

Full Length Research

Influence of Public Relations Practices on Information Service Delivery in Academic Libraries in Akwa Ibom State, Nigeria.

¹Isah Jamilu Dau and ²Columbus O. Udofot

¹Federal University of Technology, Ikot Abasi. E-mail: jamiludauisah@gmail.com

²Federal University of Technology, Ikot Abasi. Corresponding author's E-mail: columbusudofot@yahoo.com

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This study investigated the influence of public relation practices on information service delivery in academic libraries in Akwa Ibom State, Nigeria. The objectives of the study were to determine the influence of public relations practices on patrons' perception of librarians in academic libraries and determine specific public relations practices in academic libraries. The study was anchored on Melvin Sharpes behavioral model of public relations (2002). The study adopted descriptive survey research design. The population of the study was 4,260 registered users of academic libraries under study. The sample size of 426 was determined using proportionate random sampling technique. A structured questionnaire of four points rating scale titled "Influence of Public Relations Practices on Information Service Delivery in Academic Libraries Questionnaire (IPRPISDALQ)" was the instrument used for data collection. Descriptive statistics of mean and standard deviation was used for data analysis. The findings of the study revealed that public relations practices positively influence patrons' perception of librarians and influence information service delivery among others. The result of the study revealed that public relation practices have significant influence on information service delivery in academic libraries in Plateau state, Nigeria. Based on the findings, the study recommended among other things that public relations practices should be sharpened, worked on and made innovative, that public relations practices should be given much attention and that it should not be trivialized or taken lightly.

Keywords: Influence, Public Relations, Information Services, Academic Libraries.

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Introduction

Academic libraries are designed as libraries located within universities with the goal of offering efficient information services to assist the teaching, learning, and research activities of its parent institution as well as community services to its operating community. Udofot & Nwachukwu (2019) stated that the primary purpose of a university library is to give users access to current and pertinent information sources that are essential for research, instruction, and learning. The mental impression that consumers have of librarians is known as their "image" of them. The attitude, commitment,

approachability and interpersonal skills of the librarians can be used to gauge how well they are perceived Langridge *et al.*, (2014). The characteristics that can be examined are those that impact or impress library patrons, influence the promotion of library service, influence colleague and library officers and also to influence how approachable they are to library patrons Gabriel (2021).

University libraries should utilize proactive public relations to dispel users' stereotypes that librarians are only keepers of antiquated books. This misperception about them has the potential to discourage users from using the library's services altogether or just occasionally. Students and other users can be re-oriented so that they realize academic libraries are a conducive environment where they can obtain more effective learning strategies and resources as a means of acquiring relevant knowledge, skills and habits for survival in the modern world through proper planning and implementation of public relations strategies. In doing this, the librarian's reputation is positively built and service delivery is improved. The goal of public relations is to foster positive relationships and fruitful partnerships between a company and the general public. This is accomplished by implementing purposeful policies and services, disseminating interpretive and promotional materials, fostering neighborly engagement and gauging public sentiment and responses.

Statement of the Problem

Academic libraries are very important in academic institutions. While the academic institutions strive and spend a lot of resources in acquiring educational materials, the academic libraries in Akwa Ibom State still do not get the patronage they deserve and are not achieving their full potential due to the lack or failure of public relation practices in Academic Libraries in the state. A significant number of people in the academia are aware of what the library is but they lack knowledge of the range and nature of services offered by these libraries. No matter how libraries respond to the needs of their users, their values will not be appreciated without an aggressive, systematic and intentional publicity to stimulate, inform and attract the information seekers.

A number of scholars around the world have written about public relations. However, there is no such study done on this same subject and area of current investigation. It is against this background that this study is undertaken to investigate the influence of public relation practices on academic libraries in Akwa Ibom State, Nigeria.

Literature Review

An academic library is a library which serves an institution of higher learning such as colleges and universities. The academic library serves two complementary purposes: to support the curriculum, and to support the research of the university faculty and students. The prime aim of any academic library is to satisfy its users by providing materials to meet their educational, re-search, information and recreational needs. Ogundi (2014), observes that an academic library is part of a university setup and that it exists to serve the objectives of the parent institution. University libraries, according to Dodworth (2012), support the teaching, learning, research, and public service functions of their parent institutions by acquiring all pertinent information resources required for sustaining those tasks. Students are given access to information resources and services in a university setting, and depending on their area of specialty, they employ these various information services.

Public relations activities in libraries help to provide a coordinated effort to communicate a positive image of the library and promote the availability of the library's materials, programs and services for more patronage. A library without users is useless. To succeed, there is a need to let the users be aware of the benefits of the library to provide information resources and services that match their interests. Noel & Waugh (2002), opines that the success of university libraries lies mainly in convincing the clients that library services are worthwhile, they must understand what the services are and be enthusiastic about how they will be helpful. Libraries need to make their services and resources known to students and potential users to create awareness of the university library's value. Major sectors of the potential market for the library's services are probably not aware of all the services available or have no understanding at all of what is offered. That is why public relations is vital to advertise the existence of the university libraries and promote their service. The main focus of every library should be good customer service, good service can equal a good marketing campaign, which is another reason why public relations are important for libraries.

Public relations activities have significant effects on librarians' image. Adewusi (2014), posits that, the importance of public relations activities cannot be overlooked in any library organization, especially in university libraries. Any library activity, directly or indirectly, is an act of public relations and it helps to promote the librarians' image and use. University libraries assist the universities in the discharge of their functions by acquiring all relevant information resources necessary for sustaining the teaching, learning, research and public services functions of their universities. Any institution is secured

only as long as it commands the fullest measure of public understanding and support. In line with this, Isaac (2012), notes that, public relations in libraries concentrates more on promoting the libraries as a whole, developing a corporate identity or image and disseminating a clear message to the community about library missions and goals. Library public relations perform the important functions of communicating necessary information to various publics.

According to Aiyegunle& Moneme (2006), university libraries' broad public relations duties include the following: To improve the library's image and foster goodwill; to raise staff morale, foster loyalty, and enhance job performance; to serve as a tool of propaganda to enlist support, whether financial or otherwise; and to make library patrons aware of political and social issues; to persuade people that the library does have something to offer them and is willing and able to carry out its duties, to interpret library policy and make it acceptable; to describe the library's role in the affairs of the community it serves; to mold and reshape the library's perception of its status in a particular circumstance. In a nutshell, public relations perform the important functions of communicating necessary information to various public. This is achieved by informing faculty, staff, students and the entire campus community about new or existing library services, resources and materials.

The general functions of public relations in university libraries according to Aiyegunle& Moneme (2006), is to increase and expand membership for the exploitation and use of materials. There is a need for public relations activities in the libraries in order to carry out this function effectively. When users' needs are met, they will want to patronize the library and even tell others about the library services and how they can meet their needs. According to Isaac (2012), Librarians as professionals have a duty to be much more deeply involved in the creation and distribution of tools for the efficient exploitation of knowledge and also in the dissemination of information to a wide range of users; the learned and the illiterates, the professionals and nonprofessionals and of course to all categories of people in the community.

There are many problems encountered by librarians in public relations practices in the university libraries. These problems have affected in so many ways effective public relations activities in library services. According to Ajileye (2014), the biggest challenge faced by librarians in discharging their duties is how to create a positive image to users. Most users hold negative attitudes towards librarians. Communication as viewed by Patton (2012), is another problem affecting effective public relations practices in the university libraries. Most times there is lack of or poor communication between the users and the librarians. The negative attitudes of management towards public relations also contribute a lot to its effectiveness in the university libraries. No attempt is made to disseminate the acquired information to those who need it.

Lack of and poor access to information technology is another problem hindering effective public relations activities in the university libraries. Akintunde (2016), observed that many libraries in Nigeria still operate in the traditional service pattern where librarians are in charge of main service points of curriculum, reference, serial, acquisition and cataloguing etc. without any emphasis on information technology.

Objectives

The Specific objectives of the study are to;

1. examine how public relations practices influence patrons' perceptions of librarians in academic libraries Plateau State, Nigeria.
2. determine specific public relations practices that influence information service delivery in academic libraries in Plateau State, Nigeria.

Research Questions

The following questions were stipulated;

1. How does public relations practice influence patrons' perception of librarians in academic libraries in Plateau State, Nigeria?
2. What are the specific public relations practices that influence information service delivery in academic libraries in Plateau State, Nigeria?

Methodology

Descriptive survey design was adopted for the study. A total of 213 library registered users, drawn from the three academic libraries; Federal University of Technology, Ikot Abasi, University of Uyo, Uyo and Akwa Ibom State University, Akpaden were used for the study, representing 5% of the total population of 4, 260 library users in the Universities under study. Mean and standard deviation was used to analyze the data collected.

Data Presentation and discussions of the findings**Table 1:** Mean/standard deviation on how public relations practices influence patrons' perceptions of librarians in academic libraries Akwa Ibom State, Nigeria.

S/N	Item	N	$\bar{x}$	SD	Remarks
1	Media relations helps in answering patrons questions about the library	213	3.665	1.21449	Agreed
2	Proper counseling on public relations issues help in projecting and publicizing library services	213	3.8638	0.85521	Agreed
3	Research skills of PR practitioner in using extensive surveys to understand the public influence their behaviour.	213	3.9249	0.95364	Agreed
4	Effective publicity of factual, meaningful and interesting information on the media makes the public to know of library services and activities.	213	3.9296	0.95647	Agreed
5	With effective communication programmes in place, librarians are reminded of the necessity of prompt and courteous dealings with the patrons.	213	3.8451	0.73294	Agreed
6	User education updates the patrons on the available database(s) in the library	213	3.7653	0.72770	Agreed
7	Giving full attention to library patrons reduces phobia on the use of library	213	4.1127	0.72456	Agreed
8	Regular exhibition of library materials and services gives the patrons something to look forward to	213	4.3052	0.86101	Agreed
9	Regular communication with patrons about the library activities makes the patron excited about using the library	213	4.4178	0.81209	Agreed
10	Current Awareness Services (CAS) improves library patronage	213	4.3052	0.82177	Agreed
11	Politeness with the patrons makes them return to the library	213	4.3286	0.73007	Agreed
12	Time management meets the patrons research needs promptly	213	4.2488	0.80626	Agreed
Clustered mean/standard deviations			4.05	0.85	Agreed

From the data provided in table 1 above, it can be inferred that all of the public relations practices listed have a positive impact on information service delivery in academic libraries. The mean scores for each practice range from 3.6651 to 4.4178 above the benchmark of 2.50, indicating that patrons generally have a favorable opinion of these practices. The standard deviation values also suggest that there is variability in individual opinions, but overall, the practices are well-received. Some practices, such as research skills and regular communication with patrons about the library activities, have higher mean scores (3.9249 and 4.4178 respectively), indicating that patrons find these practices particularly helpful in understanding and utilizing the library's resources and services. Other practices, such as current awareness services

(CAS) and politeness with the patrons, also have high mean scores (4.3052 and 4.3286 respectively), suggesting that they contribute significantly to library patronage. Overall, these results support the notion that effective public relations practices can enhance information service delivery in academic libraries by improving patron satisfaction, engagement, and usage of library resources and services.

Specific public relations practices that influence information service delivery in academic libraries in Akwa Ibom State, Nigeria.

Table 2: Mean/standard deviation on the specific public relations practices that influence information service delivery in academic libraries in Akwa Ibom State, Nigeria.

S/N	Item	N	$\bar{x}$	SD	Remarks
1	Media relations create awareness to patrons on the relevance of the library and how to use its database	213	3.4366	1.37085	Agreed
2	Proper counseling on PR issues helps in the projecting and publicity of library services.	213	3.9155	0.88082	Agreed
3	Research skills of PR practitioner using surveys to understand the public influence their behaviour.	213	3.8122	0.95287	Agreed
4	Publicity of factual, meaningful and interesting information helps the public to know of library services.	213	3.8122	1.17860	Agreed
5	Prompt response to patron's mails and enquiries	213	4.1315	0.55931	Agreed
6	Provision of adequate and fast internet facilities	213	4.1878	0.54291	Agreed
7	Organisation of user awareness and library week to showcase library resources	213	4.1268	0.63535	Agreed
8	Professional handling of patrons concerns	213	4.2300	0.66491	Agreed
Clustered mean/standard deviations			3.96	0.57	Agreed

Data provided in table 2, concluded that public relations practices listed have a positive influence on information service delivery in academic libraries. All items in the table received high mean scores, with most falling between 3.8122 and 4.2300 on a scale of 1 to 5 (where 1 is strongly disagree and 5 is strongly agree). This suggests that patrons generally agree with the importance of these practices in improving library information services. Specifically, patrons agree with the media relations creating awareness to patrons on library relevance and database usage, proper counseling on PR issues help in the projection and publicity of library services, research skills of PR practitioners, effective publicity, prompt response to patron enquiries, adequate internet facilities, user awareness programs, and professional handling of patron concerns. The clustered mean score of 3.96 with a standard deviation of 0.57 further supports the overall positive influence of these public relations practices on information service delivery in academic libraries.

Summary

The paper revealed that:

1- Public relations practices positively influence patrons' perception of librarians in academic libraries. This is achieved through answering questions and clarifying doubts about the library, counseling on public relations issues, influencing public behaviour using extensive surveys, use of factual, meaningful and interesting information on media, projecting and publicizing library services among others. Others include library orientation, provision of library guide/brochure, display of reference services, updating patrons through user education as well as use of bulletins and notice boards to inform users about new resources.

2- The specific public relations practices used by librarians/ public relations officers in academic libraries include, among others, media relations, publicity, counseling, research, employees' relation/ communication, directional guides, library displays and among others

3- Public relations practices positively influence information service delivery in academic libraries through keeping users abreast of the functions, services and programmes of the library, building users confidence that their information needs can be met at all times among many others.

Conclusion

Based on the findings of the study, the researchers drew conclusion that public relations practices positively influence information service delivery in academic libraries; public relations practices significantly improves patrons' perception of librarians in academic libraries; academic libraries having librarians with sound competencies and skills are helpful in information service delivery.

Recommendations

Based on the findings of the study, the following recommendations were made:

1. That since public relations practices positively influence patrons' perception of librarians in academic libraries, such practices should be more sharpened, seriously worked on, and made innovative so that they would be more effective and impactful to the patrons. If this is done, information service delivery in academic libraries will be achieved with ease.
2. That public relations practices such as media relations, counseling, research, publicity, employee relations as well as library resources display, library tours, library cooperation, library instruction / orientation, exhibitions among others should be given much and desirable attention by the management of academic libraries. If management enhances these public relations practices, academic libraries can maximally benefit from them and their effort towards ensuring effective information service delivery to their publics will be achieved with ease. Through periodic training, librarians will be abreast and conversant with the basics and nitty-gritty of all public relation practices in academic libraries.
3. That public relations practices in academic libraries should not be trivialized or taken levity since the delivery of information products and services to the public depend on it. Deliberate, conscious and passionate effort should be intensified by the management of academic libraries towards upholding public relations practices. With this, patrons or users will be constantly kept abreast of the activities, services and programmes of the academic libraries.

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