# ACADEMIC RANK AND FACULTY UTILIZATION OF INTERNET INFORMATION IN RESEARCH PUBLICATIONS IN THE SOUTH SOUTH NIGERIA

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## Abstract

The primary importance of Internet tools and services for the University faculty lies not in machines that will think for scholars but in scholars using such tools to amplify collective intelligence, bringing many minds together for more  effective collaborative research and teaching. The adoption of the Internet has significantly influenced the research productivity  of academics in many progressive ways and this paper outlines the prevailing situation among scholars in Universities in the South South region of Nigeria. The paper traces the evolution of the Internet, discusses its unique reach and capabilities and draws attention to the  specific conclusion from the  findings of the study that based on the research questions answered and hypotheses tested  Academic Rank have no significant influence on lecturers' utilization of Internet  among academics in the South South zone of Nigeria.

**Keywords**: Internet, South South Nigeria, Nigerian University Libraries, University of Uyo, University of Calabar, Rivers State University of Science and Technology and  Cross River State University of Science and Technology.

## Introduction

In the past, knowledge constructs consulted by scholars were mostly in the form of printed or hard copies (books, newspapers, journals, etc), and although this format was instrumental in the development of knowledge generation and distribution since the advent of

writing, it had some limitations. Compared to the Internet, print physically limits access to information; that is a book has to be identified then actually obtained before intellectual access can take place. But on the Internet, the World Wide Web (WWW) can be searched anywhere in the world, and typically hundred or thousand of pages can be found with some relation to the topic within seconds.

Thus, the advent of the Internet has heralded the emergence of a new form of knowledge production and distribution – the soft form. This new form of information resources, has, as its greatest advantage, a virtually unlimited wealth of information resources which is widely and readily available and accessible to hundreds of millions of people simultaneously in many parts of the world. The Internet liberates scholarship from the social, legal, political, economic and geographical constraints associated with traditional print media. This liberation, has had a major effect on scholar's research capacity and productivity and  scholars, who wants to stay at the forefront of research and keep up to date with developments in his or her research fields has to utilize the Internet. This reality applies to the renown academics as well as graduate students. But younger faculty are more likely to find in the Internet the quickest route to fame, recognition and promotion.

**Literature Review**

An important element that the Internet provides in academic settings is speed. New knowledge about teaching practices, new research findings and opportunities as well as news about the profession can be shared much more easily and quickly among scholars. Jones and Johnson-Yalle (2004) in their study of Internet use by American professors attest to the fact that Internet use is common among lecturers of all ranks. Indeed, over 83% of respondents in their study agreed that utilization of the Internet information has had a positive impact on their research output. Also, respondents responses to the open-ended questions put to them revealed that lecturers of all ranks utilize Internet in many varied ways from the identification of research topic, literature search, manipulation of data, on line submission of research publications to peer reviewers, on line assessment of manuscripts and on line publication in an electronic journal or book with or without printed versions. Jones and Johnson-Yalle (2004) infer from an analysis of the sample of this study that most academics in the United States have had a long history with computers to the extent that 90% of respondents have used computers for at least 11years. About a third of the sample (34%) have used computers for 20 years. A plurality of those who have been teaching for less than 10 years first began

using the Internet as undergraduates, while those who have been teaching for 10 and 15 years first utilized the Internet in graduate school. Those who have been teaching and doing research for longer than fifteen years first began using the Internet as lecturers. The study concludes that lecturers of all ranks are active users of the Internet for research purposes.

This study reveals that over 82% of respondents have utilized e-mail to initiate research publications within the last six to fifteen years. Fewer than 5% that have used e-mail only in the last five years or less heavily represent senior professors, mostly above 55 years of age. Again, Ng'etich (2004) reveal that there is increased web based research and research publications to the extent that any academic of any rank that does not utilize the Internet runs the risk of becoming irrelevant in his or her field.

Hughes (2004), in her study of factors related to scholarly productivity, asserts that universities as achievement laden environments must make the assessment of how lecturers of different ranks utilize the Internet, an ongoing activity given the cost of installation of Internet hardware and software. This study also found that younger academics are more versed with the networked environments of today.

As personal satisfaction may be the greatest but not the only reward available for those who make the effort to adopt new technologies, Creamer (2004) in her assessment of faculty publication productivity acknowledged that individual lecturers' reputation, visibility and advancement in the academic reward structure depends on the utilization of the new technologies. In her study, Creamer (2004) also empirically establishes the fact that academics of all ranks who do not actively use the Internet are significantly less likely to be among the top producers of research publications in their fields. In other words, a small group of scholars of all ranks with innovative skills are adjudged by this study to account for a large proportion of the research publications produced in their fields due to their versatility with the Internet environment.

**Objectives Of the Study**

To examine the influence of academic rank of lecturers on utilization of Internet information for research publications in South South universities.

**Research Question**

Does academic rank influence lecturers utilization of Internet information for research publications?

**Hypothesis of study**

Academic discipline of lecturers has no significant influence on utilization of Internet for research publications.

**Research Methodology**

Based on the need to determine actual usage of the Internet in research publications, a Citation Analysis Check List is the preferred tool for this study. The study was undertaken among Lecturers of the following Universities in the South South region of Nigeria. University of Calabar, University of Uyo, Cross River University of Technology and Rivers State University of Technology. The researcher used the check list to collect and analyzed citations of research publications published in academic journals in university libraries and on line. A visit to the various university libraries was made for this purpose and an electronic search was also conducted on line to determine the existence of electronic publications by lecturers of these institutions. The advantage of citation analysis is that existing research publications in the university libraries and on line were captured.

**Research Question**

Does academic rank influence lecturers' utilization of Internet information in research publications?

**Table 1: Distribution of aggregate outcome of check for academic rank as an influence on lecturers' utilization of Internet information for research publications.**

| Academic Rank | N | $\overline{x}$ | SD |
|---|---|---|---|
| Professor | 37(13.5%) | 7.49 | 2.81 |
| Associate Professor | 34(12.42%) | 7.94 | 3.36 |
| Senior Lecturer | 49(30.2%) | 8.31 | 3.20 |
| Lecturer 1 | 49 (17.8%) | 8.06 | 3.16 |
| Lecturer 2 | 30(10.9%) | 7.30 | 2.99 |
| Assistant Lecturer | 25(9.1%) | 6.68 | 2.29 |
| Graduate Assistant | 16(5.8%) | 7.50 | 2.8 |

| | | | |
|---|---|---|---|
| Total | 274 | 7.80 | 3.05 |

Table 4 reveals that there were over 13.5% professors, 30.2% senior lecturers and 17.8% of lecturer 1 in the sample population and all of them are steadfastly utilizing the Internet irrespective of their academic rank. Therefore the question of whether academic rank influences lecturers' utilization of Internet information must be answered in the negative.

There is no significant influence of academic rank on utilization of Internet information in universities in South South zone of Nigeria, given that both renowned and up coming academics endeavour to utilize the Internet to advance their careers and keep up to date in their fields, most times at their own expense.

The null hypothesis states that there is no significant influence of academic rank of lecturers on utilization of Internet information for research publications.

In order to test the hypothesis, two variables were identified as follows:

1)      Academic rank as the independent variable.
2)      Utilization of Internet information as the dependent variable.

One-way analysis of variance was then utilized to analysed the data in order to determine the existence or otherwise of the influence of academic rank of lecturers on utilization of Internet information for research publications (see Table 2).

**Table 2: One-way analysis of variance of the influence of academic rank of lecturers on utilization Internet information for research publications.**

| | N | $\bar{x}$ | SD |
|---|---|---|---|
| Professor | 37 | 7.49 | 2.81 |
| Associate Professor | 34 | 7.94 | 3.36 |
| Senior Lecturer | 83 | 8.31 | 3.20 |
| Lecturer 1 | 49 | 8.06 | 3.16 |
| Lecturer 2 | 30 | 7.30 | 2.99 |
| Assistant Lecturer | 25 | 6.68 | 2.29 |
| Graduate Assistant | 16 | 7.50 | 2.80 |

| Total | | 1274 | 17.80 | 13.05 |
|---|---|---|---|---|
| **Source of variation** | **SS** | **Df** | **MS** | **F** |
| Between groups | 69.820 | 6 | 11.657 | 1.252$^\Delta$ |
| Within groups | 2481.537 | 267 | 9.294 | |
| Total | 2551.358 | 273 | | |

Not significant at 0.05 level, df = 6 & 26

Critical F = value  = 210

The above Table 2, presents the calculated f - value as 1.252. Thus the value was tested for significance by comparing it with the critical F - value (2.10) at 8.05 level with 6 and 267 degree of freedom. The obtained F – value (1.252) was less than the critical f - value (2.10). Hence the result was not significant. The result retained the hypothesis that academic rank of lecturers has no significant influence on utilization of Internet information for research publications.

**Discussion of findings**

**Influence of Academic Rank on Lecturers' Utilization of Internet Information on Research**

In this study, it was revealed that the any time, anywhere access to the Internet makes the adoption and utilization of the technology evident in research publications by academics of all ranks.  Middaugh (2000) show that the Internet plays a significant and largely positive role in lecturers academic experience. The findings of this study suggest that lecturers of all ranks use the Internet to communicate with colleagues and students and to post their research papers.

This implies that lecturers' academic ranks have no significant influence on the utilization of internet information for research publications given that academics of all rank in the South South region of Nigeria recognize the potential of the Internet in the conduct of research. Therefore, lecturers have to utilize the Internet in order to advance their careers. This corroborates with Gasper, McNeil, Woo, Preston and Green (2007), who assert that

many upwardly mobile lecturers of all ranks acknowledged the potential of the Internet as a study and research tool and the need to integrate it into the university experience.

Thus, the hypothesis is sustained in view of the findings that lecturers of all rank utilize the Internet in research publications. The findings show that institutions of higher learning still need to address three broad areas, that is, infrastructure, professional development, teaching and research in order to assist lecturers to continue to make good use of the Internet in their professional work.

**Conclusion**

This study on Academic Rank and utilization of Internet information in research publications in universities in South South region of Nigeria is considered timely and relevant to the prevailing need to ensure that lecturers' disposition and rank does not hinder their use and application of the huge resources available in the Internet. An understanding of the influence of Academic Rank is bound to help librarians make adequate arrangement for the deployment of Internet facilities and provision of training in order to equip lecturers with skill appropriate to the demand of today's Internet era. Therefore, continuing professional development is required to build up the technological competence of lecturers and to ensure that they utilize the Internet to conduct research, present findings and collaborate with colleagues in other nations or continents.

*The specific conclusion from the study's findings based on the research questions answered and hypotheses tested shows that Academic Rank have no significant influence on lecturers' utilization of Internet .*

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