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Marketing Research as a Tool for Finding Library Users' Needs and Demands: Application of Three Party Theory

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Introduction

Information is a vital resource for national development. A society that consumes and generates the most knowledge and information is the strongest society. One major aspect of economic development is the balanced interaction of supply and demand. In the information age, the service sector of the economy is also going through a period of almost revolutionary change. Jestin and Parameswari (2002) observe that the increasingly important role of information has resulted in information systems that provide a variety of services and products. They stress the idea that library services must be based on the modern concept of marketing to achieve reader satisfaction, and to nurture a culture of customer service to enhance the library's image in the eyes of the users.

Systematic investigation of the type, quality, and quantity of services required by the users is the basis of marketing for libraries. The concept of a "market" for library and information services emerged in the 1960s and early 1970s when studies of user requirements started to be taken more seriously. Before that, services were professionally determined and systems-led rather than customer-driven. Many user studies have been done using market research techniques. Techniques used in library market research are drawn from the commercial sector and may be designed to assess both quantitative and qualitative aspects of service. Various methodologies may be used, such as questionnaires, interviews, user panels, or focus groups (Shamel, 2002; Kennington, 2003). Koontz (2003) defines market research as the continuous acquisition and analysis of customer-related. According to him, market research usually revolves around gathering data that is needed to solve a specific problem. Ideally, agencies gather customer-related data continuously, so information is available when needed. The American Marketing Association (2007) provides a comprehensive definition of marketing and market research, saying that, "marketing is the activity, set of institutions, and processes for creating, communicating, delivering, and exchanging offerings that have value for customers, clients, partners, and society at large." Market research helps see the library through the eyes of its users. It is a way to measure what the library is providing and what its users want (McDonald, 1989; Lovelock, 1996; Wilson and Strouse, 1999; Market Research Portal, 2007).

Keeping the effectiveness of this technique in view, market research was used to determine library users' opinions about the library of the Department of Library and Information Science (DLIS), University of the Punjab, Lahore, Pakistan. As Mittermeyer (2003) observes, in library and information science (LIS) marketing, it takes "three to tango:: the parent organization, the service provider, and the customer. Her "Third Party Theory" is illustrated in Figure 1.

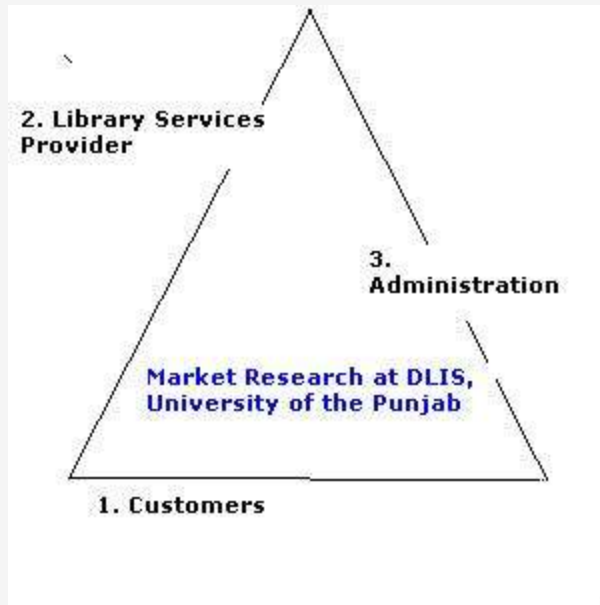


Figure 1. Liberally adapted from Mittermeyer (2003)

This study does not attempt to prepare a detailed marketing plan but it will give some suggestions, and findings of the study can be used for preparing a plan.

Research Design: A simple questionnaire was designed for data collection from the primary population of the study, which is students and teachers who are conducting and advising research at Masters, M. Phil., and Ph.D levels. A group interview (focus group) of Masters students was also conducted as a secondary target population. The administration and service provider/librarian were interviewed to get a clear picture of current status and future plans. Data were collected using questionnaires, focus group, interviews, and observation. The researcher personally met the research participants and introduced them to the purpose of the study. SPSS (version 14) was used for quantitative analysis, while qualitative analysis was done with Atlas-ti software.

Analysis of the Data

Coming section presents the analysis of the data gathered through the questionnaire (containing both open ended and close ended questions), focus group and interviews.

First Party: The Customers

Respondents were asked to give their opinion about different features of the library and mention to what extent they are satisfied with these features of the library.

Table 1. *Descriptive Statistics of Opinion about Different Features of Department of Library and Information Science Library*

Features	Minimum	Maximum	Mean	Median	Mode	Std. Deviation
Building	2	4	2.93	3.00	3	.80
Staff	1	3	2.27	2.00	2	.59
Services	1	3	2.20	2.00	2	.56
Collection	1	5	3.40	4.00	4	1.12
Equipment	2	4	2.87	3.00	3	.52
Online searching facility	4	1	2.53	3.00	3	.99
Environment	3	1	2.20	2.00	2	.68

1= Poor, 2= Fair, 3=good, 4=V. Good, 5=Excellent

Table 2. *Frequency, %age and Mean of Opinion About Different Features of Department of Library and Information Science Library (N = 15)*

Features	Excellent	V. Good	Good	Fair	Poor	Mean
Building	0	4 (27%)	6 (40%)	5(33%)	0	3.00
Staff	0	0	5(33%)	9(60%)	1(7%)	2.00
Services	0	0	4(27%)	10(67%)	1(7%)	2.00
Collection	1 (7%)	9 (60%)	1 (7%)	3 (20%)	1(7%)	4.00
Equipment	0	1(7%)	11(73%)	3 (20%)	0	3.00
Online searching facility	0	2 (13%)	7 (47%)	3 (20%)	3 (20%)	3.00
Environment	0	0	5 (33%)	8 (54%)	2(14%)	2.00

1= Poor, 2= Fair, 3=good, 4=V. Good, 5=Excellent

Respondents were asked to give their opinions about different features of the library and indicate their satisfaction. The mean (3.00) shows that they are satisfied with the library building. The mean (2.00) shows less satisfaction of the respondents by the library staff. The mean (2.00) also indicates the less satisfaction of the respondents by the library services. The highest mean (4.00) shows the highest degree of respondents' satisfaction with the library collection. The mean (3.00) shows that respondents are satisfied with the available equipments of the library. Again the mean (3.00) shows the respondents' satisfaction with the online searching facility. The low mean (2.00) shows less satisfaction of respondents with the library environment.

Respondents' opinions and suggestions for library collection

Respondents were asked to give their opinion about the library collection and provide some suggestions for its improvement. They believe that it is the best collection in this field (n=7) but better and latest resources are needed in electronic and print format (n=5). They also stressed that more research-oriented collections are needed (n=3), including serials/journals (n=2) and new reference sources (n=1) (Table 3).

Table 3. *Frequency Distribution of Respondents' Opinion and Suggestions for Library Collection*

Respondents' Opinion	Frequency
It is the best collection in this field	7
Better and latest resources are needed in electronic and print format	5
More research oriented collection should be subscribed	3
Serials/journals should be subscribed	2
New reference sources are needed	1

Problems mentioned by respondents

Respondents pointed out that more qualified and trained paraprofessional staff is needed (n=7), the OPAC needs improvement and is not user-friendly (n=5), the library lacks proper and adequate systems (n=5), semi-open shelving is barrier in its proper use (n=4), library hours are inadequate (n=4). They also mentioned that the library environment is not conducive to study and use (n=2), and that the library lacks journals (n=1) (Table 4).

Table 4. *Frequency Distribution of Respondents' Opinion About Library Problems*

Respondents' Opinion	Frequency
Qualified and trained paraprofessional staff is needed	7
OPAC is not adequate and user-friendly	5
Lack of computer systems in the library	5
Semi open shelving	4
Less library hours	4
Lack of conducive library environment	2
Lack of journals	1

Respondents' suggestions for new library services

Respondents recommended open shelving (n=6). They suggested following library services: SDI in relevant research areas (n=5), effective reference service/personalized reference service (n=3), Current Awareness Service (CAS) (n=3), library orientation (n=2), help in online searching (n=2), Document Delivery Service (n=1), blog development (n=1), Email alerts (n=1), study carrels for research students (n=1), orientation of HEC digital databases (n=1), and printing facility for research students (n=1) (Table 5).

Table 5. *Frequency Distribution of Respondents' Suggestions for New Library Service*

Respondents' Recommendations	Frequency
Open shelving	6
SDI in relevant research areas	5
Effective reference service/personalized reference service	3
Current Awareness Service (CAS)	3
Library orientation	2
Help in online searching	2
Document Delivery	1
Blog development	1
Email alerts	1
Study carrels for research students	1
Orientation of HEC digital databases	1
Printing facility for research students (Masters)	1

Focus Group

Masters students were interviewed in a focus group as secondary target population of the study. A group of 20 students (MLIS final semester) were interviewed. Analysis of participants' opinions about the library and its attributes is as follows:

- Lack of communication skills in library staff, especially non-professional staff
- More library staff is needed. The administration should appoint more trained and skillful staff for the library.
- Library orientation programs are needed. The librarian should provide assistance in online search to novice users.
- Advanced reference and information services should be implemented.
- The library should be fully air conditioned and carpeted along with other improvements.
- Library environment is not conducive to study.
- Library collections should be improved and newspapers increased in number
- Full open access should be provided to all library resources, especially reference sources
- The ILibrary should have its own website and a Web OPAC should be introduced.
- The library should be fully automated, including online circulation, etc.
- The library catalog should be converted to more user-friendly software.
- The book collection should be increased and loan periods lengthened.
- Printing and photocopying should be available for a fee.
- There should be more computers with proper furniture.
- Internet speed is slow on the existing library systems.
- Library hours should be increased for evening students
- Research students with professional experience can help upgrade the departmental library.
- The departmental library should be a model library

Second Party: The Library Services Provider

The library services provider (the senior librarian) was interviewed as the second party in the LIS market research. The librarian observed that current library staff is not sufficient for providing advanced reference and information services for research and other students. The librarian has an administrative

job as well, while the library clerk and attendant are do not have enough training for user-friendly services. Despite these problems, there are new library services such as full open access to the library collection, electronic copies of theses and dissertations, Document Delivery Service, photocopying, e-document supply, Inter Library Loan (ILL), Instructional support, a Web OPAC, and online searching that will be implemented soon.

Third Party: The Administration

The administration, including the Chair of the department, library advisor, and research coordinator were also interviewed as the most important third party of this triangular market research. The chair had shown dissatisfaction with current library services, especially for research students. He acknowledged problems mentioned by other respondents, such as lack of staff and their regular training. He recommended many special library services, i.e., effective reference service, help in online searching, library orientation programs, etc. The research coordinator and library advisor pointed out many problems that cause the users' dissatisfaction and are a hurdle in the research process. Although she mentioned many new library services, she also emphasized that without sufficient and competent staff, it will be difficult if not impossible.

Findings

Research students are clearly unsatisfied with current library and information services. They have recommended many services to fulfill their information needs. The department administration and library service provider have also suggested many new services for this segment of users. The following recommendations are made by the researcher to help in developing a user-centered marketing plan:

- New reference and information services should be designed and offered, especially for research students, which will allow the library to participate actively in the research program of the department.
- Coordination programs with other libraries should be started to overcome the problems such as lack of funds and resources.
- The library should enter into cooperative programs with other libraries to help overcome problems such as lack of funds and resources.
- A need-based collection should be developed and research students should be allowed to recommend books relevant to their area of research, which should be given special consideration by the administration and librarian. Other users should also be encouraged to suggest books. This could be done through the library website.
- An online database of abstracts of theses, dissertations, and research work should be developed in order to avoid duplication in research. The librarian may seek the help of research students in this regard.
- An online discussion group for research students can be developed, through which the library can provide the following services: SDI, article alert service, CAS, and abstracting services. For these services, target users' profiles should be developed by the library. The library can try to use existing resources for these services i.e., HEC Digital Library resources.
- Keeping the research participants' recommendations in view, the following services should be offered by the library through its website:
 1. *Ask a Librarian*: This feature on the library website provides online reference service.
 2. *Dissertation repository*: A repository of abstracts of LIS thesis and dissertations.
 3. *Suggest a Book*: This feature will allow students to recommend books for the library collection.
 4. *Browse the Library Catalog*: Online access to the library catalog should be provided.
 5. *Your Account*: Students can access a list of materials they have checked out and renew them online.
 6. *Request an Article*: Students can request a print or electronic article through the library website.

7. *Give your Opinion About Library Services*: All the students and faculty can be encouraged to give their opinions about library services or recommend any change.

Conclusion

Researchers need reference and information services, as well as other facilities, in order to further research and development in their countries. With this in mind, the “Three Party” market research approach was used to determine the information needs and their opinion about library services of DLIS students. New services are proposed on the bases of the findings. The data acquired can be used for planning and decision-making by the DLIS administration and the librarian. While the proposed services can benefit the users, they will also their time, energy, and money, which can be spent on other academic and research activities.

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