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An Assessment of Marketing Features on Nigerian Universities' Library Websites

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Abstract

Web marketing of library resources and services has become a global trend because of its potential to bridge the awareness gap that usually exists between user communities and available resources/services. This study assessed the marketing features of Nigerian university library websites with emphasis on six (6) elements of (visibility, information, networking, consultation services, online services and online resources). The study adopted a descriptive survey design. The population of the study comprised all the one hundred and ninety seven (197) NUC accredited universities in Nigeria. Purposive sampling technique was employed to select 50 university libraries with dedicated websites. Observation checklist was used for data collection. Data was analyzed using frequency count and simple percentages. Findings revealed that, the library websites are doing well in the marketing features of visibility, information, consultation services and online resources. However, their performance in the areas of networking and online services is not satisfactory. The study concluded that, although Nigerian university library websites possess moderate marketing features, there is need for improvement in their use for networking and offering of online services in order to ensure their maximum utilization for marketing purpose. Hence, the study recommends among others that, IT experts with librarianship background should be employed to handle university library website development and management to ensure the integration of all relevant marketing features from time to time.

Key Words: Marketing features, Nigerian universities, library websites

1.1 Introduction

The technological revolution that defines the 21st century has massively impacted every aspect of service delivery of organizations and institutions particularly higher educational institutions and their component units. Universities are designed to offer educational services geared towards the production of high level manpower needed for societal development through such activities as teaching and research. One of the basic vehicles required for the attainment of the lofty agenda of universities is the library which is also being transformed by technological creations like the Web. According to Babar et al. (2020) people and organizations are using the Web, and their numbers are increasing day by day. Nowadays, any organization without a website can be said to be lacking a very vital factor in its development. People want to explore the services and products of an organization on their desktop in order to make up their mind whether or not to deal with that organization. A website not only lends credence to its services but also creates a confidence among its users that they are going to be provided with services of very high order (Kumar & Bansal, 2014). In view of the massive importance of the Web, university libraries across the world are also developing their websites to enhance their services and resources.

A website is a set of unified webpages, usually including a homepage and server prepared and managed as a collection of information by an individual or institution. The Wikipedia Encyclopedia (2021) explains a website as a collection of related web pages, including multimedia content, typically identified with a common domain name, and published on at least one web server. A website may be accessible via a public Internet Protocol (IP) network, such as the Internet, or a private local area network (LAN), by referencing a uniform resource locator (URL) that identifies the site. A library website is, therefore a set of purposefully designed interconnected webpages that unveil the mission and vision of a library, its resources and services as well as activities to the visitors without the barriers of distance and time.

Indeed, university libraries play vital role in actualizing the objectives of university education by providing relevant information resources and ensuring access, use and preservation of library collections. Unfortunately, it appears that the resources and services offered by most university libraries are underutilized. There are numerous empirical evidences that point to declining patronage of university library services and resources (Mutani, 2016; Olajide & Adio, 2017; and Echem & Alex-Nmecha, 2019). The situation calls for the adoption of pragmatic and

technologically driven approach in marketing of university library services and resources to promote library use and restore the diminishing perception of library as the heartbeat of a university. In this regard, marketing of library services and resources has become imperative.

Marketing from library point of view entails all purposeful actions taken to increase the visibility and perception of the library and its services in a positive light among its actual and potential users. The aim being to create persistent awareness among patrons, which in turn encourages better use of the library. A number of ways or strategies exist through which library services and resources are being marketed which include the use of newsletters and leaflets, brochures, flyers, notice boards, bookmarks, exhibitions, direct mail, billboards, television, radio, newspapers. In the midst of all these, new and innovative methods of publicity are very necessary to reach out to the new breed of online users.

The library website has emerged as one of the major means of marketing university library services and resources especially because greater number of their users are digital natives who would rather access the services of the library virtually than visit the library building. More so, Siddike et al. (2013) believe that, the library website is the primary vehicle used to distribute library information and collections electronically to university students, faculty, and staff. In view of these, university libraries must integrate marketing features in their websites for the purpose of creating adequate awareness of their resources and services among their user communities. By so doing, they will not only be putting the websites to maximum use, but also promoting library patronage and contributing to the attainment of the overall mission of the parent institution. Suffice it to say that, the essence of a university library website that is not designed to achieve effective promotion/marketing of the library, its resources and services is defeated from the onset.

Key marketing features of library websites have been variously identified and adopted by scholars. Among them are visibility, fundraising, information, consultation and comments (Welch, 2005). Kaur (2009) modified the fundraising feature to networking. Okon et al. (2015) and Babar et al. (2020) used same features in their studies with minor modifications that saw the inclusion of online services and resources. Visibility is defined by direct link from the institutional home page to the library website. In other words, a library website whose link cannot be openly sighted on the university homepage is said not be visible. The fundraising features entail direct links to friends/associates group pages and gifts/donations. The information feature deals with direct links to library news (i.e information to users), library programs, photographs of events, exhibits, online

bulletin, new collections, among others. Consultation and Comments are determined by direct links to "Ask-a-librarian," e-mail, or comments pages. Similar to fundraising is the feature of networking which deals with link to other libraries, universities, relevant professional bodies, social media, among others. Online services and resources are measured by links to application forms, reservation and inter library loans, user education, Online Public Access Catalogue, databases, e-books and e-journals, among others. In view of the foregoing, the present study adopted the features of visibility, information, networking, consultation services, and online services and resources to evaluate Nigerian universities' library websites in order to determine their marketing potentials for improving library patronage.

1.2 Statement of the Problem

Libraries, like other enterprises need marketing to project and promote their services and resources. As library and information services move from confined spaces to the virtual space, library websites have become vital tool for marketing of library services and collections. As a result, the development and ownership of library websites have become a global practice among universities across the world in which Nigerian university libraries are not left out. Earlier study by Okon et al. (2015) revealed that, Nigerian academic Library websites were underutilized for marketing of information resources and services. This could be attributed to inherent lack of marketing features on the websites of the libraries, which is yet to be empirically investigated by any known study. Therefore, the crux of this study was to assess the marketing features of Nigerian universities' library websites with the view to determining their potentials to promote library services and enhance patronage.

1.3 Objectives of the Study

The general objective of the study was to assess the marketing features on Nigerian universities' library websites. However, the specific objectives were to:

1. determine the visibility of library links on the homepages of Nigerian universities' websites;
2. evaluate the elements of information on library websites of Nigerian universities;
3. determine the networking features on library websites of Nigerian universities;
4. determine the consultation services on library websites of Nigerian universities;

5. assess the online services on library websites of Nigerian universities; and
6. evaluate the online resources on library websites of Nigerian universities.

1.4 Research Questions

The following questions guided the study:

1. are library links visible on the homepages of Nigerian universities' websites?
2. what are the elements of information on library websites of Nigerian universities?
3. what are the networking elements on library websites of Nigerian universities?
4. what are the consultation services on library websites of Nigerian universities?
5. what are the online services on library websites of Nigerian universities?; and
6. what are the online resources on library websites of Nigerian universities?

2.0 Literature Review

Research efforts have been deployed to explore the subject of library marketing, however, few have addressed web marketing of library resources and services. Welch (2005) examined the use of academic library web sites as a marketing and public relation tool. The study surveyed 106 academic libraries in the United States. The aim was to examine the placement of marketing and public relations links on the homepages. Four categories of visibility, fundraising, consultation and comments as well as information were used to analyze the university and library homepages based on primary goals of library marketing and public relations. Finding from the study revealed that, academic research libraries were doing well for visibility, consultation, and comments, but lacking in terms of fundraising and information.

Castaldo (2008) conducted a study to see how libraries under the Association of Research Libraries (ARL) promote electronic resources from their homepages and to determine if advertising e-resources from the Duke University Libraries homepage increased use and/or interest in the selected resources. A content analysis of ARL library homepages was done to see how many advertise electronic resources and what these advertisements look like. The study further considered the Duke University Libraries to measure effectiveness of their e-resource homepage advertisements. Click-through and usage data were collected on the advertisements and the resources. Results indicate that more than half of the ARL libraries advertise electronic resources from their homepages and that they present these adverts in similar manners. Results from the data

collected at Duke Libraries did not show a direct relationship between clicks and increased usage of the resources, but high click-through numbers on the adverts indicate that user interest in these resources was apparent (Castaldo, 2008).

One of the most cited studies on the subject of web marketing of library services was carried out in Malaysia in 2009. The study examined the use of academic library websites for marketing approach, promotional and public relations activities and found that academic libraries are lacking in their promotional activities. The researcher reported that, library websites were not fully utilized as a marketing tool and an enabler to reach out to the community for promotion of services and collections (Kaur, 2009). The study of Kaba (2011) equally reveals that academic library websites in United Arab Emirates were not fully utilized for marketing library resources and services, given that majority of the libraries did not to provide online literacy courses, live supports, copyright documents, and online user surveys which are key features of library marketing.

Okon et al. (2015) assessed the strategic issue of marketing of web-based information resources and services via library websites in academic libraries in Nigeria. The study revealed that academic library websites were underutilized for marketing of information resources as this development is evolving. Abbas et al. (2016) examined the extent to which university libraries in Pakistan are relying on the website for communication with the student and for marketing purpose. Total of 148 universities websites were analyzed. The study found that the universities library websites are not fully developed in terms of using them as a marketing tool. The study also reveals that, the websites lacked some relevant information and did not have collaborative interface with the users so that they can directly communicate with the end users and get the feedback for further enhancement in the technological development of the library. One of the major reasons for marketing through websites is to collate feedback that will be used in improving service delivery; therefore, the designing stage must put in place a good feedback mechanism.

In Australia, Yi (2016) examined how academic librarians perceive techniques for promoting services and resources, and the factors affecting the perceptions regarding effectiveness of techniques used. Data for the study were collected from an online survey that was sent to 400 academic librarians in thirty-seven Australian universities. Findings from the study revealed that, librarians used a variety of techniques to promote services and resources. Specifically, the study

reported that, 87.4% of respondent perceived library websites as a very effective technique for promoting library products and services.

Aloysius et al. (2019) examined electronic marketing of library resources and students patronage in university libraries in Akwa Ibom State, Nigeria. One of the key objectives of the study was to determine the extent to which university libraries in the State used websites to market their information resources. Findings from the study revealed that, although the universities possessed functional and accessible websites, they were not used for marketing of library resources and services as information on existing library resources are not displayed on the website; the websites are not frequently updated to reflect new resources; and information on the websites did not positively influence students' patronage of the universities' libraries.

Babar et al. (2020) examined the marketing features on university library websites in Pakistan through content analysis. The researchers' main aim was to identify the key marketing features on the websites and to compare the public and private sectors university library websites in terms of marketing activities. A purposive sample of 53 main (Central) libraries websites of public and private sector universities having at least one marketing feature was selected for detailed analysis. The study reveals that the overall situation of university library websites in terms of marketing features is not good. Findings further showed that, public sector university library websites are comparatively better than the private sector in terms of marketing features.

In Nigeria, there are few known studies that address marketing of library resources and services through library websites. One of them was conducted 7 years ago (in 2015) by Okon et al. in which only 12 out of the then 129 approved universities were selected for the study. The second was by Aloysius et al (2019) which did not exclusively studied web marketing but e-marketing with the integration of other platform and was limited to only four universities in Akwa Ibom State. As at May 2021, there are 197 approved universities in Nigeria (NUC, 2021). Application of modern technologies in university libraries has also improved since 2015. There was therefore the need to examine the current status of Nigerian universities' library websites with peculiar interest in marketing features, aimed at determining the potentiality of the websites for library marketing purposes. This study was undertaken to fill the gap.

3.0 Research Methodology

Survey design was adopted for the study. The population consisted of all the one hundred and ninety seven (197) universities approved by the National Universities Commission (NUC) as at May, 2021. The universities comprises of 45 federal universities, 52 state universities and 99 private universities. Purposive sampling technique was employed to select fifty (50) universities with dedicated library websites comprising 19 federal, 16 state and 15 private universities. A checklist adapted from the studies of Okon et al. (2015) and Babar et al. (2020) was used for data collection. The checklist was used to analyze the websites of the universities and their libraries. First, the universities' websites were visited to determine the existence of direct or indirect link to their libraries. It is believed that, any search for library services or resources would likely begin from the university website particularly for people who are not familiar with the library website. Each of the websites analyzed were visited more than once within the period of the study which spanned between 1st of March to 3rd of June, 2021. Frequency count and simple percentages were used to analyze the generated data.

4.1 Results and Discussion

Table 1: Library Link Visibility on University Website Home Pages

Universities	Visible (%)	Not Visible
Number Sampled 50	40 (80%)	10 (20%)

Table 1 presents the analysis of data on library link visibility on university website home pages. The result reveals that, library link is directly visible on 40 (80%) out of the 50 university home pages visited, whereas it is either indirectly visible or not visible at all in 10 (20%) of the universities home pages. Visibility is defined as the existence of direct link from the university website to the library website. Pull-down, pop-up or mouse-over links are considered as indirect link (Siddike et al., 2013). This result therefore shows that, most of the universities sampled market their libraries by making the library link directly visible on their home pages. The university website is usually the first point of call for people seeking information on any component of the university system; hence, ensuring visibility of library link on the home page will not only create awareness of the existence of the library among the university community, but also facilitate access to the library's services and resources. The finding of this study on library link visibility

collaborates with Babar et al. (2020) who reported that 73.58% of their study sample had direct link visibility on their universities homepages.

Table 2: Elements of Information on University Library Websites

S/N	Elements of Information	Available (%)	Not Available (%)	Total (%)
1.	Library news	39 (78%)	11 (22%)	50 (100%)
2.	Library programmes	39 (78%)	11 (22%)	50 (100%)
3.	Vision and mission statements	37 (74%)	13 (26%)	50 (100%)
4.	Opening and closing hours	34 (68%)	16 (32%)	50 (100%)
5.	Photographs of events	31(62%)	19 (38%)	50 (100%)
6.	Update on new arrivals	23 (46%)	27 (54%)	50 (100%)
7.	Online bulletin	11 (22%)	39 (78%)	50 (100%)

Table 2 presents analysis on the element of information available on Nigerian universities' library websites. The result shows that, majority of the library websites provide library news (78%); information about library programmes (78%); the vision and mission statements of the libraries (74%); opening and closing hours (68%); and photographs of events (62%). However, information on new arrivals is not popular in the websites as only 23 (46%) provided such information while 27 (54%) did not. Also, only 11 out of the 50 sampled library websites had online bulletins that contained recent information about the library. Larger percentage (78%) of the websites did not have online bulletins.

Availability of elements of information on library website is vital for marketing purposes. An ideal library website is therefore required to promote its collection and services by providing pieces of information that will attract and sustain patronage. Although compliance with provision of elements of information on library website is not total among the sampled university library websites, it can be deduced that a reasonable number of the library websites contained adequate elements of information that has the potential to market the libraries to their user communities. The results of the study regarding this feature is in line with the findings of the study by (Kaur, 2009). It however contradicts the finding of Babar et al. (2020) who reported that the overall situation regarding the element of information as a marketing feature expected of a university library website was not satisfactory among Pakistani university libraries.

Table 3: Networking Features on University Library Websites

S/N.	Networking Features	Available (%)	Not Available (%)	Total (%)
1.	Link to NLA, LRCN, IFLA, others	02 (4%)	48 (96%)	50 (100%)
2.	Link to other libraries	06 (12%)	44 (88%)	50 (100%)
3.	Link to other universities	05 (10%)	45 (90%)	50 (100%)
4.	Link to NUC	03 (6%)	47 (94%)	50 (100%)

Table 3 presents the analysis of data on networking features on Nigerian universities' library websites. The result shows that, all the networking features examined were largely lacking in the sampled websites. Specifically, 48 constituting 96% of sampled websites did not provide any link whatsoever to relevant professional bodies like NLA, LRCN, NALISE, IFLA among others; only 2 did. Only 6 (12%) have links to other libraries, 44 (88%) did not. Only 5 out of the 50 websites sampled have links to other universities, 45 constituting 90% did not. Also, only 3 (6%) of the websites have links to the National Universities Commission (NUC) while 47 (94%) did not. It is therefore be concluded that majority of the library websites did not possess networking features that can improve their web marketing potentials.

The lack of networking features among Nigerian universities library websites undermines their ability to offer their clients the chance to benefit from the avalanche of information resources available in relevant institutions and organizations. For instance, through web networking, university libraries can let their patrons tap from the NUC digital library and other open access sources of relevant agencies. In a digital globalized age, networking should be a key component of university library websites in order to enable them explore available collaborative opportunities that abound in institutions of similar objectives. However, this study has revealed that most university libraries in Nigeria are not tapping into these opportunities as the library websites are not being maximally utilized for networking. This finding supports the result of earlier studies by Welch (2005); Okon et al. (2015); Abbas et al (2016), and Babar, et al (2020).

Table 4: Consultation Services on University Library Websites

S/N.	Consultation Services	Available (%)	Not Available (%)	Total (%)
1.	Email services	38 (76%)	12 (24%)	50 (100%)
2.	Ask-a-Librarian	28 (56%)	22 (44%)	50 (100%)
3.	Link to social media	31 (62%)	19 (38%)	50 (100%)
4.	Comment page	23 (46%)	27 (54%)	50 (100%)

Table 4 presents analysis of data on the consultation services available on Nigerian university library websites. Specifically, data analysis shows that, 38 (76%) of the sampled library websites provided links for email services, while 12 (24%) did not. Link for ‘ask-a-Librarian’ service was provided in 28 (56%) of the websites, while 22 (44%) did not have it. Only 23 of the websites (46%) provided comment pages for feedback; whereas 27 (54%) did not have such pages. Interestingly, 31 of the sampled 50 website provided links to social media apps like Facebook, Twitter, Instagram, WhatsApp, among others. Nineteen of the websites constituting 38% did not provide any such links.

It can be deduced from analyzed data that, the level of consultation services/platforms available on the university library websites is quite satisfactory and sufficient to promote library patronage. Modern users of university libraries are predominantly digital natives who prefer online enquiries to the traditional means of visiting the library building. Through online consultation, the barriers of time and space are entirely eliminated thereby giving the user community a 24/7 access to consultation services. Therefore, it is good that Nigerian university libraries are offering and marketing consultation services through the use of their websites as has been revealed by this study. This result is in line with the findings by Welch (2005), and Kaur (2009). However, it differs from the findings of Abbas, et al. (2016) and Babar, et al. 2020.

Table 5: Online Services on University Library Websites

S/N	Online Services	Available (%)	Not Available (%)	Total (%)
1.	Link to application (registration) forms	14 (28%)	36 (72%)	50 (100%)
2.	Link to reservation and inter library loans	10 (20%)	40 (80%)	50 (100%)
3.	Link to renewal	09 (18%)	41 (82%)	50 (100%)
4.	Link to user education	32 (64 %)	18 (36%)	50 (100%)
5.	User survey	05 (10%)	43 (86%)	50 (100%)
6.	Downloading link	18 (36%)	32 (64%)	50 (100%)

Table 5 presents the item by item analysis of data on online services available on university library websites. The result shows that, most of the measured online services were not offered through the websites of the university libraries studied. In specifics, 36 (72%) of the 50 libraries did not provide links to application forms, only 14 (28%) did. Links to reservation and inter library loans were provided in only 10 (20%) of the websites, while 40 (80%) lacked that feature. Only 9 (18%) websites contained links for renewal, whereas 41 (82%) did not. 32 (64%) of the sites have user education links whereas 18 (36%) did not. User survey features are available in only 5 out of the 50 sampled library websites. Downloading link is available in 18 (36%) library websites whereas 32 (64%) of the sampled websites did not have that feature.

From the analyzed data, it can be deduced that, majority of the university libraries studied were not using their websites to promote and offer the measured online services. The only exception is user education which 64% of the sampled websites provided access links to. Hence, the study concludes that, user education is the major online service available the university library websites studied. A dynamic library website should not only show visitors what services are available, it should more so grant them access to those services. In the case of the sampled websites, it was observed that, whereas there were sufficient information about what is available, means/links of online access were inadequate, thereby inhibiting the marketing potentials of the websites and ultimately impeding library patronage. This finding concurs with the result obtained by Okon et al. (2015).

Table 6: Online Resources on University Library Websites

S/N	Online Resources	Available (%)	Not Available (%)	Total (%)
1.	E-books	45 (90%)	5 (10%)	50 (100%)
2.	E-journals	45 (90%)	5 (10%)	50 (100%)
3.	Databases	45 (90%)	5 (10%)	50 (100%)
4.	E-newspapers	27 (54%)	23 (46%)	50 (100%)
5.	Online Public Access Catalogue	41 (82%)	09 (18%)	50 (100%)

Table 6 shows the item by item analysis on the online resources available on universities' library websites. Specifically, available e-books, e-journals, databases are all indicated by 45 (90%) of the university library websites and only 5 (10%) of websites did not indicate them. E-newspapers are indicated by 27 (54%) while 41 (81%) of the sampled sites showcased their OPAC. The result revealed that all the e-resources measured are well promoted on the sampled websites.

It can therefore be concluded that e-books, e-journals, databases, OPAC and e-newspapers are prominent e-resources available on the studied universities' library websites. The library website is an online environment, hence, it is not surprising that, the studied university libraries utilized their websites in marketing their e-resources to patrons. This result contradicts the finding of Aloysius et al. (2019).

4.2 Summary of Findings

The following are the major findings of this study:

1. the links of most Nigerian university libraries are visible on the homepages of the universities' websites;
library news, library programmes, vision and mission statements, opening and closing hours, and photographs of events are the most common elements of information on the websites of most Nigerian university libraries;
2. majority of Nigerian universities' library websites do not possess networking features. In other words, the libraries do not use their websites for networking purposes;
3. email services, ask-a-librarian and social media link are the most common consultation services on the websites of most Nigerian university libraries;
4. user education is the most prominent online service available on the websites of most Nigerian University libraries; and
5. online resources like e-books, e-journals, databases, OPAC and e-newspapers are adequately marketed on the websites of most Nigerian university libraries.

5.1 Conclusion

In the face of declining patronage, library marketing has become imperative to rekindle the interest of user groups in order to achieve maximum utilization of library resources, services and facilities. The introduction of ICT in library services has continued to engender innovation in the way and manner libraries are marketed. Web marketing of library resources and services has become a global trend because of its potential to bridge the awareness gap that usually exists between user communities and available resources/services. This study assessed the marketing features of Nigerian universities' library websites with emphasis on six (6) features of visibility, information, networking, consultation services, online services and online resources. Data analysis

showed that, the library websites are doing well in the areas of visibility, information, consultation services and online resources. However, their performance in the areas of networking and online services is not satisfactory. It is therefore concluded that, although Nigerian universities' library websites possess moderate marketing features, there is need for improvement in their use for networking and offering of online services in order to ensure their maximum utilization for marketing purposes.

Recommendations

In view of the findings of this study, the following recommendations are made:

1. university library managers should work together with the ICT unit of their parent institutions to ensure that the library link is usually made directly visible on the home pages of their universities to make for easy identification by web visitors;
2. IT experts with librarianship background should be employed to handle university library website development and management to ensure the integration of all relevant marketing features from time to time; and
3. governments and proprietors of private universities should ensure adequate provision of funds to enable university libraries have dedicated and functional websites geared towards marketing their services and resources

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