

USE AND NON-USE OF INFORMATION RESOURCES BY LOW-RANKING INDUSTRIAL EMPLOYEES IN NIGERIA

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ABSTRACT

The paper is a report of a survey to understand utilization of different information resources by junior staff of industries in Nigeria. The data collected through a structured questionnaire, sent to an industrial centre in each of the six geo-political zones of Nigeria, reveal from that 44% of the respondents need information for various economic reasons which are met through book and non-book sources. Further analysis reflects that 75% of the industries have no library services, which leads to more than 60% of the staff to adopt different information seeking strategies like discussions, audio-visual sources and visiting newspapers stands. The paper lists some suggestions to promote provision and utilization of information resources in Nigerian industrial organizations.

KEYWORDS

Information Resources-Use; Low Rank Industrial Employees-Nigeria

INTRODUCTION

Most Nigerians use the terms "industry", "company" and "firm" interchangeably. This has attained widespread acceptance, albeit, informally. Notwithstanding this emerging practice, industry connotes a group of productive enterprise or organizations that

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produce similar goods or supply related services. Industries are customarily classified as primary, secondary and tertiary. Another school of thought, however, categorizes industries as either heavy or light. The number, complexity and types of industries in any milieu provide the criteria for assessing the social, economic, political and technological standard of that setting. Industrialization has, therefore, become an important factor as most countries seek to fast-track their development, generate employment and enhance their overall gross domestic products (GDPs).

Though orthodox economists identified land, labour, capital and entrepreneur as the only factors of production, this claim is no more tenable based on recent research reports. Various studies, including **Berazi (1981)**, **Stonier (1991)**, **Aina (2004)** and Bello and **Ajala (2004)** provide proofs of the emergence of information as the most important factor in modern industrial systems. Industrial employees, stratified into high, middle and low-ranking staff, provide the knowledge-capital required for the management of other resources or factors of production. Effective discharge of the statutory responsibilities of various cadres of staff depends, to a large extent, on the degree of information utilization.

Whereas high and middle level staff enjoy privileges which include several researches on their information needs and provision of same, the survey of literature in the present study makes us to believe that this cannot be said of the fate of low-ranking staff of industries in Nigeria. Because of the menial, and perhaps, unenviable jobs they meet their information needs, and the resources to satisfy these passion, are often overlooked or at best, taken for granted.

This state of affair is anomalous considering that junior staff of industries, in Nigeria and elsewhere, performs the important function of providing support services without which the middle

and high-level employees cannot function effectively. Since information has become both a factor of production and an important resource in the contemporary industrial society, access to, and utilization of same, by low-ranking staff becomes one of the determinants of success for the entire organization.

The study is, therefore, undertaken to fill the vacuum created by absence of empirical research on information utilization by junior staff of Nigerian industries. It investigates the use or averse use of specific information resources by low-ranking staff of industries selected from different parts of the country. Information needs, search and usage patterns and reasons for information use or non-use are also covered in the investigation.

OBJECTIVES

The research was guided with the following objectives:

- The information needs of junior industrial employees in Nigeria
- Documentary sources used and type of non-book information sources appealing to respondents
- The ways by which low-ranking industrial employees search for information
- The reasons for information utilization by low-ranking industrial employees in Nigeria
- The factors responsible for non-use of information resources by employees

LITERATURE REVIEW

In an eclectic study, **Ononogbo (1990)** identifies what he wittingly referred as “information infrastructure”. **Upadhaya (2004)** provides an elaborate catalogue of non-book sources, while **Aina (2004)** covered both documentary and non-documentary materials in his “range of information carriers”. These information

infrastructures, carriers or resources, are capable of satisfying the information needs of different cadres of industrial employees, if properly managed.

Berezi (1983) categorizes information as the fifth factor of production insisting that increasing the information component in the impact factor mix definitely improves productivity. **Stonier (1991)** states that information was the most important factor in modern production systems because if one possessed enough information, one could reduce the requirements of land, labour and capital. **Bello and Ajala (2004)** stresses the need for adequate, timely and up-to-date information in taking both personal and corporate decisions. **Koenig (1990)** reviews the economics and value of information in industrial productivity and provided a graphic illustration of information environment in different companies. **Adimorah (1993)** observes that while information adds value to decisions taken in industries and corporations, the importance given to industrial information service in Nigeria is presently low. **Jegade (1993/1994)** identifies the information needs of specific leaders of government, and policy-makers and advocated the design and provision of matching information services. **Popoola (1997)** examines the information communication in Budget and Planning Office, Oyo State, Nigeria and reported that adequate utilization of information resources enhances job performance among high-ranking government officials. **Aiyepeku (1989)** remarks that effective utilization of information helps to reduce the level of uncertainty in an organization's decision-making process. **Beckit (1986)** cautions that it is instructive to look at why industrial organizations fail and opined that provision of adequate information resources for employees will turn around the fortune of these firms. **Cutterback (1982)** maintains that most firms are poor because such business concerns have no access to vital information resources. In another

study, **Susan (1986)** reveals that lack of information is one of the major reasons for business failure and argues that providing business with information materials and statistics is a national priority.

The position occupied, and jobs performed, by employees necessitate, and sometimes influence, their quest for and utilization of various information sources. **Popoola (2000)** reveals that "organizations with good information culture will promote the use of relevant information and supply the much needed of it to managers and their subordinates for input to decision-making processes". **Saunders (1983)** reports that top level managers in industries use information in making policy decision on such matters as new product development, new plant authorization and other long-range strategic plans and decision. **Okwilagwe (1995)** reveals that there is a significant positive relationship between the information acquisition and publishing industry.

Several issues determine the use or averse use of information resources in different organizations and countries. **Burch and Grudnitski (1986)** notes that factors such as nature, category, size, structure of information, and management style influence utilization of information resources in an organization. **Ehikhamenor (1990)** observes that user educational levels influence access to, and use of information. **Aiyepoku (1978)** elaborates the decision-makers personality variables and the environment in which the decision has to be make affect information use. Whereas information utilization by managers, policy-makers and other middle and high-ranking personnel enjoyed ample reportage, the literature accessed and surveyed in the course of this study was silent on low-level employees. This sustained the researcher belief that information use by junior workers is taken for granted and provided an impetus to this study.

METHODOLOGY

Nigeria has a large geographical size with thousands of industries scattered and coverage of these industries and their low-ranking staff led to the use of survey approach in this study. A pilot study was carried out with 20 low-level staff of industries in Owerri, Southeastern Nigeria. This pre-test helped to identify and eliminate ambiguous question and duplications. After the pre-test, questionnaires were batched and sent to Aba, Port Harcourt, Lagos, Kano, Jos and Maiduguri -which are the industrial hubs of Nigeria's six geo-political zones. Colleagues/associates participated in the project as surveyors. To guard against completion of the questionnaire by people outside the catchment group, identified respondents were implored to pinpoint their peers in near-by industries. In each industrial centre, efforts were made to draw respondents from large-scale, medium-scale and small-scale firms. This was intended to make the findings truly representative of the issues under investigation.

However, the researcher was unable to collect all the research instruments distributed in various parts of Nigeria. Four hundred and forty-two (442) of the 600 questionnaires were fully completed while 30 were returned uncompleted. The researcher could not use 22 of the completed and returned questionnaires because these were either badly torn or blurred. The data analysis is, therefore, based on response of 420 users.

DISCUSSION AND FINDINGS

The results show that although respondents cut across the three broad typologies of industries in Nigeria (small, medium and large-scale), more than 50% are affiliated to small-scale firms, while 30% came from medium scale companies. Lagos yields the highest number of respondents perhaps her status as the most industrialized city in Nigeria. Overall, more participants hail from

the industrial centers in Southern Nigeria. However, the sum of participants from Jos and Maiduguri are not up to half of respondents from Kano. More than 80% of the respondents have academic qualifications that do not hold a university degree or polytechnic higher national diploma (HND). Besides, 75% of the industries covered in this survey have neither libraries nor professional information services.

The use of computers and Internet as information sources amongst respondents is abysmally low despite the preponderance of business centers and cyber cafes in urban areas of the country. Inadequate use of electronic information sources is clear that 24 respondents (5.7%) use computers and 12 others (2.9%) browse the Internet. Only 16 respondents (3.8%) are fortunate to attend conferences, workshops or seminars, which they relate as vital sources of relevant information. A tabular analysis of core research questions is presented in **Tables 1-7**, which forms the basis upon which the findings were discussed.

Table 1 Information Needs of Respondents

Information Needs	Respondents
Economic information	103 (24.5)
Employment/Job opportunities	82 (19.5)
Educational information	61 (14.5)
Health/Medical information	36 (8.6)
Political Information	34 (8.09)
Cultural Information	32 (7.6)
Research Information	20 (4.8)
Religious Information	18 (4.3)
Recreational/Leisure Information	11 (2.6)
Housing and Transport Information	8 (1.9)
Others	15 (3.6)
Total	420 (100)

Note *Figures in parentheses indicate %age

The distribution of information needs (**Table 1**) reveals that majority of the junior staff in Nigerian firms and industries require information on economic issues (24.5%), job prospects (19.5%) and educational opportunities(14.5%). It is also evident that recreational information (2.6%) and housing/transport information (1.9%) is the least needed.

Most of this information is being obtained from documentary and non-documentary sources. **Table 2** reveals document usage of respondents and the most utilized documentary sources are newspapers/magazine (25.4%), pamphlets (20.4%) and the ephemera i.e. memos, circulars, leaflets, handbills, etc (19.8%). Newspapers and trade journals are used by 11.9% and 8.3% of the users respectively while the least utilized documents are text-books (4.5%), reference sources (3.6%) and learned journals (2.4%).

Table 2 Ranked Order of Documentary Sources of Information

Documents	Responden
Newspapers/Magazines	107 (25.4)
Pamphlets	101 (20.4)
Ehemera (Leaflets, Handbills, etc)	83 (19.8)
Newsletters/Bulletins	50 (11.9)
Trade Journals	35 (8.3)
Textbooks/Monographs	19 (4.5)
Reference Books	15 (3.6)
Learned Journals	10 (2.4)
Total	420 (100)

Note *Figures in parentheses indicate %age

Considering technological innovations, that led to the creation of

non-documentary information, the respondents were asked to indicate the use of non-book resources in their search for information. The responses (**Table 3**) show that most (26.1%) low-making industrial employees in Nigeria sourced information from radio, following the information from the colleagues and supervisors (24.5%). Though computers/Internet centers have become somewhat ubiquitous in Nigerian cities, only 5.7% obtain required information from electronic sources.

Junior workers in Nigerian industries adopt several strategies in their attempt to obtain required information. It reveals that majority of the respondents (28.6%) obtain information through discussion with colleagues and superiors. Other information seeking strategies adopted is listening to broadcasts/viewing telecasts (26.9%) and visiting vendor's news stands (24%). It is interesting that 3.8% attended conferences, workshops or seminars while 3.3% use library and 2.9% browse Internet (**Table4**).

Table 3 Ranked Distributions of Non-Book Information Sources

Non-Book Resources	Respondents
Radio	110 (26.1)
People llegues/Supervisors)	103 (24.5)
Telephone (GSM)	81 (19.3)
VCD/DVD/Cassettes	32 (7.6)
Computer/Internet	24 (5.7)
Slide/Projectuals	22 (4.8)
Total	420 (100)

Note *Figures in parentheses indicate %age

Table 4 Information Seeking Strategies

Strategies	Respondents
Discussion with colleagues	120 (28.6)
Rely on radio/television	113 (26.9)
Visit vendors news-stand	101 (24)
Make or receive phone calls	44 (10.5)
Conferences/workshop/semina	16 (3.8)
Read in libraries	14 (3.3)
Browse the Internet	12 (2.9)
Total	420 (100)

Note *Figures in parentheses indicate %age

Having identified the strategies adopted by respondents in their information search, it is considered necessary to analyse the mode of use of available information resources (**Table 5**)

Table 5 Ranked Order of Information Usage Pattern

Usage Pattern	Respondents
Discussion/interaction	156 (37.1)
Listening	120 (28.6)
Viewing	112 (26.7)
Reading	32 (7.6)
Total	420 (100)

Note *Figures in parentheses indicate %age

The majority of the respondents (37.1%) favour to utilize information during various interactions (whether formal or informal). A sizeable number of the participants either listen to various audio sources (28.6%) or viewed visual materials (26.7%) and 7.6% read various documentary sources (**Table 5**).

Different factors account for the use of information resources by low-level staff of industries in Nigeria. **Table 6** reveals that majority of the users (29.8%) consult various information resources to keep abreast of current events closely followed for job performance (26.4%). Accessibility (21.7%), intellectual development and social relations (4.8%) are stated the reasons for utilization of information resources by users and 3.8% of the respondents declare utilization for research purposes.

Table 6 Reasons for Utilization of Information Resources

Reasons	Respondents
For current awareness	125 (29.8)
For job performance	111 (26.4)
Due to its accessibility	91 (21.7)
For intellectual development	40 (9.5)
For social relation	33 (7.9)
For research purposes	20 (3.8)
Total	420 (100)

Note *Figures in parentheses indicate %age

The factors responsible for non-use of information materials are also examined. The major reasons for averse use of information resources by junior employees have direct bearing on economic factors. This is evident that most respondents (29.3 %) state the reasons for having low economic status or high cost of various information materials (23.1%). Other reasons stated are ignorance of sources of information (20.5%), unavailability of information sources (15.2%), lacking information searching skills (6.4%) and unavailability of time (5.5%) or busy schedules(**Table 7**).

Table 7 **Reasons for Non-Use of Information Resources**

Reasons	Respondents
Low economic status	123 (29.3)
High cost of information materials	97 (23.1)
Ignorance	86 (20.5)
Unavailability of needed inform. resources	64 (15.2)
Lack of searching skills	27 (6.4)
Unavailability of time	23 (5.5)
Total	420 (100)

Note *Figures in parentheses indicate %age

DISCUSSION

The result of this study indicates that junior staff in Nigerian industrial organization need information that is utilitarian in nature. This is evident in their preference for mostly economic, employment and educational information needs. Their choice of information is not surprising considering that this cadre of industrial workers has the lowest self esteem, do the menial and dreaded jobs but earn the least salaries/remunerations. It is natural; therefore, that these employees will seek those items of information that will enhance their career advancement, in addition to improve their pay package, self-esteem and societal appreciation.

The information requirements of these employees are met through a combination of book and non-book information suppliers or formats. Most of the documents used by the respondents are largely newspapers, magazines and pamphlets. This may not be surprising bearing in mind that besides being cheaper and easier to read than journals, technical reports, monographs and textbooks, newspapers and magazines contain job advertisements, economic

news and other pieces of news that appeal to the ordinary people, most of whom are junior staff in industries. This may provide the explanation for the browsing of newspapers and magazines at the vendors' news-stands as a strategy for information search by as much as 24% of the employees. However, the findings of this investigation is at variance with earlier researches which established that high-ranking personnel like academics, managers and policy-makers source their documentary information from journals (Osioibe, 1986; Adimorah, 1993; Aiyepoku, 1989; Jegede, 1993/1994) It is also noteworthy that despite the ubiquitous presence of computers and Internet facilities in Nigerian urban and industrial centres, only a few respondents made use of these information sources. Rather, there was a heavy reliance on the electronic media (radio and television), Global System for Mobile (GSM) communication and informal sources both of which were consulted by about 50% of the participants. The explanation for this is not far fetched. Both radio and GSM are commonplace and relatively cheaper and thus within the reach of the rich and poor alike. In addition, information, even classified ones, is known to be available in informal sources, especially, the grapevine. This is quite different from computers and Internet connectivity which are both expensive and elitist and thus beyond the reach of poorly paid low-level employees. More than half of the junior employees in Nigerian industries who took part in this study utilize information resources either to keep abreast of current events or perform jobs in respect of their employment. It is worth record that more than 80% of the respondents have neither degrees nor its equivalents, it would have been surprising if many participants utilized information resources for serious research purposes. Therefore, the heavy utilization of available information sources for current awareness and job performance may not be unconnected with the perennial search for better employment

opportunities (which is common among junior staff) while at the same time, holding tightly to the current employment. The major factors responsible for non-use of information resources were low economic status of respondents and high cost of information resources. The number of industries with libraries and information services was abysmally low. Though some of these information resources may be cheap, the pressure on the meager earnings of these low-level industrial staff would naturally make procurement of even newspapers, pamphlets and magazines an avoidable ostentatious craving. The result of this study tallies with the reports of **Helga (1992)** and **Njongmeta and Ehikhamanor (1998)** that economic factors affect the utilization of information materials in developing economies.

CONCLUSION AND SUGGESTIONS

Use and non-use of information resources have become a major determinant of success or failure in contemporary industrial businesses. Employees of industries covered in this survey utilize information sources for different reasons. However, the provision and utilization of the needed information resources are not without difficulties. The following suggestions may help to improve the supply and use of information resources in Nigerian firms and industries:

➤ Financiers and managers of firms and industries in Nigeria should establish industrial libraries. Besides, managing the documents and other information possessions of their parent bodies, these libraries would provide the necessary information services required for job performance by various categories of industrial employees.

➤ The collection development of industrial libraries should be balanced. Deliberate efforts should be made to ensure the acquisition of monographs, reference materials, journals,

newspapers, magazines and other documents in different disciplines. This policy would lead to provision of materials to meet the information needs of both junior employees and other interest groups.

➤ Management of industries should encourage vertical and horizontal communication between and among various cadres of staff. This would sustain the free flow of information since informal communication is popular in industries.

➤ Efforts should be made to expose junior industrial employees to the immense potentials of non-documentary information sources, especially Internet resources and other electronic databases. Besides enhancing their capacity to discharge official responsibility creditably, sponsoring of junior staff to workshops and conferences would help to imbue these workers with leadership skills.

➤ Low-ranking industrial employees should be encouraged to pursue further studies to earn promotions and better salaries/remunerations since several studies such as **Ehikhamenor (1990)** and **Popoola (2002)** have shown that educational level and official status influence information use or non-use.

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