

LAW UNDRGRADUATES' INFORMATION SEEKING BEHAVIOUR AND ELECTRONIC RESOURCES USE: EVIDENCE FROM PRIVATE UNIVERSITIES IN SOUTH-WEST, NIGERIA

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Abstract

The study examined information seeking behaviour of law undergraduates and their use of electronic resources. The study specifically ascertains the types of e-resources use by this group of students, and their information seeking behaviour. Descriptive survey research design was adopted for the study. The population comprised 2,823 law undergraduates at 300, 400 and 500 level in the ten private universities offering law programme in South-west, Nigeria. Purposive sampling technique was used to cover law undergraduates at these three levels. A sampling fraction of 50% was further employed using simple random sampling technique and this gives a sample size of one thousand, four hundred and twenty five (1467). The data were analyzed with the aid of frequency counts, percentage and correlational methods. The results showed that the Google online and scholar were the most tools use by law undergraduates in their search approach to obtain information needed. The findings indicated that significant number of respondents made use of social media as point of access for obtaining the needed information. The need to provide means of coordinating the search approach and improve on the point of access as a way of addressing learning skills of law undergraduates in the use of this information source was recommended.

Keywords: *e-resources, Information seeking behaviour, Law undergraduates, Search approach, Point of Access*

Introduction

Electronic resources constitute essential tools needed for studying, learning and research. They are information-bearing resources expected to be used to obtain and complement information on statutes or statutory instruments, digests cases reported as well as to follow up trending issues in the field of law. The use of electronic resources implies access and exploitation of digital information for meeting varying needs such as educational, social and political. These resources can be printed, searched and saved to be consulted at a later date. They are updated more often than printed resources and provide scholars with vast quantities of information in an easily accessible non-sequential format. Given that electronic resources have momentous implications for law undergraduates' academic activities, understanding their information seeking behaviour, will go a long way in determining their choice and use of these resources.

According to Kalbande (2019) information seeking behaviour could be described as the manner, in which an individual articulates his/her information needs, search, retrieval and use. It represents a mode to which an individual goes about to search for the information he needs to perform a task at hand or meet his needs. The concept reflects the features of information literacy, which are to seek, evaluate, select and use (Sconul 2007); while several manners of gathering information and consulting resources determine the information seeking behaviour of individuals (Ogba, 2013). Information seeking behaviour could also involve personal reasons for seeking information, the kinds of information sought and the ways which needed information is being sought (Hsieh & Wu, 2015). It includes face to face, online communication with others as well as the passive reception of information. Information seeking behaviour could be described as a goal oriented process of purposive information seeking whereby an individual can interact with any form of information sources be they manual information systems (journals or a library), or systems-based information such as computer and the Internet (Trivedi & Bhatt, 2018). The authors further noted that the term 'information – seeking behaviour' is different from information behaviour. For example, the former term explains personal reasons for seeking information, the kinds of information sought, the sources from where needed information is sought, the latter term is concerned with the totality of human behaviour in relation to the sources and channels of information including both active and passive information seeking and information use (Ossai-Onah, 2013).

Law undergraduates usually elicit information and devise various information-seeking behaviours. Several studies have shown that law undergraduates search for information about their studies as they arise during training. Some choose to consult with a colleague while some usually read from a textbook or compendium. However, others do not usually search for answers during studies but would rather base a decision on their current knowledge. This implies that the information-seeking behaviour of law undergraduates has further tilted towards other sources of information, although they are most often prompted to search on the Internet, mainly for specific academic needs and latest research on a specific topic. The information seeking behaviour of law undergraduates as used in this study were explained in terms of search approach and point of access.

Search approach entails strategies adopted and deployed by law undergraduates in gaining access to electronic based information resources. It involves their most preferred channels that require the least efforts. Search approach/process is synonymous to information seeking process (ISP) and the concept is often explained using six stages parameters namely; initiation, selection, exploration, formulation, collection and presentation. This model is concomitant with feelings; thoughts and actions. Therefore, the law undergraduates could seek information on e-resources via Google online, internet databases and archives, direct e-resources search as well as reliance on friends and relatives for e-resources exploration. Another parameter for explaining information seeking behaviour of law undergraduates is point of access. Point of access could be described as a way or means to which Law undergraduates approach electronic information. Their point of access of e-resources may include the university e-libraries, personal computer, internet, social media, tablet and other mobile technologies.

In a bid to understand the information seeking behaviour of law undergraduates, Kadir, Johari and Hussin (2018) analysed information needs and information seeking behaviour of students in private university library. Simple random sampling method was used to select the study's participants and their results indicated that all of the posited variables (types of information, information sources used, user awareness, user education) have positive bi-variate linear relationship with information needs. Srivastava and Tiwari (2016) analysed information seeking behaviour of students of the National Law University, Uttar Pradesh, India. Awareness of legal e-resources, legal information needs of law students, utilisation of digital legal resources, information seeking behaviour as well as challenges of law students in National Law Universities were investigated. Their results showed that law students made use of library resources on daily basis either to gather legal information or access online legal resources from the library.

In analysing the information seeking of Law and Engineering students in Ireland, Kerins, Madden and Fulton (2004) employed Leckie *et al's* model to discuss the information seeking strategies, perceptions of the role and value of libraries. The authors submitted that both the Law and Engineering students possess similar patterns of information seeking behaviour. The need for awareness creation and information literacy promotion were recommended as possible factors of effective and efficient information use for future professional demands. Narrowing the investigation, Ogba (2013) explored information seeking behaviour of final year Law students in Ekiti State University. A discursive face-face interview method, which was unstructured in style was employed to gather data from 25 final year law students of 2012/2013 class in Ekiti State University. A naturalistic approach was also involved as a methodology thus students were observed while they research for their resources. The findings showed that large number of respondents claimed to browse library shelves, lack knowledge of library services and current resources, use the library for print materials while they browse in cybercafé.

Okoh and Ijiekhuamhen (2015) investigated the information seeking behaviour of undergraduates of the Federal University of Petroleum Resources (FUPRE) with the aid of structured questionnaire. Their results indicated that lack of computer skills, irregular electricity supply and lack of good search skills were the inhibiting factors of information seeking behaviour of the study's respondents. Despite these assertions, it still remain unclear whether search approach and point of access could influence the information seeking behaviour of law undergraduates in private universities in Nigeria. It is on this premise that this study sought to examine law undergraduates' information seeking behaviour and electronic resources use with reference to private universities in South-west, Nigeria

Objectives of the Study

The study set to:

1. ascertain the types of e-resources used by law undergraduates in private universities in South-West, Nigeria;
2. determine the information seeking behaviour of law undergraduates in private universities in South-West, Nigeria; and
3. establish the influence of law undergraduates' information seeking behaviour on the use of e-resources in private universities in South-West, Nigeria.

Methodology

Descriptive survey research design of the correlational type was adopted for this study. The population comprised 2,923 law undergraduates at 300, 400 and 500 level in the ten private universities offering this programme in South-west, Nigeria. The universities are: Adeleke University, Ede, Afe Babalola University, Ado-Ekiti, Ajayi Crowther University, Oyo, Babcock University, Ilishan-Remo, Bowen University, Iwo, Crescent University, Abeokuta, Elizade University, Ilara-Mokin, Joseph Ayo Babalola University, Ikeji-Arakeji, Lead City University, Ibadan and Redeemers' University. Law undergraduates at these levels were purposively selected because it is at these levels that they are exposed to court attachment, legal research methods, while 500 level undergraduates are expected to write their project reports using up-to-date literature, which are the essential features of the e-resources. Since it appears that the population of students at these levels is too large to study, a sampling fraction of 50% was drawn using simple random sampling

technique and this gives a sample size of one thousand, four hundred and sixty seven (1467). However, the analysis was based on 1089 copies of questionnaire retrieved and found usable for the study. Moreover, adapted questionnaire was the instrument used for data gathering and the instrument was divided into five sections namely A, B, C, D and E

Result Presentation

Demographic Profile of the Respondents

Table 1: Socio-emographic characteristics of the respondents

S/N	Variables	Number	Percentage (%)	
1	Gender	Male	386	35.4
		Female	703	64.6
		Total	1089	100.0
2	Age range	16 to 20 years	501	46.0
		21 to 25 years	336	30.9
		26 to 30 years	145	13.3
		Others	107	9.8
		Total	1089	100.0
3	Level of Study	300	422	38.8
		400	313	28.7
		500	354	32.5
		Total	1089	100.0

From the data provided in Table 2, it could be observed that the gender distribution of respondents revealed that there were 386(35.4%) male respondents as against 703 (64.6%) female. This implies that there were more female law undergraduates than their male counterparts in private universities in South-west, Nigeria. Also, the distribution of respondents by age showed that 501 (46.0%) of the respondents were aged between 16-20 years, 336 (30.9%) were aged between 21 to 25 years and only 107(9.8%) of the respondents were above 30 years which was classified as “Others”. On level of study, 422 (38.8%) were in 300 level, 354 (32.5%) were in 400 level and 313(28.7%) were in 400 level. The implication of the findings on demographic profiles of respondents point to the fact that the law undergraduates who participated in the study were well informed to be able to respond appropriately to the questions posed in the questionnaire used in the study. The distribution also shows that demographic characteristics of law undergraduates in the ten private universities under review were homogeneous.

Objective one sought to ascertain types of e-resources used by law undergraduates in private universities in South-West, Nigeria and the result is as shown in Table 2

Table 2: Types of e-resources used by law undergraduates in private universities in South-west, Nigeria

	Types of e-resources used	VO		O		S		N		mean	S.D
		Freq.	%	Freq.	%	Freq.	%	Freq.	%		
1.	CD- ROM	69	6.3	226	20.8	267	24.5	527	48.4	1.23	1.093
2.	Electronic catalogues (OPAC)	130	11.9	261	24.0	356	32.7	342	31.4	2.12	1.003
3.	E-journals	183	16.8	350	32.1	365	33.5	191	17.5	2.48	0.968
4.	E- books	380	34.9	288	26.4	344	31.6	77	7.1	3.39	0.968
5.	E- bibliographies	80	7.3	185	17.0	388	35.6	436	40.0	1.31	0.926
6.	E- abstracts	93	8.5	304	27.9	330	27.9	362	33.2	1.90	0.979
7.	LexisNexis	159	14.6	300	27.5	312	28.7	318	29.2	2.11	1.038
8.	CompuLaw	122	11.2	235	21.8	390	35.8	342	31.4	2.18	0.981
9.	HeinOnline	101	9.3	208	19.1	370	34.0	410	37.6	1.92	0.969
10.	Legalpedia	262	24.1	306	28.1	312	28.7	209	19.2	2.51	1.054
11.	Westlaw	150	13.8	238	21.9	362	33.2	339	31.1	1.98	1.024
12.	Emmanuel Law Outlines	114	10.5	280	25.7	326	29.9	369	33.9	2.25	0.955
13.	Legal citations and abbreviations	265	24.3	319	29.3	328	30.1	177	16.3	3.32	1.024
14.	ProQuest	103	9.5	186	17.1	343	31.5	457	42.0	2.61	0.983
15.	Law pavilion	389	35.7	321	29.5	338	31.0	41	3.8	3.45	1.039
16.		Weighted mean= 2.31									

KEY: VO (Very Often) = 4, O (Often) = 3, S (Sometimes), N (Never) =1, S.D = Standard Deviation.

Source: Researcher's Field Survey, 2020

Results of types of e-resources used by law undergraduates in Private universities in South-west, Nigeria revealed that Law pavilion was the type of e-resources mostly used by law undergraduates in private universities. This is because 389(35.7%) of the respondents that they used law pavilion very often, 321(29.5%) used law pavilion often, 338(31.0%) claimed they used law pavilion occasionally while only 41(3.8%) of the respondents claimed they never used Law pavilion. Similarly, e-books is another type of e-resources being used by law undergraduates in private universities in South-west, Nigeria as indicated by 380(34.8%) of the respondents who claimed that used e-books very often, 288(26.4%) often, 344 (31.6%) sometimes while only 77(7.1%) indicated they never used e-books. Another type of e-resources given prominence in terms of usage by law undergraduates was legal citations and abbreviations. This type of e-resources was used very often by 265(24.3%) of respondents, often by 319(29.3%), sometimes by 328(30.1%) and 177(16.3%) of the respondents. From these results, it could be deduced that the three mostly used type of e-resources by law undergraduates in private universities in South-west, Nigeria were Law pavilion (mean=3.45, S.D.=1.039), e-books (mean=3.39, S.D.=0.968) and legal citations and abbreviations (mean=3.32, S.D.=1.024) respectively.

On the other hand, CD-ROM (mean=1.23, S.D. =1.093) was the type of e-resources that was seldom used by law undergraduates in the universities under study. This was apparent in the response format where 527(48.4%) claimed they never used CD-ROM as a type of e-resources; 267(24.5%) sometimes used CD-ROM while only 69(6.3%) of the respondents indicated that they used CD-ROM often. Also, 436(40.0%) of the respondents claimed they never used e-bibliographies, 388(35.6%) of the respondents posed that they used e-bibliographies sometimes with only 80(7.3%) that used e-bibliographies very often. The mean recorded for e-bibliographies as a type of e-resources was 1.31(S.D.=0.926). In conclusion, the three types of e-resources used by most of the law undergraduates in south-west, Nigeria were Law pavilion, e-books and legal citations and abbreviations. On the other hand, the three types of e-resources not used by most law

undergraduates in private universities under study were CD-ROM, E-bibliographies and e-abstracts respectively.

Objective 2 sought to determine information seeking behaviour of law undergraduates in private universities in South-West, Nigeria. The results of the analysis is as shown in Table 3

Table 3: information seeking behaviour of law undergraduates in private universities in South-west, Nigeria

Electronic resources search approach	VT		T		ST		NT		mean	S.D
	Freq.	%	Freq.	%	Freq.	%	Freq.	%		
I search Google online and scholar to obtain information needed	612	56.2	441	40.5	27	2.5	9	0.8	3.62	0.791
I search Internet archives and databases for my search	492	45.5	433	39.8	144	13.2	20	1.8	3.28	0.760
I conduct the searches in e-resources by myself	457	42.0	391	35.9	174	16.0	67	6.2	3.14	0.899
I rely on friends and relatives in exploring the e-resources	123	11.3	304	27.9	338	31.0	324	29.8	2.23	1.002
	Weighted mean=3.06									0.867
Point of Access		VT		T		ST		NT		
I access latest research on specific topics via university e-libraries	245	22.5	382	35.1	304	27.9	158	14.5	2.65	0.983
I make use of personal computer whenever there is need for me to obtain information on statutes and jurisprudence	482	44.3	355	32.6	217	19.9	35	3.2	3.18	0.860
I read ahead of my next class(es) through tablet and other mobile technologies	287	26.4	317	29.1	309	28.4	176	16.2	2.84	0.895
I seek new information in legal education/training via Internet and social media	290	26.6	559	51.3	176	16.2	64	5.9	3.10	0.815
	Weighted mean= 2.96									0.882
	Arithmetic mean = 24.04 S.D=7.005									

KEY: Very True (VT), True (T), Sometimes True (ST) and Not True (NT). S.D= Standard Deviation.

Source: Researcher’s Field Survey 2020

Results on information seeking behaviour of law undergraduates in private universities are as presented in Table 3. For electronic search approach, the result indicated that the statement “I search Google online and scholar to obtain information needed” had the highest mean score of 3.62 (S.D.=0.791). In terms of frequency count, 612(56.2%) of the respondents claimed that the statement “I search Google online and scholar to obtain information needed” was very true, 441(40.5% True, 27(2.5%)n sometimes True and only 9(0.8%) claimed that the statement was not true. This means that more than 85% of law undergraduates in private

universities under study searched Google online and scholar to obtain information needed. Also, majority of the respondents (492, 45.5%) indicated that “I search Internet archives and databases for my search” was very true, 433(39.8%) true and only 20(1.8%) of the respondents noted that the statement was not true. In fact, this statement ranked second in terms of mean score (mean=3.28, S.D=0.760) under the electronic search approach.

As for the point of access, the statement “I make use of personal computer whenever there is need for me to obtain information on statutes and jurisprudence” had the highest mean score of 3.18 (S.D=0.860). This is shown in the response formats with majority of the respondents affirming this at varying extents (Very True: 482, 44.3%; True: 355, 32.6%; 217, 19.9% and NT: 35, 3.2%). This means that a significant number of the law undergraduates in private universities made use of personal computer to get legal information whenever there is the need to obtain information on statutes and jurisprudence. In the same vein, most of the respondents stated that “I seek new information in legal education/training via Internet and social media” with 290(26.6%) Very True, 559(51.3%) true and only 64(5.9%) of the respondents did not toe this line. The mean recorded under this item was 3.10 with standard deviation score of 0.815. This means that more than 90% of the law undergraduates believed the truth of the statement at varying extent. It could therefore be stated that internet and social media were the access point through which law undergraduates sought new information in legal education/training.

Objective three set to establish the influence of law undergraduates’ information seeking behaviour on use of e-resources in private universities in South-West, Nigeria. The result is presented in Table 4.

Table 4: Linear regression showing influence of information seeking behaviour on law undergraduates ‘use of e-resources in private universities in South-West, Nigeria

Variable	Unstandardized coefficients		Standardized coefficients	t	Sig. value)	(p	Remark
	B	Std. Error	Beta (β)				
(Constant)	11.308	0.094	-	13.900	.000		
Information seeking behaviour	.205	0.016	.608	22.53	.000		Sig.

Result in Table 4 shows influence of information seeking behaviour on law undergraduates ‘use of e-resources in private universities in South-West, Nigeria expressed in beta weights. From the Table, the unstandardized regression weight (β), the standardized error of estimate (SEβ), the standardized coefficient, the t-ratio and the level at which the t-ratio are significant. As indicated in the table, information seeking behaviour (β=.608, t= 22.53, p<0.05), has significant influence on e-resources use.

Conclusion

The study concluded that Google online and scholars, internet archives and databases were the electronic search approach used by law undergraduates while the internet and social media were the access points through which law undergraduates sought new information in legal education/training. To sustain high level of use of e-resources by law undergraduates in the private universities in Southwestern, Nigeria, the private university management in Nigeria should provide means of coordinating the search approach and improve on the point of access as a way of addressing their learning skills in the use of this information source.

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