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Social Status and Image of the Library and Information Science Professionals: A Review

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Abstract

This paper aims to investigate the societal perception and global scenario of the social status and international standing of Library and Information Science (LIS) professionals. To achieve this, a systematic literature review was conducted using five major databases: Google Scholar, Web of Science, JSTOR, Taylor & Francis, and ResearchGate, covering a range of publications from 1990 to 2024. Out of 16,353 retrieved records, 29 studies were selected after applying inclusion and exclusion criteria. Thematic analysis was conducted to categorise findings based on perceptions of the general public, students, teachers, media portrayals, and librarians themselves. The results reveal that about 31.03% recognise LIS Professionals positively, but a significant proportion (68.97%) pointed out the prevailing stereotypes and undervaluation of LIS professionals. It is also found that students generally view librarianship as a low-priority career, often ranking it below other professions in terms of prestige and desirability. Media representations frequently emphasised outdated stereotypes. Moreover, self-perceptions among librarians also reflect a mix of pride and insecurity. A gradual shift toward positive acknowledgement in specific contexts was visible. This paper provides a consolidated understanding of how LIS professionals are perceived worldwide, highlights the novelty of synthesising evidence across multiple user groups (general public, students, faculty, media, and librarians themselves), identifies research gaps, and suggests practical strategies for improving professional status and societal recognition.

Keywords: Academic Librarians, Job Satisfaction, Librarianship, Professional Identity, Professional Status, Social Image, User Perception

1. Introduction

Identity is the core of who we are as individuals. Identity shapes how we present ourselves, our expectations of interacting with

others and their treatment of us. It forms the basis of what we believe are our capabilities and potential (Hussey & Campbell-Meier, 2016).

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Stereotypes certainly exist, and the public has certain expectations of librarians. Earlier, librarians were often portrayed as old-fashioned, bookish individuals or as the ideal librarian (Keller, 1909). Although the times have changed, the roles and responsibilities of librarians have also evolved in response to technological advancements; however, librarians still struggle with a problematic professional image. Librarianship is a user-service-oriented profession that supports education, research, and development, as well as other societal endeavors, where professionals are employed in various academic, public, and special libraries with different specialized designations.

Library Professionals play a crucial role in helping individuals access information and create knowledge. Despite their significant impact, the field of librarianship often struggles to receive recognition, and the public perception of librarians and the LIS (Library and Information Science) profession remains shrouded in doubt for many. There is often a discrepancy between the actual work of librarians and how the public perceives this profession. Recent scholarship in India also reflects similar concerns. For instance, Singh (2023) highlights that librarians are increasingly engaged in research support services, which enhances their academic role but still struggles to translate into broader social recognition. These transformations reflect a necessary shift towards addressing contemporary trends and issues in preparing professionals for the new era of information science (Hashim, Ismail, & Rahman, 2012).

The present study aims to explore the prevailing social status/image of Library professionals in the existing literature available in this area. The approach of this study is to conduct a systematic literature review, synthesizing findings from multiple databases to capture diverse perspectives. The review evaluates how LIS professionals are perceived by the general public, students, teaching communities, the media, and the professionals themselves.

2. Research Questions

The study is conducted based on the following research Questions:

- RQ1- What are the general Public Perceptions towards Library Professionals?
- RQ2- How do students perceive library professionals?
- RQ3- What are the perceptions of the teaching community toward Library Professionals?
- RQ4- How Library professionals are portrayed in different media platforms?
- RQ5- What is the self-perception of Library Professionals?

3. Materials and Methods

A systematic review method has been adopted for the study. The review was conducted under the general Procedure for Conducting Literature Reviews (Templier & Paré, 2015), which includes the following steps- (i) Formulating the research question(s) and objective(s), (ii) Searching the extant literature, (iii) screening for inclusion, (iv) Assessing the quality of primary studies, (v) Extracting data, and (vi) Analyzing data.

An extensive literature survey was conducted on 5 databases, viz. Google Scholar, Web of Science, JSTOR, Taylor & Francis and Research Gate from 30th May 2023 to 30 September 2024. The Boolean terms and keywords used for searching are 'Social Status AND Library Professional', 'Image AND Library Professional', 'Librarian and Social Status', 'Perception AND Librarian', 'Librarian AND Job Satisfaction', 'Librarian OR Library Professionals AND Professional Identity' and 'Social Image OR Professional Image AND Librarian'. Keywords used for the search are Librarianship, Social Image, Librarians, Professional Identity, Professional Status, Social Image, User Perception

Research Articles from the years 1990 to 2024 have been collected from the above-mentioned 5 databases and filtered for further Analysis. Selected documents are categorized



under different heads and analyzed to delineate the social image towards library professionals. The Results extracted from the primary search are:

Table 1: Boolean Search Results

| SL No | Database | Results |
|-------|------------------|---------|
| 1 | Google Scholar | 4587 |
| 2 | Web of Science | 258 |
| 3 | JSTOR | 6274 |
| 4 | Taylor & Francis | 5148 |
| 5 | Research Gate | 113 |
| | Total | 16,353 |

Among the total of 16353 papers retrieved from 5 databases, only 29 papers were selected for the study after careful evaluation based on the inclusion and exclusion criteria mentioned below:

- Only Primary research articles were included

in the study. Review papers and meta-analyses are excluded.

- Only English-language or translated into English papers are included.
- Only full-text papers are considered.
- Articles ranging from 1990 to 2024 are considered.
- The papers that are aligned and deal with the Professional and social status/image-related issues faced by Library Professionals across the globe are included.

The study follows the PRISMA Model (as shown in Figure 1) which is used commonly used for systematic literature reviews. The authors included 27 articles for the study after the careful evaluation of the articles that did not match the inclusion criteria along with the duplicate articles. The inclusion and exclusion of the papers are presented through the figure .1

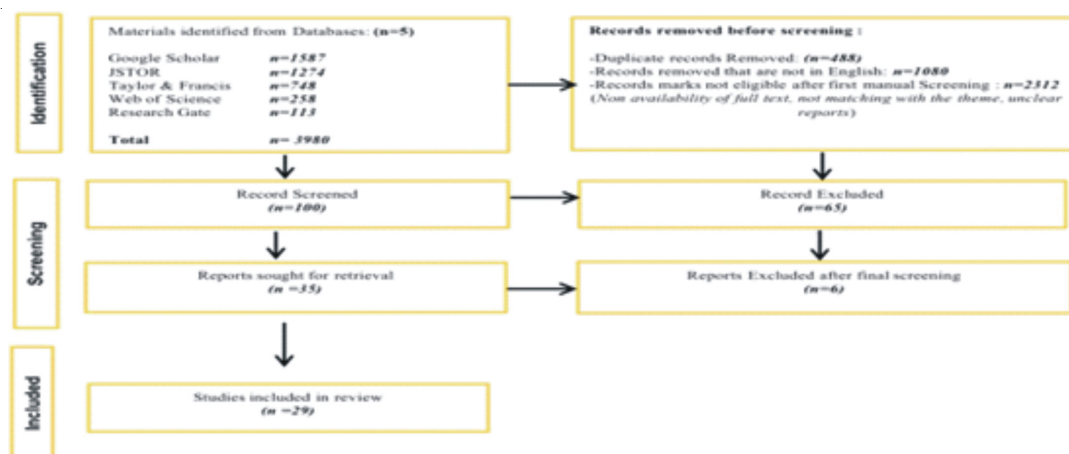


Figure 1- Inclusion and Exclusion of the documents

Data Evaluation: The first assessment was conducted through a systematic and rigorous approach to study as per the inclusion and exclusion criteria using MS Excel. The selected data (29 Articles) further was evaluated manually by conducting a critical appraisal.

Data Analysis: Thematic analysis has been

adopted for the review. During the analysis, All the retrieved papers were reviewed step by step using MS Excel software as well as a rigorous manual process. The selected papers for the review process were thoroughly studied and presented under different themes as per the research Questions of this study.



4. Result and Discussion

This study has synthesized global literature on the social status and image of Library and Information Science (LIS) professionals, drawing on 29 studies published between 1990 and 2024.

4.1 General Public Perceptions (RQ1)

Early analyses of the librarian's social image reveal strong stereotypes associated with gender and demeanour (Chopra, 1984); (Hildenbrand, 2000); (Seale, 2008). Similar perceptions persist in modern contexts despite shifts in professional roles (Hildenbrand, 2005); (Majid & Haider, 2008). The general public often sees librarians through the lens of stereotypes. Surveys and interviews (Sittler, 2011) revealed that librarians are still imagined as conservative, bookish, and somewhat outdated figures. Surprisingly, people's perception of librarians was negative in countries like Singapore, where the library system is very advanced. Libraries in Singapore have qualified to receive international recognition and awards for the innovative and creative technologies and services they have adopted and implemented in their libraries. (Jazimović & Petrović, 2014) However, at the same time, the professional status was found to be low compared to certain other professions. Similar image problems, particularly concerning low professional status, were also identified in South East Asia, such as in Malaysia (Ali, Yu, & Amran, 2018). Around 70% of responses in these studies leaned negative, associating librarians with routine, low-prestige work, while only about 30% expressed admiration for their helpfulness or knowledge. At the same time, Vassilakaki and Moniarou-Papaconstantinou (2016) remind us that context matters; in Greece, users reported warmer and more positive impressions, showing that perceptions can shift when communities experience active engagement from professionals. These findings humanize the challenge: librarians, despite their innovation and dedication, continue

to face outdated perceptions in the public eye.

4.2 Students' Perceptions (RQ2)

Students are tomorrow's professionals and decision-makers, so their views carry particular weight. Comparative studies also suggest that students' career perceptions vary by region and academic exposure (Shaw-Daigle, 2014; Klein & Lenart, 2020; Martin, 2013). Comparative studies also suggest that students' career perceptions vary by region and academic exposure. Comparative cross-national studies have also confirmed that students' attitudes toward librarianship as a career are complex and varied, often influenced by a lack of awareness (Tanacković, Šilić, Kurbanović, & Unal, 2018). These studies collectively highlight the need for stronger career awareness among LIS undergraduates. However, evidence shows that librarianship often fails to inspire them as a career. Early research on young people's views, such as that by Harris and Wilkinson (2001), already highlighted the challenge of repositioning librarianship away from dated imagery. In surveys of young people (Newbutt & Sen, 2009), librarianship ranked far below professions such as medicine or law. Even among LIS students (Tanacković et al., 2018), the profession was rarely described as a "dream job," ranking 9th out of 10 options. Abban & Saah (2021) found that many students in Ghana had a limited understanding of what librarians do, which they attributed to a lack of interest in the profession. This gap is not simply about career choice; it signals a larger issue of invisibility. Despite high-quality training and important responsibilities associated with the profession, the role of librarians is not effectively conveyed to young audiences. The studies indicate high retention rates, indicating strong participation; however, the conclusions are concerning. The profession faces the risk of being overlooked unless active outreach and storytelling efforts are implemented. The contrast between LIS and non-LIS students also highlights a controversy: awareness increases appreciation, but that



awareness is limited to those already within the field.

4.3 Perceptions of the Teaching Community (RQ3)

Faculty members often work closely with library Professionals in academic settings. Faculty perceptions have also been explored in several contexts where librarianship is evolving as an academic discipline (Babb, 2021; Prins & de Gier, 1992). Their findings reinforce the view that academic librarians continue to negotiate visibility and authority within teaching domains. Studies by Ritchie (2011) and Fagan, Lush & Ladwing (2020) show that many teachers recognize librarians as collaborators and resource experts. Some even equate librarians' contributions with those of senior faculty members. Yet gaps remain. While librarians view themselves as educators, many teachers do not fully appreciate the roles and responsibilities that librarians can play in teaching information literacy, assisting the research process, and integrating digital tools into learning. This partial recognition reflects both progress and ongoing limitations on their work. On the human side, librarians take pride in their relationships with faculty, but they also feel frustrated when their contributions are overlooked or narrowly defined. The evidence reveals a story of respect tinged with invisibility, professionals valued for what is obvious but still struggling to gain recognition for the depth of their expertise.

4.4 Representation in Mass Media (RQ4)

The media has a profound influence on how public opinion is formed and expressed. At a broader cultural level, popular and media depictions have long influenced the librarian's social image (Attebury, 2010; Seale, 2008). Studies reveal that online and cinematic portrayals often oscillate between traditional and modern archetypes of librarianship. Content analyses (Radford & Radford, 2001; Luthmann, 2007; Pachauri, 2019; Ja?imovi? & Petrovi?, 2014) show

that librarians are pictured in contradictory ways. In movies and comics, librarians are often portrayed as caricatures, and strict, unattractive, or socially awkward figures. At the same time, some portrayals celebrate librarians as perfectionists or heroic keepers of knowledge. The effect of these stereotypes is powerful because media images reach even those who have never interacted with a librarian in real life. More than half of media-based evidence still emphasizes negative images, though newer portrayals on digital platforms suggest a slow shift toward dynamic and tech-savvy depictions. For librarians themselves, this creates a painful tension: while they are innovators in their communities, the cultural stories told about them often lag far behind reality.

4.5 Self-Perception of Librarians (RQ5)

The most human aspect of this review comes from listening to librarians describe themselves. Self-perception studies (Luthmann, 2007; Sittler, 2011; Daiwatabai, 2020; Garcia & Barbour, 2018; Khasseh, Alidousti & Zare-Farashbandi, 2019) reveal a mix of pride and insecurity. Many professionals insist that their work is valuable, with Daiwatabai (2020) reporting that 60% of librarians in Karnataka rejected the notion that their profession has low status. However, Garcia & Barbour (2018) found that stereotypes still weigh heavily on practitioners, causing feelings of invisibility and lack of respect. Khasseh et al. (2019) echoed these concerns in Iran, where librarians described their social status as moderate at best. The work of Ja?imovi? and Petrovi? (2014) revealed that librarians actively resist negative stereotypes and representations of librarianship by voicing their concerns through email discussion groups, professional conferences, and journals. Interestingly, these authors also pointed out a new fear emerging among professionals, the possibility of being rebranded through another stereotype: as "modern" professionals who, in shedding traditional characteristics, risk losing their identity altogether. Regional studies add further depth to



these perspectives. Daiwatabai (2018), in a survey of library professionals across 267 colleges in Karnataka, India, found that although the general public remains largely unaware of the details of the profession, most professionals rejected the idea that librarianship carries less prestige or status compared to other fields. By contrast, Khasseh et al. (2019) reported weak to moderate perceptions of social status among librarians in the Gillian Province of Iran in a study of librarians. Similarly, Garcia & Barbour (2018) found that many librarians regarded stereotypes as a serious problem. In their study, librarians expressed feelings of insecurity about persistent public misconceptions, noting that users often fail to recognize their valuable skills and roles, leading to diminished respect and professional status. Taken together, these studies show that librarians' self-perceptions are complex and often contradictory. Professionals demonstrate pride and resilience but simultaneously carry insecurity and frustration about their visibility and recognition. This tension highlights a profession at a crossroads: determined to redefine its identity while negotiating the enduring weight of stereotypes. Tables and figures are included (Table 1, Table 2, and the PRISMA flow diagram), providing a visual synthesis of these findings. However, the deeper narrative reveals that behind every percentage is a group of professionals striving to redefine their place in a changing world.

5. Conclusion and Suggestions

This study has synthesized global literature on the social status and image of Library and Information Science (LIS) professionals, drawing on 29 studies published between 1990 and 2024. The evolving professional identity of librarians reflects a global discourse that has spanned several decades of research (Hildenbrand, 2000; Hillenbrand, 2005; Majid and Haider, 2008; Vassilakaki and Moniarou-Papaconstantinou, 2014). These studies collectively underscore the ongoing challenge of redefining librarianship in a

knowledge-driven society. The present work is valuable because it brings together the perspectives from diverse stakeholder groups, like the general public, students, faculty, media, and librarians themselves, and highlights the persistent gap between evolving professional roles and limited societal recognition. The study's findings highlight that nearly 69% of studies report largely negative perceptions of LIS professionals, while only 31% reflect positive recognition. Librarianship continues to be undervalued compared to other professions, with stereotypes dominating public and student perceptions. Media portrayals often reflect outdated images, and even landowners' self-perceptions reveal a mix of pride and insecurity. Nevertheless, gradual positive shifts are evident in specific contexts.

Librarians are assuming crucial roles as gatekeepers in maintaining academic integrity and combating plagiarism, signalling a shift toward enhanced professional identity and recognition within higher education (Matonkar and Gopakumar, 2024). To improve perceptions of LIS professionals, the following steps are recommended to conduct awareness campaigns in schools, universities, and communities, highlighting the evolving roles of librarians. Library professionals should actively support their users, which helps build a positive professional image. Increasing student-librarian interactions through orientation programs, digital literacy workshops, and research support is also advised. Additionally, librarians are encouraged to collaborate closely with faculty on teaching, curriculum development, and research support. Professionals are encouraged to use social media and digital platforms to create a modern, tech-savvy, and friendly image of librarians.

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