.2%) of respondents indicated that to know about vocational, Professional courses and employment opportunities was their information needs.

The respondents scored high in almost all the parameters, especially in the area of educational opportunities. It shows that they are ready to start their career and therefore needs information that can satisfy their quest.

Research question 2. Highlight Source of information

Figure 4: source of information available for use



Most of the respondents (94.6%) prefer Internet/online sources, while Friends/colleagues (92.6%), Journals (92.2%), and Magazines/newspapers (92.1%) sources, while library (90.6%) was considered as last resort. The emergence of electronic resources according to Ani and Ahiazu (2008) has transformed information handling and management in Nigerian academic environment. Most students now prefer the use of electronic resources, most especially the internet in searching for the needed information.

Research question 3 To ascertain why the source of information is preferred
Figure 5: Reasons for preferred sources of information by Undergraduates

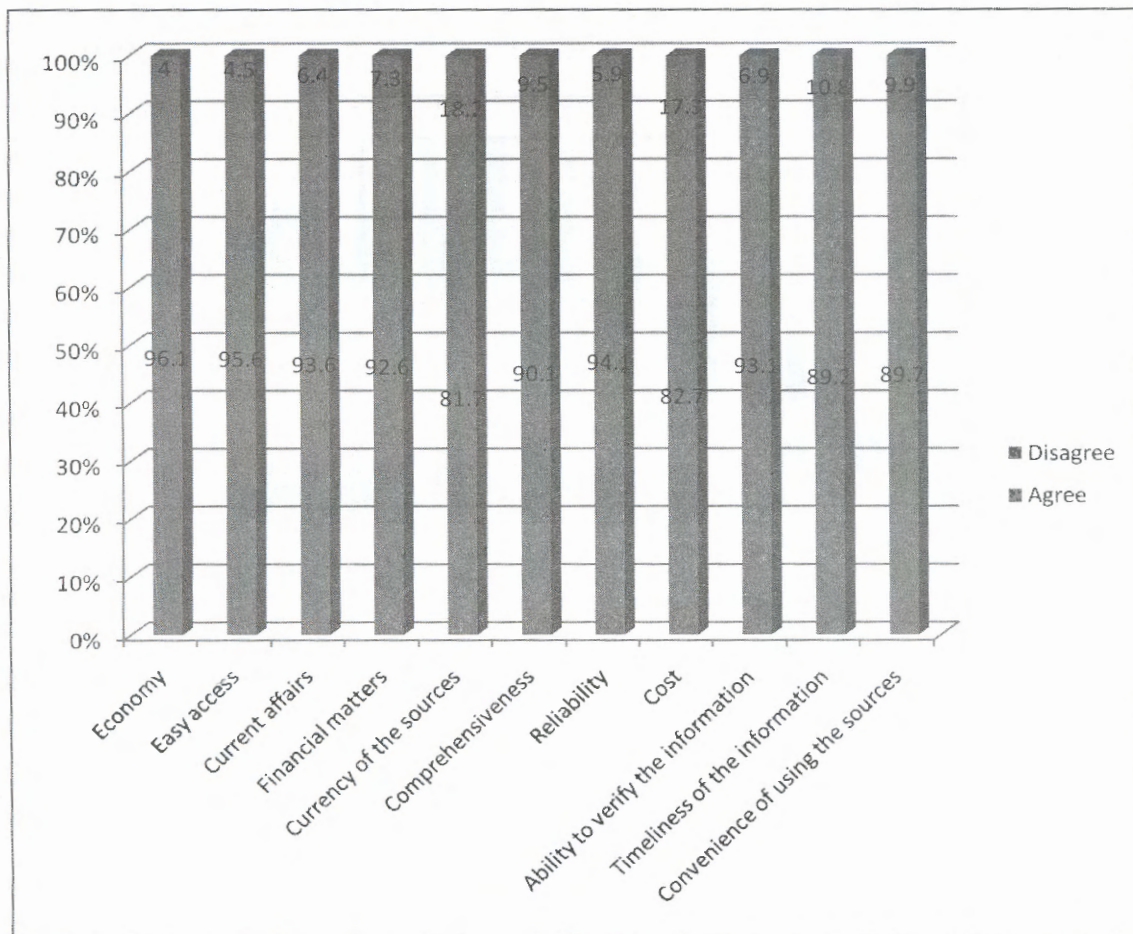


Figure 5 shows that the majority of the respondents indicated economy (96.1%) had the highest number of respondents as the main reason influencing their choice of information source used in meeting their needs. While 166 (81.7%) of the respondents indicated currency as the major reason influencing their choice of information source used in meeting their needs. It is logical for students to look out for cheap and easy means of having their information needs met.

Conclusion and Recommendations

From the study, it is evident that the students under survey maximized the use of electronic resources to get their information needs met. It is of paramount importance for the University to provide state- of – the - art equipment that will facilitate the retrieval of information in an easy manner. The University management should ensure that there is 24 hour wireless internet connectivity all around the campus. This will give room for 24 hour usage which will

minimize the number of students that will have to queue at the cyber cafe and library. It is also necessary for the library management to be proactive and make sure that the library acquires current and relevant resources as users' needs changes over time. A study of users needs should be done periodically. This could take the form answering simple questions or an opinion poll via any social network. It is necessary to constantly get a feedback from the users so as to know if the products and services are relevant or not.

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