UTILIZATION OF INTERNET FACILITY IN THE FEDERAL COLLEGE OF WILDLIFE MANAGEMENT NEW BUSSA, NIGERIA

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ABSTRACT

In major African nations today, many agencies have largely contributed to bringing information and communication technologies (ICTs) into more widespread use. ICT has offered great potential, especially as an aid to virtually every aspect of human endeavour be it agriculture, business, academic and so on. The aim of this work was to examine the utilization of Internet facility in academic environment in Niger State with focus on the Federal College of Wildlife Management, New Bussa, Nigeria. Qualitative method of data gathering (in-depth interview) was utilized to collect data from 20 respondents in Federal College of Wildlife Management, New Bussa. The findings revealed that all the respondents have been making good use of ICTs for their chosen endeavours and have derived positive results from these. Hence, proper coordination by the Stakeholders to ensure that quality service are provided for consumers making use of ICTs Services like the Internet should be given top priority.
Keywords: *Information and Communication Technologies, Teleconferencing, Utilization*

INTRODUCTION

From time immemorial, it has been the desire of man to harness and conquer his environment for his utmost convenience, hence, his efforts at achieving this through the process known as technology. Man's desire for technological improvement has shown itself since he created his first tools. He has not relented on this through continuous process of fashioning tools and machines to increase the control and understanding of the material environment. In contemporary time, information and communication technologies (ICTs) happen to be the current breakthrough which man has recorded in his quest to sustain his control over his environment. Information and communication technologies have been a highly persuasive means of imagining our future. Most areas of the social life have been the sites of speculation over the implications, which information and communication technologies (ICTs) may have for their transformation.

ICTs are probably becoming the most popular vehicle for the expression

of hopes and fears in recent times (Azeez, 2005). In many of these areas, these hopes and fears being experienced though not trivial, are largely not those anticipated at the outset. The technologies that were developed turn out not to have the wholesale transformative effects that some proposed (McWhyte, 2003). Instead, as so often with technologies, there emerged variation, contradiction and locally specific innovations. At the same time, it is clear that ICTs have indeed provided potent sites for cultural expression and for the development of new social formations.

ICTs have gradually assumed the status of culturally embedded artefacts and cultural sites in their own right (Hine, 2003). Over the past two decades, technology, specifically ICT has advanced so well, and to such an extent that almost everyone everywhere comes in contact with it in one way or the other (Preece et al., 1994). In Africa, a new era of possibilities concerning information and communication technologies (ICTs) has begun since the end of the 1980s. Satellite technology, which permits instantaneous transmission of images, has brought the continent into international information circuits. The popularity of other information and communication technologies, such as the Internet in the 1990s came at the same time with other monumental trends such as globalization, economic crisis and democratic change. Slowly, Africans albeit mostly in urban areas are learning to use these new technologies (Vittin, 2000).

Studies have shown many advantageous ways in which ICTs have been integrated into communities (in poor countries) that have positively impacted on their health (Rogan and Simmons, 1984; Ducat, 2006). Some of these advantages include the provision of telemedicine and telesurgery which enable clinical professionals to consult with their counterparts throughout the world about life threatening conditions (Mecheal, 2002). The applicability and relevance of the technologies in e-commerce (Richardson, 1996), agricultural extension, e-business (through teleconferencing), etc have equally been stressed by scholars (Rogan and Simmons 1984; Ducat, 2006; Fhwa, 2006 and Goggins, 2006). This affirms the ever-increasing relevance of ICTs on daily activities of the populace.

While assessing the benefits of ICTs and the limitations therein, FEAP Aquamedia (1998) stresses that ICTs gave room for the creation of 'virtual' organizations and opportunity for many different organisations working through a common channel to become one. In spite of this, creating the confidence in the production sector to use this technology within a highly competitive business environment is noted as the key issue that needed to be addressed. It was equally noted that many of these technological developments (ICTs) are not being used by the professional sector, simply because there is a definite lack of knowledge of how to use the Internet, what it involves and what it could do for business.

In this work, the concern is on the utilization of ICTs by the academics

for research and scientific work. Scientific knowledge being a central feature of contemporary society seems important to be examined on the extent to which ICTs are involved in transformation of the processes of research, manpower training and development as well as its outcomes. The focus of this work is on ICTs, but it is limited to the use of Internet services. The specific objectives of this study are to examine the type and rate of ICTs utilization with Internet as the point of focus and the factors that influence their utilization as well as the effects and challenges on the academic works.

METHODOLOGY

The area for this work was Federal College of Wildlife Management, New Bussa of Niger State. The staff and Students formed the study population. The choice of staff was limited to academic arm of the college. Qualitative method of data collection was adopted for this work. This involves the use of in-depth interview to elicit information from the target population. The target population was selected through stratified ramdom sampling techninque along the four academic departments (Basic Science, Animal Health and Production Technology, Tourism Management and Wildlife and Ecotourism). From each of the departments, three students and 2 academic staff were selected. The students were picked because of double benefits they are likely to derive from ICTss usage. At the end of the day, the total population amounted to 20 respondents. The respondents were those who have made use of Internet services in the last one year. The data were analysed through content analysis. In addition, ethnographic summary was added so as to accommodate verbatim quotation in support of findings.

RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

Socio-Demographic Characteristics: The socio-demographic characteristics of the respondents show that 7 of the lecturers were males and 1 female. Among the students, there were 8 males and 4 females. All the lecturers involved have spent more than 2 years at their places of work and have had more than 5 years experience of utilizing Internet facility. The breakdown of the students per 3; Basic Science (Preliminary class) 3.

Information and Communication Technologies: Ideas and Utilization: The entire study population, particularly the academic staff understood what ICT entails. They define ICTs as endeavours that involve the processing and distribution of data using computer hardware and software, telecommunications and digital electronics. The students in explaining what ICT is all about referred to the technologies as scientific advancement that enables one to make use of computers to pass information across to people all over the world. Some students and staff also define ICTs as scientific breakthrough that turned the world into a global village vis-à-vis accessibility to information around the

world. A lecturer listed some of the services that are obtainable from the use of Internet service as a branch of ICTs. According to the lecturer:

> *Internet is being used for communicating through electronic mail (e-mail), retrieving news, researching information, online shopping as it is mostly seen on net while browsing, paying bills, banking, listening to music, watching movies, playing games, and even making telephone calls.*

On the issue of utilization, virtually all the respondents have been making optimal use of Internet services in spite of the fact that their school is yet to procure the needed equipment to kit their own Internet building recently erected. The data reveal that 87.5% of the students recorded highest level of patronage of Cyber café of 4 days in a week 12.5% are those with least patronage of 3 days in a week. Majority of the lecturers except 12.5% patronize Cyber café throughout the 7 days of the week. A lecturer clarified this further:

> *There are 2 Cyber cafés in the town. One is located within a Research Institute in the town, and runs between Monday and Friday during working hours of 8am till 4 pm. The other café is privately owned and opens from Monday to Sunday; though Sunday operation commences from 3pm in the afternoon. So there is opportunity for any willing client to pick the one that best suits him or her. One can even move from one end to the other depending on the circumstance.*

An academic staff related his usage of the café located within the Research Institute in the town to availability of power supply. Accordingly,

> *Electricity is very regular in the area where the Research Institute is located; this makes the usage of Cyber café within it easier since interruption of service is always very minimal. In view of this, I always give preference to the Cyber café therein. My patronage of the other café is almost always during the weekends.*

Purpose of Utilization, Types of services and their Outcome
Clarifying their purpose of utilizing the Internet services within the community, the entire study population mentioned sending and receiving of e-mails and conducting of research. To the students, the Internet affords them, the opportunity to get materials for their term papers and other pieces of information that may be of use in the course of their studies. The lecturers see the Internet services as viable asset for sourcing information to supplement the academic materials that are obtainable from personal and College library. According to a lecturer:

> *In this era of globalization, new things keep cropping up; the best way to keep one in tune with this is to utilize the Internet service. This informs my constant patronage of café. I have never regretted this because I know I can't be found wanting when it comes to delivering lectures in my area of specialization courtesy of information and benefits I derive from the Internet.*

Another lecturer submitted that:

> *Internet services have proved very handy for me in the course of delivering lecture in the College. I update my lecture notes every academic session due to new information that keeps on coming whenever I visited Cyber café. It has also been very useful in communicating with the Students under my supervision whenever they are on long vacation. The practice is for my research students to send their work to my e-mail box. I will read the work sent by the individual students, send an attached comment on the work back to the students and instructions on what to do to make it better. The process goes on like this for the entire chapters in such students' projects until the works are certified good enough. This practice makes my work not to be overloaded when students resume for new academic session.*

The students' submissions on the outcome of Internet utilization cut across improved academic performance, more enlightenment on issues pertaining to their courses of study, information on prospects of their courses of study globally, the career path they are likely to follow after graduation and challenges they are likely to face afterward in their chosen fields and possible way out. According to one of the students from Wildlife and Ecotourism Department:

> *At the initial stage of my programme in the College, I thought my choice of course was an effort in futility, but with information I have come across over the Internet, coupled with those passed across by my Lecturers, I have realized that the sky is going to be the limit for my advancement and material success in life.*

The Challenges of ICT Utilization: Talking on challenges facing the use of ICTs particularly the Internet service, the respondents mentioned irregular power supply and erratic network availability of services of GSM providers whose services include affordable Internet (services) as major challenges. To the students, the issue includes limited number of café within the community; heavy academic work schedule that do not allow them to stay as long as they would want at the café and the distance of the café from the College. To the lecturers, occasional poor network services, poor power supply from Power Holding Company of Nigeria and erratic network availability of services of GSM providers whose services include affordable Internet (service) in the community as the challenges. To them, the above mentioned impediments impact negatively on the optimal benefits they would have derived from ICTs. In the words of a respondent in this category:

> *The work environment vis-à-vis the use of Internet services would have been easier than this if services of GSM providers that offer affordable Internet services as obtainable in major towns in Southern part of the country are consistent in terms of network availability for internet services here. Meanwhile, before internet services from GSM providers were not available. What was*

obtainable then was shuttling from office to the café and from café to our house, at times we move to the one that operates till 10.00pm. Glory be to God that such is now part of history, however, the services of the network providers are not always constant coupled with the problem of power outage.

To another respondent (academic staff):

The most frustrating challenges over the use of ICT in the community is the issue of unstable Internet network which engendered poor service outcome. One cannot say categorically the day such problem will occur; but any time such problem is about to occur, one may find it difficult to download information from the Internet. The process may take up to two (2) hours without success. On the part of GSM service providers, there was a time I loaded air time recharge for one month package for internet usage of a particular provider, everybody using this network was shut off for almost four weeks. Only few could make use of the service for the remaining 4 days, while others did not know that the problem had been resolved. No redress in terms of extension of time for the one wasted when the service was not available came from this provider. For almost two months almost everybody among the users of this facility within the college shunned this service. If not for this, ICT is nothing but a welcome development to bail students out of academic difficulties.

Recounting a similar experience, another respondent submitted thus:

The first GSM servicesProvider that came to our rescue in this part in terms of affordable Internet services disappointed us. Everybody was full of praises and appreciation to that provider for the quality of services being provided at reasonable rates. At the time when we were fully engrossed in this service; we just found out that the internet services were no longer on. Enquiry later revealed that the 'GPRS' facility had been removed and transferred to another town that is about 100 kilometers away. As a result of this, we were denied this service for almost a year, some who could afford it reluctantly moved to the one that offers 'cut throat' packages. Though the situation has changed for better, the services of the three major GSM providers are available in this community, but not very reliable.

CONCLUSION AND RECOMMENDATIONS

This study has revealed that the respondents possessed accurate knowledge of ICT. They have made maximum use of the technology for their academic pursuits. The entire study population made use of Internet for personal purposes such as communicating through e-mail, sourcing for educational materials and academic information, communicating with students over final year project works and the likes, over the last one year. The rate of utilization was revealed to be encouraging, safe for the challenges like irregular power supply, unstable

Internet networks which engendered poor service outcome. First, whatever the academic staff might have learnt from this process will be passed to the students. Secondly, the students will benefit directly from the process through accessibility to information to enhance their continuous assessment, exams, final year project works and other useful means.

Therefore, there is need for the Nigeria Communication Commission to provide enabling environment for the GSM providers to effectively reach out to every part of the country for easy accessibility to their services like Internet services. There should be proper coordination by the Stakeholders to ensure that quality services are provided for consumers making use of ICTs services the like Internet. Government should not relent in its efforts at ensuring that a reasonable proportion of Nigeria populace is computer literate. This could be effectively done through public-private partnership arrangement to ensure that virtually every Nigerian has access to computer. Unimpeded access to computer, will fast-track the quest for appreciable computer literacy in the country, since the individual owner will be improving in the usage of this computer through continuous practice.

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