

# Utilization of Competitive Intelligence by Health Information Workers of the Nigerian Institute of Medical Research

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**This paper deals on the utilization of competitive intelligence by health information workers of the Nigerian Institute of Medical Research (NMIR). Health information workers' (Library personnel) 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 endeavor of research institute most especially a medical research institute that require painstaking research activities considering the human life involved. Therefore, health information workers 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. The paper recommends that more attention should be paid to utilization of competitive intelligence in library services which will invariably enhance planning and implementation of marketing policy of libraries for effective and efficient library services.**

**Key words:** Competitive Intelligence, Health Information Workers, Library personnel, Nigerian Institute of Medical Research, Medical research, Librarian.

## INTRODUCTION

The Nigerian Institute of Medical Research Yaba, Lagos, Nigeria is the foremost research institute in the country. It was established in 1920 with the arrival of a Medical team, under the auspices of the Rockefeller Foundation Yellow Fever Commission to the West Coast of Africa. In 1925, another team from the West African Yellow Fever Commission arrived Lagos to join the team from the Rockefeller Foundation and the research facilities at the centre were expanded. The research Centre was named the West African Council for Medical Research in 1954 and metamorphosed into the Medical Research Council of Nigeria in 1960. Through the Research Institute Establishment of the National Science and Technology Act of 1977, the Medical Research Council of Nigeria was renamed the National Institute of Medical Research. The name was further changed in 1993 to the Nigerian Institute of Medical Research. It was later transferred as a parastatal under the supervision of the Federal Ministry of Science and technology to the Federal Ministry of Health. The Institute has two outstation in New Bussa; Niger State and Maiduguri in Borno State. The Institute has a liaison office in

Abuja, institute mandate. The mandate of the Institute under the enabling Act of 1977, stipulates that it shall conduct research into health problems in the country essentially in the following areas:

- Communicable Diseases of Public Health importance in the country.
- Non Communicable Diseases prevalent in the country.
- Basic, applied and operational research for the prevention and control of diseases endemic in the country in co-operation with the Federal and State Ministries of Health.
- Develop human and infrastructural capacities for clinical and biomedical research in collaboration with Medical Schools, Universities and other Health-related Institutions, in and outside Nigeria.
- Disseminate the results of health research in the country through training courses, scientific publications, conferences, workshops and other communication channels to the Federal and States

Ministries of Health, relevant stakeholders in the Public and Private sectors as well as the general public.

The Institute library was established in 1972, the library is a repository of knowledge and information about health sciences. In line with the Institute mandate, it is set up to support the research efforts of the Institute, this it does by providing access to qualitative information to Health Scientists/Researchers, NGOs, Students and other stakeholders in the health sector of the country. Hence, the Institute Library users include: research staff of the Institute, clinical and biomedical researchers/scientists from Teaching Hospitals and Research Institutes across the country, graduate and undergraduate from within and outside the country, and staff of the Federal and State Ministries of Health. Institute Library collects, preserves, disseminates and exchanges information, which is important to the progress of health sciences. This is done through subscribing to Journals and magazines and the purchase of relevant books and also by subscribing to health databases on CD-ROM. The library automation system operates on a Local area network it has terminals in all the sections of the library connected to a temporary server. It has two dedicated PCs for internet browsing and electronic search at the technical section. The library subscribes to the Medline database on CD-ROM and also has free access to HINARI database; this provides access to full-text articles in more than 7000 biomedical journals in the world. The database makes it possible for libraries in resource poor countries to have access to relatively current medical journals

Library personnel, especially librarians at the Nigerian Institute of Medical Research are the custodians of information about the organization, thus they can be referred to as the health information workers for the institute. The Library as a repository of knowledge and information on health sciences in line with the Institute mandate, it is set up to support the research efforts of the Institute, which is to conduct research on Communicable and non-Diseases of Public Health importance in the country. This it does by providing access to qualitative information to Health Scientists/Researchers, NGOs, Students and other stakeholders in the health sector in the country. It collects, preserves, disseminates and exchanges information, which is important to the progress of health sciences in the country. This is done through subscribing to Journals and magazines and the purchase of relevant books and also by subscribing to the latest updates of databases on CD-ROM, and online subscription. In line with the role of the Library as information disseminator, the Library also distributes the Institute's Publications and also a source for publications of other sister Institutions.

Thus, in order to effectively serve the health community nationwide, the institute library carries out bibliographical control duties by compiling bibliographies on topical subject headings. It is also responsible for preparation of Indexes, extraction of technical information from local and foreign Journals and preparation of manuscripts for publication. Collection and collation of data and information for the production of Audio-Visual materials are also an important service of the library. 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. However, the importance of a library is being called into question, particularly in this age of information technology, thus making it imperative on for librarians/information workers to rethink their method of service provision making use of intelligence gathering. Hence, this paper tends to examine how the knowledge of Competitive Intelligence can positively affect the services of health information workers at the Nigerian Institute of Medical Research

### Overview of Competitive Intelligence

There are a lot of definitions of Competitive Intelligence (CI). For instance Competitive intelligence can be defined as the process of gathering information from a variety of sources, and then the data are analyzed and applied to a specific industry, organization, or project. According to McGonagale and Vella (2002) 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. Haag (2006) cited by Haliso and Aina define competitive intelligence as the action of defining, gathering, analyzing, and distributing intelligence about products, customers, competitors and any aspect of the environment needed to support executives and managers in making strategic decisions for an organization. Haliso and Aina (2012) went further to state that It is very important to note that competitive intelligence is an ethical and legal business practice, as opposed to industrial espionage which is illegal. Oder (2001) opined that CI involves not only the collection of information (from both primary and secondary sources) but also an analysis of how that information affects the company's competitive environment and communication of that anal to decision-makers. According to Haliso and Aina (2012), a more focused definition of CI regards it as the organizational function responsible for the early identification of risks and opportunities in the market before they become obvious.

The main focus of intelligence gathering is 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.

### Competitive Intelligence and Health Information Workers/Librarians

Information Science is the practice that is concerned with the gathering, manipulation, classification, storage, and retrieval of recorded knowledge. According to Zins (2006) Information

Science is an interdisciplinary field concerned with the theoretical and practical concepts, as well as the technological, laws, and industry dealing with knowledge transfer and the sources, generation, organization, representation, processing, distribution, communication, and uses of information as well as communications among users and their behavior as they seek to satisfy their information needs, while the Online Dictionary of Library and Information Science (2004) said that Information Science is the systematic study and analysis of the sources, development, collection, organization, dissemination, evaluation, use, and management of information in all its forms, including the channels (formal and informal) and technology used in its communication.

According to Hohhof (1994), librarians and information scientists have long enjoyed gatekeeper status in their organizations, providing service as intermediaries between information and the people who need it. Changing information sources, technologies, 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. The development of competitive intelligence (CI) activities in companies has hastened this trend. The given definitions and responsibilities show similar activities in Competitive Intelligence, Information Science and librarianship. These similar activities are critical enough to refer to them as meta-disciplines that collect, analyzing and disseminate information for utilization. One critical link between Information Science, Librarianship and Competitive Intelligence is that they recognize information as a critical aspect of life in the 21st century, contributing immensely in the knowledge economy

To numerous organizations Competitive Intelligence is generally relevant to the competitiveness through providing a sustainable competitive advantage. The value of Competitive Intelligence in modern Information Science cannot be overemphasized as a synergy between the two promotes availability of intelligence critical for organizations 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 Information Science can be enhanced through Competitive Intelligence to enable organizations to "identify new opportunities leading to innovation and ultimately benefiting the competitive status of the organization" (Havenga and 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 organizations 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. Perhaps a definition of information professional would make an impact in discussing the value of Competitive Intelligence in modern Information

Science practice. According to Lindsey-King (1998) in Havenga and Both (2000), "an information professional can be defined as the individual who is primarily responsible for harnessing the organization's information sources and information capabilities to enable it to learn and adapt to its changing environment. In most cases the information professional adds value to Information Science through employing intelligence to provide information by responding with a sense of urgency to critical information needs.

However, in order to accurately assess the exact extent and nature of the information professional's involvement and responsibility towards the delivery of competitive intelligence it is necessary to consider the existing skills of the information professional in comparison to the skills needed by the competitive intelligence professional (Havenga & Both 2000). Correia (2005) in Chisita (2011) observed that the new information driven economy 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. Nevertheless, the instrumental participation of the information professionals in Competitive Intelligence and Information Science relate to the communicating of the information to the users despite their skills and competences.

The value of Competitive Intelligence is attributed to the communication of intelligence that is required by managers which is an enhancement of Information Science which communicate mainly information which when collected form knowledge or intelligence. Communicating intelligence is the prime function of Competitive Intelligence that is necessary in the knowledge-based economy for decision-making particularly. Miller (1996) noted that the final phase of the intelligence process consists of communicating the analysis effectively. Trimberger (2000) also noted that communicating the Competitive Intelligence product to the customer is comparable to delivering information to a client must be done in a timely fashion and in an effective format. Saracevic (1995) noted that social and economic roles of information [intelligence rather] activities are becoming more and more pronounced; their strategic importance in increasing. Further contributions by Saracevic (2000) are that there are fundamental economic and social changes afoot in which knowledge and information is becoming the base, the prime valuation, for the economy and even society as a whole. This is further expounded by Drucker (1994) in Saracevic (2000) that; the basic economic resource - "the means of production" to use the economist's term - is no longer capital, nor natural resource (the economist's land), nor "labour." It is and will be knowledge . . . . Value is now created by "productivity" and "innovation" both applications of knowledge at work. The leading social group of the knowledge society will be "knowledge workers" - knowledge executives who know how to allocate knowledge to productive use, just as the capitalist knew how to allocate capital to productive use; knowledge professionals, knowledge employees . . . Information Science has been drastically changed by information and communication technologies, thereby increasing the capacity to store information without the need for physical objects. Several authors opine that Information Science comprise "library without walls"; its "collection" is the entire world of information and the "information scientist" acquires, organizes, and disseminates that information to help people meet their needs. In actual fact, this purpose can be seen as a defining

characteristic of both Information Science and Competitive Intelligence. However the significance of Competitive Intelligence is that it identifies threats. Havenga and Both (2000) suggested that Competitive Intelligence should be positioned in the organization to identify threats in the external environment capable of impacting negatively on the future of the company or organization. Intelligence is required definitely to give the organization a competitive advantage over other companies, for example a joint venture partnership, innovation and probably for research and development.

The usefulness of Competitive Intelligence in modern organizations cannot be overemphasized bearing in mind that the knowledge-based economy requires knowledge to remain competitive and for informed decisions. Competitive Intelligence and Information Science share similar characteristics that allow information professionals remain relevant to the organizations to play the influential information role more in a fashionable manner of resending the intelligence in helpful format. Basically the value of Competitive Intelligence is critical to the survival of the organization and to compete with other companies in a sound more informed position. In most cases Competitive Intelligence may be subsumed under the broader concept of Information Science even though Competitive Intelligence analyses business events outside the company. However the bottom line is that intelligence is gathered, analyzed and disseminated to the end user more similarly as the Information Science processes.

### Utilization of competitive intelligence

The individual capacity and ability to utilize and optimize information is crucial to the level and quality of the individual productivity. Opeke (1984) identified "information capacity" as an important factor in effective information utilization. The information capacity of an individual may depend on the information environment in which the person operates. The health information workers at the Nigerian Institute of Medical Research are the Librarians. They are responsible for the planning and setting of goals for the library which serves as the information centre of the Institute. Applying their knowledge of competitive intelligence they were able to develop a library strategic plan, which is responsive and conforms to the organization's mission, goals, and objectives.

### Customer Service

According to Haliso and Aina (2012), the primary focus of a library is service, and service quality is the most studied topics in marketing research during the past decade. A repeated theme in the marketing literature is that service quality, as perceived by consumers, is a function of what customers expect and how well the firm performs in providing the service. (Danuta, 1997) as cited in Haliso and Aina (2012) It should be noted that any academic library that provides quality and relevant information materials will keep the users and they will continually use the library. This makes library users to have a good perception about library services. To promote the services of the library the librarians are committed to the marketing and promoting of the Library and its products and services. They develop and distribute the institute promotional Information materials such as newsletters, brochures, and information packets. In-service and outreach programs to market services and interpret library resources were developed by the librarians following a good understanding of the environment they operate. They are also involved in the institute seminars and workshops that support the goals and

objectives of the Institute and establish and maintain rapport with their clientele through current awareness services and selective dissemination of information.

A good and proactive customer service was introduced into the library operations. This responsibility includes activities like reference/research services and accessing resources. Electronic literature search is an important activity of the library. The Library has in stock many literatures on CDROM and two essential databases PubMed and Medline database on CD-ROM, the CD-ROMs are used for verification of citations and location of full articles. These databases provide a wide variety of resources related to the biomedical and health sciences, both past and present. The Library accesses full articles in over 7,000 journals through HINARI. License agreements were signed with HINARI for both Lagos and Maiduguri station.

### Resource Management

Haliso and Aina (2012) noted that for academic libraries to provide relevant and quality information resources to support the university's curriculum, the concept of quality management must be established. This is probably responsible for the library resource management plan which ranges from acquiring, 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, guidelines for the resource collection development that reflect the library goals and objectives were established, evaluation studies to ensure information resources are responsive to client needs and the library goals were regularly carried out. The librarians conduct user surveys and focus groups, to determine the products and services the library will offer. Key contacts within the medical, health, and information communities were developed.

### CONCLUSION AND RECOMMENDATION

The need for competitive intelligence for information workers and their organization cannot be over emphasized because organizations use intelligence to compare themselves to other organizations to identify risks and opportunities hence it is very critical for organizations to stay abreast of changing market condition by taking the right decision at the right time. Marketing 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 utilization of competitive intelligence in library services which will invariably enhance planning and implementation of marketing policy of libraries for effective and efficient library services.

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