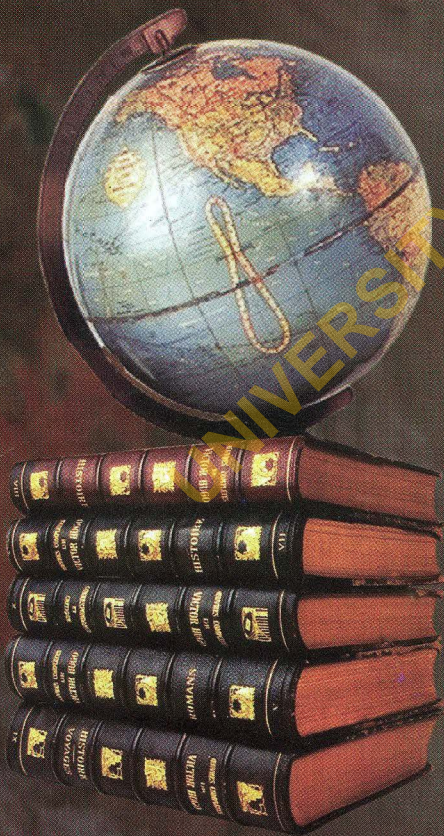


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# PROFESSIONALISM AND IMAGE LAUNDRY IN THE ICT AGE: A STUDY OF NIGERIAN LIBRARIANS

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## Abstract

This study investigated professionalism and image laundry in the ICT age of librarians in Nigeria with a view to encourage librarians to make more positive effort at becoming more relevant in society, give them the right perception their profession and proffer solution (s) that will properly launder the present image of the library profession in Nigeria. The survey design of research was adopted for the study and the simple random sampling technique was used in choosing the study population. The instruments for collecting data were the structured questionnaire, interview and focus group discussion. 350 copies of the questionnaire were administered to respondents while 336 were found valid for the study. The descriptive statistical method of analysis using mean and standard deviation was employed for data analysis. The study revealed that many Nigerian librarians were never interested in the profession before going in to study the course. Rather they studied librarianship because it was their last resort. Others studied Library Science because they were told to start with it, at entry and change to a better course later. The study recommended among other things that librarians should break out of the stereotype their predecessors left them, be proud of their profession and vigorously engage in self development thereby gaining new knowledge and imbibing current trends.

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**Keywords:** Professionalism, Librarianship, Image, Relevance, Laundry

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## Introduction

The image of a group of persons is born out of the image of the different individuals that make up that group. Individual member's perception of self will determine the collective perception of the group they belong to. A person's self esteem is a measure of the extent to which he approves of and accepts himself, and regards himself as praiseworthy, either absolutely, or in comparison with others. Self esteem determines one's health, one's looks, and one's success in one's profession as well as in one's private life (Cram 2008). The Nigerian Medical Association (NMA), Nigerian Bar Association (NBA) etc perceive themselves to be very intelligent group of persons. The lawyers call themselves

“Learned Friends” because they see themselves as possessing so much knowledge. What do Librarians perceive of themselves? Do they see themselves and live in the stereotypical image of a group of persons who are relegated to the background, who work, live in the midst of books, shelve books and assist people who want to use books as sign posts and not use the books, who do not have a proper social life, and are a constituent of old maids and tend to behave in ways which reinforce that image? In Nigeria, if you mention that you are a Librarian; to the layman, it does not click immediately what is meant. Librarians are not known due to the fact that they are not as extroverted as they should, even though they have greatly impacted the society. They do not project their worth and so, are not really visible. Probably, majority of librarians became one by accident and not as a fulfilled dream, thus they are not proud to be librarians.

Librarianship dates back to the history of libraries that is the history of written records when man began to develop methods of recording information. As a result there arose the need for proper storage, preservation and access; this need had to be met by some individuals who were intelligent enough to carry out this awesome assignment. According to Denise and David (2009) ancient librarians would have had high status in their societies because they were often scholars or priests and they would have been among the only people able to read. Even in the middle age when libraries and librarianship centered around the monasteries, and the monasteries were the only repositories of written knowledge, the monks were scribes and in most cases the chief scribe was placed in charge of the library (librarian). These monk librarians were accorded a high status. In essence they were recognized and highly respected for being in charge of the Knowledge base of their time. However, Technical development in the vertical library, i.e. the development of movable type printing presses caused a revolution in the transmission of written knowledge and in the growth of libraries. The further development of printing led to a higher literacy rate along with the cheaper and more widely available books and sizable libraries became a status symbol among the elites of Europe. But librarians were still largely classical or religious scholars, and, although honored members of society, they were not a profession unto themselves, until universities were founded in the western world like U.S. and England with college libraries to follow.

In 1928, the first Ph.D. in Library Science was awarded at the University of Chicago and Library Science programs, thrived the more with the opening of the University of Minnesota's department. Nevertheless, Williamson (1923) gave a report for the Carnegie Corporation in which he had criticized the training of

librarians and what he thought was the 'feminization' of the profession. Thus librarianship as a profession attained a relatively low status, despite the fact that the library profession was becoming increasingly technical and what had started out as 'library economy' under Dewey was fast becoming 'information science' through the influence of George Boole's principles upon scientists like Claude Shannon and Mortimer Taube. Cultural stereotypes about librarians were being ingrained during the middle of this century in movies and popular culture and they tended to fall along the lines of the 'spinster' for women and the 'egghead' for men (Denise and David 2009). Until recently, the educational and technical advances of the profession only seemed to build on these unfortunate stereotypes. Thus *Kneale (2002)* concludes that librarians are often portrayed as something less than noble or admirable.

However, the digital era of information has a major characteristic that will change the image of librarians. According to O'Leary (1997) big changes are happening in the world of library science. Online database searching and the wealth of information available on the Internet has forever changed the face of the field and more and more "librarians" are taking positions as technology managers, online specialists, and web and database designers. Although, with the growth in electronic media and the ease of access to information, there has been a lurking fear that librarianship as a profession will become obsolete in a short while. Rather than becoming obsolete, the advent of the electronic media is adding to the job of librarians. Spencer Tracy supported this view when he reassured the four reference librarians at the Federal Broadcasting Company that computers (called an "electronic brain" in the movie) won't get them fired, but will give them more work! He went on to assert that when end-user databases were first introduced, "most online searching was done by professional searchers (librarians) in libraries and information centers. But the question like he rightly asked is why go through a middleman, when millions of people could search by themselves? The answer is the knowledge or possession of information literacy skills to properly harness quality information from every hit which is lacking in majority of persons, especially in the so called third world. Forecasts about what the recent future of librarians will be, should take into account that not every library patron has his own PC or the electronic access or expertise to be a cyber citizen.

Consequently, the presence of the new electronic environment has added responsibilities such as consultants, trainers, systems designers, and webmasters (O'leary 1997). According to him, the librarian, for the first time, is seen as a professional with a set of skills and contributions comparable to those

of other professions, that have in some cases overshadowed them for so long and only those who don't feel comfortable with change are going to be marginalized. This view was strongly supported by Churukian (1997), Atinmo (2011). Apart from the duties mentioned above, some core functions of librarians which are core professional duties leaves librarianship as very relevant even in the electronic environment. Talking about relevance and the image of librarianship, Adams (2000) affirmed that the business world is finally starting to realize the importance of librarians. While they've been avoiding the "L" word, they're increasingly valuing the skills and abilities brought by librarians". It behooves Librarians everywhere and especially in the third world therefore, to develop themselves, by acquiring necessary skills to keep pace with the new electronic environment thereby changing the status of the profession. Clearly, the most obvious condition that impacts on the profession is technology. Technological skill is likely to increase the status of the field (Atinmo, 2011).

### **Statement of the Problem**

The image we portray sends an important message to our clients and society as well as influences how we feel about ourselves. Professional Images are so powerful because, whether we believe it or not, they do say something true about the profession. Thus the set of values held by a profession which include meeting professional obligations, conducting oneself according to formal and informal codes of conduct, and meeting the expectations of people with whom we come into contact spells its image. Having a robust knowledge base, great capacity for performance, good carriage and good communication skills will determine how the library and information profession is perceived by the public and even the professionals themselves. On the contrary, a profession that has not developed a good image will be undervalued, lack respect, be highly invisible because nobody would recon with it. Even members of such profession will have low self or group worth.

Many researchers have varied perceptions of librarianship. Cram (2008) opined that the component of the image problem of librarianship is basic appearance and personality, caused by status and salary. Kantumoya (1993) quoting Slater (1981) posits that Librarians see themselves in both material and intellectual terms as undervalued, thus underused and underpaid while Spaulding (1989) noted that many in the society continue to perceive the librarian as a custodian of books and other documents rather than one who is putting knowledge to work and shaping the society's future. Also *Kneale (2002)* concludes that librarians are often portrayed as something less than noble or admirable.

Presently the library profession is still struggling with image problem. Librarians are not projecting themselves and their profession well enough thus they are not accorded adequate recognition in many quarters of the society. In all tiers of government, no strategic position is occupied by a librarian. Not even in the ministry of education is there a librarian holding any prominent post. In Nigeria, if you mention that you are a Librarian; to the layman, it does not click immediately what is meant. Even in this age of ICT many librarians cannot still hold their own. When professional issues are raised they find it difficult to respond appropriately. It is against this backdrop that the researcher is engaging in this study.

### **Objectives of the Study**

The specific objectives of the study include the following:

- To determine the reason members of the profession opted to study library science.
- To determine librarians opinion of the image of their profession.
- To elicit ideas on the best possible solution to the present image crisis of the profession.

### **Research Questions**

- Why did members of library profession choose to study library Science?
- What Is their Opinion of the Image of the Library Profession?
- What do you think will be the Best Possible Solution to the Present Image crisis of the Profession?

### **Significance of the Study**

The relevance of a study such as this is that it will provoke librarians to make more positive effort at developing themselves in order to consistently prove their worth more than imparting their society behind the scene.

It will help give Nigeria librarians the right perception their profession.

Finally, it will help proffer solution (s) that will properly launder the present image of librarians in Nigeria.

### **Librarianship and Image Problem**

Librarians have had image issues from the early days when librarianship became a profession. Slagell (2003) stated that concern over the perception of librarianship is an issue that has doggedly followed librarians from its earliest days. Although a lot of studies have been carried out focusing on the image of the

library profession, existing literature shows that not much has been done on this topic concerning the third world especially Nigeria.

The social image of any group, occupation or profession has three dimensions, the public, self and the ideal situation. The public image is the way the society sees the profession, while self refers the way the professionals see themselves and the ideal image, is what the image of the profession should be. Each of the dimensions requires attention and careful examination. A large number of people in Africa and especially in Nigeria see librarianship as a last resort. Librarians are perceived as failures, persons who could not get into any other profession or occupation. Even the professional association in Nigeria, is not visible (Uzuegbu & Onyekweodiri 2011). This negative image of the profession is not just before the less educated members of the society but also among the intellectuals, policy makers and Government. Spaulding (1989) noted that many in the society continue to perceive the librarian as a custodian of books and other documents rather than one who is putting knowledge to work and shaping the society's future. For example, many undergraduates in other programmes do not understand what their fellow students in the department of Library studies actually are studying. William (1996) supports this view by opining that;

A few years ago a competent librarian might have had to explain why he or she took up such a strange profession ...No more. "I am an information scientist," or "I am a computer pundit," serves to strike awe into the individual who a few months ago would have sneered at "librarian."

They think that the only work that goes on in the library is shelving of books. Consequently students in the Library schools are ridiculed and their wisdom for coming to the university to study shelving is questioned. Black (2002) recalled how people scoff at librarians in library school; they wonder why someone would need lessons in the dewey decimal system or image arcane sorcery done beneath universities, inducting new adepts into mysteries. To them, it seems more 10<sup>th</sup> century than 21<sup>st</sup>.

Nevertheless, the disposition of a person, group or profession will determine people's perception of same. To this extent librarians are not accorded adequate recognition in many quarters of the society. In all tiers of government, no strategic position is occupied by a librarian. Not even in the ministry of education is there a librarian holding any prominent post. This speaks volume

about the people in the profession. It reveals that librarians have not made much impact in their society apart from the academic environment. It also implies that they see themselves as other people perceive them. Kantumoya (1993) quoting Slater (1981) posits that Librarians see themselves in both material and intellectual terms as undervalued, thus underused and underpaid. Wendi & Candace (2003) strongly support this position by asserting that Librarians were more openly and severely critical of themselves and their colleagues than were their laymen critics. It may be suspected that self depreciation is found among librarians to a great extent than among other professional groups.

It is obvious that Librarians brought about this negative image upon themselves by moaning and remaining in that state being undervalued, underused, underpaid and self depreciation rather than breaking forth from every form of stereotype and proving their worth to the society in general as opined by Wendi & Candace (2003), that Librarians need to strive to refine their image with various techniques to remove from it the inaccuracies of hearsay, misinterpretation and misperception, to objectify the subjective. A profession that provides valuable services to the society and impart it positively enough will not be seen and perceived as unimportant.

According to Decandido (1999), Gile posited that Librarians are supposed to be knowledge pact, “enormously intelligent, literate, genteel, sensitive, devoted to their patrons-----, concealed within, only to be let out when needed to slay the demons of ignorance”. They should have a lot to contribute to every sphere of life. However, it is the responsibility of the professionals to bring their light out from under the bushel to shine and illuminate the societies. Thanks to the evolvement of the information age. Librarians in this age, need to cease this opportunity to launder their image and prove their relevance above other stakeholders in the information world as asserted by Churukian (1997) that the challenges that librarians, not just academic librarians will face in the information age should be viewed as a golden opportunity to advance. Relevance indeed is the key word, the type that transcends book work to the application of current trends in the world of knowledge management and increased visibility in the society at large.

### **Theoretical Framework**

This study is based on the Self-Esteem Theory (SET) and Self-Determination Theory (SDT). Abraham Maslow, in his hierarchy of human needs, describes the *need for esteem* as self evaluative perception which determines how we are perceived by others and culminates in our image. This is divided into two

aspects, the esteem for oneself (self-love, self-confidence, skill, aptitude, etc.), and respect and esteem one receives from other people (recognition, success, etc.). The healthiest expression of self-esteem, according to Maslow, is the one which manifests in the respect we deserve from others, which is born from the way we esteem our self, more than fame and flattery.

Self-Determination Theory (SDT) states that man is born with an intrinsic motivation to explore, absorb and master his surroundings and that true high self-esteem is reported when the basic psychological nutrients, or needs, of life (relatedness, competency and autonomy) are in balance. When social conditions provide support and opportunity to fulfill these basic needs, personal growth, vitality and well-being are enhanced. Relatedness was an addition to the original theory to account for people's inherent ability to make meaning and connect with others through the internalization of cultural practices and values (Ryan & Deci, 2004)

### **Methodology**

The survey design was adopted for the study and the population were librarians from different parts of the country who attended the 31<sup>st</sup> annual Cataloguing, Classification and Indexing Seminar/Workshop of the Nigerian Library Association (NLA) which held from the 23<sup>rd</sup> to 28<sup>th</sup> of October, 2011, in Badagry, Lagos State, Nigeria. The population sample is made up of 350 librarians. The simple random sampling technique was used in choosing the population sample. Instruments for collecting data were the questionnaire, interview and focus group discussion. The structured questionnaire designed on a 5 point rating scale weighted as follows: Strongly Agree (SA) 5 points, Agree (A) 4 points, Disagree (D) 3 points and Strongly Disagree (SD) 2 point and No comment (NC) 1point, and was personally administered to the respondents. Also, the interview and FGD were conducted by the researcher. The descriptive statistical method of analysis using mean and standard deviation was employed for data analysis. Data were coded in presented in tables and discussed including data obtained through the FGD and interviews, in relation to the research questions.

## Results

**Table 1: The Reason Respondents Chose to Study Library Science**

<b>Reason(s)</b>	<b>Mean</b>	<b>SD</b>	<b>Rank</b>
Library profession is a very good one and is as prestigious as the others like law, medicine, engineering etc.	4.17	2.18	1
I studied Library Science because it was the only option left for me.	3.12	2.26	3
I studied Library Science because I loved the course and wanted to be a Librarian.	2.12	1.12	7
I became a Librarian because I admired those in the profession and wanted to be like them.	2.18	1.64	5
I studied Library Science because I was told to start with it and change to a better course later.	3.44	2.12	2
I studied Library Science because I listened to a career talk about the profession and its prospect	2.08	2.18	8
I studied Library Science because I read about it and saw its career prospect.	3.06	1.15	4
I studied Library Science because of the low financial involvement.	0.12	1.24	10
I studied Library Science because I wanted to be a Lecturer in the field.	2.14	1.35	6
I studied Library Science because I just wanted to be a graduate.	0.24	2.14	9

Findings from 1 above revealed that majority of respondents perceive the library profession as a very good one that is as prestigious as professions like Medicine, Engineering, Law etc with a mean of 4.17 at a variance of 2.18 thereby ranking 1. However, an average of 3.44 deviating at 2.12 and ranking 2, studied Library Science because they were told to start with it and change to a better course later. An average of 3.12 at a standard deviation of 2.26 respondents studied the course because it was the only option left for them at the time of entering the University thereby ranking 3. Participants studied Library Science because they read about it and saw its career prospect with a mean of 3.06 at a standard deviation of 1.15 and ranked 4. Only a mean of 2.12 at a deviation of 1.12 and ranking 7, entered for the course because they loved it and wanted to be librarians, meaning that many of the respondents never loved the course enough to want to become a librarian. Average of 2.18 at a standard deviation of 1.64, of respondents admired those in the profession and wanted to be like them with a rank of 5. Also an average of 2.08 at a dispersion of 2.18, ranking 8 of the respondents never heard a career talk about the profession and it's prospect before going for it. Last in the ranking on this table are low financial involvement and just wanting to be a graduate ranking 9 and 10.

**Table 2: Librarians Opinion of the Image of the Library Profession**

Statement of Opinions	Mean	SD	Rank
Librarianship is not regarded as a viable profession in the country therefore; adequate attention is given to it by Government.	3.16	1.16	5
Librarians are not making impact outside of their immediate environment e.g. practicing on consultancy basis, pioneering and promoting beneficial programs to the society, thus the group is seen as not having much to offer.	3.16	1.94	5
Librarians do not project the image of the profession because they don't feel as privileged as other professionals like Lawyers, Doctors and Engineers etc.	3.42	1.34	4
Librarians have not distinguished themselves in the society due to a dearth of current trends in their education/training and self development.	3.14	1.95	6
As Librarians, we have not yet broken out of the stereotype our predecessors left us in consequently, we are not proud to claim that we're librarians in some quarters.	3.58	1.05	3
Library profession lacks theories that provoke analyses on TV, Radio etc thereby making it invisible to the general public.	3.84	1.64	2
The Nigerian Library Association (NLA) is not yet strong and virile as other professional bodies therefore, visibility and image projections are hindered.	4.08	1.33	1
The absence of a professional institution where library graduates are inducted into the profession makes librarian somehow timid	3.84	1.62	2

Table 2 above revealed that topmost on the opinion list of respondents about the library profession is that the Nigerian Library Association (NLA) is not yet strong and virile as other professional bodies therefore, visibility and image projections are hindered. This is with a mean of 4.08 at a standard deviation of 1.33, ranking 1. An average of 3.84 respondents at a dispersion of 1.62 and 1.64 ranking 2 respectively are of the opinion that the absence of a professional institution where library graduates are inducted into the profession makes librarian somehow timid and that library profession lacks theories that provoke analyses on TV, Radio etc thereby making it invisible to the general public. Also an average of 3.58 of respondents at a variance of 1.05 are of the opinion that as Librarians, we have not yet broken out of the stereotype our predecessors left us in consequently, we are not proud to claim that we're librarians in some quarters thereby ranking 3 while respondents opined that librarians do not project the image of the profession because they don't feel as privileged as other professionals like Lawyers, Doctors and Engineers etc, with a mean of 3.42 at a dispersion of 1.34 and ranked 4.

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**Table 3: Possible Solution and Way out of the Present Image problem of the Profession**

<b>Possible Solution/ Way Forward</b>	<b>Mean</b>	<b>SD</b>	<b>Rank</b>
Librarians can project their image to the public by working towards securing appointment into higher, political and educational positions that are relevant.	4.12	1.25	8
NLA should regularly organize press conferences and put up publication in National Dailies about the profession thereby projecting its image.	4.66	1.66	3
Librarian Registration council of Nigeria (LRCN) to moderate library school curriculum ensuring the inclusion of practical current trends in the profession thereby producing graduates that can compete anywhere and be proud of themselves.	4.82	1.45	1
NLA should lobby the National assembly to ensure that all primary and secondary schools in Nigeria have libraries that are well equipped and manned by Librarians.	4.26	1.42	6
Librarians must break out of the stereotype our predecessors left us in, be proud of our profession and be ready to compete with other professionals in the world.	4.31	1.28	5
Library professionals should launder the image of the profession by organizing seminars, symposia, career talks regularly. This will affect the public positively and sensitize them of the importance of the profession to every sector of our system.	4.48	1.83	4
The Nigerian Library Association (NLA) must be strong and virile enough to monopolize and control some basic practices related to the profession, e.g. issuance of ISBN and ISSN to publishers.	4.74	1.46	2
LRCN in collaboration with NUC should establish a professional institution where library graduates are inducted into the profession by lecturers who have been sent abroad to learn contemporary ways of discharging library duties in order to be relevant anywhere.	4.20	1.44	7

From table 3 above, it is revealed that all the respondents agreed to every item recommended to proffer solution to the prevailing image problem of librarianship in Nigeria. An average of 4.82 at a standard deviation of 1.45 ranking 1 supported the idea that Librarian Registration council of Nigeria (LRCN) should moderate library school curriculum ensuring the inclusion of practical current trends in the profession thereby producing graduates that can compete anywhere and be proud of themselves. Also an average of 4.74 at a dispersion of 1.46 agreed that the Nigerian Library Association (NLA) must be strong and virile enough to monopolize and control some basic practices related to the profession, e.g. issuance of ISBN and ISSN to publishers to maintain a good image and ranked 2. Other possible solutions are well represented on the table, including their ranking.

### **Conclusion and Recommendations**

Findings from the study revealed that there is a correlation between interest in a profession and fulfillment which invariably determines one's self worth or image that will culminate in overall image of a profession. Obviously, many Nigerian librarians never were interested in the profession before going in for it. It was revealed from the ranking that many librarians in Nigeria studied librarianship because it was the last resort, thus the dearth of a drive for excellence and relevance in the society. Even though they are convinced that librarianship is as good as other professions like Medicine and law, the passion for their job is limited. However, the resultant negative image due to this limited relevance in the society over the years needs to be laundered and librarians must own the profession and wake up to their responsibilities. Based on the above, therefore, the following recommendations are made.

1. Librarians must engage in positive identity construction which will act advantageously as a cyclical effect and help them seek out strong job values to create more relevance and boost their self-esteem.
2. Librarian Registration Council of Nigeria (LRCN) should moderate library school curriculum ensuring the inclusion of practical current trends in the profession thereby producing graduates that can compete anywhere and be proud of themselves.
3. The Nigerian Library Association (NLA) should provide and support some basic practices related to the profession, e.g. issuance of ISBN and ISSN to publishers.

4. Also, NLA should regularly organize press conferences and put up publication in National Dailies about the profession thereby projecting its image.
5. More so, Library professionals should launder the image of their profession by organizing seminars, symposia, career talks regularly, which will affect the public positively and sensitize them on the importance and relevance of the profession and break out of the stereotype their predecessors left them and be proud of their profession.
6. Librarians should vigorously engage in self development thereby gaining new knowledge and imbibing current trends,
7. Furthermore, NLA should lobby the National assembly to ensure that all primary and secondary schools in Nigeria have libraries that are well equipped and manned by teacher librarians and librarians.
8. LRCN in collaboration with NUC should establish a professional institution where library graduates are inducted into the profession by lecturers who have been sent abroad to learn contemporary ways of discharging library duties in order to be relevant anywhere.
9. Finally librarians should project their image to the public by working towards securing appointment into higher, political and educational positions that are relevant and influential.

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