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The role of competitive intelligence in provision of quality Information services

Akorede Muftau Diyaolu Mr.

Senior Librarian, Federal School of Surveying, Oyo, Nigeria, diyaolu5@gmail.com

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Introduction

Competitive intelligence CI is the purposeful and coordinated monitoring competitor(s), wherever and whoever they may be, within a specific work or service delivery. Meanwhile, "competitors" are those firms considered as rivals or counterpart in business, and with whom competition is likely. According to Johnson (2018) CI also has to do with forecasting what the competitor will do before such an action happens, and to have this will involve many methods at the tactical collection level, while it also require convergence of existing information infrastructure, analysis and distribution of the information, and of cause, the calculation of business decisions on the grounds of that information and the analysis of same.

The main tours of this paper cover:

1. The Overview of Competitive intelligence
2. The role of information professionals in quality service delivery;
3. The relevance of competitive intelligence to information services;

Competitive intelligence is a systematic program for gathering and analyzing information about, competitors' activities and general business trends to further company's goals. Competitive Intelligence involves the legal collection of information on competitors and the overall business environment. The knowledge gained from this information is then used to enhance the organization's own competitiveness. Competitive intelligence can be seen as an aspect of knowledge management. The Society of Competitive Intelligence Professionals (2008) described CI as the "process of ethically collecting, analyzing and disseminating actionable intelligence regarding the implications of the business environment, competitors, and the organization itself, while it (C.I) also transforms raw information into intelligence in order to support business decisions. Muller (2006) stated that CI's main aim was to provide a company with a competitive advantage by providing input to a competitive strategy. Unlike mental or cognitive and emotional intelligence, competitive intelligence focuses on monitoring the competitive environment with the aim of providing actionable intelligence that will provide a competitive edge to the organization. Competitive intelligence is a very important tool of an organization strategic planning and management process. (Safarnia, Akbari & Abbasi, 2011).

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.

Gilad (2016) established that CI is not information, and CI "programs" do not provide information services, rather, information services are provided by corporate libraries, research vendors, Web-based aggregators of information and outsourced collectors, he stated further that the essence of information services is to avoid any alteration of the information (except packaging) and to provide answers to specific questions whereas, the role of intelligence is to interpret information and provide management with a perspective on risks and opportunities. In most cases, according to Uzohue and Yaya. (2016) the main focus of intelligence gathering was to influence strategic decision in an organization. However, the

target of intelligence gathering differs from one profession to the other despite what those who are developing it all do is essentially the same: 1. They identify the information that a decision-maker needs on the competition, or the competitive environment. 2. They collect raw data, using legal and ethical means, from public sources; 3. They analyze that data, using any one of a wide variety of tools, converting it into intelligence, on which someone can take action. 4. They communicate the finished intelligence to the decision-maker(s) for their use.

“Service delivery” is a common phrase used to describe the distribution of basic resources citizens depend on like water, electricity, sanitation infrastructure, land, and housing. Unfortunately, the government’s delivery and upkeep of these resources is unreliable – greatly inconveniencing or endangering whole communities (Chen, Dean, Frant, and Kumar, 2018)) The service delivery system should focus on what creates value to the core organisations and how to engage frontline employees to deliver the ultimate customer experience. Academic libraries provides information services to their respective communities in order to support their teaching, learning and research needs, being their statutory responsibility.(Alabi, Nduka, and Olatise,(2012) opined that the major reason for setting up library in any institution of higher learning is for service delivery, while effective delivery of information services that meet the needs and aspirations of citizens, decision-makers and life-long learners is a long standing goal of the information profession. However, information professionals are imbued to serve people through the provision of access to quality information resources in either print or electronic formats through which people’s standard of living are improved and their dreams were actualized (Yaya, Ochonna and Osisanwo 2014). Library service delivery involves individuals who have expectations of the library and information science professionals in such ways as how they relate and behave towards the users, colleagues, their organisations and entire society (Mbofung & Popoola 2014). However, the current trends in information service through deployment technological aids demanded more serious attention and strategy to draw on for the library and information professionals.

Information Professionals

The need to use competitive intelligence approaches in Library and Information Science discipline are growing, decision makers are starting to recognize the role and importance of competitive intelligence in libraries and other organizations in the human society (Uzohue & Yaya. 2016). The information professionals are those individuals that are primarily responsible for managing the organization’s information resources in order to enhance their information capabilities. Among such are: librarians, information brokers, computer scientists, competitive information professionals, Information architects, Content managers, archivist, Analyst and Social media managers. These group of professionals are directly concerned with identification, acquisition, organization, processing as well as storage of information products and services. Basically, competitive intelligence can be applied to all the roles and duties of the various information professionals and as such take a front role advantage in terms of service delivery to clients.

In the same vein, Hohhof (1994) observed that the characteristics of information professionals are changing quickly in competitive information systems environments due to the increasing availability of information sources, the wide presence of information technologies throughout organizations, and ever-increasing needs for current and changing information at the highest organizational levels (including the needs of competitive intelligence activities) have brought about the evolution of librarians into the field of C.I. These new information roles projected librarians who is not constricted to physical boundaries for information resources (or for themselves) in order to provide actionable information, but rather cultivate close relationships with their clients via electronic networks and provide information through a variety of electronic delivery media to users in a just-in-time fashion. Furthermore, Electronic delivery media goes beyond the established external information databases; to include social media and cloud computing systems in support of the demands of organizations' competitive intelligence activities.

The Role of Information Professionals in using Competitive Intelligence

Uzohue and Yaya. (2016) observed that the role of information professional is in the sourcing of accurate information for decision makers of an organization, because they know where exactly to look for information, they also have experience in dealing with databases vendors, as well as having a high developed searching strategy and techniques of databases. Generally, identified roles for information profession includes Manager, Resources producer, Creator or producer, Preserver of culture, Organizer, Researcher or Retriever. Furthermore, in order to undertake good competitive activities, the information professional essentially needs the foresight to know what sources is most relevant, and must be able to pass this advice onto others. In fact information professional can help turn information into intelligence by helping others to manage their own information.

Haliso and Aina (2012) opined that quality must be ensured in the provision and management of collections for academic libraries to provide relevant information resources to support the university's curriculum. This has probably accounted for the library resource management plan which varies from acquisition, processing, cataloguing, maintaining, and circulating of the library resources. Policies and procedures to evaluate, acquire, discard, process, organize, maintain, and circulate or loan library resources were developed, processes for the resource collection development that projects the library goals and objectives, evaluation studies to ensure information resources are responsive to client needs and the library goals were regularly carried out. The librarian conducts user surveys and focus groups, to determine the products and services the library will offer.

Similarly, Yaya et al,(2014) observed that In Nigeria today, academic libraries were having some organizations that are competing with their services and that if urgent steps were not taken these organizations may send librarians out of their laudable profession, they include: i.) Internet and web sites providers ii.) Telecommunication (telephone) operators, and other Online vendors, Archives and documentation centres. They observed further that these competitors were equipped with sophisticated technology as well as current library resources. But Horhnof (1994) reasoned that technology (IT) is used to help organizations

keep ahead of their competition. He added that CIS does not simply deliver large amounts of information; it provides information for informed decisions and the key to a successful implementation is facilitating the systematic collection of intelligence information.

The recent rise in quality and carrying capacity of the higher institutions had led to the increasing enrolment which had significantly resulted in attracting best brains, stimulating breakthroughs in research, pioneering centres of excellence, production of first rate graduates and getting listed in top ranking league tables (Idiegbeyan-ose, Christopher & Osinulu 2017). This event has brought about a paradigm shift occasioned by stiff competition among the institutions and one of the parameters for competitive advantage in this current situation is the worth of the academic library. Haliso and Aina (2012) observed that there is the likelihood of competition among various academic libraries including the public, states and privately owned universities and this has necessitated for the adoption of CI as any library that provides quality information resources that are adequate, current and relevant will probably meet the information needs of its users. Obviously, information resources come in different formats, any academic library that collects quality information materials in divert formats based on users' needs will definitely meet the needs of its patrons. In fact, library and information services has over the years being part of criteria by which universities were be assessed for quality, for instance, the web ranking of universities is a tracking of how much information is sought and served at the websites of various institutions and definitely the institution with many activities online score more points.

Therefore, Academic libraries in federal universities, state and private universities should identify their weaknesses and opportunities. They should explore the opportunity and seek for information among their counterparts to improve the library services and thereby provide quality information materials to meet the needs of patrons. Competitive information systems (CIS) help managers to stay abreast of market, competitive, and world events (Hohhof 1994). Libraries should take a pro-active stance in recommending electronic resources, stressing the need to ensure that resources are reliable and authoritative. Resources available for free from the Internet may only be of limited worth, but adventurous users may download material, while library staff will only discover what they are using if they have a problem with a resource and come to the library for a solution (Peterson 2004). According to Idiegbeyan-ose, Christopher and Osinulu (2017) academic libraries can be on competitive edge with the use of social network sites or media for service delivery in the areas of selective dissemination of information (SDI); abstracting and indexing services, current awareness services (CAS), compilation of bibliography and reading list, new arrival services and so on.

Gilad (2016) established that, to anticipate transitions in industry structure, the Competition Analyst must track four major change drivers: 1. Technology changes can be in the form of disruption but also in the form of new technology used by rivals, suppliers, or even a buyer. For example, the Internet raised the bargaining power of buyers more than anything else. In some industries, like music, this effect meant the end of many record companies. 2. Government has had an enormous, often destructive, influence on the profitability of industries. Government regulation, government corruption in some countries, and government antitrust initiatives can completely change the structure of power in an industry

Application of competitive intelligence in Information services

CI process includes collecting, analyzing and providing timely and useful information and knowledge, which are essential for managers and all decision makers for improving competitive position of their companies - in the eyes of consumers. (Cobb, 2003: 81). Competitive intelligence provides tools for transforming raw information regarding the competitive environment in the information and knowledge that is used to make strategic business decisions. (Gračanin, Kalac & Jovanovic 2015). In applying competitive intelligence into the operations of academic library, a careful analysis of competitive intelligence cycle and its process of gathering, analyzing and disseminating of information is desirable:

1. Planning and direction: is the first stage of the intelligence cycle, which requires the identification of the key intelligence topics and the determination of the course the CI practitioner should take in completing the analysis. In the academic library set up, the library resources are to be planned in line with the programmes of study (e.g. Medicine, Management, Sciences, Environmental studies, Arts & Humanities, Agriculture, Law etc.

The librarian must ensure that a detail users analysis is done at the planning stage, before selecting materials, while they also involve all stakeholder in collection development process so as to make the best out of their acquisition process as well as satisfying the information needs of the university community. If however, the plan is well focused and sharply aimed at target, then one increase the chances of a successful intelligence project. The Planning must also include how to fund the library activities and projects as well as innovations developments.

2. Collection: The collection phase involves the gathering of raw information from which the required intelligence should be generated. A large amount of the collected information comes from publicly available materials, which include periodicals, annual reports, books, internet sources, newspapers and other printed or unprinted sources. Most CI practitioners find all the information they require ethically and legally. The collection activity may also involve obtaining information from primary sources, usually individuals. These individuals may be employees of an organization or specialists in other companies, consulting groups, universities, or government agencies. Competent information collection of this kind requires an extensive knowledge of interviewing techniques and the ability to develop and maintain a personal information network.

According to Hohhof (1994) effective CI information services also track fugitive material from consultants, trade organizations, technical societies, universities, and other sources, for which bibliographic access is difficult, because this category of material is often the most specialized and valuable source of competitive information and is sometimes available by simple request. This kind of service is often provided by an individual with a library background who is on the CI staff or in the organization's library.

3. Analysis and production: The analysis phase is known to be the most challenging part of the intelligence cycle, since it requires high skilled CI practitioners. More specifically, the person performing such an analysis needs to weigh information, look for patterns and come up with different scenarios based on what the analyst has discovered (Nikolaos and Evangelia, 2012). It should be noted here that some of the requests sent to the library may not have detailed or well described bibliographic information such as author, title, current edition, International Standard Book Number (ISBN), price, publishers, place of publication and other bibliographic details; the librarian will then analyse all the requests by using some collection development tools like: publishers catalogues, Books in print (BIP), Whitaker books in print, National Bibliography of Nigeria (NBN) and other acquisition tools to provide those bibliographic details that are lacking in their requests before procuring them into the library collections.

It should be emphasized here that not all the materials suggested by the stakeholders will be acquired, materials are procured base on their relevance to the academic programmes of the institution and the availability of fund.

4. Dissemination: This is the last stage of the intelligence cycle. It is the step where the CI practitioner communicates the results of the analysis to the decision makers. The analyst must be able to suggest possible courses of action based on the work analysis and provide useful recommendations which must be supported by logical arguments. The hallmark of any academic library is to provide information to all information seekers and also to support the academic programmes of the parent institution.

Abolariwa and Yaya (2015) found that applying CI in library resource management plan ranges from acquiring, processing, cataloguing, maintaining, and circulating of the library resources. It also entails using standard policies and procedures to evaluate, acquire, discard, process, organize, maintain, and circulate or loan library resources. The librarian after the collation and careful analysis of the selected titles, will then place order to acquire such materials either through direct purchase or exchange. The library also provide other essential services like; automated catalogue and computer search services, internet services, Library Integrated Management Systems, Online Reference services, collation of users feedback through the use of social media platform, this can also serve as a means of evaluating the library services. Similarly, Uzohue, and Yaya, (2016) affirmed that information professional must have some basic skill which will help them to deliver their services intelligently, these includes; tactical, technical and communication skills. Above all, access to both external and internally developed information systems is very crucial to the success of competitive intelligence activity of any library and information centre.

Conclusion

Information professionals needs to achieve their objective of meeting the information needs of various users, there is the need to run an effective information gathering with a

competitive intelligence approach. This implies that information professionals need to identify and use a variety of non traditional information strategies such as competitive intelligence that would enable the academic library to edge out its competitors and make library users to develop renewed interest in the services provided by the library and information centres. Library and information science professionals need to use innovative and creative ways to meet adequate information needs of their users. It is particularly important to note that as the work environment is becoming increasingly complex and competitive; the academic libraries in tertiary institutions need to respond positively to these changes by providing crucial services which includes; quick access to high quality, accurate, up-to-date and reliable information to make timely and well-informed decisions.

Besides, it is shown in this paper that competitive intelligence practitioners and information professionals share similar characteristics because they all are in the business of gathering, analyzing data and disseminating relevant information to support decision making at top level management. Therefore, information professionals remained relevant to the organizations in spite of information explosion; they can adopt a creative and unique method of providing information services and use such to promote the image of their organization as well as to achieve its stated goals.

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