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## Competitive Intelligence and Improving Patronage of the Twenty First Century Academic Libraries in Nigeria

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# Competitive Intelligence and Improving Patronage of the Twenty First Century Academic Libraries in Nigeria

## Abstract

*The paper discussed the employment of competitive intelligence for improving patronage of the 21<sup>st</sup> century academic libraries. It explored literature on; the concept of competitive intelligence, characteristics of the twenty first century academic library, attributes of competitive advantage in academic libraries and competitive intelligence activities in Nigerian academic libraries. It was discovered that funds and the necessary skill-sets were required for an academic library to develop to the point of having a competitive edge over other libraries. Also literature revealed that only few libraries especially private university libraries were already treading the path of gaining the competitive advantage for attracting increased patronage. The paper concluded that having competitive advantage is a function of better application of knowledge gained through competitive intelligence as a major factor for staying relevant and be able to attract the 21<sup>st</sup> century academic sophisticated library clientele. Also adequate provision of funds for innovation and upscale facilities and services is key to attracting patrons. Therefore, it was recommended that library and information science professionals should seek ways of generating funds apart from library subventions and be knowledgeable about their users, they should be sensitive to their environment as well as brace up to the changes taking place in their internal and external environments by acquiring relevant skill-sets and deploy both traditional, non-traditional (ICT) and creative/innovative methods to meet the highly specialized information needs of users thereby attracting more patrons while they strive to acquire some facilities that beautify and make the environment inviting and conducive.*

**Keywords:** Competitive Intelligence, Competitive Advantage, Academic Libraries, Library Patronage, Librarians, 21<sup>st</sup> Century Library

## **Background**

The twenty first century academic libraries are characterised by the deployment of Information Communication Technology (ICT) and varied kinds of electronic information resources that can be accessed anywhere and anytime on a personal computer through the internet with a click of the button thus becoming libraries without walls. Consequently, the physical library building may almost be deserted because of available information in the electronic format. This is such that clichés like “I don’t have to go to the library to have my information needs met” and “what we have now is libraries without walls” have become common place in our academic communities. The prevailing situation where persons assume that they do not need the physical library anymore is far from the expected. Libraries are supposed to be patronized due to the rich resources they hold both in print and electronic format. Staying away from the physical library owing to unlimited access to e-resources is tantamount to a neglect of great cultural heritage that lies in print and other formats.

More so, statistics show that the largest libraries of the world are hybrid of which a sizable portion of their holdings are in print format requiring users to visit the libraries in order to use them. Vey and Althaus (2013) opined that libraries requires more than e-resources, stressing that digital libraries are well and good, as well as the traditional libraries and that librarian will attest to the fact that libraries are far from being old-fashioned, and farther from being irrelevant to the modern era as both the physical and electronic libraries complement each other. He concluded that information professionals must strive to bring this view and message to the public. Therefore, libraries and librarians need to think outside the box, re-imagine the conventional idea of what constitutes a library and carry out a repositioning of operations to remain relevant in the society thereby continuing to attract high patronage. Nevertheless, in this age of information overload only successful employment of Competitive Intelligence (CI) can make it happen.

Competitive intelligence involves identification of a need to be at the top, the lawful collection of information on competitors and the entire business environment and making strategic moves to meet the need. Presently, CI has become a veritable instrument for achieving the competitive advantage over competitors (Davis, 2004). The knowledge gained from competitive intelligence endeavors are analyzed, and used to take decisions that enhances the organization’s own

competitiveness. Thus this paper will be discussing how to promote patronage in the twenty first century academic library by employing competitive intelligence. To put this in proper perspective therefore, it shall explore literature on; the concept of competitive intelligence, characteristics of the twenty first century academic library, attributes of competitive advantage in the libraries parlance, competitive intelligence activities in Nigerian academic libraries and the way forward.

## **THEORETICAL BASIS OF THE PAPER**

### **Total Quality Management Theory (TQM)**

The theoretical framework of this study is underpinned on the fact that Quality is a competitive priority for any organization/library that must make impact and add value to users. Total Quality Management (TQM) theory is one that explains the fact that quality in an organization's operations and services will result in value-added services to the customers or users. Psychogios and Priporas (2007) described TQM as the mutual co-operation of parties in an organization and related business processes to create products and services that is hoped to meet and or exceed the expectations and needs of customers. TQM is a set of values as well as a management guiding ideologies for administration in organisations. TQM theory Demings (1980) postulates that the best way to enhance organizational productivity is to continually improve performance and quality improvement as a task is a continuous activity that has no end. Thus, the emphasis is on looking for enhancement opportunities, not just maintaining the status quo. The focus is on planning, prevention and anticipation (Psychogios & Priporas, 2007).

### **Relevance of this Theory to the Study**

Quality is the basis for patronage which culminates in value that accrues services to users. Any academic library that must remain relevant and be above its competitors must ensure that their personnel, operations and services to users are of utmost quality. TQM theory addresses these pertinent issues, as it posits that quality processes in organization or library will create products and services, which meet and or exceed the expectations and needs of customers not precluding

other stakeholders. This actually is the concept of increased patronage in library and information centres.

### **Concept of Competitive Intelligence**

Competitive Intelligence is a critical topic in the business world thus; there has been series of training courses, seminars, workshops and books since 1980. SCIP (2000) and Miller (2000) posited that CI is one of the top emergent disciplines in the US. Nevertheless, the concept of CI is somewhat indistinct, as many definitions of CI in existing literature are not precise and often mixed with other related concepts such as competitor intelligence and business intelligence. Theorists and Practitioners agreed on a definition of CI even though, consensus about several parts of the function have been realized. Fuld and Co, a high profile CI consulting firm, defined the concept based on its functions, employing a holistic approach. Thus, “competitive intelligence can mean many things to many people. A research scientist sees it as being ahead of a competitor’s new R&D initiatives. A salesperson considers it as an insight on how his or her company should bid against another firm in order to win a contract. A senior manager perceives competitive intelligence to be a long-term position over its rivals” (Fuld & Co, 2002).

The Society for Competitive Intelligence Professionals (SCIP), defined competitive intelligence as a systematic and ethical program for gathering, analyzing, and managing external information that can affect your company’s plans, decisions, and operations. In essence, CI is the process of improving competitiveness in the marketplace through a greater and unequivocal ethical understanding of the business’ competitors and the competitive environment” (SCIP, 2002). CI can also be defined as actionable information and foreknowledge of the external environment in which a business operates. The paramount goal of any competitive intelligence process therefore, is to aid accurate decision-making that will culminate in fruitful action. Competitive intelligence can be seen as a formalized, as well as ever evolving process by which the management team of an organization evaluates the progress of its operations and the abilities and performance of its existing and possible competitors in order to develop and or maintain a competitive edge (Prescott and Gibbons, 1996). According to Mutongi and Chiwanza (2016), CI practitioners believe that some returns on CI programs include the following:

- ❖ Influence actions of decision-makers
- ❖ Address early warning signals
- ❖ Identify new opportunities
- ❖ Exploit competitor vulnerabilities
- ❖ Share ideas
- ❖ Better serve the company's customers

Prescott and Bhardwaj (1995) cited by Mutongi and Chiwanza (2016) argued that these benefits are directly identifiable, although there are no quantitative measures to support them. Better market position and profits/revenue may not be directly identifiable since they are not certain effects. Consequently, they belong to the category of bottom-line measures, which are more often than not the most generally requested. Mutongi and Chiwanza, (2016) opined that Simon and Blixt, tried to measure these uncertain effects and described the important issues to address when taking into consideration uncertain outcomes or economic benefits of a CI program to include:

- ❖ Quality, relevance, timelines
- ❖ Accuracy of intelligence
- ❖ Accuracy of data in analysis
- ❖ Increasing number of clients and additional business from current clients
- ❖ Business success and performance measured by industry benchmarking

It should be noted that CI brings the state of business to the fore, reveals the unknown, and guides on how to deal with existing market situation. It helps identify risks and market opportunities early and thereby acting promptly. Good competitive intelligence provides accurate and objective knowledge especially at unpredictable and periods of crises. Also, through CI organizations can gain control over the future of businesses.

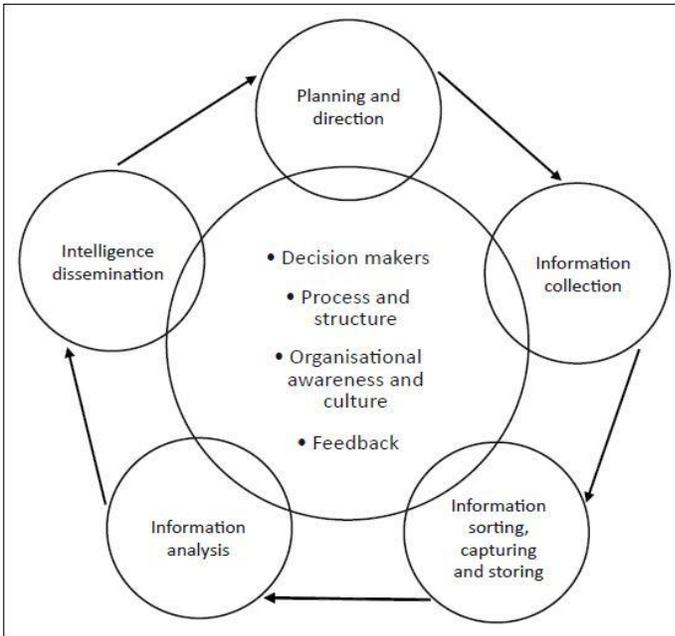


FIGURE 1: Competitive intelligence process model.

*Adapted from Pellissier and Nenzhelele (2013)*

From the figure above, it is implied that the CI process comprises of monitoring the business environment (information, knowledge and external data), gathering, sorting, analyzing, filtering and disseminating findings (intelligence) that supports decision making process thereby increasing competitiveness and improving the position of organizations. Consequently, there will be adequate decision making and great processes and structure (Mutongi and Chiwanza 2016; Society of Competitive Intelligence Professionals, 2008). Some examples of CI are; background checks, competitor assessments, benchmarking, network analysis, war-gaming and won-loss analysis. Moreover, CI is a very important aspect of the knowledge economy which entails careful analysis of rivals and the overall marketplace to enable libraries and organizations anticipate effectively, market developments and take timely action (Taib et al., 2008; McGonagle and Vella, 2012).

### **Characteristics of the Twenty First Century Academic Library**

The 21<sup>st</sup> century library is characterized by continuous changes in routines and operations therefore; the environment places a premium on speed, flexibility, and the ability to lead in uncertain situations. Jantz (2012) stated that during the last half of the 20th century, many researchers and practitioners claimed that academic libraries are bound to make dramatic changes or face the possibility of being marginalized.

Cronin, (2010) noted at the session of an online information conference, that reference queries, reference transactions and circulation activities in libraries have been steadily decreasing in recent years and libraries are progressively getting less and less of universities' budgets, especially in the current financial crisis. One of the issues that arise from this is staffing. Libraries sometimes spend almost half their budget on staff which often results in duplication of effort.

Cronin, (2010) then predicted that the 21<sup>st</sup> century academic libraries are going to be zones of sanctuary and security where people can be networked and work together. He envisaged a re-conceptualised space that will be a combination of coffee shop, book shop and speed dating centre, with core materials and off site stores. He also predicted greater cooperation between libraries beyond the normal consortia deals noting that libraries need to understand what users want and embrace available opportunities to meet the needs; he argued that students want materials that are virtual and personalised. We need to get materials into the palms of users hands and get the library brand out there to compete with Google and new services like ChaCha.

Presently, emerging information technologies are increasingly being deployed to libraries thus, Many libraries are effectively using mobile Apps, Twitter, telegram, flickr, group chats google plus, etc., while some libraries have developed applications that enable users to search catalogues from within Facebook.' others use text and instant messaging alerts, QR codes, social bookmarking applications devices such as e-book readers and iPods to mention a few while the physical space is constantly being transformed to improve users' experiences.

According to Abubakar, and Isa (2018), Great and vibrant libraries are now measured by the level of automation, Internet connectivity, and accessibility to other libraries on real time basis, subscription to reputable online databases as well as quality of collections. Thus, information and communication technology (ICT) has become a defining parameter in delineating libraries. The ones that are fully ICT driven are regarded as modern while those manually-driven are termed traditional. The current global standard is that libraries should thrive on the application of technologies in their quest for excellent service delivery. To disregard leveraging this benchmark is to accept becoming moribund and irrelevant.

The rapid and seemingly unpredictable changes in the library and information profession have put the twenty-first century librarians in an unprecedented apprehension, due to the growing and stern competition from other information providers and companies like Google. It is therefore a critical and defining period for the LIS professionals and Librarians as they are expected to grow their leadership competencies and skills to cope with the emerging changes in libraries. However, the extent to which libraries will adapt to technologies and mainstream to global standards would be a reflection of its competitive advantage.

### **Attributes of Competitive Advantage in Academic Libraries**

Competitive advantage of a library is the edge it has over its competitors, such as other libraries and information providers which enables it to attract more preference, greater patronage and/or retain more clients than those competitors. Considering the fact that we are in the information age, the library is faced with enormous responsibility of attracting patrons. According to Yaya, Achonna and Osisanwo (2014) the extant information driven economy possesses overwhelming challenges for information experts as there is the need to redefine, rebrand their roles and titles, develop skills and identify roles to take on or eliminate, develop relationships with varied categories of patrons and contemporaries and establish a new process of acquiring resources.

Based on the foregoing therefore, information professionals must identify attributes or innovations that will distinguish their libraries from others and attract increased patronage thereby constituting competitive advantages for the libraries. These characteristics can be broadly categorized into quality of resources, organization of resources, service delivery, and the library ambience. Saloner, Sherpard and Podolny (2011:21) opined that every firm faces real or potential competitors; therefore, it must have a convincing reason to hope and believe that it will be able to compete effectively against them. Competitive advantage connotes high performance in a library that will culminate in advantage over competitors. Consequently, a library will be more successful if its source of competitive advantage is inimitable. Some unique attributes in this regard are; deployment of a viable web-based library software, Radio frequency identification/self-service machine, provision of a library App, deployment of quick response code (QR code), use of liaison librarian, provision of study carrels, group discussion rooms, unplugged zones, creative commons, coffee bar, photo gallery, advanced awareness programmes, online selective dissemination of

information and installation artificial intelligence, training and retraining of library staff to mention but a few.

The use Information Communication Technology (ICT) is a major characteristic of the twenty first century for achieving efficiency and effectiveness. Thus, deployment of viable web-based library software becomes inevitable for gaining a competitive edge among the committee of libraries. Web-based library software will attract more patronage as the library could be accessed from anywhere there is internet access in the world. For instance, a user can access the library catalogue from home or otherwise and know if a needed information material is available in the library or not. This will definitely increase patronage because if the needed material is available, the user will visit the library to consult same. In essence, a library with limited access will result in reduced patronage.

Embracing Library 2.0 and Web 2.0 or 3.0 to enable external community-based input, discussions, interaction, content sharing and collaboration is highly necessary for gaining the competitive edge over other libraries. This is made possible through social media and applications which include; social networking, micro-blogging, forums, wikis and social curation. Web 2.0 applications cuts across geographical boundaries thus, users can share and publish information across borders. The library could also market itself as well as place advertisement on web 2.0 thereby reaching out to different patrons and new clients globally. Librarians should endeavor to use web 3.0 which is transformational in the way library services are delivered to library users (Mutongi and Chiwanza, 2016). This way, the library space becomes more interactive, collaborative and community needs driven. There is also constant feedback from the client as well as suggestions for improvement via this avenue.

In addition, the deployment of facilities that makes for easy services such as Radio Frequency Identification (RFID) and self-service machines will encourage users who feel that librarians are difficult people to patronize the library. The Radio Frequency Identification, identifies every entrant into the library by mere swiping of the ID card on the machine while the self service machine component will enable clients to return resources on loan without having to come to the

circulation desk. All that is required is for the user to swipe his or her ID card across the lens of the machine and slip the materials into the safe deposit box and walk away.

The use of liaison librarians is another way of increasing library patronage. This entails the attachment of subject specialists to departments and colleges. The liaison librarians work closely with the lecturers and students to give them awareness, orientation and desired support. The liaison librarians practically take the library to the users where they are, may be busy and are not able to visit the library. They attend departmental meetings, asks question about the information needs of the staff, collect and collate their reading lists as well as their research interest areas in order to serve them adequately. This way, the library is patronized without prior intensions.

Privacy is a major avenue for preventing distractions in an independent learning environment such as the library. Thus, provision of study carrels or single study rooms will attract students and lecturers, who seek a most secluded place for their studies.

Another critical characteristic that would encourage patronage of the library in this age is the provision of Group Discussion Rooms (GDR). Sometimes users want to discuss but the traditional library does not permit it. However, with the provision of sound proof GDR, with facilities like white board, good seats and a round table, dozens of users especially students will flood the library.

The creative commons is a development in the modern library that avail users the opportunity to escape from the conventional mode of learning in absolute silent environment to leisure learning atmosphere. It is characterized by comfortable seats, television set that is connected to a decoder and DVD player. In this arena, users learn consciously and unconsciously in course of relaxing and ventilating their memories. The creative commons have proven to attract clients to the library from the experience of libraries that have adopted same, such as Hunt library in the University of North Carolina, University of Jos Nigeria, and Covenant University, Nigeria to mention but a few.

Contrary to the traditional library rule of non-admittance of edibles, coffee bar where users can refresh with light coffee, tea and snacks are becoming features of the 21<sup>st</sup> century library which has the ability to attract users to the library. However, this requires a great deal of environmental

management to ward off rodents and insects. In addition, photo gallery (information in pictorial format) is another feature of the new age library that could attract users thereby giving it a competitive edge over others.

Extension and outreach services are activities geared towards meeting information needs of the less privileged and rural population with the aim of creating awareness of library and information resources, and encouraging the development of good reading culture and delivering valuable information to them (Nkiko and Iroaganachi, 2015). According to Ijirigho (2011), library outreach programmes are methods of rendering library services to disadvantaged persons and the rural areas where there is dearth of valuable information (under-served, people with special needs and non-users). Well orchestrated library outreach programme have great potential to improve the quality of lives of people in our communities. Cabello and Butler (2017) opined that librarians have the ability to go into communities and engage them, as well as render specific targeted services which define what a library should be to any community. Libraries need to bridge the information gap by working in partnership with communities and institutional partners to create and promote services. Extension and outreach programmes are great avenues for competitiveness as they help libraries to take the resources and services to the users who need same. Engaging in library outreach is a way for libraries to demonstrate their values and exemplify their usefulness and relevance within communities (Graves, LeMire, Mastel & Farrel 2018). This is competitive advantage.

“Online and analogue” selective dissemination of information is another important activity of the library that allows those who cannot come physically to the library to continue to patronize same. For instance, a professor whose research profile is in the library and receives needed information materials will always cherish and desire to receive such services at all times. More so an internet savvy client will be appreciative of getting needed information in electronic format which is easily accessible and utilized.

Holding quality, comprehensive, current resources with diverse coverage in a library are major tools for competitiveness in this knowledge economy. Consequently, librarians need to acquire resources in different formats to be able to attract patrons. A library that desires to have a competitive advantage must hold print and electronic resources such as hard copy books, journals,

reference materials, magazine, monographs, Government publications and their electronic versions. It should be noted that in acquiring these resources, the librarian will not just single handedly in his/her office select and get these materials but carry the major immediate community of its clients (i.e. students, faculty and staff) along in executing this significant task.

Information literacy programme is focused on achieving competence for using the library resources, computer networks and technologies. McClure (1994) described information literacy as the ability to locate, process, and use information effectively regardless of delivery mechanisms and the type of format in which that information appears; that is, to be literate, one must be literate in both print and electronic formats. Durodolu and Ocholla (2016) defined information literacy as effective use of ICT to acquire information, which requires the use of computer, network, media, visual and library literacy including critical thinking ability to enable the proper evaluation and ethical use of information. In view of the foregoing, academic libraries must promote programmes that help users to acquire skills that will enable them search for information independently on any aspect of knowledge by employing both conventional and electronic techniques of accessing information. They should also engage in the training and not just emphasizing it in order to increase patronage.

Organizing research clinics by libraries is another way of gaining a competitive advantage over other libraries. Research clinics entail sundry trainings that were not captured in all the terms that have been used in this discourse. It is a platform for diagnosing prevailing scholastic challenges in the immediate user community and prescribing or providing appropriate solutions to same. For instance, there is a strong wave of plagiarism across campuses in Nigeria which has become obvious due to the adoption of turn-it-in and other plagiarism check techniques. Therefore, any academic library that is worth its salt will seize the opportunity to educate different segments of its clients on how not to fall victim of the offence thereby maintaining its relevance and attracting more patrons. Other prevailing issues are the use of special tools such as Mendeley and Zotero for citations, references and protection of copyright laws etc.

The fact that ICT is highly necessary for gaining a competitive edge in library and information profession cannot be overemphasised. Information and communication technology does not only affect how library activities are performed but occasions seamless information flow, it also greatly

enhances the library's ability to exploit linkages between activities on the delivery of information both within and outside the library (Mutongi and Chiwanza, 2016). Thus, library users are assured of saving time when searching for information since the available resources will be of high quality. If this is the case, such a library will be greatly patronized as its information retrieval and dissemination system is easier coupled with an environment that is conducive.

### **Competitive Intelligence Activities in Nigerian Academic Libraries**

The present state of academic libraries in Nigeria is the same as most parts of the world as increase in access to ICTs make retrieval of information from the internet very easy. Many members of the academic community subscribe to electronic materials in addition to what they get on Google, Yahoo and other open access sources consequently patronage is not as expected, leaving libraries to employ competitive intelligence for attracting patrons. However, it is evident from the discussions above that the deployment of facilities that gives the competitive advantage comes with some financial implications. Yet a major challenge in Nigeria academic libraries in recent times has been that of funding (cut in budget) (Iroaganachi, Durodolu, and Omatseye 2016). Therefore many libraries are struggling to subscribe to and or maintain an open source library software. Rilwanu (2014) purported that a critical limitation in automation and migration to new software is a non-cooperative attitude of policy makers and leaders in some institutions, as well as funding. According to Rilwanu, Nigerian government should provide more funding to procure ICTs and e-resources as they emerge. Apart from provision of meagre funds for Nigerian academic libraries, misappropriation of the little that is made available is another problem (Iroagnachi and Nkiko 2015).

Additionally, the necessary skillsets for operating an intelligent system is lacking in many Nigerian academic libraries. Nkiko (2014) posited that majority of academic libraries in the country are in a state that evoke a sense of struggling and survival phase of development which is characterised by survival instincts devoid of standards, ideals, values and ethics as a result of the helplessness of operators in the ICT environment thereby living in a mentality of justifiable mediocrity. Yaya and Uzohue (2016) affirmed that the skills required for a competitive process which Nigerian librarians must develop include; Communication skills, Technical skills, Conceptual skills, Human

skills, Time management skills, Presentation skills, Planning skills, Organizing skills, Controlling skills and Decision Making. Nevertheless, a number of academic libraries particularly in privately owned institutions have begun to operate in this direction such as Covenant University Ota and Babcock University Ilishan Libraries to mention but a few.

### **Conclusion and way forward**

Having the competitive advantage over competitors is basically focused on being competitive intelligent in the application of information or knowledge in the quest to making the library generally attractive to patrons in all facets of its operations. Therefore, library and information science professionals should employ creative and innovative ways in response to identified environmental gap, to attract and meet diverse information needs of users. This is particularly important because the work environment is becoming more and more competitive and complex. Academic libraries must brace up to the changes in their external environments. This will enable students, faculty, researchers and staff of institutions of higher learning to have speedy access to high quality, accurate, current and reliable information for timely and well-informed decisions. Information experts need to use non-traditional (ICT) and innovative methods to meet the highly specialized information needs of the present day users thereby attracting more patrons in addition to provision of traditional library services.

More so, there is the need for continuous improvement of libraries to remain relevant in this competitive era while striving to acquire some facilities that beautify and make the environment inviting and conducive. Above all, government and proprietors of tertiary institutions need to cooperate with librarians by making funds available for laudable endeavours. Libraries can only achieve a competitive advantage by becoming attractive and good place for clients while ensuring that there is utmost effectiveness and efficiency in all their operations. However, it must be noted that adequate scenario management is the watch word for every innovation in the library system.

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