Public Relations in Contemporary Academic Libraries

By

Iniobong M. AKAI[1]
(Doctor of Philosophy, CLN)
iniobongakai@aksu.edu.ng

Unwana I. UDOH[2]
(Doctor of Philosophy, CLN)
unwana.udoh@abiastateuniversity.edu.ng

[1]Akwa Ibom State University (AKSU) Library, Obio Akpa Campus, Akwa Ibom State.
[2]Department of Library and Information Science, Abia State University, Uturu, Abia State

ABSTRACT
In contemporary times public relations has become an imperative and a necessity in the library. The reason for this is apparent - the library has evolved along with trends in the human society. It is no longer a mere building where information resources are acquired, stored and loaned to users but an institution of information accessibility, managed by better trained professionals, offering auxiliary services that aid the information and knowledge conscious population that constitute the present human society. Library public relations are therefore the planned programme of activities and actions that help in creating a positive and acceptable image, as well as generate and sustain goodwill towards the library as a distinct institution. The place of public relations and how its guiding principles and practices apply in an academic library as a distinct institution in contemporary times, its scope and objectives, the various categories of people that constitute the community of the academic library, and an understanding and appreciation of the role of librarians in this constantly evolving and complex relationship between the academic library and its community form the main focus of this discourse.

Keywords: Academic library, Community, Contemporary times, & Public relations.

Introduction

Public relations have generally been seen as a distinctive management function which helps in establishing and maintaining goodwill and mutually beneficial relationships between an organization and the various publics it has dealings with. It has been described as a "phenomenon and a necessity of our times" by Lesly (2002:4). As Lesly explains, it is a creation of the "forces that have increased the tempo of the world." These forces, Lesly states, have cast people into "many diversified groups, all seeking different objectives yet all having to work together toward common advantages and progress." This description aptly fits contemporary times. Innovations in all facets of human life, occasioned largely by education, industrialization, advances in information and communications technology (ICT) and globalization, have affected and consequently changed the way things are done. Human lives and expressions, the way academic institutions and all kinds of organizations (for-profit and not-for-profit) operate have all become more complex but interdependent. Handling these constantly evolving complexities of civilization requires greater expertise because the "human climate" is no longer simple and distinct.

Libraries as, distinct institutions in the society have not been left out of these developments - they have also evolved along with the trends in other sectors of the society. They exist as service providing institutions and are adjudged invaluable and very important to human development. In academic institutions for instance (especially at the tertiary education level), they are established and exist to support the teaching, learning, research and community service functions of the institutions. Other types of libraries, such as public, national and special libraries, also exist and serve the purposes of education, life-long learning, research, culture, recreation and entertainment, amongst others. These libraries can also help "by ways of applications involving setting of goals, purposes, activities, inputs, indicators, outputs, milestone and targets with data" (Akpan-Atata, Akai, & Jimmy; 2024; Akai & Uford, 2025). These authors assert that academic libraries with data, in particular, enhance work, explaining that this is derived from measurable variables, operation outputs, outcome, and implementation arrangement which include key activities, process, roles responsibilities, modalities and timeless data. The discharge of these functions necessarily brings the libraries in constant contact and interaction with various categories of persons, groups and authorities. This accounts for the need for public relations in libraries.

Deploying public relations techniques, strategies, structures, and tactics have therefore become imperative in contemporary academic libraries, because unlike traditional libraries they are not mere buildings where information resources (predominantly books) are acquired, stored and loaned to users. Contemporary academic libraries are institutions of information accessibility. Most of them are what library and information science professionals describe as "hybrid libraries" - their resource collections exist in a combination of print, electronic and digital formats. In some of these libraries, they create single user interface which facilitate easy and speedy access to these resources (which they have in a variety of formats) using computers and high-speed networks. Academic libraries are now managed by better trained, certified and experienced professionals. They also offer auxiliary services that aid the information and knowledge conscious population that constitute the present human society, and especially the academia (Ajayi, 2019; Akai & Udonte, 2021; Akai, Uford & Udoh, 2025).

Academic libraries in particular occupy a unique position in all of these. They exist as micro institutions within the larger (macro) academic institutions. The academic environment itself is a complex and delicate community composed largely of an informed population with diverse and competing interests, each seeking one form of attention or another. Each unit within this larger community can be described as an entity of its own though there exists a seamless, symbiotic relationship in the way they perform their functions and generally operate. As an integral part of academic institutions, academic libraries need to develop effective, positive and mutually beneficial relationships with other constituent units within the institution as well as with the government and other relevant individuals and organizations outside the institution. These persons and groups are considered important to the library because they all contribute in numerous ways to the accomplishment of the overall purpose of the institutions, and in achieving the specific objectives of the library (Radock, 2002; Uzuegbu, Nwosu, & Nnadozie, 2015).

Against this backdrop, library public relations cannot be overemphasised. It has become a critical component of library management. It is considered a strategic management approach for achieving effectively the primary objectives of an academic library when properly deployed (Pearce and Robinson, 2003; Hayes, 2024). However, its implementation must go beyond an offbeat, spontaneous and reactionary activity. It has to be a deliberate, diligently planned and ongoing programme of activities that takes cognizance of the need to be prompt and proactive in handling all issues concerning and affecting the library as an institution and librarianship as a profession (Odede, 2012; Edom, Nwosu, and Akanwa, 2015; Umar, 2015).

Public Relations: A Brief Overview

Public relations (commonly referred to as "PR") has been in existence and been practiced in various forms and dimensions for centuries before concerted measures were taken to establish it as a "defined, respectable, and accepted field of professional practice" at about the late 19th century (Lattimore, Baskin, Heiman & Toth, 2009:34). It is an interdisciplinary field which cuts across many other fields of study. According to Obe and Adebayo (2010), public relations encompass management, psychology, sociology, economics, and politics, besides the mainstream communications' disciplines that it is more commonly known for. Along this line of thought, Nnadozie, Nnadozie & Okeke (2015:2) posit that depending on the professional training and work experience of the pundit, public relations are either one or a mix of "management function, communication tool, image management process, change agent, reputation maker, and crisis management programme, amongst others." These positions are further attested to by Hayes (2024) and the Public Relations Society of America (PRSA).

At its early stages public relations was seen as being synonymous with propaganda and publicity - its activities mostly revolved around publicity. However, as it progressed and evolved over time, it expanded in scope to include other functions and practices beyond publicity. Public relations now thrive on a two-way symmetrical communication process (Uford, 2017; Udo, Akpan & Uford, 2024)). Lesly (2002) observes that besides telling about someone or group (publicity), public relations also tells the organization what others (individuals or groups) think about it. It helps the organization to determine what it must do to get the goodwill of others it has dealings with; plans ways and means of winning that good will; and carries out, on an ongoing basis, programmes of activities designed to win and sustain that goodwill. This perhaps informed Adekunle Salu, one of the foremost Nigerian public relations' practitioners, to assert as far back as 1994, that no organisation in the current complex society can survive, have the goodwill of the authorities, the people and community where it locates and operate, without a good image, earned through public relations.

As a concept, public relations have been variously defined. Lesly (2002:5) defines it simply as "helping an organization and its publics adapt mutually to each other." In the opinion of Seitel (2011:36), public relations are "a planned process to influence public opinion, through sound character and proper performance, based on mutually satisfactory two-way communication." In the views of Lattimore, et al (2009:4), it is "a leadership and management function that helps achieve organizational objectives, define philosophy, and facilitate organizational change." Hayes (2024) sees public relations as "the set of techniques and strategies related to managing how information about an individual or company is disseminated to the public." Prout's (2002:728) definition is equally instructive. Prout describes public relations as the "function responsible for planning and coordinating the company's interface with its publics…the function responsible for corporate goodwill – protecting what the company has, building additional stores of it for the future, and employing it to protect and further the company's position."

In more recent times, professional bodies such as the Public Relations Society of America (PRSA) and the International Public Relations Association (IPRA) have come up with what they have respectively described as "more modern" and "a new definition of public relations which is fit for the times we live in." On the strength of this, PRSA states that there have been myriad definitions of public relations "often evolving alongside public relations' changing roles and advances in technology." The PRSA (2012) then defines public relations as "a strategic communication process that builds mutually beneficial relationships between organizations and their publics." Also, the IPRA in September 2019 adopted the following as its definition of public relations, the body states that "Public relations is a decision-making

management practice tasked with building relationships and interests between organisations and their publics based on the delivery of information through trusted and ethical communication methods."

The forgoing definitions give insight into the multi-dimensional functions of public relations. However, no matter the perspective from which public relations is viewed or how it is defined, the fundamental fact to note is that it is about behaviour. As explained by the PRSA (2022), "At its core, *public relations is about influencing*, engaging and building a relationship with key stakeholders across numerous platforms *in order to shape and frame the public perception* of an organization" (emphasis, that of this writer). This position had earlier been elicited by Center, Jackson, Smith and Stansberry (2011). These authors opine that public relations focus on behaviour by either "getting people to do something"; "getting them not to do something"; or "winning their consent to let the organization do something" (Center, et al, 2011:2). In essence, all public relations practices are either geared towards motivating new behaviour, reinforcing existing positive behaviour, or modifying negative behaviour. Its practices include helping an organization to develop, execute, and evaluate programmes that promote the exchange of influence and understanding among its constituent parts and publics; initiating and ensuring that there is a flow of communication with all its relevant publics (internal and external); developing positive relationships; and creating consistency between organizational goals and societal expectations (Lattimore, et al, 2009; Center, et al, 2011; PRSA, 2022; Hayes, 2024).

Based on the foregoing, any and all efforts an organization puts into eliciting and ensuring a sustained, mutually favourable behaviour from within and outside the organization can be described as public relations. Therefore, in order for public relations efforts to be effective and yield the needed results, it must be a conscious, deliberate and diligently planned programme of activities that goes beyond mere rhetorics of publicity and (or) creating awareness. It should, and must necessarily be complemented with "sound character and proper performance" (Seitel, 2020); and be "based on trust and ethics" (IPRA, 2020), among other factors. This is why it is said to be a leadership and management function because it requires and involves all the management processes that ensures effective and efficient operations. Factors of decision-making through planning, organizing, directing, controlling and coordinating various activities that leads to accomplishing overall purpose and stated objectives of an organization are often ascribed to management. However, it is expedient to note the observations of Nnadozie, et al (2015:1) that "either as a field of study or management function, the reach of PR is so wide that it has become a very popular multi-disciplinary activity." What this means is that public relations guiding principles and practices, its techniques, strategies and tactics subsist and apply everywhere in all forms of organisations generally as well as when it involves academic libraries as distinct institutions within the academia.

Library Public Relations: What it means

The conceptual view and practice of library public relations is not significantly different from the general purview of public relations. In other words, library public relations are not something special or a concept that can be completely delineated and isolated from the general field and practice of public relations. As Nnadozie, et al (2015) observe, library public relations have grown out of, and draws its meaning from the wider context of the concept. This is in the affirmative because the peculiarities of an organization determine and influences its public relations practices (Tom & Ndaeyo, 2024). For instance, nomenclatures such as "public affairs" and "corporate affairs" have been used by professionals in the field to describe and differentiate the practice as it relates to governments/governance and that which involves corporate organizations (especially those that are for-profit or profit-making) respectively.

In this wise, library public relations simply describe the practice as it obtains in the library as a distinct institution. It is therefore a term or 'coinage' used to refer to, and explain the deliberate but carefully planned programme of activities and actions that help in creating a positive and acceptable image, as well as generate and sustain goodwill towards the library as a distinct institution. It suffices then to say that every activity that helps to create a favourable opinion, boosts awareness of the benefits, and elicits interest of the public to utilize the services, resources/facilities, and programmes provided by the library, etc. is public relations. This submission corroborates the opinions of Okeke, Oghenetega and Ugulu (2014:9) that library public relations is "a conscious effort aimed at establishing and maintaining good relationship between the library and its patrons." As the authors explain, library public relations help in creating an acceptable image for the library. This is done through advertising available library resources, in print and non-print format, as well as its programmes and services.

Marshall (2001:116) observes that as far back as the 1970s' public libraries were known to be implementing "some public relations strategies, to interact better with their many constituencies including patrons, community members, and governing bodies." This observation is also echoed in Nnadozie, et al (2015:7). The authors maintain that though the phrase "library public relations" may not have been used, the practice is not entirely new in librarianship. They explain that for several centuries different efforts had been made to project the library with the aim of winning public support for the library and its services. This assertion is made in obvious reference to the many innovative services, programmes and policies that have been designed and implemented in different libraries, aimed at meeting and satisfying the diverse needs of the public and institutions they serve.

Library public relations, in concept and practice, is therefore not entirely new. It has been in existence over time and is known to be one of the major means of creating awareness on the operations and services of the library. This is done through providing adequate, easy-to-understand information on available resources and facilities in the library as well as in educating existing and potential users on how best to put these resources/facilities to use in order to derive maximum, possible benefits. In addition, auxiliary services offered in some libraries are often times not known to the public, it is through public relations efforts that these services are introduced to patrons. In contemporary times, Ojo (2025) observes that libraries face challenges of "maintaining relevance and engaging with their communities." In the light of this, the author notes that it is through the crucial role which public relations plays that libraries can "achieve these goals, promote their services and foster a positive image." In all, the aim is always to ensure that library patrons, sponsors/donor agencies, regulatory authorities, including its personnel, etc., who are all part of its publics, find satisfaction in being associated with the library in their various capacities (Nnadozie, et al, 2015; Mbashir, Job, and Edom, 2015).

Library public relations is therefore mainly about library advocacy, where its value is being effectively communicated to its key stakeholders. It includes community engagement and outreach, where the library uses planned events such as book fairs and workshops to connect with its relevant publics. It is about maintaining an active media and digital presence in order to reach broader audience. It involves internal communication within the library, where staff members are well informed about new policies, professional development opportunities, etc. it is also about crisis management, where issues of funding cuts, policy changes, or misinformation are transparently communicated with key stakeholders (Ojo, 2025).

The Scope of Library Public Relations in Contemporary Academic Libraries

A cursory view of public relations in the library would often present it as being the concern and responsibility of the reference and circulation services units. The reason for this assumption is obvious – these units provide immediate and primary points of contact between the library and its users. Also, the job responsibilities of the staff in these units bring them in regular contact and interaction with the public - readers, information seekers, and others who use the facilities and services that are available in the library. This position recurs as evident in the submissions of many library and information science professionals. including Odede (2012) and Nnadozie, et al (2015). Nnadozie, et al (2015:8) specifically state that "initially, public relations in libraries were assumed to be concerned with only reference and circulation services." The reason the authors advance for this also coincides with the one earlier posited. In their words, the reason "resides in the fact that the circulation and reference units are usually the first points-of-contact between the library and the wider society from which it draws its clientele."

However, in contemporary times this limited view of library public relations has changed; several factors account for this. First, along with developments in the wider human society, the library itself has evolved. Contemporary academic libraries in particular, are not mere buildings with books and periodical publications such as newspapers and magazines, which are managed by non-professionals, and where their services are offered to a relatively few numbers of persons who visits only occasionally. Academic libraries exist as 'distinct institutions' of information accessibility, with a vast storehouse of resources in print and non-print - electronic and digital formats, and are managed and supervised by trained, certified and experienced information and library science professionals (Ossai-Onah, Onuoha, & Udo-Anyanwu, 2015; Obot, Bantai, & Jonah, 2021; Jimmy, Obot, & Ekop, 2024).

Also, the range of services they offer have increased to cater for the diverse and myriads of information needs of an equally increased population of library patrons. Contemporary academic libraries therefore store and provide access to both print and non-print information resources. Terminologies such as "e-resources" which were hitherto unheard of are now common. Furthermore, contemporary academic libraries boast of facilities for on/offline e-resources where database management systems are deployed, using desk/laptop computers and the Internet. They also provide real-time database services where Access Codes and Passwords are provided and used. Wi-Fi Internet Access are now deployed for quick, speedy and easy access to thousands of information resources. In addition to all these, they offer auxiliary services such as literature search, acquisition of ISBN number, referral services, etc. all in order to aid the information and knowledge conscious population that constitute the present human society generally, and the academia in particular (Igwela and Nsirim, 2018; Daniels, Wiche, & Nsirim, 2023).

Having the necessary funds to acquire the huge facilities, structures and equipment involved in all these naturally require a change of approach. Also, attracting patronage and winning public acceptance, as well as approvals from relevant authorities needs additional efforts and thinking outside the box. Furthermore, the actions, attitude to work and general behaviour of all library staff, beyond those in the reference and circulation services/units, do necessarily have to change considerably as they provide the basis for evaluating the library and its services (Odede, 2012; Unagha, 2015; Edom, Edom, & Ebuchu 2015).

The implication of all this is that library public relations have changed and expanded in scope, objectives and functions. It is no longer something that is restricted to the reference services/units and its personnel, neither is it something that is done spontaneously or haphazardly implemented. Library public relations is now a carefully planned and diligently

implemented programme of activities, in policies and services. It is aimed at meeting and satisfying the needs of library users, sponsors/donor agencies, government/regulatory authorities, as well as the interest of the community where the library itself is located. It has become a strategic management technique that involves all library personnel, and is now deployed in contemporary academic libraries to create awareness, and to generate and sustain patronage and goodwill on an ongoing and mutually beneficial basis (Umar, 2015; Ossai-Onah, et, al, 2015; Ojo, 2025).

Library public relations now transcend the provision of a building with reading space and relevant facilities; it focuses on improved standards and quality of services the library renders. It is concerned with, and permeates the attitude and dispositions of library personnel to visitors and users of the library. It is to be found in how quick, easy and speedily access can be gained into available resources whether in print or electronic/digital formats. It also includes the comfort and convenience level experienced by the patrons, the lighting and ventilation in the library itself, among other considerations. Library public relations therefore include, but is not limited to the following programmes and activities:

- Planning and implementing readership promotion/campaigns
- Library displays – where available facilities/resources and how to put them to effective and beneficial use are carried out
- Organizing library instruction/orientation programmes for new, potential and existing users
- Organizing book fairs and exhibitions - where the most current resources on diverse subject areas/disciplines, in both print and electronic formats, are made known to the public
- Organizing regular/periodic refresher courses for library personnel
- Providing reference/referral services and inter-library co-operation
- Publication of accessions list and current contents
- Organizing library tours/extension services
- Press releases/conferences and media interviews and briefing
- Hosting of special events that showcases the library, its functions and services, librarianship, etc.
- Publication of library newsletters
- Readers advisory services
- Providing current awareness services
- Organizing library extension/outreach programmes
- Book donation/exchange of materials
- Initiation and sponsorship of researches and library surveys
- Hosting of seminars, workshops, symposia, etc.
- Floating of library publications (handbills, posters, diaries, calendars, etc.)
- Regular/timely publication of new materials on the notice board
  (Radock, 2002; Nnadozie, et al, 2015; Edom, Nwosu and Akanwa, 2015; Seitel, 2020).

Functions/Objectives of Library Public Relations

The library as a distinct institution exists to meet the educational, research, information and recreational needs of the public generally. For academic libraries in particular, they are established, and exist to support the teaching, learning, research and community service functions of the institutions and of the larger society. To achieve this broad purpose requires strategic planning and management; this is where public relations become necessary. Public relations in academic libraries therefore aims at achieving certain objectives in line with the overall purpose of the institution within which they operate and functions or serve.

Several authorities have given their perspectives on this. Some of the submissions they put forward have found expressions under objectives, functions, or even importance of public relations in the library. These authorities include Rao and Chandra (1993), Odede (2012), Gupta (2013), Egwim, Edom and Nnadozie (2015) and Nnadozie, et al (2015), Ojo, (2025) to mention but a few. Their different submissions have varying degrees of similarities and differences but the general ideas they put forward do converge. However, in all of these what can be deduced is that the emphasis on public relations in contemporary libraries is not a frivolous exercise. It implies that implementing public relations in academic libraries in particular, is not an enigma – something that cannot be done, or too difficult to fully understand. It is rather an imperative for efficient, successful and satisfactory service delivery and discharge of the functions of the library in contemporary times both for the library as a distinct institution, and for librarianship as a profession. Drawing inference from the submissions of various pundits, the functions and objectives of library public relations, though not exhaustive, are enumerated below:

- Library advocacy and awareness, where the value and role of the library as an agent of development is effectively communicated to relevant stakeholders
- Create and maintain good and acceptable image of the library on a sustained, ongoing basis.
- Ensuring that library policies, rules/regulations are known, understood and adhered to by the library patrons, in a manner that enhances a harmonious and beneficial relationship.
- Developing and deploying appropriate methods and best approaches in the management of the library and in the discharge of the duties and responsibilities by its personnel.
- Educating the various publics on the policies, functions, facilities, resource collections and services of the library.
- Working to position the library in good stead to attract necessary resources in finances, collections, equipment/gadgets, etc. from relevant authorities, agencies, corporate organisations, individuals, etc. to enable it function at its optimal level.
- Ensuring that any negative impressions about the library as an institution or librarianship as a profession is corrected as soon as possible, using appropriate publicity tools and/or media.
- Develop and foster the goodwill of employees, regulatory authorities, donor agencies, etc. towards the library, its services and management.
- Stimulating public interest in the library and what it represents and thus winning acceptance for the library as well as librarianship and its practitioners.
- Eliciting and encouraging library consciousness among members of the public.
- Protection and projection of a good, credible and qualitative reputation for the library as an information and service providing institution, librarianship as a profession, as well as the practitioners.
- Creating, nurturing and sustaining the confidence library patrons have in the library's facilities and resources, as well as the competence of its personnel to deliver qualitative and satisfactory services at all times.
- Advising and providing guidance to management of the library on the types of programmes and policies that can be initiated; how and when it could be executed in order to enhance the attainment of optimum benefits/satisfaction among the library's clientele, donors (individuals/organisations), regulatory authorities, as well as the institution and community it is established to serve (Rao and Chandra, 1993; Odede, 2012; Gupta, 2013; Egwim, et al, 2015; Falk, 2025; Ojo, 2025).

As can be observed from the foregoing, there are many perspectives on what constitutes the functions and objectives of public relations in the library. Based on this premise, this list is not meant to be exhaustive and all-inclusive as it can be taken differently, on and on. However, the bottom line is that building credibility and attracting favourable public opinion, and creating a reputation that brings about mutually beneficial relationships between the library and its publics (which includes its personnel) should be the major driving force in every public relations activity of the library.

The Publics of Academic Libraries

Public relations is not an abstract concept; it is a practice which involves and impact on people described as the publics of the organisation or institution. Accordingly, every organization has categories of persons, groups or other organizations that are considered important to it. These categories of persons exist both within and outside the organization and are called "publics". Promoting an exchange of influence amongst these constituent parts (publics) that are considered important to the organization and which the organization deals with directly and indirectly, entails first identifying them (Seitel, 2020).

Viewed against this background, it follows that each organization has its specific publics which, oftentimes, share certain common characteristics and have particular but diverse interests in the organization. They exist both internally – within the organization, and externally – outside the organization. According to Lattimore, et al (2009:6), any individual or group becomes the public of an organization once they recognize an issue that concerns them, understands its relevance to them, and then either talk about it or organize themselves to do something about it. In public relations, Seitel (2020) states that the word "public" (or publics) is used in a specific sense, and refers to "a group of people with a stake in an issue, organization, or idea." This publics, Seitel explains, can be classified into several overlapping categories such as internal and external; primary, secondary, and marginal; traditional and future; and proponents, opponents, and the uncommitted.

However, in recent times, public relations professionals have been of the opinion that the publics of an organization should better be described as "stakeholders" since they consist of "any group or individual who can affect or is affected by the achievement of the organization's objectives" (Fontaine, Haarman and Schmid, 2006:6). In the case of libraries, its publics is determined by the type and category of each library, its objectives, services and functions. Uzuegbu, et al (2015:47) define the publics of the library as "those groups of people who are affected (one way or the other) by the existence, services and policies of the library and who equally exert certain influences upon the affairs of the library."

With particular reference to academic libraries, its publics is wider than what many conjectures it to be as it encompasses more than information seekers and users of the library. The publics of academic libraries (especially at the tertiary level of education) have been identified to include, but are not limited to those enumerated below. They are:

Students (undergraduate/graduate);	Staff members (academic/non-academic);
Research students from other institutions;	Staff/students from other institutions
Professors and subject experts;	Research scholars: Ph. D/Post-Doctoral scholars
Government officials/Policy makers;	Regulatory authorities
Publishers/printers	Binders/book vendors
Philanthropists/benefactors	Individuals/Sponsors/donor agencies;

Personnel of the library   Alumni/Alumnus of the institution;

Other staff and academic visitors to the institution; and Members of the institution's academic and executive bodies (Uzuegbu, et al, 2015).

These groups all have a stake in the successful functioning and general operations of an academic library as they have varying degrees of contributions to make either as personnel, patrons, donors, or regulators. To the librarian, being able to identify these groups, prioritizing their needs and interests' vis-a-vis the purpose and objectives of the library as an institution, and communicating through appropriate lines (means/channels) brings about mutually beneficial relationships. This is what library public relations does.

The Role of Librarians in the Implementation of Public Relations in the Library
The key to a successful implementation of public relations programmes and activities in contemporary libraries lies in the librarians. This assertion is based on the fact that the librarian (especially the head librarian) epitomizes the library as an institution and librarianship as a profession. On the strength of this, the librarian remains the 'foremost' public relations officer of the library. Viewed from this perspective, it suffices then that the role of the librarian is primarily, and most importantly to give direction as well as serve as the coordinating force for the implementation of public relations programmes and activities in the library. This is why practitioners and authorities in the field of public relations opine and maintain that it is a "leadership and management function".

In contemporary academic libraries, management responsibilities rests on library and information professionals. It is therefore expected of them to have had sufficient training; to have acquired relevant academic qualifications; and to have been professionally-certified by appropriate authorities to function in that capacity (i.e. as librarians) as enunciated by Obot, et al (2021). Also, to be able to interpret correctly the role of public relations in the library, and to be able to situate and utilise it as a management strategy, and to know how to give guidance in carrying out public relations functions for efficient and successful service delivery, in a manner that enhances users/patrons' satisfaction, there is need for basic, additional training in the field of public relations (Ossai-Onah, et al, 2015). This position is equally averred to by many authorities, including Nnadozie, et al (2015), and Obot, et al (2021).

In academic libraries however, performing this role is more challenging considering the complex and demanding relationship between the library, the parent institution's management (Udoh & Akai, 2025), government/regulatory authorities and the conglomeration of other component units that constitute its publics. These facts further buttress the necessity for public relations practices to originate, be directed and coordinated from the management level within the library. Besides, it is a fundamental principle in management to situate policy issues at the highest level of management authority. This position is not (and should not be) different in academic libraries with regards to public relations practices. In line with this position, it is obvious that the institution's librarian is the only one who officially has direct access and contact, and is involved with the institution's management at the highest level of authority. Thus, to establish public relations policies, set goals, plan programme of activities, etc., remain the role and responsibility of the librarian. Alongside the foregoing, the role of the librarian includes the following:
- Developing capable workers that can handle public relations activities and discharge its functions in the library efficiently by encouraging regular training workshops and seminars, for updating of knowledge in emerging trends in library public relations practices.

- Building a reputation for credibility in the library, through "sound character and proper performance" on the part of all personnel.
- Serving as the bridge by always being always in the middle, between the library, the institution's management and its various and diverse publics. This entails being attuned to the thinking and needs of both the parent institution which it is established and exists to serve, the library itself as a distinct institution as well as the larger society – the community and other stakeholders, such as regulatory authorities (Government Ministries, Departments and Agencies such as NUC, TetFund, etc.); donor agencies (such as UNICEF, etc.); alumnus/alumni of the institution and other individuals, corporate organisations, etc.
- The librarian, as the foremost public relations officer of the library should also be in tune with the dynamics and needs of the various publics of the library starting from its personnel, faculties/departments, researchers, the community, etc. so as to be able to interpret these needs, counsel/advise top management, and meet-up with the requirements of regulatory authorities.
- Be conversant with, and know when to deploy some marketing strategies and methods to create awareness, stimulate interest in the library, and build relationships. This may include the following, as suggested by Odede (2012):
  (a) establish favourable press relations in order to get news coverage for the library and its activities on regular basis;
  (b) create publicity for specific services and resources of the library in order to be able to maintain awareness of its capabilities as an institution;
  (c) establish regular communication channels in order to promote understanding of the library functions and operations, internally and externally;
  (d) maintain awareness of laws and regulations that affect the library, as well as be able to lobby for legislations that can help the library provide effective services; and
  (e) watch out for contemporary trends and issues at the library's community and at the national levels especially those that could impact on the library's image, as well as inform the library administrators at the parent institution's level.
- Create and ensure that there is a functional public relations unit in the library by whatever nomenclature it is identified - whether as information unit/desks, manned by competent and experienced personnel, preferably library and information professionals who have had considerable and basic training, and can handle public relations issues and functions efficiently.
(Odede, 2012; Edom, et al, 2015; Ossai-Onah, et al, 2015; Umar, 2015; Seitel, 2020; Obot, et al., 2021; and Ojo, 2025)

In putting forward the above position, this writer is not negating or contesting the fact that carrying out public relations functions in the library is the responsibility of every staff/personnel. It has been made from the standpoint that management is about getting things done through and with people. Thus, the selection of personnel and assigning public relations (related) responsibilities, providing guidance through coordinating the various activities is both directly and indirectly the responsibility of the librarian. The librarian therefore occupies a privileged and pivotal position, earned through the professional training and experience that has been gained over time. The librarian is as such expected to be someone with the knowledge base to understand the fundamentals of public relations principles and practices – its techniques, strategies, structures, and tactics (Ossai-Onah, et al., 2015; Obot, et al, 2021).

Also, it is worth noting at this point that public relations in contemporary libraries have become a given - an imperative which requires the active and conscientious involvement of someone with a fair, but substantial knowledge, understanding and appreciation of the

voluntary exchange of values which public relations seeks to bring to a service institution such as the library. Therefore, the librarian must be equipped with the necessary experience, creativity, contacts, skills and resources that can be deployed to achieve set objectives and overall purpose of the library using public relations techniques and tools (Nwosu, and Njoku, 2015; Hayes, 2024; Ojo, 2025).

Conclusion

Public relations in contemporary academic libraries is primarily aimed at creating and maintaining good and mutually beneficial relationships between the library and its publics. When effectively deployed, it culminates in building a positive image and favourable reputation that elicits goodwill for the library. It revolves around advocacy and creating awareness among users/patrons, government/regulatory authorities, and donor agencies, among other stakeholders. It is about forging a connection with key stakeholders through active engagement as well as outreach to its publics/community through a planned process, in an on-going basis.

Public relations in academic libraries includes maintaining an active media presence in order to amplify knowledge of its value to education and society, the services it offers to the community it is located as well as to its critical publics – students/research fellows and the lecturers. It is equally concerned with ensuring that beyond the librarian, all the library staff are well informed about operational policies; their role in facilitating the discharge of the prime responsibility of the library, which borders on the satisfaction of its users need for resource materials that meet their educational, research, information and recreational purposes.

In the face of the challenges posed by the digital landscape which every society finds itself presently, robust public relations play a vital role in ensuring that academic libraries maintain their relevance among its stakeholders.

Recommendations

In contemporary times, academic libraries face increasing responsibilities while at the same time competing for attention with other interests and responsibilities of the parent institution in the face of limited financial resources. It has therefore become imperative that academic libraries should heighten awareness of its value and services through regular public relations programmes and activities for the purposes of sourcing for, and securing assistance for the library's development.

Also, considering that in the discharge of its functions, library operations naturally bring it in constant contact and interactions with people and organisations, there is need for academic libraries to consciously and deliberately deploy public relations principles and strategies in its service delivery process.

Furthermore, public relations techniques, strategies, structures, and tactics should be made a core part of the management strategy in academic libraries for efficient and satisfactory service delivery to its critical stakeholders, community and publics.

In addition, the active and conscientious involvement of the librarian is required, both in its proactive and pragmatic sense, in order to give direction and coordinate relevant public relations programmes and activities that creates and develops, on a sustained basis, visibility, credibility, and growth for the library. Accordingly, activities such as library displays/week, workshops and seminars, book fairs and exhibitions, and readership promotion/campaigns should be considered in addition to other activities.

Finally, in order to create and foster confidence in the patrons, sponsors/donor agencies, regulatory authorities, as well as the parent institution's management, librarians should ensure that there is quality resource collections and facilities, and that qualified and experienced personnel are attracted and retained to enhance quality service delivery in the library. This also, is a function of library public relations

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