

Influence of Information-Seeking Behaviour on Utilization of Electronic Information Resources: A survey of Agricultural Scientists at the Federal College of Agriculture, Ishiagu, Nigeria

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Abstract

This study examined the influence of information-seeking behaviour on the utilization of electronic information resources by agricultural scientists at the Federal College of Agriculture, Ishiagu, Ebonyi State, Nigeria. The study adopted a survey research design, with a population of 95 agricultural scientists drawn from agricultural-based departments in the institution. A census sampling approach was adopted given the relatively small population size. Data were collected using a structured and validated questionnaire with a reliability coefficient of 0.79, and were analysed using frequency counts, percentages, and mean scores. Findings revealed that agricultural scientists primarily adopted self-searching and consultation with colleagues as methods of seeking electronic information. Frequently utilized electronic information resources included social media platforms, search engines, databases, and online journals. Information-seeking behaviour significantly influenced the utilization of electronic information resources, particularly in the ability to locate information, conduct independent searches, and utilize search engines. Major challenges identified included poor internet facilities, limited access to current information, and difficulty identifying appropriate information sources. The study concludes that effective information-seeking behaviour significantly predicts the utilization of electronic information resources among agricultural scientists. The study recommends improved digital infrastructure, enhanced information literacy, and increased institutional support for electronic information access.

Keywords: Information-seeking behaviour, electronic information resources, agricultural scientists, electronic resource utilization, academic libraries.

Introduction

Information is a vital resource in research institutions, particularly in this era of information and communication technology (ICT), where timely access to relevant information significantly influences research productivity, planning, and decision-making. Research institute libraries serve as essential knowledge centres that support researchers through the provision of print and electronic information resources. Agricultural scientists, in particular, depend on access to accurate and up-to-date information for research, teaching, innovation, and professional development. Libraries in research and academic institutions are expected to provide diverse information resources and services to meet the information needs of researchers and specialized users. The effectiveness of a research library is largely dependent on its ability to identify with the objectives of its parent institution by providing specialized resources, facilities, and services to users. Research institute libraries play a crucial role in supporting agricultural scientists by providing access to scholarly information resources, digital services, and electronic information systems that facilitate research and innovation (Ibenne & Uhegbu, 2004; Anike, Otubelu, & Malgwi, 2025).

Information-seeking behaviour refers to the actions and strategies employed by individuals to identify, search for, and utilize information to satisfy specific needs. In research environments, information-seeking behaviour may involve consulting colleagues, librarians, scholarly databases, internet sources, and other specialized information systems. Agricultural scientists rely heavily on effective information-seeking strategies to access scientific findings, solve research problems, and improve productivity in agricultural practice and innovation (Wilson, 2000; Singh & Satija, 2007; Ekundayo, 2025)

The increasing availability of electronic information resources such as e-books, e-journals, electronic newspapers, databases, electronic theses and dissertations, and internet-based reference materials accessible through computers and mobile devices. These resources enhance accessibility, facilitate knowledge dissemination, and provide opportunities for researchers to acquire and utilize information efficiently (International Federation of Library Associations and Institutions, 2012; Wilson, 2000).

Utilization of electronic information resources has become increasingly important in supporting research activities among agricultural scientists. Effective utilization contributes to improved research output, problem-solving, and informed decision-making. However, utilization patterns may differ among users depending on factors such as information needs, occupation, access, and information-seeking behaviour,

especially among agricultural scientists. this is where the issues of agricultural scientist come to play.

Agricultural scientists are professionals engaged in the scientific study of plants, animals, soil, and agricultural systems with the objective of improving agricultural productivity, environmental sustainability, and food security. In carrying out their responsibilities, agricultural scientists require reliable electronic information resources for research and evidence-based decision-making. However, how information-seeking behaviour predicts the utilization of electronic information resources remains the focus of this study.

Statement of the Problem

The use of electronic information resources have become indispensable for research, teaching, and extension activities in higher institutions and research organizations. Ideally, agricultural scientists should effectively utilize resources such as electronic journals, e-books, online databases, institutional repositories, and internet-based information services because these resources provide timely access to current scientific information, enhance research productivity, support evidence-based decision-making, and promote innovation in agriculture.

Despite the availability of these electronic information resources, observations indicate that their utilization by agricultural scientists is often inconsistent and may be influenced by differences in how they seek and access information. Some scientists may rely on personal searches, colleagues, or other information channels, while others may encounter difficulties in locating relevant and reliable electronic information. Consequently, the potential benefits of electronic information resources for research, teaching, and extension services may not be fully realized.

If agricultural scientists do not effectively utilize available electronic information resources, they may depend on outdated information, experience reduced research productivity, make less informed professional decisions, and contribute less effectively to agricultural innovation and sustainable development. Understanding the factors that influence the utilization of these resources is therefore essential for improving research performance and institutional information services.

Although previous studies have examined information-seeking behaviour and the utilization of electronic information resources in universities and other research institutions, there is limited empirical evidence on how information-seeking

behaviour influences the utilization of electronic information resources among agricultural scientists at the Federal College of Agriculture, Ishiagu, Ebonyi State. It is this knowledge gap that necessitated the present study, which seeks to examine the influence of information-seeking behaviour on the utilization of electronic information resources among agricultural scientists in the institution.

Objectives of the Study

The objectives of the study are to:

1. determine the methods of information seeking among agricultural scientists in the Federal College of Agriculture, Ishiagu;
2. assess the types of electronic information resources utilized by agricultural scientists;
3. investigate the information-seeking behaviour exhibited in the utilization of electronic information resources by agricultural scientists; and
4. examine how information-seeking behaviour predicts the utilization of electronic information resources.

Literature Review

Information-seeking behaviour refers to the process through which individuals identify information needs, search for information, evaluate available sources, and utilize acquired information to satisfy specific goals. It is generally regarded as a purposive activity influenced by users' information needs, access to information systems, educational background, and available information channels. In research environments, information-seeking behaviour may involve interactions with colleagues, librarians, institutional repositories, online databases, and internet-based information systems (Asifor & Ogboulo, 2024).

Researchers such as Ibenne and Uhegbu (2024) and Asifor and Ogboulo (2024) have argued that information-seeking behaviour varies among users and professional groups, due to differences in occupation, educational level, access to information resources, and technological competence. Agricultural scientists, in particular, rely heavily on effective information-seeking strategies to access scientific literature, research findings, and current agricultural innovations necessary for evidence-based practice and decision-making (Ekundayo, 2025).

The emergence of electronic information resources has transformed information access and dissemination in research and academic institutions. Electronic information resources include e-books, e-journals, online databases, electronic theses and dissertations, online public access catalogues (OPAC), and internet-based scholarly materials accessible through computers and mobile devices. These resources enhance accessibility to current information, reduce geographical barriers, and support research productivity (Anike, Otubelu & Malgwi, 2025). These online information resources, among others, allow users of all categories to access and make use of information resources without geographical or other human limitations.

Utilization of information resources refers to the extent to which users effectively access and employ available information resources to satisfy their information needs. The utilization of electronic information resources depends largely on their availability, accessibility, users' technological competence, and information-seeking behaviour. Effective utilization of electronic information resources improves research output, teaching, professional competence, and problem-solving among researchers (Malgwi & Itsekori, 2025). Information-seeking behaviour varies from person to person and even among occupations, as demonstrated in the context of India by Kumar (2010). According to this Author, information-seeking behaviour among agricultural scientists in India involved seeking information primarily for research, professional development, classroom instruction, and current awareness. Their access to relevant information significantly supported effective decision-making in agricultural development.

Mohammed and Akor (2017) examined availability and utilization of electronic databases among agricultural scientists in Nigerian university libraries and revealed that there was widespread access to databases such as AGORA, AGRICOLA, CAB Abstracts, and PubMed. The study found out that agricultural scientists frequently utilized electronic databases for research, updating professional knowledge, and maintaining current awareness. In the same Vellie by Singh and Satija (2007) highlighted that agricultural scientists heavily depended on institutional libraries and information centres to satisfy their information needs. Their findings indicated that information-seeking behaviour among scientists is influenced by factors such as institutional support, accessibility of information facilities, and the perceived usefulness of information sources.

In Nigeria, a study by Oladele (2006) demonstrated that agricultural researchers depend on timely and relevant information for effective decision-making and improved productivity. The findings emphasized the need for improved access to information resources and training in information retrieval skills. Other studies on

electronic resource utilization also revealed that accessibility, digital literacy, and availability of technological infrastructure significantly influence the use of online information resources among researchers. Researchers have consistently noted that electronic information resources improve access to scholarly content, save time, and enhance research productivity.

Despite these studies, existing literature appears to focus largely on agricultural scientists in universities and research institutes outside the Federal College of Agriculture, Ishiagu. There remains limited empirical evidence regarding how information-seeking behaviour predicts the utilization of electronic information resources among agricultural scientists in the institution, thereby creating a knowledge gap that this study seeks to address.

Research methodology

This study adopted a survey research design to examine information-seeking behaviour as a predictor of the utilization of electronic information resources among agricultural scientists in the Federal College of Agriculture, Ishiagu, Ebonyi State, Nigeria. The survey design was considered appropriate because it enabled the collection of data directly from respondents regarding their information-seeking practices and utilization of electronic information resources.

The population of the study comprised 95 agricultural scientists drawn from relevant agricultural departments in the Federal College of Agriculture, Ishiagu. These departments included Agricultural Technology, Animal Health and Production Technology, Crop Production Technology, Horticultural and Landscape Technology, Pest Management Technology, Fisheries Technology, and Agricultural Extension and Management. Since the population size was relatively small and manageable, the entire population was adopted for the study using a census sampling approach.

Data were collected through a structured and validated questionnaire with a reliability coefficient of 0.79. The questionnaire was divided into sections covering respondents' demographic characteristics and variables relating to information-seeking behaviour and utilization of electronic information resources. Items in the instrument were structured using a modified four-point Likert rating scale ranging from Strongly Agree, Agree, Disagree, and Strongly Disagree.

Data analysis was carried out using frequency counts and percentages to analyse respondents' demographic information, while mean scores were used to answer the

research questions. The mean score was used to answer the research questions. A criterion mean of **2.50** was adopted as the benchmark for decision-making, based on the average of the four-point Likert scale values ($4 + 3 + 2 + 1 \div 4 = 2.50$). Mean scores equal to or above 2.50 were regarded as positive indicators (Accepted), while mean scores below 2.50 were regarded as negative indicators (Rejected)

Methods of Information Seeking among Agricultural Scientists

Table 1: Mean Analysis of the Methods of Seeking Electronic Information by Agricultural Scientists

Ways of Seeking Electronic Information	$\bar{X}$	Decision
Self-searching	3.3	Accepted
Consult colleagues	3.0	Accepted
Pay a consultant	2.6	Accepted
Use my students	2.2	Rejected
Liaise with international collaborators	2.4	Rejected
Liaise with local collaborators	2.5	Accepted

Criterion Mean = 2.50

The findings revealed that agricultural scientists sought electronic information through self-searching (mean = 3.3), consultation with colleagues (mean = 3.0), paying consultants (mean = 2.6), and liaising with local collaborators (mean = 2.5). However, the use of students (mean = 2.2) and liaison with international collaborators (mean = 2.4) were not commonly adopted."

The findings revealed that agricultural scientists primarily sought electronic information through self-searching, consultation with colleagues, paying consultants, and liaising with local collaborators. In contrast, the use of students and international collaborators was less common. This suggests that respondents relied more on personal initiative and professional networks within their immediate environment than on external collaborations when seeking electronic information.

The finding agrees with recent studies that reported that researchers prefer independent searching and consultation with colleagues because these approaches provide quick and reliable access to relevant information (Asifor & Ogboulo, 2024; Anike, Otubelu, & Malgwi, 2025).

Types of Electronic Information Resources Utilized

Table 2: Mean Value Analysis of the Types of Electronic Information Resources Utilized by Agricultural Scientists

Type of Electronic Resources	$\bar{X}$	Decision
Social media (WhatsApp, YouTube, etc.)	3.1	Accepted
Search engines	2.6	Accepted
Databases	2.6	Accepted
Institutional repositories	2.5	Accepted
Open online journals	2.9	Accepted
Open online textbooks	1.6	Rejected

Criterion Mean = 2.50

The findings revealed that agricultural scientists utilized several electronic information resources, including social media platforms such as WhatsApp and YouTube (mean = 3.1), search engines (mean = 2.6), electronic databases (mean = 2.6), institutional repositories (mean = 2.5), and online journals (mean = 2.9). However, open online textbooks (mean = 1.6) were not widely utilized. These findings indicate that agricultural scientists relied more on internet-based and scholarly electronic resources to support research, teaching, and professional communication.

The findings showed that social media platforms, search engines, databases, institutional repositories, and online journals were commonly utilized by the respondents, whereas open online textbooks were less frequently used. The high

utilization of social media and search engines may be attributed to their ease of access and ability to provide timely information. The relatively low use of online textbooks may reflect a preference for current journal articles and database resources for research purposes.

Information-Seeking Behaviour of Agricultural Scientists

Table 3: Mean Value Analysis of the Information-Seeking Behaviour Exhibited by Agricultural Scientists

Information-Seeking Behaviour	$\bar{X}$	Decision
Ask librarian for assistance	2.6	Accepted
Ask anybody	2.4	Rejected
Computer search	2.6	Accepted
Talk out with colleagues	2.5	Accepted
Outside friends	2.2	Rejected
Independent search	2.7	Accepted

Criterion Mean = 2.50

The findings revealed that agricultural scientists exhibited positive information-seeking behaviour by seeking assistance from librarians (mean = 2.6), conducting computer searches (mean = 2.6), discussing information needs with colleagues (mean = 2.5), and conducting independent searches (mean = 2.7). However, seeking information from just anybody (mean = 2.4) and outside friends (mean = 2.2) were not commonly adopted. This suggests that agricultural scientists preferred formal and professional information sources and self-directed search strategies over informal sources when seeking information.

The findings indicated that agricultural scientists demonstrated positive information-seeking behaviour by seeking assistance from librarians, conducting computer searches, discussing information needs with colleagues, and carrying out independent searches. However, they did not commonly rely on asking just anybody

or outside friends for information. This suggests that respondents preferred professional, credible, and self-directed sources of information rather than informal sources. Such behaviour is consistent with effective research practices that emphasize the use of authoritative information sources.

Challenges Affecting Information Seeking and Utilization

Table 4: Mean Value Analysis of the challenges affecting information seeking and utilization of electronic information resources

	Problems	X	Decision
A	Poor internet facilities	3.2	Accepted
b	Lack of access of current relevant information.	3.1	Accepted
C	Difficulty identifying information sources	2.9	Accepted
D	Copyright and licensing restrictions	2.1	Rejected
E	Lack of digital literacy	2.4	Rejected
F	Poor staffing and time constraints	2.3	Rejected

Criterion Mean = 2.50

The findings revealed that the major challenges affecting information seeking and the utilization of electronic information resources among agricultural scientists were poor internet facilities (mean = 3.2), lack of access to current and relevant information (mean = 3.1), and difficulty identifying appropriate information sources (mean = 2.9). However, copyright and licensing restrictions (mean = 2.1), lack of digital literacy (mean = 2.4), and poor staffing and time constraints (mean = 2.3) were not considered major challenges by the respondents.

The findings revealed that poor internet facilities, lack of access to current and relevant information, and difficulty identifying appropriate information sources were the major challenges affecting the utilization of electronic information resources. Conversely, copyright and licensing restrictions, lack of digital literacy, and poor staffing and time constraints were not perceived as major challenges. These findings suggest that infrastructural and information access issues remain the principal barriers to the effective use of electronic information resources among agricultural scientists.

Discussion of Findings

The study found that agricultural scientists at the Federal College of Agriculture, Ishiagu predominantly sought electronic information through self-searching, consultation with colleagues, computer searches, and independent searches. This finding suggests that respondents relied primarily on self-directed search strategies and professional interactions in meeting their information needs. The finding is consistent with Asifor and Ogboulo (2024), who reported that researchers increasingly depend on electronic information systems and self-directed search strategies because they provide timely access to scholarly information. The finding also supports Ibenne and Uhegbu (2024), who observed that information-seeking behaviour varies according to users' professional responsibilities, access to information resources, and technological competence. However, the finding differs from Singh and Satija (2007), who found that agricultural scientists relied more heavily on institutional libraries and information centres than on independent electronic searching. The observed difference may be attributed to the increased availability of internet facilities, mobile technologies, and digital information resources in recent years.

Types of Electronic Information Resources Utilized

The study revealed that social media platforms, search engines, electronic databases, institutional repositories, and online journals were the major electronic information resources utilized by agricultural scientists, while online textbooks were less frequently utilized. This finding agrees with Anike, Otubelu, and Malgwi (2025), who reported that electronic journals, databases, and other internet-based information resources have become indispensable tools for research because they provide timely access to current scholarly information. Similarly, Mohammed and Akor (2017) found that agricultural scientists frequently utilized electronic databases for research, professional development, and current awareness. The relatively low utilization of online textbooks may be explained by researchers' preference for current journal articles and databases, which provide more up-to-date scientific information.

Information-Seeking Behaviour

The findings indicated that agricultural scientists exhibited positive information-seeking behaviour by consulting librarians, conducting computer searches, discussing information needs with colleagues, and undertaking independent

searches. This finding corroborates the views of Asifor and Ogboulo (2024), who argued that effective information-seeking behaviour facilitates efficient access to relevant electronic information resources. It also supports Ekundayo (2025), who emphasized that agricultural scientists depend on effective information-seeking strategies to obtain current scientific information for research and evidence-based decision-making. Likewise, Ibenne and Uhegbu (2024) observed that information-seeking behaviour is influenced by users' educational background, technological competence, and access to information resources. These findings indicate that effective information-seeking behaviour contributes significantly to the utilization of electronic information resources among agricultural scientists.

Challenges Affecting the Utilization of Electronic Information Resources

The study identified poor internet facilities, lack of access to current and relevant information, and difficulty identifying appropriate information sources as the major challenges affecting the utilization of electronic information resources. This finding is consistent with Oladele (2006), who reported that inadequate access to relevant information constrained research productivity among agricultural researchers in Nigeria. It also agrees with Mohammed and Akor (2017), who emphasized that the effective utilization of electronic information resources depends largely on the availability and accessibility of electronic databases and related digital infrastructure. Furthermore, the finding supports Anike, Otubelu, and Malgwi (2025), who reported that electronic information resources enhance research productivity only when adequate technological infrastructure is available. These findings imply that improving internet connectivity, expanding access to current electronic information resources, and strengthening institutional digital infrastructure would enhance the effective utilization of electronic information resources among agricultural scientists.

Conclusion

This study established that information-seeking behaviour significantly predicts the utilization of electronic information resources among agricultural scientists in the Federal College of Agriculture, Ishiagu. Agricultural scientists relied primarily on self-searching and consultation with colleagues in accessing electronic information. The most commonly utilized electronic resources included social media platforms, search engines, databases, and online journals.

The findings further revealed that effective information-seeking practices such as independent searching, locating electronic information, collaboration, and the use of search engines positively influenced electronic resource utilization. However, poor internet connectivity, inadequate access to current information, and difficulties in identifying reliable information sources constituted major barriers to effective utilization.

The study therefore concludes that strengthening information-seeking competencies and improving institutional digital infrastructure are essential for maximizing the utilization of electronic information resources among agricultural scientists in research and academic environments.

Recommendations

Based on the findings of the study, the following recommendations are made:

1. **To improve information-seeking behaviour**, the management of the Federal College of Agriculture, Ishiagu should strengthen information literacy programmes and organize regular training workshops to equip agricultural scientists with effective information-searching, retrieval, and evaluation skills.
2. **To enhance the utilization of electronic information resources**, the institution should improve access to electronic information resources by subscribing to relevant databases, strengthening electronic library services, and ensuring that electronic journals, institutional repositories, and other digital resources are readily accessible to agricultural scientists.
3. **To address the challenges affecting the utilization of electronic information resources**, the institution should invest in reliable internet connectivity, upgrade its digital infrastructure, and improve online public access catalogues (OPAC) and digital library systems to facilitate seamless access to electronic information resources.
4. **To strengthen institutional support for electronic information utilization**, librarians should provide continuous user support and guidance on effective search strategies while encouraging collaboration among agricultural scientists to promote information sharing and maximize the use of available electronic information resources.

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