

# Information Needs and Seeking Behaviours of Journalists and Artisans

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## Abstract

This paper discussed the information needs and information seeking behaviours of journalists and artisans. It is observed that information seeking is context based meaning that people seek information so as to resolve a problem or to take a particular decision. Also, people vary in their ability to seek information: differences in intelligence, analytical ability, educational status, profession/occupation, age, and gender among other factors have substantial influence on the capacity of people to seek information effectively. Journalists are a heterogeneous group of professionals and their information needs are enormous, quite insatiable and much diversified because they do not only inform the masses but also play an important role in the interpretation of news and events to develop understanding, opinion formation and persuasion. They consult a variety of formal and informal sources but a greater emphasis is placed on the informal (interpersonal) sources. Some of the problems hampering access to information by journalists include lack of time to search for information, information overload, inadequate library services and sources, lack of support from library staff, problem of accessing information, finance and language. Artisans also are highly heterogeneous groups of information seekers. They often engage in very small to medium scale business enterprises and cut across all age groups. Majority of them have little or no education and this results in major differences in their information needs and seeking behaviours. Artisans need information for training and gaining new skills, job related issues, financial matters, health, socio-economic issues, politics and government, community development matters, employment opportunities, current affairs, and sports among others. With regards in information sources, artisans are most frequently engaged in informal, face-to-face discussion with customers and neighbours and through attendance at their association meetings. On the usage of ICTs, artisans rely almost exclusively on mobile phones as a significant cost-saving device in everyday business communication. They also use radio, television and internet as formal sources of information. Problems encountered by artisans in seeking information include the inability to get required information, time to be spent in getting required information, ignorance of the existence of information sources, problem of getting reliable information, and language. Journalists and artisans as well as other information seekers would want to expend the least effort in searching for information; they generally consult the most convenient sources. Librarians and other information providers should, therefore, take convenience into consideration in the design and delivery of information services to ensure adequate utilization.

**Keywords:** information needs, information seeking behaviour, journalists, artisans, formal and informal sources.

## 1. Introduction

Information is a vital resource for national, organizational and individual growth and development. One of the major factors for the success of any business enterprise, occupation, vocation and profession is access to current, timely and relevant information. Information needs and seeking behaviours are dependent on a number of variables such as discipline, environment, educational and occupational, status, age, intellectual ability among others. Uhegbu (2001) stressed that information needs of an individual in any society is influenced by the purpose and goal at hand; the more urgent the information needs are, the more urgent the search. He further stated that the speed and accessibility of information are also factors that lead to effective information utilization. Designing and evaluating how users' information needs are met requires a knowledge of the characteristics of the users and their needs at all levels. Rubin (1998) emphasized that information systems cannot be well designed without clear understanding of what the intended users want or need to know, how they seek information and how they evaluate information that they received. In an information system, the various components such as people, procedures, and information resources are organized in such a way that they interact to perform a series of functionally related task such as storing and retrieving information to satisfy the information needs of a variety of users (Singh and Sharma, 2013).

Auster (1982) defined information seeking behaviour as “a field composed of studies that are concerned with who needs what kind of information and for what reason: how information is found, evaluated and used and how these needs can be identified and satisfied.” The process of information seeking behaviour includes defining information needs, use of sources of information and satisfaction and dissatisfaction derived from the process of seeking information. Wilson (2000) equally defined information seeking behaviour as the “purposive seeking for information as a consequence of a need to satisfy a goal.” In other words, information seeking behaviour means seeking information to fulfill a need or for some purpose or to accomplish a task. It is a mental process which occurs in the mind of an individual or he perceives in his mind to satisfy his needs. He searches for information through information channels such as the library, information centre, online services or some other purposes (Ansari and Zuberi, 2010).

Ocholla (1991) observed that information seeking behaviour is a means of reducing uncertainty and solving the information needs of a consumer. He stressed that high level of uncertainty increases information seeking activities and vice versa. He identified other factors that influence information seeking behaviour to include challenges facing the individual or organization, accessibility, availability, cost (in terms of money, energy and time) of information, desire to introduce variety and novelty, for general knowledge and pleasure among others. Uhegbu (2004) observed that information seeking behaviour of people varies according to their age, gender, occupation, location, education, religion and even culture. According to him, information seeking behaviour can be influenced by the source of information, content, medium and language of communication, time and nature of information, authenticity of the source, motives and past experiences. Information needs and seeking behaviours, being naturally occurring phenomena in every society, are not restricted to any specific social, political or ethnic group. Series of studies have been conducted on information needs and seeking behaviour of specific groups of individuals with the intention of identifying the users’ needs and how they go about satisfying those needs. The purpose of this paper is to discuss the information needs and seeking behaviours of journalist and artisans.

## 2. Information Needs and Seeking Behaviours of Journalists

Journalism is defined as “a skill by which an event of the day is distilled into a few words, sounds or pictures processed by the mechanics of communication to satisfy the human curiosity of the world that is always eager to know what is new” (Wainwright, 1982). Thus, journalism is positioned in an information rich environment. Journalists can never fulfill their responsibilities without information and their information needs are enormous, quite insatiable and much diversified due to the fact that they do not only inform the masses, but also play an important role in the interpretation of news and events to develop understanding, opinion formation and persuasion (Ansari and Zuberi, 2010). Thus, the responsibilities of journalists are very substantial and in fulfilling these information needs, they have to consult different sources of information. Journalists are a heterogeneous group of professionals who use a variety of informal and formal sources to satisfy their personal and work-related information needs. They are concerned with writing news items, a feature, an article, editorial, a column, personality profile and editing new items. Also their information seeking behaviour differs depending on the reporting areas such as crime, education, foreign affairs, entertainment and sports.

Chinn (2001) observed that journalists express information needs in their specific reporting areas in a vague or generalized description due to confidentiality. Anwar *et al.* (2004) stated that journalists do not communicate their information needs in a clear and precise terms. This is because of the confidentiality of their interests, the uncertainty as to what they want, and also because of certain profession arrogance as to why people, especially information professionals, should want to know about their work (Nicholas and Martin, 1997). The full understanding of this approach is critical in designing information systems and services that will enable journalists satisfy their information needs.

Nicholas and Martin (1997) investigated British journalists and found that journalists need information for checking facts, current affairs and researching. They described the major characteristics of journalists’ information needs as sheer size of their information appetites, their requirements for authoritative and current information. Anwar *et al.* (2004) studied information needs and seeking behaviour of journalists in Kuwait and found that the major information needs included fact-checking and verification, general information needs, background information, and information on the subject of their interests in that order. Edem (1993) observed that the area of greatest information needs of journalists in Nigeria was in political activities (27%) followed by government affairs (21.4%), social activities (16.4%) and economic activities (14.2%).

Journalists depend on various types of information sources to satisfy their information needs. They consult formal and informal sources but a greater emphasis is placed on informal (interpersonal) sources. Edem (1993)

investigated the information needs and information seeking behaviour patterns of journalists in Nigeria and noted that 76% of the respondents preferred using informal sources compared with 24% who used formal sources such as the library and archival centres. Among the formal sources, 41% of those who used the library consulted Federal/State Government publications, gazettes, and so on, 20% used old and new magazines/newspapers while 17.6% consulted published proceeding of conference/symposia. Apart from informal sources, journalists obtained information from other radio, newspaper, news magazine, television and news agency houses (Edem, 1993).

Information sources consulted by journalists depend mostly on the nature of information required. Singh and Sharma (2003) assessed the information seeking behaviour of newspaper journalists and observed that for the purpose of seeking specific information, the five important sources consulted were dictionaries/biographical dictionaries, Government publications, encyclopedias, books and newspaper clipping files. The most used sources consulted by journalists for keeping up-to-date were current issues of newspapers, newsmagazines, periodicals, book reviews and Government publications and for the purpose of background information, sources consulted were newspaper clipping files, back issues of newspapers, books, archival sources and periodicals. As regards the frequency of use of these sources, periodicals, news magazines, current issues of newspapers, newspaper clipping files, and dictionaries/biographical dictionaries were most frequently consulted.

The internet has become a major source of information for journalists because it provides easy access to current information. Anwar *et al.*, (2004) stated that Newspaper Organizations in Kuwait make journalists have access to the internet to find information. They observed that 41.4% of 87 respondents acknowledged that their organizations provided internet connection and search facilities while 35.6% claimed to have internet connection at their homes. They also stated that 58.6% of journalists used the internet as a source of information. Ansari and Zuberi (2010) assessed the information seeking behaviour of media professionals in Karachi, India and noted that these professionals require complete, factual and dependable information sources such as the library, the internet and online databases. The authors stated that the library and the internet were the main source of information consulted by these professionals. They observed that the use of the internet was highest among television and radio practitioners probably because it is a great source of information on which information on worldwide basis is easily available. It also provides current news and happenings in the world. Internet now plays a significant role in our lives because it makes data retrieval and comparison easier. It is hard to get the same data that is available through the internet by other means. The internet has become a major source of information not only for the journalists but also for many other works of life.

Journalists are faced with many difficulties in their quest for information. Edem (1993), in a survey of information needs and information seeking behaviour patterns of journalists in Nigeria, observed that the difficulties hampering access to information by journalists include finance (33.5%) which was ranked as the greatest obstacle, lack of modern communication equipment (25%), poor library and archival centers (21.4%), bureaucracy (8.5%) and language (5.7%). Anwar *et al.* (2004), who worked in Kuwait, highlighted the difficulties to include lack of time to search for information, information overload, lack of support from library staff and the problem of accessing information. Sing and Sharma (2013) studied information seeking behaviour of newspaper journalists in India and identified the difficulties to include lack of modern communication gadgets, information scattered in many sources, lack of time to look for or read information, information not readily available and inadequate library services and sources.

The difficulties encountered by journalists in their search for information vary from one part of the world to another. For instance, in the developed countries, the problem of finance, lack of modern communication equipment, lack of support from library staff, inadequate library services and sources, and language should be non-existent. On the other hand, information overload, which is a world wide phenomenon and, consequently, time to go through too much information, can still be problems. In the developing countries, particularly in Africa, finance will always be a problem as well as language because of the multilingual nature of the continent. With the Information and Communication Technology (ICT) now in vogue, the problem of lack of modern communication equipment must have been greatly reduced in these developing countries.

### **3. Information Needs and Seeking Behaviour of Artisans**

Artisans are highly heterogeneous groups of information users. They often engage in very small (often one man business) to medium scale business enterprises and cut across all ages but are mostly young adults and, therefore, economically active. Majority of them have little or no education while some have completed primary and secondary school education and very few being university graduates. According to Chimah and Udo (2015),

there would be the most major difference in terms of information needs and seeking behaviours of this category of information seekers because of the big disparity in their levels of education. Mabawonku (2004) observed that artisans include hair dressers/barbers, electricians, fashion designers, painters, petty traders and watch repairers. Others are bakers, cloth weavers, plumbers, phone call businesses, transporters and so on.

Artisans contribute immensely to national development. Thus, like other professionals, they require access to current, accurate and reliable information for the success of their business enterprises. Information need arises when these artisans encounter work-related problems that can be solved through access to information. However, Chimah and Udo (2015) observed that, as a result of their low levels of education and general lack of exposure to a variety of information resources, artisans may not know how to go about meeting their information needs, or even if they know, they tend to wait passively for their information needs to be met instead of taking proactive measures to meet them. Artisans need information for training and gaining new skills, job related issues, health, socio-economic issues, politics and government, community development matters, employment opportunities, current affairs and sports among others.

Adetoro (2004) investigated the patterns of information provision and needs among commercial motorcycle operators in Ijebu, Nigeria and found that socio-economic, current affairs and community development information top the list of information desired. Customers were the main source of information for the motorcyclists followed by their association meetings. Library and books were the least frequently consulted information sources which the author attributed to high illiteracy rate, lack of awareness and poor reading culture. He observed that the respondents most frequently engaged in a face-to-face discussion with their customers and neighbours and through attendance at their association meetings to obtain the needed information.

In a related study on artisans' information seeking behaviours in Uganda, Ikoja-Odongo and Ocholla (2004) stated that the respondents needed information most on training and gaining new skills, work-related activities and finance (loans). Their sources of information are personal experiences and interpersonal sources such as friends, neighbours and work supervisors. Extension agents, internet, ICT facilities, politicians and libraries were the least consulted sources. Face-to-face conversation, listening to radio/TV, and attendance at meetings were the most popular strategies for obtaining needed information. Mabawonku (2004), in her study on information needs of artisans in Ibadan, Nigeria, observed that the information needs of this group were on job related activities, health, politics and financial matters. The major sources of information for this group were interpersonal and radio. Formal information agencies such as libraries were rarely consulted.

The Information and Communication Technologies (ICTs) have had a significant impact on every sphere of life even among artisans. As a result of illiteracy or low-level education, an aspect of ICT widely used in seeking information by the artisans is the mobile phones. Molony (2008) studied the role of mobile phones in informal sector enterprises in Tanzania and reported that when informal sector enterprises do use ICT, they rely almost exclusively on mobile phones as a significant cost-saving device in every day business communication. For small businesses, answering a call immediately, rather than responding later could make a difference between winning or losing an order. If one spends a lot of time away from his business premises, on site or with customers, a mobile phone will allow people to contact him at any time of the day (Duncombe and Heeks, 2001). According to Molony (2008), an artisan uses his mobile phone to store the numbers of all his previous customers and calls them periodically to see if they have any work to be done or if they know of other potential customers. Many artisans use the mobile phone in a similar manner.

In a study on the use of electronic gadgets for information seeking process by fishermen in Tamilnadu, India, Ramadas and Saravaran (2016) reported that the majority of the respondents used equipment such as mobile phone and television for information seeking. They observed that the electronic gadgets such as mobile phones, radio, television and internet were more frequently used by fishermen for collecting the needed information to meet their day-to-day information requirements. The fishermen also used the mobile phone for information on climatic changes, information sharing with friends and relatives and price fluctuation in the fish market. Onayinka and Dayo (2015) observed that the use of mobile phones by artisans on Ogun State, Nigeria was significantly influenced by age but not by educational qualification and work experience indicating that artisans of varying ages should be encouraged to use mobile phones in order to boost their businesses.

Problems encountered by artisans while seeking information include inability to get required information, spending too much time to get required information, ignorance of the existence of information sources and problem of getting reliable information. Other problems include information not being in the required working language, information not being timely and information being too technical or not being in a useable format.

## 5. Conclusion

In discussing the information needs and seeking behaviours of journalists and artisans, some observations can be highlighted. Information seeking is context driven indicating that people seek information because they want to solve a specific problem or take a particular decision. Individuals differ in their information seeking abilities. Differences in intelligence, analytical ability, educational status, profession/occupation, age, and gender among other qualities have substantial influence on the capacity of people to seek information effectively. Not only do people vary in their ability to seek information but different groups of individuals have different information needs and seeking strategies. Information seekers are very likely to consult interpersonal sources probably because of the convenience. In other words, information seekers would not want to expend the least effort in seeking information; they generally consult the most convenient sources. The electronic gadgets such as the radio, television, mobile phones, internet and online databases are ubiquitous and have become valuable sources of information; they are now very conveniently consulted by most groups of individuals. People rarely consider libraries as major sources of information. Few individuals with information needs have identified libraries as primary sources for satisfying their information needs. The problems encountered by journalists and artisans in their quest for information include difficulty in accessing information sources, lack of time to search for information, searching skills, information overload, problem of getting reliable, current, and relevant information, spending too much time to get the required information, information being too technical or not in a useable format, finance and language.

The wide variation in information seeking behaviours implies a need for further categorization of information needs and sources as well as careful planning and designing of information systems and services to meet the requirements of specific user groups. Information repackaging and use of appropriate media for information provision are needed to ensure improved citizens' access to information in this knowledge age. For instance, an appropriate model of information system for information poor community must be grounded in oral communication and indigenous knowledge and must be sensitive to poverty, inadequate infrastructure and illiteracy. As a result, demonstrations, seminars/workshops, talk shows and so on should be more meaningful to this group.

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