

**PUBLIC RELATIONS PRACTICES AND ADVOCACY AS STRATEGIC TOOLS FOR
PROMOTING PATRONAGE OF LIBRARY SERVICES**

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Abstract

The aim of this paper was to examine the use of public relations practices and advocacy as strategic tools for promoting patronage of library services. The paper is an opinion paper based on literature analysis on the topic. Public relation practices and advocacy in the library are very essential in ensuring that users are aware of the services and resources available in the library as well as receiving public support and increase in patronage. The paper observed that for library services and patronage to stay in the current information environment, it is important they adopt effective promotional strategies to help meet the organizational mission, goals and objectives. The paper identified and examined promotional tools like printing of brochures, flyers, newsletters, development of library website, library display and exhibitions, application of social media and use of internet etc. For enhancing public relation practices, the paper recommended that library managers should advocate for funds from the government, Non-Governmental Organizations (NGOs) and policy makers in order to maintain the image of the library. Librarians should also improve on various public relation and advocacy skills such as good communication skills, research skills, good writing skills, computer and ICT literacy and evaluation skills so that they can promote their resources and services physically and remotely for improved library patronage. Other recommendations include: provision of facilities such as projectors, television signage and directional facilities etc.; improved library staff training; and reorientation.

Introduction

Libraries are known to be stocked with reading material, which consist of books, journals, films, images, manuscripts, audio visual materials etc. They are increasingly being redefined as places to get unrestricted access to information in many formats and from many sources as they continually invest huge amount of fund in acquiring different formats of information resources and facilities. With the abundance of these services and resources, the patronage of libraries in our present society are being neglected in the scheme of information

services. For libraries to survive in the present world of information explosion and internet age, they need to promote their resources and services. Jose and Bhat, (2007) pointed out that we live in an era of competition and library's competitors include internet, television, FM radios, exhibitions and fairs, leisure services, holiday services, computer games, family retreats etc. Therefore libraries need to also employ these means of reaching out to the public in order to keep users, potential users and the general public aware of the available resources and services provided in the library. Chukwudum and Dika (2017) noted that the objective of the university library has been to increase access to resources and information services as well as increase in patronage. Ijiekhuamhen, Aghojare and Ferdinand (2015) opined that the level of using the library depends on users' awareness and satisfaction with the available information resources and services and this can be enhanced through good public relations practices and advocacy.

Public relations refers to a well arranged programme of action for daily operations to the direction in which a library is moving and will move, including the aim and quality of services and the manner in which it co-operates with opinion forming groups. It is a management function of continuing and planned character, through which public and private organization such as the library seek to win and retain the understanding, sympathy, and support of those whom they are or maybe concerned (Okube, 2023). Public relation involves information given to the public, persuasion directed to modify attitudes and actions and efforts to integrate attitudes and actions of an institution with its public and of it publics with that institution (Chia in Israel (2012).

Advocacy on the other hand is an important concept in any information environment including the library. It is the act of lobbying, defending, supporting, justifying, persuasion and soliciting for an action or need. The importance of Public relation practices and Advocacy in the library cannot be overemphasized as it exposes and supports the services offered in the library as well as attracts users. Patil and Pradhan, (2013) reiterated that to attract more and more users to the library, Library staff need to extend promotion and cooperation to users and continuously market their services.

Concept and Rationale for Public Relations

Public relations refer to the various strategies or activities an organization or an individual employ to improve its services and relations with the public it deals with. Shidi and Sambe (2019) explain it as a way of establishing and maintaining or sustaining mutual relationship between the library and its publics. Public relation uses four principal methods to communicate with the public, namely; • Advertising • Lobbying • Publicity and • Press agents. (Grunig cited in Kitchen 2003). Public relations practices are classified into three main categories; 1. Informing 2. Advertising and encourage 3. Seeking cooperation, integration and optimizing affairs.

Nnadozie (2015) identified the need of public relations practice in library promotion as:

- To protect the image of the library with the aim of attracting and sustaining wider patronage
- To create, nature and retain the confidence which library patrons have in the library
- To educate library patrons on the functions and services of different libraries
- To identify the information needs of library patrons and find ways of making them available
- To create good, credible and qualitative reputation for library as an information providing institutions
- To communicate effectively and positively influence library patrons' opinions and attitudes towards the library, its functions and services.

To advice and guide the management of different libraries on the execution of effective programmes and policies that will benefit the library community. According to Shidi and Sambe (2019) public relations practices is necessary in the library so as it erode the decayed public image about the library and to promote patronage in an age where information technology and the social media are seriously competing with the library for attention. Public relations practices as stipulated by Nnadozie (2016) are; integrated readers' services, library displays and exhibitions, library week, use of notice boards, directional guides, film shows, book talks, library publications, story hours, etc.

According to Mole (2023) the same methods used in marketing are used in public relations to let people know who and what you are and to build relationships with the media. Examples include press release, newsletters, brochures, annual reports, or well-designed publications. Modern libraries are utilizing interactive social media, such as blogs, twitter and face book, as tool in their public relations campaigns to promote library activities.

Some of the methods of enhancing public relation practice in the library include: Exhibitions, active function of the library website, newsletters, flyers, focus group, talk shows, seminars, trainings etc. Gordons (2011) identified some of the public relation strategies as advertisement, website, exhibitions, printing flyers, newsletter and emailing etc.

Concept and Rationale for Advocacy

Advocacy is the process of influencing what other people feel, think and believe, so that changes can happen the way the influencers want them to happen. It is the active support of an idea or caused expressed through strategies and methods' that influence the opinions and decision of people and organization (Buckley, 2009). It can be defined as the pursuit of influencing outcomes including public policy and resource allocations within political, economic and social systems and institutions that directly affect people's lives (Wikipedia in Ochogwu, 2015). According to Gitachu (2008) it is a set of targeted actions directed at decision makes in support of a specific policy issue. In the information age, library advocates continue to have a crucial role to play in educating our communities about why libraries and librarians are essential in an information society. To be effective, they must speak loudly, clearly and with a unified voice. Ochogwu (2015) highlights the importance of lobbying and advocacy for effective library and information service delivery to include: to influence decision makers in supporting library related projects; to show the importance of libraries and information centres in the development of any human endeavour such as health, education, agriculture, sports, engineering etc. they assist in the demonstration of the importance of formulating library and information policies to achieve positive structural changes in any establishment; they help to increase awareness of the importance of library and information services among communities for self-development.

Library Advocators consist of community organization, friends of the library, library board members and trustee, library volunteers, library staff, business leaders and workers, elected officials, business leaders and workers, community leaders, educators, administrators, school board members etc. with the following qualities: Well informed and articulate, Good communication skills, well connected and friendly etc. Advocacy uses many marketing tools and public relations strategies, such as Lobbying, News conferences, public meetings focus group, strategic partnership etc. (Mole 2023).

Necessary steps involved in advocacy are:

- Understanding the environment in which your decision makers are working
- Pay attention to the things they love and value.
- Tell people what they need to hear, not what you want them to know.
- How does the issue look from their perspective?
- What other priorities and pressures are having an impact on them

Need for Promotion of Library Services

Libraries are service institutions, they exist in order to enable users to make the most effective use of the resources and services of the library. Library services are assistance offered both within the library and remotely to meet user’s information needs. As libraries continue to fight for their survival amid growing expectations, competitions from online sources and wavering public perceptions, effective library promotion and services is increasingly becoming a critical tool to ensure the continued support of users, stakeholders and the general public.

The services provided in libraries include reference services, interlibrary loan services, internet services, selective information dissemination services (SDI), computer services, users advisory services etc. Madukoma (2015) identified the following library services: loan services, interlibrary cooperation services, photocopy services, bibliographical services, binding services, lamination services, printing services, internet services, CD-ROM search, and readers’ advisory

services, reference services (both digital and print), etc. Tyckoson (2011) categorized reference services into four dimensions which are: instructing users, providing answers to users' queries, recommending information resources and marketing library services. According to Nyantakyi (2016) if the service offered in libraries meets users' information needs or expectations, it can be considered that there is quality and effective library service. Gama (2013) asserted that libraries, especially university libraries users are generally scholars and students whose use of library services assists them for their academic work. Libraries play a very crucial role in promoting knowledge which has necessitated the advancement of academic activities through the availability and provision of information resources and services to its users. The objectives of any service provision organization cannot be achieved without the presence of public relations (Okube, 2023).

A magnificent library building with large collections of information resources and services are worthless if they are not being accessed to meet an information need. According to Ogunmedede and Emeahara (2010), no matter how huge a library's stock is, if its services and resources are not effectively utilized, the library will become a white elephant project. Therefore, libraries need to make their services known to the general public, through public relation practices in order to maintain the image of the library as a service provider. Kiriri (2018) suggested that libraries as service providers need to anticipate the needs of their users and demonstrate results to present library users, for continuity as reliable service providers. It is necessary to attach high level of value to the library services through public relation practices and advocacy.

Nyantakyi-Baah (2016) opined that libraries must exhibit their value to the activities of their parent body, in order not to become trivial or peripheral. Ahmad and Islam (2012) asserted that libraries need to improve their service quality as they relate and get feedback from the public, to achieve high students' satisfaction with the library services". According to Becker, Hartle and Mhlauli (2017) feedback on the levels of service provided is essential for future planning of library services, allocation of staff and identification of areas for improvement". Kiriri (2018) asserts that the success of a library in achieving its target in terms of vision and mission is closely linked to how its users perceive the services offered. The quality of services

provided in the library and strategic promotion tools employed, has a direct significant positive effect on the value of library services, user satisfaction and library patronage.

Need for Promotion of Library patronage

Library patronage is the purposive visit to the library to utilize its resources and services to satisfy a need. It is a process whereby users willingly visit the library to consult information resources or services that will meet up with their information needs. Iyanda, (2018) defined library patronage as the extent to which library users visit the library to use information resources or for any other relevant activities. Adeyomoye (2017) also described library patronage as a user purposeful visit to a library to use their resources or services for either studying, researching or for recreational purposes, which is not limited to physical visit but also involves the use of online resources. Patronage is very important in the library as it enables the library management to determine what users want, which helps libraries design, refine and monitor their services and identify service problems. Library patronage is a vital aid for effective planning and management in university libraries (Awojobi 2004). Olajide and Adio (2017) opined that library patronage encompass service points used, frequency of usage, time spent, browsing, reading and studying etc. The level of users awareness of the information resources and services provided in the library, determines the frequency of their patronage and utilization. Onanuga et al. (2017) believe that if library users patronize libraries frequently, there is a high tendency that they would utilize information resources and service. Ofordile and Ifijeh (2013) examined the current trends in library patronage by faculties in Nigerian universities, they found that there was a significant relationship between awareness and patronage. This implies that when the users are aware of the services that are provided in the library, they may likely patronize such services frequently. Ibrahim and Wada (2021) observed that the patronage of a library is a compass for library services provision and promotion. It is very important for libraries to focus on user's patronage and utilization of information resources, because they store resources that are considered a good measure for educational, economic and social development.

How Public Relation and Advocacy can be Employed to Promote Patronage of library services

The integral role of libraries within society is being undermined by low visibility, passive community support, and the prevailing myth that books, libraries and librarians will be replaced by computer terminals and virtual connections. To ensure that the integral role of libraries within society is maintained and strengthened librarians need to engage in deliberate, organized, and sustained efforts to raise library awareness and value among potential supporters.

According to (Israel 2012), public relation practices helps to promote library services and patronage in the following ways:

1. Public relations practices influences and create confidence for library services in various ways, such as making the members of the university aware of the services and policies of the library. It also helps to improve knowledge and understanding of innovative restructuring or initiative introduced by the library.
2. Public relations helps to make better contact between the librarians and the public, this give the librarian opportunity to create a good image of the library which can lead to an increase in the utilization of library services and resources.
3. Public relations practices have the tendency of attracting students who are distracted academically to focus on patronizing the library and using their resources to improve on his/her academic performance.
4. Public relations practices create room for public suggestion box for contribution and observations so as to gather opinions as well as comments to the library management for possible consideration.
5. Effective public relations practices will help librarians get more support from their parent organizations and the public in terms of personnel, budgets allocations and sponsorship.
6. Public relations practices help to educate, publicize and market the functions and services of the library to both the old and prospective students, thereby improving relationship and patronage.

Advocacy on the other hand contributes to the promotion of library services and patronage in the following ways according to Mole (2023).

1. Advocacy helps to keep people informed of the importance and value of libraries and as well attract people to the library
2. It provides an avenue for the support of library services by library employees
3. Library Advocacy helps to improve library patronage as it communicate loud and clear the message that libraries are unique and valuable. Libraries are social places for meetings, human services for both the young and old, a lifelong learning centre etc.
4. It helps to update the image of the library as well as the library staff for the 21st century library advancement

Issues Associated with Public Relation and Advocacy in as Tools for Promoting Patronage of Library Services

Advocacy and public relations practices in the library in very critical and are constantly challenged with realities such as reduced funding, lack of professional library staff, negative attitude of librarians etc. Bassey (2006) argues that, the attitude of both or either of the staffs, information seekers and users of the library has a great effect of how that library is being patronize. If the attitude of librarian is good, there is likely to be high patronage of library otherwise, the reverse is the case. According to Odine (2011) the nature of the interaction and relationship between the librarian and the users poses a great challenge in library patronage. Solanke and Nwalo (2016) found in their studies that unfriendly reference personnel, obsolete reference materials, inadequate reference time, poor service quality, lack of awareness etc. were challenges to the patronage of reference services. Users frequently claim that certain librarians are unfriendly or overly rigorous in their treatment of their clients. Mahwasane and Mudzielwana (2016), argue that insufficient user education, lack of computer knowledge and lack of information retrieval skills, lack of publicity and awareness were some of the challenges faced by students in accessing information in the library. Shidi and Sambe (2019) identified some of the challenges of public relation practice in the library as follows; include inadequate financial allocation, absence of accepted media, lack of recognition, lack of ICT skills, cost of sponsorship, inadequate knowledge of public relations in libraries etc. Similarly Mole (2023),

highlighted the challenges of public relations and Advocacy as follows: inadequate funding, lack of skilled library PR and Advocacy professionals, attitude of issues, inadequate facilities and poor media presence in the library.

Strategies for Enhancing Public Relation Practices as Tools for Promoting patronage of Library Services

The success or failure of an organization largely depends on the level and the type of competency that exists within the organization. For a successful planning and effective implementation of library public relations programme, Ossai-Onah, Onuoha, and Udo-Anyanwu (2015) insists that library public relations is best suited for someone that has the following attributes; an interest in communication, a methodical approach of gathering and editing information and a high capacity to manage pressure. Some of the methods of enhancing public relation practice in the library include: Exhibitions, active function of the library website, newsletters, flyers, focus group, talk shows, seminars, trainings etc. Gordons (2011) identified some of the public relation strategies as advertisement, website, exhibitions, printing flyers, newsletter and emailing etc. Public relations practices as stipulated by Nnadozie (2016) are; integrated readers' services, library displays and exhibitions, library week, use of notice boards, directional guides, film shows, book talks, library publications, story hours, etc.

Mole (2023) highlighted strategies for enhancing public relation practices as follows:

- **Increased funding:** For production of publicity material e.g. flyers, posters, media programmes, banners for organizing social events and library week programmes
- **Provision of facilities:** Facilities such as projectors, television signage and directional facilities etc.
- **Improved library staff training:** Continuous training and re-training of librarians on effective marketing and public relation strategies
- **Reorientation:** Library staff need to be oriented on the essence, benefits and impact of public relations.

- **Improved media coverage of the library:** Library management and staff should make effort to attract the media and project the importance and services of the library to the public

Recommendation

For enhancing public relation practices, the following recommendations are made

1. Library managers should advocate for funds from the government, Non-Governmental Organizations (NGOs) and policy makers in order to maintain the image of the library.
2. Librarians should also improve on various public relation and advocacy skills such as good communication skills, research skills, good writing skills, computer and ICT literacy and evaluation skills so that they can promote their resources and services physically and remotely for improved library patronage.
3. There is need for provision of facilities such as projectors, television signage and directional facilities etc.
4. There need for improved library staff training and re-orientation.

Conclusion

Public relation practices and advocacy in the library is very essential in ensuring that users are aware of the services and resources available in the library as well as receiving public support and increase in patronage. For library services and patronage to stay in the current information environment it is important they adopt effective promotional strategies to help meet the organizational mission, goals and objectives. The promotional tools like printing of brochures, flyers, newsletters, development of library website, library display and exhibitions, application of social media and use of internet etc. usually incurred additional funding.

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