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Marketing Strategies Used By Medical Libraries Of Public Universities For Their Information Resources And Services In The North-Western Geopolitical Zone Of Nigeria

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ABSTRACT

The paper examined the strategies used for marketing of information resources and services in medical libraries of public universities in the North-western geopolitical zone of Nigeria. The main objectives of the study is to identify the major strategies used in marketing of information resources and services and how to enhance the existing marketing strategies for optimum use of information resources and services. An explanatory sequential mixed methods research was used for the study. The study involved medical libraries of four public universities in the zone under study. A sample of 365 number of students and 4 number of heads of the medical libraries were chosen for the study. Questionnaire, interviews and observation were used as instruments for data collection. SPSS and Nvivo software were used to analysed the quantitative and the qualitative data collected. The findingd reveales that the major strategies used include advertisement, notice boards, use of social media, use of posters and pamphlets, exhibition and display, user oreintation program and user education. Others were seminars and workshops, SDI, CAS and handbook. The challenges surrounding the libraries' strategies in marketing the information resources and services were the absence of adequate funding and lack of sufficient facilities that will facilitate marketing the information resources and services, among others. Therefore, it is recommended that there is the need for a policy to guides the strategies in use, adequate training should be given to library staff. The libraries should provide adequate facilities to facilitate marketing of information resources and services to their users.

Keywords: marketing, strategies for marketing medical libraries of public universities in North-Western Nigeria.

INTRODUCTION:

Information is a valuable resource for individual and national significance. It is a resource which all human beings require to develop themselves (Bello (2015:58). Similarly, Chimah and Nwokocha (2013:43) described information as a product of data being processed, manipulated and organized in a manner that contributes to the recipient knowledge. It is a force for change, which is becoming as important as life itself. Medical libraries play a significant role in the provision of information resources and services. They acquired, organized and made information available to their users for research, education and teaching needs (Unobe 2015:2). This can only be achieved through the acquisition of relevant information resources that can meet the information needs of their users. Thus, medical libraries are libraries found in academic institutions, hospitals, and health-related institutions with the aim of providing for the information needs of a specialized group of people within the institutions or the hospitals that they are situated at.

STATEMENT OF THE PROBLEM

Marketing in libraries entails the process of promoting the availability and use of information resources and services to patrons, using various methods and strategies. Edewor et al. (2016:293) state that marketing involves the systematic evaluation of user needs and the design of information products and services to satisfy these needs. For the library to do this task, it must identify its users through a community analysis (market survey), to determine the needs and the appropriate strategies through which those needs will be provided for. This will ensure adequate use of library resources and services. The benefits of marketing in libraries include a change in the perceptions of the library and its staff, as well as the encouragement of more users to visit the library again and again so that the library will maintain its relevance and encourage efficient use of information resources (Okon and Umoh 2014:31).

However, Unobe (2015:8 and 78) observed that students and medical professionals in Nigerian Universities do not make use of medical libraries as they ought to. Also, the libraries do not all have services such as e-mail, electronic alerts and the selective dissemination of information, online databases and an electronic resources consortium. More

so, it does not look as if the libraries have deliberate effort at marketing the information resources and services they have. There is absence of appropriate marketing strategies that will be used to inform and attract users to use information resources and services. At the same time with strategies in place it will be used to inform users about other available online resources and platforms. Therefore, with effective marketing strategies in place libraries will attract more users to use these resources and services. It is against this background that the study sought to investigate the strategies used for marketing of information resources and services by medical libraries in the North-western geopolitical zone of Nigeria. This is also to proffer useful recommendations that would address the existing challenges identified.

RESEARCH OBJECTIVES

The overall objective of this research is to examine the situation of the marketing of information resources and services in medical libraries in public universities in the North-Western geopolitical zone of Nigeria. However, the specific objectives of the study is to examine the strategies/techniques used in marketing of information resources and services in the libraries under study.

RESEARCH QUESTIONS

1. What marketing strategies and techniques are currently employed in meeting the users' needs in medical libraries of public universities in the North-western geopolitical zone of Nigeria?

REVIEW OF RELATED LITERATURE

Marketing of libraries entails an understanding of the objectives of the library, researching the needs of the target market, as well as the library and its services, to meet these needs. It also entails promoting the library and its services to attract users (Aderibigbe 2015:3). Marketing is an interdisciplinary socio-economic activity, which focuses on people and organizations in terms of how they collaborate to determine and satisfy the needs of their users (Igwela and Owate 2016:248). This is why Enweani (2018:3) noted that if the libraries and the librarians want to remain in the academic world marketing is necessary. On the other hand, Kennedy and LaGuardia (2017:8 and 16) highlighted the benefit of marketing which include enabling libraries to display their value and enabling the libraries to communicate that they understand the value of the resources the library has and that they are disseminating that value to their users. Other benefits of marketing as identified by Dongardive (2013:229)

include a good reputation, good facilities, high service standards, helping to accelerate the elimination of obstacles, being business-like and having users led librarians.

On the other hand, every library aims to motivate the clients to visit and use resources available frequently and this can be achieved through informing and enlightening clients on the advantages of utilizing resources and services of the library (Odiye 2011:35). Strategy according to Osinulu, Adekunmi, Okewale and Oyewusi (2018:21) can be defined as a comprehensive statement of goals that an individual or organization must achieve. It can also be seen as a long-term, forward-looking planning approach with the fundamental objective of attaining a sustainable competitive advantage. Marketing strategy on the other hand, as opined by Shehu (2015:39) is a process that can enable an organization like the library to focus its limited resources on the best opportunities to increase patronage and attain a sustainable advantage. Varadarajan (2010:119) asserts that a library marketing strategy should be unified in such a way that it specifies critical choices concerning resources, markets, marketing events and marketing conception. Therefore, the library in delivering resources that benefit clients simultaneously meets its organizational objectives.

Kennedy and LaGuardia (2017:60-188), Yi (2016: para 2 line 2), Mathew (2013:200 and 201), Jain (2013:2-3), Kumar (2017:223), Edewor et al. (2015:298), Aderibigbe and Farouk (2017:95), Amina and Ngwane (2015:209), Bello (2015:62), Aderibigbe (2015:306), Okon and Umoh (2014:32), Abdulsalami and Salami (2013:12-14), Odiye (2011:40, 47 and 54), Igbokwe, Ezeji and Obidike (2010:11) and Enweani, (2018:10-11), highlighted some of the following strategies used by libraries to market themselves:

- i. Students union newsletter; this web-based letter produced at intervals can be used to relay changes to opening hours, reminders of the current services options and alerts to newly introduced services;
- ii. Social networking sites (such as YouTube Twitter, blogs and Facebook,) provide the facilities, and various libraries presently utilize the enabling environment that allows users to associate, to interact and team up along with colleagues online in their promotional and other canvassing activities. This is because social networking sites can favor client to produce information content that can be dispersed between the members to look at, communicate and expand;

- iii. Patron training on how to access the different resources of the library; through regular orientation, library week, workshops and seminars and any program or course with any of the teaching faculty that will emphasize to the users on some of the resources or services of the library;
- iv. Library websites and other communication media can be used to convey all library information. Printed materials that are still acquired such as books, periodicals, journals publications and reference resources such as encyclopedias and dictionaries and so on can be displayed at the main access points to attract users' attention. Colourful posters, brochures, printed newsletters aid to promote up-to-date information about library events and keeping users abreast about the changes in the library. Also, SMS alerts, use of published guides to promote services and resources, use of statistics, an annual calendar of events, feedback forms, one-to-one conversations, notice boards, fliers and handbills, surveys, radio, and e-mail alert, advertising in print media or directories;
- v. Others are pasting the new information in the notice boards, public relation strategy, and use of newspapers and magazines for marketing and involvement of staff into the marketing activities to ensure optimum use of information resources and services and so on.

Tella and Ojo (2011:54) opined that libraries and information organizations used both old and new strategies to market and publicize their activities. The new approach emanated due to information and communication technology explosion. An example of traditional methods is community meetings where people meet and interact with groups of professionals who share information to the community. In such a forum, people will be given chance to ask question. Similarly, Solomon (2011:91-92) states that strategic marketing entails libraries recognizing the varying information needs of their patrons for patron-centered services.

Potter (2012:27) rightly emphasized that segmentation involves first determining how best to split the groups of individuals to whom you market and creating different value propositions for each of them. This in essence means showing each of the many 'faces' of the library as relevant to each particular group and marketing the aspect of the service provision that most appeals to them.

METHODOLOGY

Using explanatory sequential mixed methods research, the researcher first administered 365 questionnaires to medical students in four public universities and interviewed four heads of medical libraries in the same universities in the North-Western geopolitical zone of Nigeria. The quantitative data was analyzed using SPSS software and the interview was recorded, coded and analyzed using NVivo software. The research is about the marketing strategies used in the medical libraries under study and how they will be improved. The aim of the study is to identify the strategies for marketing information resources and services in public universities in the North-Western geopolitical zone of Nigeria. The specific objectives is to find out the strategies employed in marketing of information resources and services in medical libraries under study.

The presentation of findings

The researcher asked the medical students and the heads of medical libraries about the strategies/techniques employed in marketing in your library. Findings of the study showed that the most used strategy as acknowledged by the majority of the respondents 234(84.5%) is advertisement. This followed by Public lectures 228(82.3%) notice boards 215(77.6%), use of social media 213(76.9%), use of posters and pamphlets 203(73.3%), exhibition and display 191(69%), user orientation program 191(69%) and user education program 129(46.6%).

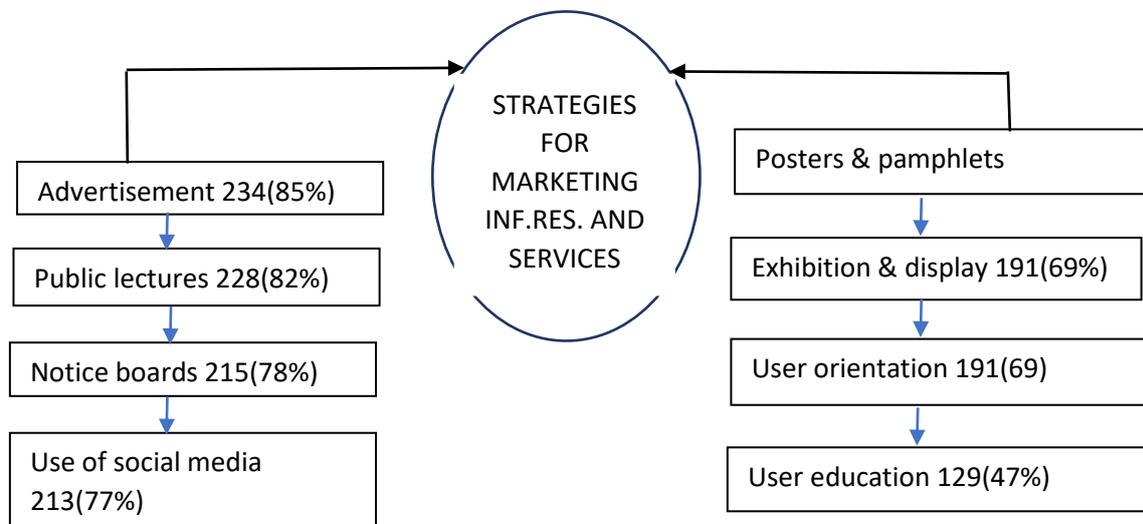


Figure 1: strategies for marketing information resources and services

From the expressed opinions of the students presented in Figure 1 the students were aware of all the listed strategies being used for the marketing of the available information resources and services in the medical libraries. Top among the strategies is the use of advertisements which 85% of the students agreed was being used along with public lectures acknowledged by (82%) of the students

Discussion of findings

Concurring, Bello (2015:61) in research with a focus on marketing of information resources in Nigeria, strategies and challenges, explained that the aim of advertisement is generally to assist in establishing client relations by conveying to the client an important product or service. Advertising can be done across any of the mass media, for example, radio, newspaper and television and social media. The purpose of advertising has to be clear for the advertiser, regardless of whether the advertising is intended to notify, influence or remind. Even though advertising is expensive, however it has the benefit of touching substantial and various groups of users quickly. The responses are aligned with the opinion of Adegoke (2015:4) who sees advertisements as any paid type of non-individual outline and promotion of thoughts, product and services by a known sponsor. Advertisement is a ground-breaking strategy in marketing library and information services to its public and the individuals who will require the services. Adegoke (2015:3) and Shehu (2015:86) pointed out that promotion is primarily the means or methods for notifying or influencing users about what you do and what you can do. The benefits of promoting the library services include expanded support and effective usage of library assets, the improved significance of the library organization, and training of customers and altering their opinions and views about the library.

Moreover, Konya (2017:155) in a study on marketing communication in libraries: observation of German research libraries noted that library services will easily reach their users when using advertisements, personal sales, sales promotion and public relations that are parts of the marketing communication mix.

Similarly, Mollel (2013:25) opined that advertising in the library context is intended to develop user awareness, increase the use of services and promote the library's image. Advertising can be designed to attract the attention of readers, increase interest in the product

and lead the user to decide to use the product with satisfaction. This could be done through displaying, advertisements in in-house newsletters, billboards, local press and posters among other. Adegoke (2015:3) and Shehu (2015:86) pointed out that promotion is primarily the means or methods for notifying or influencing users about what you do and what you can do.

The result of the interview with the heads of medical libraries confirmed that the medical libraries used user orientation programs, notice boards, used of social media and series of seminars and workshops as marketing strategies. Other strategies used were SDI, CAS and handbook. Concurring, Martin-Yeboah, Alemna and Adjei (2018:25) noted that user education or orientation programs in all study areas were common features or strategies used. Enweani (2018:10) in the study of marketing strategies in hospital libraries in Nigeria, noted that the notice board is being used to keep library users up-to-date with the university library services provided. It has the self-explanation benefit. It helps to market the library to library users. The library notice board is usually situated in highly visible locations where users can readily see, or access collected information. This findings are aligned with view of Cabonero, Tindaan, Attaban and Manat (2019: 2-3) opined that current awareness services are essential library services for quick and easy retrieval and circulation of information. It keeps users informed about current trends and developments within and outside the library. It also helps in pursuing studies, fosters excellence and broadens user understanding in line with their interests.

However, one of the interviews reported that sometimes the library is trying to impress users on the available resources and services. But the library is a handicap as in some instances, they gather people to inform them about their resources and service, and the light goes off. Unfortunately, the generator is faulty, or there is no money to fuel the generator. This implies that there are still some challenges associated with the marketing strategies in the medical libraries. Bello (2015:62) opined that a good number of libraries do not have Internet service, where users can go to for other resources. In the event that users come to the library on more than one occasion and cannot discover what they needed, they will be disheartened and may not go back to the library. These and a lot more issues, for example, infrastructural deficit, persistent power failure, poor public conveniences in the libraries, and uncompromising rules and regulations can add to poor patronage of the libraries and consequently poor utilization of the information resources.

CONCLUSION:

Thus, it can be concluded that strategies are the use of available and appropriate means or platforms to inform, attract actual and potential users or the target users about what the library has to offer regarding resources as well as services to ensure optimum use.

RECOMMENDATIONS

- i.** It is recommended that the respective medical libraries should develop a marketing policy that will drive the adoption of appropriate marketing strategies. The policy should aimed at harmonizing the use of both conventional means and new technologies in developing strategies that will guide and improve the use of resources and services in the medical libraries. Especially now that these technologies are needed most. This is primarily for coronavirus phobia, as libraries were forced to provide their services remotely (IFLA 2021). Simultaneously, the policy will help measure the strength and weakness of the strategy in place and at the same time allows the libraries to improve it much better. What is more, the policy should be reviewed periodically, for example, after every five (5) years, so that it will be in line with contemporary trend of marketing strategies in libraries. Involving Professional associations like the Nigerian Library Association (NLA) and Librarian's Registration Council of Nigeria (LRCN) is significant, particularly in realizing this objective.
- ii.** It is also recommended that all library staff should be encouraged to undergo training programs so as to acquire new skills through internal seminar and workshops conferences, meetings with senior professional through professional Associations such as the Nigerian Library Association (NLA), Librarian's Registration Council of Nigeria (LRCN), Nigerian Medical Library Association (NMLA), to acquire advanced certificates and degrees, as well as new skills for the provision of information during the COVID-19 pandemic period, including observing COVID 19 protocols during skeleton services and other safety measures by the library staff (IFLA 2021).These will undoubtedly motivate the medical library staff to be more committed to their duties and to equally enlighten them on building a cordial relationship with the library users. As a result, the users will

regularly patronize the library and will in turn assist the libraries in marketing their resources and services to their friends and relatives.

- iii.** The study suggest that the library should make more efforts to use all the facilities within their reach to market information resources and services to students, especially SMS alerts, radio programs, television, leaflets and posters, and social media like Facebook, WhatsApp, blogs, Twitter, and so on. This is because they are easy to use and they capture the attention of most of the new generation users. Similarly, the appropriate adoption of these media will help the medical libraries a great deal. This would inspire them to profoundly market their resources and services to the users, especially in the coronavirus pandemic era, when services are remotely provided. So, the provision of at least data bundles to these groups of users by the libraries suffices, for example. This can be achieved through proper use of these facilities to create awareness on the availability of the resources and services, which will assist immensely in facilitating the use of information resources and services. In addition, they should make provision for alternative power supply such as standby generators, inverters, solar energy so that there will be a regular and continuous power supply in the library.

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