Research Article

ENHANCING LIBRARY PATRONAGE THROUGH PUBLIC RELATIONS BY POLYTECHNIC LIBRARIES IN NORTH CENTRAL, NIGERIA

Audu, OzohuOmolola Mohammed, Ehoniyotan, Femi Simon and *Ogbonyomi, Michael Adebayo

Department of Library and Information Science, Kogi State Polytechnic, Lokoja

Abstract

The study focused on enhancing library patronage through public relations by Polytechnic libraries in North Central. Five objectives guided the study which include, to identify the services provided by the library and patronized by library patrons, to find out the public relations practices used to enhance library patronage, to determine the facilities employed in public relations to enhance library patronage, among others. The research design adopted was the descriptive survey design. The population of the study comprised of 96 library staff drawn from six polytechnic libraries in the North Central, three each from Federal and State Polytechnics. The instrument used for the collection of data was questionnaire, while the data collected were analysed using mean score. The findings of the study revealed that the categories of library services provided include: circulation service, reference service, Library Orientation/Information Literacy, photocopying service, Current Awareness service; the public relations practices used in the libraries studied to enhance patronage are display of new arrivals in the libraries, attending to users' enquiries on the public information desks, provision of directional services; the facilities employed in public relations by the libraries are computer system, polytechnic website, Library Website, library notice board, Social Media Platforms, among others. Based on the findings, it was recommended that, the library services provided by the libraries studied should be overhauled while new ones are added to the services provided in order to enhance library patronage among the patrons; the public relations practices used should be sustained and further improved for optimal performance; the lowly ranked facilities employed in public relations to enhance library patronage such as public address system, exhibition and display need to be overhauled and put into more frequent use to enhance library patronage, among others.

Keywords: Library, Patronage, Public Relations, Polytechnic libraries

INTRODUCTION

The need for public relations efforts in libraries cannot be overemphasized. For most organizations, public or private, a positive public image is vital to their overall success. Educational institutions, and specifically their libraries, understand the necessity of positive relations with their various publics as insurance for the continued financial and emotional support that will lead to their ongoing growth and success. This is because public relations would help academic libraries to market themselves and their products - library services effectively. Public relations are 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. Public relation activities help to provide a coordinated effort to communicate a positive image of the library and promote the availability of the library's materials, programmes, and services. It is the totality of an organisation or individual performance aimed at earning public favourability which results in continued growth mutually beneficial to the organisation or individuals and society within which it operates. Public relations include improving, establishing, and maintaining direct relations with all publics. Today, there is a seemingly low public relations effort by polytechnic libraries in building good relationship with their patrons which has in turn affected the degree of awareness and level of patronage among their clienteles. This research work is aimed at enhancing library patronage through public relations by polytechnic libraries in North Central Nigeria

*Corresponding Author: *Ogbonyomi, Michael Adebayo*
Department of Library and Information Science, Kogi State Polytechnic, Lokoja, Nigeria.

Objectives of the study

The specific objectives are as follows:

1. Identify the services provided by the library and patronized by library patrons
2. Find out the public relations practices used to enhance library patronage;
3. Determine the facilities employed in public relations to enhance library patronage
4. Identify the challenges to public relations practices in enhancing library patronage
5. Determine strategies for improving the public relations practices to enhance library patronage

Research Questions

1. What kind of services are provided by the library and are patronized by library patrons?
2. What are the Public Relations practices used in your library to enhance library patronage?
3. What are the facilities employed in public relations by your library to enhance library patronage?
4. What are the challenges to public relations practices in enhancing library patronage?
5. What strategies can your library engage to improve public relations practices in order to enhance library patronage?

Expected output of the Study

This study will acquaint Polytechnics and their library management with basic techniques of public relations in the realization of their objectives. It will help libraries and

information centres build and promote their corporate image in such a manner that would protrude their resources and services favourably to their target audience. It will enable public relations personnel to see the areas that need to be improved upon in order to promote positive image about their organizations and establish beneficial collaboration between them and the public that constitute their operational community.

Literature Review

An overview of related literature that are relevant to the study are reviewed under the above heading. As reported by Ajala, cited in Yaji (2003), Public relations is seen as the totality of an organisation or individuals performance aimed at earning public favourability which results in continued growth mutually beneficial to the organisation or individuals and society within which it operates. Aitufe cited in Odede (2012) also views public relations as management functions which evaluate public attitudes, identifies the policies and procedures of an individual or an organization with the intent of achieving an understanding or acceptance. In a related development, Kotler and Armstrong (2006) opined that public relations facilitates the building of good relations with a company's various publics by obtaining favourable publicity, building up a good corporate image, and handling or heading off unfavourable rumours, stories, and events relating to such a company. Thus, the central focus of library's public relations is to increase the general awareness of services provided by the library.

According to Cutlip, Cente and Broom cited in Musa (2016), the following are presented as the major functions of public relations: serving as the central source of information about the organization; bringing to public attention through appropriate media, significant facts, opinions, and interpretations; coordinating activities which affects the organization's relationship with the general public; collecting and analyzing information on the changing attitudes of key public groups towards the organization, and, planning and administering informational programs designed to fulfil most effectively, the responsibilities and functions outlined above. Kotler and Armstrong (2012) opine that public relations facilitates the building of good relations with a company's various publics by obtaining favourable publicity, building up a good corporate image, and handling or heading off unfavourable rumours, stories, and events relating to such a company. Thus, the central focus of library's public relations is to increase the general awareness of services provided by the library.

A number of techniques have been identified by scholars as tools or facilities employed by libraries to enhance their public relations drive. Kotler as cited in Musa (2016) identified such tools as News, that is creating favourable news about the library or its products or people; Events, that is drawing attention to new products or activities by arranging special events like news conferences, seminars, exhibitions, competitions, anniversaries, and the likes in order to reach the target publics; andexhibitions and trade fairs which are useful for both public relations communication and sales promotion thereby boosting the image of the library; Display and Exhibitions are other public relations techniques polytechnic libraries employed in marketing library and information services to their clienteles, and so on. Owobu (2011) opines that in spite of the good sides of public relations, there are notable challenges to it in this contemporary world. These includes financial constraint which result in cost cutting policy in the budget of those organizations thereby becoming reluctant to spend the little revenue available on improving their media profile; poor manpower situation which is occasioned by having background in disciplines other than the practitioner's field of studies; low awareness of public relation and what it stands for. This has had a negative effect on the profession; Poor usage of social media. There is a heavy abuse on the part of the users of these social networks. Nevertheless, practitioners in public relations must not lose sight of their relevance and importance or stand the risk of fading out of the profession.

RESEARCH METHODS

The area of the study is North Central Nigeria which comprises of seven states, Kogi, Benue, Niger, Nassarawa, Kwara, Plateau and Federal Capital Territory (FCT), Abuja. The descriptive survey method was used for this study. The design was considered appropriate for this study because its procedures have been developed and refined to suit a wide variety of research questions. The population of the studywas drawn from Polytechnic libraries from 6 states in North Central Nigeria, three Federal and three State Polytechnic libraries respectively. Data collected was analysed using descriptive and inferential statistics. The research questions were answered using mean and standard deviation.

Analysis of Data Collected

Data collected for the study are presented and analyzed as follows:
Summary Table for the Six Institutions

Question 1. What kind of services are provided by the library and are patronised by library patrons?

Table 1: Mean rating of response on the Services provided and patronized by library patrons

N = 96

VARIABLES	INSTITUTIONS								
	BSP 6	FPI 19	FPB 23	FPO 16	KSP 10	PSP 22	$\sum X$ 96	RANK	DECISION
Circulation Service	1.17	1.32	1.17	1.06	1.10	1.00	1.14	1st	HP
Reference Service	1.17	1.58	1.57	1.31	2.10	1.41	1.52	2nd	HP
Library Orientation/Information Literacy	2.50	2.26	1.78	1.13	2.00	1.86	1.92	3rd	MP
Photocopying Service	2.17	2.84	1.87	1.00	2.30	1.82	2.00	4th	MP
Current Awareness Service	1.67	2.32	1.87	1.69	2.90	1.59	2.01	5th	MP
Selective Dissemination of Information	1.67	2.16	2.26	1.50	2.50	2.09	2.03	6th	MP
IT Related Service	2.67	2.42	1.78	1.31	2.40	1.64	2.04	7th	MP
Database Search	2.33	2.00	1.83	2.69	3.20	1.82	2.31	8th	MP
Inter Library Loan Service	2.83	3.11	2.96	1.75	3.30	1.77	2.62	9th	LP
Audio Visual Service	4.00	2.79	2.57	1.19	3.40	2.23	2.70	10th	LP
GRAND MEAN (x)	2.21	2.28	1.96	1.46	2.52	1.72			

Keys: $\sum X$ = Mean summation. HP- Highly Patronised, MP- Moderately Patronised, LP- Less Patronised, NP- Not Patronised. BSP- Benue State Polytechnic, Ugbokolo, FPI- Federal Polytechnic Idah, FPB- Federal Polytechnic Bida, FPO- Federal Polytechnic Offa, KSP- Kogi State Polytechnic Lokoja, PSP- Plateau State Polytechnic.

Table one show responses on the services provided and patronized by patrons in the libraries under study. The table revealed that out of the 10 items, 2 were rated as Highly Patronized, 6 were rated as Moderately Patronized, while the last 2 were rated as Less Patronized. The mean summation ranges from 1.14 – 2.70. The first ranked item is circulation service, followed by reference service, Library Orientation/Information Literacy, photocopying service, current Awareness service, Selective Dissemination of Information, IT related and Database search. The lowly rated items are Inter library Loan Service and Audio Visual Service. The libraries grand mean score shows that KSP has the highest mean score of 2.52, followed by FPI 2.28, BSP 2.21, FPB 1.96, PSP 1.72 and FPO 1.46 respectively. The findings made from the libraries under study revealed that the services provided above are either highly or moderately provided to enhance library patronage.

Question 2. What are the Public Relations practices used in your library to enhance library patronage?

Table 2. Mean rating of response on Public relations practices used in the libraries to enhance library patronage

N = 96

VARIABLES	INSTITUTIONS							RANK	DECISION
	BSP 6	FPI 19	FPB 23	FPO 16	KSP 10	PSP 22	$\sum X$ 96		
Display of New arrivals in the libraries	1.17	1.47	1.43	1.13	1.50	1.32	1.34	1st	HU
Attending to users' enquiries on the public information desks	1.33	1.74	1.70	1.13	1.90	1.68	1.58	2nd	HU
Provision of directional Services	1.83	2.11	1.96	1.19	2.60	2.18	1.99	3rd	U
Use of bulletin boards for public announcements	1.00	1.89	2.48	1.38	3.10	2.23	2.01	4th	U
Provision of suggestion boxes to collect users' opinion	2.17	2.05	1.83	1.38	3.50	1.59	2.09	5th	U
Organising information literacy talks	4.00	2.58	2.52	1.31	3.00	2.18	2.60	6th	LU
Organising library week	4.00	2.95	2.78	2.31	3.20	2.45	2.95	7th	LU
GRAND MEAN	2.21	2.11	2.1	1.40	2.69	1.95			

Key: HU- Highly Used, U- Used, LU- Less Used, NU- Not Used

Table 2 reveals the response on the Public relations practices used in the libraries to enhance library patronage. The mean summation ranges from 1.34 – 2.95. The first ranked item is display of new arrivals in the libraries, followed by attending to users' enquiries on the public information desks.

Others are provision of directional services, use of bulletin boards for public announcements, provision of suggestion boxes to collect users' opinion. The lowest ranked items are organising information literacy talks and organising library week. KSP has the highest mean score of 2.69, followed by BSO 2.21, FPI 2.11, FPB 2.1, PSP 1.95 and FPO 1.40 respectively. The findings revealed that the above responses are the public relations practices used in the libraries under study to enhance library patronage

Question 3. What are the facilities employed in public relations by your library to enhance library patronage?

Table 3 revealed mean score of responses on facilities employed in public relations by libraries under study.

Table 3. Mean rating of response on facilities employed in public relations by libraries under study

N = 96

VARIABLES	INSTITUTIONS							RANK	DECISION
	BSP 6	FPI 19	FPB 23	FPO 16	KSP 10	PSP 22	$\sum X$ 96		
Computer system	2.33	1.74	1.17	1.06	1.70	1.36	1.56	1st	HE
Polytechnic Website	2.00	1.42	1.61	1.38	2.00	1.68	1.68	2nd	E
Library Website	3.50	1.63	1.43	1.06	1.40	1.64	1.78	3rd	E
Library Notice Board	2.00	1.47	1.57	1.25	3.40	1.73	1.90	4th	E
Social Media Platforms	1.33	2.05	1.57	1.50	3.10	2.23	1.96	5th	E
Mass Media	2.17	2.26	1.61	1.25	3.10	2.27	2.11	6th	E
Library Publication	2.50	1.74	2.04	1.19	3.10	2.09	2.11	7th	E
Projectors	4.00	2.68	1.41	1.44	2.00	1.64	2.20	8th	E
Posters	3.17	2.26	2.52	1.31	2.90	1.86	2.34	9th	E
Public Address System	3.67	2.47	1.52	1.50	3.40	1.95	2.42	10th	LE
Exhibition and Display	3.67	1.89	2.09	1.31	3.40	2.36	2.45	11th	LE
Flyers	3.67	2.37	2.52	1.31	3.10	2.09	2.51	12th	LE
Television	4.00	2.68	2.04	1.38	3.20	1.91	2.54	13th	LE
Banners	4.00	2.68	2.70	1.31	3.40	1.86	2.66	14th	LE
Organising Social Events in the Library	4.00	2.79	2.45	1.69	3.50	2.27	2.78	15th	LE
GRAND MEAN	3.07	2.14	1.88	1.33	2.85	1.93			

Key: HE- Highly Employed, E- Employed, LE- Less Employed- NE Not Employed

The mean summation ranges from 1.56 – 2.78. The first ranked item among the 15 items is computer system. Others are polytechnic website, Library Website, library notice board, Social Media Platforms, mass media, library publications, projectors and posters. The other 6 items are less employed and are ranked lowest. BSP has the highest mean score of 3.07, followed by KSP 2.85, FPI 2.14, PSP 1.93, FPB 1.88 and FPO 1.33respectively. The responses to the above questions revealed that the identified responses are either highly employed or employed to enhance library patronage.

Question 4. What are the challenges to public relations practices in enhancing library patronage?

Table 4. Mean rating of response on challenges to public relations practices

N = 96

VARIABLES	INSTITUTIONS								
	BSP 6	FPI 19	FPB 23	FPO 16	KSP 10	PSP 22	∑X 96	RANK	DECISION
Inadequacy of fund for library publications	1.17	1.58	2.17	2.06	1.40	1.55	1.66	1st	A
Inadequacy of fund for organizing social events in the library	1.67	1.42	2.17	1.94	1.50	1.36	1.68	2nd	A
Inadequacy of fund for organizing of Library week	1.33	1.42	2.04	3.00	1.50	1.36	1.78	3rd	A
Non availability of Polytechnic web managers to place library news and issues in the Polytechnic Library	3.33	1.68	2.13	1.69	1.70	1.68	2.04	4th	A
Irregularity of library exhibition activities	1.67	2.00	2.52	2.69	1.50	2.00	2.06	5th	A
Inadequacy of directional facilities	3.00	1.95	2.35	3.00	1.90	1.86	2.34	6th	A
Non availability of public information desks for attending to users' enquiries	3.17	2.21	2.91	2.69	2.60	1.95	2.59	7th	D
Low level of public relation skills by librarian	3.67	2.68	2.35	2.75	2.40	1.73	2.60	8th	D
Non availability of Students' library notice board (electronic and manual)	4.00	2.47	2.74	3.25	1.40	2.09	2.66	9th	D
Non availability of suggestion boxes to collect users' opinion	3.17	2.53	3.22	3.44	1.80	1.95	2.69	10th	D
GRAND MEAN	2.62	1.99	2.46	2.65	1.77	1.75			

Key: SA- Strongly Agree, A- Agree, SD- Strongly Disagree, D-Disagree

Table 4 deals on the responses on challenges to public relations practices in the libraries under study.

It revealed that the mean summation ranges from 1.66 – 2.69 which shows that 6 items were agreed upon by respondents as challenges while 4 others were disagreed upon. The first ranked item among the 10 items is inadequacy of fund for library publications, followed by inadequacy of fund for organizing social events in the library, Inadequacy of fund for organizing of Library week, Non availability of Polytechnic web managers to place library news and issues in the Polytechnic Library, irregularity of library exhibition activities, inadequacy of directional facilities. The other 4 items were rejected and therefore ranked lowest. FPO has the highest mean score of 2.65, followed by BSP 2.62, FPB 2.46, FPI 1.99, KSP 1.77 and PSP 1.75 respectively. The librarians' responses to the questions above revealed that the above challenges were agreed as upon as the major challenges to public relations practices in the libraries under study.

Question 5. What strategies can your library engage to improve public relations practices in order to enhance library patronage?

Table 5: Mean rating of response on strategies engaged in to improve public relations

N = 96

VARIABLES	INSTITUTIONS								
	BSP 6	FPI 19	FPB 23	FPO 16	KSP 10	PSP 22	∑X 96	RANK	DECISION
Fund provision for production of publicity materials like flyers, posters, banners etc	1.00	1.26	1.22	1.06	1.10	1.77	1.24	1st	VA
Allocation of fund for library publications	1.00	1.32	1.43	1.69	1.10	1.95	1.42	2nd	VA
Provision of visual display facilities such as projectors, television, etc in the library	1.67	1.42	1.35	1.06	1.30	1.77	1.43	3rd	VA
Allocation of fund for organising social events	1.17	1.42	1.43	1.69	1.40	2.23	1.56	4th	VA
Provision of adequate directional facilities	1.67	1.26	1.52	1.75	1.30	1.91	1.57	5th	VA
Provision of suggestion boxes to collect users' opinion	1.33	1.68	1.39	1.94	1.30	1.77	1.57	6th	VA
Provision of public information desks for attending to users' enquiries	1.33	1.68	1.35	2.31	1.30	1.45	1.57	7th	VA
Maintaining consistence in Library exhibitions activities	1.83	1.37	1.52	1.75	1.20	1.91	1.60	8th	A
Provision of Users' notice board (electronic and manual) for information update	1.33	1.63	1.70	2.19	1.30	1.77	1.65	9th	A
Allocation of fund for organizing library week	1.17	1.21	1.48	3.13	1.70	2.23	1.82	10th	A
GRAND MEAN	1.35	1.43	1.44	1.86	1.30	1.88	1.35		

Key: VA- Very Appropriate, A- Appropriate, LA- Less Appropriate, NA-Not Appropriate

Table 5 shows the mean rating of responses on strategies engaged in to improve public relations in the libraries under study. The mean summation ranges from 1.24 – 1.82 which shows that 7 items were rated as very appropriate by the respondents while the other 3 items were rated as appropriate.

The first ranked item among the 10 items is fund provision for production of publicity materials like flyers, posters, banners etc, allocation of funds for library publications, provision of visual display facilities such as projectors, television, etc in the library, allocation of funds for organizing social events, provision of adequate directional facilities, provision of suggestion boxes to collect users' opinion, provision of public information desks for attending to users' enquiries. Others were rated as appropriate, as indicated above. PSP has the highest mean score of 1.88, followed by FPO 1.86, FPB 1.44, FPI 1.43, BSP 1.35 and KSP 1.30 respectively. The mean summation is an obvious indication that all the above strategies were considered appropriate by the respondents for enhancing library patronage.

Summary of major findings

1 The following library services are provided by the libraries studied and patronized by their patrons: circulation service, reference service**,** Library Orientation/Information Literacy, photocopying service, current Awareness service, Selective Dissemination of Information, IT related and Database search.
2 The public relations practices used in the libraries studied to enhance patronage are: display of new arrivals in the libraries, attending to users' enquiries on the public information desks, provision of directional services, use of bulletin boards for public announcements, provision of suggestion boxes to collect users' opinion, organising information literacy talks and organising library week.
3 The facilities employed in public relations by the libraries are: computer system, polytechnic website, Library Website, library notice board, Social Media Platforms, mass media, library publications, projectors and posters.
4 The challenges to public relations practices are: inadequacy of fund for library publications, inadequacy of fund for organizing social events in the library, inadequacy of fund for organizing Library week, Non availability of Polytechnic web managers to place library news and issues in the Polytechnic Library, irregularity of library exhibition activities and inadequacy of directional facilities.
5 The strategies engaged in by the libraries studied to improve public relations are: fund provision for production of publicity materials like flyers, posters, banners etc, allocation of funds for library publications, provision of visual display facilities such as projectors, television, etc in the library, allocation of funds for organizing social events, provision of adequate directional facilities, provision of suggestion boxes to collect users' opinion, provision of public information desks for attending to users' enquiries.

Recommendations

Based on the findings of this study, the following recommendations are made:

1 The library services provided by the libraries studied should be overhauled while new ones are added to the services provided in order to enhance library patronage among the patrons
2 The public relations practices used should be sustained and further improved for optimal performance. The ones rated less used should be substituted with best practices to enhance patronage.

3 The lowly ranked facilities employed in public relations to enhance library patronage such as public address system, exhibition and display, fliers and banners need to be overhauled and put into more frequent use to enhance library patronage.
4 To overcome the identified challenges, adequate budgetary allocation, training and retraining of library personnel on the cardinal role of public relations in the library should be canvassed.
5 The current rating on the strategies employed in to improve public relations in the libraries studied should be sustained. There should be an active participation in the polytechnic activities to be more seen and heard.

Conclusion

The research focused on enhancing library patronage through public relations by polytechnic libraries in North central, Nigeria. In libraries, nothing communicates quite like the product itself or simply put the services provided by the library. A major challenge for the library profession over time has been how to keep in touch with the community served which in most cases has resulted in user apathy. Therefore, to succeed in public relations in polytechnic libraries, the quality of services should be the platform on which library personnel stand. It is hoped that with adequate implementation of all the recommendations contained herein, there should be increased library patronage in the libraries studied through improved public relations practice.

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