Overnight Internet Browsing Among Cybercafe Users in Abraka, Nigeria

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Abstract

This paper is a survey of overnight browsing service use in cybercafes located in Abraka, Nigeria. Data was collected by means of questionnaires from 61 clients who were in 5 cybercafes to make use of the overnight internet access service. It was revealed that a majority of the users (59%) were males, the age range of 21-25 ranked first (50%) as users of the service with students as the major users. It was also discovered that 60.7% of the respondents use the overnight internet service to enable them to have enough time to explore the services and resources of the Net; computers/internet response ranked first as a factor which determine the cybercafe used for the service, 68.8% of them seek information to supplement their course work during the overnight service but sleep is a constraint faced by most of the clients followed by inability to open some sites/web pages. It is recommended that cost of internet access be reduced to NGN30.00 per hour to encourage cybercafe users to use the internet for long duration during the day and individuals/organizations should archive their documents/files to prevent site disappearance.

Introduction

Overnight internet browsing is a special internet access service offered by Nigerian cybercafes from 10.00 p.m. to 06.00 a.m. Cyber cafe users who intend to do overnight internet browsing are normally required to pay and register with the cafe staff before the start of their session. Overnight browsing normally allows users who have a considerable amount to download from the internet to do so at minimal cost. This service is mostly used by students who require lengthy sessions to obtain information for their academic work. While some cafes make this service available once per week, others provide it twice or three times or even every night. (Adomi, 2005a).

The cybercafe also known as internet cafe or PC cafe is a place where internet public access services are provided by entrepreneurs for a fee (Adomi, Okiy and Ruteyan, 2003; Calson Analytical, 2004). While in the USA and Western Europe, the term cybercafe refers often to true cafes offering both internet access and beverages, in Nigeria and other parts of Africa, cybercafes can refer to places offering public internet access in places like restaurants or hostels, or they are locations that are wholly set aside for public access internet services (Adomi, Okiy and Ruteyan, 2003; Adomi, Omodeko and Otolo, 2004).

Cybercafes are springing up in their numbers daily (Accra's News, 2004). They are now common in major cities of the world providing venues for people to meet friends, read newspapers, discuss important events of the day, and respond to their e-mail correspondence. People are increasingly communicating with their friends and work mates by means of e-mail from their offices, or from the privacy of their own homes and now increasingly from cybercafes. Although connectivity is limited in Africa, people on that continent are increasingly gaining access to the internet through cybercafes rather than at places of work, schools, or in their homes (Mutula, 2003).

A combination of factors has made it extremely difficult for individuals and corporate bodies to be connected to the internet in Africa and particularly in Nigeria. These is a lack of technical know-how/awareness, lack of adequate telecommunications infrastructure, and poverty of the citizens (Ahiakwo, 1998). Others reasons are the high cost of machines (PCs) and of bandwidth (Jensen, 2002; INASP, 2003, Adomi, 2005b). These factors which deter individuals and most organizations and educational institutions from having internet connectivity, force people to patronize cybercafes for internet surfing, e-mail communication and for other internet services/resources in Nigeria. According to Sairosse and Mutula, (2004) cybercafes are currently becoming the preferred internet access points since most of them are open for long hours, charge reasonably, provide assistance to users, have diverse services and are generally convenient and flexible places for searching the internet.

The adoption and use of the internet by students and faculty in Nigerian universities started becoming widespread in the late 1990's. Currently, internet access points for Nigerian students include ICT centers and cybercafes located on the campuses and cybercafes situated off campus. Nigerian students have not started having free access to the internet on campuses. They have to pay to use the internet.

The internet is very important to Nigerian university students in helping them to have access to timely, accurate and relevant information. University libraries in Nigeria, at present, experience under-funding which makes it very difficult to subscribe to enough journals and to buy enough textbooks to support the curriculum. The students therefore access the internet to obtain information that their libraries cannot provide through their shelves (Adomi, Omodeko and Otolo, 2004). Apart from seeking academic information from the internet, the students also use the net to send and receive e-mail, for entertainment and sports, to read newspapers among other uses (Adomi, Omodeko and Otolo, 2004; Iweze, 2004). It has accordingly been observed that the largest number of cybercafe users in Nigeria are students (Adomi, Okiy and Ruteyan, 2003).

Some scholars have conducted investigations on cybercafes in different countries. Chachage (2001) investigated the knowledge and skills of the users of internet cafes in Tanzania; Gitta and Ikoja-Odingo (2003) studied the impact of cybercafes on information services in Uganda; Adomi, Okiy and Ruteyan (2003) surveyed cybercafes in Delta state, Nigeria; Adomi, Omodeko and Otolo (2004) investigated the use of cybercafes in Abraka, Nigeria; and Sairosse and Mutula investigated cybercafe use in Gaborone, Botswana. None of these studies surveyed overnight browsing. Adomi (2005b) only partly investigated the cost of overnight browsing in Abraka, Nigeria where her survey found that 6% of the sample had done overnight browsing. Of these, 4% of used the Net for less than 30 minutes, 50% for 30 –1 hour, 25% for 1 hour-1½ hours, 8% for 2 hours on average per visit while 6% provided no answer. There is therefore a need for a more comprehensive survey on overnight internet browsing among cybercafe clients.

Abraka whose cybercafe users are the subject of this study is a suburban town located in Delta state, Nigeria. It is the location of the state university and has a population of approximately 42,000 inhabitants – 25,000 non-students and 17,000 students. The major occupation of the local population is farming, but some of the inhabitants practice local trading, while 2% of the populations are civil servants (Adomi, 2005a). At the time this survey was conducted in December 2004, there were 11 cybercafes, five of which were rendering overnight internet access/browsing services.

The study sought answers to the following questions:

What were the personal characteristics of the internet cafe users?

Why did the respondents undertake overnight internet browsing?

What were the determinants of the choice of cybercafe for overnight internet browsing?

What were the internet access activities carried out during the overnight browsing?

How many times have the users done overnight browsing in internet cafes?

What were the search engines used?

What were the problems encountered by the cybercafe clients?

This study is significant in that its findings will enable the international community to know how internet cafe users in Nigeria are making frantic efforts to spend longer hours surfing the Net.

Methodology

This study included items intended to glean data on the personal characteristics of the respondents as well as their use of the overnight internet browsing service in cybercafes. The research instrument was administered and retrieved from 61 clients who were in 5 cybercafes in Abraka, Nigeria using the overnight internet browsing service. At the time of this study in December 2004, there were a total of 11 cybercafes in Abraka but only 5 of them were providing an overnight internet access service and these were the ones used for the study. The data generated from the study was analyzed using frequency counts and percentages.

Findings and discussions

Table 1 reveals that more males 36 (59%) than female participated in the study (were using overnight internet access in the cafes when the questionnaires were administered). This implies that more males than females take advantage of the overnight services of the internet cafes. The possible reason for more males taking advantage of this service could be that girls are afraid that it may not be safe for them to walk at night.

Table 1: Gender of respondents

Gender	Frequency	%
Male	36	59.0

Female	25	41.0
Total	61	10

Table 2: Age of respondents

Age range	Frequency	%
16-20	10	16.4
21-25	33	50.1
26-30	12	19.7
31-35	4	6.6
36-40	-	-
Above 40 years	1	1.6
No of response	1	1.6

The age range 21-25 years ranked highest with 33 (50.1%) respondents followed by 26-30 years with 12 (19.7%) respondents. These age ranges are those usually associated with the ages of students (university students) who make up the highest numbers of clients of the internet cybercafes. Students typically have the need to explore the internet for information to compliment and augment their lecture notes and complete class assignments.

Table 3: Status of respondents

Status	Frequency	%
Students	54	88.5
Applicants	4	6.6
Civil servants	2	3.3
Lecturers	1	1.6

Students ranked highest as the clients who used the cybercafes for overnight internet browsing, This finding confirms earlier ones (Adomi, Okiy and Ruteyan; and Sairosse and Mutula, 2004) that students constitute the highest number of cybercafe users in Africa.

Table 4: Reasons for utilizing overnight internet access service

Reasons	Frequency	%
Enables me to have enough time to explore the resources of and services of the internet	37	60.7
More convenient for me	14	31.1
It costs less	9	14.8
Faster internet response	5	8.2
Other	2	3.3
No response	1	1.6

To have enough time to explore the resources and services of the internet attracted the highest response rate of 37 (60.7%). There are some possible reasons for this. Overnight internet browsing normally commences at 10.00 p.m. and terminates at 6.00 a.m. Thus the clients that make use of this cybercafe service have as much as 8 hours to use the internet. It should also be noted that most of the overnight access service users are university students who need a lot of information for academic purposes – assignments, term papers, seminars, projects, theses among others. Engaging in overnight surfing of the internet would therefore enable them to explore the resources and services of the internet in order to download enough materials for their studies.

As well, 14 (31.1%) considered the overnight as more convenient. This could be due to the fact that they have to devote the day hours to attending of lectures and other academic activities. They would normally not have enough time during the day to settle down for serious internet surfing. The night hours when there are no lectures will naturally be more convenient.

Table 4 reveals that 9 (8.2%) indicated that the fact that it costs less to use the overnight service was the reason for taking advantage of this. It costs an average of NGN100.00 (1 USD exchanges for NGN 127.00) per hour during normal service hours (8.30 a.m. to 10.00 p.m.) to access/use the internet in the cafes; while the overnight browsing service costs between NGN300.00 and NGN400.00. Thus if a user were to use the internet for 8 hours during the normal service hours, he/she would pay NGN800.00. Using the internet during the overnight period costs less. It should be pointed out that a majority of the overnight users are students who may not have enough money to use the internet for longer hours during the day.

The respondents were asked to indicate the factors that determine their choice of a particular cybercafe for their overnight browsing. The data in table 5 are the factors they take into considerations before deciding.

Table 5: Determinants of the choice of cybercafe for overnight internet browsing

Determinants	**Frequency**	**%**
Fast computer internet response	31	50.8
Security of premises	19	31.1
Reliability of power supply	12	19.7
Cost of internet service	7	11.5
Availability of printers	7	11.5
Proximity	4	8.2
Support/assistance to users	2	3.3
Provision for the use of diskettes	1	1.6
Other	1	1.6

As revealed in Table 5, fast computer/ internet ranks first with 31 (50.8%) as a determinant of where most respondents decide to go for night internet browsing. INASP (2003) notes that students and researchers in the West tend to take free, fast access to the Net for granted.

While it is not necessary to have very fast access to the internet for it to be usable, there is a limit below which it becomes frustrating. Usability studies show that an average page should load within 10 seconds; if the text starts loading immediately, followed by the graphics, load time of up to 39 seconds can be acceptable. However, Rosenberg (2005) found that speed and reliability of internet connection is a major challenge faced by libraries in providing e-resources and e-services in Africa, while Adomi, Okiy, and Ruteyan; Gitta and Ikoja-Ojongo (2003) and Adomi, Omodeko, and Otolo (2004) discovered that slow internet response hampers cybercafe services. Thus, the findings of these previous studies corroborate that of this study. In some of the cybercafes, internet response could be very slow in that it could take up to 5 minutes or more to open particular web pages. Internet users would thus prefer to use cybercafes where they can have fast internet response. It should be pointed out that most of these users are students who depend on their parents and guardians for financial support and would like to maximize the use of the time they have paid for using the internet.

Power outages are a problem militating against information/internet provision and use in African countries (Jensen, 2002; Adomi, 2002; Adomi, Okiy, and Ruteyan, 2003; Adomi, Omodeko, and Otolo, 2004, Rosenberg, 2005; Adomi, 2005b, Adomi, Obarakpor and Akparobore , 2005). This causes cybercafe operators to mount standby electricity plants that they switch on when power outages occur. A cafe that does not have this alternative power source will disappoint its clients. The concern over reliable power supply in cybercafe thus attracted 12 (19.7%) responses

Table 6: Activities carried out during overnight browsing

Activities	Frequency	%
Seek information to supplement my course work	42	68.8
Check/send e-mail	14	31.4
Search for job/employment	9	14.8
Browse for information to complete assignment	9	14.8
To learn/perfect internet search skills	8	13.1
Browse for information on behalf of someone	7	11.1
Browse for information on grants/scholarship opportunities	6	9.8
To engage in discussion groups	6	9.8
To visit recommended sites	4	8.2
For electronic commerce/order goods and services	3	4.9
Visit musical sites	3	4.9
Other	2	3.3

Cyber cafe clients engage in various internet search activities during overnight browsing sessions as revealed in table 6. A majority of the respondents 42 (68.8%) were in the cafe to seek information to supplement their course work, while 9 (14.8%) engage in browsing for information to complete class assignments. These respondents engage in this academic related internet search because most of them were students who needed information to meet their academic requirements. Luambano and Nawe (2004) had earlier discovered that many students were given assignment that required them to use the Internet.

Table 7: Number of times overnight browsing has been done

No of times	Frequency	%
Once	8	13.1
Twice	6	9.
Three times	4	8.2
Four times	9	14.8
Five times	2	3.3
Six times	4	8.2
Seven times	4	8.2

Eight times	2	3.3
Nine times	-	-
Ten times	1	1.6
More than ten times	21	34.4

The data presented in table 7 indicates that most of the users have been patronizing the cafe for the overnight public internet access services somewhat frequently.

Table 8: Search engines used

Search engines	**Frequency**	**%**
Google	40	65.6
Yahoo!	24	39.3
AskJeeves	7	11.7
Altavista	3	4.7
MSN	3	4.7
Northern light	2	3.3
Teoma	2	3.3
Mamma	1	1.6
Dogpile	1	1.6
Other	3	4.7

Google ranked highest (65.6%) among the search engines used by the respondents, followed by Yahoo!. This finding does not corroborate an earlier one where Yahoo ranked highest followed by Google (Adomi, Omodeko, and Otolo, (2004) but corroborates the finding of internet use among academic librarians in the University of Zimbabwe and Zululand by Mugwisi and Ocholla (2003).

Table 9: Problems users encounter during overnight internet access service

Problems	**Frequency**	**%**
Sleep	15	24.6
Inability to open some sites/web pages	14	23.0
System failure	12	19.7
Inability to locate materials needed	10	16.4
Disappearance of sites	7	11.5
Electricity interruption	7	11.5
Slow internet/computer response	6	9.8

Other	1	1.6
No response	8	13.1

Sleep ranked highest, with 15 (24.6%) responses, as the problem the cybercafe users encountered while engaged in overnight internet browsing. Since the internet service is overnight, unless a user had enough sleep during the day before the commencement of the service session, he/she may encounter problems of lack of sleep. Owing to the fact that the day hours of students are crowded with numerous activities they could fall asleep while surfing the Net overnight.

Inability to open some sites/web pages was indicated by 14 (23.0%) respondents. There are a number of reasons why users are unable to open some web pages. Some pages/files require the use of some programs to be able to open and download them. Such web pages cannot be downloaded from a terminal without such programs, for instance, a system on which the Acrobat reader is not installed cannot open a PDF file. It is also possible that some sites the users were unable to open require subscription. Virus infection could be another reason.

Another problem some respondents 10 (16.4%) indicated was that of locating needed information. Though the internet contains masses of information, not all information can be readily found. Inability of the user to use appropriate search terms can also hinder the person from obtaining the needed information. In addition, some information, which may be relevant to the searcher, may be in closed access sites.

Conclusion

The overnight browsing service is a special internet access service rendered by cybercafes in Nigeria to enable internet users access/use of resources and services for longer hours at reduced rates. Most of the clients who make use of this service at Abraka are males and students, the majority of whom use the service to obtain information from the Net for academic purposes. Most of the respondents in this study use cybercafes where they can have fast computer/internet response. However, sleep is a problem which most of the users encounter during the overnight internet access service.

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