Information needs and seeking behaviour of lawyers based on gender and location in Imo State

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Abstract
This study investigated the information needs and seeking behaviour of lawyers based on gender and location in Imo State. Two research questions and hypotheses guided the study using a correlational research design. The population consists of 2,599 registered lawyers of Nigerian Bar Association Imo State Chapter. The sample for the study was 650, barristers. The Researcher used the stratified random sampling technique to select 325 male lawyers and female lawyers respectively with consideration to their location. A 40 item structured rating scale titled “Lawyers' Information Needs and seeking behaviour Scale (LINSBS)” validated by an expert in library and information science and two other experts in educational measurement and evaluation, was used for data collection. The reliability of the instrument was established at 0.84 using Cronbach’s alpha statistic. The data obtained were analyzed using frequency numbers and Chi Square ($X^2$) contingency statistics to answer the research questions, so as to determine the magnitude of the relationship between the dependent and independent variables of the study. Chi Square ($X^2$) test of independence statistic was used to test the hypotheses at 0.05 level of significance. Among the findings of the study was that; the contingency coefficient for the influence of lawyers' gender, location and their information needs and seeking behaviour very low. That is to say that there is a very low relationship between lawyers' gender, location and their information needs and seeking behaviour. The relationship of lawyers' information needs and seeking behaviour is significant with lawyers' location but insignificant with lawyers' gender. Based on the findings, the study recommended among other things that government should provide unlimited access to information to lawyers because they play crucial role in the judiciary. This can be done by anchoring programmes that directly address the needs of Lawyers in electronic and print media. Lawyers, irrespective of their gender, location, years of experience, areas of specialization and academic qualifications should endeavour to use different sources for sourcing their information, so as to give reliable services to their clients.

Keywords: Information needs and seeking behaviour, lawyers, Imo State

Introduction
Information needs have been understood by information scientists as evolving from vague awareness of something missing and culminates in locating information that contributes to understanding and meaning. Tuhumwire and Okollo-Obura (2010) stated that information needs are of various types. Apart from expressed or articulated needs, there are unexpressed needs which the client is aware of, but does not like to express it. In order to meet the information needs of individuals, adequate knowledge about information seeking behaviour and information used are crucial. This knowledge may also lead to the discovery of novel information skills and user profiles that can be used to enhance existing information models or even develop new ones. In order to be effective, information providers, librarians and other information Professionals require a full understanding of information seeking behaviour, needs and uses of individuals (i.e., lawyers).

A lawyer is a person learned in the law as an attorney, counsel or solicitor, a person licensed to practice law. Working as a lawyer represents the practical application of legal theory and knowledge to solve real problems or to advance the interests of those who retain (i.e. hire) lawyers for legal services. The role of a lawyer varies significantly across legal jurisdictions and therefore can be treated here in only the most general term.
(Tuhumwire and Okello Obura 2010). As noted by Fowler (2007), Lawyers work primarily in the legal culture, with its extensive rules and procedures requiring the right kind of legal information. Lawyers operate in information intensive environment. Everything they do, whether providing legal advice, representing a client in court, or drafting a legal document requires information (Otike & Mathews, 2000).

The need to become well informed and knowledgeable, leads to the process of identifying information needs. This process does not work without finding out how lawyers articulate, seek, evaluate, select and finally use the required information, and this is commonly referred to as information-seeking behaviour (Zawawi & Majid, 2001). The understanding of information needs and information-seeking behaviour of various categories of Lawyers is essential as it helps in the planning, implementation and operation of information systems and services in a particular work setting. This is because the working environment and type of task performed by lawyers shape their information needs and the ways they acquire, select and use this information.

In the legal profession, there are Solicitors who could not attend the legal (law school), Solicitors who had the opportunity to attend the Law School, and others are also master's and Ph.D degree holders that had opportunity to further their profession. They could be male or female, working in different locations (urban and rural) of the society, and all seek and utilize information to satisfy their professional needs.

Alao and Arinola (2012), citing Leckie, Pettigrew and Sylvain, observed that factors which affect information seeking behaviour include personal reasons, kinds of information being sought, and the ways and means by which the information is being sought. Other factors that may also determine the information seeking behaviour of an individual or a group of individuals include; the purpose for which information is being required, the environment in which the user operates, users’ skills in identifying the information, and sources preferred for acquiring the needed information.

A study carried out in Nigeria by Haruna and Mabawonku (2001) observed that there are three highest ranking types of information sought by Lawyers, and these are knowing the latest decisions of the superior courts; knowing the most recent legislation', and obtaining information on local and international seminars. These legal information needs are met through some sources. Bitso (2012), noted that the source of legal information is partly from law books of primary and secondary nature. Primary materials include acts of Parliament, Subordinate legislation and reputed decisions of Courts and Tribunals. Secondary materials include all types of legal literature that constitute formal records of law, such as Encyclopedia, Digests, Cases, Textbooks, Formats, Dictionaries, Indexes and Bibliographies, as well as e-legal information. These sources can be obtained through the Internet, Libraries, Newspapers and other information providing Centers. The Lawyers must also possess certain skills which are required to equip them or with the idea to get required information necessary for their legal profession.

In an empirical study carried by Ossai (2011), he found out that there is a
slight difference in how male and female undergraduate law students use information resources and that the need to compliment lecture notes ranks highest in the information need of the students. Similarly, Baro, Onyenania and Osaheni (2010), affirm that there is a significant difference between male and female students in the sources they use in obtaining information in the humanities and in their search strategies.

Momoh and Folorunso (2013), carried out a study on the effect of location on demographic information seeking behavior of male and female law students. They found demographic out that variables, location and age have considerable effect on information seeking behaviour of both the male and female lawyers in the Northeastern Nigeria.

In order to improve the design of acceptable legal information mechanism, there is need to, develop a better understanding of lawyers' information seeking behaviour with existing systems and needs (Makri, Blardford, & Cox, 2008). Generally, an accurate, in-depth identification of the legal information needs and information seeking behaviour of users is crucial in assessing the effectiveness of a library or information service in meeting its legal information and library training requirements.

Based on the above expositions, the Researcher wishes to investigate the information needs and seeking behaviour of lawyers in Imo State, based on their gender and their location.

Statement of the problem
Imo State lawyers embark on information seeking for a variety of purposes. From personal observation, they research to update their knowledge, to carry out professional assignments, to prepare for moot court competitions and to write other articles relevant to their profession. One therefore wonders how and where the different categories of gender based lawyers from diverse locations source for both print and digital materials, how and where they acquire their computer and internet skills, how they seek and acquire their information needs, their skills, the barriers they normally meet while seeking for information and the factors responsible for them, their information literacy skills (if they have any) and the behaviour they exhibit while seeking for information. The above are therefore research problems seeking for answers in this current study. This study posed in question form is: what is the information needs and seeking behaviour of lawyers based on gender in Imo State?

Purpose of the Study
The general purpose of this study is to examine the information needs and seeking behaviour of lawyers based on gender in Imo State. Specifically, the study sought to:

1. determine the information needs and seeking behaviour of lawyers based on gender., and
2. ascertain the information needs and seeking behaviour of lawyers based on location.

Research questions
The following research questions were posed to guide the study:

1. What is the contingency coefficient for the influence of lawyers' gender on their information needs and seeking behaviour?
2. What is the contingency coefficient for the influence of lawyers'
location on their information needs and seeking behaviour?

### Hypotheses

The following hypotheses are tested at 5% error level of significance in the study:

**H₀₁**: The information needs and seeking behaviour of lawyers do not significantly depend on gender.

**H₀₂**: The information needs and seeking behaviour of lawyers do not significantly depend on location.

### Methods

This study adopted a correlational research design. The population of the study consists of 2,599 registered lawyers to the Imo State chapter of Nigerian Bar Association (NBA, 2014). The sample for this study comprised of 650 Barristers in Imo State. The researcher used stratified random sampling technique to sample 325 male lawyers and 325 female lawyers with consideration to their location. The data collection instrument that was used for this study is a researcher-made rating scale titled "Lawyers' Information Needs and Seeking Behaviour Scale (LINSBS)". The instrument was validated by experts in Library and Information Science and two other experts in Educational Measurement and Evaluation from the Faculty of Education at the Imo State University, Owerri. The rating scale was administered to 30 lawyers from Abia Slate using one shot test method to determine the reliability of the instrument. The scores were subjected to internal consistency (stability) using Cronbach alpha statistic which gave an index of 0.84. This index showed that the instrument is reliable for the study. In analyzing the data that were collected, frequency numbers and Chi Square ($\chi^2$) contingency statistics were used to answer the research questions, this was also used to determine the magnitude of the relationship between the dependent and independent variables of the study. Furthermore, Chi Square ($\chi^2$) test of independence test was used to test the hypotheses at 0.05 level of significance.

### Results

#### Research question one

What is the contingency coefficient for the influence of lawyers’ gender on their information needs and seeking behaviour?

Table 1: Contingency coefficient for the influence of lawyers' gender on their information needs and seeking behaviour

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Information needs and seeking behaviour</th>
<th>S</th>
<th>A</th>
<th>D</th>
<th>SD</th>
<th>Total</th>
<th>C</th>
<th>Decision</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td><strong>Lawyers' Gender</strong></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Male</td>
<td>123</td>
<td>89</td>
<td>72</td>
<td>41</td>
<td>325</td>
<td>0.09</td>
<td>Very Low</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Female</td>
<td>137</td>
<td>101</td>
<td>54</td>
<td>33</td>
<td>325</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Total</strong></td>
<td>260</td>
<td>190</td>
<td>126</td>
<td>74</td>
<td>650</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Table 1 shows the contingency coefficient for the influence of lawyers' gender on their-information needs and seeking behaviour. It was indicated in the table that under male lawyers, 123 strongly agreed, 89 agreed, 72 disagreed, while 41 strongly disagreed. This shows that there are 325 male lawyers. Under female lawyers, 137 strongly agreed, 101 agreed, 54 disagreed, while 33 strongly disagreed. So there are 325 female lawyers in the sample. The total number who strongly agreed were 260, 190 agreed, 126 disagreed, while 74 strongly disagreed. With the application of contingency statistic, 0.09 was recalled indicating a very low relationship. Therefore the conclusion is that the contingency coefficient for the influence of lawyers' gender on their information needs and seeking behaviour is very low. That is to say that there is a very low relationship between lawyers' gender and their information needs and seeking behaviour.

**Research question two:** What is the contingency coefficient for the influence of lawyers' location on their information needs and seeking behaviour?

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Lawyers' Location</th>
<th>Information needs and seeking behaviours</th>
<th>C</th>
<th>Decision</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Urban</td>
<td>SA: 271, A: 102, D: 118, SD: 87</td>
<td>0.12</td>
<td>Very Low</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Rural</td>
<td>37, 20, 11, 4</td>
<td>72</td>
<td>Relationship</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Total</td>
<td>308, 122, 129, 91</td>
<td>650</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Table 2 shows the contingency coefficient for the influence of lawyers’ location on their information needs and seeking behaviour. It was indicated in the table that under lawyers from urban areas, 271 strongly agreed, 102 agreed, 18 disagreed, while 87 strongly disagreed. This shows that there are 578 lawyers from urban areas. Under lawyers from rural areas, 37 strongly agreed, 20 agreed, 11 disagreed, while 4 strongly disagreed. So there are 72 lawyers from rural areas in the sample. The total number who strongly agreed are 308, 122 agreed, 129 disagreed, while 91 strongly disagreed. With the application of contingency statistic, 0.12 was realized indicating a very low relationship. Therefore the conclusion is that the contingency coefficient for the influence of lawyers' location on their information needs and seeking behaviour is very low. That is to say that there is a very low relationship between lawyers' location and their information needs and seeking behaviour.

**H0**: The information needs and seeking behaviour of lawyers do not significantly depend on gender.

Table 3: Summary of the X Chi-Square test of significant dependency of information needs and seeking behaviour of lawyers on their gender
The findings of this study revealed that the contingency coefficient for the influence of lawyers’ gender on their information needs and seeking behaviour is very low. That is to say that there is a very low relationship between lawyers’ gender and their information needs and seeking behaviour. This implies that the magnitude of the relationship between the variables is very weak/low. The study further established that the information needs and seeking behaviour of lawyers do not significantly depend on their gender. This implies that gender do not significantly affect the information needs and seeking behaviour of lawyers. The results of this study support the result of Wiklund (1998). In the real sense, men are generally given the preferential right of interpretation, leading to an uneven distribution of resources. These relationships were seen as circumstances in which people have opportunities to act. Description of the academic community according to Wiklund as male research culture belongs here. In this perspective, he considers men and women as not having to act differently, but women have to adjust to structural and cultural conditions where they do not have the same status as men. This can be said that lawyers, irrespective of their gender use many sources to get information need and their behaviour do not vary. In line with
this, Al-Daihani and Oppenheim’s (2008) study found out that majority do not use the Internet or legal databases. Personal collections were found to be the most heavily used source used on a daily basis. The majority rely on internal communication with colleagues as a channel for exchanging information more than external communication with others. Newspapers were the most important source from which they obtained information by chance. In contrast to this finding, Ossai’s (2011) study found out that there is only a slight difference in how male and female undergraduate law students use information resources and that the need to compliment lecture notes rank highest in the information need of the students. Similarly, Baro, Onyenania and Osaheni (2010) noted there is a significant difference between male and female students in the sources they use in obtaining information in the Humanities and in their search strategies.

The study revealed that the contingency coefficient for the influence of lawyers’ location on their information needs and seeking behaviour is very low. That is to say that there is a very low relationship between lawyers’ location and their information needs and seeking behaviour. One can say that lawyers’ location affect their information needs and seeking behaviour to minimal extent. This finding led to the establishment that the information needs and seeking behaviour of lawyers significantly depend on their location. This implies that though there exists a low relationship between lawyers’ location and their information needs and seeking behaviour, but the relationship is remarkably visible. That is to say that the relationship can be felt in this study. It could therefore be that the lawyers use many sources of information, browse through the internet as mode of search for information, information seeking behaviour and uses of the information in their field of profession. In line with this finding, Momoh and Folorunso’s (2013) study found out that demographic variables; location and age have considerable effect on information seeking behaviour of company advertising strategies in the North-eastern Nigeria. The similarity in this finding, could be as a result of similar characteristics of respondents.

Based on the findings of this study, the following recommendations were made:

1. Lawyers irrespective of their gender, location, years of experience, areas of specialization and academic qualifications should endeavor to use different sources for sourcing their information so as to give reliable services to their clients.

2. The layers should also make use of internet, libraries and other relevant modes of information in their information needs and seeking behaviour.

References


Olike, I. & Mathews, G. (2000). Legal Information needs of Lawyers in