

RE-BRANDING THE NATIONAL LIBRARY OF NIGERIA: A NEW ERA OF OUTREACH

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Abstract

The National Library of Nigeria (NLN) faces critical identity and relevance gap in the digital era, where “libraries” are often equated without dated, silent book ware houses. This paper argues that strategic rebranding, anchored on digitalization, rebranding services and proactive outreach, is non-negotiable for NLN’s survival and national impact. Drawing on post- 2020 literature and NLN’s recent initiatives, the paper identifies (1) the urgency for rebranding (2) the shift from passive custodianship to active community engagement, and (3) a frame work for outreach-led rebranding. This paper takes the unequivocal position that outreach is not one of NLN’s functions, it is the function. In the Fourth Industrial Revolution (4IR), a national library that cannot demonstrate daily, measurable impact in schools, markets, hospitals, and online communities has no justification for public funding. The paper conclude that unless outreach becomes NLN’s primary keep performance indicator (KPI), rebranding will fail. NLN must evolve from “duty-based storage”to“delight-based service” by leveraging digital transformation, local partnerships, and open knowledge to meet Nigerians information needs.

Keywords: National Library of Nigeria (NLN), Rebranding, Outreach, Digital Transformation, Reading Culture, Public Libraries, 4IR.

Introduction

The National Library of Nigeria, established in 1964, it has been a cornerstone of information dissemination and knowledge sharing in the country. The National library of Nigeria also has various departments, including Office of the National Librarian/Chief Executive Office, Public Services Department, Collection Development & Technical Services Department, Planning, Research and Statistics Department, Legal Deposit Department, Virtual Library Service Department, Human Resource and Administration Department, Finance and Accounts Department, International Standards and Programmes Department and Board Secretariat. However, with the rapid evolution of technology and changing user expectations, the library's traditional services are due for a revamp. In an era of rapid digital transformation, the National Library of Nigeria must adapt to stay relevant (National Library of Nigeria. 2025).

Rebranding the National Library's services is very essential in the 21st digital era, the authors forecast that to revitalize its role as a vibrant hub of learning, innovation, and community engagement, ultimately enhancing its relevance and impact in Nigeria's digital age is essential.

Therefore rebranding library services is not just about a fresh coat of paint; it is about revolutionizing how Nigerians access and engage with information easily and effectively. According to NLN 2025 to 2030 plan the National Library of Nigeria plays a crucial role in promoting literacy and providing access to information (National Library of Nigeria. 2025). According to National Library of Nigeria Strategic Plan of 2025-2030

rebranding its services is crucial to meeting the evolving needs of its patrons/Clientele and ensuring the library remains a hub of learning and innovation.

The following initiatives by National Library of Nigeria on digital transformation and the following are relevant in rebranding of the services provided by the NLN.

The National Library of Nigeria offers a range of services, including:

- Lending and Reference Services: Providing access to books, journals, and other materials for research and study.
- Virtual Library Services: Offering online access to resources, databases, and digital collections.
- Research Assistance: Helping users with research and information needs.
- Literacy Promotion: Conducting campaigns, outreach programs, and reading competitions to promote reading culture.
- Bibliographic Services: Compiling and maintaining the National Bibliography of Nigeria and other bibliographic tools.
- Legal Deposit: Collecting and preserving published works in Nigeria.
- International Cooperation: Collaborating with international library organizations to share practices and enhance service delivery.

- Consultancy Services: Offering professional advice and guidance to state and institutional libraries.
- Photocopying and Digitization Services: Providing access to photocopying and digitization services for users.
- Exhibition and Display Services: Organizing exhibitions and displays on topical national and educational issues.

National Library of Nigeria is facing several challenges, including:

- Lack of Funding: Insufficient budgetary allocation hinders the library's ability to maintain its 35 branches, provide adequate services, and implement digital transformation initiatives.
- Dilapidated Infrastructure: Many library branches are in poor condition, requiring renovation and modernization.
- Limited Digital Resources: The library struggles to provide access to digital materials, with only 5,000 out of 69,812 volumes available in indigenous languages.
- Inadequate Staff Training: Librarians require further training to effectively utilize digital technologies and provide quality services.
- Poor Governance: Weak governance structures and obsolete staffing practices impede the library's growth and relevance.

- Limited Access to Technology: Inadequate internet connectivity and outdated equipment hinder the library's ability to provide digital services

Despite facing challenges, the National Library of Nigeria remains a vital institution in the country's information landscape.

Initiatives taking by National Library of Nigeria on digital transformation

- Digitizing Nigeria's Cultural and Historical Heritage: The library is working on digitizing the country's cultural and historical heritage to make it more accessible.
- Expanding Digital Access: The library is developing a robust virtual platform to increase digital access to its resources.
- National Virtual Library: The library is working on developing a National Virtual Library to provide online access to its collections.
- International Digital Literacy Training: The library has conducted International Digital Literacy Training, certifying 141 graduates.
- Centre for Advanced Library and Information Management (CALIM): The library has secured full NBTE accreditation for CALIM and has matriculated diploma students.

The above are initiatives that are part of the library's 5-year strategic plan (2025-2030), which aims to foster literacy, education, research, cultural preservation, and access to knowledge. Another initiative that is towards the rebranding of NLN is the rebranding of

NLN human resources is the establishment of centre for Advance Library and Information Management (CALIM).

Rebranding is simply the process of changing the image, identity, or perception of an organization, product, or service. According to Amanze O. Unagha and Samuel K. Ibenne (2024) rebranding also involves updating the brand's visual identity, messaging, and overall experience to better connect with the target audience, stay relevant, and achieve its goals. In the case of the National Library of Nigeria, rebranding could mean modernizing its image, improving services, and communicating its value more effectively to attract users and stakeholders. James Mngutyo, Angbande, Dennis P, and Joseph Ahemba Gbuushi (2020), encouraged the engaging Government in Library Services for Sustainable National Development, explores government involvement in library and information services.

Since the establishment of National Library of Nigeria in 1964 with the mandate of serving as the nation's intellectual memory and apex knowledge institution. Yet 60 years later, public perception remains tied to duty, a silent, bureaucratic repository for legal deposit and student examinations. In the Fourth Industrial Revolution (4IR), characterized by automation, artificial intelligence, and digital natives as primary users, this perception threatens NLN's relevance. Tellaetal (2022) noted that people turn to the internet for information instead of walking into libraries and in agreement with the above finding that patrons prefer the internet than walking into the library for their information needs with the above finding rebranding the NLN is important and necessary. Libraries globally are

rebranding to embrace open space, aesthetic design, and user-centered services as destinations for relaxation, discussions and hangouts (Mwanzu&Wendo, 2017). For NLN, rebranding is not cosmetic, it is existential and necessary, Alonge (2025) supported by stating that librarians must “shift from simply storing materials to actively sharing knowledge online”.

Methodology: This position paper employs document analysis of NLN reports 2023–2025 and systematic review of Library and Information Science literature 2020–2025 to develop an outreach-led rebranding frame work.

Conceptual Discussions

Rebranding National Libraries through Outreach in 4IR is key. Rebranding in the library context has shifted from cosmetic changes to a strategic repositioning of identity, services, and value proposition in response to digital disruption. The concept of library to be passive by Tella et al (2022), he argues that Nigerian libraries face an existential threat if they remain passive ware houses in an era where information seekers prioritize speed and interactivity. Their study found high awareness of 4IR technologies among Nigerian academic librarians but low implementation due to infrastructure and funding gaps. Similarly, Subaveer apandiyan et al.(2024) assessed meta verse readiness in Nigerian

libraries and concluded that while perceived priority for immersive technologies is high, cost, privacy, and digital skills remain structural barriers. Thus, technology alone can not rebrand NLN; user perception must be rebuilt through relational strategies.

Mwanzu and Wendo (2017) assert that 21st-century libraries must rebrand to embrace open space, aesthetic reflections, and redefined user service to attract digital natives. EIFL (2023) case studies demonstrate that outreach to non-traditional users, farmers, hospital patients, small businesses measurably shifts community's perception from irrelevant to essential. Alonge (2025) contextualizes this for Africa, insisting that librarians must shift from simply to ring materials to actively sharing knowledge online. The authors agreed that NLN as a matter of necessity need to rebrand there resources both human, information, technology and all-rounder resources

Outreach can be seen as a rebranding engine for NLN. Recent empirical work by Alonge (2025), confirms that outreach, not digitization one, drives relevance .in the same line Ogunbodede et al. (2022) found that Nigeria university libraries with high digital adoption still reported generally low perceived effectiveness because services were not embedded in user communities. Conversely, NLN's 2024 Readership Promotion Campaigns featured: interactive reading sessions, book drives, literacy workshops, spelling bee, book clubs and engagements with local schools and community groups (National Library of Nigeria, 2024). The 2025 Abuja Book City initiative further positions NLN as a convener of year-long activities including reading contests and public engagement rather than mere

custodian (National Library of Nigeria, 2025). therefore we can agree that digital transformation alone can not rebrand NLN but outreach and digitization can help in rebranding NLN.

Digital Transformation and Open Knowledge are powerful Outreach. Ajakaye et al (2024), emphasizes that marketing strategies for the digital age are inseparable from open access initiatives. NLN's 2025 partnership with Wikimedia and AfLIA to train over 180 librarians in open licensing and digitization of cultural heritage exemplifies this dual approach (Wikimedia Foundation, 2025). This moves NLN from "closed archive to open knowledge hub," a transition Ifijeh and Yusuf (2020) identified the above initiative as critical and necessary for national libraries in developing economies. With the above conceptual discussion there is still some studies confirm the need for digital transformation and aesthetic redesign, few offering targeted, outreach-led frameworks for national libraries in West Africa and particularly Nigeria. This paper fills that gap by proposing an operational framework grounded in NLN's current initiatives for rebranding.

Evidence from NLN's Recent Outreach

1. Annual Readership Promotion Campaign: All the 34 NLN State Branches organise RPC, run interactive reading sessions, book drives, literacy workshops, spelling bee and engagements with local schools and community groups, (National Library of Nigeria, 2024).

2. Abuja Book City 2025 :NLN partners with the Network of Book Clubs to launch year-long activities with the National Librarian(NL/CEO) stressing reading as “a bridge between ignorance and knowledge” (National Library of Nigeria, 2025).
3. Open Knowledge Projects :In 2025, NLN collaborated with Wiki media and AfLIA to train over 180 librarians in Nigeria, Kenya, and Ghana on open licensing and digitization (Wiki media Foundation, 2025).
4. Partnership and Collaboration NLN branches partners and collaborate with NGOs, Corporate organisations and individuals to organise community base Educational, literacy, Entrepreneurship and library establishment as aligned with the world international days of celebration.

Position Statement: This paper asserts that NLN’s rebrand is important and necessary, it can either succeed or fail on outreach as buildings and collections by changing perceptions of people and experiences about the NLN. The 4IR demands that NLN be judged not by how many books it holds, but by how many lives it touches and how many lives it impacted in the society outside the walls of the library. Therefore, we argue that NLN must restructure its budget, staffing, and KPIs continually to make the primary outreach metric a success, with collection development and preservation serving as a support, not only to the mission. The NLN need rebranding because of the current information age demands new technologies to expedite library operations, increase client satisfaction, and improve technical performance. Ogunbodede et al (2022), stated that awareness is insufficient.

Nigerian libraries report high rates of digital adoption coexist with generally low perceived effectiveness due to deficits in policy, budgets, and skills. For NLN, rebranding can not wait for perfect infrastructure. It must be re-branded by relationships, moving services to communities rather than waiting for communities to come to library buildings. Rebranding the NLN is very important as it is stated below as follows:

1. Enhanced Visibility: A modern brand identity will increase the library's visibility and appeal to a wider audience.
2. Improved Perception: Rebranding can change the public's perception of the library from a traditional, dusty repository to a vibrant, innovative hub.
3. Increased Relevance: A rebranded library will be better equipped to meet the evolving needs of Nigerians, aligning with national development goals.
4. Attracting Funding: A strong brand can attract funding, partnerships, and investments, enabling the library to improve its services and infrastructure.
5. Digital Transformation: Rebranding can facilitate the library's digital transformation, enabling online access to resources and services.
6. Community Engagement: A rebranded library can engage more effectively with its community, fostering a culture of reading and learning.

7. Competitive Advantage: A modern, rebranded library will be better positioned to compete with other information providers, such as Google and online platforms.

Traditional library outreach is event-based, such as Annual Readership Promotion Campaigns. The new era demands embedded, continuous, and participatory outreach aligned with UN Sustainable Development Goals. By rebranding, the National Library of Nigeria can revitalize its image, improve its services, and remain a vital institution in Nigerian society. With the traditional outreach been event-based there are gap in the outreach of NLN. Despite these efforts, systemic constraints persist. African libraries report digital adoption without impact due to policy and budget deficits, (Ogunbodede et al., 2022). For NLN, outreach must therefore be strategic, not episodic, a frame work model for outreach is proposed below.

Frame work for Outreach-Led Rebranding of NLN:

The R.E.A.D Model

Proposal of a 4-pillar R.E.A.D frame work, synthesized from 2020–2025 literature:

Pillar Strategy Evidence Base

READ

R–Re design for Access: - Transformation of branches into colorful, tech enabled community hubs with maker spaces. Use social media, pod casts, virtual exhibit is to “meet

people where they are” Mwanzu & Wendo (2017) link aesthetic, open designs to increased user satisfaction

E–Embed in Communities: Mobile libraries, hospital outreach, correctional centres for Inmate “Read to a Pet” hours, farmer information services. Target farmers, youth, and businesses with digital informational services. EIFL (2023) case studies show outreach to hospitals and farmers changes perception.

A–ActivatePartnerships:- MoUs for cultural exchange and digitization, e.g., NLN-Bulgaria 2024 renewal. Partner with telcos, schools, and book clubs for Book City. Partnerships bridge funding /skills gaps (Tella etal., 2022; National Library of Nigeria, 2025)

D–Digitize and Democratize:- Scale open licensing digitization; adopt marketing strategies fore-resources. Train young LIS professionals as digital champions. Ajakaye etal. (2024) argue digital marketing requires policy and budgets; Ifijeh & Yusuf (2020) stress digital preservation role too. Strategies to be use in rebranding the NLN and the are listed below as follows:

1. **Digital Transformation:** Develop a robust online presence, including a user-friendly website and social media platforms.
2. **Modernize Facilities:** Renovate physical spaces to create comfortable, tech-enabled environments.

3. Innovative Services: Offer services like coding workshops, digital literacy programs, and author talks.
4. Community Engagement: Partner with schools, businesses, and community groups to promote literacy and learning.
5. Repositioning: Reposition the library as a hub for innovation, creativity, and entrepreneurship.
6. Branding and Marketing: Develop a strong brand identity and marketing strategy to raise awareness.
7. Staff Training: Equip staff with digital skills and customer service training.
8. Partnerships: Collaborate with tech companies, educational institutions, and cultural organizations. These strategies can help the National Library of Nigeria stay relevant and vibrant.

Rebranding of National Library of Nigeria cannot be effective without engagement roles of the following stake holders.

1. National Library of Nigeria Leadership: Provide policy, funding, and training. NLN must decentralize cataloguing and lead digital transformation.
2. Librarians: Evolve from custodians to Book DJs, content creators, and community influencers (Alonge, 2025).

3. Government: Fund the National Library headquarters and infrastructure; address staffing shortages.
4. Private Sector & NGOs: Sponsor Book City, mobile libraries, and digitization.
5. Library Users: Shift from passive recipients to co-creators through citizen science, Wiki media editing, and book clubs.

The following are the benefit the National Library of Nigeria will gain after rebranding the resources.

1. Increased Visibility: A modern brand will raise awareness and attract more users.
2. Improved Perception: The library will be seen as innovative and relevant.
3. Enhanced User Experience: Modern services and facilities will better serve users.
4. Increased Funding: A strong brand can attract investments and partnerships.
5. Digital Access: Online services will reach a broader audience.
6. Community Engagement: The library will become a vibrant community hub.
7. Competitive Advantage: The library will stay ahead of online information providers.

With the clarity of the above benefit National Library of Nigeria most overcome the following challenges for the rebranding of NLN to be successful and effective

1. Stakeholder Engagement: Involve users, staff, and partners in rebranding process to build support.
2. Phased Implementation: Roll out changes gradually to manage resources and minimize disruption.
3. Training and Development: Equip staff with necessary skills for new services and technologies.
4. Funding Diversification: Explore grants, partnerships, and corporate sponsorships.

The above challenges when overcome by the NLN there are leveraging opportunities for the NLN as follows:

1. Digital Presence: Develop a strong online platform for services and engagement.
 2. Partnerships: Collaborate with tech companies, schools, and community groups. 34 NLN branches, measuring community contacts, school visits, and digital engagements, not just registered users.
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1. Dedicate 20% of annual budget to outreach-led digital projects and partnerships/collaborations.
 2. Main stream the R.E.A.D frame work into National Library of Nigeria (NLN's) 2025–2030 Strategic Plan.

3. Staff Training, workshops and seminars: Equip staff with digital skills and customer service training especially in digital outreach, library influencers, and content creation writing and so on.
4. Branding and Marketing: National library of Nigeria need to rebrand their marketing strategies, mobilizing their services to people in needs like patients in the hospitals, inmates in prisons, rural and communities.
5. Partnerships: Collaborate with tech companies, stakeholders, educational institutions, cultural organizations and Non-governmental organization.

Recommendations

Rebranding the National Library of Nigeria (NLN) is more like the knowledge and innovation hub for Nigerians of this dispensation called gen z, the following recommendations with help NLN in the rebranding process.

1. Digital First: Relaunch website and NLN app with VLN, NRN, ISBN /SSN online portal, blog content, e-books, audiobooks and social media handles in Hausa/Igbo/Yoruba/English.
2. National Digital Repository with DOI for Nigerian research.
3. Community Hubs: NLN Creative Labs – Maker space, podcast studios, coding classes in Abuja and 36 states.

4. Continuous Sensitization of Stakeholders: Education of publishers and authors on standard of publishing and purpose of legal deposit of publications to NLN across Nigeria will help preserve knowledge.
5. Cultural Programming: National Book Festival, history archives exhibition, memory project" – digitize newspapers, oral histories, manuscripts for posterity seek and organizing events on national and international days.
6. Partnerships: Partnership with schools, universities, Telcos, Google, Wikimedia, UNESCO
7. Communication and Marketing: Librarians as creators, not just custodians, NLN should be active on Social Media, TikTok, Instagram, influencers, livestream to all state branches.
8. Internal Rebranding: Staff training, customer service training, mentoring, and KPIs-track Staffs growth, digital downloads program attendance.
9. Update metadata standards: NLN shows up on Google, KOHA, WorldCat and other trending online facilities will promote library cooperation in sharing resources.
10. National and International professional exposure will improve NLN service delivery.

Conclusion and Position

In conclusion rebranding library services at National Library of Nigeria is a timely initiative that can revitalize the institution's role in the country information landscape. By

embracing modernization, user-centric approaches and innovative technologies, the library can enhance its relevance, accessibility and impact. Rebranding the library services can also increase user engagement and improve service delivery. Effective rebranding will not only improve the library image but also contribute to Nigeria socio-economic development. This paper reaffirms that National Library Of Nigeria (NLN's) rebranding will succeed or fail on outreach as the 4IR, relevance is not measured by collections but by connections. The empirical evidence from NLN's 2024–2025 initiatives shows that when the library leave its building, communities respond. Conversely, digital tools without community embedding produce "low perceived effectiveness" (Ogunbodede et al., 2022).

The National Library of Nigeria must stop asking "How do we get people into the library? And start asking how do we take the library to the people? That is the new era of outreach. That is rebranding. Without this shift, National Library of Nigeria risks institutional irrelevance despite its statutory mandate.

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