



Perceived Effects of Professional Networking on Career Growth of Librarians in Kwara State, Nigeria

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Abstract

Professional networking has become an important skill for librarians because of the ever-growing nature of information practice. This makes this study investigate the perceived effects of professional networking on career growth of librarians in Kwara State. Descriptive-survey design was adopted for a population of 183 librarians who registered with the Nigerian Library Association (NLA) Kwara State chapter. Sample size was 80 respondents who were conveniently selected based on their willingness to fill the online questionnaire sent to the chapter's WhatsApp platform. Response rate for the questionnaire was 73.75%. Data collected were analysed in simple percentages, frequency tables, mean and standard deviation. Findings revealed that that majority of the respondents (84.7%) perceived that the strategies of networking for career growth are engaging in skills development/acquisition to meet new people, reading current literature to connect with trending researchers, getting mentors and reviewing books, monographs and journal articles. This study concludes that librarians in Kwara State perceived networking to be an instrument for their career growth and engaged in its different forms for career enhancement.

Keywords: Career Growth, Librarians, Professional networking, Kwara State, Nigeria

Introduction

Career advancement is a means of preparing to qualify for official promotions with the current employer or a different employer; preparing for more responsibility and compensation by advancing in a formal career, obtaining industry recognized credentials that results in additional responsibility, which sometimes may also be associated with an increase in income or benefits (Imuero & Mokobia, 2022). Career advancement is very paramount to the attainment of career peaks in every profession, with Librarianship inclusive.

Librarianship is a profession whose relevance is akin to the quality of services its practitioners render to the society through the collection, organisation, storage, preservation, conservation, retrieval, dissemination and utilisation of information resources to contribute to the well-being of the societal members. Librarianship has been further influenced in the 21st century by the rapid, continuous advancement in technologies which has enhanced the provision of sophisticated library and information services.

Library and information practitioners cannot exist in isolation. This makes professional networking non-negotiable for them because their ultimate responsibility is to provide relevant, up-to-date and quality information to establish contact and become relevant among the societal members, themselves or with other professionals, regardless of their locations. The non-negotiability of professional networking for librarians makes it a necessity that must be developed by all librarians (Alabi, 2018) to connect with colleagues in different locations, share expertise, knowledge and ideas and link themselves for career opportunities.

Professional networking, according to Kagan (2022) is the exchange of information and ideas among the people in a profession or sharing common interest, usually in an informal social setting. It often begins with a single point of common ground. Tobin (1998) asserted that the connection in professional networking is usually made up of a group of people who can guide or direct one's learning or learning opportunities, answer one's questions, and share their own knowledge and experience.

Professional networking is a veritable avenue for librarians to develop and position themselves for opportunities they desire to grow, fulfill their career objectives and become relevant in their profession. Professional networking is a combination of science and art. As a science, it is being governed by some established principles that should be followed when engaging in it; while as an art, it gives room for individuals to network by acknowledging and expressing their uniqueness to connect and relate with other people, without abusing the tenets of mutual respect.

Howerton-Hicks and Maleeff (2016) submitted that professional networking is an important skill to practice, hone, and have in someone's professional development toolkit. Leveraging it requires librarians' ability to identify and understand other people's work in relation to their own and assessment of the value of their connection with other people (Rajagopal, 2013). These researchers have observed that many librarians have remained stagnant in the course of their professional development because of poor networking skills. It is on this background that this study is tailored towards investigating the perceived effects of professional networking on career growth of librarians in Kwara State.

Statement of the Problem

Professional networking has become an essential element of career progression in every field of study, Librarianship inclusive. Many librarians have exploited the benefits of professional networking to progress in their career. However, it has been observed by Howerton-Hicks and Maleeff (2016) that professional networking is difficult for information professionals to master. Referring to librarians specifically, Howerton-Hicks and Maleeff (2016) bemoaned that introverted personality has been observed as one of the excuses librarians give for poor networking skills. Nonetheless, Aslam (2017) countered this claim by submitting that professional networking is about the librarian's desire, career goals and engagement in professional activities. These problems, and many others, justified why this study is investigating the perceived effects of professional networking on career growth of librarians in Kwara State.

Objectives of the Research

The main objective of this study is to investigate the perceived effects of professional networking on career growth of librarians in Kwara State.

The specific objectives are to:

1. Identify the types of professional networking perceived to be relevant to career growth of librarians in Kwara State.
2. Identify the strategies of networking for career growth by the librarians.
3. Examine the perceived importance of networking to career growth of the librarians.
4. Examine the challenges to networking for career growth of the librarians.
- 5.

Research Questions

This study answers the following questions:

1. What are the types of professional networking perceived to be relevant to career growth of librarians in Kwara State?
2. What are the strategies of networking for career growth by the librarians?
3. What is the perceived importance of networking to career growth of the librarians?
4. What are the challenges to networking for career growth of the librarians?

Literature Review

Professional Networking and its Types

Professional networking is the process of initiating contacts, forging strong and mutual relationships with other people, with the primary motive of career advancement. According to the Community for Advancing Discovery Research and Education [CADRE] (2019), professional networking is about building and sustaining relationships with people that can contribute to one's professional growth and those with whom one can work with to contribute to the profession and field.

Alabi (2018) views professional networking as a form of informal learning. This implies that professional networking may be conscious or unconscious because it often occurs naturally in the course of someone's professional life, even when one does not realize it is happening. Building professional networks is one of the best ways to set-up early career professionals for success (CADRE, 2019).

Kagan (2022) identifies three different types of professional networking as personal, operational and strategic. Personal networking refers to relationships primarily outside someone's organization and even outside someone's field. He stresses that personal networking is what most people picture when they think of networking. This type of networking involves building connections throughout the industry to enhance professional prospects.

Operational networking, on the other hand, refers to relating with people within someone's organization and forge relationships that serve immediate intra-organizational needs. This type of networking is essentially someone's working relationships with colleagues. Strategic networking functions as a combination of the two preceding types. It refers to the practice of reading both industry and intra-organizational trends and making connections to keep oneself professionally relevant. Strategic networking might build connections that keep someone abreast with widespread developments in research or organizational trends at one's place of employment (Kagan, 2022).

Strategies of Networking for Career Growth

Luliano (2012) asserted that professional networking is a two-way street that includes listening and both giving and taking advice and a professional's motive for it always determines the networking strategies to be adopted. Aslam (2017) argued that information professionals can network through continuous skills development/acquisition, reading current literature on library and information practices, sign-up for a mentor (CADRE, 2019) and looking for collaborators for projects such as research activities (Luliano, 2012).

Other strategies that are pivotal to professional networking include building one's digital footprints, joining professional association, participating in activities organised by professional bodies, volunteering on programmes that interest professionals, reviewing books, monographs and journal articles, connecting with other professionals on social media, attending workshops, symposia, fora and conferences and writing a few notes on the back of peoples' business cards (Howerton-Hicks & Maleeff, 2016).

Importance of Networking to Career Growth

Professional networking builds relationships that evolve into a supportive system of sharing information, advice and ideas among professionals (Alabi, 2018; Kagan, 2022). Through professional networking, people could exchange ideas; share information, seek clarification; get second opinion; test new ideas (Alabi, 2018); have access to collaborative problem solving platforms; enhances career development; provides platforms for finding constant support in the profession when the need arises (Alcock, 2009).

Kagan (2022) further asserted that professionals used networking to expand their circles of acquaintances, find out about job opportunities in their fields (Staff Writers, 2022) and

increase their awareness of news and trends in their fields or the greater world. Professional networking, according to Staff Writers (2022) also enhances career development, knowledge and resource sharing and relationship building. Professional networking can prove invaluable, enabling people to get their foot in the door even if they lack professional experience needed to be accepted for job roles.

Challenges to Networking for Career Growth

Studies have revealed that many professionals find it difficult to network because of their wrong perceptions of networking, believing that the ability to network is connected to a personality type. Howerton-Hicks and Maleeff (2016) submitted that the ability to network and connect with people is a skill, not a personality trait, and like many skills, some people are better at it naturally than others. But that doesn't mean that networking can't be learned, improved upon, and mastered by anyone.

Other factors limiting professionals from networking are apprehension to tell others who they are and what they do, lack of priority to promote or market oneself, (Howerton-Hicks & Maleeff, 2016), lack of following up (Jones, 2015), fear of rejection or low self-esteem, poor preparation for networking, lack of skills to nurture relationships, curiosity to gain from the relationship which may make the other parties suspicious, poor attentions from other professionals and insufficient channels to network.

Methods

This study adopts descriptive-survey design because its population spread across different parts of Kwara State, which the researchers may not cover all of them. The population of this study is 183 members of the Nigerian Library Association (NLA), Kwara State branch. Sample size was determined by using Sample Size Calculator (www.calculator.net), with 95% Confidence Level, 5% Margin Error and 90% Population Proportion, which gives 80 sample size who are conveniently selected based on their willingness to participate in the study by filling the online questionnaire designed with Google Form, which was sent to the NLA Kwara State chapter's WhatsApp platform. Responses contained in the questionnaire were generated from the points discovered in the literature reviewed. The link to the form was left active for 6 weeks in order to give the respondents enough time to fill the questionnaire at their comfortable time. From the 80 respondents expected to fill the questionnaire sent to the WhatsApp platform of the NLA, Kwara State branch, only 61 respondents filled the questionnaire. From the 61 filled, only 59 were adequate and suitable for analysis. The 59 responses represent 73.75% response rate. The response rate for online survey is considered excellent because it aligns with the position of Chung (2023) that online survey should be considered excellent if the response rate is more than 30%. Data collected was analysed with simple percentage, frequency table, mean and standard deviation.

Results

Table 1: Demographic Information of Respondents

Options		F	%
Respondents' libraries	Academic	31	52.5
	Public	8	13.6
	Private	4	6.8
	Research/Special	5	8.5
	National	4	6.8
	School	7	11.9
	Total	59	100
Gender	Male	29	49.2
	Female	30	50.8
	Total	59	100
Academic qualification	ND	3	5.1
	HND	10	17.0
	BLIS	23	39.0
	MLIS	16	27.1
	Ph.D.	7	11.9
	Total	59	100
Work experience	1 - 5 years	16	27.1
	6 - 10 years	11	18.6
	11 - 15 years	11	18.6
	16 - 20 years	6	10.2
	21 - 25 years	5	8.5
	26 and above years	10	16.9
	Total	59	100

Table 1 indicates that majority of the respondents (52.5%) work in academic libraries/environment, followed by 13.6% for public libraries, school (11.9%), research/special (8.5%), while national and private have 6.8% respectively. There is a close margin in the gender parity of the respondents with 50.8% for female and 49.2% for males. Also, 23 respondents (39.0%) are BLIS holders, followed by 27.1% for MLIS, 17.0% have HNDs, while 11.9% have Ph.Ds. Finally, 27.1% have 1 – 5 years' work experience, followed by 18.6% for 6 – 10 years and 11 – 15 years respectively, while 16.9% for 26 and above years' work experience.

Table 2: Types of professional networking perceived to be relevant to career growth of librarians in Kwara State

Options	Yes		No	
	F	%	F	%
Network with people within your library	48	81.4	11	18.6
Network with people both within your library and your field of study	48	81.4	11	18.6
Network with people outside your library and your field of study	46	78.0	13	22.0

Table 2 indicates that majority of the respondents (81.4%) networked with people within their libraries and also with people both within their libraries and their field of study. However, only 78.0% networked with people outside their libraries and their field of study.

Table 3: Strategies of networking for career growth by librarians in Kwara State

Options	Yes		No	
	F	%	F	%
Engaging in skills development/acquisition to meet new people	50	84.7	9	15.3
Reading current literature to connect with trending researchers	50	84.7	9	15.3
Getting a mentor or mentors	50	84.7	9	15.3
Reviewing books, monographs and journal articles	50	84.7	9	15.3
Collaborate with others on research activities	49	83.1	10	16.9
Joining professional associations	48	81.4	11	18.6
Participating in activities organised by professional bodies	48	81.4	11	18.6
Attending workshops, symposia, fora and conferences	48	81.4	11	18.6
Building your digital footprints by showing your works on social media and databases	45	76.3	14	23.7
Connecting with other professionals on social media	41	70.7	17	29.3
Volunteering on programmes of your professional interest	41	69.5	18	30.5
Writing a few notes on the back of your colleagues' business cards	34	57.6	25	42.4

Table 3 reveals that majority of the respondents (84.7%) perceived that the strategies of networking for career growth are engaging in skills development/acquisition to meet new people, reading current literature to connect with trending researchers, getting a mentor or mentors and reviewing books, monographs and journal articles. These are followed by 83.1% for collaboration with others on research activities; while attending workshops, symposia, fora and conferences, joining professional associations and participating in activities organised by professional bodies have 81.4%. On the other hand, only 57.6% perceived that writing a few notes on the back of your colleagues' business cards is a strategy for career growth.

Table 4: Perceived importance of networking on career growth of librarians in Kwara State

Options	SA		A		U		D		SD		M	SD
	F	%	F	%	F	%	F	%	F	%		
Helps librarians build relationships that evolve into a supportive system of sharing information	34	57.6	18	30.5	3	5.1	4	6.8	0	0.0	4.39	0.87
Enhances the development of librarians' careers	32	54.2	19	32.2	3	5.1	2	3.4	3	5.1	4.27	1.06
Increase librarians' awareness of news and trends in their field	29	49.2	22	37.3	3	5.1	3	5.1	2	3.4	4.24	1.06
Offers librarians avenues to seek clarification on ideas that are not clear to you	30	50.8	19	32.2	4	6.8	2	3.4	4	6.8	4.17	1.15
Provides platforms for collaborative problem solving	25	42.4	24	40.7	5	8.5	3	5.1	2	3.4	4.14	1.01
Offers librarians avenues to second opinions	22	37.3	29	49.2	2	3.4	2	3.4	4	6.8	4.07	1.08
Gives librarians access to job opportunities	24	40.7	24	40.7	4	6.8	3	5.1	4	6.8	4.03	1.14
Helps librarians expand their circles of acquaintances	25	42.4	20	33.9	6	10.2	6	10.2	2	3.4	4.02	1.12
Offers librarians some avenues to test new ideas	22	37.3	25	42.4	5	8.5	3	5.1	4	6.8	3.98	1.14

Table 4 shows that helps librarians build relationships that evolve into a supportive system of sharing information is ranked highest out of the importance of networking perceived by the respondents with (4.39 ± 0.87) , followed by enhances the development of librarians' careers (4.27 ± 1.06) and increases librarians' awareness of news and trends in their field which has (4.24 ± 1.06) . Offers librarians some avenues to test new ideas is ranked lowest with (3.98 ± 1.14) . This shows that helping librarians build relationships that evolve into a supportive system of sharing information, enhancing the development of librarians' careers and increasing librarians' awareness of news and trends in their field are the major importance of networking perceived by librarians in Kwara State.

The challenges to networking for career growth of librarians in Kwara State.

Table 5: Challenges to networking for career growth of librarians in Kwara

Options	SA		A		U		D		SD		M	SD
	F	%	F	%	F	%	F	%	F	%		
Apprehension to tell others who librarians are and what they do	15	25.4	28	47.5	5	8.5	8	13.6	3	5.1	3.75	1.14
Librarians don't prioritize promoting or marketing themselves	11	18.6	28	47.5	9	15.3	9	15.3	2	3.4	3.63	1.07
Low self-esteem, leading to fear of rejection	14	23.7	26	44.1	6	10.2	7	11.9	6	10.2	3.59	1.26
Librarians lack skills to follow-up, nurture and strengthen relationships	12	20.3	27	45.8	8	13.6	8	13.6	4	6.8	3.59	1.16
Librarians believed that the ability to network is connected to a personality type	15	25.4	21	35.6	9	15.3	7	11.9	7	11.9	3.51	1.32
Poor attentions from other professionals	16	27.1	16	27.1	11	18.6	9	15.3	7	11.9	3.42	1.35
Librarians are curious to gain from the relationship which may make the other parties suspicious of their interest	10	16.9	20	33.9	14	23.7	15	25.4	0	0.0	3.42	1.05
Librarians don't prepare for networking	9	15.3	24	40.7	11	18.6	12	20.3	3	5.1	3.41	1.13
Insufficient channels to network	14	23.7	21	35.6	6	10.2	9	15.3	9	15.3	3.37	1.41
Librarians are not deliberate with professional networking	9	15.3	14	23.7	11	18.6	18	30.5	7	11.9	3.00	1.29
Librarians' perceptions of networking are wrong	5	8.5	13	22.0	18	30.5	12	20.3	1	18.6	2.81	1.22

Table 5 reveals that apprehension to tell others who librarians are and what they do is ranked highest out of the perceived challenges of networking for career growth of librarians in Kwara State with (3.75 ± 1.14), followed by librarians don't prioritize promoting or marketing themselves (3.63 ± 1.07) and 3.59 ± 1.26 for low self-esteem, leading to fear of rejection. Librarians' perceptions of networking are wrong is ranked lowest with (2.81 ± 1.22).

This implies that the apprehension to tell others who librarians are and what they do, librarians don't prioritize promoting or marketing themselves and low self-esteem, leading to fear of rejection are the major perceived challenges to networking for career growth by librarians in Kwara State.

Discussion of Findings

This study investigates the perceived effects of professional networking on career growth of librarians in Kwara State. Findings revealed that the respondents networked with people within their libraries (operational networking) and also with people both within their libraries and their field of study (strategic networking) are perceived to be the most types of networking practiced by the respondents. This implies that with these types of networking, respondents networked with their colleagues both within and outside their libraries solely for work-related purposes. This is consistent with the point of Kagan (2022) that operational networking is used for building working relationships with colleagues at work places and also use those relationships to initiate contacts with professional colleagues outside someone's place of work.

Realising that the respondents don't pay much attention to networking with people outside their libraries and their field of study (personal networking) is not encouraging because it shows that the respondents don't prioritised networking for promoting themselves and what they do personally. Failure to engage in personal networking will influence the strategies adopted in networking by the respondents because since they don't perceived networking to be a personal affair, they won't want to be involving in writing notes on the back of business cards of their colleagues and others, in order to improve themselves personally.

Apart from not writing notes, the respondents networked through engaging in skills development/acquisition to meet new people, reading current literature to connect with trending researchers, getting a mentor or mentors, reviewing books, monographs and journal articles, collaboration with others on research activities, attending workshops, symposia, fora and conferences, joining professional associations and participating in activities organised by professional bodies. Attending workshops, symposia, fora and conferences organised by individuals, professional associations and bodies are robust strategies for librarians for librarians to acquire new skills or develop their skills, since the qualities of services they can render and deliver are determined by the skills they possessed.

Conferences, seminars, symposia, workshops and fora are indispensable strategies for librarians to network because they are avenues for librarians to meet other professionals from the same or different areas of knowledge (Thomas, 2012), who can later turn to mentors or coaches that can be guiding librarians on making logical moves and making strategic decisions that can position librarians for career progressions and advancement. The mentors or coaches can be taken librarians through the processes of reviewing books, monographs and journal articles and also collaborate with their protégés on research activities.

Networking is important to the career growth of librarians in many ways by helping librarians build relationships that evolve into a supportive system of sharing information, enhancing the development of librarians' careers and increases librarians' awareness of news and trends in their field. These responses are consistent with the assertions of Alcock (2009), Alabi (2018) and Kagan (2022) and also consistent with the respondents' perceptions that networking aids continuous skills acquisition/development. The essence of the respondents' views is that networking is important to their career growth because it offers them avenues to become acquainted with trends and practices in their field.

However, knowing that just a few of the respondents perceived that networking offers librarians some avenues to test new ideas contradicts the views of Alabi (2018), where it was asserted that networking enhances testing of new ideas and exchanges of information. Through, networking such as mentoring, coaching or attending conferences, seminars and others, librarians can gain extensive insights on their ideas, discover some ways of tackling a problem and proffer solutions to it, either individually or personally.

Many challenges are responsible for poor professional networking among librarians globally. Among them which are clearly revealed in this study are apprehension to tell others who librarians are and what they do, librarians don't prioritize promoting or marketing themselves and low self-esteem, leading to fear of rejection. The sum of these challenges validated the positions of the respondents in Table 2 that showed that the respondents don't involve in personal networking. It is difficult to network personally when people lack self-esteem. This may/will lead to telling others about themselves and their profession and also affect the ways they market and promote themselves and their profession.

Finally, findings revealed that the librarians' perceptions of networking are not a challenge to them. Though, this contradicts the view of Howerton-Hicks and Maleeff (2016) the wrong perceptions of networking are affecting many professionals from involving in it; but it is just that the respondents of this study haven't been networking due to some factors perceived to be personal – low self-esteem and lack of appreciation of self and one's profession – as have been revealed in this study.

Recommendations

This study recommends the following:

1. Librarians in Kwara State and elsewhere should always endeavour to involve in professional networking. This will help them relate with people both within and outside their profession and turn them to career prospects which they can leverage in this 21st century.
2. Librarians should prioritise building credible social media handles and connect with each other so they can grow in their career. They can achieve this by signing up in different social media handles to promote or market themselves and posting their works. This will also boost librarians' digital footprints and position them for different types of networking.
3. Librarians should perceive networking as avenues to test new ideas.
4. Librarians should work on their self-esteem. This will help them overcome fear of rejections, encourage them to prioritise promoting and marketing themselves. With this, they will be proud to describe themselves and their duties.

Conclusion

Professional networking has become a veritable tool of career progress for professionals in every field of study or branch of knowledge. Since research allows testing ideas with peculiarity to a particular location or environment, this study has established that librarians in Kwara State perceived networking to be an instrument for their career growth. This perception motivates them to be involved in both operational and strategic networking by attending seminars, workshops, conferences, symposia, fora; getting mentors, reviewing books, monographs and journal articles; all for the sake of skills acquisition and development. Through networking, librarians in Kwara State build relationships that

evolved into a supportive system of sharing information, develop in their careers and increase their awareness of news and trends in their field for career progression. However, there are some personal factors perceived to be limiting them from leveraging networking for their career growth. Among the factors are: Apprehension to describe librarians and their duties, lack of priority for promoting or marketing themselves and low self-esteem.

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