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# THE LIBRARIAN IN THE DIGITAL AGE: A PREFERRED NOMENCLATURE, PERCEPTIONS OF ACADEMIC LIBRARIANS IN IMO STATE NIGERIA.

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# THE LIBRARIAN IN THE DIGITAL AGE: A PREFERRED NOMENCLATURE, PERCEPTIONS OF ACADEMIC LIBRARIANS IN IMO STATE NIGERIA.

## **Abstract**

*Nomenclature is a system of names or terms or the rules for forming these terms in a particular field of arts or sciences. It has a far-reaching impact on the mind. It also defines the status of positions. Therefore changes in librarians' professional identity as a result of increased use of new technology in the performance of their routine chores seem, however, inevitable. Such application generates changes in the context of their work and ultimately necessitates changes in professional identity. This article explored various changing roles of the librarian in this digital age. It also identified the nomenclatures professional librarians in Imo State would prefer to be identified with and also gave some reasons they would favor such nomenclature. Descriptive survey research method was employed to investigate a total population of 68 professional librarians in Imo State. The structured questionnaire was used to collect data for the research out of which 57 representing 83.8% were duly filled and returned for analysis. Findings revealed that professional librarians in Imo State would want a change in nomenclature. The study also identified some of the nomenclatures they would prefer. It discovered that librarian, Information manager, information scientist and information professional are some of the nomenclatures they prefer. Finally, they gave reasons on why they prefer such nomenclatures.*

**Keywords:** Nomenclature, Librarians, Professional Librarians, Preferred, Imo State.

## **Introduction**

The librarian is synonymous with knowledge dissemination. This is because of librarians process, organize and disseminate knowledge through various library processes such as cataloguing, and classification, indexing, selective dissemination of information, current awareness services, etc. However, technological changes in the world have changed the way libraries work. Before the emergence of technology, librarians were perceived as bookkeepers. According to the Online Computer Library Catalogue [OCLC], (2005), public perceptions of librarians, however, are tied to the outdated understanding of librarians as keepers of the books. In line with this statement, Lahm, (1994) and Fagan,(2002) observe that the public does not fully grasp the librarian's function or what the means to be an expert in this area. It is often the assumption of people that librarians do not need broad education and that they should not be considered professionals in data retrieval, data gathering, and processing and that they are viewed as educated clerks who are responsible for the dissemination and transmission of books. This view may have been considered valid in times past when librarians watched over books with limited or closed access.

With technological advancements and the changing learning environment, librarians are providing borderless information services. According to Obadare (n.d), digital information is changing the role of librarians radically: No longer are they to wait for students to ask for assistance in finding information in a place called a library. Their new role makes it imperative for them to provide services and instructions regardless of location, time or format. Consequently, the digital age has changed librarians from the custodian of books to thoroughbred information experts who now provide services to users in diverse locations. This transformation is precipitated by changes in the way clients are accessing, retrieving and using information. As a result, librarians are now providing as well as promoting access, guidance, and training to both physical and electronic materials housed outside and in an online environment. They ensure that there is an active and efficient flow of information from the generators to the users of information in the digital environment (Obadare, n.d). With this paradigm shift in librarians' roles, it is evident that the goal post has changed regarding service delivery thus demystifying the "custodian" notion. Hence, this study seeks to ascertain the views of librarians in Imo state on a preferred nomenclature in the digital age.

### **Objectives**

1. To identify the changing roles of librarians in the digital age
2. To ascertain a preferred nomenclature for librarians in the digital age
3. To find out reasons for the preferred nomenclature.

### **Literature review.**

In a digital age, academic researchers are increasingly referring to online sources to begin their research journey. Therefore with such significant change underway, it is essential that the role of librarians is evolving to keep up with this shift in research behavior. Librarians foresee their role growing to that of a consultant and planner, where they facilitate the delivery of end-user information through the corporate network

Melchiona (2004), emphasizes that the role of librarians has developed to that of educators, facilitators, and collaborators, with a robust customer-oriented accent. New and innovative information resources and tools, development in the network which empower the end-user have imposed librarians to be more flexible and creative to work out approximate solutions and deal with a profession which was changing almost every day under their hands. Sarasvathy; Nambratha and Giddarch (2012) were of the view that the responsibility of the librarian and information scientist has increased regarding packaging and repackaging of information, electronic publishing, advising users about the strategy to identify relevant electronic sources. They further state that librarians have to change and acquire more skills and roles, such as leadership roles and managerial skills, evaluation of digital resources, proactive information professional role and information literacy programme.

Sathe, (2016) posits that in the digital era, the role of Librarian changed from the traditional role and that librarians need to be aware of the implications of the changes. The role of the Librarian is evolving as a network specialist, information broker, system designer and knowledge manager, webmaster, intranet manager, content manager, E-resource manager, etc. Surywanshi (2015) also described the role of librarians in the following ways: Information Broker, Educator, Researcher: Furthermore. Bharathi (2012) reported the following as roles of library professionals in the present digital knowledge society: subject expert, global information provider, resource manager, creator, preservator, navigational guide, communicator, financial manager, time managers, legal advisor, personnel manager, tech-savvy, mentor and leader.

Along the same line, the application of information and communication technology in libraries has changed librarians' working patterns as well as the traditional name "Librarian." With this change, the nomenclature of library professionals has also changed. Nomenclature has a far-reaching impact on the mind. It also defines the status of positions. Nomenclature is a system of names or terms or the rules for forming these terms in a particular field of arts or sciences. An excellent and new name can have a profound influence. Nomenclature change reflects not only a difference in what librarians are called and known as but more importantly what our profession which is now driven by technology has assumed. It would appear that nomenclature change is to state the obvious the 'confirmation' of the name by which we were earlier 'baptized' (Nwosu and Nwokocha, 2015). Mustafa and Ansari (2012) opine that this change has brought new nomenclatures including digital librarian, digital library operations officer, cybrarian, information scientist, knowledge manager, library technologist, and IT resource manager.

Dhar (2018) posits that the nomenclature of librarians has changed from custodians of stored books to documentation officer, knowledge managers, information officers, information scientists, information managers and information specialists due to various developments in information technologies and their applications in libraries. According to Nicholas, Debrowolski, and Huntington (2000), "terminology drives our thinking and, most importantly, the perception of the people we serve.

In the same vein, Firebaugh (1996) suggests that it is better not to use the librarian nomenclature anymore as most clients will prefer the information broker nomenclature while Singer (1997) was of the opinion that librarians who have changed their nomenclature to information specialist become computer technocrats empowered by technology, but they do not advance the process of acquiring information.

Similarly, changes in librarians' professional identity as a result of increased use of new technology in the performance of their routine chores seem, however, inevitable. Such application generates changes in the context of their work and ultimately necessitates changes in professional identity. The library and information science profession have increasingly witnessed radical transformations over the years as a result of the introduction of ICT. Therefore new technical terms and buzzwords are emerging to reflect the changing scenario. (Nwosu and

Nwokocha, 2015:103). According to Mustafa and Ansari (2012:1), nomenclature has an impact on our minds. It defines the status of a job and also a new name makes an impression. On the other hand, Hutchins and Travis (2000) posit that the professional librarianship nomenclature carries with it no social status or power of attractiveness and that if ever there were a profession badly in need of re-inventing itself this is the one.

Prins and De Gier (1992) state that in 1991, the International Federation of Library Associations and Institutions (IFLA) conducted a global study on the image and status of librarians. The study found that 82 percent of the survey respondents were convinced that the librarian's profession suffered from low status. Finally, it was concluded that a new title should be given to the profession to provide it with a facelift and librarianship does not solve the problem entirely.

According to Adams (2000) and Tancheva (2005), the perception of the librarian as an old, rule-obsessed spinster, with glasses on her nose and her hair in a bun remains a widely recognizable signifier in popular culture. A newspaper article from the U.S. vividly captures this image, even if only to dispute it: “Librarians? Aren’t they supposed to be bespectacled women with a love of classic books and a perpetual annoyance with talkative patrons – the ultimate humorless shushers?” (Jesella, 2007). For Seale (2008), librarians are seen as an old maid, the policeman, a parody, the inept and the hero/ine.

Majid and Haider (2008) investigated the perceptions of public and academic library users regarding doctors, accountants, lawyers, information technology specialists, librarians, and teachers. The findings revealed that library users do not have a positive image of librarianship despite the technological innovations introduced to Singapore libraries. The majority of the users ranked the librarians lower regarding status, educational requirements, computing knowledge, salaries, and usefulness in society compared to the examined professions. As shown, not even the technological advances were able to change and promote a positive image for librarians.

Similarly, Aharony (2006) investigated the perceptions of the first-year students enrolled in three different programs of higher education in Israel regarding both the librarian and the information scientist. The results indicated that students ranked the professional image of an information scientist higher than that of the librarian.

Arising from the above, it is evident that previous studies have advocated for a change in nomenclature as a result of the changing roles librarians have played in the current electronic dispensation. Hence, this article attempts to elicit the views of librarians in Imo State Nigeria on a preferred nomenclature and reasons if any on why they prefer a change.

## **Methodology**

The study made use of descriptive survey using the questionnaire to collect data from 68 professional Librarians in Imo State. The questionnaire was designed using a four point likert scale and out of the 68 questionnaires, 57 copies representing 83.8% were returned and found usable.

## Result

Data were analyzed using descriptive statistics. Mean values were employed to present data. The following was used in calculating the mean from the responses based on Likert scale: Strongly Agree = 4; Agree = 3; Disagree = 2; Strongly Disagree = 1. The decision to accept or reject any statement of the objectives were based on the decision rule for each table of the objectives.

### Level of agreement of the following changing roles of librarians.

The following were identified as the changing roles of librarians in Imo State.

S/ N	Roles of Librarians	SA	A	D	SD	Total	Mean	Decision
A	Librarians are information consultants	40	17	-	-	57	3.70	Significant
B	Librarians are knowledge managers	37	20	-	-	57	3.64	Significant
C	Librarians engage in information literacy campaigns	42	15	-	-	57	3.73	Significant
D	Librarians provide research data management	25	32	-	-	57	3.43	Not Significant
E	Librarians support digital scholarship	20	21	10	6	57	2.96	Not Significant
F	Librarians promote open access to resources	35	22	-	-	57	3.61	Significant
G	Librarians are cybrarians	29	20	6	2	57	3.33	Not Significant
H	Librarians attract users to the library through innovative services and practices	35	22	-	-	57	3.61	Significant
I	Librarians utilize social media to market library products and services	38	19	-	-	57	3.66	Significant
J	Librarians engage with the community to provide a range of activities across all ages	24	27	6	-	57	3.31	Not significant
	<b>Significant mean value</b>	<b>3.49</b>						

**Decision Rule: 3.49**

Analysis of data showed that the mean response on the changing roles of librarians was high in the following areas: Librarians are information consultants (3.70), Librarians are knowledge managers (3.64), Librarians engage in information literacy campaigns (3.73), Librarians promote open access to resources (3.61), Librarians attract users to the library through innovative services and practices (3.61) and Librarians utilize social media to market library products and services (3.66) However, the mean response on the changing roles of librarians were low on Librarians provide research data management (3.43) Librarians support digital scholarship (2.96), Librarians are cybrarians (3.33), and Librarians engage with the community to provide a range of activities across all ages (3.31).

### **Nomenclatures professional Librarians would prefer**

The following Nomenclatures were identified as being preferred by Professional librarians in Imo State.

S/N	Preferred Nomenclature	SA	A	D	SD	Total	Mean	Decision
A	Librarian	25	19	7	6	57	3.10	Significant
B	Information broker	14	20	11	12	57	2.63	Not Significant
C	Cybrarian	10	20	10	17	57	2.40	Not Significant
D	Information manager	20	27	5	5	57	3.08	Significant
E	Information architect	12	20	18	7	57	2.64	Not Significant
F	Knowledge manager	15	18	10	14	57	2.59	Not Significant
G	Research Data Manager	12	22	8	15	57	2.54	Not Significant
H	Content analyst	5	28	16	8	57	2.52	Not Significant
I	Information scientist	20	24	7	6	57	3.01	Significant
J	Information professional	28	19	10	-	57	3.31	Significant
	<b>Significant mean value</b>	<b>2.78</b>						

### **Decision Rule: 2.78**

Analysis of data revealed that the mean response on Preferred Nomenclature by professional librarians in Imo State was high in the following areas: Librarian (3.10), Information manager (3.08), Information scientist (3.01), Information professional (3.31). However, the mean response on Preferred Nomenclature by professional librarians in Imo State was low in Information broker (2.63), Cybrarian (2.40), Information architect (2.64), Knowledge manager (2.59), Research Data Manager (2.54) and Content analyst (2.52).



## Why the nomenclature listed above

The following reasons were identified as influencing their choice of nomenclature.

S/N	Reason for the preference	SA	A	D	SD	Total	Mean	Decision	
a	The nomenclature is in line with changing roles	28	16	13	-	57	3.26	Significant	
b	New name makes an impression	19	30	8	-	57	3.19	Significant	
c	It defines the status of a job	39	18	-	-	57	3.68	Significant	
d	The “Librarian” nomenclature has no social status	7	10	32	8	57	2.28	Not Significant	
e	The nomenclature radiates authority	24	22	8	3	57	3.17	Significant	
f	Librarian nomenclature suffers from low status	6	19	24	8	57	2.40	Not Significant	
g	The image of a librarian is seen as a woman’s work	9	20	18	10	57	2.49	Not Significant	
h	The image of the librarian is viewed in the negative	7	11	28	11	57	2.24	Not Significant	
i	The nomenclature is attractive	16	30	8	3	57	3.03	Significant	
	<b>Significant mean value</b>	<b>2.86</b>							

### Decision Rule: 2.86

Analysis of data indicated that the mean response on reasons for the Preferred Nomenclature by professional librarians in Imo State was high in the following areas: The nomenclature is in line with changing roles (3.26), New name makes an impression (3.19), It defines the status of a job (3.68), the nomenclature radiates authority (3.17) and that the nomenclature is attractive (3.03). However, the mean response on the reasons for the Preferred Nomenclature by professional librarians in Imo State were low in Librarian’s nomenclature has no social status (2.28), Librarian nomenclature suffers from low status (2.40), The image of a librarian is seen as a woman’s work (2.49) and The image of the librarian is viewed in the negative (2.24).

### Discussion.

The findings of the study revealed the level of agreement between the changing roles of the librarian. This finding proves that the role of librarians has changed from being keepers of the book to information consultants. These changes may be as a result of technological innovations which are employed in the library in the dissemination of its services and products.

The study also discovered various nomenclatures professional librarians in Imo State Nigeria would prefer. Librarian, information manager, information scientist and information professional was identified as some of the nomenclatures they will prefer to be addressed. This may be due to

the fact that the changing roles of the librarian has changed from being only keepers of book and also librarian as an old, rule-obsessed spinster, with glasses on her nose and her hair in a bun to that of information providers and thoroughbred information experts who now provide services to users in diverse locations due to the application of information and communication technology in libraries.

Finally, the study also gives some reasons why professional librarians in Imo State would prefer such nomenclatures to include, that the nomenclature is in line with changing roles, the new name makes an impression, it defines the status of a job, it radiates authority and that the nomenclature is attractive. Therefore it behooves professional librarians in Imo State to live up to their new roles as information providers and information experts who provide information and services to users in diverse location.

### **Conclusion**

Nomenclature is a system of names or terms or the rules for forming these terms in a particular field of arts or sciences. It has a far-reaching impact on the mind. It also defines the status of positions. Therefore changes in librarians' professional identity as a result of increased use of new technology in the performance of their routine chores seem, however, inevitable. Such application generates changes in the context of their work and ultimately necessitates changes in professional identity. The professional librarians in Imo State have identified some of the nomenclatures they will prefer due to the changing roles of librarians in this digital age. Be that as it may despite their changing roles the still want the Librarian" nomenclature.

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