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Peter Olubunmi Olubiyo

Adeyemi College Education, Ondo, olubiyopeter@gmail.com

Jude Timilehin Olubiyo

Department of Statistics Faculty of Physical Sciences Ahmadu Bello University, Zaria, Nigeria,
judecrown2013@yahoo.com

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Marketing Information Product and Services in the Digital Age in Academic Libraries Environment

by

Peter Olubunmi OLUBIYO,

College Library,

Adeyemi College of Education, Ondo, Nigeria.

+2348166392038, olubiyopeter@gmail.com

And

Jude Timilehin OLUBIYO

Department of Statistics

Faculty of Physical Sciences

Ahmadu Bello University, Zaria, Nigeria

+2348069606111, judecrown2013@yahoo.com

Abstract

Library and information centers have began to realize that by using marketing principles and techniques, they can understand better their users needs, justify finding, communicate more effectively with a variety of internal and external audiences and achieved greater efficiency and result in delivering product and services that meet the identified needs of their client. In contemporary society, people can now easily access information and information- bearing resources on the go as long as they are connected with their laptop, smart phones, ipad e.t.c. Even though users can have access to information via the internet and other technology, the fact remains that the place of the library in the society cannot be put aside. As such, librarians are now dwelling in a highly competitive world of marketing

Key Words: Marketing, Information Product and Services, Digital Age, Academic

Libraries Environment

Introduction

Information is an indispensable factor for promoting the development of society (Elavazhagan, n.d). According to Ramadevi, (2018) in Baquee and Sevukan (2019) marketing is an essential aspect of organizations irrespective of profit-making and non-profit making and the library is not an exception to it. However, Marketing of library and information services is a nascent development in developing countries (Kendadamath,n.d). Dike (2009) in Horsfall (2020) observed that marketing involves advocating for libraries, publicizing resources and services, convincing people of the value and relevance of the library. It means not waiting passively for users but actively going out to seek them. A number of librarians around the world have gone to the streets, playgrounds, shopping centres, markets etc in search of users. Marketing can also involve envisioning the library as a business (from where the concept of marketing came) selling commodities to customers.

Adekumisi, (2013) in Benson, Udo-Anyanwu and Onuoha (2016) described the rapid growth of internet that it has drastically changed and transformed the way and manner which library and information product and services are offered and as well put the libraries and librarian at the center of hyper-competition. Adekumisi, (2013) in Benson, Udo-Anyanwu and Onuoha (2016) expressed that if librarians and libraries must survive, then marketing must be seen as a necessity. Library and information centers have begun to realize that by using marketing principles and techniques, they can understand better their users needs, justify finding, communicate more effectively with a variety of external audiences and achieved greater efficiency and optional result in delivering product and services that meet the identified needs of their client. In contemporary society, people now easily access information and information- bearing resources on the go as long as they are

connected with their laptop, smart phones, ipad e.t.c. Even though users can have access to information via the internet and other technology, the fact remains that the place of the library in the society cannot be put aside. Librarians are now dwelling in a highly competitive world of marketing (Benson, Udo-Anyanwu and Onuoha, 2016). Three main factors, namely the information explosion, the technology revolution, and escalating library costs are responsible for encouraging the library profession to develop a marketing approach in its operations and services (Joseph and Parameswari, 2002).

Renborg, (1997) in Kumar and Diksha, (2014) traced the history of marketing library activities long before the concept was born. Samuel Swett Green in his often quoted speech at the ALA Conference in 1876 advocated "improved personal relations between librarians and readers". It could be said that today's marketing of library services has its roots in parts of those words in USA and Northern Europe, in countries with few illiterates and more money, libraries, and library schools than the rest of the world. This certainly does not mean that the idea of libraries reaching out to "the common man" has not occupied librarians in other parts of the world. For instance, there is the example of the "library movement" in Nigeria at the beginning of the 20th century. Marketing of library and information products and services is a new concept in Nigeria. It is not too old as a compared to the developed countries also. The above said concept has emerged during the early 1970s. Since then, it has gained much attention in the USA and is considered as most important profession. Information institutions have grown into information industries which are providing free web based information services (Patange, 2013).

Marketing of library and information products and services is an area which is now beginning to attract the attention of research scholars, market researchers, and the business people. Marketing in the broadest sense ranks as one of the most popular topics of the day.

Marketing basically starts with the market research, identifying the consumer needs and demands, their pricing and promoting them to the appropriate consumers. The main purpose in marketing is attracting and retaining a growing base of satisfied customers. These information industries have employed more than 50% of human resources. Marketing approach is useful to academic libraries to improve their image and to attract more and more users. It helps the library staff to upgrade their innovative knowledge both within their organizations and as a profession within the society. It is the need of the hour to adopt this concept (Patange, 2013).

Acquisition of knowledge in learning resources, processing, storage, retrieval and utilization are activities which like any other human endeavor engender cost. The problems of information acquisition are certainly not without their economic ramifications. It has been established that information is an economic resource. It has been recognized as a powerful saleable commodity. The present day society is rapidly changing. Information plays an effective role in the transformation of the society. This is an information era. It is almost identified as the fifth need of man ranking after air, water, food and shelter (Patange, 2013). Most of the librarians view that marketing of products and services is not possible in the profession of librarianship. But, Author such as Kotler (n.d) in Patange (2013) is of the view that marketing is not limited to large corporations seeking profits only. It is equally applicable to non-profit organizations as well as colleges, universities, charitable institutions, libraries, information centers and services organizations also.

Marketing of library and information services require the applications of ICT. Furthermore, to effectively handle and manage information, librarians need to market library and information services to their clientele. The question now is, “how can librarians effectively market library and information services in the digital age to their users so that the information

needs of their users can be met?" One of the primary functions of the library is to make available to the reader the information materials needed without waste of time. The library's basic need for survival is through information as information is a source for development. As mentioned earlier, marketing of library and information services in the digital age require the application of ICT through web 2.0 tools; these include WhatsApp, email, Face book, You-tube, Twitter, LinkedIn, etc, to reach out to their clientele (Horsfall, 2020).

With ICT facilities in the library, an e-newsletter can be produced. Marketing of library and information services can be achieved by libraries and librarians through; creating awareness, fliers, checkout for sponsorships, selective dissemination of information (SDI), talk shows promotions, exhibition, posters etc. Posters offer good visual communication. They can draw attention when displayed at prominent locations and provide brief information about an event, service, etc. Old and defaced posters should be replaced on a regular basis. These are information marketing (Horsfall, 2020).

Information Products

The products of information refers to sources of information and knowledge contents that are available in electronic and non electronic formats such as CD- ROMs, interactive video, films, audio digital products, online publishing, public domain and commercial online databases available through internet and other databases available through various private network providers; textbooks, encyclopedia, almanac, handbooks, dictionaries, thesauruses, patent information, journals etc (Kumar, 2014). Similarly, the products that can be marketed in order to satisfy the needs of library users according to Vig (2012) in Benson, Udo-Anyanwu and Onuoha (2016) ranges from books, periodicals, reports to electronic documents. Abdulsalami, and Salami, (2013) as cited in Benson, Udo-Anyanwu and Onuoha (2016) in

their study of marketing information products and services in polytechnic libraries in Nigeria using a survey method revealed that information products that are available in most polytechnic library are books, journals, pamphlets as well as information communication technology with library orientation and current awareness services as mostly used strategy in marketing of information resources.

Information Services

Information Services (IS) in library, according Kumar and Diksha, (2014) are current awareness services, newspaper clippings, indexing/abstracting services, translation services, literature search, photocopying of periodical articles, selective dissemination of information, circulation of periodical content, reference services, inter library loan, information repacking and condensation services.

Marketing of Library and Information Services (LIS) by librarians is an attempt to influence library users on how library resources and services can be effectively utilized to advance the position of information services in the digital age. For effective marketing of LIS, librarians/libraries can either learn to adapt and seek out creative solutions to change in society or find themselves going the way of the dinosaurs. Librarians should embrace change; they are to be honest with themselves about how comfortable they are with change because change is constant. Librarians should advocate for excellent library services, appropriate staffing and facilities in the context of marketing themselves and the services they provide (Horsfall, 2020).

Advocacy such as promotion, public relations and marketing to indicate what is currently being done within the library and its environment will be greatly enhanced by what the librarians can offer. With increased alternatives for information, librarians must learn to gain a competitive

edge and promote the added value in the services they provide. For effective information handling and management, effective marketing should be used to promote access to library and information services as a panacea towards sustainable libraries in the digital age (Horsfall, 2020).

Marketing Mix for Academic Libraries

Komolafe-Opadeji and Haliso (2012) in Benson, Udo-Anyanwu and Onuoha (2016) pointed out that marketing is an important weapon for handling competition and that for academic libraries in Nigeria to remain relevant to the academic community, marketing concept must be embraced. Shapiro, (1981) in Patange (2013) opined that there are four key marketing concepts that provide the basis for marketing thought and action in the nonprofit environment which are considered. The core concepts of marketing are considered to be the marketing mix.

Borden's concept of marketing mix has given due recognition to marketing theory and the concept of marketing mix which was accepted as the set of marketing tools. Singh and Shukla (2009) as cited in Horsfall (2020), opined that marketing is the process of planning, pricing, promoting, and distributing goods and services to create "exchanges" that satisfy the library and the customers. Also, Patange (2013) expressed that Borden's marketing mix was summed up into 4Ps – Product, Price, Place and Promotion.

1. **Product:** It is anything which is offered to the market for exchange of consumption. It is tangible (which can be seen and touched). Product is the most important thing in the marketing system. Thus, information product such as books, theses, email, google etc are the products

2. Price: Pricing is another variable of the marketing mix. It is the most difficult issue. Lot of things are to be kept in mind while fixing the price. Two types of pricing are suggested (i) Cost recovery, by which the libraries cover only budgeted cost of acquiring information materials. (ii) Commercial pricing, where the libraries make a profit through fine placed on defaulters.
3. Place: Place is the process of getting the goods or services from the producer to the destination where consumer can have access. In this business it is a matter of access. It is the channel that links product and consumer.
4. Promotion: It is yet another important factor in marketing. It can only be successful if the other factors of the mix have been considered. It was pointed out that promotion, in general, involves one or more, or all, of the following methods to reach the client:
 - Public relations
 - Advertising
 - Personal selling

Marketing of Information Products in Academic Libraries

Okogwu (2006) in Benson, Udo-Anyanwu and Onuoha (2016) pointed out that marketing has become important in library environment because it sets the librarians toward organizational strategic thinking and planning, thereby offering the opportunity to develop more effective library services which could lead to over all improved organizational decisions. Marketing of information product, according to Ibrahim (2010) in Horsfall (2020), is defined as any activity that is undertaken in order to provide information goods and/or services that can satisfy the needs of customers. The library is a marketplace of ideas and information. Hence, when customers/users realize they are getting more from their libraries, they become

advocates and passionate supporters for what the library do. Librarians are therefore to convince users to accept their help/assistance.

In this digital age, librarians are introduced to the concept of branding and rebranding its products, marketing strategies and different online platforms are open to design and market products and services to remain relevance in their role. Marketing of library and information services is absolutely a necessary agenda to librarians, situation or activity for all kinds of libraries all over the world. It is a very important area for library and information science professionals. It shows that librarians are not book worms, they maintain a competitive air over other professional. They adopt social management principles, stand and face the individual with facts and figures [making self-services]. They possess the knowledge of identifying the information needs of clients (client-oriented), and have effective communication, interviewing, and presentation skills, as well as managerial skills and good sense of humour. It must be emphasized that marketing and communication become as important as delivering the services.

Thus, (Fisher and Pride, 2006; Mathews, 2009; Webreck Alman, 2007) in Otoberise and Omagbon (2019) opined that promotional tools that can be used to market information products by academic libraries to promote their services and resources are digital media, such as the library's website, e-mail lists, blogs and podcasts; print materials, such as posters, handouts and giveaways; events such as orientation tours and workshops; and other tools such as library publications, contests, brochures, direct mail, Web 2.0 applications and displays.

Marketing of Information Services in Academic Libraries

Patange (2013) expressed that successful marketing of information services includes the act of deciding the strategies/ techniques used in different situation for upkeep, management and

growth of the library. As non-profit-making organization, library and information center cannot avoid marketing practices. Although libraries/information centers as non-profit organizations, yet they have two assignments –they are responsible to clients to whom they provide services and the parent institution/donor agencies from whom they receive funds. The library should be a growing organism and this is why they should market their services for the following reasons:

- a. Marketing enables librarian or information manager to understand the real needs of users for taking good management decisions, which will in turn help in providing maximum information services to users more efficiently and effectively.
- b. Librarian or information manager is not only interested for the people who do use the services regularly. He is also interested in non-user groups. Marketing play a vital role to identify the information needs of non-users and helps to draw them with necessary information.
- c. Librarians and information managers need to present their services as an indispensable part of the organization and try to justify the claim that their clients/users cannot do their job efficiently or effectively without a library service. In this way, marketing techniques will help libraries and information services receive more funding from their patrons.
- d. Marketing will help to improve the image of the library and information profession through collection of revenue through library users' registration to performing different services to users.

According to Bhatt, (2011) as cited in Horsfall (2020), marketing library and information services can be effectively managed to advance the position of information literacy in sustaining library services in the digital age. It helps to achieve organizational goals by determining the needs and wants of target audience, in other to make them satisfied. Effective marketing of

library and information services is a way of making sure libraries and librarians market their services and themselves to meet their users' information need. Activities such as book displays, lectures, quiz, debates, seminars, competitions, exhibitions, etc., can have a positive impact on the image of the library, motivate people to come to the library and promote the use of its products and services. This will help solve the problems of the users' and their needs and also enable them to visit and use the library often.

Challenges to Marketing Information Product and Services in Academic Libraries

A literature review conducted revealed that marketing of information was a relatively new issue in developing countries and that most of the case-study literature on the subject were scanty. The review concluded that marketing potential is underestimated by librarians and information service professional and that they were generally reluctant to embrace the marketing concept (Lafond, 1999). Librarians and information managers seem to be reluctant to become fully involved in marketing their information products and services and when they attempt to market their information services they neglect or fail to understand the behavior of the user. The librarians should understand the nature of information, needs of users, the transfer process between people and information. Understanding of this new dimension of library and information services will help concerned policy makers in formulating appropriate plans and programs to make the library and information services most effective, and long sustainable. But this is not the case. (Patange 2013).

There are some challenges associated with marketing of Library and Information Services. These according to Horsfall (2020) include the following:

- Ignorance among librarians: Some of the librarians are ignorant about the marketing services of the library in the digital age.
- Lack of ICT infrastructure: A lot of libraries do not have up to date ICT infrastructure for information marketing.
- Lack of awareness of the public on their access to information: It is a common problem for some individual to have access to the right information and at the right time and place.
- Lack of funds: For any organization to stand firm and aid development in any angle, fund is needed. For instance, in Nigeria, libraries are not well funded to help them procure their needed materials and improve on current marketing services needed by the library in this age to promote their image.
- Lack of training and retraining of library staff: Training and retraining of staff has posed problems in most libraries in Nigeria. This deny them of the current marketing strategies of the 21st century obtainable in the western world.
- Lack of marketing strategies and skills: This has posed challenges to librarians/libraries who do not have the strategies to market library and information services in the digital age.

Way Forward

Abdulsalami and Salami (2013) in Benson, Udo-Anyanwu and Onuoha (2016) opined that librarians must begin to change their orientation about traditional approach to library services in order to experience the modern dividends of marketing library and information services. Information professionals need a better understanding of marketing

concepts and approaches to be able to introduce them into their services and to recover the costs of the information services and products that they provide (Lafond, 1999). Bamigbola (2013) as stated in Horsfall (2020) that marketing strategy is a well-structured plan that highlights the organization's goals and quest and the specific process of achieving those set of goals. For librarians to maintain a competitive air over other professionals, they need to market themselves and library and information services in the following ways;

- As part of developing library's access to information, librarians have to continue to learn about resources and users' needs outside their area of specialization, always learning for learning is a lifelong thing.
- Create awareness in the library environment, thereby learning how to market themselves; by knowing how to sell themselves and their skills not just to their future employer but to the constituency they are hired to serve. They need to get out of the library environment and introduce themselves to faculties, staff and students, through fliers, magazines, placing their library home page prominently on a departmental web page with their names on it especially the faculty librarians.
- There should be the urge to share information, any organization benefits from the free flow of information. Closed-mouthed librarians foster inefficiency, rumours and resentments. Make them aware of what you can offer them and be proactive in getting them what they need; send them alert or articles that may help them with either teaching, research, or learning needs.
- They must focus on self-promotion and review resource allocation in an increasingly competitive field. Librarians must keep basic principles of librarianship and merge them with the changing face of knowledge, information and society. Life is about change;

technology has not changed what librarians do; it merely changed the way in which librarians do things.

- The librarian needs to continuously update his/her professional knowledge and skills through relevant staff training and development programmes by going to conferences, workshops, seminars, educational centres and in-house training, always learning for learning is a lifelong thing. Although there is inability to have needed funding which is a problem that militates against taking advantage of staff training and development programmes.
- Library web 24/7(24 hours 7 days in a week) access, initiating information desk with liaison librarians, information literacy programmers, establishment of virtual reference-telephone, e-mail and chat reference service were the major ways to increase the marketing orientation in the library (Kumar, 2014).

Conclusion and Recommendations

Abdulsalami and Salami (2013) in Benson, Udo-Anyanwu and Onuoha (2016) expressed that librarians must begin to change their orientation about traditional approach to library services in order to experience the dividends of marketing library and information services. Presently, the need for marketing of information services is being felt by all types of libraries. Libraries are facing competition from other information service providers. They need to make daily decisions on the form and formats for acquiring and archiving information. Librarians are striving to provide free access to information. They are struggling with space constraints, shrinking budgets and rising cost of materials. At the same time, users' expectations are going high with the emergence of online access to information. In response to these factors, management philosophies and administrative operations of libraries have changed. Librarians are

embracing marketing techniques to be more efficient managers and effective information service providers.

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