

INFORMATION SEEKING BEHAVIOUR OF POULTRY FARMERS IN ZARIA AND ENVIRONS

C.C. EZE¹ AND A. NALADO¹ AND O.H. EZE²

¹College of Agriculture, ²Department of Community Medicine, Ahmadu Bello University, Zaria.
(kuchezech@yahoo.com)

ABSTRACT

A cross-sectional survey of small, medium and large scale farmers in Zaria and environs was carried out to elicit their information needs and behavior. A sample of 68 respondents (71% of population) were randomly selected and interviewed using a structured questionnaire. Both descriptive and inferential statistics were employed to analyze the data collected. The result revealed a significant relationship between information seeking behavior and the respondents. The educational attainment, farming experience and flock size at $P < 0.05$, age with r -value of 0.0263 was not significant at ($P < 0.05$). Recommendations are made with a view to improving poultry farmers information seeking behavior and the use of information.

Key words: Information needs behavior poultry farmers

INTRODUCTION

Generally speaking, information is that which informs, i.e. an answer to a question. Information is valuable, increases understanding and reduces uncertainty. Also, information relates to knowledge communicated, received or learned concerning a particular fact, subject or circumstance. Information Seeking Behaviour includes "those activities a person may engage in when identifying their own needs for information, seeking for such information in any way and using or transferring that information (Wilson, 1999, 2000). According to Donald (2002), information behaviour is the totality of human behaviour in relation to sources and channels of information including both active and passive information seeking and information use. He went further to describe information seeking behaviour as purposive seeking of information as a consequence of a need to satisfy some goal. Collaborating this view, Nicolaisen (2006) affirmed that information seeking behaviour refers to the way people search for an utilize information. Expounding the theories of information seeking behaviour is obviously beyond the scope of this discourse. Nevertheless, Nicolaisen (2006) describes four distinct types of information seeking behaviour – visceral, conscious, formalized and compromised needs. Wilson (2000) argued that information seeking is based on a series of uncertainty resolutions which lead to a problem solution. He identified four steps in the process: problem identification; problem definition; problem resolution; problem statement. Invariably, information seeking behaviour derives from information needs i.e. Knowledge gaps that

exist and represent uncertainty. Poultry production is a very technical process and at any point in time and any stage of production there are knowledge gaps. The more technical a process, the wider the knowledge gap. The ultimate goal in information search is to use information gathered to satisfy information needs. The broad objectives of this study is to evaluate the information seeking needs and behaviour of poultry farmers in Zaria and environs. The specific objectives are to:

- i. describe the socioeconomic characteristics of poultry farmers in the study area.
- ii. Identify the information needs of the respondents.
- iii. Evaluate the relationship between socio economic characteristics and information seeking behaviour.
- iv. Identify the challenges faced by the respondents in searching for and utilizing information.

METHODOLOGY OF THE STUDY

The cross-sectional survey of small, medium and large scale poultry farmers was carried out in Zaria and environs comprising three local government areas – Giwa, Sabon Gari and Zaria LGAs. A sample of 68 respondents was randomly selected from a list of 96 poultry farmers (70.8%) and interviewed using a structured questionnaire. Data collected were analyzed using both descriptive and inferential statistics including mean ($\bar{x}$), frequency distribution, and correlation analysis (PPMC).

RESULTS AND DISCUSSIONS

The results of the study are discussed under the following sub-headings:

Socio-Economic Characteristics of Respondents: Major characteristics of the respondents recorded include age, educational attainment, marital status and religion.

Table 1: Distribution of the socio-economic characteristics of the respondents (N=68)

Characteristics	Respondents (f)	Percent age (%)
i. Age		
Below 20 years	2	2.9
21-30 years	11	16.2
31-40 years	21	30.8
41-50 years	26	38.2
Above 50 years	8	11.8
Mean age (years) =		38.95
ii. Educational attainment		
Primary education	9	13.2
Secondary education	15	22
OND/NCE	22	32.4
HND/B.Sc/PGD/M.Sc	15	19.1
Ph.D	6	8.8
Adult Education	3	4.4
iii. Marital status		
Single	16	23.5
Married	38	55.9
Divorced	5	7.4
Widowed	9	13.2
iv. Religion		
Christianity	27	39.7
Islam	41	60.3
Traditionalist		

Source: Field Survey, 2014

Majority of the respondents fell within the middle age bracket with a mean age of 38.9 years. Only 2 of the respondents were below 20 years while 8 were above 50 years. The literacy level of the respondents can be adjudged reasonably high; a possible explanation being that many of the respondents double as civil servants.

Scale of Operation and Experience

Table 2: Distribution of the respondents according to scale of operation (N=68)

Category/size	Respondents (f)	Percentage (%)
Small scale:		
<500 birds	43	63.2
Medium scale: 500-1500 birds	20	29.4
Large scale: >1500 birds	5	7.4
	68	100

Source: Field Survey, 2014

As shown in table 2, most of the poultry farmers (63.2%) fell within the small scale category; 29.4% identified as medium scale while only 7.4% would pass as large scale operators.

Table 3: Farming Experience of Respondents (n=68)

Experience	Respondents (f)	Percentage (%)
<5 years	7	10.3
6-10 years	18	26.5
11-15 years	27	39.7
>16 years	16	23.5
	68	100

Source: Field Survey, 2014

With respect to experience in poultry production, it is noteworthy that over 63 percent of the respondents have been in poultry production for over 10 years. Only 10.3 percent have had less than 5 years experience.

Information Needs and Behaviour: While reckoning with the experience of the respondents, the study sought to elicit from them whether or not they needed and sought information in their production activities. Majority (86.7%) affirmed in the positive, 7.4% were not sure, while 5.8% outrightly declined need for information. The study investigated the purpose of information seeking among the respondents; what motivated their search for information?

Table 4: Distribution of Purpose of Information Seeking by Respondents

Purpose of information search	Respondents (f)*	Percentage (%)*
General awareness	28	41.2
Risk/loss control	34	50.0
Enhance productivity	38	55.8
Increase profitability	47	69.1

Forward looking/upbeat	18	26.5
Competitiveness	21	30.8

*Multiple response were recorded

Source: Field Survey, 2014

Not surprisingly, the purpose of information seeking by the respondents centred around enhancing net returns, hence the lead by 'increase profitability' (69.1%) followed by 'enhance productivity' (56.8%). Indirectly, 'risk/lose control' came third (50%) realizing the risky nature of poultry enterprise. This result corroborates the position of Meyer (2005) who affirmed that information is seen as a resource with which to solve particular problems. On the sources of information, various formal and informal sources were evaluated as shown in table 5.

Table 5: Distribution of Respondents According to Information Sources

Source of information	Respondents (f)*	Percentage (%)	Rank
Newspapers	28	41.2	2
Television	19	27.9	4
Extension agent	25	36.8	3

Radio	37	54.4	1
Neighbours	15	22.0	5
Farmer groups	11	16.2	7
Subscribed			
Newsletters	6	8.8	8
Internet	14	20.6	6

*Multiple response were recorded

Source: Field Survey, 2014

In a general sense, the information sources in this study recorded low patronage by the respondents. Apart from the top three sources as ranked (radio, newspapers and extension agents) the others recorded dismal patronage. The study also sought to elicit frequency of seeking and updating information by the respondents. For weekly, fortnightly and monthly, the responses are 25%, 19.1% and 16.2% respectively. 'As problems Arise' recorded the highest percentage of 30.08 while the lowest of 4.4% was recorded for quarterly.

Specific information sought by poultry farmers

The study also investigated specific information sought by the respondents. The results are shown in table 6.

Table 6: Distribution of Respondents According to Specific Information Sought

Specific information/practice	Not sought (0)	Partially sought (1)	Greatly sought (2)	Mean (x)
Feeding regime	9 (13.2)*	27 (39.7)*	31 (47.1)*	1.34
Sanitation	22 (32.4)	31 (45.6)	15 (22.0)	0.89
Vaccination	7 (10.3)	26 (38.2)	35 (51.5)	1.41
Culling of birds	33 (48.5)	19 (27.9)	16 (23.5)	0.75
Debeaking	27 (39.7)	21 (30.8)	20 (29.4)	0.89
Feed quality/types	13 (19.1)	21 (30.8)	34 (50.0)	1.31
Veterinary/Health Issues	11 (16.2)	31 (47.1)	15 (36.8)	1.21

*Figures in parenthesis indicate percentages

Source: Field Survey, 2014

Specific information on feeding, vaccination, feed quality types and veterinary/health issues was greatly sought by the respondents. On the other hand, information was poorly sought for culling of birds, sanitation and debeaking with mean values of 0.75, 0.89 and 0.89 respectively

Relationship Between Respondents

Characteristics and Information Seeking

The correlation analysis to show the relationship between personal characteristics of the respondents seeking behaviour showed that age

with r-value of 0.0263 was not significant. However, educational attainment, farming experience and scale of production were found to be significant ($P < 0.05$) with r-values of 0.267, 0.254 and 0.285 respectively.

Table 7: Relationship between information seeking behavior and personal characteristics of the respondents

Variable	r-values	p-value	Remarks
Age	0.0263	0.0904	NS*

Education	0.267	0.0293	S *
Farming experience	0.254	0.0302	S *
Scale of production	0.285	0.0253	S *

NS*= Not significant, S* =Significant at $P < 0.05$

Source: Field Survey, 2014.

Challenges faced by Respondent Seeking Information

The respondents indicated that they faced a number of challenges- personal and external barrier -that mitigated the seamless search and utilization of information. These were identified to include distant locations for consultation (27.9), unavailability of extension officers (54.4), poor responses to information requests (35.2), poor knowledge sharing culture (27.9) and non existence of viable farmer groups (41.2).

Conclusion and Recommendations

The study has shown that knowledge gaps do exist among poultry farmers in the study areas. The frequency of information search and update as well as information seeking for specific practices indicate a positive attitude of the respondents in seeking information. As shown by the purpose motivating information search, increasing net returns can be said to be the key factor.

In view of the nature of challenges identified as barriers to information flow, recommendations are made with respect to Providing reliable

information sources; Encouraging the formation and membership of farmer groups; Conducting regular studies on information needs; Creating awareness of information sources. It is hoped that all these would improve the information seeking behavior of poultry farmers.

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