

The mental image of library and information science among Arab newspaper readers: a descriptive analytical study

Research – English Summary

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Abstract

The daily press plays a vital role in raising awareness among individuals in the community about ongoing local and global events. It also serves as a crucial platform for conveying the opinions and ideas of its members to the largest possible number of interested readers who follow current happenings. The study derives its significance from the importance of journalism in providing information and news to readers, as well as from the significance of library and information science in the creation, collection, organization, provision, retrieval, and utilization of information. This, in turn, enhances scientific research and culture within society. Therefore, the study's importance lies in understanding the information provided by daily newspapers regarding library and information science, as well as in identifying the types of issues that occupy Arab newspapers and the role these publications play in addressing them. This is based on what is published for all members and categories of society across various geographic areas, and it helps in monitoring the public's perception of library and information science among readers. The study aimed to identify the mental image and attitudes formed among readers toward this field. The study employed the descriptive-analytical survey method, using the descriptive approach to explore readers' perceptions of library and information science. Data collection tools included a questionnaire directed at a sample of newspaper readers, which covered four key areas. The study yielded several results, including a finding that 67.4% of the sample expressed interest in library and information science. Additionally, 57.4% held a positive view of the field, while 39.8% sometimes followed library and information issues through the press, whether in print or electronic form. "Al-Youm Al-Sabea" was the most preferred newspaper among the sample members, with 63.9% indicating it as their choice. This newspaper is considered one of the most significant Egyptian private electronic publications. Furthermore, 55.7% of the study sample agreed that journalistic content effectively presents the role played by libraries in society. Additionally, 57.2% recognized the "cultural role" that journalistic content about libraries contributes to society. Finally, 45.0% of the sample appreciated the press's coverage of library and information issues as complementary to what other media outlets offer.

Keywords

Mental image, libraries, librarians, newspapers, Arab countries

1. Executive Summary

This study investigates the mental image of Library and Information Science (LIS) among Arabic newspaper readers, analyzing the role of the press in shaping this perception. It reveals that while the press still plays a role in providing information, readers' primary reliance for LIS news has shifted to the internet. A significant finding is the prevalence of a "neutral" journalistic approach when covering LIS topics, suggesting a lack of strong editorial opinion. Despite this, a majority of respondents express interest in LIS issues, particularly "book fairs," and prefer digital news consumption. The study emphasizes the importance of journalistic quality and depth to attract readers and enhance the mental image of LIS.

2. Main Themes and Key Findings

The study explores several key themes related to the role of the Arabic press and the perception of Library and Information Science:

2.1. The Role and Importance of Journalism

- **Public Awareness:** Journalism remains a crucial tool for informing the public about local and international events and for conveying diverse opinions. The study highlights its "important role in informing members of society about local and international events... as well as playing an important role in conveying the opinions and ideas of its members to the largest possible number of interested readers." (Abstract)
- **Shaping Public Perception:** The press significantly influences the formation of mental images within society. The study asserts that journalism "plays a very important role in shaping the mental image among members of society." (Introduction)
- **Information Provision:** Newspapers are a traditional source of information, providing access to knowledge and suiting all segments of society, despite a decline in reader reliance on them for information.

2.2. Mental Image of Library and Info

rmation Science (LIS)

- **Concept of Mental Image:** The mental image is defined as a "conceptual mental representation of a specific topic within the social sciences." (Section 8: Study Terms) In media, it's the "final outcome of the subjective impressions that individuals form about a specific person or anything else that can affect human life." (Section 8: Study Terms)
- **Variation in Perception:** The mental image of LIS has varied significantly since its inception due to rapid changes in the field, including technological advancements and the growth of the information society. "The field of libraries and information has witnessed rapid and successive changes since the middle of the last century, and these

changes have encompassed all academic and practical dimensions of the field. Therefore, it is natural for the mental image of the library and information science specialization to vary and differ from its inception until now." (Introduction)

- **Positive Perception:** A notable finding is that 57.4% of respondents hold a positive view towards the LIS specialization.
- **Neutral Coverage:** The study's analytical findings indicate a "neutral" editorial stance in press coverage of LIS topics (35.2%), meaning content is presented without strong positive or negative bias. This neutral approach may leave readers to form their own opinions.

2.3. Reader Engagement and Preferences

- **Interest in LIS:** A significant 67.4% of the surveyed audience expressed interest in LIS, with 39.8% reporting occasional follow-up on LIS issues through the press (both print and electronic).
- **Primary Information Source (Internet):** The internet (specifically "the internet network") is the preferred and most relied-upon source for LIS news, with 87.4% of respondents using it for this purpose. This preference is attributed to its "diversity of information sources, and the ease of access to information available on it." (Section 10/2/5)
- **Decline in Newspaper Reliance:** There's a notable decline in readers' consistent reliance on newspapers for LIS information, suggesting they have other primary sources. "The readers do not rely primarily on newspapers to know the news of the Library and Information Science specialization; rather, they have their own sources from which they get their information." (Section 10/2/1)
- **Reasons for Not Reading Newspapers:** A lack of trust in the information presented (37.9%), irrelevance of information to their field of work (31.8%), and lack of importance of the information (30.3%) are key reasons for not reading newspapers. This "lack of credibility" is a major factor in the public's disengagement from newspapers, particularly among youth. (Section 10/1/3)
- **Preferred Newspaper Format:** Electronic newspapers are overwhelmingly preferred, with 63.9% of readers preferring them, largely due to their availability "at any time, with ease of handling." (Section 10/1/4) "Al-Youm Al-Sabie" (The Seventh Day) newspaper was the most frequently followed, highlighting its success in attracting readers, especially youth.

2.4. Specific LIS Topics of Interest

- **Book Fairs:** "Book fairs" are the most frequently followed LIS topic, indicating strong public interest and consistent press coverage of these events and related conferences.
- **Academic Learning and Job Opportunities:** "Academic learning" (28.3%) and "jobs and appointments" (28.1%) are also significant areas of interest for readers regarding LIS.

2.5. Adequacy of Press Coverage

- **"Sufficient to some extent":** A majority of respondents (56.5%) perceive press coverage of LIS topics as "sufficient to some extent," implying it's not entirely comprehensive but provides some value. This "can be explained by the presence of events that have topped the newspapers' interest, which may be of greater importance, and therefore the coverage was 'sufficient to some extent.'" (Section 10/4/9)
- **Influence of Other Media:** The study suggests that press coverage integrates with other media, contributing to the overall mental image of LIS.

3. Study Design and Methodology

- **Objective:** To analyze the mental image of Library and Information Science specialization among Arabic newspaper readers.
- **Methodology:** Descriptive-analytical study, relying on a survey questionnaire and content analysis.
- **Sample:** 540 newspaper readers (ages 20-65+ years old), with a majority holding university degrees (63.1%) or higher (22.4%). Notably, 50% of the sample were unemployed, which the study acknowledges but does not explicitly analyze the implications of for their media consumption habits.
- **Data Collection:** Both electronic (Google Forms, 440 responses) and paper questionnaires (100 responses) were used.
- **Scope:** Focused on Arabic newspapers in both print and electronic forms, published between February and June 2024.
- **Reliability:** The questionnaire demonstrated high statistical reliability (Cronbach's Alpha of 0.885 overall).

4. Key Hypotheses and Confirmation

The study tested six hypotheses, all of which were statistically confirmed:

1. **Relationship between Mental Image and Exposure to Newspapers:** A direct correlation exists between readers' exposure to newspapers and their mental image of LIS, especially for those who regularly read newspapers.
2. **Relationship between Mental Image and Interest in LIS Issues:** A strong positive correlation exists between the mental image of LIS and the level of interest in following LIS issues in the press.
3. **Relationship between Mental Image and Preferred Newspapers:** A direct correlation exists between the mental image of LIS and the specific newspapers readers rely on for LIS news. "Al-Youm Al-Sabie" (The Seventh Day) ranked first in this regard for private newspapers.
4. **Relationship between Mental Image and Sufficiency of Press Role:** A direct correlation exists between the mental image of LIS and the perceived sufficiency of the press's role in shaping this image.

5. **Relationship between Mental Image and Reasons for Interest:** A direct correlation exists between the mental image of LIS and the reasons for individuals' interest in LIS issues (e.g., staying informed, seeking knowledge).
6. **Relationship between Mental Image and Type of Coverage:** A direct correlation exists between the mental image of LIS and the type of coverage LIS issues receive in the press (e.g., depth, analysis).

5. Notable Insights and Conclusions

- **Credibility Gap:** The study highlights a "credibility gap" concerning information presented in newspapers, particularly among youth, leading to a shift towards alternative sources like the internet.
- **Internet Dominance:** The internet has become the primary source for LIS-related information, underscoring the need for LIS institutions to leverage online platforms for outreach.
- **Neutrality vs. Advocacy:** The "neutral" journalistic approach, while aiming for objectivity, may limit the depth of engagement with LIS issues and potentially hinder the formation of a strong, positive mental image.
- **Call for Enhanced Coverage:** The study implicitly calls for newspapers to re-evaluate their "editorial and artistic styles" to attract a wider audience and provide more engaging content on LIS. "It is imperative for newspapers to reconsider their editorial and artistic styles in order to attract their audience." (Section 10/4/8)
- **Unique Contribution:** The researchers state that this study is "a new study" due to the scarcity of previous Arabic and foreign studies explicitly linking the mental image of Library and Information Science to its coverage in the press.