

**STRATEGIC APPROACH TO NETWORKING AND PROMOTION OF
INFORMATION PRODUCTS AND SERVICES IN NIGERIAN UNIVERSITY
LIBRARIES: WITH FOCUS TO UNIVERSITY LIBRARIES IN IMO STATE NIGERIA**

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ABSTRACT: *Library networking entails sharing the resources of a library with users of other libraries. This article explored various resources and services shared between university libraries in Imo State. It also identified the rationale for the networking. Also it identified some networking tools/ platforms utilized in the course of the networking. The study gave some benefits derived towards improving information resources and services through networking. Finally it identified some of the factors hindering effective information resources and services networking and promotion. Descriptive survey research method was employed to investigate a total population of 49 academic librarians in university libraries in Imo State. The structured questionnaire was used to collect data for the research of which the totality of the questionnaire representing 100% were duly filled and returned for analysis. Findings revealed the resources and services that were networked and shared. It also revealed the rationale behind the networking and promotion of information resources and services. The findings discovered some of the tools used in the networking and promotion of the information resources. The study also identified some benefits towards improving networking and promotion of information resources and services finally the study revealed the factors hindering effective networking and promotion of information resources and services.*

KEYWORDS: networking, information products, information, library, university, promotion

INTRODUCTION

Information implies data, facts, imaginations, ideas, opinions and cultural values in a society of media including print, audiovisual materials, and electronic formats. In a library situation, information is all-encompassing regarding personal knowledge, external services which include referrals, interlibrary loans, and data banks. In the 21st century, the explosion of information from all sources and various formats are overwhelming. The digital era characterized by new technologies for creation, search, retrieval, dissemination, use and sharing of information has molded new sets of information users who are technology-savvy and somewhat satisfied with the internet alone as their information source. Thus, as more advances are made in digital technology, libraries are increasingly tilting towards a zone of irrelevance and abandonment. The onus lies with libraries to lift their heads above the water and harness these technologies to their advantage

for relevance sake. On a brighter note, Umeozor (2019) opine that the many arrays of information in the web shared through communication technologies are mixed with just anything and consequently, there is a mismatch with what is available and what is needed. Therefore, the library has an opportunity to retain its traditional role of providing accurate information. Akparobore (2015) opine that if information is the raw material for the information profession, then technology promotes them by facilitating the creation, storage and distribution of information. Networking of libraries gets more feasible with technology through convenient and speedy creation and distribution of information across member libraries. Haber (2011) rightfully observes that while book provision was a lone function for libraries for the past centuries, their offerings have evolved with digital technology to meet the changing needs of patrons. The problem of inadequate fund, together with the proliferation of information has placed libraries in a dilemma. This situation, therefore, has forced libraries all over the world to resort to resource sharing to serve the information needs of their users. Thus it becomes imperative as a result of the present information explosion that there is a need for networking to promote information products and services in Nigerian university libraries.

Objectives of the study

The broad objective of this study is to access the approaches academic libraries in Imo state engage in the networking and promotion of information products and services and the specific goals include

1. To identify the resources and services shared by University libraries in Nigeria
2. To determine the rational for the networking and promotion in University Libraries in Nigeria.
3. To identify the tools used in the networking and promotion of information products and services
4. To determine how networking and promotion has improved the resources and services of the University library.
5. To identify the factors hindering networking and promotion of resources and services in University Libraries in Imo State.

LITERATURE REVIEW

Library networking, also known as resource sharing, library linkages, library association, library consortia, interlibrary loan, and library cooperation in the digital age, is the sharing of a library's resources with users of other libraries (Odini, 1991; Ani and Owoeye, 2010). According to Sujatha (2000), it is an activity in which a group of libraries has come together and entered into some kind of structured agreement for the purpose of sharing the resources of each other's content, functions, facilities, and staff for their mutual benefit, recognizing that the highest amount of the best

information can be given only through library networking. It is the mechanism by which the services of a group of network libraries are made accessible to the total number of people who are qualified to use all of the libraries in the group. According to Jebarai and Devadoss (2004), a library network is a set of libraries that have come together under some kind of arrangement to help each other meet the information needs of their patrons.

The aim of information networking in Nigerian university libraries is to encourage resource sharing among members by coordinating efforts for appropriate collection creation and avoiding unnecessary duplication. Since no library can ever be self-sufficient or boast of having all the resources required by its users, resource sharing is the most significant responsibility of libraries worldwide, according to Abubakar (2007). Individual libraries have discovered that they can no longer be self-sufficient in terms of information services, and that it is impossible to procure all of the materials needed by their patrons, regardless of their financial resources. Given this, local and national collaboration and partnership have become unavoidable for all libraries.

Usman (2006) exerts that three fundamental trends in modern society contribute to the need for resource sharing: the growth of all types of literature, the emphasis on knowledge to allow society to work effectively, and the availability of technology. Usman goes on to say that the value of knowledge networking in libraries cannot be overstated because it enables libraries and their users to access a wide range of resources as well as other facilities that they would not have had access to otherwise. Ali and Owioye (2010) were of the view that resource sharing among libraries has become the universal desire and practice; the increase in the size of library information resources; the increasing costs of acquiring and processing them, the need for trained personnel, storage space and the growing demands by users are motivating factors for libraries to network in order to share books, journals, preprints, catalogues, list of publications, newsletters, policy decisions, current events and newsflash.

Academic libraries may use a variety of promotional resources to advertise their services and goods, according to Fisher and Pride (2006), including library websites, blogs, and podcasts, interactive media, and e-mail lists. Printed materials such as giveaways, posters, and handouts; library publications, brochures, web 2.0 applications, displays, and direct mails; and events such as orientation tours and workshops.

Matthews (2009), observe that a good website helps to put resources and goods together in a unique way because it serves as a direct connection between the library and its individual customers, as well as the services it is promoting. It also serves as a means of contact with the intended audience. Librarians now use a group of software applications to keep up with emerging information technology, (Hinchliffe and Leon, 2011). These applications include blog, podcasting, and wikis, as well as media-sharing platforms like Flickr and YouTube and social networking sites like Facebook and Twitter to advertise their goods and services. Islam and Habiba (2015), opine that

social networking sites were used by several university libraries and were thought to be beneficial in terms of promoting library facilities and engaging with students.

However, networking activities among Nigerian university libraries remain a mirage, as all attempts at efficient resource sharing appear to have failed. The National Union Catalogue was established in 1963, and the National Bibliography was established in 1974, with up to 85 libraries sending lists of their collections to the National Library of Nigeria. However, due to a lack of necessary infrastructure, a lack of cooperation, and poor communication, these efforts were not sustainable (Ilo, 2008). According to Ubogu (1992), network failure is caused by a lack of networking policy, poor library automation, lack of a union catalogue, insufficient photocopying services, insufficient funds, slow document delivery, and poor communication infrastructure. Fund insufficiency, according to Nwalo (2006), is the root of failure in the adoption of cooperative resource sharing among libraries.

Inter-library cooperation is not foreign to Nigerian libraries; most have ideas about what could be achieved," writes Oke (1977), "but no machinery has been put to work to ensure a systematic and cooperative intervention." Furthermore, the Nigerian government has not increased its efforts to encourage knowledge as a critical component for the country's survival. The Nigerian Government has not seen information as a national resource. According to Blakes (2006), most libraries in Nigeria face numerous barriers to networking, including corruption, mismanagement of resources, inflation, library neglect, and failed institutions.

METHODOLOGY

The study made use of descriptive survey using the questionnaire to collect data from university Librarians in Imo State. The questionnaire was designed using a four point likert scale and out of the 49 questionnaires, all were returned representing 100% while 48 was 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 resources and services shared between libraries

The following were identified as the resources and services shared between university libraries in Imo State.

S/N	Resources and services shared	SA	A	D	SD	Mean	Decision
a	monographs	3	21	6	2	2.28	Not significant
b	Journals	9	20	5	1	2.74	Significant
c	Newspapers and magazines	5	21	6	1	2.46	Not significant
d	Institutional outputs (theses and dissertations)	9	19	6	3	2.76	Significant
e	catalogue	4	14	11	4	2.15	Not significant
f	Reference materials	9	20	5	1	2.74	Significant
g	Online resources	12	19	4	1	2.92	Significant
h	Books/journals orders and acquisition	6	16	5	2	2.12	Not significant
i	Database search	9	19	4	1	2.61	Significant
j	Technical services	3	16	11	2	2.15	Not significant
k	OPAC	7	16	10	1	2.48	Not significant
Significant mean value		2.5					

Decision Rule: 2.5

Analysis of data showed that the mean response on the resources and services shared between university libraries in Imo State was high in the following areas: Journals (2.78), Institutional outputs (theses and dissertations) (2.76), Reference materials (2.74), online resources (2.92), Database search (2.61). However, the mean response on the resources and services shared were low on Monographs (2.28), newspapers and magazines (2.46), Catalogue (2.15), Books/Journal orders and acquisition (2.12), Technical services (2.15) and OPAC (2.48).

Rationale for the networking and promotion of information resources

The following were identified as the rational for the networking of resources and services

S/N	Rationale for networking and promotion of information resources	SA	A	D	SD	Mean	Decision
a	Changing and diverse user information needs	12	22	1	1	3.0	Significant
b	Need to remain relevant in the face of emerging technology	11	25	-	-	3.05	Significant
c	Diminishing funds for libraries	11	20	3	-	2.82	Not Significant
d	High cost of information materials	12	18	6	-	2.82	Not Significant
e	Information explosion	9	21	5	-	2.79	Not Significant
	Problems of foreign exchange	8	22	4	-	2.71	Not Significant
g	Limited space for accommodating resources	5	17	10	2	2.38	Not Significant
h	Need for increased availability and accessibility of information sources	17	17	2	1	3.17	Significant
Significant mean value		2.84					

Decision Rule: 2.48

Analysis of data revealed that the mean response on the rationale for sharing of resources and services was high in the following areas: Changing and diverse user information needs (3.0), Need to remain relevant in the face of emerging technology (3.05), Need for increased availability and accessibility of information sources (3.17) whereas the are low in the following areas: Diminishing funds for libraries (2.82), High cost of information materials (2.82), Information explosion (2.79), Problems of foreign exchange (2.71) and Limited space for accommodating resources (2.38).

Networking tools/platforms for networking

The following were identified the networking tools/platforms for sharing

S/N	Tools for networking and promotion of information resources	SA	A	D	SD	Mean	Decision
a	Inter- library loan	17	14	3	-	2.97	Significant
b	Photocopying	15	18	1	1	3.0	Significant
c	Circulation (Read and keep)	11	19	3	2	2.79	Significant
d	Email	15	20	2	-	3.17	Significant
e	Social media	12	20	2	1	2.89	Significant
f	Bequest	5	19	6	2	2.23	Not Significant
g	Reference services	8	24	1	-	2.71	Not Significant
h	Library website	11	21	1	-	2.79	Significant
i	Blogs and podcasts	12	14	6	2	2.56	Not Significant
j	Union catalogue	9	15	9	-	2.53	Not Significant
k	Web 2.0 application	7	16	9	-	2.41	Not Significant
l	Library workshops	9	22	4	-	2.82	Significant
m	Seminars and conferences	12	17	5	-	2.79	Significant
	Significant mean value	2.74					

Decision Rule: 2.74

Analysis of data indicated that the mean response on networking tools/platforms for sharing of resources and services in university libraries in Imo State was high in the following areas: Inter-library loan (2.97), Photocopying (3.0), Circulation (Read and keep) (2.79), Email (3.17), Social media (2.89), Library website (2.79), Library workshops (2.82), Seminars and conferences (2.79). However, the mean response on the tools for sharing were low in Bequest (2.23), Reference services (2.71), Blogs and podcasts (2.56), Union catalogue (2.53) and Web 2.0 application (2.41)

Towards improving the resources and services of the library through networking

The following were identified as the benefits towards improving the resources and services of your library through networking

S/N	Benefits towards improving the resources and services	SA	A	D	SD	Mean	Decision
a	Increase in use/patronage of the library	20	13	1	-	3.10	Significant
b	Visits/request for information by outside users	12	20	1	-	2.82	Not significant
c	Request for IT attachment/experience	10	18	-	3	2.48	Not significant
d	Increased demand for digital services	18	11	4	-	2.89	Significant
e	Responses from library social media platforms	16	15	2	-	2.89	Significant
Significant mean value		2.83					

Decision Rule: 2.83

Analysis of data showed that the mean response on how the resources and services of the library has improved as a result of networking was high in the following areas: Increase in use/patronage of the library (3.10), Increased demand for digital services (2.89), Responses from library social media platforms (2.89) whereas it showed a low response in Visits/request for information by outside users (2.82) and Request for IT attachment/experience (2.48).

Factors hindering networking and promotion of resources

The following were identified as factors hindering networking and promotion of resources and services in University libraries.

S/N	Factors hindering networking and promotion of resources	SA	A	D	SD	Mean	Decision
a	Lack of infrastructure	23	10	1	-	3.17	Significant
b	Lack of cooperation	14	14	4	-	2.71	Significant
c	Poor communication infrastructure	13	15	4	-	2.69	Significant
d	Lack of networking policy	14	19	1	-	2.94	Significant
e	Poor library automation	16	13	4	-	2.84	Significant
f	Insufficient funds	21	9	2	-	2.98	Significant
g	Insufficient photocopying services	12	9	9	-	2.38	Not significant
h	Slow document delivery	9	17	5	-	2.48	Not significant
i	Corruption	13	9	6	2	2.38	Not significant
j	Mismanagement of resources	11	13	7	2	2.53	Not significant
Significant mean value		2.65					

Decision Rule: 2.65

Analysis of data revealed that the mean response on the factors hindering networking and promotion of resources and services of the library was high in the following areas: Lack of infrastructure (3.17), Lack of cooperation (2.71), Poor communication infrastructure (2.69), Lack of networking policy (2.94), Poor library automation (2.84), Insufficient funds (2.98). However, it showed that it were low in insufficient photocopying services (2.38), slow document delivery (2.48), corruption (2.38) and mismanagement of resources (2.53).

DISCUSSION

The findings of the study revealed the Level of agreement of the resources and services shared between libraries. This finding shows that the libraries under study share some of their resources amongst them. This is in agreement with Abubakar (2007) opinion that no library can ever be self-sufficient or boast of having all the resources required by its users. Again those individual libraries have discovered that they can no longer be self-sufficient in terms of information services, and that it is impossible to procure all of the materials needed by their patrons, regardless of their financial resources.

The study discovered the rationale for the sharing of library resources and services between libraries to include, changing and diverse user information needs, need to remain relevant in the face of emerging technology, need for increased availability and accessibility of information sources. This is in tandem with Usman's exertion that three fundamental trends in modern society contribute to the need for resource sharing: the growth of all types of literature, the emphasis on knowledge to allow society to work effectively, and the availability of technology. Usman goes on to say that the value of knowledge networking in libraries cannot be overstated because it enables libraries and their users to access a wide range of resources as well as other facilities that they would not have had access to otherwise.

The study found out the tools employed by the libraries under study in the course of their sharing of resources to include Inter- library loan, Photocopying, Circulation (Read and keep), Email, Social media, Library website, Library workshops, Seminars and conferences. This agrees with Matthews' observation that a good website helps to put resources and goods together in a unique way because it serves as a direct connection between the library and its individual customers, as well as the services it is promoting. It also serves as a means of contact with the intended audience.

The study also discovered the benefits towards improving the resources and services of libraries under study as a result of networking to include increase in use/patronage of the library, increased demand for digital services, and responses from library social media platforms. This may be as a result of technological innovations which are employed in the library in the dissemination of its services and products.

Finally, the study identified various hindrances for effective networking for the promotion of information resources and services. Lack of infrastructure; lack of cooperation; poor communication infrastructure; lack of networking policy; poor library automation; insufficient

funds. This collaborates Ubogu (1992) and Nwalo (2006) statement that network failure is caused by a lack of networking policy, poor library automation, lack of a union catalogue, insufficient photocopying services, insufficient funds, slow document delivery, and poor communication infrastructure also that fund insufficiency is the root of failure in the adoption of cooperative resource sharing among libraries.

CONCLUSION

Information networking has increasingly become the trend in this information age and globalized world of this 21st century. Information networking, on the other hand, is exerting a great deal of impetus in the acquisition and utilization of information. As libraries and information centers operate in a shared environment, it offers them points of contacts, comparison, collaboration, and self-improvement. In this case, networking presents a platform for which user competitive services places the position of the information providers very valuable. The significant attributes of academic libraries, in particular, have been selection, acquisition, organization, and dissemination of information of all aspects of human endeavor for the benefit of their present and future patrons. Meeting users challenging environmental and societal requirements has been the new focus of academic libraries. To this end, user's demands have necessitated a shift in the way and method academic libraries meet their needs.

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