
Influence of Competitive Intelligence in the Promotion of Information Delivery in Agricultural Libraries in Ahmadu Bello University, Zaria

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ABSTRACT

This paper discusses the influence of competitive intelligence in the promotion of information delivery in Agricultural Libraries in Ahmadu Bello University, Zaria. Library and librarians' knowledge and adaptation of competitive intelligence in library service is considered a very important requirement for efficient and effective information delivery in libraries because a library is an essential element in the educational and research endeavour of research institute most especially a agricultural research institute that require painstaking research activities considering the needs for food self-sufficient and source for country income. Therefore, agricultural librarians should understand their clients' needs make the best use of their competitive intelligence, plan service provision, promote the available services, and deliver them efficiently and effectively. However, the paper discover that agricultural librarians are yet to maximize their potentials as information requirement in agricultural institutions

are becoming increasingly complex and competitive. The paper then concludes that agricultural librarians should acquire the technique and skill of competitive intelligence to promote information delivery services to agricultural libraries.

Introduction

Agriculture in the twenty-first century globally has been characterized and driven on business ethos. The agricultural institutions are faced with stiff competition in an attempt to increase agricultural product, also to enrolment students and agriculturalists to make the agricultural institutions a pioneer centres of excellence that will showcase outstanding research output for higher agricultural productivity. Therefore, librarians and information professionals knowledge and adaptation of competitive intelligence in library service is considered a very important requirement for efficient and effective service delivery in a library because a library is an essential element in the educational and research endeavour of research institute most especially a agricultural research institute that require painstaking research activities considering the effort for food sufficiency and raw materials for export. According to Abolarinwa and Yaya (2015) librarians and information professionals should understand their clients' needs make the best use of their competitive intelligence, plan service provision, promote the available services, and deliver them efficiently and effectively.

Jerome, Nkiko and Ifeakachuku (2017) stated that the nature of the collection of any agricultural library will define the information delivery services to the clientele. The Library collection is the hub of service delivery. A well stock and current collection incorporating both print and electronic resources will add value to the users. A balanced collection of resources that will meet and add value to information delivery to users must be balanced in terms of quantity, quality and format. The 21st century agricultural library that must be on top of competitors and gain more customers must deliberately and constantly acquire quality and quantity information resources that will attract and add value to

serve the users. Well stocked and integrated collection, accuracy, comprehensiveness, currency, reliability, validity are criteria for promoting information delivery to customers. (Mathews, 2013)

According to Hohhof (1994), librarians and information professionals have long enjoyed gatekeeper status in their organizations, providing service as intermediaries between information and the people who need it. However, the change in information sourcing, management practices, and organizational cultures are transforming the role of intermediary to one of enabler, providing the mechanisms to supply quicker and more direct access to information. Therefore, the value of Competitive Intelligence in modern information delivery cannot be overemphasized as a synergy to promote availability of intelligence critical for agricultural institutions libraries to remain or become truly globally competitive. According to Santos and Correia (2010) Competitive Intelligence can be seen as an information processing routine that looks forward to prepare the organization to compete (and win) in changing environments, whose dynamism is the result of systematic monitoring. Santos and Correia (2010) further maintain that the process of acquiring, and structuring information and knowledge are central as an activity within a broader planning process.

The practice of modern Agricultural Science can be enhanced through Competitive Intelligence to enable agricultural institutions to “identify new opportunities leading to innovation and ultimately benefiting the competitive status of the institution” (Havenga & Botha, 2000). Miller (1996) identified that the components of the intelligence process include identification of users and their needs, the collection and analysis of information and dissemination of intelligence to decision makers and for strategist. It becomes clear that Competitive Intelligence is a narrow activity in Information Science that sieve for relevant information from both primary and secondary sources to capture and communicate this information on a consistent basis with minimal cost. With the increasing need for information in agricultural institutions, information professionals are required to be competitive information leaders utilizing both Competitive Intelligence and Information Science to communicate information for strategic purposes and remain purposeful in their capacities.

Agricultural Research Institute Libraries: Agricultural research libraries as established under the auspices of agricultural research institute and are set aside for the use of students, agricultural scientists, researchers and practitioners in agriculture and related areas. The emphasis for the agricultural research libraries is the dissemination of specialized information primarily devoted to a special discipline, offering specialized services to specialized clientele. (Uganneya, Ape & Ugbagir, 2012). According to Rhoe, Oboh and Shelton (2010) the libraries support agricultural research by enhancing access to information through effective management of its resources and provision of wide range of information services to researchers, scientists and policy maker in agriculture sector.

The agricultural research institutes libraries are special libraries that are expected to acquire, organize, preserve, and disseminate information as well as to improve, stimulate and guide research in agriculture by coordinating the efforts of research findings in agriculture, setting in motion interaction and better working relation between producers and consumers of agriculture research. Uganneya, Ape and Ugbagir (2013) maintained that agricultural research libraries remain societal mechanisms designed essentially for the provision of needed information services and resources for high quality agricultural productivity. These libraries are mandated to provide information services for study and research activities that will enhance the provision of prompt solution to farmers' practical problem and raise farmers output, income and accelerate the drive toward national food self-sufficiency.

Essentially, information resources and services are provision with the aim of disseminating desirable information to information users; library and information professionals have to provide the range of resources and services. These resources and services should play important role in improving user's accessibility and utilization of library collection.

However, Ezeala and Yusuf (2011) noted that, it is pertinent to state that considering the mandates of agricultural research institute in a developing country, expectation of research libraries performance is high, frequent evaluation of library resources and service should not be compromised, research library evaluation would increase users utilization of information which in the past has been adjudged to be very low. Apart from supporting the management

with both immediate and strategic management information, research library evaluation would also help libraries understand their position within the cycle of information resources provided in the library. This would lead to effective and efficient information delivery to clientele.

Competitive Intelligence Concept

Competitive intelligence (CI) is a method of collecting, analysing and distributing information on the external environment in which an organization operates (Jin, 2011). Competitive intelligence “is the process by which organization systematically and legally collects, organizes, analyses and distributes information about its competitors or competitive environment in order to obtain or maintain competitive advantage on the market place” (Jin, 2011). Yap and Rashid (2011) defined competitive intelligence in terms of both a process and a product; they explained that as a process it involves the set of legal and ethical imperatives for collecting, analysing and disseminating actionable information relating to competitors, suppliers and customers. As a product, competitive intelligence is actionable information about the present and future behaviour of the competitor, customers, suppliers, technologies, government, market and general business environment (Vedder and Gugness, 2000). In the same way, Haliso and Aina (2012) define competitive approach in libraries as the ability to seek information from other counterpart’s libraries and make use of the information to provide quality services and be in a better position than others.

According to Makinde and Ogungbo (2015) Competitive Intelligence of libraries is the intelligentization activity process in which, in the drastically competitive survival and development environment, in order to maintain and win the competition advantages. The libraries thus legally collect, choose, analyse, synthesize, forecast and assess the information on the environment of competition, competitors and themselves, so as to form innovative, value added and monopolistic intelligence information products and provide decision foundation for the library to formulate strategy and tactics (Aiqui, 2012; Yali, 2013). It is vitally important to note that the library contain resources that help individuals to grow in the information business intelligence and also

academically, economically, socio-politically, psychologically and in all facets of life which lead to societal development.

Yap and Rashid (2011) discovered that organizations perceived the acquisition of competitive intelligence about customers to be the most important factor, followed by the competitors, technology and economics. This is a fact because organizations that must remain competitive in this globalized and twenty-first century business world must know their customers, their competitors, and the technology so as to have an edge over competitors. According to Yaya, Achonna and Osisanwo (2015) competitive intelligence can be summarize as an ongoing activity that gather intelligence with the aim to categorize it for dissemination to users in an easily interpreted form to influence decision-making. The concept of CI has its roots in marketing where it is commonly used to gather data to map marketing plans (Mangemba, 2011).

Libraries and Competitive Intelligence

Abdulsalami, Okezie and Agbo (2013) stated that the purposes of libraries have been changing over times becoming more faceted and multifarious. This modern concept of the library makes it defy the definition given to it in the earlier times. Libraries are not institutions/building/warehouses/stores etc. of materials, but are agents of educational, social, economic and political changes that are without boarder. Library are entrusted with the acquisition, organization, preservation, storage, retrieval and dissemination of information in whatever format it might appear.

According to Yali (2013) competitive intelligence is an overall detection process for the whole competitive environment in the progress, the information on the strengths, weakness and purpose of commercial activity in business competition is collected and analysed through legal means. Currently, competitive intelligent has already become the international recognized fourth production factor following the technology, capital and talent. Haliso (2014) stated that competitive intelligence is very useful in library and information work where it is seen as the process of ethically collecting, analysing and disseminating accurate, relevant, specific, timely, foresighted and actionable intelligence regarding the implication of business environment, competitors and the organisation. Hence competitive intelligence can be applied to libraries for

best performance in the 21st century. Rubin (2004) observe that intelligence gathering take place in different areas which include information on competitors, newly discovered scientific and technological development, new products, services, regulations mergers, acquisitions, information on customers, suppliers and experts. Gathered intelligence has to be located where it will be of optimal benefit to an establishment therefore one find that competitive intelligence is being applied to various section of library's work for competitive advantage. For example, in the area of library management, the benchmark for library information work in agricultural libraries in developed nations can be obtained through intelligence gathering and Nigeria agricultural libraries can use such intelligence to take decision that will move their libraries forward. This can be done through gathering information on the library website, following the publication of their professional association and following the research publication of the approved library. Also, competitive intelligence can be deployed in the selection and acquisition of current and relevant information resources authored by renowned scholars and experts in the various fields of knowledge relevant to agricultural libraries and other general reading materials. Through competitive intelligence, agricultural librarians in Nigeria can get informed about the various promotional activities the libraries can engage in in order to make library practice attractive to their reading public.

Promotion of Information Delivery in Agricultural Libraries

Promotion is the main push button to accomplish the aim of library and librarians. Promotion in library is the coordination of all library initiated efforts to set up channels of information and persuasion to deliver library information resources and services or promote an idea. According to Yi (2016) promotional tools that can be used by academic libraries to promote their services and resources include: digital media, such as the library's Website, e-mail lists, blogs and podcasts; print materials, such as posters, hand-outs and giveaways; events such as orientation tours and workshops; and other tools such as library publications, contests, brochures, direct mail, Web 2.0 applications and displays (Mathews, 2009). A good Website helps to bring services and resources together in a unique way, because it is a direct link between the library and its specific users (for example students and academics) and the services it is

seeking to promote. It also provides a channel for communication with target clients. Some media can be cross functional; for example, traditional tools, such as flyers, brochures and posters, can be used to promote events and programmes, which are promotional tools in themselves. Newsletters can introduce new developments as well as highlight current services. Target audiences can be easily and effectively targeted through e-mail lists and the Internet. These services are cost effective, as they require little investment in resources and reach the intended client directly.

A variety of techniques has been used to promote library services and resources. Nkanga (2002) found that promotional techniques such as personal contacts, circulars, memos, telephone calls, meetings, direct mailing, displays, talks, newsletters, library tours and leaflets were widely used. The tools used for promotion were reviewed and the promotion activities of the studied department's information products were described by Cummings (1994). Many forms of techniques such as a combination of outreach programmes, holding lectures, changing library exhibits, library tours, classroom instruction, one-on-one appointments, library homepage, online catalogue and one-on-one training were suggested to promote library services and resources (Dodsworth, 1998).

To keep pace with evolving information technologies, librarians use a group of software applications including blogs, wikis and podcasting, media-sharing tools such as YouTube and Flickr, and social networking services such as Twitter and Facebook (Yi, 2014) to market their services and resources with mixed success. Blogs and wikis, as well as social networking and information sharing sites such as Facebook, Flickr and YouTube, create new types of content. Information professionals use tools such as RSS (Really Simple Syndication), tagging and bookmarking as a means of promotion. YouTube is a video sharing site which allows people around the world to communicate and interact, making it a distribution point for user-created content (You Tube, 2015). Kho's paper (2011), which explores social media use for customer engagement, substantiates the successful use of YouTube to market the library's collection. YouTube also enables users to embed videos in other Web 2.0 tools, such as Facebook, blogs and wikis. Flickr is a photo sharing website which allows users to store, sort, search and post photographs and to create discussion groups. Besides posting materials for promotion purposes, information

professionals can post photos of the organization and staff to provide a virtual tour of their agency. Twitter is social networking tool that is becoming increasingly popular, because of its ability to showcase interesting events, features or news in 140 characters or less.

The Needs for Competitive Intelligence

Sewdass (2009) cited Kahaner (1997) noted that the reasons why organisations need Competitive Intelligence (CI) have been identified by as follows:

- The pace of libraries are increasing rapidly and decisions need to be made faster and with fewer resources, hence institutions can keep pace with this new speed by means efficient management and CI
- Librarians and information professionals are faced with information overload, since information is traditionally regarded as power. However, information is of no value if it is not relevant, timely, accurate and reliable. CI has the capacity to analyse and evaluate the information gathered and to offer the most relevant, high quality and accurate information to users, thereby saving them the effort and time to sift through large quantities of information
- Libraries are faced with increased global competition from new competitors, since they are now part of information society, and their competition can emerge from anywhere in the world. CI can help libraries to identify these emerging competitors.
- Libraries' existing competition are becoming more aggressive, and this has resulted in the survival of the fittest' where information providers all compete for the same customers. CI can assist the library to forecast competitors' actions and allow them to be proactive, and take action before the situation becomes worse
- Political changes affect libraries either positively or negatively and all libraries need to ensure that they function within the ambit of these political changes. CI has the capability to keep libraries informed of political changes that affect their operations
- Rapid technological advancements can mean new opportunities for libraries. Keeping track of these changes in its own institution as well as other related institutions is essential for the survival of the libraries.

The above is by no means an exhaustive list of the reasons for the use of CI, but it provides libraries with sufficient motivation for ensuring that CI forms a part of their management processes. Furthermore, Bernhardt (2005) proposes that the executives in most institutions function in an intelligence vacuum, and that strategic planning is based on “gut feel” or “instinct.” Several unchallenged assumptions are made regarding certain situations and few mechanisms are available to coordinate and manage the delivery of accurate, relevant and timely intelligence about external threats or competitor capabilities, intents and plans that can benefit the organisation.

Benefits of CI in Libraries

Various benefits can be identified from the needs listed above. CI can do more than just provide the organisation with intelligence for decision-making purposes. A well designed CI system can assist the organisation in their strategic planning process as well as in determining the intention and capabilities of its competitors, so that the extent of the risk to which the organisation is exposed, can be established.

Gross (2000) confirms this by indicating that CI within an organization serves as a catalyst in the decision-making process. It also forms part of the value chain that takes data elements, converts these into actionable information, and results in strategic decisions.

The benefits of Competitive Intelligence (CI) for organisations are identified by Kahaner (1997) and Bernhardt (2005) as cited by Sewdass (2009) are as follows:

- Libraries that implement CI are rarely surprised by events that affect their services and performance since they are able to anticipate the changes the actions of their competitors and adjust their own activities accordingly in good time to outsmart the competition
- CI helps libraries to discover new or potential competitors and their activities in the marketplace
- Libraries learn from the successes and failures of others and, thus, save valuable time, money and resources

- Libraries are in a better position to increase the range and the quality of their future acquisitions, targets, mergers, and partnerships
- CI helps libraries learn more about new technologies, products and processes that affect them and so determine which are the most appropriate ones for their success
- Political, legislative and regulatory changes take place regularly and Libraries are not always aware of them. CI provides an opportunity for organisations to learn about any such changes that would impact their business operations
- Libraries deciding to enter into new knowledge and information society can benefit from CI, not only in their decision-making, but also by providing foreknowledge about the potential success (or otherwise) of these new ventures
- CI exposes the libraries to new ideas and concepts, thereby providing the opportunity to view the organisation in a new light, and with an open mind. It also forces the libraries to be more outwardly focused and not have a limited, internal focus on the Library
- Libraries, which have in the past failed to implement and sustain the latest management tools as a result of a lack of information, are now able to do so successfully as timely, accurate, unbiased, and valuable information is provided by CI
- CI reinforces the competitive culture in the organisation
- CI makes the libraries more aware of its need for counter-intelligence and information security.

A recent global study of CI in large companies that was conducted by the Global Intelligence Alliance (2005) revealed the following benefits that institutions claimed to have achieved through the use of CI:

- Increased quality of information received
- Accelerated decision making
- Improved systematically, in terms of information collection and analysis

- Improved effectiveness
- Increased awareness
- Improved dissemination of information
- Improved threat and opportunity identification
- Time and cost saving.

Challenges of Competitive Intelligence in Libraries

Competitive Intelligence (CI) involves the use of public sources to develop data on competition, competitors, and the market environment. It then transforms, by analysis, that data into intelligence. Public, in CI, means all information you can legally and ethically identify, locate, and then access. But unfortunately, with the trends in information management and the declining in funding of libraries presuppose that librarians/information managers need to re-strategize to meet their clientele needs so as to justify the money expended on them and the purpose for which they are set up. This application of knowledge acquired in the cause course of relating to their environment (competitive Intelligence) is highly desirable to bring about continuing operations and relevant to their organization. According to Sharma and Bhardwaj (2009), the challenges to library services from changes in educational approaches, the impact of technology, new methods for information provision and declining budgets have meant that marketing is now so essential that it cannot be considered a separate function.

Correia (2005) cited in Chisita (2011) observes that the new information driven society presents insurmountable challenges to information professionals as they have to rebrand, redefine their roles and titles, developing skills and identifying functions and tasks to adopt and eliminate, developing relationships with different categories of clients and colleagues, establishing a new process and gathering and applying new resources and techniques. In support of this assertion Makinde and Ogungbo (2015) stressed that there are still many information workers in Nigerian agricultural libraries who lack the necessary technological skills needed to operate fully in the automated library environment.

The internet are used to promote library services and the techniques used to promote library Website. Agricultural libraries have undergone a

comprehensive and wide-reaching transformation in how they create, use and maintain scholarly materials, and have become providers of electronic resources as well as places in which physical collections can be accessed and used. However, the epileptic electricity supply in Nigeria is affecting the operations of library services in many agricultural libraries as they cannot afford to fuel their generators regularly for Internet operations and conducive atmosphere in the libraries through the use of electric fan and air conditioners (Oluseye & Abraham, 2013).

Conclusion

The need for competitive intelligence for the promotion of information delivery in agricultural libraries cannot be over emphasized because agricultural institution libraries use intelligence to compare themselves to other agricultural institution libraries to identify risks and opportunities hence it is very critical for agricultural libraries to stay abreast of changing in information society by taking the right decision at the right time. Competitive intelligence approach in librarianship will indeed go a long way to meet the current trend in information service to library users and this will enhance the relevance of the profession and promote service delivery in libraries. It therefore means that more attention should be paid to competitive intelligence in library services which will invariably enhance and promote information delivery in libraries for effective and efficient library services.

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