

**Competitive Intelligence and National Development: The Role of Information Professionals****Information Impact:**

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**Abstract**

Competitive intelligence (CI) is the process of developing actionable foresight regarding competitive dynamics and non-market factors that can be used to enhance competitive advantage. It is a relevant tool for strategic decision making which in return impacts national development. Though CI is an organizational function developed for the business organizations and later expanded to other sectors in the nation's economy, its presence in the library and information delivery is yet to be established. This in other words implies that library and information professional working in libraries, archives, resource centers, etc are yet to realize their position as Competitive Intelligent Agents. This paper showcases the place of Library and Information Science Professionals as Competitive Intelligent Agents/Managers and also highlights the various ways in which CI influences national development.

**Keywords:** competitive intelligence, information professionals, library and information science, big data.

**Introduction**

The development of any nation is usually gauged by the degree and extent of the socio-cultural, socio-economic, and political improvement that are brought to bear through such means as education, provision of infra-structural facilities and availability of relevant information. The socio-economic and information adventure of the 21<sup>st</sup> century has brought quite a lot of changes and development in the manner in which individuals and societies go about the satisfaction of their needs. The surge in the availability of Information Communication and Technology (ICT) has also made it possible for people to access information which could enable them to be more creative thereby, being equipped to compete with their counterparts.

Competitive intelligence is defined as a systematic and ethical program for gathering and analyzing information about your competitor's activities and general business trends to further your own company's goals (The Society of Competitive Intelligence Professionals (SCIP) cited by Bexon, Stephens, & Pritchett 2012). It could also be seen as the way in which data is transformed into information, and ultimately made to become meaningful intelligence. Competitive intelligence process can be formulated by gathering data about competitors and the

external environment with the aim of having an edge over the competitors or operating more effectively and successfully in a competitive business environment.

Competitive intelligence which in the past was a common terminology exclusively used in the business world has now extended its popularity to the information world. This has resulted in organizations especially those in the developed nations engaging “Librarians”, “Information Brokers” and other information related professionals to be their Competitive Intelligent Agents/Managers. Competitive intelligence as a business strategy can only be successful or fruitful when there is availability and accessibility of information. Library and Information Science (LIS) professionals are professionally trained to make information and information sources and materials available, accessible and usable by organizing them in a manner that the clients can conveniently access and utilize them in satisfying their information needs.

### **The concept of Competitive Intelligence**

Competitive intelligence means, a process by which an organization legally gathers, analyzes and strategically utilizes information related to its competitive environment. The Society of Competitive Intelligence Professional defined Competitive Intelligence as a “systematic and ethical program for gathering and analyzing information about your competitor’s activities and general business trends to further your own company’s goals”. Competitive Intelligence could also be seen as the way in which data is transformed into information, ultimately to become meaningful intelligence. Organizations can formulate a competitive intelligence process by gathering data about both their competitors and the external environment. This gives such organization the benefit of having an edge over its competitors in order to operate effectively and successfully in a competitive business environment with a view to achieve the set organizational goals. According to Vasiljevic (2015) competitive intelligence stands for information flow, management and protection of strategic information that enables enterprise directors to optimize their decisions. He further stated that CI comprises all the instruments and ways of getting information that an enterprise can use to learn about all the aspects of the external environment where it develops its strategic activities.

The purpose of a competitive intelligence CI program is to develop action-oriented implications for managers. This has to be delivered on a timely basis so as to enable its incorporation into the decision making process. (Prescott, 2009). Organizations will hardly perform creditably well globally without competitive intelligence. This is because CI enables them access to information on competitor’s activities and general business trend and in turn empowers them in developing their own strategies. The three ways in which competitor’s information are useful according to West (2010) are; it enables the organization to be aware; the organization becomes sensitive and it boosts the organization’s intelligence.

Competitive intelligence consists of three basic activities. These are:

Information Impact | Journal of Information and Knowledge Management

- Monitoring external environment- this function enables an enterprise to recognize menacing or even favourable signs for developing its strategic activities.
- Safety in terms of protecting the property of the enterprise. Examples of such properties to be protected include the scientific, technological and competitive advantages of the enterprise.
- Defining and developing strategies which an enterprise uses to exert influence on external environment and its players thus defending its interests.

### **Competitive Intelligence tools**

In a statement credited to Veila and McGonagle (1999), the authors stressed that 80-90 per cent of all data required for the intelligence process is available in the public domain, or it can be systematically, legally, and ethically developed from public data. In this regard, both primary and secondary sources of information are utilized.

Other tools for the practice of competitive intelligence include the following:

#### a) The Internet and Intranet:

One of the major sources for CI are the Internet and Intranet as there are about 500 billion pages of information in it and can be reached through the use of search engines, into the organization's websites. However, websites as valuable as it is for CI is time consuming and can be misleading. The web can also be used to counter intelligence. According to Kassler (2007), there are three main areas where the Web is most valuable to CI; in putting together company profiles; for obtaining news; and for finding some types of primary information.

#### b) Software:

The software collects, contracts, and compares information but does not analyze them. The main findings of a study conducted by Fuld and Company (2010) have indicated that software is not a total solution to competitive intelligence process. Several packages were found to be lacking in the software that was tested. For example, at the planning stage of the intelligence cycle, when decisions are made about what information is required, the analysis offered by some packages failed. Generally, they did not match the marketing hype required. Products also required high levels of customization. The main benefit of using software is that it can index vast amounts of data from disparate sources quicker than human indexer, and this makes it easier for the CI practitioner to search for information. Software is unable to provide true CI and cannot replace the role of the CI practitioner.

### **Competitive Intelligence Agent**

A competitive intelligent agent is an individual who is responsible for the process of discovering, analyzing, and delivering intelligence from publicly available, non-proprietary information sources for the purpose of becoming more competitive in the marketplace. According to Smith

(2011) the main role of a competitive intelligence agent is to provide management with accurate and timely information for strategic decision-making processes. The person who provides the services of a skilled competitive intelligence agent within the organization must be:

- Aware of the developments in their company's industry
- Familiar with online and offline resources pertinent to their company's information needs
- Prepared to disseminate knowledge throughout the organization

Here are a few questions that a Competitive Intelligence Agent might need to answer in the performance of his job:

- Where can I find current and past statistics regarding our industry?
- Do we have any recent profiles on our competitors?
- What are the best sources to extract current news and articles about the industry and competitors?

### **Daily Tasks Associated with Competitive Intelligence**

Several tasks are associated with competitive intelligent duties. These include:

#### **1. Filtering**

This has to do with sifting or sorting information with the aim of meeting a specific information need. This task has become very relevant in the face of information explosion that is presently being experienced. The filtering process seems to be a time-consuming task; however, skilled librarians have at their disposal many tools to screen relevant information. By screening the information that is available online, the Information Intelligent Agents prevent their organizations from information overload. Filtering information by using keyword searches and alerts ensures that the right data gets to the right person.

#### **2. Archiving**

Archiving tasks are vital to any company that wishes to have an efficient and systematic approach to managing their information. Archiving ensures that information which has been collected in the past is not misplaced and overlooked when it is needed. The tasks behind proper archiving are:

- Indexing by keywords
- Providing brief and precise abstracts of the data
- Providing updates when new information becomes available

Failure to complete these tasks on a regular basis will lead individuals or the organization to the wrong place to find information.

### **Competitive intelligence and the library and information profession**

We could hardly imagine the current business environment and culture without libraries. In the course of centuries and longer, library and information professionals have been not only reliable and recognized keepers of the written word and recorded knowledge, but have also been irreplaceable and active mediators in the transmission of knowledge and guarantors of access to all sources of knowledge. Though developing nations are yet to fully exploit the potentials of library and information professionals as competitive intelligence managers in relation to what obtains in the developed nations, the place of library and information professionals in the success of competitive intelligence can never be over-emphasized.

Competitive intelligence as a tool is made possible because of the availability and accessibility of information as well as information products and services which library and information professionals are trained to provide. CI is the driving force in any establishment and, one of the marketing practices that was brought about by the evolution of information and communication technology. It is an attitude, which not only provides knowledge, but spurs wisdom, because of its comprehensive view regarding the interrelationships of all aspects of life and consequently, the behaviour of man, nation or organization and the evolution of their notions. It generates a special kind of information product, which is content-specific and focused towards a decision-making situation and is highly evolved in terms of possessing considerably greater informative value than the original data extracted from information sources.

There is an essential difference between information and intelligence as a quality or ability of individual or organization. Information could be considered as value-added pieces of knowledge through meaningfulness for specific person or organizations (Hedin, 2012). At the same time intelligence is more about having a skill of guessing right supported by information and organizational culture. Since competitive intelligence is required for policy formulation, decision-making, and strategy formulation in the corporate and business world, librarians as trained information professionals are better placed in handling this service. For example, car does not just need the gas, it must have much more complicated systems and a driver to steer it in the right direction. This implies that though organizations need intelligence alongside decision-makers to be able to thrive in the competitive environment, they also need a librarian to steer them in the right direction by providing the required competitive intelligence. The higher the quality of intelligence products, the less effort required from the decision-maker in terms of information gathering, processing and interpretation.

The place of library and information professionals in the provision of competitive intelligence and other information products could be seen from the anatomy of information behavior as provided by Choo, Detlor, and Turnbull (2012). They stated that human information behavior has three components: information needs, information seeking, and information use. Information needs are often discussed at the cognitive level- gaps or anomalies in the state of knowledge or understanding being represented by questions or topics. In an organization or a

work setting, information need often arises when people are involved in such tasks as planning and decision making. Information seeking refers to a purposive, goal-oriented process to search for information in satisfying a certain need. Information use on the other hand, can be seen as the flip side of information need.

### **Competitive intelligence and national development**

The ability to acquire and use knowledge is increasingly important for national development. This is because underdevelopment which most often is seen to be a consequence of environmental, social or technical impoverishment will definitely heighten in the absence of relevant information needed for the development of the nation. Chronic inability of countries to cope with internal change springs mostly from incapability to deal with problems of underdevelopment such as inaccessibility of vital information. This is especially clear for countries with underdeveloped system of education where basic facilities such as libraries, information centers and technological facilities, necessary for education are rarely available.

Ordinarily, competitive intelligence stands for information flow management and protection of strategic information that enables enterprise directors to optimize their decisions. It comprises all the instruments and ways of getting information that an enterprise can use to learn about all the aspects of the external environment where it develops its strategic activities. In the intelligence system, information is the "fuel for action" and has to provide the confidence for the use and reasoning of usage. It is recognized in current economic theory and practice that the development progress of a nation has a direct correlation with the expansion in the manufacturing and processing business sectors. This business expansion which usually occurs as a competitive intelligence outcome gives room for employment-creation in the industries. The employment-creation effects in turn exert a beneficial distributive influence on the pattern of ownership of income and wealth, thereby influencing national development

The key national development indicators as identified by Dili Planning Commission (2012) include: economic indicators, such as growth in income (aggregate and per capita GDP), inequality in income distribution, labour force participation and employment, and poverty incidence; social indicators including food availability, access to and use of education, health, water and sanitation services; indicators of security including personal and food security as well as security from shocks and disasters; empowerment indicators such as the number of voluntary people's associations and voting in elections; and indicators of gender equity and empowerment of women. Competitive intelligence therefore is focused on improving the productivity of the industry as well as achieving strong financial growth in a competitive business environment. This on the other hand impacts the economic growth of the society thereby contributing to national development.

According to Jucevicius (2013) the future orientation of intelligence stems from the recognition that competitive advantage is derived not so much from knowing what already

happened, but from knowing what is likely to happen. Such foreknowledge gives the country or organization the advantage to either pre-empt the competition or take appropriate alternative actions. Competitive intelligence consists of three basic activities. The first one is monitoring external environment, which enables an enterprise to recognize menacing or even favourable signs for developing its strategic activities. The second activity refers to safety in terms of protecting the property of an enterprise, i.e. its scientific, technological and competitive advantages. The third activity is about defining and developing strategies which an enterprise uses to exert influence on external environment and its players thus defending its interests.

CI is the process of gathering and analyzing relevant market factors or the external business environment that can affect a company's competitiveness. It can help answer the following questions:

- What is the current size and potential growth of your company's industry?
- What are the emerging trends (opportunities or threats)?
- Are there potential mergers or acquisitions on the horizon?
- Are there prospective partners for your business?
- What are the demographics of my competitors and what are they doing?

## Conclusion

Competitive intelligence is critical for the development of organizations, with CI agents playing crucial roles. To be a competent competitive intelligence agent, Smith (2011) has suggested the following:

- Assemble the best resources on the Web that will have strategic value to your company's objectives.
- Examine the content you have been asked to find. Summarize your findings and make your opinions known about what the information means to your company.
- Present your findings in a clear manner that will be easy for management to analyze and use to make decisions.
- Familiarize yourself with simple and straightforward analysis tools/model and see what kind of information is needed to apply the tool for the correct situation.

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