



Public Relations Practices in the Management of Academic Libraries in Abia State

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Abstract

The study was set out to determine the nature of public relations practices in the management of academic libraries in Abia State as well as how such practice influenced the management of the image and reputation of librarians. The survey design was adopted to study a population of 157 described as all librarians and para-professional librarians in the four (4) government owned public academic libraries of Michael Okpara Federal University of Agriculture Umudike, Abia State University Uturu, Abia State Polytechnic Aba and Abia State College of Education Arochukwu. The researcher used the census method or purposive sampling technique due to the fact that the population size was so small. After analysis of data, the findings showed that the level of public relations practices in academic libraries in Abia State was high. It also found out that academic libraries employed public relations strategies that were beneficial and efficacious to library users and the academic community. The research therefore, recommend amongst others that the management of academic libraries in Abia State should create standard public relations unit in the library so as to enhance professionalism in the practice and as well as to protect the image of the library.

Keywords: *Public, Public Relations, Management, Academic Libraries.*

1.1 Introduction

Public relations include efforts made by organization such as the library organization, groups or individuals aimed at having and promoting favourable image. Its overall objective is to promote and sustain favourable image. In other words, public relations is the prelude to other activities that enhance favourable image of an organization. Public relation in libraries is the act of creating a likable and acceptable organizational image for the public. In other words, it is the task of portraying an organization in a way that the

public approves of and is also intended to gain new loyalists and patronages (Ihechu, Okugo & Afulike, 2024).

The library like every other human organization needs the understanding, goodwill and continued support of its operative environment to survive and exist. To accomplish this task, the library ceaselessly seeks to identify and service or meet the needs and aspirations of its users and the academic community at a most profitable cost. According to Onuoha (2024), effective and

efficient management is very crucial to the continued existence or survival of any organization; whether the library or the organization is a private or public sector. Management is the process of decision making in relation to getting work done using human and material resources. The library as an organization needs effective and efficient management for continued existence and survival. Good management involves both efficiency and effectiveness. Efficiency involves doing things right – using resources wisely and with a minimum of waste. An efficient library manager maximizes the application of organizational resources which often are not sufficient in supply, thereby achieving higher output at a reduced cost. Effectiveness on the other hand, involved doing things that are intended to attain the objectives of the organization (the library).

Public relations in libraries is a management function and the practice by library professionals which contributes greatly to the achievement of the organizational objectives or goals. Public relations practice as a management function is the effective and efficient management communications between an organization and her publics to create good image, goodwill, acceptance, mutual understanding, trust, and cooperation to work together for the realization of the goals of the organization (Ibe, 2020).

According to Onuoha (2024), an organization is a combination of people or individual efforts, working together in pursuit of certain common purpose called organizational goals. The goals may be such things spread of knowledge as in educational institution, information management within the academic community and community analysis. However, organizational goal may be hindered as a result of ineffective and inefficient communications due to lack of or ineffective public relation practices. Bad image of an organization, absence of trust among the publics about the library, all this will

hinder the realization of the library objectives.

The role of public relations according to Ugocha (2024) as a management functions is to create cooperation between an organization and its publics as well as generating goodwill, acceptance, understanding and cooperation. Thus, the understanding created will make them work together for the realization of the goals of the library.

The public relations professionals apply the public relations management tools for effective management of communication for the publics of the organization. Some of these tools in library public relations include media relations, advertorials on library products and services, social media, newsletters, community relations etc. These tools aid the public relations officer in libraries to effectively and efficiently manage the internal and external communication of the library organization (Akilu, 2024).

1.2 Statement of the Problem

The aim of public relations officer in libraries is not to persuade one to buy library products; but to create a favourable image. The favourable image thus created will, in turn, stimulate the determination of purpose, decision and preference. Image is the general perception of an individual, group or organization passed interpersonally or through the mass media. The twentieth century was significant in two ways for the business world and democratic societies. It marked the end of 'let the public be damned' attitude to public relations, and the beginning of according public relations a prime place in the strategic plan of corporate bodies and institutions.

Interestingly, however, public relations is yet to be totally embraced among many social groups including libraries. The libraries particularly in Nigeria are among institutions that are still questioning the relevance of public relations in their overall corporate existence; and the undermining of public relations is insidiously deleterious to the library. The

attitude of the library must have stemmed from ignorance or misconception of what public relations is; and library position on the subject.

However, preliminary observations by the researchers showed that there are several activities in the library, though not consciously planned, that could pass for public relations. Therefore, the problem of this study was spurred by the need to identify the public relations practice in libraries particularly academic libraries in Abia State, as well as, how such practices affects or influence the management of academic libraries. There is also need to ascertain the effectiveness of such strategies in relation to the image and reputation of libraries. Hence, to what extent have public relations practice contributed to the management of academic libraries in Abia State, Nigeria.

1.3 Objectives of the Study

The general objective of this study is to ascertain the roles of public relations practice in the management of academic libraries in Abia State. However, the specific objectives are to;

- i. Determine the level of public relations practiced by academic libraries in Abia State;
- ii. Ascertain the public relations strategies employed by academic libraries in Abia State;
- iii. Ascertain the prominent public relations media used by academic libraries in Abia State.

1.4 Research Questions

The researcher formulated the following research questions to guide the outcome of the study;

- i. What is the level of public relations practiced by academic libraries in Abia State?
- ii. What are the public relations strategies

employed by academic libraries in Abia State?

- iii. What are the prominent public relations media used by academic libraries in Abia State?

2.1 Literature Review

The issue of public relations has been described as a sixty-four-million-dollar question (Guth, 2024). Several misconceptions about public relations in libraries have led to various views about its nature and practice, yet there is no universally acceptable answer to the question of what public relations is. Guth and Marshall (2023) observe that defining public relations is hard...so hard, in fact that even people who practice public relations on a daily basis have yet to arrive at a singular definition to describe what they do.

In 1974, a public relations pioneer and scholar Rex Harlow compiled 472 different definitions of public relations from which he coined one broad-based definition, which stressed public relations as a management function that helps to establish and maintain lines of communication, understanding, acceptance and cooperation between an organization and its publics. A very modest definition by Hunt and Gruing (2023) say, public relations is “the management of communication between an organization such as the library and its publics”. It is obvious from the foregoing that communication is fundamental to any description of public relations.

Man is a social animal, organizations or institutions are formed and managed by man; therefore, they must employ the instrumentality of communication in running and sustaining the organizations with their publics. Mutuality is another important concept in the definition of public relations. Reciprocity according to Ugocha (2023) is the catchword in modern corporate life. It is

important for academic libraries therefore to persistently ask itself what it is giving to its publics. He went further to say that mutuality and reciprocity suggest that public relations transcend personal communication and selfish gain. It seeks communicative interaction with others for mutual benefits.

From the above definitions, it could be seen that public relations is a strategic communication process in which companies, libraries and organizations use to build mutually beneficial relationships with the public. A public relations specialist in libraries especially in academic libraries drafts a specialized communication plan and uses media and other direct and indirect media to create and maintain a positive brand image and a strong relationship with the target audience (Ochenga, 2024).

The main objective of public relations is to maintain a positive reputation of an organization and maintain a strategic relationship with the public, prospective users, partners, employees of the organization where the library is located and other stakeholders which makes library services and service delivery to be honest, successful, important, and relevant (Basil, 2022). Public relations in libraries is different from advertising. Public relations agencies do not but ads, they do not write stories for reporters, and they do not focus on attractive paid promotions. They rather promote brands by using editorial content appearing on magazines, library bulletin, newsletters, news channels for bigger libraries and TV programmes (Ugocha, 2024).

The library organization particularly academic libraries are involved in communication with its user public. The librarian and other staff of an academic library be it in universities, polytechnics or colleges of education choose the right user in the community to communicate with.

It has been observed by the members of the academia that library users follow the suggested strategies of relating with its user

public, it is also notable that the competitiveness to stand out from the rest of other information dissemination communities is the focus of libraries all over the world. These do not come cheap for those who are determined to keep the library services flowing, it takes a great deal of planning and extending actions that will serve in the best interest of her leaders, member and the public. While some have been able to attain the eagle height, many libraries still grope on the plains of obscurity due to lack of understanding (Jonnes, 2023). Therefore, every public relations activity in academic libraries must be sensitive to public understanding and attitude. Achieving public understanding and favourable attitude must be a major goal of library public relations programmes.

3.1 Research Methodology

The study used both the qualitative and quantitative methods. In the process of collection of data for the research, the researcher made use of both questionnaire and interview methods. Through the structure interviews with the heads of the public libraries in Abia State studied, their opinions were used as a follow-up to the questionnaire. The formulation of questions in the interview schedule and the questionnaire by the researcher relied on face validity in determining the constancy of the instruments. The descriptive and narrative analysis were adopted for discussions. The descriptive statistics included tables, frequency distribution and simple percentages. Data from both primary and data secondary sources was used to draw conclusions and recommendations.

The population of the study is 157 respondents. It consists of all librarians in the University libraries studied. Librarians in the context of this study are made up of professional and para-professional staff in these libraries. The population of the study is drawn as follows:

Table 1.1: Population of the Study

S/N	Academic Librarian in Abia State	No of Librarians
1.	Abia State University, Uturu	43
2.	Micheal Okpara University of Agriculture, Umudike	64
3.	Abia State Polytechnic, Aba	40
4.	Arochukwu College of Education	13
	Grand Total	157

Source: Field Work, 2025

4.1 Data Presentation and Analysis

Table 1.1: Gender Distribution of Respondents

Gender	Number of Respondents	Percentage (%)
Male	47	30
Female	110	70
Total	157	100

Table 1.1 above shows that the majority of the respondents were females (70%), leaving 30% to male. This data represents the reality of situation in Abia State where there are more female librarians in academic libraries. Thus, it was not out of place to have more female respondents than males. The implication is that the library profession in Abia State is currently dominated by women. The following data presentations are done in relation to the research questions.

Research Question 1: What is the level of public relations practiced by academic libraries in Abia State?

Table 1.2: Level of Practice

Rating	Score (X)	Frequency (F)	FX ²	Percentage (%)
Very high	5	47	235	30
High	4	78	312	50
Average	3	16	48	10
Low	2	16	32	10
Very low	1	0	0	0
Total	15	157	627	100

$$\text{Average score} = \frac{\sum FX}{\sum F} = \frac{627}{157} = 3.9 = 78\%$$

The data in Table 1.2 above show that the respondents submitted that there is 78% practice of public relations by academic libraries studied. This emanated from the fact that on a scale of five, there was an average rating of 3.9; an indication that academic libraries in Abia State particularly government public owned academic libraries practice public relations. The Table showed

that the level of public relations practiced in academic libraries in Abia State is high. This indicated that public relation services is encouraging in academic libraries in Abia State. Therefore, public relations is a veritable tool for academic library services and should be sustained in the management of academic libraries in Abia State.

Research Question 2: What are the public relations strategies employed by academic libraries in Abia State?

Table 1.3: Strategies of Relationship with Users of Academic Libraries and Librarians

Strategies	Frequency	Percentage (%)
Transparency in service delivery	16	10
Assistance to library users	78	50
Current awareness services (CAS)	39	25
Selective dissemination of information (SDI)	24	15
Total	157	100

The public relations strategies employed by staff and management of academic libraries in Abia State as submitted by the respondents in Table 1.3 ranges from mostly assistance to library users, current awareness services (CAS), selective dissemination of information (SDI) and transparency in service delivery. This last strategy rested on the ability to show administrative accountability in academic library service delivery particularly on how the library community

rate the library and its public relations. From Table 1.3, the data also show that the public relations strategies adopted by academic libraries in Abia State studied are efficient and beneficial to library users. It was also observed that such strategies are productive in several ways; as well as enhanced efficient academic library management. In all, the strategies are acceptable to both management and the publics of the library.

Research Question 3: What are the prominent public relations media used by government public owned academic libraries in Abia State?

Table 1.4.1: Use of Different Media in Academic Library Public Relations

Media	Frequency	Percentage (%)
Fliers	32	20
Posters	16	10
Social media	78	50
Television	8	5
Radio	24	15
Total	157	100

From Table 1.4, the data show that academic libraries made use of conventional and social media in execution and publication of public relations activities. However, radio and fliers with percentage response of 24% and 20% respectively also shows that academic

libraries in Abia State use radio and fliers to sustain public relation services in public libraries in Abia State. The implication of this analysis shows that public relations strategies is highly dominated by the use of social media platforms.

Table 1.4.2: Preference of Public Relations Media

Media	Frequency	Percentage (%)
Fliers	16	10
Radio	8	5
Television	8	5
Posters	24	15
Social media	101	65
Total	157	100

From Table 1.4.2 above, it could be seen that social media are most preferred by the public relations manager in academic libraries in Abia State. This could be because the attributes of the other media could easily be represented in social media because popular social media carry video, audio, texts and graphics. Even posters and fliers could easily be distributed through the social media. Therefore, the implication shows that academic libraries in Abia State should make use of fliers, posters and social media for their public relation services.

5.1 Summary of Findings

From the analysis of data generated for this study, the findings of the study are summarized as follows;

- i. Academic libraries in Abia State employed public relations strategies that were beneficial and efficacious to both library users and librarians.
- ii. Academic libraries in Abia State prefers social media for their public relations communication because of mainly easy of access, popularity, speed, feedback and audience preference.
- iii. The level of public relations practice by

academic libraries in Abia State was high and also contributed highly to the decision making process of academic library management.

- iv. Public relations activities in academic libraries performed very high in attracting library users to the library.

Conclusion and Recommendations

Public relations is a veritable tool in the management of any library, be it small or large scale library organization. So as to realise the importance of public relations which falls under the reference librarian in libraries. Academic libraries should create functions in line with public relations activities in order to achieve their target objectives. The activities and strategies were the ones that the library staff accepted; and which on the long run; created favourable image for the library. Therefore, this study would be concluded by saying that academic libraries in Abia State engaged in high level of public relations practice which sustained their members, attracted library users and consequently enhance academic library growth.

Based on the findings of the study, the

researcher recommended that academic library in Abia State should endeavor to professionalize their public relations activities by creating standard public relations units outside the reference section of the library. Secondly, academic libraries in Abia State should always conduct public needs assessment, so as to gear their actions towards tackling such needs for a greater impact.

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