

# Keys to Effective Public Relations in Library and Information Centre

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## Abstract

Public relations activities are aimed at generating an increased patronage and support to all facets of the library and information centres. Library and information centres are knowledge hub and information based organisation whose activities ought to be made known to its audience (users). This paper examines the meaning of public relations in an attempt to ascertain whose responsibility it is to carry out public relations activities in library and information centres. It examines also, the need and the keys to effective public relations in Library and Information centres and then concludes.

**Keywords:** Public relations; Library; Information centres.

## 1. Introduction

Public relation is a management function and an effective communication tool which serves as a window of the organisation through which management can monitor changes. This tool is developed to communicate to an audience (whether internal or external publics) in such a way that the message coincides with organizational goals and seeks to benefit mutual interests whenever possible. Library and Information centres features in this mutuality because both domains are in transition and study human behaviour in information exchange aiming at the creation of knowledge and ideas. This knowledge and ideas creation could be understood from the definitive view point of the library as a collection of resources in a variety of formats, organised by information professionals or others experts who provide convenient physical, digital, bibliographic, or intellectual access and, offer targeted services and programme with the mission of educating, informing a variety of audience in order to stimulate individual learning and advancement of the society as a whole [10, 18, 5].

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Similarly, information centre serves as a centre designed specifically for storing, processing, and retrieving information for dissemination at regular intervals, on demand or selectively, according to express need of users. This means that, library and information centres are knowledge hub and information based organisation whose activities ought to be made known to its audience (users). Therefore, public relation is needed to make the users aware of the benefits of library and Information centres especially, in exploiting information resources and services that match their interests. Since library is there to serve its public or community, it must let the users know what is in stock for them through public relations. Having services and resources that no one knows about is as good as having no service and resources at all [3]. This article therefore attempts to;

1. Examine the meaning of public relations and ascertain whose responsibility it is to carry out public relations activities in library and information centres
2. Examine the need for public relations in library and information centres
3. Examine the keys to effective public relations in Library and Information centres.

## **2. Meaning of public relations and whose responsibility it is in Library and information centres**

Public relation is the creation, distribution and dissemination of messaging and communication for the purpose of promoting and fostering positive awareness, association, imagery, perceptions of a person, place or thing among target audience to effect a desired behaviour. Public relation has been defined differently by various scholars as follows; According to public relations is the process of making a heartfelt connection between a person or organisation and the people who can truly benefit from and care about their message [4], defined public relations as the planned effort to influence opinion through good character and responsible performance, based upon mutually satisfactory two-way communications [9], sees it as a planned and sustained effort to establish and maintain goodwill and mutual understanding between an organisation and its public [20], stated that, public relation is the discipline which looks after reputation, with the aim of earning understanding and support, and influencing opinion and behaviour [11], Public relations is the management function of researching, engaging, communicating, and collaborating with stakeholders in an ethical manner to build mutually-beneficial relationships and achieve results [16], Public relations is the engagement between organizations and individuals to achieve mutual understanding and realize strategic goals. It can be deduced from the above definitions that, 'organisations', 'understanding' and the 'public' (audience) are central to the meaning of public relations especially as it pertains to activities of library and information centres. Library and information centres are research facilities that offer a wealth of relevant information for students, researchers, consultants, law firms and advisory firms and so on. Public relations in Library and Information centres could be seen as a distinctive management function which helps to establish and maintain mutual lines of communication, understanding, acceptance and cooperation between library and information centres and its audience (users). Public Relations campaign for attracting, motivating the users to the resources and service in Information centres and in libraries of all types, be it academic (university, college and school libraries), special, public and or nation library. Every library has public relation in the sense that it has a relationship with the community that it serves but how mutual is the relationship that exist is the concern here. The mutuality of relationship can be ensured through cordial and effective communication of roles and responsibilities. This is because, public relations counsel the practitioner in the field e.g. Library staff, Librarians and Information

scientists, advises library management on attitudes and conduct needed to achieve social objectives. It also advises on how to receive and interact with users in order to achieve results [16]. Public relation in essence, is a point of view with an ultimate goal. It is not a department, not a person, and not publicity campaign, although it may include any or all of these. In effect, it is a state of mind and an attitude towards anyone who comes in contact with the library. It is fundamentally the function of the human element that exists in the library [18]. Library staff, Librarians and information scientists are to be in the forefront of ensuring this relationship between the users of library and information centres. They are seldom involved in direct conversations with the users [2], supportably noted that, Librarians are the libraries public relations officers because they deal directly with the users.

### **3. The need for public relations in library and information centres**

Public relation is important in library of all types and Information centres. Public relations activities in libraries help to provide a coordinated effort to communicate a positive image of the library and information centres, promote the availability of the library's materials, programmes, and services. The general need for public relations in organisations according to the author in [6], are outlined below;

- PR helps in building relationships, promote, and benefit the reputation of organisations.
- PR is needed in communicating messages to gain allies, advocates, supporters, etc. in the community and the institution
- It aids in marketing the department for recruitment purposes.
- It demonstrates to funding agencies that you are making a difference and actually have results
- It improves the reputation of an individual department

However, in libraries and information centres public relations concentrates more on selling/marketing them (i.e Library/Information centres) as a whole, developing a corporate identity or image and disseminating a clear message to the community about their missions and goals [13]. Public relation is needed in library and information centres for the following reasons;

- For establishing the relationship between the library/information centres and their users
- To develop reciprocal understanding and goodwill.
- It analyses the users perception and attitude,
- Identifies the library/information centres policy with user's interest and then executes the programmes for communication with the user community.

Public relations activities are aimed at generating an increased patronage and support to all facets of the library and information centres. There is need for users to be aware of the services and resources held by these information organisations. They need to be conscious of what is in stock for them [14], notes that, no matter how libraries respond to the needs of their users, their values will not be appreciated without an aggressive, systematic and determined programme of public relations to stimulate, inform and attract the information seeker/library users.

#### **4. keys to effective public relations in Library and Information centres**

Effective public relations is possible in the library if Librarians' possess the ability to assess challenges and prospects and analyze these with beneficial reference to the users that should be served by bringing out long term programme of action to achieve a realistic relationship with the past, present and potential library users. Librarians and Information scientist championing the campaign must be audience minded, always ready, punctual, willing to learn, have adventurous attitude and persuasive prowess. The author in [19], adds that, good manners, patience, small landless, sympathetic attitude towards unreasonableness of human beings are the qualities needed in a Librarian for good public relations programme in the library. Generally, the following are key and necessary for the effectiveness of public relations; public, relations, propaganda, campaigns and lobbying.

##### **Public**

A group of similar individuals; an assortment of persons having the same interests, problems, circumstances, goals; it is from such persons that opinion emanates [21]. In library and information centres, users constitute this public. The author in [1], defined users as anybody who visits the library with the purpose of exploiting its resources to satisfy his/her information need. These users require information to satisfy certain needs. They are of different types and could be researchers, students, doctors, teachers, artisans, politicians etc. They are key to the effectiveness of public relations because they are the 'public' and from them emanate opinions which necessarily need to be considered in ensuring the mutuality of relations in library and information centres

##### **Relations**

Librarians and information scientists must create the need to establish relations with user. This is because, they are in contact with users on daily basis e.g. Librarians in reader services unit. To understand any relationship therefore, one must understand the wants of those involved e.g. Librarians and users.

##### **Organisation**

It is referred to here as the resources e.g. Library and information centres and the services offered by them. The meaning is informed by the singular fact that, you cannot describe a man different from his intestines or legs, both combine with other organs to make him whole. It is organisation's existence that gives rise to public relations. Organisation could be structural wise e.g. Library building, information resources orderliness and ease of use e.g. books in all formats, print and non print resources, promulgated by the functionality of public relations activities to cause an effectiveness in the system

##### **Propaganda**

Propaganda is the manipulation of symbols to transmit accepted attitudes and

skills. Library and information centres must proof its worth in conveying the true meaning of falsified messages

to users to its advantage e.g. the library is a book store. This means that, users can buy books from the library. This propaganda must be taken advantage of duly in order to re-establish the meaning, mission and vision of library and information centres in the minds of its users.

### **Campaigns;**

These consist of concerted, single-purpose publicity programme, usually on a more or less elaborate scale, employing coordinated publicity through a variety of media, aimed, at a number of targets, but focussed on specific objectives [7]. This is key in library and information centres especially as it create awareness, keep the users informed about the projects and progress of the projects initiated for their benefits. This campaign could be staged through, orientation, tours, rallies, newsletters, fliers, electronic boards etc. This is key in endearing the Library/information centres and the services provided by them to the users.

### **Lobbying;**

Lobbying is key to the effectiveness of public relations in library and information centres. This is because, lobbying entails the exertion of influence, smooth and measured pressure on users, and has the quality of exercising persuasion cum-pressure. In essence, it means a group putting its points of view forward in an attempt to win the other e.g. you must have a library identification card to transact with the bank. This is a collaborative effort by libraries to exert influence on its user community. Library and information centres can lobby to share their expertise and to promote their position e.g. awarding influential Library users/citizens who are library minded during library week or other library celebrations. The effectiveness of public relations in library and information centres is determined by the relationship accompanied with, before and after the use of the services and information resources [11,7], identified the following as factors to consider in evaluating public relations effectiveness in libraries:

- a) Staffing arrangement
- b) Building arrangement
- c) Bibliographic arrangement
- d) Social and educational characteristics of readers.

Library and information centres are said to be effective not when they are filled with resources, make money but rather how they are meeting the needs of users through good relations. To be relevant through public relations, libraries and information centres must continuously assess the needs, goals and capabilities of target users, stage a systematic campaign planning and production, make continuous evaluation, examine the roles played by complementary roles of mass media and interpersonal communication and select appropriate media for target users.

## **5. Conclusion**

Public relations activities are aimed at generating an increased patronage and support to all facets of the library and information centres. The following are key and necessary for the effectiveness of public relations; public, relations, propaganda, campaigns and lobbying. The effectiveness of public relations is key to the role of library and information centres because, it provides a coordinated effort to communicate a positive image of the library and information centres, promote the availability of the library's materials, programmes, and services. No matter how libraries respond to the needs of their users, their values will not be appreciated without an aggressive, systematic and determined programme of public relations to stimulate, inform and attract the information seekers/library users.

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