Analytical Approach to Effective Marketing of Library and Information Products and Services in Academic Libraries

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Abstract

This paper attempts a conceptual analysis of relationship between marketing as a strategy, and academic library as an information service provision centre. Marketing has a wider and deeper implication as it is applicable to not only profit making ventures but also not – for – profit social service oriented institutions such as libraries. The main concern or goal of libraries is user satisfaction of their products and services which marketing helps to advance. The paper, therefore, critically views the adoption of marketing techniques as a necessity to enhance the efficiency and effectiveness of academic library services by offering products which would be wanted and valued by users so as to attract more and more users. With this, the public image of the academic library as an intellectual centre is likely to be boosted. All the attendant benefits of marketing in library operation especially on cost recovery and revenue generation for academic libraries are explored.

Keywords: Libraries, Academic Libraries, Marketing, Marketing Strategies, Library Products and Services, Users' Satisfaction.

Introduction

Librarianship, by its very nature, is multidisciplinary, embracing virtually every sphere of human endeavour. One of such endeavours is marketing. To many, the two (librarianship and marketing) may seem not to have a kind of symbiotic relationship, and therefore incongruent. The impression of those with such view is that marketing is wrongly believed to be primarily concerned with buying and selling which is profit-driven as against library which is a social service oriented centre, and not for profit making.

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A critical analysis of the above, however, would reveal that both concepts have certain things in common, especially satisfaction of customers or users of services and products they offer. Towards this end, Madusudhan (2008) opined that the main focus of marketing and by extension library is the client and the goal is client satisfaction. As described by Rowley (2001), marketing is a management process by which customer or user requirements are identified, anticipated and supplied efficiently and profitably. In the same vein, goods / products and services are offered in marketing and libraries to meet the needs of their target user groups.

Academic libraries being support systems to their affiliated educational institutions play a pivotal role by providing them with the required library and information services to support academic activities, and their contributions in the development of their institutions is also undisputedly accepted worldwide. Bhatt (2009) proposed that marketing techniques and strategies can be adopted for the promotion of library products and services, and academic libraries in particular.

Marketing offers both a theory and a process by which academic libraries can link products, results and roles. Marketing principles can assist them in determining their future, and in identifying quality products, services, programs and materials. What the library will look like and what it will offer as products can be determined through the use of modern marketing theory and practice (Bushing, 1998).

Marketing as a concept

The term marketing conveys many things to many people because it entails a number of activities geared towards a goal. It has been defined in a number of ways by individuals and professional bodies. Kotler (2000), who is often described as marketing guru, defined marketing as a set of activities by which demand for goods, ideas and services are managed to facilitate exchange. His definition appears to be most comprehensive and highly referred in most marketing literature. Marketing is considered as the analysis, planning, implementation and control of carefully formulated programme designed to bring about voluntary exchanges of values with target markets for the purpose of achieving organizational objectives (Kotler, 2000). He added further that marketing relies heavily on designing the organisations' offering in terms of the target markets' needs and desires and on using effective pricing, communication and distribution to inform, motivate and service the markets.

According to Kotler and Armstrong (2006) marketing is the organisation's effective management of exchange relations with various clients in order to achieve the organisations' objectives. This is a holistic approach to marketing as it indicates its broad scope and applicability to a wide range of management activities like library management.

Kotler as viewed by Chandraiah (2009) further proposed a meaning of marketing from human behaviour angle which sees it as a human activity that is directed at satisfying needs and wants through exchange process. According to Chandraiah, an exchange relationship is the act of offering something of value such as a product or service, to someone who voluntarily accepts the offer in exchange of something else of value.

Marketing is also sometime concerned with the full range of activities that are undertaken in order to be certain of meeting customers' needs and receiving enough value in return for doing so. The enough value hereto referred implies receiving enough in return of time, efforts and investment expended to provide the service or product offered.

The International LabourOrganisation (ILO) as cited in Chandraiah (2009) considered marketing as the performance by an enterprise of all the activities required in order to create, promote and distribute products in accordance with the present and potential customers' demand and firm's ability to produce. It is therefore a planned strategic approach aimed at bringing customers and the desired products or services into close contact. In the same vein, the Chartered Institute of Marketing (CIM) (U.K) as observed in Bushing (1995) offered one of the most succinct definitions of marketing as the management process that is responsible for the identification, anticipation and satisfaction of customers' requirements profitably. In this sense, marketing is viewed as a process but does not clarify the full significance of the way in which marketing can and should pervade the organisation if it is to be effective.

More aptly, marketing can be explained as the social and managerial process by which individuals and groups obtain their needs and wants through creating, offering and exchanging production of value with others. Marketing really refers to two distinct, but interrelated concepts in which it is an organizational attitude, philosophy and a set of shared value on one hand and as a function, or process and a set of activities, on the other hand.

Marketing has broad applications regardless of the type, nature or motive of business. Its goals are usually the same in any type of business it is applied, be it profit driven business or not-for-profit oriented enterprise. The goals are to identify the clients' base, to determine their needs/wants/or demands, and to fulfill the first two by designing an effective means to deliver the products and services appropriately. Marketing can therefore, make a difference in any enterprise once customer/user is involved. This is why it is seen as the process of getting the customers to place a high value on the services so that they will want to consume more or support them.

From the foregoing, it becomes clear that the main focus of the concept of marketing is the clientele while satisfaction of the clientele is its primary goal. In other words, the essence of marketing as a management tool and process is to find out what the users' needs are and to set out strategies towards meeting those needs.

In libraries, marketing involves defining a target audience and planning specific strategies in order to value specific library services.

Components of Marketing

The components of marketing are best described as the "Four P's" of marketing which in recent times have been extended to "Seven P's". The seven P's are the products, price, place, promotion (Marketing Communication), People/Participants, physical evidence facilities and the process. All these, altogether, constitute what is termed as marketing mix which is a set of tools and techniques that social enterprises use to achieve the marketing objectives. According to Dc Aze (2002), marketing mix is the planned package of elements which will support the organisation in reaching its target markets and specific objectives. It helps to position the library or information service very firmly in the perceptions of the community they serve.

Product: A product is regarded as anything that can be offered to a market to satisfy a need or want. As described by Chandraiah (2009), product can be anything offered by the marketer to the customers for attention, acquisition and use or consumption that would lead to the satisfaction of their wants or needs. Thus, products could include physical goods, services, persons, places, organisation and Ideas (Chandraiah, 2009, and Dhiman and Sharma, 2009). Seetharama (1998) opined that without products no organisation like library has any reason to exist, there is no task to perform; hence product is the most important factor in marketing.

Price - This refers to the dominant element that determines the revenue or profit or market share for the organisation. It is an important factor in marketing which the customer considers before purchasing a particular product. Price for the product is usually set when the organisation introduces or acquires a product. Price could be social or monetary, according to Dhiman and Sharma (2009). Social price refers to the additional effort that the customer must make in order to obtain access to a product while monetary price implies the payment of certain sum by the customer. That is to say, price is not always considered in monetary terms, but it is also associated with time, effort and psyche (Bell Ann Jo, 1985). Pricing is one of the most difficult aspect of marketing exercise.

Place – This represents the distribution channel through which a product/service is conveyed to the customer. It is usually associated with 'when', 'where' and 'how' a particular service/product is made available to the users/customers. Dhiman and Sharma (2009) described *when* as the time period, in which the service / product is provided, *where* as the location of the services and *how* as the type of distribution of the service or channels, which Jestin and Parameswari (2002) concluded could be through interpersonal delivery, group personal delivery, in-house dissemination, mass media, broadcasting, mail, telephone, strategic placement, etc.

Promotion – This is what Konya (2013) called marketing communication. It is described as a mechanism through which target group (customers/users) are informed about the availability of resources, services and products offered by an organisation. It is a way of reaching out to customers. Promotion mix consists of different sub-components such as advertising, personal selling, sales promotion, public relations, direct marketing, internet marketing, sponsorship, trade fairs and exhibitions (Konya, 2013). Promotion moves the products toward the customer, and stimulates demand and increases sales. It is a means of informing customers/users about what you do and what you can do.

Participants - These are the human elements in marketing who play vital roles in service delivery in organisation. They are the organisation's personnel who occupy key position in influencing customers' perceptions of product quality. In Library, they include all the categories of library personnel.

Physical evidence – This is the environment in which the services are delivered that facilitates the performance of the services.

Process - This constitutes the procedures, mechanisms and flow of activities by which a service is acquired. Process decisions affect how a service is delivered to customers, (Dhiman and Sharma, 2009).

Library Products and Services

Provision of products and services which provide benefits for users and which answer users' most important needs are the core business of the library and information service (De Aze Elliot, 2002). The primary concern of any library and information centre is the provision of products and services that would benefit users and assuage their important information needs. In other words, the library's success depends upon the quality and excellence of its products and services. The products and services that libraries provide are varied and ever changing and could be in form of core, tangible and augmented products.

Tangible products have the ability to meet the needs of clients, while augmented products is the totality of benefits and costs that the clients receive or experience in obtaining the product (Kotler, 1975). A product is defined as anything that can be offered to a market to satisfy a need. It includes physical objects, services, persons, places, organisations, and ideas (Kotler, 1999). Products include those goods and services that are made available through the library. They might even include materials owned by the library and services that are provided by staff of the library.

According to Bushing (1998), these products may also include such things as contracted services from other providers for which the Library serves as a type of agent for the client. Products might be electronic information or access to information held by other libraries. Library products can also be looked at as the ways in which libraries package information and organize access points between the client and the information. Moreover, products consist of both existing and potential services and materials of the libraries. As submitted by Bushing (1998), library's product lines which are directly related to the client market are cataloguing and classification services, Online Public Access (OPAC), indexing and abstracting, traditional reference services, internet access to library product databases and other information.

Majaro (2002) added that product whether in the form of services, programs or materials, must be constantly evaluated in terms of their ability to satisfy the community of users so as to continue to enjoy the support provided by the community or organisation served.

Weingand (1999) argued that library's products can be arranged within a three dimensional structure of the product mix, product line and product item. Under the product mix, collection of the library represents the product line. Product items include books, serial or periodicals, videos, films, audio recordings, etc. Services of the library can also be considered as a product line, and the circulation of library materials, Inter-Library Loans (ILL), reference services, on-line searching as product items. Programmes of the library would be another product line where product items comprise bibliographic instructions, library orientation, displays and lectures. In short, library products, which vary according to the scope and objectives of the library can be identified in tangible and intangible forms.

Library products in the information sector are spread out over three levels which are core level, tangible level and augmented level. Library can provide bibliographic information, abstract and index of information, books, databases, journals, bulletins, etc which constitute the tangible information products. Library can also augment information through quality, reliable, speedy and timely professional services.

According to Bushing (1995), a core product is what the individual consumer really wants and it is often something intangible, though libraries provide tangible products in the form of materials which meet users' needs and requirements. Above all, it should be noted that all the services offered by the library as mentioned earlier are products that can be marketed successfully. To achieve this, Kotler's (2006) five distinguishing characteristics of products can be applied to the varied products of the library. These five characteristics are brand name, features, quality, styling and packaging. Of these five characteristics, the one that receives the most discussion within libraries is that of quality which is synonymous with excellence. Libraries should endeavour to offer and provide quality or excellent products and service that would benefit the users.

User / Customer Analysis

The first step in the overall marketing planning process is to undertake a survey of the consumer of the products and services. These consumers are either addressed as users or customers. The customer is the starting and ending point for any business, institution or agency. Once the customers' need are identified, then products and services can be designed to meet the needs. As products and services are used by customers. Customers' reactions should guide adjustments to current products and services and the development of new ones. Thorough understanding of the customers' goals and challenges is essential to successful marketing exercise. It is important to identify which customers your organisation desires or is chartered to serve. It is the customers who are the focus of the strategic marketing plan and who are the audience for the promotional campaign.Environmental assessment can help in defining who the users are, who the competitors are, while understanding users behaviour can assist in knowing what influences users and how to approach them. Users are indispensable to library operations and library should endeavour to satisfy them. Resources and services of the library should therefore be targeted to meet the needs of the users. It is when this is accomplished that users' satisfaction is attained.

The library as a service orientated institution can be called information market and the library user is the consumer of information in the library and information avenue (Jestin and Parameswari, (2002). As a result, librarians should never forget that library users are the library customers. It may be useful as suggested by Chandraiah (2009) to identify both current and potential users. The primary customers are always the users of your products and services. For an academic library the following is the general list of customers/users of the library:

- Undergraduate students - who use the library and library resources primarily to locate course materials, to complete course assignments, for course reference materials, and to promote self-discovery for personal development.

- Graduate students - who use the library and its resources for research, theses and dissertation writings, and reference in addition to course assignments.
- Faculty - who use the library resources for course development and preparation as well as for their own research, and selection of teaching textbooks and rare materials, etc.
- Researchers - who use the library and its resources especially rare or unique materials for reference purpose in their research works.
- Staff and administration - who use the library collections to assist them in institutional tasks.
- Community members who use the academic library, especially in smaller communities where their nearest public library is not convenient or small, for leisure reading, public information access, research assistance and social interaction, space among others.
- Others including interest groups, professional groups and others who may use the library for the collections, research services and activities.

As noted above, each of these library users' categories has a set of wants and needs in relationship to the academic library. Users' wants are those things that customers would like the library to provide for comfort, extension of services or interests. On the other hand, user's needs are the basic things that the library must provide to assist the users adequately to accomplish their information gathering goals such as having the proper collections, an easy access system, personal support and amenable facilities and equipment. Needs can be as specific as "learning to use the online catalogue" and as general as "improving learning capability (Schewe and Hiam, 2007). The current and future needs of the library users must be identified and planned with a view to satisfying them. The librarians should try to understand the nature and needs of the users. Understanding of this new dimension of library and information services according to Patange (2013) would help the library in formulating appropriate plans and programmes which would make the library and information services most effective and sustainable.

Additionally, library services should be customer-centered where customer needs are given priority when library performs its acquisition, product planning, dissemination and handling of information services.

Needs for Marketing in Academic Libraries

Academic libraries are those libraries that cater for the intellectual needs of the researchers of an academic community like universities, polytechnics and colleges of education, etc. Their role primarily is to support teaching – learning process as well as research activities of their parent bodies.

Marketing enables library personnel especially library and information managers to be more proactive in their approach to meeting the needs, wants and demands of their clientele which are dynamic. By so doing, marketing helps academic libraries to design, develop and provide information products and services that are specially tailored to meet such needs, wants and demands of the users. In the same vein, effective marketing strategy or plan and its adoption in academic libraries could help the library to extend or reach out to their users with the information rather than wait for them to ask for the same. This would therefore, help in boosting the public image of not only the library setting but also the profession. Marketing is the process that successful businesses and organisations use to ensure continuing success.

In addition, it is increasingly becoming acceptable the recognition of information as an important resource for development. As a result, making the right information available to the right user at the right time and in an acceptable format is unarguably the primary responsibility of all contemporary libraries, and academic libraries in particular. Having this information alone and storing it would be of no value unless and until it is put to effective use by those who need the information. Marketing in this regard would help to bring the user, information needed, and information provider into close contact (Raina, 1998). Marketing involves interaction between the consumer and the commodity on one hand, and provider of the commodity and the consumer of the commodity on the other hand.

One other reason for the adoption of marketing strategy in library and information centres is the decrease in public sponsorship/funding of library affairs. The original notion of provision of certain social services such as free health, education, justice, library etc. is becoming unrealistic due to global economic malaise. There is a rise in the cost of provision of those essential services. The global economic downturn is having its toll on these services. More importantly, information is becoming increasingly expensive, so also is its packaging and repackaging. Owing to this and other factors, libraries and other public agencies/institutions that are statutorily charged with the responsibility of providing these services are now being challenged to be self-sustaining and look inward to generate funds if they are to survive in this era of hostile economic condition. Hence it is the adoption of marketing approach that can make this happen.

Marketing principles and strategies in libraries in general would enable libraries and information centres to find more markets which are not served by other similar organisations and this would create more opportunities for library business. In a survey by Arachchige (2013) on marketing approach in special and academic libraries in Sri Lanka, it was revealed that academic libraries found more non-users in external markets outside the institutions they serve which help to expand their scope, income generation and boost their image.

Adekunmisi (2013) in her submission identified some reasons or needs for marketing library and information products and services. According to her, libraries should no longer be seen as the only information services providers to users. Others which include mega-bookstores, online book dealers, information consultants or brokers, the internet services providers, free web access providers, social media as well as individual customers are all ever-ready to market the same information products and services to potential library users. This makes the job competitive for librarians. There is also the felt-need for marketing in libraries in order to improve the image of not only the library and librarians but also the profession. In this regard, Adekunmisi further opined that academic libraries as intellectual centres have to be unique in the kind of access and services they provide, while librarians also have to change the perception of users and others towards them as information experts.

Patange (2013) added that marketing enables librarian or information manager to understand the real needs of users which would help in taking good management decisions, which will in turn help in providing quality information services to users more efficiently and effectively.

Some other needs for the adoption of marketing techniques in library as outlined by Kawatra (2008) are as summarized below:

- It would increase the visibility of library and information centres;
- It would improve the quality of library services;
- It would ensure economic use of major library resources as well as management of the library affairs more effectively;
- It would help the academic library management to gain support and commitment of the parent body;
- It would help to establish the value of information.
- It would improve good will for the library from the users.
Complete marketing process may result in:
- Greater use of the library by the users
- Better discussions about what to offer in the library
- Better partnership with faculty and administration
- Maintenance of the central position of library in the institution.
- Generation of adequate funding by the library.

It is safe to conclude from the foregoing that marketing approach is useful to academic libraries as not – for – profit making organizations to improve their image and attract more and more users.

Conclusion and Recommendations

This study establishes a relationship between library and marketing, which is essential for academic libraries as an instrument of achieving their objectives. Marketing techniques adopted in academic libraries can help to enhance library operations in the areas of users' satisfaction and image boosting as information provider in the information profession. It is the users who drive marketing and shape the service which also confirms earlier studies (Dhiman and Sharma, 2009). Librarians should therefore keep the needs and wants of their users in the forefront of their planning.

Library acquisition, organisation and dissemination of information as suggested by Jestin and Parameswari (2002) must be based on the modern concept of marketing to achieve reader satisfaction. Equally too, it becomes expedient for other categories of libraries apart from academic libraries to explore the inherent benefit of marketing strategies most especially in this era of economic crunch which effect is felt in the reduction of budgetary allocation to libraries. That is, the challenges of budget cuts, rising cost of materials including library materials, band width subscription competition among library database vendors, and complexity in information requirements are driving forces for librarians to adopt marketing principles with a view to improving library efficiency, effectiveness and income. Financial profit can be obtained by the library by charging membership fees, fines for overdue books, photocopying services, online searching and other fee-based services.

Modern libraries are becoming proactive and customer – focused by tending to define the market before designing their products and services. Little proceeds from fee-based library services could add value to library functions. It is therefore recommended based on the foregoing that library services should be based on user orientation whereby users' needs are given priority in the scheme of things in the library. The library personnel should also be orientated on the importance of marketing in libraries by exposing them to what is termed as marketing mix and its applicability in libraries.

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