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## Social perception of the image of public libraries and librarians by users as catalyst of transformation: A survey

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# **Social perception of the image of public libraries and librarians by users as catalyst of transformation: A survey**

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## **Abstract**

In life, people form impressions of and make inferences about other people as sovereign personalities which is social perception. This study therefore investigated the impression of and the inferences about public libraries and librarians by the users as a catalyst of transformation. The study adopted a descriptive survey design with users of public libraries in Ebonyi State Nigeria forming the population of the study. The study was guided by 5 research question while one null hypothesis was tested. A sampled population of 762 was drawn using Research Advisor table for selecting samples. The primary instruments used in collecting data for the study are a 4-point Likert scale type of questionnaire and oral interview. Using Cronbach Alpha, the questionnaire pre-tested yielded a reliability coefficient of 0.75 whereas data collected with the aid of SPSS 23.0 were analyzed using percentages, tables, mean and standard deviation and the hypotheses analyzed using Pearson Product moment correlation with a criterion mean of 2.50 used for decision. The outcome of this study reveals that librarians are socially perceived and placed at the lowest ebb of the professional strata and to certain level underestimate the level of training required for one to become a librarian. The crown glory is that the users recognized and appreciated the all important role of the public library and librarians as catalyst of transformation. Based on the findings, recommendations were made.

**Keywords:** Social perception, Perception, Public library, Librarian, Users, transformation, Society

## **1.0. Introduction**

In life, people form impressions of and make inferences about other people as sovereign personalities which is social perception. The public library as an institution and the librarians as professionals working in this institution are not left out. As the public interact and associate with them, they create an impression which allows them to draw a conclusion. In as much as

Perception is a uniquely individualized experience. One can only draw from what is known to oneself. In literature, the poem “*The Blind Men and the Elephant*,” written by John Godfrey Saxe in the 19<sup>th</sup> century, exemplifies the need to be exposed to something in order to have any perception of it. The poem tells the tale of six blind men. They encounter an elephant and try to identify appropriate comparisons for this unknown entity. Each man touches the elephant and the limited area within each man’s reach influences his conclusion. Each has a different mental image based on past experiences. They debate that an elephant is like a wall, snake, spear, tree, fan, or rope. Each man is confident in his own perception. Librarianship therefore in the eyes of their clientele is like the story of the six blind men and they elephant which means every user of public library has his/her own impression of the library and the librarians therein.

Come to think of it, the world has gotten a stage whereby the source of wealth and power are being determined by information and human intellectualism which entails that people must possess the enabling knowledge that can make them utilize great potentials in information for creative and innovative purpose that will bring about all-round human and global development. The implication is that institutions, organisations and the society at large have embraced this wind of change like-wise the desired skills. The above situation has necessitated the quest for transformational agents, who will spear-head and act as catalyst for societal transformation. As explained by Lunenburg (2010), a catalyst for transformation is someone, institution, organisation or body who has the skill and withal to stimulate, facilitate and coordinate the transformational effort. The library and the librarians’ responsibilities by tradition no doubt fall within this description.

To this end, Librarians as information management professionals and the library as the custodian of knowledge charged with the responsibility of acquiring, collecting, storing and assisting individual and organisations access and utilize information in a technology transforming environment need to stay ahead as catalyst of transforming the society considering as stated by Opoke (2004) and Onwubiko (2020) that it is only a nation that is conscious of the importance of information that can survive and flourish in this era and that in life the only thing that is constant is change and this has become an issue much bigger than operational improvement and cost efficiencies As noted by Keller (2016), it is more intertwined to the very essence to any

organization's existence. Imperatively being a catalyst of transformation is crucial to any organization thus needed to be numero-uno in any transformation plan.

The totality of the discuss is that history has that librarians and the library in most issues are not recognized or taken seriously inasmuch as writes Ady (2016), it may be surprising that this is not the actual problem, but a demonstration of the actual problem. In Nigeria for example, librarianship has struggled and is still battling with wrong societal perception and government recognition. Take the case of the of the Nigeria Library Association (NLA) established in 1962 only to be recognized as a body in 1995 under the government of President Ibrahim Badamosi Babangida, the battle of recognizing librarians as academic staff in Nigerian universities was one that was fought headlong before the recognition was granted (Okoye, 2010). Apart from the above mention backdrops, the profession is yet to be accorded its due place in the society when compared with other professions like: accountants, medical doctors, engineers, lawyers among other. This situation has brought about the under rating and some cases the ignoring of librarians and libraries by both government, institutions and organization when decisions concerning them are being taken worse affected in this predicament is the public libraries which rely solely on the community for support and funding either through local, regional o national government (JFLA/UNESCO, 2001).

It is against these backdrops that scholars like Hutchins and Travis (2005), Dupre (2009) and Fumilayo (2015) posit that negative perception of librarianship may portray some sense of professional insecurity although Agaja (1999) is of the opinion that the sagging morale of librarians in the area of lack of self confidence or self-esteem can affect how users and the society think of the profession. Be that as it may, the public library and the librarians in a world that is being transformed and reformed by technology, economy and global politics have prominent role to play by embracing the reformation and re-strategizing as to maintaining and increasing their relevance and in the area of information provision for national development. To this ended reveals Okafor (2017), if public libraries in developing countries are to be part of the global transformation in the information world beyond being the custodian of books, the librarians must be creative and innovative as to promoting the image of the profession in their local communities. This built on the premise that the image and societal perception held by

people may affect the extent libraries and librarians can contribute to national integration and sustainable development goals (Benson, Nwaigwe and Okorafor, 2017)

It is in view of all the above factors that this study became imperative as to ascertaining the societal perception of public libraries and librarians as catalyst of transformation using public libraries in Nigeria libraries as a case in point though limited to Ebonyi State as a microcosm of the macrocosm – Nigeria.

### **1.1. Statement of the problem**

One known fact is that a public library is a type of library established and funded various forms of government with the aim of providing and satisfying the information needs of the concerned general public divulge of any form of restriction. This to say therefore, that public library is a social institution that is traditionally assigned the responsibility of providing access and disseminating information to users. This implies that it has to promote its mission and resources through proper marketing and creating the desired goodwill that would encourage the utilization of the library by the public.

Regrettably public utilization of resources of public libraries is dwelling and the attention and support required are not sufficiently given due poor funding from government and erroneous social perception of the relevance among users. As noted by Ogundipe (2005) librarians have been tagged with stereotypes like custodians of old dusty books, stern looking persons, non-graduates and poorly dressed. The above assumption is in conformity with that of Tijani (2004) who stated that from the career choices made by Nigerian students, librarianship has not fared well as some students believed that the profession is not attractive and lucrative when compared with other professions. While Simineli (2016) argued that users do not understand even slightly the rigorousness in what librarians do to make information accessible to them. To some users, librarianship is the only profession one be into without being a graduate (Wilkinson and Harrison (2001).

The truth is that if all these impressions are left without correct representation, the aftermath is that users of public libraries may likely discontinue their usage or require their services thereby denying them their needed information in this era of information and communication technology

(ICT) which will definitely affect the funding of such libraries thus rendering them irrelevant. It is based on these assumptions that this study became imperative with a view to correcting this erroneous social perception of the public library and the librarians through the outcome by establishing the place of the public library and librarians as catalyst of transformation.

## **1.2. Research objectives**

The specific objective of this study is to ascertain the social perception of public library and librarians as catalyst of transformation. Other objectives include:

- i. To establish the general social perception of the image of librarians working in public libraries;
- ii. To ascertain the public rating of the profession of librarianship;
- iii. To ascertain the social perceived required training of a librarian in comparison with other professions,
- iv. To ascertain social perception of the responsibilities of public library and librarians as catalyst of transformation
- v. To establish the major factors that can positively influence the social perception of public libraries and librarians' image.

## **1.3. Research questions**

This study was guided by the following research questions:

- i. What is the general social perception of the image of librarians working in public libraries?
- ii. What is the public rating of librarianship as a profession?
- iii. What is the social perceived required training of a librarian in comparison with other professions?
- iv. What is the social perception of the responsibilities of public library and librarians as catalyst of transformation?
- v. What are the factors that can positively influence the social perception of public libraries and librarians' image?

## **1.4. Research hypothesis**

One research question was formulated and tested as further guide;

H01. There is no statistical significant ( $P < 0.05$ ) relationship between the social perception of the occupational status of librarians working in public libraries and their perceived roles as catalyst of transformation.

## **2.0. Literature review**

### **2.1 Conceptual overviews**

#### **2.1.1. Perception**

The term *perception* which is a noun and has its etymology from the Latin word ‘perceptio’ meaning comprehension is according to Wikipedia (2008) the process of attaining awareness or understanding of sensory information. While the *Collins Essential English Dictionary* (2006), describes it as insight or intuition and way of viewing. The Merriam-Webster (n.d.a) lists these definitions: “1 a: a result of observation; b: a mental image; 2. *obsolete*: consciousness; 3 a: awareness of the elements of environment through physical sensation; b: physical sensation interpreted in the light of experience; 4 a: quick, acute, and intuitive cognition appreciation; b: a capacity for comprehension.” The Merriam-Webster Online Thesaurus (2009) adds this: “1. the ability to understand inner qualities or relationships; 2. the knowledge gained from the process of coming to know or understand something.” Synonyms in *Roget’s II: The New Thesaurus* (1995) include awareness, cognizance, consciousness, sense, concept, conception, idea, image, notion, and thought. Other related terms are: attention, cognition, heuristic, information, intelligence, mental model, and understanding (Wikipedia, 2008).

According to Lumen (n.d), Perception refers to the way sensory information is organized, interpreted, and consciously experienced. Perception involves both bottom-up and top-down processing. Bottom-up processing refers to the fact that perceptions are built from sensory input. On the other hand, how we interpret those sensations is influenced by our available knowledge, our experiences, and our thoughts. This is called top-down processing. Cherry (2020) explained that Perception is the sensory experience of the world. It involves both recognizing environmental stimuli and actions in response to these stimuli. Through the perceptual process, we gain information about the properties and elements of the environment that are critical to our survival. Perception not only creates our experience of the world around us; it allows us to act within our environment. Perception is a uniquely individualized experience. One can only draw

from what is known to oneself just as earlier explained in the introductory part of this study as in case of The Blind Men and the Elephant. The conclusion that can be drawn is that perception is a multifaceted concept that is as complex as the human mind itself.

Basically, there are various types of perception but in this context our concern is the social perception. So the question is: What is social perception?

### **2.1.2. Social perception**

According to Smith and Mackie (2000), Social perception is the part of perception that allows people to understand the individuals and groups of their social world. Thus, it is an element of social cognition. Social perception (or person perception) is the study of how people form impressions of and make inferences about other people as sovereign personalities. Social perception refers to identifying and utilizing social cues to make judgments about social roles, rules, relationships, context, or the characteristics (e.g., trustworthiness) of others. This domain added Aronson; Wilson and Akert, (2010) also includes social knowledge, which refers to one's knowledge of social roles, norms, and schemas surrounding social situations and interactions. People learn about others' feelings and emotions by picking up information they gather from physical appearance, verbal, and nonverbal communication. Facial expressions, tone of voice, hand gestures, and body position or movement are a few examples of ways people communicate without words. A real-world example of social perception is the understanding that others disagree with what one said when one sees them roll their eyes. There are four main components of social perception: observation, attribution, integration, and confirmation.

Observations serve as the raw data of social perception; interplay of three sources: persons, situations, and behavior. These sources are used as evidence in supporting a person's impression or inference about others. Another important factor to understand when talking about social perception is attribution. Attribution is expressing an individual's personality as the source or cause of their behavior during an event or situation. To fully understand the impact of personal or situational attributions, social perceivers must integrate all available information into a unified impression. To finally confirm these impressions, people try to understand, find, and create information in the form of various biases. Most importantly, social perception is shaped by an individual's current motivations, emotions, and cognitive load capacity. Cognitive load is the

complete amount of mental effort utilized in the working memory while Social cognition is a sub-topic of various branches of psychology that focuses on how people process, store, and apply information about other people and social situations. It focuses on the role that cognitive processes play in social interactions.(Park et al (2015).

All of this combined determines how people attribute certain traits and how those traits are interpreted.

### **2.1.3 Public Library**

According to Rubin (2010), a public library is a library that is accessible by the general public and is usually funded from public sources, such as taxes. It is operated by librarians and library paraprofessionals, who are also civil servants. There are five fundamental characteristics shared by public libraries: they are generally supported by taxes (usually local, though any level of government can and may contribute); they are governed by a board to serve the public interest; they are open to all, and every community member can access the collection; they are entirely voluntary in that no one is ever forced to use the services provided; and they provide basic services without charge. Dictionary. Com (2020), sees it as a nonprofit library established for the use of the general public and maintained chiefly by public funds. Merriam Webster Online dictionary (2020) defines it as a nonprofit library maintained for public use and usually supported in whole or in part by local taxation. While Cambridge Dictionary (2020) describes as a building where people can read or borrow books without having to pay

However, ALA (2019), posits for public libraries, the governmental definition used by the Institute for Museum and Library Services applies which that a public library is established under state enabling laws or regulations to serve a community, district, or region, and provides at least the following:

- an organized collection of printed or other library materials, or a combination thereof;
- paid staff;
- an established schedule in which services of the staff are available to the public;
- the facilities necessary to support such a collection, staff, and schedule, and
- is supported in whole or in part with public funds.

All said and done writes Encyclopedia Britannica (2010) Public libraries are now acknowledged to be an indispensable part of community life as promoters of literacy, providers of a wide range of reading for all ages, and centers for community information services.

#### **2.1.4. Users**

In a library or information centre, the users are the last link or a recipient of the information in the communication cycle. In other words, the library user is indisputable the most important person in any library setting. The library user is the focal part to the 21<sup>st</sup> century library and information services, as the library primarily exists to satisfy the user (Aina 2004). Nwalo (2003) defines him as anybody who visits the library with the purpose of exploiting the resources to satisfy his information needs. The underlined/emphasized word “visit” includes remote access to library portal or website. Aina (2004) sees the term user to include all those who await themselves of the services offered by the library. According to Whitaker (1993) a user may be a person who uses one or more library services at least once a year. Users therefore, are individuals who can be divided into different categories on the basis of tasks assigned to them in a library organization. (Devaranjan, 1989). The term user encompasses various terms such as patrons, clients, clientele, information users, information seekers, consumers, customers, readers etc. All these can be used inter-changeably.

#### **2.1.5. Transformation**

According to Business Dictionary (2019), transformation from an organisation context is a process of profound and radical change that orients an organisation in a new direction and takes it to an entirely different level of effectiveness. Transformation therefore implies a basic change of character and little or no resemblance with past configuration or structure. This implies that for librarians and public libraries in the context of this study to contribute meaningfully in the transformation of the society, there must be a paradigm shift on the way public libraries and librarians are seen in communities. Agents of transformation therefore possess the personal skills and attributes needed to drive innovation, and they operate within organizations that have the right culture, leadership and tools in place to enable successful digital and business transformation. They find themselves at the forefront of transformation initiatives, but they never

stand still. They recognize the need for constant personal development and learning in order to remain relevant and fulfill their ambitions (Lachhman, 2018)

## **2.2. Social Perception of the image of the librarian**

People's perception of librarianship as a profession and practice could be related to the story of Jesus Christ in the Holy Bible when he asked his Apostles the question: who do people say I am? The Apostles answered; some say you are Elijah, some John-the-Baptist and others one of the great prophet and Jesus asked them; to you who do you say I am? Or the story told of the seven blind men and the elephant and their description thereof of how they perceived the elephant. As their descriptions were based on how each of them felt the elephant. The analogy is that librarianship means different thing to different person even some in the profession. To many people, librarianship is all about managing books, to some, it involves storing and preserving books and to others, it is all about providing information to library users (Onwubiko, 2020).

According to Ogundipe (2005), a librarian will loosely be perceived as anyone who works in the library, custodian of old dusty books, stern looking person, one who knows nothing more than arranging books, a non-graduate and poorly dressed. This misconception asserts (Agaja 1999) have overtime affected the image of the profession to the point where the practitioners themselves grapple with inferiority complex even within the library system thus describing as a psychological problem that needs to be seriously tackled as its continuity will not only dapple the image of the profession, it will also affect work ethics, it will also affect the morale of librarians and portends danger to the profession in the near future. Writing on why the negative impression the users have on librarians persist Seminelli (2016) reveals that professional library operations that keep the library running are done behind the scene and are unknown to users. Library users therefore, do not still understand even superficially what librarians do and this has led to undervaluing of the impact and importance of libraries and librarians.

Furthermore, the result of a survey conducted by Wilkinson and Harrison (2001), shows that students considerably underestimated the level of education that is required to be a librarian. They also underestimated librarians' average starting salary and rated the profession social status and prospect to be lower compared to other professions. Tijani (2004) finding in a study on

career choices of Nigerian student also corroborated the assertion as the respondents believed that the profession is not a money making type like medicine, accountancy, law, pharmacy and engineering. The negative effect of these studies outcomes for librarianship education is that students who are starting their career quest have already been influenced by this negative social perception of the profession and convincing to make a u-turn as seeing librarianship as a career with good prospect will be as hard as the camel passing through the eye of a needle.

According to Vassilakaki and Moniaro-PapaConstantinous (2014) in their study revealed that librarians were negatively perceived by the public therefore how they are portrayed in the media and literature are often negative exaggeration of the characteristics which they have been seen as possessing in past years. Nevertheless writes Rothwell (1990), if librarians are complaining about their image and representation, they should first consider what kind of image they would like to have judging from the roles they play in the society as change agents.

All the same, Attebury (2010) listed some qualities of an ideal librarian as: neat appearance, cordial manner, avoidance of alcohol, gambling profanity and vulgarity, character deserving of the description, wonderfully adaptable besides being ubiquitous. Consequently after due consideration of the facts and social perception of libraries and librarians Seale (2008) concludes that the qualities have not changed but rather the negative social perception of librarians is based on what they assume the librarians do. Stating the record straight, not every staff in the hospital is a medical doctor, neither is every staff of a law court a lawyer same applies to the library users come in contact with library officers, library assistants and library attendant therefore should not assume that they are all librarians.

Stating the obvious, the issue of low social perception of libraries and librarians has greatly hindered the development of librarianship as well as the discharging of her role as a catalyst of transformation in a dynamic world their so much desire information which rules the world today. Frankly speaking, this low social perception is not peculiar to developing countries as developed countries are also victims as it is noted to have been associated with the profession since it came into being.

### **2.3. Roles of public libraries and librarians as catalyst of transformation**

The practice of librarianship constitutes holding out oneself as skilled in the knowledge, art and services of the organisation, dissemination, preservation of recorded information, the reading, the rendering, furnishing and contracting of professional services such as consultation and advice on the organisation and management of libraries data banks, research and information centre to client on a fee or otherwise; the teaching of subjects in the library and information; and the signing or authenticating for clients of document and reports when called for (Chanroble, 2019). This implies that the sole aim of librarianship is to provide the needed information to library users and so to speak to the society.

As expressed by Information School, University of Washington (n.d) librarianship involves collecting, organizing, preserving and disseminating information to those who need it. Librarians help their constituencies find and make use of information contained in a collection of various kinds, sizes and resources to support individual needs as well as an organization's strategic goals. Adding that Library and information professionals organize and evaluate important documents and resources in businesses, non-profits, governmental agencies, web firms, and public/school libraries where data is essential to projects and decisions. According to Dictionary .com (2020), librarianship is a profession concerned with acquiring and organizing collections of books and related materials in libraries and servicing readers and others with these resources.

According to Singh (n.d.) librarianship today has arrived at the information age where the role of information is increasingly emphasized as an economic resource, a marketable commodity and as a social wealth. In this content, the roles of librarians are of much importance. He / she will have to act as a facilitator, advisor, consultant, instructor, navigator, searcher, researcher, evaluator, organizer, preserver, promoter, communicator, technical expert, as well as a manager, leader, entrepreneur and visionary.

The mission of the library revealed IFLA/UNESCO (2001) is to provide timely, accurate and up-to-date and reliable information to it users and by providing a wide range of materials to support the educational and social needs to all members of the community regardless of race, nationality, age, gender, religion, language, disability, economic and educational status and educational attainment, the public library acts as a positive catalyst of transformation in the community. As a

catalyst of transformation, libraries play important role in enhancing access to information, contributing to the creation and maintenance of a well-informed democratic society, bringing about desired attitudinal change and helping to empower people in the enrichment and development of their lives and that of the community in which they live through the services they rendered.

As a catalyst in a transforming information society, librarians face new responsibilities which Shelton (2011) outlined as: providing inspiration, creative spaces, creating opportunities for healthy and positive dialogues between different populations, rebuild the information landscape, helping society move away from misinformation to clarity and balance. Furthermore, the birth of the internet which is information super-highway which has transformed the world to a global village with other emerging technologies brought about information explosion and by extension, information overload which makes it imperatively difficult for non-information managers from knowing the right and relevant information to acquire. Hence there is what may be called tsunami of data crashing into the breeches of global recorded knowledge which Ifijeh (2010), liken to a tidal war of unrelated, growing data formed in bits and bytes and coming in an unorganized , uncontrolled, incoherent cacophony of forms. Madu, Aboyade and Aboyade (2017) were of the opinion that the world has been flooded with literature so much that mankind would have been displaced by its own record if not for the perennial efforts of libraries.

Libraries provide an essential means of reaching the next billions by supporting digital inclusion through access to ICT and dedicated staff to help people develop new digital skills added Ubale (2018).

Ubale (2018) further explained that world-wide, 320,000 with other libraries ensure that information and the skills to use it are available to everyone thereby making critical institution for all in the digital age. Libraries provide information and communication technology (ICT) infrastructure, help people develop the capacity to effectively use information and preserve information thereby ensuring continual access to future generations. They provide an established trusted network of local institutions that effectively reach new marginalized populations. Access to information is a cross-cutting issue that supports all of the SDGs. Public library services therefore contribute to improved outcomes across the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs).

On the other hand, Okiy (2006) opines that the state of development of public library, facilities and resources in most libraries in Nigeria for example leaves much to be desired which places a demand on the librarian to play active roles in promoting and marketing available services and resources to the users.

#### **2.4. Factors influencing the social perception of the professional image of librarians**

A Profession as defined by Australian Council of Professions (2003) and Professional Standards Council (n.d) is a disciplined group of individuals who adhere to ethical standards and who hold themselves out as, and are accepted by the public as possessing special knowledge and skills in a widely recognized body of learning derived from research, education and training at a high level, and who are prepared to apply this knowledge and exercise these skills in the interest of others. In addition wrote Webb and Webb (1917), a profession is also an occupation founded upon specialized educational training, the purpose of which is to supply disinterested objective counsel and service to others, for a direct and definite compensation, wholly apart from expectation of other business gain. While Turner and Hodge (1970) further defined it as a special type of occupation...(possessing) corporate solidarity...prolonged specialized training in a body of abstract knowledge, and a collectivity or service orientation...a vocational sub-culture which comprises implicit codes of behavior, generates an esprit de corps among members of the same profession, and ensures them certain occupational advantages...(also) bureaucratic structures and monopolistic privileges to perform certain types of work...professional literature, legislation, etc

Writing on the characteristic features of a profession Larson (1978) reveals that it has: professional association, cognitive base, institutionalized training, licensing, work autonomy, colleague control... (and) code of ethics adding that high standards of professional and intellectual excellence, that professions are occupations with special power and prestige and that they comprise an exclusive elite group, in all societies. Members of a profession have also been described as workers whose qualities of detachment, autonomy, and group allegiance are more extensive than those found among other groups...their attributes include a high degree of

systematic knowledge; strong community orientation and loyalty; self-regulation; and a system of rewards defined and administered by the community of workers (Brown, 1992)

Librarianship all over the world and Nigeria in particular no matter the angle one looks at it, possesses the above mentioned features but of all the attributes, the major concern to any profession including librarianship is the recognition accorded it and her professional image in the eyes of the public which form the mirror with which they perceive and evaluate their importance in the society. As explained by HR Future Staff Writer, UK.(n.d) an 'image' is basically the way that people perceive you. It's a combination of characteristics you give off that people associate with your brand. Whereas professional is seen as one who is skilled or competent in a particular activity. In essence, you demonstrate to others that you know what you're doing and are good at doing it. So, the simple definition is that a professional image is a way of presenting yourself in a professional manner. Therefore, a professional image is just that. It's the perception that you are skilled at your job and can do it to a high level.

According to Wolf (2013), Professional image is the image that one projects about themselves based upon appearance and reputation. Image can be conveyed as professional by the way that you dress, the way you speak, the way you respond to others, and the way that others speak about you. Obviously, as stated by Seminelli (2016), there have been studies on the public image of librarians with most on the stereotypes held by the general public and by librarian themselves (Agaja, 1999) while others noted Rugby and Pagowsky (2014) looked at factors such as: attitude, skilled biased and appearance

As stated by Arbib and Mendelovitz (2004), there are many elements involved in the evaluation of a profession such as status and prestige, self-concept, career progression, skills and competencies, funding and mass media. Other elements associated to social perception of the professional image of librarians added Bua and Yawe (2014) is user satisfaction on the services rendered. User satisfaction as defined by American Society for Quality (2021) is the measurement that determines how happy customers are with a company's products, services, and capabilities. In other words, user satisfaction has to do with how good users feel after visiting and using the library and the likelihood that they will return to the library when subsequent information is needed. Bua and Yawe (2014) disclosed that the quality of staff is judged by the

services rendered to users or readers of any library and vice versa. They then advised that any library that wants to improve its services to meet the views, opinion and perceptions of the users, must implore the help of the users as to identifying areas of weakness in order to improve upon them.

In a research conducted by Bonnet and McAlexander (2013) on image rating to assess how visibly salient characteristics can influence library users perception of librarians' approachability, it was discovered that factors associated with affect and attire like facial expression, direction of gaze, formality of clothing and clothing colour influenced perception of approachability. While Arbib and Mendelovitz (2004) opined that library graduate who practice the profession in various work settings, either in libraries, private or public institutions and shape their practice on the basis of their job expectations which may be contrary to the ideals in librarianship. In another study carried out by Majid and Haider (2008), shows that low reputation for librarians and consequently the ranking of employees generally is characterized by poor, meager salaries and inconsistent working condition.

On the other hand, Chin, Kim and Teck (2008) in the study revealed that the low ranking of public library and librarians is due to the birth of the internet as it will eventually replace the libraries. Although on this issue, Clark (2010) argued that if physical libraries were truly obsolete and unneeded in the internet age, public usage statistics would have upheld the theory long time ago instead there have been recorded continued usage, indicating that the roles of the libraries are still been felt by the communities they serve for physical materials freely available meeting spaces and community related event.

### **3.0 Methodology**

The study adopted a descriptive survey design with users of public libraries in Ebonyi State Nigeria forming the population of the study. A sampled population of 762 was drawn using Research Advisor table (2006) for selecting samples. The primary instruments used in collecting data for the study are a 4-point Likert scale type of questionnaire and oral interview. The questionnaires were randomly administered to the respondents Using Cronbach Alpha, the questionnaire pre-tested yielded a reliability coefficient of 0.75 whereas data collected with the aid of SPSS 23.0 were analyzed using percentages, tables, mean and standard deviation and the

hypotheses analyzed using Pearson Product moment correlation. A criterion mean of 2.50 obtained from the average of the ranked responses was used for decision. This implies that an item is accepted if it is within the benchmark of 2.50 and above and rejected if otherwise. It is pertinent to state that out of 762 questionnaires distributed only 684 were returned or approximately, 90%. Of the used respondents, 488 (71%) were male whereas 196 (29%) were female.

#### 4.0. Presentation of Data

Data collected are presented in table based on research questions

**Research question 1:** What is the general social perception of the image of librarians working in public libraries?

**Table 1:** Social perception of the image of librarians

S/No	Item	SA	A	DA	SDA	Mean(X)	Decision
1	Positive	288	256	20	20	3.33	Accept
2	Negative	12	80	308	284	1.74	Reject

**Key:** SA=Strongly Agree, A=Agree, DA=disagree, SD=Strongly Disagree **Benchmark:** 2.50

It is emphatic going by the data in table 1 that the social perception of the image of librarians is in the positive as the mean score stands at 3.33 against the negative mean score of 1,74. This implies that librarians have encouraging and constructive attitude the dual items.

**Research question 2:** What is the public rating of librarianship as a profession?

**Table 2:** Public rating of librarianship as a profession

S/No	Profession	VH	H	L	VL	Mean	Decision
1	Engineer	244	404	32	4	3.30	Accept
2	Medical Doctor	516	148	12	8	3.71	Accept
3	Accountant	244	404	32	4	3.30	Accept
4	Journalist	108	432	136	8	2.94	Accept
5	Librarian	96	144	340	104	2.34	Reject
6	Lawyer	348	312	24	-	3.47	Accept

**Key:** VH=Very High, H=High, L=Low, VL=Very Low **Benchmark:** 2.50

The data in table 2 reveal that of the 6 profession listed in line with occupational status, 6 which include; Medical Doctor (X=3.71); Lawyer (X=3.47), Engineer (X=3.30), accountant (X=3.30)

and Journalist ( $X=2.94$ ) were rated above the benchmark of 2.50 by the respondents. The only profession that is rated below the benchmark is librarian ( $X=2.34$ ).

**Research question 3:** What is the social perceived required training of a librarian in comparison with other professions?

**Table 3:** social perceived required training of a librarian in comparison to other professions

S/No	Profession	VH	H	L	VL	Mean	Decision
1	Engineer	284	360	20	20	3.33	Accept
2	Medical Doctor	568	84	16	16	3.76	Accept
3	Accountant	284	360	20	20	3.33	Accept
4	Journalist	216	376	88	4	3.18	Accept
5	Librarian	220	248	164	52	2.93	Accept
6	Lawyer	372	288	20	4	3.50	Accept

**Key:** VH=Very High, H=High, L=Low, VL=Very Low

**Benchmark:** 2.50

The data in table 3 are all about the respondents rating of the type of training required by each profession. The highest rated required professional training is Medical Doctor with a mean score of 3.76, it is followed by lawyer with a mean score of 3.50, Engineer and Accountant ranked 3<sup>rd</sup> with a mean score of 3.33 while librarian is on the lowest with a mean score of 2.93.

**Research question 4:** What is the social perception of the responsibilities of public library and librarians as catalyst of transformation?

**Table 4:** social perception of the responsibilities of public library and librarians as catalyst of transformation

S/No	item	SA	A	DA	SDA	Mean	Decision
1	Enhancement of access to information	472	204	4	4	3.67	Accept
2	Bringing desired attitudinal change through the services rendered	208	412	64	-	3.21	Accept
3.	Cultural development of individuals and social groups	120	352	196	16	2.84	Accept
4.	Creating opportunities for healthy and positive dialogue between different populations	136	380	144	24	2.92	Accept
5	Providing creative spaces for skill development	324	320	24	12	3.41	Accept
6.	Helping society move from misinformation to clarity and balance	412	228	32	12	3.52	Accept
7.	Bridging the digital gap by providing computers and internet services	392	228	44	20	3.45	Accept

**Key:** SA=Strongly Agree, A=Agree, DA=Disagree, SDA=Strongly Disagree **Benchmark:** 2.50

Table 4 above contains data in respect of research question 4. From the data collected, all the items were agreed to a certain level as roles of public libraries and librarians as catalyst of transformation. Going by the mean score ranking, 'Enhancement of access to information' is of the highest with  $\bar{x}=3.67$ , second highest mean score of 3.52 is 'Helping society move from misinformation to clarity and balance', this is followed by 'Bridging the digital gap by providing computers and internet services' with a mean score of 3.45. Other roles are: 'Providing creative spaces for skill development' with a mean score of 3.41; 'Bringing desired attitudinal change through the services rendered' with a mean score of 3.21, 'Creating opportunities for healthy and positive dialogue between different populations' with a mean score of 2.92 and Cultural development of individuals and social groups with mean score of 2.84

**Research question 5:** What are the factors that can positively influence the social perception of public libraries and librarians image?

**Table 5:** factors that will positively influence the social perception of public libraries and librarians images

S/No	Item	SA	A	DA	SD	Mean	Decision
1	Libraries and librarians are no longer needed because of the availability of the internet.	20	84	312	268	1.79	Reject
2	Librarians need to work on their nagging and nonchalant attitude to rendering services.	168	316	144	56	2.87	Accept
3	Librarianship as a profession is not as lucrative as other professions.	140	176	248	120	2.49	Reject
4	As information professional, librarians need to be innovative and creative to be able to keep up with technology	432	240	12	-	3.61	Accept
5	The attitude and dressing patterns of some librarians do not make them approachable.	124	240	276	44	2.65	Accept
6	Public libraries should solicit for more funds to tackle the problem of inadequate facilities and resources.	512	156	16	-	3.73	Accept
7.	Some librarians have poor communication and public relations skills.	36	124	316	208	1.98	Reject

**Key:** SA=Strongly Agree, A=Agree, DA=disagree, SD=Strongly Disagree **Benchmark:** 2.50

The data as presented in table 5 indicate factors that can positively influence the social perception of public libraries and librarians' image. Using the mean scores, items 2, 4, 5 and 6 are affirmed as positive factors with item 6 having the highest mean score of 3.73, followed by item 4 with mean score of 3.61. Others are item 2 mean score of 2.87 and item 5 with mean score of 2.65 while items 1, 3 and 7 were rejected since the mean scores were below the benchmark of 2.50

#### 4.1. Testing of hypothesis

H01. There is no statistical significant ( $P < 0.05$ ) relationship between the social perception of the occupational status of librarians working in public libraries and their perceived roles as catalyst of transformation

**Table 6: Correlation**

Variables		Social perception of the occupational status of librarians	Social perceived roles of libraries
Social perception of the occupational status of librarians	Pearson correlation	1	.540
	Sig (2-tailed)		.211
	N	7	7
Social perceived roles of libraries	Pearson Correlation	.540	1
	Sig (2-tailed)	.211	
	N	7	7

The result of the null hypothesis tested as displayed in table 6 above shows that there is statistical significant correlation between the social perception of the occupational status of librarians and perceived roles of public libraries ( $r = .211$  @ sig level  $p < 0.05$ ). The implication is that there is significant relationship between social perception of librarians and perceived roles of public libraries. It is on this ground that the null hypothesis which is in the contrary is rejected.

#### 5.0. Discussion of findings

The outcome of this study as revealed in table 1 shows that public libraries and librarians social perception is in the positive. This implies public libraries and librarians have encouraging and constructive attitude from the community they serve. The outcome of this study is contrary to that of Vassilakaki and Moniaro-Papa Constantinous (2014) who in their study revealed that librarians were negatively perceived by the public therefore how they are portrayed in the media

and literature are often negative exaggeration of the characteristics which they have been seen as possessing in past years.

It was discovered that librarian was ranked low in occupational status with a mean score of 2.34 which is lower than the benchmark 2.50 while professions like: Medical Doctor; Engineer, accountant, Lawyer and journalist were ranked high above the benchmark.(see table 2). The deduction is that by professional recognition, other professions are ranked above librarianship. The finding is not different from that of Petr and Aparac-Jelusic (2002) as well as Majid and Haider (2008) who found in their study that the public ranked librarians low (6<sup>th</sup> of 7) compared with other professions like doctors, school teachers, civil engineers, economists, lawyer with only system engineers ranked lower than librarians. The above finding is also in conformity with that of Tijani (2004) who stated that from the career choices made by Nigerian students, librarianship has not fared well as some students believed that the profession is not attractive and lucrative when compared with other professions. From the outcome of this study one can deduce that inasmuch as people make use of public library facilities, they still been taken for granted by vast majority of those served. All the same, it is pertinent to state that the image problem of the public library and the librarians therein is by no means new, the issue of how the library and librarianship is been seen is peculiar given the tremendous reformation that has taken place within the profession in the last decade.

The data in table 3 shows that the required training for a librarian was ranked above the benchmark but below that of other professions an indication that librarians are not within the class of the 'learned'. This finding is in conformity with that of Wilkinson and Harrison (2001), which shows that students considerably underestimated the level of education that is required to be a librarian. They also underestimated librarians' average starting salary and rated the profession social status and prospect to be lower compared to other professions. The finding also revealed that the respondents do not believe that librarians require a university degree to do their job. This is built on the premise that librarians job is less challenging when compared with other professions. This assumption no doubt affirms Shaw (2010) finding that librarians skills and duties were under-reported and overshadowed by the value of the libraries and that of Seminelli (2016) who reported that library users are not aware of the operations librarians do behind the scene.

On the perceived roles of public libraries and librarians, data in table 4 show that the respondents affirm to all the items and thus all the items had positive scores. The finding therefore is the social perception of the roles of public libraries and librarians as societal catalyst of transformation. The outcome of the interview further buttressed the data obtained through the questionnaires as the respondents actually appreciated the relevance of public libraries as they stated that they help to engage the youth for their study, career development and community integration. This finding is in conformity with that of Bull (2015) who opined that public libraries role is to support all group of users and providing access to digital skills and services and that of Ubale (2018) who explained that world-wide, libraries ensure that information and the skills to use it are available to everyone thereby making critical institution for all in the digital age. Libraries provide information and communication technology (ICT) infrastructure, help people develop the capacity to effectively use information and preserve information thereby ensuring continual access to future generations.

On the factors that can positively influence the social perception of public libraries and librarians image, the data analyzed as displayed in table 5 reveal that of the 7 items listed, 4 were in the positive. These are: Librarians need to work on their nagging and nonchalant attitude to rendering services; As information professional, librarians need to be innovative and creative to be able to keep up with technology, The attitude and dressing patterns of some librarians do not make them approachable and Public libraries should solicit for more funds to tackle the problem of inadequate facilities and resources. While the respondents disagree that Libraries and librarians are no longer needed because of the availability of the internet, Librarianship as a profession is not as lucrative as other professions and that some librarians have poor communication and public relations skills. This implies that the four accepted items will have positive influence on social perception of librarians' image as catalyst of transformation if applied to the latter in public libraries.

The disagreement of respondents on the assertion that Libraries and librarians are no longer needed because of the availability of the internet, nullifies the finding of Chin, Kim and Teck (2008) who in their study revealed that the low ranking of public library and librarians is due to the birth of the internet as it will eventually replace the libraries. Clark (2010) argued that if physical libraries were truly obsolete and unneeded in the internet age, public usage statistics

would have upheld the theory long time ago instead there have been recorded continued usage, indicating that the roles of the libraries are still been felt by the communities they serve for physical materials freely available meeting spaces and community related event.

The result also shows that the attitude and dressing patterns of some librarians do not make them approachable. This implies that librarians' dressing and behavioral approach have great influence or effect on users' perception and approachability in a service setting. This finding further support the outcome of the research conducted by Bonnet and McAlexander (2013) on image rating to assess how visibly salient characteristics can influence library users perception of librarians' approachability, it was discovered that factors associated with affect and attire like facial expression, direction of gaze, formality of clothing and clothing colour influenced perception of approachability. The conclusion is that librarians' behavior matters a lot with a lay down treatment as it may increase or decrease perception approachability and an attentive and welcoming environment is essential to encouraging users to engage with librarians. As a matter of fact, librarian as service providers and social workers it behooves they stay awake of how they present themselves to the public and develop this instinct that keeps them abreast as to knowing public preconceived notion of how they should look that will enhance their service provision.

On the hull hypothesis tested, it was established that there is statistical significant correlation between the social perception of the occupational status of librarians and perceived roles of public libraries ( $r = .211$  @ sig level  $p < 0.05$ ). The implication is that there is significant relationship between social perception of librarians and perceived roles of public libraries. It is on this ground that the null hypothesis which is in the contrary is rejected

## **5.1. Conclusion and recommendations**

In an era of ICT and information growing in a geometrical proportion, the public library assumes the position of the people's university and the librarians the driving hub of information accessibility. A position that makes the public library a centre for providing timely, accurate and up-to-date and reliable information to it users; providing a wide range of materials to support the educational and social needs of all members of the community regardless of race, nationality, age, gender, religion, language, disability, economic and educational status and educational attainment. In this situation, the public library acts as a positive catalyst of transformation in the

community. This development has made public libraries and librarians to focus on the relationship that determine human potentiality and opportunities within the communities they serve which goes beyond the boundary of the traditional function of the public library as a transformation agent and fore-runner advocate of information accessibility for all.

Be that as it may, this study has revealed that public libraries and librarians ought to go extra mile and think outside the box as to modifying their attitude and behavior so as to win the heart of their public as to a larger extent, the public underestimate their level of competency as regards training as well as their professionalism when compared with other professions. It is against this backdrop that the following recommendations are made:

- There is need for a total re-orientation for both the librarians and community of users by creating awareness and sensitization through community based programmes that will not only serve them but will also allow them participate. By so doing, the very concept, need, relevance and ideology behind librarianship as a profession will be engraved in their minds.
- One is addressed as he dresses. The assertion is that librarians working in public libraries should add pep to improving their self-image through effective service delivery, positive attitude towards the job, development of high emotional intelligence, proper and effective communication, good user relationship and corporate dressing pattern.
- Professional bodies should see it as a collective responsibility to launder the image of the profession. This they can achieve through the creation of both community and national based awareness on the roles of public libraries and librarians in community building and national development so as to be accorded their due recognition as the driving access to knowledge and more.
- Library schools need to invest more knowledge than they are currently doing looking at the general fading importance of libraries in the minds of the people. This is a clarion call that needs prompt attention so as to stop breeding graduates in librarianship who do not understand the principles of librarianship as a service oriented profession either by re-visiting the curriculum on general ethics and public relations courses or have practicing professional librarians teach some practical relational courses. This has become necessary

as stitch in time saves nine. The bottom line is that librarians should work to keep their reputation above reproach and conduct themselves to win public respect and recognition.

- As a follow up to the above, going by the type of rigorous trainings that librarians are exposed to in library schools, librarians should make effort to demonstrate high level of professionalism in discharging their duties, show class and value while rendering services to the community they serve.
- This is a collective responsibility for both the government, professional bodies, public libraries management and librarians to work as to ensuring that adequate funds are made readily available for the acquisition of information resources, provision of facilities and equipment so as to have the public libraries well equipped as to be well positioned to actively engage and involve all sections of the community in the delivery and evaluation of library services.
- In personnel management, training and re-training of staff in line with global best practices is seen as a necessity if a staff is expected to produce optimally. In public libraries, the situation should not be different in an era of information and communication technology. The advice therefore is that public libraries management boards should take the initiative and seize the opportunities of the digital age by training and re-training the library staff in information and communication technology and this will help maintain the long standing reputation of the profession through quality service delivery.
- On a lighter mood, librarians of any sort should learn to work as a team. The idea of seeing a librarian working in a public library as inferior to an academic librarian or any other, should be erased from the minds of some librarians. The professional bodies should be unifying factors and should from time to time organize, seminars, conferences and workshops where librarians of all sort will meet and rob minds together and share their experiences for better service delivery.

On a final note, in the words of Fister (2012) public library librarians are advised to resist the displacement of their image, values and roles by bringing the desired transformation in the society and even in the workplace. They should develop a very high self-esteem and hold their heads so high in the mist of professional colleagues and professionals in other fields.

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