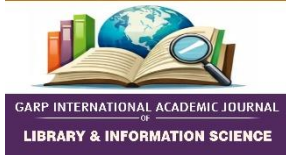


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APPLICATION OF MARKETING MIX TO LIBRARY RESOURCES AND SERVICES: PROSPECTS AND CHALLENGES

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Abstract

The paper examines the concept of marketing of library resources and service with particular reference to the marketing mix as a strategy for effective marketing of library resources and services. Thus, the paper discussed product, place, price, promotion, process and people as variables that can be manipulated to yield effectiveness in the marketing of library information resources and services. The paper also generated questions along these strategies that can help clarify these concepts and stimulate action. In the face of technological innovation, the paper examines the practice of marketing using web 2.0 (social media) and examining its prospects to marketing of library information resources and services. Moreover, the paper examined some of the challenges encountered in marketing library information resources and services. The paper concluded that libraries must engaged in effective marketing as a tool to reaching both potential and actual library users, communicating to them the value of library's resources and services in order to stimulate usage, satisfaction and return intention. This invariably projects the value of libraries amidst alternative information sources.

Keywords: Marketing, marketing mix, prospect of marketing, challenges to marketing, social media in marketing

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Introduction

The concepts of marketing activity and library have been used in economic literature since the 70s of the last centuries. Back in 1976, Peter Drucker noted the importance of marketing actions for libraries, positively assessing the reorientation of the activities of library institutions. He argued that "there are two areas where it is not enough to be smart. The first is personnel decision-making, the second is marketing. To find out what a particular audience wants or expects from a library, it is not enough only mental efforts, intuitive ones should also be used" (Drucker, 1976 in Railean & Cheradi, 2023). It was further noted by Railean and Cheradi (2023) that Marketing activity of libraries is a creative management activity, the task of which is to develop the market of library services through the assessment of information needs of users, finding ways to meet them, conducting practical activities to educate users and meet their needs. With the help of this activity, the possibilities of creating library services are coordinated, as well as steps to promote information services to the end user are determined.

Marketing in libraries is the process of identifying our visitors' and users' needs and ensuring that we deliver benefits that will satisfy or enhance the visitor and user experience. Apart from identifying and attracting new users, marketing will be used to develop a range of tactical functions to meet customer needs (National Library of Wales, n.d). They added that marketing will also help to improve the Library's performance, achieve our strategic priorities and deliver against our targets. The marketing strategy fundamentally puts the user at the heart of all we do.

The Marketing mix

The Library's marketing tactics or strategy based on the "Four Ps": Product, Place, Price and Product.

The Library has a wide range of different products and services which in itself presents challenges. However, these information and library services which are products of libraries are also variables or factors that can act as strategy in addressing marketing of library and information services. For instance, the information resources in libraries that are adjudged to be of quality in terms of recency, completeness, authority, etc., will stimulate usage. Also, library services that appeal to users and adequately meet their needs serve as strategy that stimulates use of library and subsequent return

intention. Thus, delivering value through features and scalability tailored to customer needs.

According to Lawan (2015), product refers to the goods and services that the company sells. The marketing manager must consider all the pertinent questions related to a company's product. E.g. What features should the product have? What form of packaging should be used? How many models are required? How important is quality? Should a brand or trademark be used? The most important web marketing mix in the case of libraries is the product, which can be offered to a user to satisfy her/his information needs. Products in libraries and information centres would include physical resources, e.g., books, journals available in print form, CD or on-line and services, such as making reply to queries, services related to databases and bibliographies, etc. Libraries and information centers must study the users' needs for the kind of products they want, the form in which they want and when and where they want to use. This also includes the quality, relevance and organization of information resources for greater accessibility.

Place

The Library geographical location could affect people's access to the library. It's about distribution channels, online platforms, and customer support accessibility. However, with the technological transformation in most libraries, a substantial proportion of library users access the Library's resources via the Internet, therefore our marketing context includes the online user experience, online navigation and Search Engine Optimisation. Thus, the Place factor in the marketing mix of the 21st century transcend beyond physical geographical location to online space where library transactions take place. As part of marketing strategy in libraries, the library building should be strategically located to have wider reach, easily accessible, accommodating and inclusive of those with special needs.

Price

In most libraries, entry is often free, however, some information resources and services often attract a certain price which should be affordable to users. Also, the value these resources and services should be commensurate with the price paid for them. Pricing is a complex strategy including perceived value, shape the cost structure. The value of the information product or

service varies according to the circumstances and the needs of the user. The library and information service providers should charge the appropriate price for the information product or service.

According to Velasquez and Campbell-Meier (2018), when looking at the results for the four Ps, it is noticeable that there is nothing for price. This is because price typically means that the patron or customer pays for the service or programme. In most public libraries, the customer comes in and borrows the books or participates in the programme as a type of 'opportunity cost' based upon time. Some summer or school term programmes have booking requirements and/or nominal fees for supplies which could be construed as a price. Goods and services, such as the shop, café, reprographic and digitisation services are chargeable and any profit generated is re-invested in the Library's income stream. Certain events and activities also attract a charge to cover the cost of staging the event. One of the aims aim of marketing is to demonstrate that the Library's products and services (whether 'free' or not) add value which outweighs any associated cost.

Promotion

This is how the Library communicates with, and attracts the target audiences. All methods of communicating with users either one-way or two-way are included in promotion. For library the aim of promotion is to build awareness among its users about what the services library offers and also to reduce the perceived and actual barriers to use the library. To achieve this objective a combination of various communication channels can be utilized to reach the maximum number of target users. Strategies like content marketing, webinars, and social media drive awareness and lead generation. Promotion is not simply an action which is done 'to' the audience; it includes two-way communication and educating the audiences. This may include (National Library of Wales, n.d):

Advertising: paid advertisements online, in newspapers, magazines and radio.

Print: banners, posters, leaflets etc., and arranging distribution. Leaflets are sent to places such as libraries, tourist information offices, cafes and other places likely to be visited by the campaign's target audience.

Direct mail: sending leaflets or other print to named individuals, using the in-house database.

E-newsletters, website features and social media campaigns as part of a Content Strategy to deliver content which is high quality, timely and relevant to

the audiences. Content will be engaging, worth sharing and easy to access.

Public Relations: In addition to traditional Press releases, PR increasingly overlaps with social media (and vice-versa). The Delivery Group will have an overview of the many social media channels used by the Library and ensure that users of social media are both coordinated and on-message.

Additional three elements: people, process and environment play an important role in the effective operation of the organization providing services (Палий, 2012):

Process

To ensure the efficiency of user's resources (creating value for the users) libraries can create facilities in terms of reliable network and systems, easy navigability, availability of help, print and accessibility of web documents, self-service options in terms of online renewals and reservations. Process is the integration of technologies, resources and systems. All the above-mentioned processes must be ensured for user-oriented library and information products and services. This element covers the interface between the business and consumer and how they deal with each other at every stage of your service. Service delivery is an important consumer touch point that forms part of the customer feedback loop, encouraging process innovation.

People

Library staff is a part of production and delivery of the product. They are involved in service interaction with users. Library users need information to resolve a query and they also ask for customized solutions for their queries. In e-marketing of library services, face-to-face communication is missing, therefore, service levels should be created where users get prompt response to all their problems. At the same time rewards and recognition scheme for employees would help to strengthen the delivery of effective services. Library staff should be given incentives in the shape of rewards and recognition which would help in strengthening of effective delivery of products and services.

The use of a marketing mix in practice is useful when analyzing the implementation of an organization's strategy, as well as when introducing a new product or service to the market. This analysis assumes detailed answers to the following questions (Railean & Cheradi, 2023):

By product

- What product or service should I offer the user? What is the value of this service?
- How to position a library service correctly?

By distribution (Place)

- How and in what format do users purchase the library service?
- How to choose the optimal distribution channels?

By price

- What is the cost of the library service?
- Is there a segment of users willing to pay for some exclusive library services?
- What should be the cost of such services?

By promotion

- How to promote library services?
- Which promotion channels to use?
- How to measure the effectiveness of the promotion of library services?
- How to choose the optimal time to promote the library and its services?

By people

- Who are our users and what are their information needs?
- To what extent does our staff have the necessary competencies to meet the information needs of users?
- How to improve the professional competence of employees?
- How to interact more effectively with the library's contact audiences?

By process

- How optimal is the process of providing library services?
- Is the procedure for servicing library users well thought out?
- Are we able to save users' time resources?

By physical environment

- How convenient and attractive is the physical space of the library for the user?
- What techniques and methods are used to create a favourable environment that attracts the user?
- What prevents the user of our library from feeling comfortable and spending more time in it?

Marketing and Social Media

Social media marketing takes advantage of Web 2.0 technologies was first discussed in 2001 by O'Reilly (O'Reilly, 2007; Garoufallou et al., 2013) and includes all the various Internet platforms one can conceive of including blogs, wikis, Facebook, Twitter, Instagram, Pinterest, etc. Based upon the study of Velasquez and Evans (2018), the majority of the libraries were linked mainly to

Facebook and Twitter. As with any type of marketing done via social media there are limits to who those channels will reach based upon subscription to the service. It is anticipated that librarians are taking advantage of social media to market their services in a frugal manner.

The other aspect of using social media to market is the need to have someone monitor the posts and respond to the community at large. While this could be a small amount of time per week (half a day a week), there still needs to be someone assigned to the task. Making sure that the clientele signs up as 'following' the page in Facebook, Twitter or whatever social media platform is used is needed. For example, Cuddy, et al. (2010) discussed the use of Twitter in a health science library was going to improve their marketing. While the library had 66 followers, the community following the tweets (university staff, students, nearby medical professionals and other health libraries/librarians) created a community that was aware the library was 'willing to make an effort to reach out' (Cuddy et al., 2010, p. 329). Authors have noted the need to develop a critical mass of followers before marketing efforts could impact the number of hits on the website or in the library (Vucovich, Gordon, Mitchell, & Ennis, 2013).

As most marketing depends upon the 'bang for the buck', does social media actually pay off? It really depends on the audience and whether or not the library has a connected community who are interested in Facebook, Twitter, Instagram and other social media platforms. Different social media platforms are of interest to different age groups. Currently, Instagram and Snapchat are where more 18–35 year olds tend to be, while Facebook is for the older baby boomer demographic (Chaffey, 2018). Library management needs to consider who their target market is and move forward with their planning for marketing.

The Prospect of Social media on Marketing Approaches

The advent of the Internet has offered new cost-effective and wide-reaching marketing opportunities for public libraries. Social media and networking tools, such as Facebook, Twitter, Google+, YouTube, Pinterest, and Tumblr expand the public libraries' ability for outreach, provide a new space to have value, and offer an inexpensive way of meeting typical public library goals of creating community, building brand awareness and increasing traffic (Dankowski, 2013).

There have been numerous examples of public libraries which have successfully leveraged these opportunities. For examples, in 2012, the New York Public Library used social media to increase monthly library card sign-ups by 35 percent; and to help address budget cuts, in 2010 the Charlotte Mecklenburg Library in North Carolina raised \$400,000 through social media. Knowing the audience, you are attempting to engage as well as the specific purpose of your efforts ultimately drives your choice of which technologies to use and when to post messages (Kaser, 2013).

The nature of the Internet and access to these social media and networking tools creates an opportunity for "agile marketing", which can be defined as a process which is "iterative, allowing for short marketing experiments, frequent feedback, and the ability to react to changing marketing conditions" (Ewel, 2013). In a public library setting, agile marketing is particularly useful because of: the speed of query and response; the ability to get instant feedback and experiment with ideas on a smaller scale; the economic benefits of employing low-cost web-based marketing options; and the opportunistic approach to evaluating and analyzing trends and responding to real-time events (McClarey, 2013). The mix of controllable marketing variables that the organisation uses to pursue the desired level of sales in the target market is an important consideration (Velasquez & Campbell-Meier, 2018).

Other prospects of marketing and application of marketing mix to libraries include (Okon & Umoh, 2014):

- Increase in usage of services
- Users will be educated
- Perceptions about the library and its staff will change
- Users will be more satisfied and can visit the library again and again.
- The library will maintain its relevance
- Efficient use of information resources

- Save library from devaluation
- Introduce cutting edge Information and Communication Technology in library and information service.
- Concentrate specially on acquiring information resources that are needed by their clientele; and not just any information resource.

Challenges to Effective Marketing in Libraries

There are some challenges or barriers to the effective marketing of library resources and services. These have been discussed in previous studies like that of Okon and Umoh (2014); Nowrin et al. (2020) to include:

Attitude of library staff: Marketing also deals with improving customer's experience to the library. On a regular basis the library staff interacts with the users. The truth is that most library staff for one reason or the other does not show a positive attitude to the users thereby making the user to feel unlikely to return to the library.

Lack of funds: Lack of funds constitute a major hindrance to marketing of information and library services in Nigerian university libraries. Under normal budgetary allocation some library management do not make provision for marketing in their budgetary plans. As a result, they find it very difficult if not impossible to source for funds to undertake this very essential aspect of library routine.

Low level of knowledge: Lack of marketing knowledge by library personnel has been identified as a barrier to effective marketing of information and library services in Nigeria university libraries. Alemna (2001) has observed that one of the problems hindering marketing of information and library services is the relatively low level of knowledge of library staff.

Diverse nature of services and clientele: University libraries have a wide range of services and clientele. Marketing of these varieties of services and attending to various clientele has not been easy.

Non-realization of information value: Information resources and services constitute an intangible value to research and development. However, this value has been overlooked thus marketing a resource which value cannot be evaluated has been difficult.

Lack of interest & awareness: It really seems very awful that some of the libraries even do not

want to implement marketing strategies in their library services because they are not interested in doing what they serve to the users. Awareness of anything is the half solution of any problem. But lack of awareness is the biggest hindrance of the libraries to implement marketing in library services. And almost 60 percent of the libraries are not aware of the benefit of the library marketing. Therefore, the challenges faced by both libraries and the librarians should be overcome to fruitfully incorporate marketing library services to the users to make their library products and services available and to ensure effective utilization of library materials.

Insufficient personnel & expertise: The study revealed that the highest number of libraries mentioned that one of the major challenges of marketing library services faced by them is insufficient library personnel. There are very little recruitments of the library personnel in proportion to the original requirements. Obviously lack of expertise is another biggest challenge of library marketing faced by libraries. As skilled and competent personnel are crucial to marketing library services, the recruitment of skilled and expert staff is badly necessary to the successful marketing of library services in private university libraries in Bangladesh (Ofori et al., 2020).

Inadequate budget: Lacking of sufficient budget in any organization is considered one of the major obstacles towards achieving the organization's objectives. Almost 60 percent of the libraries of the study felt that because of lack of a sufficient budget for marketing sections, it becomes difficult for them to market or promote their library service to the users which is certainly a big challenge towards library marketing. Some literatures have also found the similar challenge faced by the organizations.

Conclusion

Libraries and information centers are known for providing information resources and services that meet the ever-changing needs of library users. However, with the advent and wide acceptance of the Internet as an alternative source of information, libraries are now engaging in marketing to get their products across to their market audience using several marketing strategies. How well libraries deploy these strategies, otherwise known as the marketing mix, will determine the effectiveness of their marketing endeavor. Thus, that libraries must engaged in effective marketing as a tool to reaching both potential and actual library users,

communicating to them the value of library's resources and services in order to stimulate usage, satisfaction and return intention. This invariably projects the value of libraries amidst alternative information sources.

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