

Antecedents of the Use of Electronic Information Resources by Lawyers in Selected Law Firms in Lagos State, Nigeria

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Abstract

The study examined the influence of gender, age, ICT competence and awareness of Electronic Information Resources (EIRs) on the use of EIRs in legal research by lawyers in Lagos State, Nigeria. Stratified sampling technique was used to select 226 lawyers from a population of 377. A structured questionnaire was used for data collection. The data was analysed with frequency and percentage distribution, correlation and multiple regression. Findings showed that the majority (>70%) were aware of most of the listed legal EIRs and also utilized them. However, not all could rate themselves highly competent at using ICTs for some of the listed tasks. Awareness and use of information resources had a significant, positive relationship ($r = .82, p < .05$). ICT competence ($\beta = .63, t = 6.51, p < .05$) and age ($\beta = -6.01, t = -3.28, p < .05$) significantly influenced the use of EIRs while gender did not ($\beta = -6.78, t = -3.72, p > .05$). The study recommends that the law firms should ensure continuous training in the use of ICTs and law librarians should find innovative ways of keeping lawyers abreast of new EIRs.

Keywords: Electronic Information Resources (EIRs), Lawyers, Awareness of EIRs, ICT competence.

Introduction

The legal profession is highly dependent on information and ability to access and use various legal information sources to effectively counsel clients and defend cases is one of the competencies expected of a legal practitioner. As learned fellows, lawyers are expected to possess the skills required to determine what type of information is needed to pursue a particular case, the sources of such information, the depth and scope of the information required and the ethical implications using the information (Du Plessis, 2008). These set of skills is what the American Library Association (ALA) described as information literacy. Babalola (2010), citing Orr, Appleton and Wallin (2001) defined information literacy as the ability to locate, manage, critically evaluate and use information for problem-solving, decision-making, research and professional development. It is a set of lifelong skills that is relevant to every sphere of life. The need to be information literate is very apparent in the legal profession.

A critical component of information literacy is Information and Communication Technology (ICT) competence or Information Technology (IT) competence, which is the ability to use various digital devices to retrieve, process and communicate information. Tyagi (2011) asserts that fluency with information technology is one of the prerequisites for effective use of

electronic information resources. ICT competence is itself a different kind of literacy that gives a person an edge over others. Lawyers who will remain competitive in this information age must be ICT competent; those who are averse to ICTs or who lack the skills will not be able to access and use electronic information resources. As Dodo (2015) noted, no lawyer will be able to compare with his/ her counterparts across the globe without ability to effectively use ICTs in practice.

With the gamut of legal information resources such as journals articles, law reports, legislation, statutes and precedents that are accessible over the internet, lawyers can access up-to-date legal information anytime and anywhere. Nevertheless, they may not be able to take advantage of this opportunity if they are not aware of the existence of the resources or if they lack the requisite skills to access them. There is a need to characterize EIR use among this population and to ascertain the antecedents to EIR use. This study was carried out to ascertain the influence of EIR awareness, ICT competence, age and gender on the use of electronic information resources by lawyers in selected law firms in Lagos State.

Objectives

The main objective of this study was to determine the influence of gender, age, ICT competence and awareness on the use of electronic resources by lawyers in Lagos State. The specific objectives were to:

1. Determine the level of awareness of e-resources among lawyers in Lagos State
2. Ascertain the lawyers' use of various electronic information resources
3. Find out how competent the lawyers are at using ICTs
4. Determine the relationship between awareness and use of electronic information resources lawyers in Lagos State
5. Determine the joint effect of age, gender and ICT competence on lawyers' use of e-resources
6. Ascertain the relative influence of age on the use of e-resources by lawyers in Lagos State
7. Determine the relative influence of ICT competence on lawyers' use of electronic information resources
8. Find out the influence of gender on lawyers' use of electronic information resources in Lagos State,

Research Questions

The study provided answers to the following research questions:

1. What is the level of awareness of various electronic information resources among lawyers in Lagos State?
2. Which electronic information resources do lawyers in Lagos State utilize?
3. How competent are lawyers in the study area at using ICTs?
4. What is the relationship between awareness of electronic information resources and their use by lawyers in Lagos State?

5. What is the joint effect of lawyers' age, gender and ICT competence on their use of e-resources?
6. What is the relative influence of age on the use of electronic information resources by lawyers in Lagos State?
7. How does ICT competence influence lawyers' use of electronic information resources in Lagos State?
8. To what extent does gender influence lawyers' use of electronic information resources in Lagos State?

Hypotheses

In line with the research questions outlined above, the following hypotheses were tested at 0.05 level of significance:

- H₀₁ There is no significant relationship between awareness and use of electronic information resources by lawyers in Lagos State
- H₀₂ Lawyers' age, ICT skills and gender do not significantly influence their use of electronic information resources
- H₀₃ Age has no significant influence on the use of EIRs by lawyers in Lagos State
- H₀₄ ICT competence has no significant influence on the use of EIRs by lawyers in Lagos State.
- H₀₅ Gender has no significant influence on the use of EIRs by lawyers in Lagos State

Literature Review

Previous studies on information seeking behaviour indicate that most lawyers, though skilled at searching authoritative print sources for their legal pursuits are not enthusiastic about using Electronic Information Resources (EIRs). Kuhlthau (2001) found that lawyers preferred using print sources to computer databases in meeting their information needs. Thanuskodi (2010) carried out a study to ascertain the information needs and use pattern district court lawyers in Tamil Nadu and found that most of them were not aware of available e-resources and preferred using their print collection. Besides, most of them reported that they have difficulty accessing electronic information materials from digital libraries. A decade later, Khan, Bhatti & Khan (2011) reported a similar finding among lawyers in Bahawalpur City, India. The authors found that only 2 out of the 54 lawyers they surveyed used electronic information resources while the rest relied on their print collections and their colleagues. This might not be unrelated to the low level of internet search and retrieval skills reported by the lawyers themselves. A more recent study conducted among undergraduate law students in twelve faculties of law in Nigeria also found that more than half of the respondents used print law sources more than their electronic version thus raising a concern about legal education (Olorunfemi, 2015).

Perhaps lack of awareness of available information resources is a reason for the low uptake of EIRs among users since prospective users must be aware of the existence of an information source before they can use it. Leckie, Pettigrew and Sylvain (1996) recognized the importance of information awareness and captured it in their model as one of the factors

influencing information seeking by professionals like doctors, engineers and lawyers. Also, Wilkinson (2001), focusing specifically on the information seeking behaviour of lawyers included awareness as a determinant of source selection. The scholar opined that information users will naturally limit themselves to only the resources they are aware of and familiar with. A review of extant literature shows that awareness is considered an antecedent to the use of EIRs among various user groups. A study by Rehman and Ramzy (2004) reported that lack of awareness, time constraints and low skill levels were the major constraints to optimum use of the resources by health professionals in three faculties of Kuwait University. In Nigeria, Okiki (2012) submits that more than fifty percent of lecturers at the University of Lagos were not really aware of the subscribed electronic information resources in the library hence, did not use them. Similarly, Otulugbu (2017) reported that lack of awareness of online resources resulted in very low use of the resources among students of University of Ibadan.

The literature also indicates that awareness may not be the only factor influencing EIR use as people may be aware of the existence of the resources but lack the capacity to use them. The findings of a survey of law academics at the University of South Africa showed that although the lecturers were aware of various electronic information resources and also have the basic skills to use them, they were more confident at searching Google than using specialized legal information resources (Festus, 2007). This is a major limitation considering that only a fraction of available EIRs are accessible to search engines. A study of faculty members at the Dubai International Academic City (DIAC) found that the respondents were aware of and fully utilize various electronic information resources but were not conversant with library-specific resources such as e-theses, patents and CD-ROM databases (Ahmad & Panda, 2013). Another study by Prangya, Siksha and Rabindra (2013) also found a high level of awareness, but limited use of library-based EIRs like the OPAC by researchers in Berhampur University in India.

While the contemporary information user could be regarded as literally swimming in an ocean of electronic information, he/ she is likely to drown without the requisite skills to navigate through successfully. Studies have shown that ICT competence or ICT skill is another important precursor to the use of Electronic information resources. Fonnbad and Moahi (2005) conducted a study to ascertain lawyers' attitude to and use of ICTs in Botswana and reported that although the lawyers were positively disposed to the use of EIRs, their use of ICTs was rather low due to inadequate training. Coker's study in 2014, revealed that legal practitioners in Ibadan, Oyo State, Nigeria used mobile phones and computers more frequently than any other ICTs and that the younger lawyers were more favourably disposed to using ICTs more than the older ones. Ugwu and Orsu (2017) investigated the challenges limiting the use of e-resources by undergraduate students of the University of Nigeria, Nsukka. The authors identified inadequate ICT skill as one of the greatest problems students face in the use of EIRs. The findings of Adedokun and Babalola (2018) showed a high level of ICT competence but moderate use of EIRs by undergraduates of the National Open University in South-West, Nigeria. The use of EIRs was constrained mainly by erratic power supply and poor internet connectivity. The study however established a significant positive relationship between ICT competence and use of EIRs.

Scholars have explored the association between demographics and the use of electronic information resources among various user groups. Manda and Mukangara (2007) found that gender influences the use of EIRs among postgraduate students of the University of Dar es Salaam, Tanzania with male students more likely to use EIRs than their female counterparts. A similar result was presented by Sivathaasan, Achuchuthan and Kajanathan (2013) who found that male university teachers at the University of Jaffna, Sri Lanka had a significantly higher mean usage of electronic information resources than the female teachers. . Another study by Ajuwon and Popoola (2014) also reported gender as one of the variables that positively and significantly influenced the use of EIRs among resident doctors in South-West, Nigeria. Quadri (2013) examined the influence of age, gender, religion and level of study on the use of EIRs by undergraduates in two private universities in Nigeria. His results showed that age and level of study had a significant, positive relationship with the use of e-resources while gender and religion were not significant.

Methodology

The study adopted the survey research design. The population consisted of 377 lawyers working in 10 of the 33 law firms listed among the top Nigerian law firms in 2018 (Chambers and Partners, 2018). Chambers Global is a yearly ranking of law firms and lawyers globally by Chambers and Partners. The studied law firms were Aellex, Aluko & Oyebode, Banwo & Ighodalo, Olaniwun Ajayi, Udo Udoma & Bello Osagie, Abdulai Taiwo & Co., Giwa Osagie & Co, Adepetun, Caxton-Martins, Agbor & Segun, G. Elias & Co and Jackson, Eti & Edu. The sample size was 226 representing 60% of the total population. The respondents were selected from the law firms using proportionate stratified random sampling. A self-developed, structured questionnaire was used for data collection. The instrument was subjected to face and content validity. The Cronbach’s Alpha test result was 0.75 showing that the instrument is reliable. Data was collected personally by the researchers. Out of the two hundred and twenty-six copies of the questionnaire distributed, 212 (94%) were retrieved and found useful. Data were analysed with frequency and percentage distribution, Pearson Product Moment Correlation and multiple regression.

Findings and Discussion

The demographic data of the respondents as presented on Table 1 show that they were mostly male (63%) between 30 and 40 years (68%) and with minimum of LLB degree (56%).

Table 1: Demographic Characteristics of the Respondents

Demographic Variable	Frequency Distribution	Percentage Distribution
Age		
< 30	64	30.0
30-40	144	68.0
41-50	4	2.0
Sex		

Male	133	62.5
Female	80	37.5
Qualification		
LLB	131	62.0
LLM	49	23.0
PGD	11	5.0
MPhil	21	10.0

Table 2: Awareness of Legal EIRs

S/N	Electronic Information Resources	Aware	Not sure	Not aware
1	Online Newspapers	189(89.1)	15(7.1)	8(3.8)
2	Electronic Law Report	186(87.7)	14(6.6)	12(5.7)
3	Electronic Journals	185(87.2)	23(10.8)	4(1.9)
4	Law Pavilion Database	169(79.7)	23(10.8)	20(9.4)
5	Government Websites	165(77.9)	8(3.8)	39(18.4)
6	Westlaw Database	162(76.4)	19(9)	31(14.6)
7	Lexis Nexis Database	162(76.4)	23(10.8)	27(12.8)
8	Online Gazette	145(69)	26(12.3)	49(19.0)
9	Electronic Indexes	142(67.3)	34(16.1)	35(16.6)
10	Web's Legal Dictionary	133(63)	23(11)	55(26)
11	Electronic Case Citations	130(62.5)	35(16.8)	43(20.7)
12	Law Breed Database	129(60.8)	32(15.1)	51(24.1)
13	Quick Law	112(53.1)	23(10.9)	76(36.0)
14	Juta's Labour Library Online	68(32.2)	47(22.3)	97(45.5)
15	Delphion IP Network of Legal System	57(27)	53(25)	102(48)

The results presented on Table 2 show that the respondents were aware of most of the legal EIRs listed. More than 70% of the respondents were aware of online newspapers, electronic law report and electronic journals, Law Pavilion database, government websites, Westlaw database and Lexis Nexis. Also, (>60%) were aware of online gazettes, electronic indexes, Web's legal dictionary, electronic case citation and Law Breed database and about 53.1% were aware of Quick law. However, <40% were aware of Jutta's Labour Library and Delphion IP Network of Legal System. This suggests a need to create more awareness of these legal resources among the lawyers.

Table 3: Use of Legal EIRs

S/N	Electronic Information Resources	Utilized	Not sure	Not utilized
1	Online Newspaper	174(82.1)	23(10.8)	15(7.1)
2	Electronic Journals	170(80)	19(9)	23(11)

3	Electronic Law Report	162(76.4)	16(7.6)	34(16.0)
4	Lexis Nexis Database	158(74.5)	22(10.4)	32(15.1)
5	Westlaw Database	150(70.8)	34(16.0)	28(13.2)
6	Government Websites	142(67)	33(15.5)	37(17.5)
7	Law Pavilion Database	136(64.2)	41(19.3)	35(16.5)
8	Online Gazette	135(63.7)	28(13.2)	49(23.1)
9	Electronic Indexes	129(60.8)	44(20.8)	39(18.4)
10	Law Breed Database	124(58.5)	33(15.6)	55(25.9)
11	Electronic Case Citators	118(55)	50(24)	44(21)
12	Quick Law	116 (54.7)	35(16.5)	61(28.8)
13	Web's Legal Dictionary	110(51.9)	38(17.9)	64(30.2)
14	Online Juta's Labour Law Library	70(33)	50(23.6)	92(43.4)
15	Delphion IP Network	65(30.7)	46(21.7)	101(47.6)

Table 3 presents the results on the use of electronic information resources by the respondents. The distribution of the responses show that the lawyers used the resources they were aware of more. For example, online newspapers of which most of the respondents were aware (See Table 1) was also the most utilized. The less familiar ones such as Online Juta's Labour Law Library, and Delphion IP Network were used by less than 40% of the respondents. This result further emphasizes the need to create awareness of these information resources in order to enhance their use by lawyers.

Table 4: ICT Competence of Respondents

S/N	ICT Competence	Highly Competent	Competent	Not Very Competent	Not Competent at all
1	I can use internet for effective communication	182(85.9)	27(12.7)	3(1.4)	0
2	I can conduct a full length legal research using ICT	163(76.8)	30(14.2)	19(9.0)	0
3	I can use computers to prepare briefs	158 (74.5)	47(22.2)	7(3.3)	0
4	I can manage legal information using ICT	131(61.8)	66(31.1)	15 (7.1)	0
5	I can search for and retrieve legal information sources from a database	127(59.9)	64(30.2)	16(7.5)	5(2.4)
6	I can effectively participate in online forums & social networks	125(59.0)	70(33.0)	10(4.7)	7(3.3)
7	I can produce visual dynamic (animated) slides and presentation	98(46.2)	71(33.5)	24(11.3)	19(9.0)

8	I can manage a database	87(41.0)	77(36.3)	32 (15.1)	16 (7.6)
9	I can use computers and application software for case appraisal	81(38.2)	75(35.3)	47(22.2)	9(4.3)
10	I can use various software for data analysis	79(37.3)	81(38.2)	28(13.2)	24(11.3)

Table 4 shows the results of self-rated ICT competence of the respondents. The results show that over 90% of the respondents rated themselves as either highly competent or competent at using ICTs for legal research and communication as shown in the first six statements on the table. This implies that most of the respondents considered themselves competent at using ICTs for these activities to a reasonable extent. The ratings were however lower (>70%) for the last four statements which were mostly on the use of software for database management, data analysis and presentation. This implies that some of the respondents still need training on how to use various software packages for database management, data analysis and presentation.

Test of Hypotheses

Hypothesis 1: There is no significant relationship between awareness and use of electronic information resources among lawyers in Lagos State.

Table 5: Correlation analysis of lawyers' level of awareness and use EIR

		Awareness of EIRs	Use of EIRs
Awareness of EIRs	Pearson	1	.815**
	Correlation		.000
	Sig. (2-tailed)	212	212
	N		
Use of EIRs	Pearson	.815	1
	Correlation	.000	
	Sig. (2-tailed)	212	212
	N		

** . Correlation is significant at the 0.01 level (2-tailed).

The result of Pearson Correlation analysis shown on Table 5 reveals a strong, positive and significant relationship between lawyers' level of awareness of electronic information resources and their use of electronic information resources ($N = 212, r = .82, p < .05$). This implies that increase in awareness of EIRs will increase their use by the lawyers therefore, the null hypothesis was rejected.

H₀2: Lawyers' age, ICT skills and gender do not significantly influence their use of electronic information resources.

Table 6: Influence of Lawyers' Personal Attributes on their use of EIRs

Model	Unstandardized Coefficients		Standardized Coefficients	T	Sig. .000
	B	Std. Error	Beta		
(Constant)	48.542	5.05		9.60	.00
Age	-6.01	1.83	-.21	-3.284	.00
Gender	-6.78	1.82	-.24	-3.725	.10
ICT Competence	.63	.097	.41	6.51	.00

Dependent Variable: Use of electronic information resources

$$R^2 = .69 \text{ Adj } R^2 = .54, F_{(2, 21)} = 21.67, p < .05$$

The results on Table 6 show that the regression model accounted for 54% of the total variance in lawyers' use of electronic information resources ($Adj R^2 = .54$), which was also significant ($F_{(2, 21)} = 21.67, p < .05$) thus confirming the goodness of fit of the model. The hypothesis that age, ICT competence and gender do not jointly and significantly influence the use of EIRs by lawyers in Lagos state is therefore rejected.

H₀3: Lawyers' age has no significant influence on their use of electronic information resources.

The results further show that lawyer's age had significant but negative influence on the use of electronic information resources ($\beta = -6.01, t = -3.84, p < .05$) which implies that younger lawyers used EIRs more than the older ones. Thus the hypothesis that age has no significant influence on ICT use was rejected.

H₀4: ICT competence has no significant influence on the use of EIRs by lawyers in Lagos State

The results on Table 6 shows that ICT competence positively and significantly influenced the use of electronic information resources ($\beta = .63, t = 6.51, p < .05$) hence, the hypothesis that ICT competence has no significant influence on ICT use was rejected.

H₀5: Gender has no significant influence on the use of EIRs by lawyers in Lagos State

Finally, the results on Table 6 show that gender has no significant influence on the use of EIRs ($\beta = -6.78, t = -3.73, p > .05$) therefore, the stated null hypothesis was accepted. These findings suggest that apart from gender, personal attributes like age and ICT competence actually influence the use of e-resources among lawyers in Lagos state.

Discussion of findings

The findings from this study revealed most of the respondents were highly aware of all the listed EIRs apart from Jutastat labour law library and Delphion IP network of legal system. This finding corroborates that of Bhardwaj and Madhusudhan (2013) who reported a high level of awareness of open access legal information sources among students of National Law University, India. It however contradicts the finding of Okiki (2012) among academics at the University of Lagos. Findings also showed that the lawyers utilized all the e-resources they were aware of more than the others. This is in line with the submission of Okiki (2012) and Otulugbu (2017). It also affirms the assertion of Leckie, Pettigrew and Sylvain (1996) as well as Wilkinson (2001) that awareness is a critical factor in the use of information resources by lawyers and other professionals. Findings further revealed that most of the lawyers' rated themselves highly competent or competent at using ICTs for communication and legal research but lower on the use of various software packages for database management, data analysis and presentation. While the results look impressive enough, it however highlights the need for training in this area.

On the relationship between lawyers' awareness and use of EIRs, the findings of this study, in agreement with previous studies such as Owoeye, (2011); Tuhumwire, and Okello-Obura (2010) and Dadzie (2007) revealed a strong, significant positive relationship between lawyers' level of awareness and use of electronic information resources. This implies that increasing lawyers' awareness of EIRs will likely increase their use. Regarding the influence of lawyers' personal attributes on their use of EIRs, findings showed no significant influence of gender on the use of EIRs by lawyers in Lagos state which contradicts the reports of previous studies (Manda & Mukangara, 2007; Sivathaasan, Achuchuthan & Kajanathan, 2013; Quadri, 2013 and Ajuwon & Popoola, 2014). Lawyers' age was found to have a significant, negative influence on the use of electronic information resources with younger lawyers using EIRs more than the older ones. This is in line with the report of Quadri (2013) and Coker (2014). The third personal attribute, ICT competence however showed a significant, positive influence on the use of electronic information resources among the respondents confirming the submission of Ugwu and Orsu (2017) and Adedokun and Babalola (2018).

Conclusion

There is no doubt that EIRs have great potentials for legal research. The quintessential legal practitioner cannot ignore the gamut of electronic information resources accessible through global networks. The present study reveals a significant positive relationship between awareness and use of EIRs. The study also showed that ICT competence and age significantly influenced the use of EIRs while gender had no effect. Therefore, the study concludes that awareness, age and ICT skills are critical factors in the use of electronic information resources among lawyers in Lagos State, Nigeria. Notwithstanding the impressive rating of their awareness of EIRs and their ICT skills, there is obvious need to keep lawyers in Lagos State abreast of existing as well as emerging legal information resources and to continually sharpen their IT skills so they can exploit these resources for optimum performance.

Recommendations

In the light of the findings discussed above, this study recommends that:

1. law librarians should find innovative ways of keeping lawyers informed of available electronic information resources. This could be done through current awareness services through
2. law firms should encourage and sponsor lawyers' participation in workshops and trainings on existing and emerging technologies. Such workshops/ trainings should be packaged to meet the needs of older lawyers who may not be adept at using ICTs.
3. information literacy is a life-long skill that lawyers need throughout their professional lives. Therefore, law educators should place emphasis on information literacy as an important course for law students.

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