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INFLUENCE OF PUBLIC RELATIONS PRACTICES ON INFORMATION SERVICE DELIVERY IN ACADEMIC LIBRARIES IN PLATEAU STATE, NIGERIA

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Abstract
This study investigated the influence of public relation practices on information service delivery in academic libraries in Plateau State, Nigeria. 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 has 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 highly. Lastly the study rounded up with summary, conclusion, suggestions for further studies, limitations and contributions to knowledge.
Keywords: Public relations, information service delivery, academic libraries

Background to the Study

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.

Statement of the Problem

Academic libraries are very important tools in any academic institutions due to the range of services and information resources they provide. While, the academic institutions strive and spend a lot of funds in acquiring information educational resources, the academic libraries in Jos Plateau 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 Plateau State, a significant number of people in the academia are unaware of what the library has thereby lacks the knowledge of the range and nature of services offered by these libraries. For this reasons therefore, this study investigated the impact of public relations on information delivery in Plateau State's academic libraries, by bridging the gap between librarians and users, this research aims to optimize academic library services in Plateau State, Nigeria.

Objectives of the Study

The main objective is to examine the influence of public relations practices on information service delivery in academic libraries in Plateau State, Nigeria, while, the specific objectives of the study are to:

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

Review of Related Literature

This model, developed by veteran publicist Melvin L. Sharpe was used in this paper, and it makes an effort to address the flaws in the four models of Hunt and Grunig (1984). According to Sharpe, these models fall short of achieving all the behavioural components needed for successful public relations performance. The model's foundation was developed by Sharpe (2002), that certain behaviours are essential for effective public relations because they facilitate relationships and communication as a means for raising

awareness of those behaviours. According to Sharpe, these actions are important for the organization to carry out its goals and objectives. This is due to the fact that when such behaviours are displayed, it fosters understanding between the business and its audiences. He asserts that there are five behavioural principles required for effective public relations. These are the guiding principles; honesty, openness, fairness, **Continuous Communication and Continuous Analysis.**

Adewusi (2014), stated that, the importance of public relations activities cannot be overlooked in any library organisation, 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 and 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 and 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 non-professionals 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.

The review in this paper encompasses several studies as well as articles that were conducted and published which has direct relationship with the present study; in terms of purpose, design, population and area of the study together with other empiricism were tracked. Okekeet. al., (2014), carried out a study on public relation skills of university librarians in South East geopolitical zone of Nigeria. The purpose of this study was to assess the extent of public relations skills of university librarians. Their findings show that public relations skills of university librarians are poor and this affects the overall library administration. Adebola (2012), carried out a study on "Evaluation of Public Relations Practice in Public Tertiary Institutions in South-West Nigeria". The purpose of the study was to evaluate the public perceptions of public relations practice in public tertiary institutions in South-West Nigeria, with a view to describing its current activities, structure and effectiveness in creating a conducive academic environment in the institutions as well as between the institutions and their public. The findings further revealed that public perceptions of the public relations practice in the study area are favorable contrary to other studies in perceptual of public relations practices. It also revealed that practitioners in these institutions do not comply with professionals' ethics and they are not members of key management team, this has therefore rendered them as mere communication technicians who do not contribute to decision making process in those institutions.

Research Methodology

Descriptive survey design was adopted for the study. A total of 213 library registered users, drawn from the three academic libraries; University of Jos, Jos Plateau State, Plateau State University, Bokkos and Plateau State Polytechnic, Barkin Ladi will be used for the study, representing 5% of the total population of 4, 260 library users in the Universities under study. This sample agrees with (Haruna, 2013) who stated that for a

population that runs in thousand the range between 5% and 20% may be drawn. Based on the foregoing recommendation, the researcher considered 5% of the study population appropriate for the large population of the present study.

Results

Table *1*: Public Relation Practices influence on patrons' perception of librarians in academic libraries in Plateau State.

S/No	Item Description	N	SA	A	D	SD	$\bar{X}$	*SD*	Decision
1	Library public information desk helps in answering patrons questions about the library.	213	68	79	39	27	2.88	1.00	Agree
2	Library orientation gives a general overview on the library.	213	70	58	35	50	2.69	1.16	Agree
3	Library guide/brochure gives the patrons helps the patrons to know about the library at a glance.	213	70	58	30	55	2.67	1.18	Agree
4	Library displayed ref erence services allows the patrons to see the materials available for themselves,	213	70	58	32	53	2.68	1.17	Agree
5	Bulletin/notice board informs the patrons about the new resources available in the library.	213	70	58	40	45	2.72	1.13	Agree
6	User education updates the patrons on the available database(s) in the library.	213	71	59	37	48	2.70	1.15	Agree
7	Giving full attention to library patrons reduces phobia on the use of library.	213	74	55	45	39	2.75	1.10	Agree
	Cluster Mean						**2.72**		**Agree**

Source*: Field survey, 2024*

Table 1 indicated the Mean response values of items 1-7 as 2.88, 2.69, 2.67, 2.68, 2.72, 2.70, 2.75 and a cluster mean of 2.72 with a corresponding Standard Deviation value of 1.00, 1.16, 1.18, 1.17, 1.13, 1.15 and 1.10 respectively. All the mean response values are above the criterion Mean of 2.50. This implies that the respondents agreed library public information desk helps in answering patrons questions about the library, library orientation gives a general overview on the library, library guide/brochure gives the patrons helps the patrons to know about the library at a glance, library displayed reference services allows the patrons to see the materials available for themselves, bulletin/notice board informs the patrons about the new resources available in the library, user education updates the patrons on the available database(s) in the library and giving full attention to library patrons reduces phobia on the use of library.

Table 2: Specific Public Relations Practices that Influence Information Service Delivery in Academic Libraries

S/No	Item Description	N	SA	A	D	SD	$\bar{X}$	*SD*	Decision
8	Reorientation of patrons on the relevance of the library and how to use its database.	213	70	58	41	44	2.77	1.13	Agree
9	Use of directional gu ides to save the time of the patrons.	213	68	60	56	29	2.79	1.04	Agree
10	Rehabilitation of academic library buildings to suit the modern academic environment and users.	213	71	58	47	37	2.77	1.09	Agree
11	Periodic in-house training of librarians on the public relations etiquettes.	213	73	55	52	33	2.78	1.07	Agree
12	Prompt response to patron's mails and enquiries.	213	89	62	32	30	2.99	1.06	Agree
13	Provision of adequate and fast internet facilities.	213	91	55	30	37	2.94	1.12	Agree
14	Organisation of user awareness and library week to showcase library resources.	213	88	58	34	33	2.91	1.10	Agree
	Cluster Mean						**2.85**		**Agree**

Source: *Field survey, 2024*

Table 2 indicates the Mean response values of items 8-14 as 2.77, 2.79, 2.77, 2.78, 2.99, 2.94, 2.91 and a cluster mean of 2.85 with a corresponding Standard Deviation value of 1.13, 1.04, 1.09, 1.07, 1.06, 1.12 and 1.10 respectively. All the mean response values are above the criterion Mean of 2.50. This implies that the respondents agreed that the specific public relations practices that influences information service delivery in academic libraries include reorientation of patrons on the relevance of the library and how to use its database, use of directional guides to save the time of the patrons, rehabilitation of academic library buildings to suit the modern academic environment and users, periodic in-house training of librarians on the public relations etiquettes, prompt response to patron's mails and enquiries, provision of adequate and fast internet facilities and organisation of user awareness and library week to showcase library resources.

Discussion of Findings

The first finding of the study revealed that public relations practices positively influence patrons' perception of librarians in academic libraries. The influence is such that mass relations helps in answering questions and clearing doubts about the library; proper counseling on public relations issues helps in projecting and publicizing library services; research skills of librarians in using extensive surveys to understand the public influence their behaviour; publicity of factual, meaningful and interesting information on the media makes the public know of library's activities and services; with effective communication

programmes in place, staff are reminded of prompt and courteous dealings with the publics. With these and many others, public relations practices influence patrons'' perceptions of librarians in academic libraries. This finding is in line with Adebola (2012) who observed that public relations helps in harmonizing various publics of the institutions to create mutual relations between these publics and their respective educational institutions also, he observed that public perceptions of public relations practices are favourable. The finding of this study also agrees with Musa (2016) who observed that mass relations, research, counseling, notice boards, library newsletter, handbook, news bulletin, posters are the major types of communication media for projecting libraries' image and services as well as improving perception of patrons about librarians. They are communication media for communication with the customers or patrons in the university libraries

The second finding of the study revealed that public relations practices positively influence information service delivery in academic libraries. Specifically, 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, changing patrons' negative perception about librarians and libraries, increasing general awareness of services provided, creating or establishing mutual understanding between libraries and their publics, encouraging public or user participation in planning library services, creating, protecting and sustaining good reputation of the libraries and stimulating patrons' interest on activities, programmes and resources of the library positively influence public relations practices on information service delivery in academic libraries. This finding collaborates with Okeke, Oghenetega and Lawrence (2014) who observed that public relations techniques of university libraries are poor and this affects the overall library administration. They further observed that when public relations practices are improved, there will also be improvement on information service delivery in academic libraries.

Conclusion

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

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 with be achieved with ease. 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.

2. Conscious efforts should be made to ensure that public relations as a course is fully integrated into library and information science curriculum as a core course and not just an optional one to equip potential librarians with all the competencies and skills required of the 21st century librarians or public relation officers in academic libraries in dealing with their publics. With this, without any iota or pinch of doubt, librarians will have their communication skills, interpersonal skills, marketing skills, as well as ability of fluency of speech among others improved upon.

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