

Public Relation Skills of University Librarians in South-East Geopolitical Zone of Nigeria.

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Abstract

This study investigates the Public Relation Skills of University Librarians in South-East geo-political zone of Nigeria. Two research questions guided the study. Questionnaire with 19 items and interviews method were used for the study. Descriptive survey design was used. The population sample constitutes (13) Federal and State Universities with one hundred and seventy-four librarians and library officers in University Libraries South-East geopolitical zone-Nigeria. Sample used are five (5) University Librarians and thirty-seven (37) practising librarians, all totally 42. Data were collected, tabulated and analyzed using simple percentage method. The major findings of the study show that the public relation skills of university librarians are poor and this effects the overall library administration. The major recommendation is that the University should as a management matter of urgencies organize in-service-training on public relation skills for university librarian and library schools to include in their curriculum public relation courses in order to strengthen the leadership quality of future librarians.

Keywords: Librarians, Public Relations Skills, Library services, and management

Introduction

Public relations (PR) are the practice of managing the spread of information between an individual or an organization and the public. Public relations may include an organization or individual gaining exposure to their audiences using topics of public interest and news items that do not require direct payment(wiki, 2014). The aim of public relations by a company often is to persuade the public, investors, partners, employees, and other stakeholders to maintain a certain point of view about it, its leadership, products, or of political decisions. Common activities include speaking at conferences, winning industry awards, working with the press, and employee communication. Pu

blic relation is an organized existence of mutual relationship in an organization and members of the organization in order to guarantee peaceful existence and the continuity of such organization. The international public relation association (n.d) declares that:

“Public relation is management function of a continuing and planned character, through which public and private organizations and instructions seek to win and retain the understanding, sympathy and support of those with whom they are or may be concerned by evaluating public opinion about themselves in order to correlate, as far as possible, their own policies and wide spread information, more productive cooperation and more efficient fulfillment of their common interests.

Good public relations therefore brings total understanding of the aims and objectives of an organization in line with cordial relationship with its work force, good environment and condition of services all aimed at achieving the organizational goals. This means that while the organization is growing in all its ramification, the

staff members are enjoying good working relationship and is equally growing. Again that the library interacts with its users and donor defined public relation in library as

“Publicity designed to create favourable public opinion and boost awareness of the benefits of library services, resources and program and promote the interest of libraries in society”

Library public relation is a conscious effort aimed at establishing and maintaining good relationship between the library and its patrons, public relations in library also help in creating an acceptable image of the library by advertising the available library resources both in print and non-print format, programs and services. The library administrator (University Librarians) is one who controls or supervises the day to day running of the library. He oversees the administration of library activities in all its ramifications. Dictionary of library and information science (2004) defined library administration as the control and supervision of a library or library system, including planning, budgeting, policy making, personnel management, public relations, and program assessment, with the responsibility for results. The university librarian uses its department to enhance the function of university by making available relevant informational resources both in print and non-print. Sufficient it to say that the university cannot achieve its objectives without a functional library and functional library cannot be in place without good public relations. Library operations are successfully carried out when public relation is done to promote the library image and use.

The main objective of the university library is to support its parent institutions teaching, learning and research through the provision of relevant informational materials both in print and non-print forms. This objective, the university library has failed to meet up with due to lack of public relation skills in university librarians. The study therefore is necessary so as to determine the extent of public relation skills of university librarians in South East geopolitical zone- Nigeria.

Statement of the problem

University librarians are the window through which the library can be seen by the patrons. They are the image makers and as such portress in all its ramification what the university library is all about. It is therefore pertinent to note that the level at which the university librarian relates with the staff members and the library patrons determines the extent to which the library can achieve its set goals. Unfortunately in the university library, the common complain by patrons are non-challant attitude of librarians towards the plight of library patrons, poor attitude to work, non availability of the required library resources and lack of knowledge of what is available in the library. The mentioned problems can only be trussed to lack of or poor public relation activities in university libraries. In the university libraries understudy indication tend to show that there are problems in existence due to non-existent of good public relations. Therefore, this study is aimed at assessing the extent of public relation skills of university librarians South East geo-political zone of Nigeria.

Objective of the study

The main objective is to assess the extent of public relation skill of university librarians South East geopolitical zone of Nigeria. Specifically the objectives are

- i) To determine the level of public relation skills of university librarians, South East geopolitical zone of Nigeria.
- ii) To examine the effect of the university librarians public relation skill on academic librarian output.

Research Question

The following research questions will guide the research work

- i) What is the level of public relation skills of university librarians, South East geopolitical zone?
- ii) What is the effect of university librarians public relation skills in academic libraries output?

Scope of the study

The study is on the assessment of the extent of public relation skills of university librarians in South East geopolitical zone, but excluded librarians is federal and private universities. It is only state university libraries that are used for this study

Population of the study – It is made up of librarians in universities-South East – Nigeria. The number of librarians in the five universities is forty-two (42).

Review of Related Literature

Public relation is an attempt aimed at positively presenting the image of person or institution so as to make it acceptable. The institute of public relation (UK) defined public relations as the deliberate planned and sustained efforts to establish and maintain mutual understanding between an organization and its public. This is in line with world Book Encyclopedia (2004) which asserts that public relation is an activity aimed at increasing communication and understanding between an more group called publics.

According to Babafemi (2002) the public relation officer advertises the organization through print and electronic media as well as physical contacts canvassing for patronage. Also public relation includes the involvement of the library patrons in the business of collection development by involving them in selection of material for user's consumption. Babafemi (2002) stated that it is not too much for public relation officers to follow up request form given to departments requesting them to write titles of journals and books needed, and ensure that there is positive response from them. This made it possible for the library to avoid duplication of materials and irrelevant ones. Exhibition of available library materials is another excellent way of exhibiting public relation skills. But this act of exhibition is not done by most university libraries. Ogunrombi and Babafemi (2002) stated that the role of exhibition is not taken seriously as publicity strategy in Nigeria University libraries.

The library is there to serve its public or community. This must be explained totally and made known to its patrons. The library must let the patrons know what it has in stock Sherma (200) stated that a good library service is obtainable when the librarian exhibits good public relation. Agbonny (2001) stated that a good and genuine public relations can be possible in the library when the librarian posses the ability of assessing the situation, analyzing the public that should be served bringing out long term program of action to achieve a realistic relationships with the past, present and potential library users. This is in line with the words of Rice (2002) who stated that good manner, patience, small landness, sympathetic attitude towards unreasonableness of human beings are the qualities needed in a librarian for good public relation program in the library. Ifidon (2000) observed that the best way to cultivate good public relation with patrons is excellent performance. The libraries major patrons among others are a specialized group, who uses the available resources in the library for research, academic and personal needs. The library owes it as a duty to develop current and up to date library resources if its patrons will continue to patronize it.

Public relations (PR) and library image

Schora, (2002) Public relations (PR) help establish the library's image and position within the community. Public libraries "provide services and programs that support literate, productive, and informed communities" Furthermore, the following were listed by the author:

- Libraries are great places for kids.
- Libraries bridge the "information divide."
- Libraries protect our right to know.
- Libraries connect people with ideas, information and each other.
- Libraries are for everyone.
- Libraries are a shared community resource.
- Libraries support lifelong learning.
- Libraries support a productive workforce.
- Libraries are community information centers.
- Libraries foster community identity.
- Libraries are a source of community pride.
- Libraries are a "port of entry." to learn more about their new community.
- Libraries support a community of readers.
- Libraries provide global reach and local touch.

These are the concepts that good public relations can communicate, establishing a clear corporate identity or image, and disseminating a clear message about library mission and goals. Public relations involve promoting the library as a whole, developing an identity and image, and communicating library goals and mission to the community. For marketing, public relations, or advertising the ultimate goal is the same - let the community know what you have to offer.

Promoting message with public relations tools in the libraries.

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 releases, newsletters, brochures, annual reports, or well-designed publications. Plans may include:

- Establishing favourable press relations to get news out about the library on a regular basis.
- Creating publicity for specific services and resources and to create and maintain awareness of library capabilities in the community.
- Representing the library and participating in community planning and organizations, to establish the library as a player in community development.
- Establishing regular communications channels to promote an understanding of your organization internally and externally.
- Maintaining awareness of laws and regulations that affect libraries and lobbying to ensure legislation that helps libraries provide effective services.
- Watching for community and national trends and issues that impact the library's image, and informing library administrators(ALA Fact Sheet 2000-2001).

Data Analysis

All the forty-two (42) questionnaires distributed to the respondents were completed and returned. This is 100% respondent. The responses were analyzed by tabulating them in raw scores and then converting them to simple percentage.

South: East State University Librarian's

| S/N | State | University | No of University Librarian | No of Academic Librarian |
|-----|------------------|--|----------------------------|--------------------------|
| 1. | Abia | Abia state University – Uturu | 1 | 10 |
| 2. | Anambra | Anambra State University – Uli | 1 | 6 |
| 3. | Ebonyi | Ebonyi State University Abakaliki | 1 | 7 |
| 4. | Enugu | Enugu State University of Science and Technology Enugu | 1 | 7 |
| 5. | Imo | Imo State University of Science and Technology Enugu | 1 | 7 |
| | Total | | 5 | 37 |
| | Sum Total | | | 42 |

Table 1: Extent of University Librarian's public Relation Skill

| S/N | Items | Yes | No | % of yes | % of No |
|-----|---|-----|----|----------|---------|
| 1. | Is the relationship between the University Librarians and other librarians cordial? | 30 | 12 | 71.43 | 28.57 |
| 2. | Is there major communication gap? | 21 | 21 | 50 | 50 |
| 3. | Is the staff comfort and convenience put into consideration? | 30 | 12 | 71.43 | 28.57 |
| 4. | Does the University Librarian has a listening ear | 20 | 22 | 47.62 | 53.38 |
| 5. | Is there equity and justice on the part of the University Librarian | 18 | 24 | 42.86 | 57.14 |

The table above shows that 71.43% of the respondents stated that the relationship between the University Librarian and academic librarians is not cordial. 50% of the respondents agree that there is communication gap between the University Librarian and the other academic librarians. Also the other 50% said that there is no communication gap between the university librarian and the academic librarian. 71.43% of the respondents said that the university librarian put into consideration the comforts and convenience of academic librarians whereas 28.57% said that the university librarian do not put into consideration the academic librarians comfort and convenience. 47.62% of the respondents were of the opinion that the university librarian listens to everybody who cares to talk to him whereas 53.38% of the respondents said no, he does not consider other peoples suggestion before acting on issues. The question of justice and equity on the part of the university librarian had 42.86% and 57.14% Yes and No respectively.

Table 2:

The above table shows that 47.62% agree that there is proper library orientation programme for newly employed librarians where 53.38% disagreed with it saying that what we call orientation is not really orientation indeed. 50% of the respondents are of the opinion that the university librarian is a dedicated and hardworking leader and

worthy of emulation whereas the other 50% are of the opinion that the university library is not dedicated and hardworking staff. 57.14% agrees that the relationship between the university librarian and readers are cordial and fruitful whereas 42.86% said No. 47.62% agrees that the university librarian creates an enabling environment for staff members and library patrons whereas 53.38% said No.

Table 2: Influence of the University Librarian’s Public Relation Skill on Academic Librarians

| S/N | Items | Yes | No | % of Yes | % of No |
|-----|---|-----|----|----------|---------|
| 1. | Is there any proper library orientation for librarians newly employed by the university librarian | 20 | 22 | 47.62 | 53.38 |
| 2. | Is he a dedicated and committed leader | 21 | 21 | 50 | 50 |
| 3. | Is his relationship with both librarians and readers cordial? | 24 | 18 | 57.14 | 42.86 |
| 4. | Does he create an enabling environment for all staff members and library patrons? | 20 | 22 | 47.62 | 53.38 |

Also the university librarian’s dedication and commitment is at the average. Poor relationship with library patrons. Again the responses show that the public relation skill that is practiced at the average is those that benefit internally the administration of the university libraries.

Findings

The analysis in Table 1 and 2 shows lack of public relation skill in major administration qualities of the university librarian’s since the analysis shows mostly at the average absent of proper communication skills, lack of motivation for academic librarian’s, average relationship between the university librarian and the librarians and library patrons.

Conclusion and Recommendation

Provision of in service training for university librarians on modern skills in public relations. The improvement of communication skills of university librarian’s through workshops. Exposure to new fields of university library administrations, creating proper library orientation for new students and newly employed librarians. When all these suggestions are properly carried out, the university librarian’s South East geopolitical zone of Nigeria will be in a better place to exhibit proper public relation skills.

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