

Chapter 9

Demographics, Socio–Economic and Cognitive Skills as Barriers to Information Seeking in a Digital Library Environment

Felicia Yusuf
Landmark University, Nigeria

Sunday Oguntayo
Landmark University, Nigeria

Sola Owolabi
Landmark University, Nigeria

Foluke Okocha
Landmark University, Nigeria

Ayooluwa Aregbesola
Landmark University, Nigeria

Toluwani Eyolorunse
Landmark University, Nigeria

ABSTRACT

The chapter considers the importance of demographic and socio-economic factors as well as cognitive skills to information seeking in a digital library environment. Demographic factors such as age and gender were considered. Younger adults were found to respond positively to the demands of information seeking in the digital environment while their older counterparts are still struggling to come to terms with the changes. In the same vein, studies have revealed that the value placed on technology by men and women varies. While men express high level of confidence in navigating the digital environment, women still suffer low self-confidence in doing same. Identified socio-economic factors that also constitute a barrier to information seeking in a digital environment include income level, level of education, non-availability of ICT infrastructures and epileptic power supply especially in Africa among others. Unwillingness to see one's needs as information needs, inability to articulate one's information needs, unawareness of information sources, low self-efficacy, poor search skills among others were identified as cognitive barriers to information seeking in the digital environment. Based on the findings of this chapter, the study recommends that for persons who are adjudged to be the older generation, it is imperative for them to acquire requisite ICT skills that will make it easier for them to navigate the digital environment. There is also a clarion call on African leaders to provide infrastructures that will enable ICT to thrive as the digital environment is fast replacing the hitherto traditional one.

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INTRODUCTION

Demand for information is traceable to its importance and relevance to production of goods and services. The relevance of information to human existence has positioned it as a factor of production in addition to land, labour and capital. Organizational decision making and management in the 21st Century depend on information. In social parlance, treasure is sought for its worth, none seeks rot. Information is treasure sought after by many. Military operations and intelligence reports depend on information. Investments in shares, oil and gas explorations even marriages require information for decision making process. Kaye (1995) explained that good information is essential for effective operation and decision making at all levels in businesses, affirming that managers use of information in decision-making processes (strategic and operational).

The progressive speed of information acquisition, processing and dissemination has given birth to information society referred to as a society characterized by a high level of information intensity in the everyday life of most citizens, in most organizations and workplaces; by the use of common or compatible technology for a wide range of personal, social, educational and business activities, and by the ability to transmit, receive and exchange digital data rapidly between places irrespective of distance (<http://whatis.techtarget.com/definition/Information-Society>).

Furthermore, an information society is such in which the creation, distribution, and manipulation of information has become the most significant economic and cultural activity. It has therefore become pertinent to study barriers to digital information seeking considering the transformational capability of information accompanied by technologies which have given birth to the digital age. Digital libraries house millions or innumerable collections in the virtual space with the aim of meeting the information seeker's need but the aim may be truncated by certain intervening variables conversant with users.

These intervening variables are the focus of this discourse. We shall critically examine demographic, socio-economic and cognitive barriers that may limit information seekers from maximally benefiting from unlimited access to the information commonwealth that characterizes the 21st Century. Information rich and information poor are a new way of classifying nations and people around the world. The rich have greater access to available right information and are capable of using them to achieve economic, social and other survival needs, while the poor are limited due to one intervening variable or the other which serve as barrier to ease of access and use.

INFORMATION NEEDS AS PRECEDENCE OF INFORMATION SEEKING

Information seeking is preceded by information needs. Without a specific need information seeking process will not have proper definition and seeker behavior that typifies the information seeking process. Thompson & Zeynep (2004) conceptualized need as a discoverable matter or fact. He further asserted that needs are objectives in the sense that they are what one must look for to support his or her profession. Needs are a matter of priority, what we need is overriding reason. Information needs could be seen as demand (requirement) and want (desire). Haruna and Mabawunku (2001) explained that needs arise when the state of possessed knowledge is less than what is needed to deal with some issues, and that information needs are diverse, consistently changing and not amenable to generalization. The uses of information vary among individuals, groups and society. Krikelas (1983) defined information need

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