

Public Relations in libraries: a case study based on the staff of public libraries in Kalutara district

Kumara H.U.C.S, Nishanthi H.D.M., Konpola and L.D.M. Premarathna K.W.A.M.

kumara@sjp.ac.lk¹, nishanthi@sjp.ac.lk², anura@sjp.ac.lk³, mayurap@sjp.ac.lk⁴

Abstract

Public relations are a very important tool that all libraries use to enhance their strong public image. The public relations of the library staff were discussed under study. The communication tools used by library staff to enhance public relations were focused. The survey method was used in the study. The purposive sampling technique was employed in the study. The population was the staff of public libraries in the Kaluthara District. The staff of five libraries was selected as a sample. The questionnaire data were evaluated with descriptive statistics such as a percentage. This study reveals that strong public relations were not available between library staff and users. The libraries do not use formal communication systems in the libraries. It is envisaged that regular training and education programmes for library staff and users conducted by the library may support this task.

Keywords: *Library staff, Library users, Public library, Public relations, Social media*

Introduction

Library public relations are a thoughtful, planned, and continued strength to establish and continue mutual acceptance between the library and the users. According to the encyclopedia (World Book, 2002), Public relations is an activity aiming at improving communication and understanding between an organization or individual and one or more groups known as the public. Public relations activities help to provide a coordinated effort to communicate a positive image of the library and promote the availability of the library's materials, programs, and services. People have long been able to acquire dependable information, discuss ideas, and cooperate at public libraries (Wade, 2012). Libraries must create frequent communication tools with their key stakeholders to foster an awareness of their duties (Nwezeh, 2010). Effective public relations may enhance the library's image and position in the community. Public relations efforts should be aimed at promoting the library as a whole by successfully conveying its goals and mission to the public (Alansari, 2013)

Research Problem

Libraries need to consider how they connect with their audiences. Mi and Nesta (2006) noted that part of the problem for libraries was a lack of public relations skills.

There is a general belief that libraries are underutilized, and it is thought that users lack awareness about the services available (Ameen, 2015). Hence, more obstacles are faced by the library when they organize the library programs. As a result, they are not done effectively and efficiently.

Objectives of the Study

- To study the public relations of the library staff in the library.
- To identify the communication tools used by library staff to enhance public relations in the library.

Research methodology

The survey method was used in the study. The purposive sampling technique was employed in the study. This study mainly focused on questionnaires as data collection instruments and semi-structured interviews for validation of data collected through questionnaires. The population was public libraries in Kaluthara District.

There were three categories of public libraries as follows:

Table 1. Study Sample

Categories of Library	Number of Libraries
1. Grade One	03
2. Grade Two	07
3. Grade Three	55

The libraries were selected with the following criteria:

- The library should be at least ten years old
- The library should have at least five full-time staff members.

A total of 05 libraries was selected as a sample. Grade one =2 and Grade two =3. They were situated in Horana, Kaluthara, and Panadura municipalities, as well as Mathugama Pradeshiya Sabha. According to the sampling technique, the instruments for the 69 questionnaires were distributed to five public libraries in the Kaluthara District. Both questionnaire instruments were distributed to the library staff and users to collect primary data. The interview technique was done face-to-face at the library.

Method of Data Analysis

The questionnaire data were evaluated with descriptive statistics such as percentage distribution, mean, and frequency counts in excel. The data were presented in users' charts, bar charts and pie charts, etc. The study's interview data were transcribed and organized into themes and sub-themes.

Results and Discussion

Data analysis shows that 23 (33%) library staff respondents and 46 (67%) users participated in the study. There were more user participants than library staff participants in the study sample. According to the library staff public relationships among library staff, the majority of library staff respondents, 86.96% (20), agreed that they contribute to the events organized by the libraries. Three (13.04%) respondents said that was good. The

interview with the respondents confirmed that library staff were very willing to participate in the library activities that were assigned by the librarian. Library staff respondents were also asked to contribute to the work of other staff members. From the respondents, 95.65% (22) answered "Very Good" and 4.35% (1) answered, "Good". The results showed that 78.26% (18) respondents agreed that connection with the parent institution. Five respondents said "Good" to that fact. The interview with the respondents confirmed that some staff, preferring to work as a group and others working alone.

The majority, 82.61% (19) of the library staff respondents, said "Very Good" to the statement "connection with the users". This was followed by three respondents who said emphatically "Good" to that those who responded, 04.35 % (01) said they "do not know" about this. The number of respondents confirmed "Very Good" to the statement "connection with the user community" 91.30% (21) and those who said "Good" connection with the user communities 09.70% (02). The interview with the library staff respondents confirmed that "Very good contribution to the events organized by the libraries through the user community. Some users' behaviour was wrong. The interview with the user respondents confirmed that the library staff does not know me normally, and I do not know them profusely. They know my information needs are neutral and their contribution to finding the information is very satisfying.

This study shows majority 69.57% (16) of library staff respondents said "Very Good" to the statement "Public Relations between institute, association and community". Six (26.09%) respondents said that was good, 04.35 % (01) said they were "poor" the fact. The interview with the respondents confirmed that the connections with the National Library, book publishers, and library associations are good. Connections with the business community, the political community, other public libraries, and school libraries are usual.

The results of the communication tools to enhance public relations among library staff showed that 95.65% (22) of the respondents used that letter and suggestion box. Respondents used 91.30% (21) telephone/cell phone systems to develop the relations. The interviewees expressed their views as follows. "The library used mass communication – the internet, social activities–library user society activities, displaying activities – advertisements, posters, banners, and notes boards, inter-personal network–meetings, voice systems, telephone/cell phone systems, and email systems". The majority of staff respondents said that 52.17% (12) of the libraries do not hold meetings once a month. The interview with the library staff respondents confirmed that the libraries have not scheduled regular meetings in the libraries.

The results of the communication tools to enhance public relations among users confirmed that 50% (23) of the respondents used that Notice Board. The above communication tools are used by the libraries to develop public relations. According to social media, Facebook 69.57% (16) and WhatsApp 26.09% (06) are used by the libraries. Users confirmed that 54.35% (25) of Facebook and WhatsApp are used regularly.

Conclusion

The results reveal that there are poor public relations among library staff and users. There is cross-fire among library staff and library staff between users in the libraries. As a result, libraries continue to face challenges when performing and communicating in library activities. The user communities support organizing the library

activities. The libraries do not use formal communication systems in the libraries. Social media is used by the libraries for extended library activities and events. There were obstacles faced by the libraries when enhancing public relations.

Recommendations

The libraries organize training and education programs to enhance public relations and change staff attitudes. The libraries can create the post of Public Relations in the libraries. An experienced staff member should be allocated to the post responsible for performing public relations duties. The written public relations plan and developing library user society activities enhance public relations. The library should conduct meetings or discussion sessions once a month for the awareness of public relations. The public relations team should be created a process for formal activities in and out of the library to minimize the obstacles. This study recommends the library development of social media is very important to public relations. The library budget should be allocated the Public Relations activities and increase the usage of information technology to enhance public relations.

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