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July 2012

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Nwosu, Obiora and Anyira, Isaac, "The Use of Google and Yahoo by Internet Users in Nigeria" (2012).

Library Philosophy and Practice (e-journal). 779.

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The Use of Google and Yahoo by Internet Users in Nigeria

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Abstract

This paper investigated the use of Google and Yahoo in retrieving relevant information resources by Nigerian Internet users. It was found that Nigerians prefer the search services of Google to Yahoo. This is because with Google search engine, they are able to retrieve the exact information that they need; they obtain more relevant and adequate information resources than Yahoo; Google is easier to use than Yahoo; and Google retrieves faster than Yahoo. Most Nigerian Internet users have personal access through their mobile devices such as mobile phones, lap tops, palm tops etc. It was therefore recommended that Google should incorporate more Nigerian content to their knowledge base as most Nigerians depend on it to meet their information needs; while Telecommunication companies (such as Etisalat, MTN, Globacom, Airtel, Starcoms etc.) that offer Internet services to Nigerians should make their services more efficient as they have emerged as the major Internet service providers to Nigerians in the 21st century. Nigerian Internet users are expected to continually up-date their search engine skills as more and more advances are made in the field of information retrieval.

Introduction

The format of information-bearing resources is changing rapidly as more and more technological innovations emerge. With the introduction of the Internet and the World Wide Web, information has become more accessible than in the print regime, and it is now considered a key resource and asset in every aspect of life. Information resources available on the Internet include e-journals (current and archives), e-books, wiki resources, reports, web sites, newspapers, reference resources, virtual library resources etc. According to Grillon (1994) the entrance into the information age has had many impacts on our way of life. One of these impacts is the changes in information storage and retrieval. The jobs and functions performed by all and sundry are becoming increasingly information dependent (Grillon, 1994). Like the library, the Internet stores a large amount of information (in the form of web pages) in individual databases. According to Williams and Sawyer (2007) the Internet is the largest computer network connecting over 200 smaller networks around the world. It was established in 1969 as ARPANet (Advanced Research Project Agency Network) by the United States Ministry of Defense. The web is the resource-base of the Internet where information is stored and retrieved. The Internet, therefore, is a form of library, as it aims at storing and organizing information for easy location and retrieval with accessing facilities such as the search engines.

A search engine is defined by Microsoft Encarta Dictionary (2008) as a computer program that searches for specific words and returns a list of documents in which they were found, especially a commercial

Internet service. According to Williams and Sawyer (2007) a search engine is defined as a search tool that allows one to find specific documents through keyword searches and menu choices, in contrast to directories, which are list of websites classified by topic. A keyword is the subject word or words that refer to the topic one wishes to find. Aina (2004) viewed keyword as a combination of few words or phrase that represent what the information seeker is looking for, giving enough information about each document that will enable a user to retrieve the desired document when needed.

Furthermore, Williams and Sawyer (2007) categorized Search engines into three, namely:

- Keyword Indexes: A keyword index allows the Internet user to search for information by typing one or more keywords, and the search engine then displays a list of web pages that contain those keywords (Williams and Sawyer, 2007). Examples of keyword indexes search engines include Google, Yahoo Search, Microsoft Network (MSN) Search, etc.
- Meta Search Engines: A Meta Search engine allows a user to search several search engines simultaneously. Examples are Dogpile, Ixquick, Metacrawler, Profusion, Vivisimo, Clusty, etc. Meta search engines search other search engines in order to provide information.
- Specialized Search Engines: These are search engines that help locate specialized subject matter, such as materials about movies, health and jobs. These overlap with the specialized portals. They include Yahoo Job search, Expedia (for travel and tourism), webMD (for health), Motley fool (personal investments), career (job), etc (Williams and Sawyer, 2007).

All categories of search engines make use of keywords in retrieving relevant information. A search engine is what allows web searchers to peruse and select the relevant document that they seek through keyword search. Three major functions of a search engine were identified by Aina (2004) to include:

1. To find a particular document or information resource on the web;
2. To bring together the entries of all related information resources on the web; and
3. To allow a user to choose from among many entries in the search engine.

Google and Yahoo search engines, which are the focus of this study, are typical examples of keyword search engines. In several literatures, different conclusions have been drawn about the status of Google and Yahoo search engine use.

According to Bake (2007) there are a few services which Yahoo search provides better than Google. He reported that most Internet users in the United States prefer Google search, but still make use of Yahoo news, Yahoo sports, or Yahoo Finance on a daily basis. He noted that Yahoo does better than Google in entertainment search. However, in January 2003, Search Engine Watch (which is the body that is responsible for rating Internet search engines) gave awards to Internet search engines as follows: Google won the outstanding search service award, best news search engine award, best image search engine award, best design search engine award, most webmaster-friendly search engine award, best paid-placement search engine award, best search feature award, and best specialty search engine award (Sullivan, 2003; www.searchenginewatch.com/2155921). However, Yahoo search engine was awarded the best shopping search engine award (Sullivan, 2003). These awards to Google show that it reigns supreme in Internet search services. Google was therefore described as a trusted, easy to use, high quality, comprehensive, fastest and preferred search engine ever (Sullivan, 2003).

As it now, no Internet user is particularly sure of the methods that Google and Yahoo engage to decide what users actually want. But it is a common misconception that relevant information can be easily found on the Internet using any search engine, for any kind of information. The Internet although contains millions of information resources on a given topic, these resources are often not arranged in any systematic fashion. To retrieve relevant information therefore requires search engine literacy skill. Because, Anyira (2011c) stated that lack of Internet skills excludes users from many relevant information resources even though they are connected to the Internet. This study seeks to find out how search engine skills can affect the use of Google and Yahoo search engine in the retrieval of information by Nigerian Internet users.

Statement of the Problem

The Internet has been identified as best source of up-to-date information resources in the 21st century, and Yahoo and Google are the Internet's most used search tools worldwide (Sullivan, 2003; www.searchenginewatch.com/2155921). In Nigeria, from the inspection of literature and the researcher's observation and interaction, Google and Yahoo have been found to be popular search engines in use by majority of Internet users. Although the two search engines are popular, nothing has been reported concerning how Nigerians use them especially as it concerns their search engine literacy skills.

It has been further observed that many Nigerian though connected to the Internet, spend much time searching, but more often than not, retrieve irrelevant and insufficient information resources that leave them seriously disappointed. This is a consequence of lack of requisite knowledge of how to use search engines effectively to retrieve relevant information resources independently.

Nigerians now need to be well informed on the things they need to know about Google and Yahoo coupled with a sound information literacy skill to ensure that they retrieve relevant information resources whenever they are in need of information.

This study was designed to fulfill that purpose.

Research Questions

1. Between Google and Yahoo, which one is preferred by Nigerian search engine users?
2. Does user skill constitute a major factor in the use of search engine?
3. To what extent is adequacy of relevant search results responsible for their preferences?
4. To what extent does access to the Internet affect their use?

Review of Related Literature

The Internet has been described by the Media Awareness Network as a terrific source of information on all kinds of topic. According to the Network, there are so much information resources on the Internet, but it is difficult to find exactly what you need. The network went further to state that search engine catalogue's what is on the Internet, but they can only give you what you asked them to give you. As a result, if you are not Internet skilled, you cannot get the information you actually want (www.media-awareness.ca).

Hargittai (2002) defined search engine skills as the abilities of an Internet user to effectively and efficiently engage search engines to find information on the web. Furthermore, it entails the extent to which users are able to use them to satisfy their information needs. Generally, search engine use skills have several components. According to Wilson (2000) they are embedded in information and computer literacy skills. Information literacy skills requires the ability to define your problems and asking good questions such as what information do I need, information seeking strategies by asking questions such as where can I find the information I need, selecting and evaluating your resources by asking how you can search the sources efficiently, organizing and structuring information by asking how much of the retrieved information is relevant, is the information retrieved enough to satisfy your need, communicating the result of your retrieval by determining how to effectively use the information (www.sdast.org/shs/library/infolit.html).

Association of College and Research Libraries (ACRL) (2000) stated that information literacy is a set of abilities requiring individuals to recognize when information is needed and have the ability to locate, evaluate and use effectively the needed information. They noted that information literacy skill has become increasingly important in the contemporary environment of rapid technological change and proliferating information resources.

Thus, as a result of the escalating complexities of this environment, individuals are faced with diverse abundant information choices in their academic studies or in their workplaces or in their personal lives.

They further hinted that an information literate person is able to determine the extent of information needed, access the needed information effectively and efficiently, evaluate the information and its sources critically, incorporate the selected information into one's knowledge-base and use information effectively to accomplish a specific purpose. To Association of College and Research Libraries (ACRL) (2000), information literacy is related to information technology skills but has broader implication for the individual, the educational system and for society. They noted that Internet skills enable an individual to use Internet search engines and other Internet tools to achieve a variety of academic, work-related and personal goals.

Internet skills (also called digital literacy skills) were defined by Bawden (2008) as a set of attitudes, understanding and skills to handle and communicate information and knowledge effectively, in a variety of technological environments. He explained that digital literacy in this sense is a framework for integrating various other literacy and skill-sets. Indeed, many scholars who analyzed the concept of digital skills distinguished between two major components. These are technical/ operational skills which are needed to operate computers and basic programs; and informational skills, which are very much required to navigate, select, evaluate, and re-use information. Van Dijk (2005) proposed what is probably the most interesting model so far to distinguish between different parts of digital skills. He stated that operational skills relate to the ability needed to operate computers and the Internet with their basic applications. He coined another concept "strategic skills" to mean the abilities to determine the general goals of media used in a universe of information overload and disorganization. He divided strategic skills into three components- basic, intermediate and advanced Internet skills. The basic skills include knowing how to switch on and put off the computer, being able to see the computer keyboard. The intermediate skills include effective use of search engines, database etc; while the advanced skills include writing of programs and the use of advanced search engines for specialist research.

Havice, Cawthon and Blackburn (2001) who conducted a self-evaluation of search engine skills of administrators reported that many administrators lack certain skills due to rapid changes in technological innovations without corresponding training programs. They suggested that to become a more effective administrator, recognizing one's skills limitations and acquiring new skills is very important. They recommended approaches for new skills to be acquired to include course enrollment, attending training workshops and using Internet tutorials.

Davis (1997) reported a lack of computer literacy skill among recent college graduates. Similarly, Katonda (2010) stated that lack of Internet and digital skill is the main reason while 93 million (i.e. one third of the country's population) are not connected to high speed Internet at home. He further explained that 22% of non-Internet users, which is equivalent to 17 million adults, do not use the Internet because they lack Internet skills. Anyira (2011d) however, posited that in every field of human endeavor, personal self development is the key for continuous relevance. He therefore recommended that information seekers should undertake self-sponsored ICT training so that they could be able to satisfy their information needs through the effective use of web search engines.

Materials and Methods

The descriptive survey research method will be used in this study. The descriptive research describes and interprets variables in relation to the population. The descriptive survey research method will be used because according to Akuezilo and Agu (2003) it seeks to find out the conditions or relationships that exist, opinions that are held, processes that are going on, effects that are evident, or trends that are developing. The study's respondents were drawn from students, lecturers, and specialists who engage Google and Yahoo in the retrieval of relevant information resources.

The structured questionnaire and interview were used to gather data for this study. The questionnaire was developed after consulting various relevant literature and resource persons. Three researchers/ subject specialists drawn from Computer Science, Library and Counseling Psychology helped to scrutinize the instrument. Respondents were made up of students, lecturers, specialists/ researchers who

make use of Google and Yahoo search engines, drawn from South East, and South-South Nigeria. Data were analyzed using percentage count and graphical charts.

Data Analysis and Presentation

Chart 1:

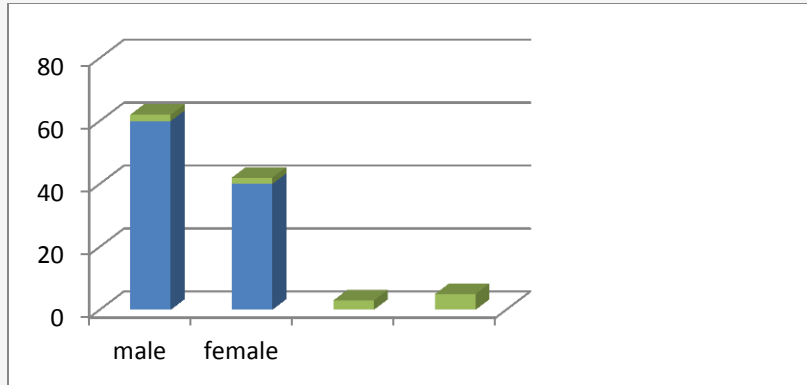


Chart 1. Distribution of respondents by gender

The chart above shows the distribution of respondents by sex. It shows that 60% of the respondents were male, while the female made up the remaining 40%.

Chart 2:

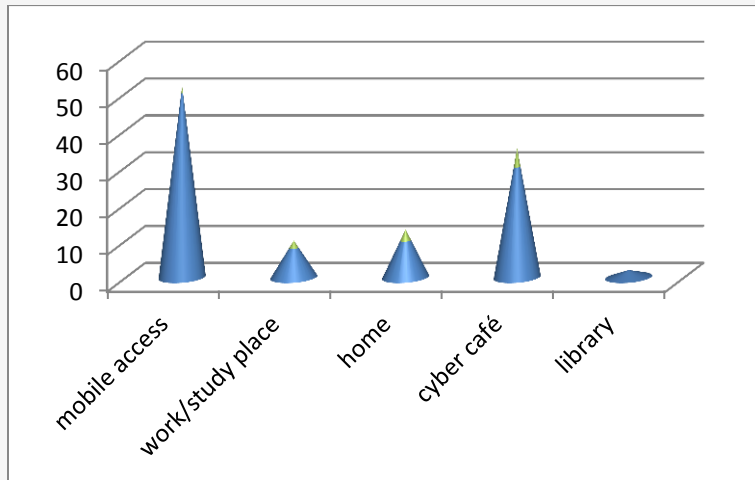


Chart 2. Location of Internet access

Data in chart 2 shows that 50% of the respondents have mobile access to the Internet. Thus they can access the Internet anywhere on their mobile devices. This was followed by 30% who access the Internet via cyber cafes, 8% who have access the net at their homes. 8% access the net at the workplace, and 2% access it through the library.

Chart 3:

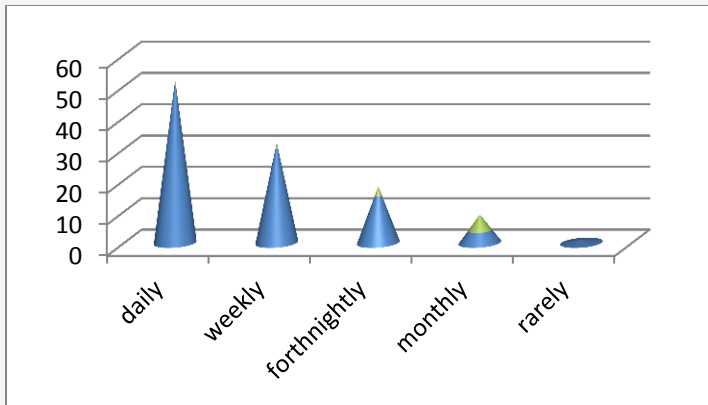


Chart 3: frequency of Google/ Yahoo search engine use

Chart 3 shows that 50% of the respondents use Google/Yahoo search engine daily, 30% use them weekly, 15% fortnightly, 4% monthly, and 1% rarely see them.

Chart 4:

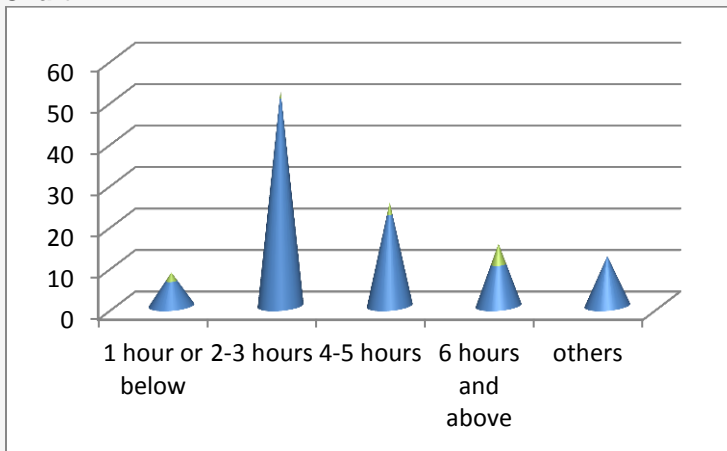


Chart 4: length of time spent in every use in hours

The chart shows that 6% use for only 1 hour or below every time the use them, 50% use them for 2-3 hours, 22% use them for 4-5 hours, 10% use them for 6 hours and above, and 12% said others.

Chart 5:

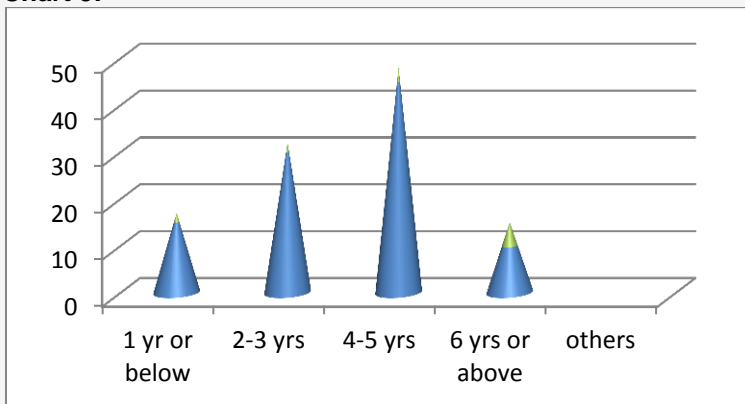


Chart 5: Google/ Yahoo Search experience

Chart 5 reveals that 15% of the respondents have been using Google and/or Yahoo search engine for 1 year or below. 30% of them have between 2-3 years experience, 45% have between 4-5 years experience, 10% have 6 years and above experience.

Chart 6:

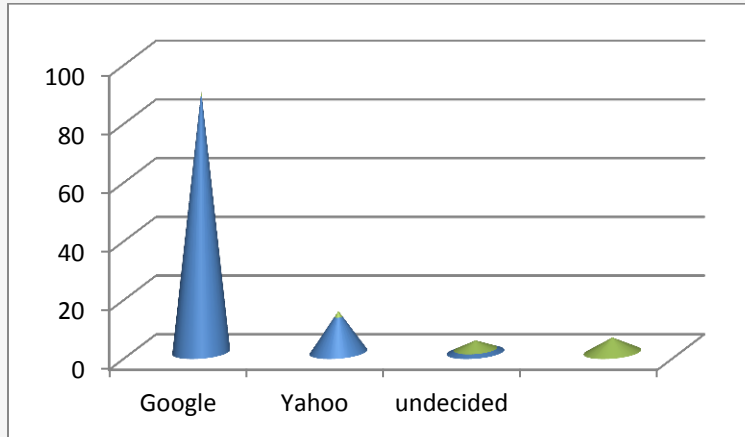


Chart 6: between Google and Yahoo, which retrieves exact information sought

Chart 6 reveals that majority of search engine users believes that Google gives them more exact information than Yahoo search engine.

Chart 7:

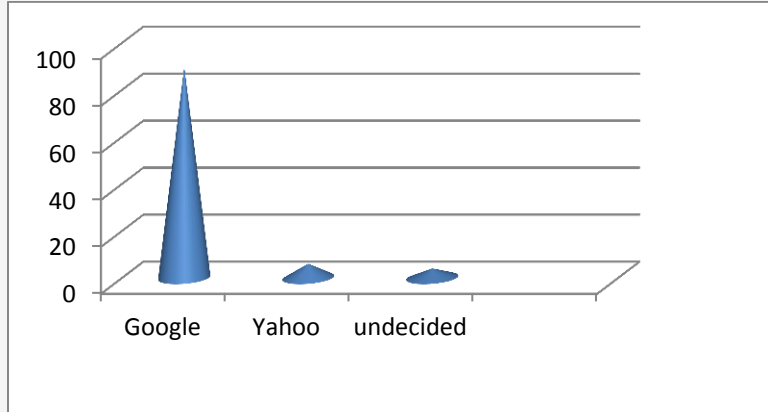


Chart 7: ease of use

Chart 7 shows that 90% of search engine users said that Google is easier to use compared to Yahoo with 6%, and 4% undecided.

Chart 8:

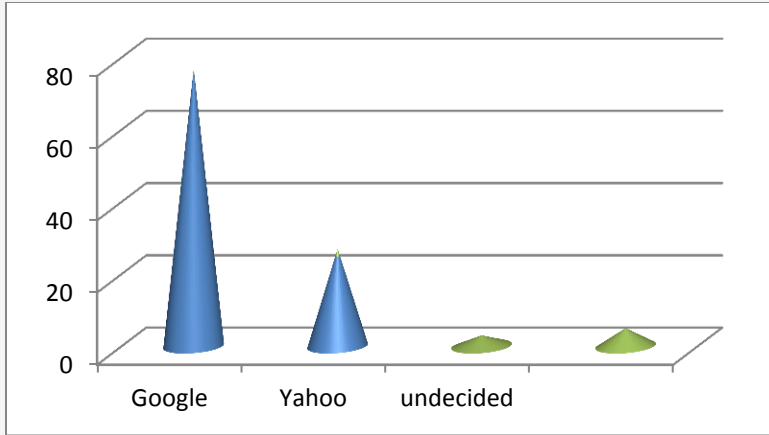


Chart 8: which retrieves more adequate and relevant information

Chart 8 reveals that 75% of the respondents said that Google retrieves more adequate and relevant information than Yahoo with 25% responses.

Chart 9:

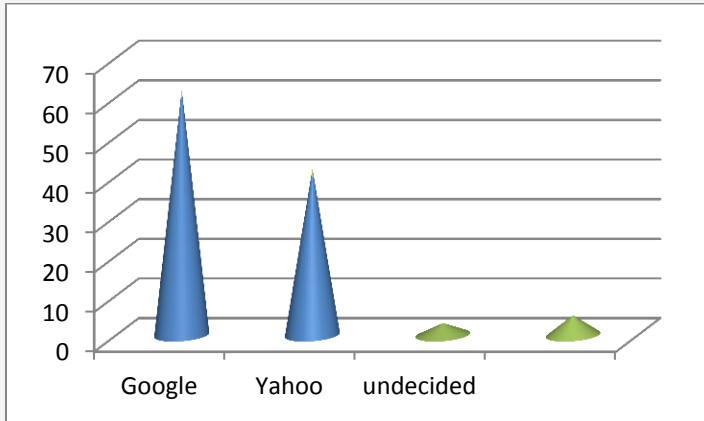


Chart 9: speed of retrieval

Chart 9 shows that majority of the respondents believed that Google retrieves information faster than Yahoo.

Chart 10:

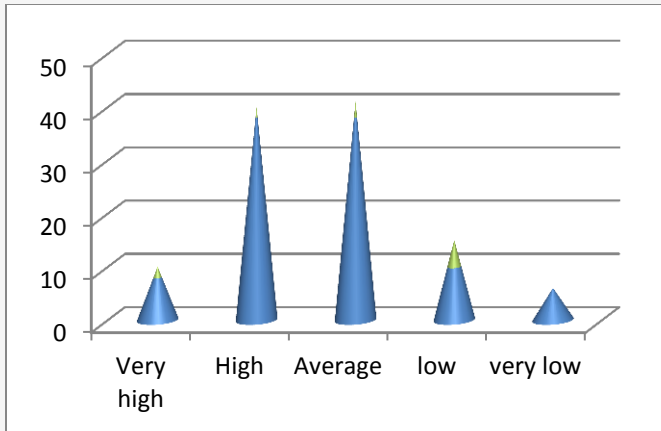


Chart 10: personal rating of search engine skills

Chart 10 reveals that 8% rated their search engine skills as very high, 38% rated high, another 38% rated average, 10% rated low, while 6% rated very low search engine skills.

Chart 11:

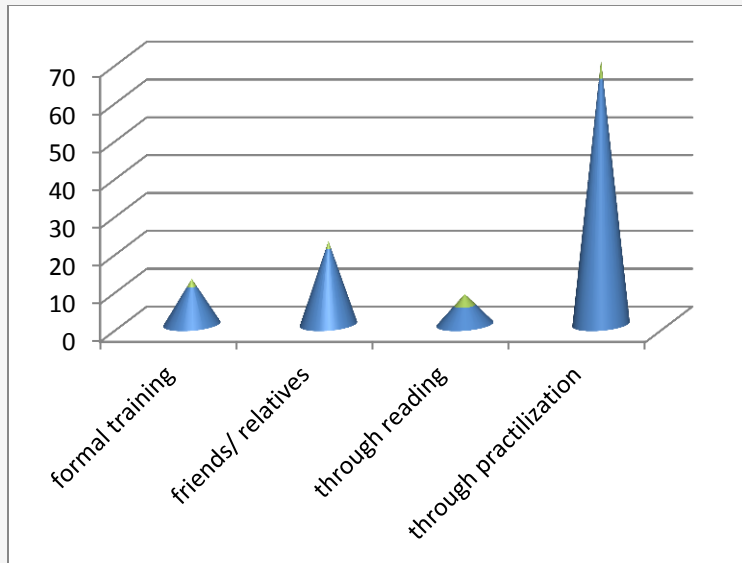


Chart 11: source of search skill acquisition

Chart 11 shows that majority of search engine users acquired their search skills through practical learning of how to search. 20% learnt to search through the help of friends/ relatives. 10% learnt through formal training, and 5% through reading of books.

Chart 12:

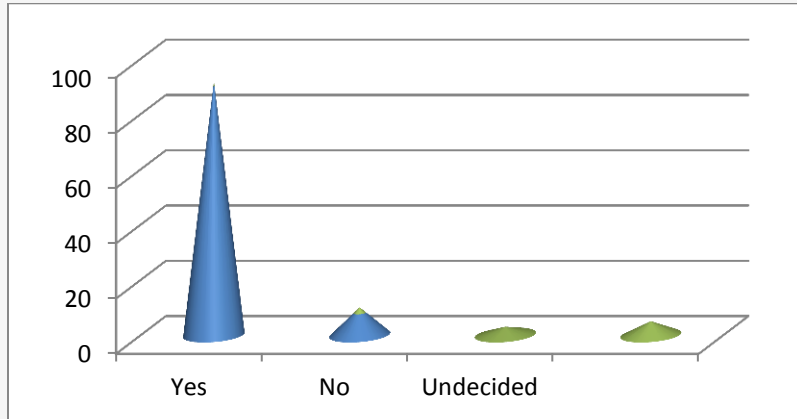


Chart 12: lack of skill hinders Google/Yahoo Usage

Chart 12 reveals that lack of search skills hinders search engine usage.

Research Findings and Discussion of Results

It was found that majority of search engine users in Nigeria have personal access through their mobile devices such as mobile phones, lap tops, palm tops etc. others access the net at cyber cafes, and at

home. Nigerians do not access the Internet in libraries. This confirms an earlier report by Anyira (2010) who found that Nigerian libraries lack Internet connectivity. The recent development in the Nigerian telecommunication industry has opened up mobile access to the Internet through GSM (Global System for Mobile Communication) phones and other mobile devices. As a result of mobile Internet access, everyone that has a mobile phone with GPRS (General Packet Radio Service) facility could at any location, search Google or Yahoo to meet an information need. It was discovered that majority of Nigerians use Google than Yahoo daily and the use lasts mainly between two and three hours. Earlier, Sullivan (2003) had reported that Google is the most used search engine on the Internet. According to Bake (2007) there are a few services which Yahoo search provides better than Google. He reported that most Internet users in the United States prefer Google search. This also means that just as Internet users in the United States prefer Google search to Yahoo search, Nigerian Internet users also prefer Google search to Yahoo search. It was discovered that Nigerians prefer Google to Yahoo because when using Google search engine, they are able to retrieve the exact information that they need, and they found Google to be easier to use than Yahoo. Nigerian Internet users also noted that Google gives them more relevant and adequate information resources and at a higher speed than Yahoo. However, Nigerians who rated their Internet search engine skill high and those that rated theirs as average were equal. Thus, majority of search engine users in Nigeria perceive their search engine skills as either high or average. Furthermore, result shows that majority of Nigerian search engine users, acquired their search skills by practical learning of how to use search engines over the years. Many, however, acquired theirs through friends and relatives. Anyira (2011c) had earlier suggested that there is the need for personal-self development if a user could make effective use of search engines. Finally, it was discovered that the major hindrance to effective use of search engines in Nigeria is lack of search engine skills/ literacy. This corroborates Anyira (2011d) who stated that it is no secret that most information seekers lack basic and fundamental skills for using ICT to retrieve information. He further noted that lack of skills constitute a major obstacle to effective retrieval of information available on the Net.

Conclusion and Recommendations

Between Google and Yahoo search engines. Nigerians prefer Google search because with Google search engine, they are able to retrieve the exact information that they need; they obtain more relevant and adequate information resources than Yahoo; Google is easier to use than Yahoo; and Google retrieves faster than Yahoo. Most Nigerian Internet users have personal access through their mobile devices such as mobile phones, lap tops, palm tops etc. Nigerians who have mobile access mostly use Google than Yahoo daily, and the use lasts mainly between two and three hours. Cyber cafes are the second most Internet access location in Nigeria. Poor services in cyber cafes affect their patronage and use. Nigerian libraries are the least locations of Internet access in Nigeria among the locations studied. Consequently, the academic community will either resort to personal access or cybercafés. It was therefore recommended that:

- Google should incorporate more Nigerian content to their knowledge base as most Nigerians depend on it to meet their information needs.
- Telecommunication companies (such as Etisalat, MTN, Globacom, Airtel, Starcoms etc.) that offer Internet services to Nigerians should make their services more efficient as they have emerged as the major Internet service providers to Nigerians in the 21st century.
- There is the urgent need for Nigerian libraries to wake up from their technological slumber and get their libraries connected to the Internet.
- Nigerian Internet users are expected to continually up-date their search engine skills as more and more advances are made in the field of information retrieval.

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