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## **ROLE OF COMPETITIVE INTELLIGENCE IN ENHANCING INFORMATION SERVICE PROVISION IN NIGERIAN UNIVERSITY LIBRARIES**

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### **Abstract**

This study examines the role of Competitive Intelligence (CI) in enhancing information service provision in Nigerian university libraries. In an increasingly competitive and technologically dynamic academic environment, libraries must evolve beyond traditional service models to remain relevant and effective. Competitive Intelligence, defined as the systematic process of gathering, analyzing, and applying information from the external environment to inform strategic decisions, enables libraries to respond proactively to changes in user needs, technology trends, and institutional goals. Drawing on conceptual and empirical insights, the study highlights how CI facilitates innovation, user-centered services, and strategic planning in academic libraries. It further explores how CI tools such as environmental scanning, SWOT analysis, and user feedback systems enable libraries to benchmark against best practices, optimize resources, and enhance service quality. Despite its potential, the adoption of CI in Nigerian university libraries faces challenges including inadequate infrastructure, limited technical expertise, and low awareness among library staff. The study underscores the need for strategic integration of CI into library operations to drive continuous improvement and academic excellence. It concludes that CI is not merely an optional managerial tool, but a critical asset in repositioning Nigerian university libraries for greater visibility, efficiency, and impact in the knowledge-driven economy

*Keywords:* Competitive Intelligence; Information; Service provision; Service quality; University Libraries

## INTRODUCTION

Libraries are repositories of knowledge and information. The willingness of the library and information professionals to proactively accept the evolving changes into new knowledge is helping library and information science profession to remain significant and useful in the fast-changing society (Majid and Khoo, 2009). With the continually developing innovations and creative services the libraries tend to keep up with the fast-changing society. Libraries are responsible in providing access to information for the library users often times making use of information and communication technology (ICT) in achieving that aim with the library users expecting speed and comprehensiveness in the information provided by the librarians and competitive intelligence can help to enhance the driving innovation and creativity in the library and information science profession.

Competitive intelligence (CI) is the process of systematically gathering, analyzing, and applying external information about an organization's environment, including competitors, market trends, and technological advancements, to enhance strategic decision-making (Chisita, 2020). In the context of academic libraries, CI plays a critical role in enabling librarians to anticipate shifts in user needs, adopt emerging technologies, and benchmark against best practices to maintain relevance in a competitive educational landscape. Ocholla (2021), competitive intelligence empowers library managers to transition from traditional service models to more responsive, data-driven approaches that align with institutional goals. This intelligence-driven strategy helps libraries proactively tailor services, optimize resource allocation, and offer user-centered innovations in teaching, research, and learning. Literature emphasizes the growing importance of CI in addressing service quality gaps and fostering innovation in African academic libraries. Yusuf and Adedokun (2023) assert that Nigerian university libraries that integrate competitive intelligence into their strategic planning processes are better positioned to deliver value-added services and support academic excellence. Moreover, Aina and Oyelude (2022) highlight that CI supports libraries in tracking global trends such as open access publishing, digital literacy, and remote service delivery, which became crucial during the COVID-19 pandemic. By leveraging tools such as environmental scanning, SWOT analysis, and user feedback systems, libraries can gain actionable insights to improve service delivery. Thus, competitive intelligence serves not only as a strategic asset but also as a driver of continuous improvement in library service

provision. Competitive intelligence of libraries is the intelligentization activity process that helps to maintain and win the market competition in the drastically competitive survival and development environment. The libraries thus legally collect, choose, analyze, synthesize, forecast and assess the information on the environment of competition, competitors, and themselves, so as to form innovative, value-added and monopolistic intelligence information products and provide decision foundation for the library to formulate strategy and tactics (Aiqin, 2012; Yali, 2013). It is vitally important to note that the library contain resources that help individuals to grow in the information business intelligence and also academically, economically, socio-politically, psychologically and in all facets of life which lead to societal development. However, the question one may ask is do libraries employ competitive intelligence approach in their service delivery? If yes, in what way(s) do they employ competitive intelligence to serve their customers? This study therefore analyzed the contribution of competitive intelligence towards quality service delivery in academic libraries in Nigeria Universities.

### **RATIONALE OF THE PAPER**

Higher education in the twenty-first century globally has been characterized and driven on business ethos. The institutions are faced with stiff competitions in an attempt to increase their student enrolment and remain relevant. Academic libraries all over the world therefore are in a serious competition to contribute to their parent institution's competitive advantage. The problem is what the libraries can do to have an edge over their competitors and remain relevant as a hub of scholarship in this 21st century business driven environment. Therefore, this paper seeks to establish the nexus between Competitive Intelligence and quality service delivery in academic libraries.

#### **Specific Objective of the paper is to:**

- i. Assess the role of competitive intelligence toward quality service provision in academic libraries in Nigeria.
- ii. Identifies the challenges facing Universities libraries in adopting competitive intelligence approach in their service deliveries.

## CONCEPTUAL FRAMEWORK

### Academic Libraries

The major reason for setting up library in any institution of higher learning is for service delivery. Librarians and information scientists are imbued to serve people through the provision of access to quality information resources in either print or electronic formats through which people's standard of living are improved, dreams are actualized, education is sustained, sound decisions are made and executed, freedom of expression is enhanced and information resources are preserved for posterity. The proliferation of information in different formats and the attendant complexity in retrieval processes have promoted and sustained the need for society to share resources, works, ideas and information. This provides the rationale for library and information practice (McGinty, 2021). The belief in the need for human beings to share information and ideas implies the recognition of information rights as expressed in the United Nations Universal Declaration of Human Rights (1948), Article 19 which states: Everyone has the right to freedom of opinion and expression; this right includes freedom to hold opinions without interference and to seek, receive and impart information and ideas through any media and regardless of frontiers. Furthermore, the library as an institution exists for the benefit of a given constituency, whether it is the citizens of a community, members of an educational institution or some larger or more specialized group. Those who enter the library profession assume an obligation to maintain ethical standards of behaviour in relation to the governing authority, under which they work, to the library constituency, to the library as an institution, to fellow workers, to colleagues and to society in general.

### General library services

The library in a community provides a unique service that should be accessible to everybody. The provision of library and information services should be one of the fundamental human rights of every citizen. It is a store, which stocks all kinds of knowledge and information carriers that are meant to be consulted and used by readers with little or no expense on their part (Makinde & Ogungbo, 2015). The services provided to users of individual libraries depend on the objectives of the parent organization.

**Lending services:** This is perhaps the most important service provided by a library. It is essentially a social service in which users of a library have the privilege of borrowing library

materials either for reading or consultation. Apart from books, other resources in the library that can be loaned out include such materials as audiocassettes, slides, videotapes, films, projectors, cassettes and video-machines.

**Inter-library loan (ILL) and document delivery service:** This involves, essentially, transactions between two or more libraries. A library which does not have a particular library material desired by one of its clientele will borrow the material requested from another library on behalf of the clientele who needs the materials.

**Reservation service:** Reservation of library materials is very common in academic and school libraries. There are some documents that merit being reserved for use only in the library because clients heavily use them or they are high-risk books that could be stolen or mutilated if they are kept on the open shelves.

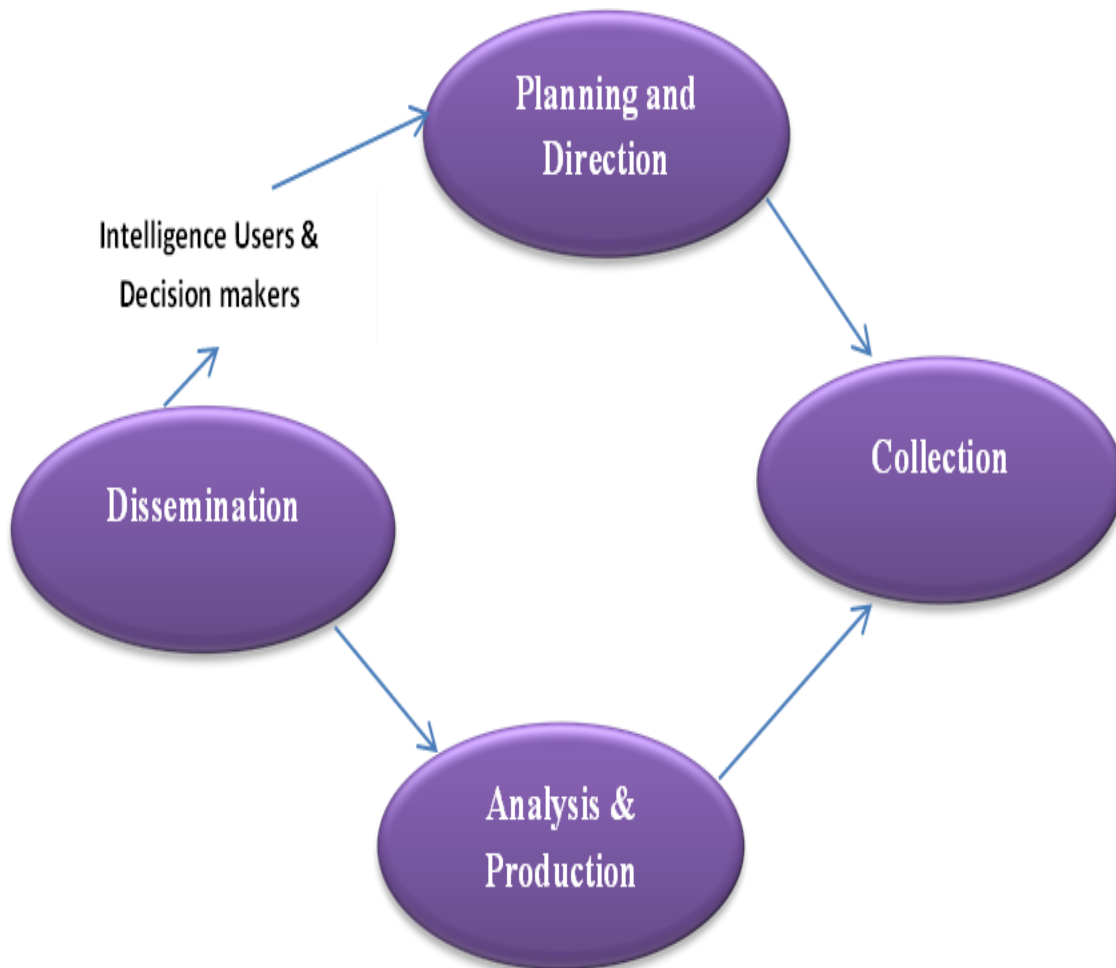
**Provision of seating and study facilities:** The library is normally expected to provide seating facilities for its readers so that they can consult and read books of interest to them, hence the need to provide a suitable space environment. For this, libraries do provide seats and reading tables for readers who intend to use the library for research or any serious academic activity, academic and large public libraries provide study carrels.

**Reference services:** The provision of reference is an important function of a library. Readers are provided this service on request. It should be noted that people have different reference queries that need to be solved by the librarian. Hence, it is generally a person-to-person service. In many cases, reference processes involve interviewing the reader to enable the reference librarian articulate the problem of the user clearly.

### **Competitive Intelligence**

Competitive intelligence (CI) is a method of collecting, analyzing and distributing information on the external environment in which an organization operates (Jin, 2011). Competitive intelligence “is the process by which organization systematically and legally collects, organizes, analyses and distributes information about its competitors or competitive environment in order to obtain or maintain competitive advantage on the market place” (Jin, 2011). Yap and Rashid (2011) defined competitive intelligence in terms of both a process and a product; they explained that as a process it involves the set of legal and ethical imperatives for collecting, analyzing and disseminating actionable information relating to competitors, suppliers and customers. As a product, competitive intelligence is actionable information about the present and future

behaviour of the competitor, customers, suppliers, technologies, government, market and general business environment (Vedder and Gugness, 2000). According to Makinde and Ogunbo (2015) Competitive intelligence of libraries is the intelligentization activity process that helps to maintain and win the market competition in the drastically competitive survival and development environment. The libraries thus legally collect, choose, analyze, synthesize, forecast and assess the information on the environment of competition, competitors and themselves, so as to form innovative, value added and monopolistic intelligence information products and provide decision foundation for the library to formulate strategy and tactics (Aiqui, 2012; Yali, 2013).



The competitive intelligence cycle of Nikolas & Evangelia, (2012)

Intelligence cycle as adapted from Nikolas and Evangelia (2012) are briefly explained as follows:

**Planning and Direction:** the first stage of the intelligence cycle. According to Nikolas and Evangelia (2012) requires the identification of the key intelligence tools and the willpower the competitive intelligence practitioner should take in completing the analysis. In open and distance learning academic library set up, the library resources are to be planned in line with the programme that are offered by the universities.

**Collection:** this phase involves the gathering of raw information. Required intelligence would be generated from the raw information. This information could be gotten from competitors' periodicals, newspapers, internet web site. This phase requires that all information is gathered ethically and legally.

**Analysis and Production:** this phase is the most challenging because it requires high skills. It should be noted that some raw information sent to the library may not be accurate, the librarian using competitive intelligence skills would analyze all the requests by using for instance National Bibliography of Nigeria (NBN) to check the list sent in by faculty members before procuring the books into the library.

**Dissemination:** this is the last stage of the intelligence cycle. The competitive intelligence practitioner delivers the results of the analysis to the decision makers. The main objective of any academic library is to provide information to all information seekers and also to support the academic requirements of the universities.

### **Libraries and Competitive Intelligence**

Abdulsalami, Okezie and Agbo (2013) stated that the purposes of libraries have been changing over times becoming more faceted and multifarious. This modern concept of the library makes it defy the definition given to it in the earlier times. Libraries are not institutions/building/warehouses/stores etc. of materials, but are agents of educational, social, economic and political changes that are without boarder. Library are entrusted with the acquisition, organization, preservation, storage, retrieval and dissemination of information in whatever format it might appear. According to Yali (2013) competitive intelligence is an overall detection process for the whole competitive environment in the progress, the information on the strengths, weakness and purpose of commercial activity in business competition is collected and analysed through legal means. Currently, competitive intelligent has already become the

international recognized fourth production factor following the technology, capital and talent. Haliso (2014) stated that competitive intelligence is very useful in library and information work where it is seen as the process of ethically collecting, analysing and disseminating accurate, relevant, specific, timely, foresighted and actionable intelligence regarding the implication of business environment, competitors and the organization. Hence competitive intelligence can be applied to libraries for best performance in the 21st century.

### **Benefits of Competitive Intelligence (CI) in Information Service Delivery in the Library**

Competitive Intelligence (CI) refers to the systematic collection, analysis, and application of information about competitors, users, and the external environment to enhance strategic decision-making (Sewdass, 2020). In the context of library and information services, CI plays a critical role in improving service delivery, resource management, and user satisfaction.

**1. User-Centered Service Design** CI allows libraries to gather and analyze user data and environmental trends to understand evolving information needs. This supports the customization of services such as information literacy training, digital reference services, and resource access (Tury, 2021). By using CI tools such as surveys, feedback analysis, and usage metrics, libraries can proactively adapt to users' expectations.

**2. Strategic Resource Allocation** With the help of CI, libraries can identify underused or outdated resources and invest in more relevant collections and technologies. This data-driven approach ensures the efficient use of financial and human resources (Olaajo & Akewukereke, 2023). For instance, CI may inform decisions on whether to invest in e-resources or physical collections based on trends in access patterns.

**3. Innovation and Technological Adoption** CI enables libraries to monitor technological advancements and innovations in peer institutions. Early awareness of emerging technologies—such as AI-driven search engines, cloud-based services, or virtual libraries—empowers libraries to integrate innovative tools that enhance user experience and service delivery (Okike & Olatokun, 2020).

**4. Improved Decision-Making** Libraries benefit from CI by utilizing strategic frameworks such as SWOT and PESTLE analyses. These tools aid in identifying opportunities and threats, guiding

management in making informed decisions related to service expansion, staff training, or facility upgrades (Ajiboye, 2022).

**5. Benchmarking and Performance Evaluation** Through CI, libraries can compare their performance against national or international standards. This benchmarking helps institutions identify gaps and set measurable targets for service improvements (Ezeani & Ugwuanyi, 2020).

**6. Enhanced Marketing and Outreach** CI supports strategic marketing by identifying target audiences, user behavior, and service demand. Libraries can tailor outreach campaigns and promote services more effectively to increase visibility and usage (Oduwole & Oyesiku, 2024).

**7. Support for Institutional Goals** CI aligns library operations with broader institutional objectives such as research output, digital transformation, and community engagement. This alignment ensures the library remains a strategic partner in the achievement of academic and developmental goals (Onuoha & Iroaganachi, 2023).

## **THEORETICAL FRAMEWORK**

Two theories were employed to explain how competitive intelligence enables universities libraries to deliver quality services to their users. These theories are the Gaps Model of Service Quality Theory and Total Quality Management Theory (TQM).

### **The Gaps Model of Service Quality Theory**

The second theory employed in this paper is the "Gaps Model of Service Quality" developed in 2003 by Health and Cook. This theory is used because it explores the relationship between customer's satisfaction and quality delivery in academic service delivery which before now was only applied to industry. In this theory, an academic institution is viewed from a commercial perspective. It is assumed that the customers (students, parents, and other stakeholders) patronage of an institution largely depends on how they view its services. Health and Cook (2003) state that in the early 1980's concerns about customer satisfaction and product services quality became emerging tides in the affairs of industry and academic. From 1985-1988, three academicians, Parasirama, Zeithmal and Berry created and refined the SERVQUAL survey instrument with the purpose of accessing/ measuring service quality within an organization, from customer's stand point. They came up with a conceptual model of service quality called the "gaps

model of service quality" of ten dimensions. These are: access, communication, competence, courtesy and, credibility. Others are reliability, responsiveness, security' tangibility, and understanding/knowing the customer.

These were further regrouped into five dimensions service quality:

- a) Tangibles: the physical facilities, equipment and appearance of personnel.
- b) Reliability: ability to perform the promised service dependable and accurately.
- c) Responsiveness: willingness to help customers and provide prompt service.
- d) Assurance (competency, courtesy, credibility, and security were subsumed under this dimension.): knowledge and courtesy of employees and their ability to inspire trust and confidence.
- e) Empathy (Access, communication and understanding the customer was amalgamated into this dimension). They carry the individualized attention the organization provides its customers.

In agreement with this theory, Debowski (2003) in defining information service states that information services are aimed at achieving six key outcomes:

- I. Ensuring the needs of users and the accessible information sources are suitable matched at all times.
- II. Delivering those information sources to the user in a timely and appropriate fashion.
- III. Ensuring that information provided is highly quality, accurate and appropriate.
- IV. Assisting the user in interpreting the materials if necessary.
- V. Promoting user awareness of new services and information sources as they develop.
- VI. Providing users with individual guidance and support as they build information search and application skills.

### **Total Quality Management Theory (TQM)**

Quality is a competitive priority for any organization/library that must render effective services to users. Total Quality Management (TQM) is a theory that explains that quality in organization processing and services will lead to quality services to the customers or users. Psychogios and Priporas (2007) defined TQM as the mutual co-operation of everyone in an organization and associated business processes to produce products and services, which meet and, hopefully, exceed the needs and expectations of customers. TQM is both a philosophy and a set of management guiding principles for managing an organization. TQM theory postulates that the

best way to improve organizational output is to continually enhance performance. Quality improvement is not a task that has an end, as it is not static. The emphasis is on seeking improvement opportunities, not just holding the status quo. The focus is on planning, prevention, and anticipation (Psychogios and Priporas, 2007). Quality is the bedrock of satisfaction by users. Any academic library that must remain relevant and be on top of competitors must make sure that their personnel, operations and services to users are of the almost highest quality and users are satisfied. TQM theory addresses this pertinent issue, it states that quality processes in organization or library will produce products and services, which meet and, exceed the needs and expectations of customers. This actually is the concept of quality services in library and information centres.

### **Challenges Faced by Libraries in Utilizing Competitive Intelligence for Service Delivery**

Libraries today operate in an increasingly dynamic and competitive information environment, necessitating the use of competitive intelligence (CI) to enhance service delivery and maintain relevance. Competitive intelligence involves the systematic collection and analysis of information about competitors, market trends, and user needs to inform strategic decision-making. However, despite its potential benefits, many libraries face significant challenges in effectively leveraging CI. These challenges range from limited awareness and understanding of CI practices among library staff, to inadequate technological infrastructure, lack of training, and insufficient organizational support. As libraries strive to transition from traditional information repositories to proactive, user-centered service providers, understanding and addressing these obstacles is essential to fully harness the power of competitive intelligence in improving library performance and user satisfaction. Specifically some of these challenges are:

**1. Lack of Awareness and Training:** Most librarians are not adequately trained in competitive intelligence practices such as environmental scanning, SWOT analysis, and benchmarking, limiting their ability to gather and use strategic information effectively (Chisita, 2020).

**2. Inadequate Technological Infrastructure:** Many Nigerian university libraries lack access to up-to-date digital tools, analytics software, and reliable internet, all of which are essential for CI processes (Aina & Oyelude, 2022).

**3. Insufficient Funding:** Limited financial resources hinder the acquisition of CI tools, hiring of skilled personnel, and continuous professional development needed to support intelligence-driven services (Yusuf & Adedokun, 2023).

**4. Organizational Resistance to Change:** Library management and staff may resist adopting CI due to fear of change, uncertainty about outcomes, or attachment to traditional service models (Ocholla, 2021).

**5. Poor Data-Sharing Culture:** There is a lack of collaboration and information-sharing between libraries and related institutions, which restricts access to valuable external intelligence necessary for benchmarking and strategic planning (Chisita, 2020).

**6. Limited Strategic Planning Culture:** Many university libraries in Nigeria operate without clear strategic plans or key performance indicators (KPIs), which makes it difficult to integrate CI into long-term decision-making and service improvement strategies (Yusuf & Adedokun, 2023).

**7. Information Overload and Poor Data Management:** Even when data is available, libraries often struggle to filter, analyze, and interpret relevant intelligence due to poor data management practices and lack of analytical expertise (Ocholla, 2021).

**8. Ethical and Legal Concerns:** There may be uncertainty about the boundaries of ethical information gathering, especially when sourcing data from competitors or external institutions, which can discourage active use of CI (Aina & Oyelude, 2022).

## Conclusion

This study underscores the crucial role of competitive intelligence in enhancing service delivery within Nigerian university libraries. In an era marked by rapid technological evolution, increased academic competition, and shifting user expectations, libraries must transcend traditional service models. CI offers a dynamic, data-driven approach that equips libraries with actionable insights, enabling proactive responses to institutional and user needs. Through tools such as environmental scanning, SWOT analysis, and user feedback systems, libraries can refine their

strategic decisions, align services with global trends, and remain vital partners in academia. The intelligence cycle—comprising planning, collection, analysis, and dissemination—provides a practical roadmap for institutionalizing CI in library operations. However, challenges such as insufficient training, poor infrastructure, and limited awareness continue to impede full CI integration. Addressing these barriers is key to maximizing CI's benefits and ensuring libraries fulfill their mandate in supporting education, research, and lifelong learning.

## Recommendations

1. **Capacity Building:** Library staff should undergo regular training on CI tools and techniques to enhance their analytical and strategic planning capabilities.
2. **Policy Integration:** University management should incorporate CI practices into the strategic plans of their libraries to institutionalize its use.
3. **Infrastructure Development:** Investments should be made in ICT infrastructure and digital tools to support the collection and analysis of competitive data.
4. **Collaborative Networks:** Libraries should collaborate with other academic institutions and professional associations to share CI insights and benchmark best practices.
5. **User-Centered Services:** Libraries should use CI to develop tailored services that reflect user preferences and anticipate emerging academic needs.
6. **Awareness Campaigns:** Organizing workshops, seminars, and awareness programs will help demystify the value of CI among librarians and stakeholders.

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