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Characteristics and information-seeking behaviour of cybercafé users in some Nigerian cities

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Abstract

Internet use is becoming increasingly popular in Nigerian cities, thus necessitating the spread of commercial cybercafés nationwide. Unfortunately, use of cybercafé has been associated with a number of anti-social behaviours. This study is an exploratory investigation of the characteristics and information seeking behaviour of users of commercial cybercafés in selected Nigerian cities. A total of 180 respondents were selected via a multi-stage random sampling technique. Data were collected using a structured questionnaire. Data analysis revealed that about 60% of respondents were male, and nearly 80% were less than 36 years old. Furthermore, 91% of respondents had above 12 years of formal education, while 30% had no formal training in use of computer. Majority (40%) had 1 - 4 years of Internet use experience, while students constituted about 40% of respondents. About 40% had no formal source of income. It was further revealed that 59.4, 13.4, and 27.2% of respondents used the Internet for academic, business, and 'social' purposes respectively. Pearson correlation analysis revealed significant relationship between weekly use of cybercafé and Internet use experience (r = 0.61, p = 0.016), years of formal education (r = 0.69, p = 0.008), and monthly income (r = 0.78, p = 0.002) among respondents. The paper concludes that cybercafé users in Nigerian cities are mostly students and academics, and proffered some useful recommendations for improvement.

Keywords: Cybercafés, socioeconomic characteristics, Internet use, purpose, duration, Nigeria.

INTRODUCTION

What is now known as the 'Internet' beganthere aroundareabout when the United States Defence Advanced Research Projects Agency (DARPA) conducted a research to investigate echanisms that could interlink packet networks of various kinds, thereby developing Internet was originally used to send messages and communication protocols which would allow networked computers to communicate transparently across multiple and linked packet networks (Abdel Kader, 2009). By 1986, the U.S. National Science Foundation (NSF) began the development of the NSFNET which still continues to present-day application of the Internet for finding

Internet worldstats (2009), around1.81973billion internet users in the world today, with Africa accounting for just about 4%. Usually referred to as the network of networks, Internet documents electronically; for acting as information host; for online group discussions; and for accessing remote computers. Ojedokun (2007) observed that the use of the Internet has transcended these functions to include serve

as a major backbone of communication service for information using the World Wide Web (www) with easy-the Internet. Abdel Kader (2009) further states that public to-use interfaces like GUI (Graphical User Interface). domain and commercial mplementations of the roughly The internet became a reality in Nigeria in the late 100 protocols of Transmission Control Protocol (TCP) 1990s. Today, Nigeria, with more than 400 Internet and internet protocol (IP), protocol suite became available service providers (compared to just 11 in 2000) as well as in the 1980's, and by the end of 1991, the Internet has a good number of data carriers, Internet exchange and grown to include some 5,000 networks in over three gateway operators, is the largest user of the Internet in dozen countries, serving over 700,000 host computers Africa, accounting for about 10% of Africa's popu used by over 4,000,000 people. According to internet users (Internteworldstats, 2008). With about

1,968 internet hosts, Internet users constitute only about 7.4% of Nigeria`s population. Internetworldstats (2009) further reveals that Internet use penetration (% population) in Nigeria is lower than many African countries such as Seychelles (36.6%), Morocco (32.9%), Mauritius (29.6%), Tunisia (26.7%), Cape Verde (23.9%), and Algeria 12.0%).

Even though Internet connectivity has been enhanced by mobile phone network operators in Nigeria through the use of GPRS (General Packet Radio Service) connectivity, cybercafés have become so popular that there are at least two privately-owned and operated cybercafés (mostly connected over European Internet connections) in every major street in most Nigerian cities (Kolawole, 2008). Cybercafés are public places that provide Internet services at a fee, normally charged per hour (occasionally per 30 min). They have become veritable sources of timely, easy, fast, and relatively affordable Internet access for many Nigerians. Unfortunately, cybercafés are beset by a number of problems that include poor power supply (coupled with high and unstable cost of diesel to fuel generators), low level of appreciation of the web, unfavourable tax regimes and poor e-commerce options, which are also some of the problems facing the use of Internet in Nigeria generally (Eyitayo, 2008; Kolawole, 2008). Also noted as a major problem, is the high cost of accessing the Internet in African countries. This is to the extent that the Internet was considered to have had the 'greatest impact at the top end business and in well-educated, wealthy families, primarily in the major urban areas' (Budde008).

Another problem with the use of cybercafés, particularly in Nigeria, is cyber fraud. Cybercafés are fast becoming associated with cyber-related criminal activities that have given the country a very bad image which, of course, is not the true picture of the vast majority of Nigerians (Adomi, 2008). For instance, the Internet Crime Report prepared by the National White Collar Crime Centre and the FBI, ranked Nigeria as the third in the world in cyber crime, accounting for 5.7% of perpetrators of cyber crimes (2007 internet crime report). Indeed, Igwe (2007) opined that although Advance Fee Fraud (known as 419), now very much synonymous broached as a global phenomenon, it did emerge from Nigeria and was the brainchild of a group of Nigerian nationals'. Some Nigerian cyber fraudsters have truly exploited the opportunities offered by the nature of cybercafés in Nigeria to hoodwink unwary individuals and organizations of their moneys and other possessions within and outside the country, thus necessitating the Economic and Financial Crimes Commission (EFCC) to place a ban on overnight browsing from 10:00 pm to 6:00 am. Though overnight browsing is very useful to cybercafé owners and users, it was banned by the EFCC to arrest the use of cybercafés for criminal activities and the constant embarrassment posed to the Nigerian government and people by the cyber criminals

(Adomi, 2007; Chawki, 2009). The Nigerian government also set up the Nigerian cybercrime working group (NCWG) which is an inter-agency organ charged with devising ways of combating Internet-related criminal activities in Nigeria (NCWG Website, 2008).

Nigeria, with a population of over 140 million and about 51 million people making up her labour force, is the most populous country in Africa. According to CIA-world fact book (2008), Nigeria has a literacy rate of 68% (75% and 60.6% among male and female respectively), gross domestic product (GDP), (purchasing power parity) of $294.8 billion, GDP per capita of $2,200 and industrial production growth rate of 3.1%. As at June 2009, Nigeria had about 11 million Internet users, representing about 5400% increment from 200,000 in December 2000 (Internetworldstats, 2009).

This study thus seeks to provide empirical data on the contemporary socioeconomic characteristics of Nigerian cybercafé users and their information seeking behaviour. Specifically the research focuses on their major purpose of using the cybercafés and the relationship between their socioeconomic characteristics and their visits to cybercafés.

METHODOLOGY

Data were collected between February and September 2009. A multi-stage random sampling technique was used to select respondents for the research. Nigeria has six geo-political zones (GPZ), each made of between 5 - 7 states. From each GPZ, one state was randomly selected, while one city was also randomly selected from each of the chosen states. In each selected city, six cybercafés were randomly selected. Finally, from each cybercafé, five users were randomly selected. This gives 30 respondents from each city (or state) and a total of 180 respondents for the research sample. The cities used for the study are Ilorin (Kwara State, North-Central GPZ), Ibadan (Oyo State, South-West GPZ), Owerri (Imo State, South-East GPZ), Port Harcourt (Rivers State, South-South GPZ), Maiduguri (Borno State, North-East GPZ), and Kano (Kano State, North-West GPZ). All the cities used for data collection are state capitals and each has, at least, two institutions of higher learning. Data were collected using a structured questionnaire that was directly administered on the respondents at the respective cybercafés.

A number of variables were measured. Age of respondents was measured in years, while educational level was measured as the number of years of formal education. Formal computer training among respondents was measured in months. Experience in Internet use was measured in years, while income was measured as the total monthly Weeklyduration of use of the Internet was measured as the number of hours respondents used on the internet at cybercafés each week. Major purpose of internet use was measured among respondents as academic, business, or social. Academic purpose refers to when users visit cybercafés for study and research motives, while business purpose refers to when respondents used cybercafé visits to transact business on-line, such as 'forex' purchases, and search for business and job opportunities. Furthermore, respondents whose major purpose of using the cybercafés was other than academic or business were classified as social users. These include respondents who visitedcybercafés to chat, send or read e-mails, download/uploadmusic/films; on-line dating and so on. Frequencies, percentages, means, and chi-square were used to analyse data and present the findings of the research.

RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

Socioeconomic and personal characteristics of cybercafé users

Table 1 shows the summary of the socioeconomic characteristics of the respondents. Most respondents (78.4%) were below 36 years of age, while about 8.3% of them were above 50 years. This shows the preponderance of youths in the use of cybercafés. Also, Table 1 shows that 58.9% of the respondents were male, while female respondents constituted 41.1%.

An investigation of educational background of respondents revealed that only 8.8% of the respondents had 10 years and below of formal education, while more than 90% had above 10 years of formal education. Indeed, about 52% of them had more than 15 years of among cybercafé users in the study area.

Furthermore, about 29% of the respondents (representing the majority) had no formal training in use of computer, while the remaining 70% had at least one month of formal training in computer use. Indeed, about 26% of respondents claimed to have undergone more than twelve months computer training. These imply that even though formal computer training might not be a pre-requisite among users of cybercafés in the study area, it characterized most of the respondents. Occupational distribution of respondents as contained in Table 1 revealed that majority (about 68%) of respondents were students, mostly of higher institutions of learning. They were followed by respondents in the academia such as teachers and lecturers of higher institutions, who accounted for 9.0% of the study sample. Technicians such as electricians, photographers, and designers accounted for 4.4% of the respondents, while businessmen and traders, civil servants, and the unemployed accounted for 3.9, 3.3, and 6.7%, respectively.

Investigation of Internet use experience (IUE) among respondents shows that about 28% were relatively new users having less than one year of IUE, while about 60% of the respondents claimed to have used the Internet via cybercafés for between 1 - 8 years (Table 1). Also, about 13% of the respondents had used the Internet for more than eight years, with about 32% having at least 5 years Internet use experience. The mean IUE for the study area was 3.7 years - implying that the average cybercafé user in the study area had about 4 years of Internet use experience. This is long enough for reasonable ability to achieve desired motives of visits to cybercafés.

Table 1 reveals that about 39% of the respondents had no formal source of monthly income, perhaps reflecting the preponderance of unemployed students among cybercafé visitors in the study area. Furthermore, while about 12% claimed to earn not more than N10,000 monthly, 25.6% earned between N11,000 and N50,000 as monthly income. However, 23.3% earned more than N50,000 as monthly income, while average monthly

income among respondents was about N12,800. These imply that a good majority of cybercafé users in the study were engaged in one form of income-generating activity or the other. Furthermore, Table 1 shows that about one third of the respondents were married, more than half were not married, while the remainder were divorced, separated or widowed.

Information-seeking behaviours

Data in Table 2 reveals the major purposes for which respondents visit cybercafés in the study area. The three major purposes are academic, business, and social. More than half of the respondents visited cybercafés mainly for academic purposes.

About 32% of this category of respondents was female, and they also accounted for 18.9% of total respondents. On the other hand, male visitors to cybercafés whose major purpose was academic accounted for 40.5% of the research sample. The table further reveals that 27.2% of respondents visited cybercafés mainly for social purposes. However, this category of respondents was dominated by females, who accounted for about 19% of the respondents. The respondents who claimed to visit cybercafés for business purpose were the least in number, accounting for just 13.4% of the total respondents. This perhaps suggests that cybercafé users in the study area are not fully exploiting the business potentials available on the Internet. Male respondents also dominated this category of cybercafé users, accounting for 10.0%, while females accounted for just 3.4%. This implies that more men used the cybercafés for online business activities than women in the study area.

An investigation of the preferred periods of visits to cybercafés yielded the data contained in Table 3. Majority of respondents (53.3%) conceded that they had no specific or chosen period of visiting the cybercafé. To this category, their visits to cybercafés are determined by need for 'browsing' and exig about 18% claimed to visit cybercafés mostly in the mornings when, according to them, the cybercafés normally had fewer customers. About 11% claimed to prefer using the cybercafés despite the ban on late-night operations by the EFCC.

This suggests that some cybercafés might be flouting browsing restrictions. Table 3 further shows that about 12 and 6% of respondents preferred to use the cybercafés in the afternoon and evening, respectively.

Respondents were requested to estimate the number of active hours per week they spent using the Internet at cybercafés. Their responses yielded the data contained in Table 4. Majority (about 33%) of the respondents claimed to spend between one and five hours using the Internet at cybercafés in a week. This means that this category of cybercafé users spent an average of less than one hour/day.

Table 4 further reveals that about 18% of the

Table 1. Personal characteristics of respondents (N=180).

Variable		Frequency	%	Mean
Age (years)	Below 20	54	30.0	26
	21-35	87	48.4	
	36-50	24	13.3	
	51-65	15	8.3	
Gender	Male	106	58.9	-
	Female	74	41.1	
Years of formal Education	<10	16	8.8	
	10-15	93	51.7	12.06
	16-20	71	39.4	
Months of formal Computer training	0	53	29.4	
	1-4	41	22.8	
	5-8	16	8.8	6.3
	9-12	23	12.8	
	>12	47	26.1	
Occupation	Student	123	68.3	
	Unemployed	12	6.7	
	Civil service	6	3.3	
	Business/Trading	7	3.9	-
	Technical	8	4.4	
	Academic/Teaching	16	9.0	
	Others	8	4.4	
Internet use experience (Years)	<1	51	28.3	
	1-4	72	40.0	
	5-8	34	18.9	3.7
	>8	23	12.8	
Monthly income (N'000)	None	71	39.4	
	1-10	21	11.7	
	11-20	13	7.2	
	21-30	11	6.1	12.8
	31-40	12	6.7	
	41-50	10	5.6	
	>50	42	23.3	
Marital status	Married	60	33.3	
	Not married	102	56.7	-
	Others	18	10.0	

Source: Field survey, 2009.

respondents also spent less than one hour/week at cybercafés, probably visiting a cybercafé once in a week, while about 43% spent between 6 and 30 h per week. The latter category might be dominated by respondents using cybercafés mostly for academic or business purposes, while the former might be those using the cybercafés for social purposes mainly. About 4% of the respondents were unsure of the number of hours they

Table 2. Major purpose of visiting cybercafés among respondents according to gender.

Type	Frequency	Percentage
Academic		
Male	73	40.5
Female	34	18.9
Sub-total	107	59.4
Business		
Male	18	10.0
Female	6	3.4
Sub-total	24	13.4
Social		
Male	15	8.3
Female	34	18.9
Sub-total	49	27.2
Total	180	100.0

Table 3. Period of visit to cybercafés.

Period	Frequency	Percentage
Mornings	33	18.3
Afternoon	21	11.7
Evenings	11	6.1
Overnights	19	10.6
Not specific	96	53.3
Total	180	100.0

Table 4. Respondents' estimation of their weekly duration o

Duration of visits (hours/week)	Frequency	Percentage
<1	33	18.3
1 - 5	59	32.8
6 - 10	29	16.1
11 - 15	26	14.4
16 - 20	12	6.7
21 - 25	8	4.4
26 - 30	3	1.7
>30	2	1.1
Do not know	8	4.4
Total	180	100.0

spent per week using the Internet at the cybercafés.

Relationship between weekly duration of internet use and socioeconomic characteristics of respondents

Table 5 shows the relationship between selected socioeconomic variables of respondents and their weekly duration of using the Internet at cybercafés. At $p = 0.05$, weekly duration of Internet use exhibited positive and significant relationship with age ($r = 0.61$), monthly income ($r = 0.69$), and years of formal education ($r = 0.78$).

It is discernible from Table 5 that monthly income

Table 5. Results of Pearson correlations of weekly duration of internet use at cybercafés with selected socioeconomic variables among respondents

Variables	Correlation coefficient	p-value
Internet use experience	.61	.016*
Years of education	.69	.008*
Monthly income	.78	.002*
Age	.31	.117
Months of computer training	.22	.105

*Significant at 5%

exhibited the highest correlation with weekly visits to cybercafés among the respondents. This implies that weekly visits to cybercafés form monthly income more than other socioeconomic variables. This suggests that the amount of money available to respondents might significantly determine the number of hours they used in cybercafés per week. Table 5 further shows that years of formal education increased with duration of weekly visits to cybercafés among respondents. This means that the more educated respondents were, the more the number of hours they spent using the Internet at cybercafés. This might be due to their relatively high propensity to use of the Internet for study and research. Similarly, Internet use experience positively and significantly correlated to the weekly duration of visits to cybercafés among respondents. This implies that increasing Internet use experience led to increase in weekly duration of visits to cybercafés.

Table 5 revealed, however, that age and duration of formal computer training had no significant correlations with duration of weekly visits to cybercafés among respondents. Thus, cybercafé use in the study area did not increase with age and length of formal computer training. The non-significant correlations figure for age could be attributable to the fact that most respondents (about 80%) were less than 36 years. The results of correlations in respect of formal computer training suggest that the weekly duration of use of cybercafés for internet browsing did not depend on (lengthy) formal computer training.

Conclusion

The paper is an exploratory study of cybercafé users and their information seeking-behaviour. It investigated the relationship between information-seeking behaviours and socioeconomic characteristics of the respondents. From the findings of the study, it is discernible that most cybercafé users in the study area were engaged in one occupation/vocation or the other, with business men/women, civil servants and technicians constituting the least occupational groups among cybercafé users.

However, at least three out of every cybercafé users are students. The research also revealed that cybercafé users in the study area possessed relatively high educational standards, while only about one-third had no increased training use of with computer respondents'. Furthermore, the research revealed that while four out of every ten cybercafé users had no formal source of income, about two-thirds of cybercafé users in the study area used cybercafés mainly for academic purposes. Convincingly, the study further showed that monthly income, level education, and Internet use experience were the significant correlates of duration of weekly active use of cybercafés in the study area.

Based on these findings, the study proffers the following recommendations:

1. Institutions of higher learning should make Internet services available to their students, either by encouraging the establishment of more campus-based cybercafés or extending official Internet service access to students.
2. Since students of institutions of higher learning are the overwhelming majority of cybercafé users, it is imperative for stakeholders such as governments at all levels, parents, and school proprietors to encourage primary and post-primary school students to be Internet-literate before gaining admission into institutions of higher learning.
3. Technicians, artisans, and civil servants (through their associations) should be encouraged to use the Internet via cybercafés for useful information and knowledge that could aid them enhance their professional knowledge; and
4. Government and its agencies should intensify the campaign to give Nigeria a better image in relation to the use of the Internet, since the study found that majority of cybercafé users were academically motivated. This could be achieved through proper monitoring and campaigns by agencies like the National Orientation Agency, National Communications Commission and the Internet Engineering Taskforce (IETF).

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