

**Инфо-предпринимательство в Африке.  
Взгляды из Южной Африки и Нигерии**  
**Development of Infopreneurship in Africa.  
Some South African and Nigerian Perspectives**

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В докладе мы показываем, что выпускники информационных отделений университетов, не нашедшие работу, могут обрести свою нишу в сфере инфопредпринимательства – при условии знакомства с основами данного вида деятельности и ее популяризации. Инфопредприниматели – это специалисты в области информатики, предоставляющие специализированные информационные услуги за плату. Целью доклада является анализ состояния и перспектив инфопредпринимательства в некоторых городах Нигерии и Южно-Африканской Республики. Основное внимание уделено информационным компаниям, владельцами которых выступают выпускники факультетов библиотековедения и информатики, а также родственных отделений учебных заведений, расположенных в нескольких городах двух названных стран. Было предпринято множественное практическое исследование (кейс-стади) с применением метода анализа качественного содержания. Для сбора информации о респондентах и бизнес-структурах мы использовали интервью и наблюдения. Респонденты были отобраны методом невероятностной (неслучайной) выборки с целевой выборкой и выборкой по методу снежного кома. Целевая группа выбиралась из списка зарегистрированных информационных компаний, а также из числа выпускников факультетов библиотековедения и информатики, занятых инфопредпринимательством в некоторых городах Нигерии и Южной Африки. Всего из восьми (8) групп бизнес-деятельности и/или научных дисциплин, таких как информационно-коммуникационные технологии (ИКТ), масс-медиа и коммуникации, телекоммуникации, библиотеки, архивы и центры управления документацией, издательский и типографский сектор, вычислительные системы, библиотековедение и информатика. Результаты исследования показали следующее: инфопредпринимательство – динамичное направление бизнеса в обеих странах; в приведенной выборке компании обнаруживают больше сходства, нежели различий; более на информационные технологии ориентированы те компании, которые принадлежат выпускникам отделений ИТ и вычислительных систем, чем те, которыми владеют выпускники факультетов библиотековедения и информатики; большая часть продуктов и услуг ориентирована на ИКТ – например, программное обеспечение и установка компьютерного оборудования, слежение, решение проблем, веб-дизайн, программирование, видеонаблюдение, онлайн-телевидение и пр. В докладе дается рекомендация популяризировать инфопредпринимательство в этих двух странах, в том числе, в рамках учебной программы по вычислительным системам, медиа, коммуникациям в школах библиотековедения и информатики. Авторы считают, что данному направлению развития должна быть оказана государственная поддержка в части политики и организации.

**Ключевые слова:** инфопредпринимательство, предпринимательство, Нигерия, Южно-Африканская Республика, Дурбан, Лагос.

In this paper we argue that there are unemployed information sector graduates who can benefit from infopreneurship if more awareness and popularization of the business is achieved. Infopreneurs are experts in the information field/discipline that provides specialized information services in exchange for money. The purpose of this paper is to investigate the status and development of infopreneurship in selected cities in Nigeria and South Africa. The study focused on information-based businesses owned by Library and Information Science (LIS) graduates and other graduates of related fields, in selected cities from the two countries. A multiple case study, using the qualitative content analysis research method, was applied for this study. Both interviews and observation were used to gather information from the respondents and business sites. The respondents were identified through non probability sampling techniques involving purposive and snowball sampling. The target population was chosen from the lists of registered information-based businesses as well as LIS graduates practicing infopreneurship in the sampled cities in Nigeria and South Africa. A sample size of 160 information-based business owners, LIS graduates and other related information disciplines was picked from eight (8) clustered business areas and/or disciplines, which included: information communication technology (ICTs), mass media/communication, telecommunication, libraries, archive and records management centers, publishing and printing sectors, computer science, and LIS education. The findings show the following: infopreneurship is a growing practice in both countries, there are more

similarities than differences in infopreneurship in the samples, there are more IT oriented businesses owned by IT and computer science graduates than Library and Information Science/studies graduates, and most business products and services are ICT oriented such as software and hardware installation, tracking services, trouble shooting, web designing, programming, CCTV installation, online TV, among others. The study recommends popularization of infopreneurship in the two countries and in the curriculums of computer science, media, communication and Library and Information Science schools. More government support in the form of policies and infrastructure is also recommended.

**Keywords:** Infopreneurship, entrepreneurship, Nigeria, South Africa, Durban, Lagos.

## 1. Introduction and theoretical background

In contemporary society, information and knowledge have become as significant in the discourse and practice of social and economic development as other factors of production such as land, labor, and capital. Information is increasingly viewed as both a commodity and a resource (Ikoja-Odongo and Mostert 2006:14 citing McCreadie). David and Dube (2013:2) acknowledge that the current information era characterized by the abundance of information is a typical experience of an information society (see Jiyane et al., 2013); particularly in countries where increased access to digital applications and instruments are enhanced across society in different sectors and fields of information.

There are a myriad of definitions of infopreneur and entrepreneur. In essence, the concept of an 'infopreneur' is closely linked to the concept of an 'entrepreneur'. Entrepreneurs are the individuals who take the leading roles, as well as risks, in mobilizing production factors (e.g. natural resources, human resources, and capital) in combinations that produce new products and services (Lee-Ross and Ashley, 2009:10). The 'entrepreneur' and 'entrepreneurship' are increasingly considered to be significant with regards to the production of goods and also for national development, especially in terms of economic growth and job creation. Lahm and Stowe (2011:10) define infopreneurship as the widespread practice of developing, selling, and reselling information products and services, while Rugge and Glossbrenner (1997:xxi) define it as the practice of self-employed individuals who have acquired specialized skills that help address people's information needs by accessing important information that supports the demand and justifies charging fees for a profit. Mason and Dobson (1998) note that infopreneurship is a practice that provides information services, that are basically information-for-profit businesses, that focus primarily on organizing ideas into specialized information and delivering that information in a customized manner in order to fit clients' specific information needs. Thus, infopreneurship is a practice by information specialists that markets their products and services in different formats in order to meet different users' information needs with the intention of making a profit. Infopreneurs organize ideas into products, providing satisfaction to the customers who need the products and services. Similar definitions tend to narrow down the concept of infopreneurship to the "business of selling information products and services via the Internet in order to make money" (Du Toit, 2000:83.84), a "specialist who gives expert advice in information and information brokerage to individuals or organizations"(Ocholla's 1999:84). Thus, the information consultant or infopreneur could provide consultation on a single item or several items, depending on his/her areas of specialization. Lahm and Stowe (2011) note the transformation of infopreneurship from traditional information products and services to ICT driven e-information services with the Internet and cyberspace playing a major role.

There are numerous reasons for the rise of infopreneurship. Ocholla (1999:106) identifies unemployment, the willingness of the information consumers to pay for consultancy services, the inability of existing information centers to cope with the demand for information services, rising demands for complementary information services, and cutbacks on public sector spending, as major factors in the ascension of infopreneurship. Coulson-Thomas (2000) argue that the main factor is the over production and circulation of information products and services beyond coping with the information output produced on a daily basis and made available for public access. They also note that the increase in the demand for specialized and repackaged information has encouraged infopreneurs to assist users in coping with the proliferation of information by sifting, screening, and sorting the information on their (the consumers) behalf. This trend has promoted the development of infopreneurship practices amongst graduates by creating employment opportunities. Other views (Du Toit, 2000:83) are that infopreneurship emerged because of the global economic crisis/ meltdown, such as that of 2008, that results in job -cuts and

unemployment in the formal sector which affects graduates the most. . This situation, coupled with the lower demand for graduates' services, contributed towards the rise in self-employment and infopreneurship practice. This trend reflects the slow economic growth in Nigeria and South Africa, and people's growing need for specialized information services in their day to day activities.

There are many areas of infopreneurship. According to Ocholla (1999:84), these include: advising a client on matters within the expertise of the consultant; developing new skills and knowledge on behalf of a client; reviewing and evaluating technologies on behalf of a client; and performing specific professional tasks based on a consultant's specialist knowledge, through staff selection, education, and development. David and Dube (2013:4) mention IT oriented areas that are increasingly trendy, such as: the blogging software used in websites; construction of robust websites that are accessible to non-programmers; development of wiki software; print-on-demand services; new web-based publishers; and broadcasting. In addition, they list software and hardware installation, automation of the library, marketing of information products, information repackaging, records management, proof reading and editing, Internet providers, e-abstracting and indexing, building a consistent branded web presence, online broadcasting, and website creation. Recent areas of infopreneurship are largely driven by technology. Lahm and Stowe (2011:1) note two ICT driven trends in infopreneurship: 1) The technological improvements in electronic products, which have resulted in the rise of numerous media through which information-based products are provided; and 2) The development of the Internet as a means of both marketing and distributing goods and services. The application of the Internet has dramatically improved the efficiency and reliability of information services.

Skrob (2009:2-3) lists ten benefits of infopreneurship as follows: it replaces manual labour by speeding up the provision of services (this is also known as 'multiplying yourself' and leveraging what the infopreneur knows better), it provides a passive income and large profit potential, it has a low cost of entry, it provides specialized services (good expert status), it introduces new products which bring new customers, it creates marketing opportunities, it establishes cross-promotion opportunities, it creates potential for corporate deals, it can be spread through word of mouth and little to no interaction with buyers/customers is possible with infopreneurship. Considering the reasons, areas, and benefits of infopreneurship highlighted above, there appears to be a strong justification for infopreneurship as an alternative employment sector to information providers; one that is worth exploring, understanding, and promoting.

## **2. Purpose of the study**

We argue that there are unemployed graduates from the information sector who could significantly benefit from infopreneurship if the status of the sector was more well-known as many cited studies seem to suggest. The practice of infopreneurship has not been fully embraced by LIS graduates as an alternative to limited library and information employment opportunities in both countries. There seems to be a research vacuum in this important information service sector. Our study strives to answer the following research questions: Is there awareness of infopreneurship?. What is the status of those practicing infopreneurship from the eight (8) cluster information fields/disciplines? What are the areas or types of infopreneurship in the samples in Nigeria and South Africa? What are the challenges and opportunities encountered by infopreneurs in the two countries?

## **3. Methodology**

This study largely adopted the interpretative/qualitative method/ approach. The population for this study consisted of registered small and medium information-based businesses in the general economic sector of both countries. The target population was small and medium- size registered information-based businesses in the sampled areas in Nigeria and South Africa. The study applied non- probability sampling in the form of purposive and snowballing sampling techniques in the selection of potential information-based business owners. The purposive sampling was used in selecting some of the information-based business owners through the list of all registered business organized by authorized bodies such as: Board of directorates South Africa (2014); Nigeria Yellow Page (2014); and the Nigeria corporate affair commission (2014). Seventy six information-based businesses were picked from both countries for this study. These information-based businesses were picked according to the types of services rendered and their area of practice from the 8 clusters information business areas. Snowball sampling was also used to complete the targeted number sampled for the study through one LIS graduate that assisted the researcher

in reaching out to other graduates of the information field working in information-based businesses. The application of snowballing helped to reach out to 15 graduates from South Africa and 20 LIS graduates from Nigeria from the selected cities in both countries. The adoption of the qualitative method allowed the use of interviewing and observation for data collection from information-based business owners. The business owners were interviewed face-to-face at their business premises. The interview schedule used both structured and semi-structured interview questions and was divided into three sections: demographic data, general information about the respondents' businesses, and several questions regarding infopreneurship practice and concepts within the research questions framework. These questions included an inquiry into their experiences in the information-based business, and how they package and sell information to their clientele. Out of 160 information-based businesses, 111(69.4%) respondents participated in this research. The respondents were drawn from selected cities/towns in Lagos State and Oyo State in Nigeria and Kwa-Zulu Natal in South Africa. Respondents were selected from 8 distinct clustered information fields and disciplines in the information sector. These were: telecommunications; mass communication; Information Communication Technologies (ICTs); computer science; information science (LIS) schools; libraries; records and archive centers; and printing and publishing.

*Table 1. Sampling frame*

Respondents	Nigeria	South Africa	Total	
	Count(N)	Count(N)	Count(N)	%
Records & archive management	7	4	11	9.9
Mass communication (broadcasting)	7	5	12	10.8
Information technology	8	8	16	14.4
Library	9	4	13	11.8
Publishing	7	8	15	13.5
Library & Information Science (LIS)/Library Science education	7	5	12	10.8
Telecommunication	8	7	15	13.5
Computer science / computer engineering	8	9	17	15.3

#### 4. Results and discussions

It is important to acknowledge that infopreneurship is essential for alternative employment. Infopreneurs in this study were largely male (76.4), an economically active population (21–40yrs; 72%), had college/university formal education (95.5%) including postgraduate/graduate qualifications (23.2%), and most of them admitted that they were unemployed before entering infopreneurship (65%).

The study established that the concept of infopreneurship is largely unknown by infopreneurs. Searches on popular research databases such as Scopus, Thompson Reuters WoS, LISTA, and Google Scholar (GS) also confirmed that infopreneurship is not a popular concept when searched together with information brokerage or information consultancy. However, that does not mean that information businesses do not exist. This lack of understanding of the concept is likely to cause problems in mapping and auditing information related businesses which is why it is important to find and promote a popular concept for research and development of the sector.

As noted in tables 2, 3&4 there were a variety of business names reflecting different contexts in the study areas. However, there were more similarities than differences when it came to areas and types of businesses in the sampled business environments. More computer or ICT oriented information products and services/infopreneurship were common confirming the growth of this business orientation (Du Toit, 2000) with more graduates with computer skills and knowledge involved. It was noted that specialised business skills is essential as well as ICT and entrepreneurial knowledge and skills. It is noted further that information products and services are diversified and growing but largely ICT oriented, a trend that is also confirmed in related studies (e.g. David and Dube, 2013). This trend was not common in earlier studies (e.g. Ocholla, 1998; 1999) as technology driven infopreneurship was still quite low then. There was more overlap in the types of information products and services found in the eight cluster areas (see table 2, 3 & 4) identified in this study suggesting more similarities than differences in infopreneurship activities in the eight related sectors.

Table 2. Types of Information Products and Services Provided: Libraries & Records/Archives

	Nigeria		South Africa		Total	
	N	%	N	%	N	%
<b>Libraries</b>						
Library automation business	5	8.2			5	4.5
Library management	3	4.9	1	2	4	3.6
Designing of library building	1	1.6	2	4	3	2.7
Indexing and abstracting	4	6.6	2	4	6	5.4
Organizing setting and up of library	5	8.2	2	4	7	6.3
Information Consultancy service	4	6.6	6	12	10	9.0
Referral services			2	4	2	1.8
Project writing	2	3.3	3	6	5	4.5
Preparing business plan			1	2	1	.9
Business registration			1	2	1	.9
<b>Recording/Archive services</b>						
Setting of records centers	9	14.8	4	8	13	11.7
Records management	11	18.0	4	8	15	11.7
Documentation			2	4	2	1.8
Database design and management system	5	8.2			5	4.5

N=Multiple responses

Table 3. Types of Products and Services Provided: Publishing and Mass Media Oriented

Response	Nigeria		South Africa		Total	
	N	%	N	%	N	%
<b>Publishing</b>						
Newspaper and book vendor	3	4.9	1	2	4	3.6
Books publishing	14	23.0	5	10	19	17.1
Editing and proof reading	10	16.4	10	20	20	18.0
Magazine report	6		3	6	9	8.1
Development of professional journals	7	11.5	1	2	8	7.2
Bookshop	4	6.6	3	6	7	6.3
Printing of cards, flyers, T-shirt	14	23.0	10	20	24	21.6
Desktop and electronic publishing	4	6.6	9	18	13	11.7
Database design and management system	5	8.2			5	4.5
<b>Mass communication</b>						
Television broadcasting						
Radio broadcasting	2	3.3			2	1.8
Online television						
Online radio business	1	1.6	1	2	2	1.8
Online Advertising	2	3.3	8	16	10	9.0
General advertising	4	6.6			4	3.6
Training programme	2	3.3			2	1.8
Trouble shooting	2	3.3	1	2	4	3.6
Satellite connection	1	1.6	2	4	3	2.7
Online news	2	2.2			2	1.8
Online business						
MC job (master of ceremony or programme director)	2	3.3	1	2	3	2.7
Graphing designing	2	3.3	1	2	3	2.7

N=Multiple responses

Table 4. Types of Information Products and Services Provided: Information Technologies Oriented

Response	Nigeria		South Africa		Total	
	N	%	N	%	N	%
<b>Information technology / ICTs</b>						
Cyber café	11	18.0	19	38.0	30	27.0
Web blogging	14	23.0	4	8.0	18	16.2
Internet Blogging	14	23.0	10	20.	24	.21.6
Web site creating	14	23.0	5	10	19	17.1
IT training centers	12	20.0	11	22	23	20.7
Trouble-shooting	19	31.2	12	24	32	28.8
Software and hardware installation	19	31.2	16	32	35	31.5
Security devices installation	1	1.6	2	4	3	2.7
Designing local area network(LAN)	3	4.9	1	2	4	3.6
CCTV installation/ maintenance	3	4.9	1	2	4	3.6
Internet connection	3	4.9	4	8	11	9.9
Tracking device	0		1	2	1	.9
Software designing	0		2	4	2	1.8
<b>Telecommunication</b>						
Global system for mobile communication (GSM) connectivity	11	18.0	3	6	14	12.6
Airtime business	12	20.0	14	28	26	23.4
Phone call centers	11	18.0	8	16	19	17.1
Trouble shooting	8	13.1	1	2	9	8.1
Sim cards marketing			3	6	3	2.7
Bulk SMS	2	3.3			2	1.8
Phone repairs			3	6	3	2.7
Network maintenance	6	9.8			<b>6</b>	<b>5.4</b>
Fax messages			9	<b>18</b>	<b>9</b>	<b>8.1</b>
Max maintenance	2	3.3			<b>2</b>	<b>1.8</b>
Graphing designing	2	3.3	1	2	3	2.7
<b>Computing services</b>						
Training of information providers	3	4.9	6	12	9	8.1
Video shopping			2	4	2	1.8
Type-setting	7		14	28	21	18.9
Photocopy center	13	11.5	23	46	36	32.4
Computer repairs	5	8.2	13	26	18	16.2
Scanning	1	1.6	6	12	7	6.3
System programming			2	4	2	1.8
Conversion of manual file into M-files/ E-files	3	4.9			<b>3</b>	<b>2.7</b>
Scanning	2	3.3			<b>2</b>	<b>1.8</b>
Binding	3	4.9	5	10	8	7.2
Lamination	10	16.4	9	18	28	25.2
<b>Information products and marketing</b>						
CD ROM marketing	3	4.9	9	18	12	10.8
Marketing	5	8.2	10	20	15	13.5
Computer accessory/spare parts	4	6.6	13	26	17	15.3

N=Multiple responses

The challenges identified by the respondents can be grouped into the following areas: political, economic, social and technological (PEST). For instance, political challenges refer to: legal, policy, and business licensing activities. Economic challenges refer to: finance, loans, grants, infrastructure, business space and power/electricity supply. Social challenges focus on: customer care and relations, education

and training/re-skilling/informal education and ethical issues (Ponelis, 2014). Technological challenges refer to access and use of appropriate technology.

While the solutions suggested tended to refer to turning the challenges into opportunities, a main solution was the inclusion of infopreneurship/ entrepreneurship in LIS education curriculum, development of business plan/strategies, government support, SMEs and business/professional ethics and business stability.

### Conclusions

This study re-affirms that infopreneurship is important and relevant for library and information sector development, particularly as an alternative job opportunity for graduates, therefore it should be integrated in the planning for graduate education and training, government employment strategies and library and information services. While the study may not be used for generalisation because of the limited nature of the samples, it provides an agenda for future information service development that goes beyond the sampled sectors and environment. We recommend that the political, economic, social and technological issues explored in this study, such as the development of business friendly legislations and policies, infrastructural support and education and training, be supported and developed.

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