Usage and Perception of Online Information Resources among Students of Delta State University, Abraka, Nigeria: A Case Study of Library and Information Science Department

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ABSTRACT

Online information resources encompass the wealth of learning resources and research data that are available in electronic format from online sources such as the World Wide Web, journal databases, library catalogues, course materials databases and unit websites. They are invaluable resources to the academic achievement of students. However, there are some barriers encountered by students while using these online information resources. This study adopts descriptive survey method. Stratified random sampling technique is used to select 200 respondents for the study. Questionnaire is used to collect data for the study. Statistical tools such as frequency count and simple percentage are used in analyzing the data collected. Pie chart is used to present the results. The findings reveal that majority of the participants frequently make use of online information resources. Also, the study reveals that online information resources are of great benefits to the students. However, it is discovered that students encountered several barriers while using online information resources such as power failure etc. The study recommends among others that the university management should ensure constant power supply especially in areas where students access online information resources such as the library and adequate computers systems should be provided to enable students access online information resources at any point in time.
Keywords: Online Information Resources, Internet, Library and Information Science.

INTRODUCTION

The use of online information sources has been on the increased for students over the years due to the rapid development of communication and web technologies, which have made scholars and students in all disciplines have access to an unprecedented wealth of information, tools and services. Online information resources as asserted by Gbaje (2007) facilitate access to relevant and current information for teaching, learning and research development. Dadzie (2009) further highlights the importance of online information to academics, stating that online information could be accessed by users that are restricted by geographical location or finances, access to current information and provision of

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extensive links to additional resources or related content. They could be stored electronically, thereby saving space, avoiding the risk of loss, lessening theft or damage and cost is significantly reduced. Academics in any society are seen as propellers of knowledge.

Higher education is changing rapidly with the advent of technology. According to Shuling (2007), these days, electronic information resources have gradually become imperative in every university library. Hughes and Bruce (2005) note that online information resources encompass the wealth of learning resources and research data that are available in electronic format from online sources such as the World Wide Web, journal databases, library catalogues, course materials databases and unit websites. The internet is of paramount importance in accessing this unprecedented wealth of information available to students online. Borgman (2007) notes that the internet lies at the center of a global information infrastructure for distributed, data-intensive and collaborative research. Odede (2013) states that the Internet offers a host of ideas, a broad array of information and engaging interactive opportunities to educators and students. Creating and disseminating information online has become possible and desirable with the help of more vibrant, social and participatory Web 2.0 tools (Anderson, 2007).

At the same time, it becomes increasingly critical for people to utilize various online information resources as a great deal of relevant information is available only on online resources. The internet and Web 2.0 technologies have had a large impact on the way students carry out research and disseminate research information among each other. Some of this information can be provided through subscription to online information resources, while a great deal is available free on the Internet. There is a general shift from using formal published sources of information towards gathering, analyzing and sharing open source information from the web, such as e-journals, e-data archives, e-manuscript, e-maps, e-books, e-magazines, e-thesis, World Wide Web, e-newspapers, e-research reports, and e-bibliographic databases (Sharma, 2009). Currently, the use of e-resources by university students is remarkable because higher institutions of learning around the world have setup E-archives and web base resources with searching facilities.

In addition to that users also preferred to use e-resources than printed resources. The use of online information resources encourages knowledge sharing among students and researchers. Magara (2002) opines that many university students rely on the web for their assignments, term papers, research and communication with their teachers. Students, through the web, exchange ideas and information which can help their academic activities. Fakolujo (2005) reports that electronic mail (e-mail) over the Internet enables one to overcome many barriers to communicate due to geographic distance such as time, costs and language'. In this new technological environment, academic members as well as students of higher institutions use an increasing array of electronic information resources, including online databases, OPACs, e-conference materials, e-mail,

full-text databases, e-books and scholarly websites (Jirojwong and Wallin, 2002). The use of these resources is vital for academic and research activities because of its ability to provide users with timely, easy to access and, up-to-date information. For instance, ScienceDirect which is a database that houses e-books adequately supports researches in the fields of natural science, medicine, engineering, food science and social studies, enabling users to access up-to-date information in the sciences.

The growth of research in all fields of human endeavour is becoming increasingly detailed and sophisticated, the use of online information resources by students have become inevitable. The importance of online information resources cannot be over emphasized. Ellis and Oldman (2005) state that though online information resources replace the traditional library, it enables users to retrieve materials easily from remote sites. Students, especially those in the universities use the electronic information resources for various academic purposes. These purposes include; doing class assignments, writing term papers, augmenting class works, retrieving current literature for studies, following blog discussions on subject area of interest, searching for scholarship opportunities, searching for internship placement and for research purposes.

Steven (2003) notes that undergraduates find online resources useful in completion of class assignments and sourcing materials for their research projects that usually require various types of sources and references. Dilevik and Gottlieh (2002) investigate the advantages of online resources to students. According to their findings, online resources are very vital as it enhance learning. Urquhart and Rowley (2007) point out that online information resources has many functions and benefits which can be of immense use to students in schools and educational sectors, particularly research institutions. They note that once the information user is connected to the internet, the user can link up with any part of the world to access a wide range of online information resources. Oyedum (2007) outlines some benefits of the use of online information resources to undergraduates to include:

i.   Making information and data transfer available to users.
ii.   Serving as motivating factor to students as it provide them the opportunity to transmit, acquire or download, process and disseminate information on a subject of interest.
iii.   Enabling the user to select only information needed to solve a specific problem.
iv.   Opening up the possibility of searching multiple files at one time, a feat accomplished more easily than when using printed equivalence.
v.   Giving access to a wider range of information.
vi.   Giving access to current and up to date information.
vii.   Making information available all the times.
viii. The ability to work from any location.

ix.   Making information available in one place.
x.   The diversity of resources provided and the availability of resources that students would not have access to otherwise.

Tenopir (2003) explains that students believe online resources improve the quality of their papers by allowing them to spend less time in the research phase and more time in the writing phase. Online resources also result in students obtaining more resources, a diversity of resources, and more up to date resources. Many previous works demonstrate that online information resources are important for undergraduate students' information seeking (Dalgleish and Hall, 2000, Becker, 2003, Drabenstott, 2003, Mittermeyer and Quirion, 2003, Kerins, Madden and Fulton, 2004). More recently, the Electronic Publishing Initiative at Columbia (EPIC) (2004) reveals that electronic resources have become the primary tool for students' information gathering and that undergraduate students in particular heavily depend on the web. Students use the internet's free online information resources rather than the library's print resources due to the convenience of access to online information resources. Colon-Aguirre, Freberg and Allard (2011) study the perception and uses of Google Scholar among undergraduate students for their coursework and research assignments. Their results show that many students used Google Scholar for their classes and were satisfied with the information they gathered through the search engine.

However, effective information searching and access to the wide range of online information resources by students is of major concern to information practitioners. Within the context of various disciplines, successful information literacy programs require an individual to be able to define a problem; initiate a plan to find information; locate and access resources; use the information; synthesize the information; and carry out some forms of evaluation (Ojedokun, 2007). Amalahu, Oluwasina and Laoye (2009) note that such skills include; library literacy, computer literacy, research literacy, and critical thinking skill. These skills are important in the use of online information resources because of the proliferation of information presently experienced as a result of series of developmental activities in this 21st century.

There are a number of problems facing student's use of online information resources. Baro, Benake ebide and Ubogu (2011) state that problems affecting the use of information resources by students in Nigerian universities libraries vary from availability of resources, management and administration as well as students' attitude and disposition. Chang (2006) observes that amongst such factors that militate against the use of online information technology in general in developing countries are problems of high cost of computers, inadequate and unreliable telephone network systems, shortage of man-power and lack of computer skills. Adeoye and Popoola (2011) point out that harsh economic condition in Nigeria makes it difficult for availability of computers. Salibury and Elli (2003) state that sometimes information users encounter difficultly in

downloading and retrieving materials, adding that electricity failure was another problem. Baro, Benake ebide and Ubogu (2011) identify some factors militating against the use of online information resources in Nigerian universities which are: Access to adequate and reliable electricity which services are restricted to urban centres, while most of our universities are usually situated in the rural areas. Aina (2004) also identifies high cost of ICT training that can improve the users' skills as another problem facing the use of online information resources. Ukachi (2013) notes that though the benefits derived from using EIRs are no longer debatable, some factors such as level of information literacy skill, attitude towards electronic resources use, computer self-efficacy, gender, and accessibility could affect the use of electronic information resources.

Akintola and Olayinwola (2004) report that in developing countries, acquiring the needed online information is problematic because of slow internet response, high cost of online services and lack of internet services in most libraries in Nigeria. Singh and Jindal (2009) highlight some problems limiting the use of online information resources by undergraduates to include: inadequate technological infrastructure. This refers to issues as poor or lack of national ICT policy, low internet connectivity, inadequate number of personal computers among others. Manda (2006) in his contribution says that internet access is now widely available, but the efficiency is poor as many libraries in Nigerian universities experience downtime several times a week.

The use of online information resources is of paramount importance to students in this 21st century. The current and up to date nature of online information resources have made it to become an excellent resource to students in universities and other higher institutions of learning where researches of various magnitude take place. Online information resources are regarded as the best channel for information retrieval for students research. The use of online information resources facilitate students learning in a more flexible ways but not free of challenges. From personal observation, some students deliberately avoid the use of online information resources as a results of the challenges associated with the use. Therefore, this study is to examine the benefits and barriers associated with students' use of online information resources.

The main purpose of this study is to examine the usage and perception of online information resources among students of Delta State University, Abraka, Nigeria with focus on the Library and Information Science Department. Specifically, the study is designed to:
1. Examine the students' frequency of online information resources usage.
2. Determine the students perceived benefits of using online information resources.
3. Examine the barriers encountered by students while using online information resources.

METHOD

The study adopted the descriptive survey method to enable the researcher pose a series of questions to the respondents. The justification for the adoption of this design according to Pickard (2013) is that it describes the situation and/or look at the trends and patterns within the sample group that can be generalized to the defined population of the study. The instrument used to collect data for this study is the questionnaire. The questionnaire was entitled: "Questionnaire on barriers and benefits of using online information resources (QBBUOIR)". It was divided into two sections. Section A was to elicit background information of respondents while section B was to elicit information on research questions formulated for this study. The targeted population for this study comprised all undergraduate students in the Department of library and Information Science, Delta State University, Abraka. Stratified sampling technique was employed thus breaking the population into four levels of studies. Random technique was used to select the 50 students from each stratum. Therefore, a sample of 200 respondents was randomly selected for this study. Statistical tools such as frequency count and simple percentage were used in analyzing the data collected. Pie charts were used to present the results.

RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

Figure 1 shows that 83(41.5%) participants are male, while 117(58.5%) are female. This shows that majority of the participants are female. Figure 2 shows that majority of the participants frequently make use of online information resources. 91(45.5%) make use of online resources daily; 73(36.5%) use online resources weekly; and 25(12.5 %) use online resources monthly. While only 11(5.5%) occasionally use online resources. Therefore, it could be interpreted that the undergraduate students under study frequently make use of online information resources. This confirmed a study by Udende and Azeez (2010) on 'Internet access and use among students of the University of Ilorin, Nigeria'. The study revealed that100 (26%) respondents used it daily, 178(46.2%) used the internet on weekly basis, while 107(27.8) used the facility ones in a while.
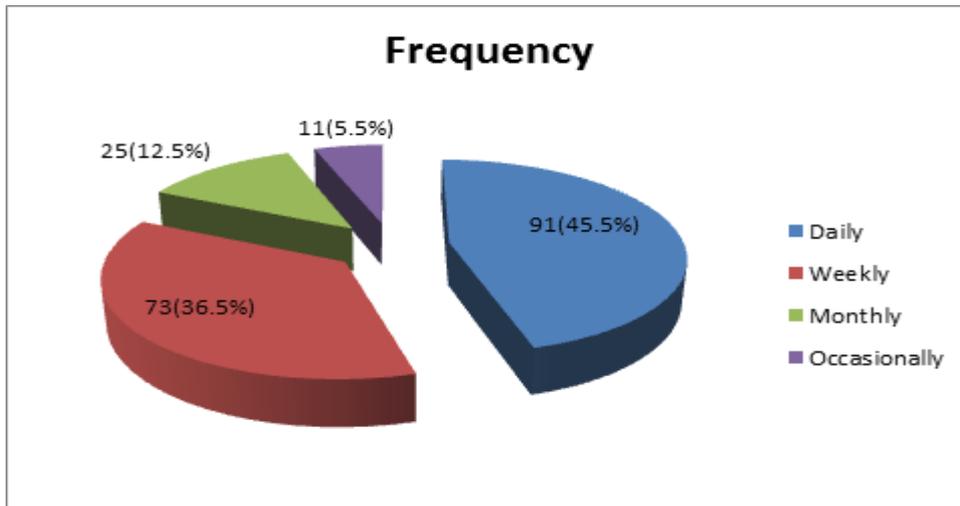
Table 1 reveals that online information resources are of great benefits to the students. This is evident in their responses to the benefits associated with their use of online information resources. 198(99.0%)are of the opinion that online information resources enable them have access to quality and up to date information. This finding corroborates Waithaka (2013) where access to quality and up-to-date information had the highest rate of responses, with 209 respondents (79.1%) indicating that internet had improved their academic work.While 196 (98.0%) and 194(97.0%) agreed that online information resources enable them have access to timely and relevant information and enhances knowledge sharing

respectively. From the responses, it could be inferred that online information resources are invaluable resources to the academic achievement of students. The findings also support Gbaje (2007), who emphasizes that online information resources facilitate access to relevant and current information for teaching, learning and research development.

Table 2 reveals that students encountered several barriers while using online information resources. Power failure was ranked the highest with 182(91.00%) followed by inadequate computer systems with 178(89.00%). Other barriers ranked high include lack of consistent technical support168(84.00%), slow speed of server 163(81.50%) as well as systems breakdown 161(80.50%). Table 3 also reveals that poor attitude towards the use of online information 78(39.00%), difficulties operating in online environments 82(41.00%) as well as difficulties in determining relevance of resources to information needs 88(44.00%) are not major barriers encountered by the students while using online information resources. This finding is in agreement with Baro, Benake ebide and Ubogu (2011), who note factors such as lack of skills needed to use online resources, ineffective user education programs, lack of time, slowness of the server, and fluctuation of electricity militate against students effective use of online information resources. The finding also agrees with the finding of Olasore and Adekunmisi (2015) who discover that power outage is the highest among other barriers. This finding is also similar to Ogbuiyi, Ogbuiyi and Oriogu (2014) findings that reveal that the challenges encountered in the use of computer and online searching are low speed access (mean=2.55) ranked highest in the mean score rating and was followed by Inadequate computer system in the library (mean=2.54), Internet service fluctuation (mean=2.52), Erratic power supply (mean=2.12), Frequent breakdown of the system (mean =2.03), Downloading of PDF files takes time (mean=1.83), Poor information literacy skill (mean=1.72) and lastly followed by unaware of where to locate needed information (mean=1.64).
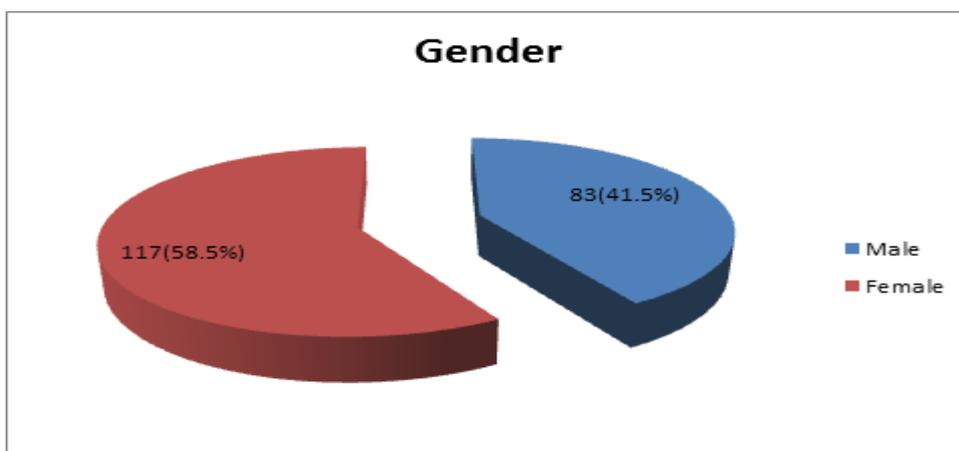
Figure 1: Distribution of Respondents by Gender (N=200)

Figure **2: Frequency of online information resources usage**

Table 1: Benefits of using online information resources

Benefits of using online information resources	Frequency	Percentage
Access to wider range of information	194	97.00
Access to quality and up-to-date information	198	99.00
Fast access to information	192	96.00
Access to timely and relevant information	196	98.00
Accuracy of information	186	93.00
Availability of information at all times	189	94.50
Enhances knowledge sharing	194	97.00
Enhances scholarly communications	182	91.00
Convenience	167	83.50
Access to reliable information	179	89.50

Source: Fieldwork, 2015

Table 2: Barriers encountered while using online Information Resources

Barriers	Frequency	Percentage
Inadequate computer systems	178	89.00
Slow speed of server	163	81.50
Power failure	182	91.00
System breakdown	161	80.50
Information over load	142	71.00
Limited knowledge of databases and their arrangement	102	51.00
Difficulties in evaluating online sources	98	49.00
Difficulties operating in online environments	82	41.00
Difficulties in determining relevance of resources to information needs	88	44.00
Difficulty in choosing search engines other than Google	108	54.00
Poor attitude towards the use of online information	78	39.00
Lack of consistent technical support	168	84.00

Source: Fieldwork, 2015

CONCLUSION AND RECOMMENDATIONS

The importance of online information resources to the academic achievement of undergraduate students in an academic environment cannot be overemphasized. It remains an invaluable resource that enable students have access to quality and up to date information and help facilitate students' access to relevant and current information as indicated in this study. The study also indicate that the students encountered some barriers during the use of online information resources such as power failure, inadequate computer systems, lack of consistent technical support among others. The study conclude that online information resources which encompass the wealth of learning resources and research data that are available in electronic format from online sources such as the World Wide Web, journal databases, library catalogues, course materials databases and unit websites etc are of immense benefits to students' academic performance. BAsed on this, it is proposed that:

1.   The University management should endeavour and ensure that adequate infrastructure are provided for students to access online information resources due to its numerous advantages over traditional print resources
2.   Students should be more encouraged to use online information resources frequently to enhance their academic performance.
3.   The University management should ensure there is constant power supply especially in areas where students access online information resources such as the library.
4.   Adequate computers systems should be provided to enable students' access online information resources at any point in time. Also, technical support should be given to students who might be in need at any time.

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