THE PRACTICE OF MARKETING ACADEMIC LIBRARIES OF DEVELOPING COUNTRIES IN THE ERA OF INFORMATION AND COMMUNICATION TECHNOLOGIES (ICTS)

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ABSTRACT

This study aimed at analysing the implementation of marketing strategies in Academic Libraries in Developing Countries in the era of Information and Communication Technologies (ICTs). The objectives of the study were to; identify the marketing strategies implemented by academic libraries in Cameroon, determine the efficiency of marketing strategies implemented by academic libraries and to investigate the challenges faced by academic libraries in marketing their services. The study used elements from the Marketing Communication Mix Theory and employed an exploratory research design. Data were collected using an interview guide which was validated by subject experts in the information and marketing professions. Participants were selected from 2 Academic Libraries in Fako Division of the South West Region of Cameroon. Data collected were analysed thematically. The findings indicated that several electronic and non-electronic marketing strategies are used by these libraries, but these are inefficient and there is need for exploitation of more technological means of marketing. One of the recommendations of this study was that current Information and Communication Technology trends be adopted in marketing of academic libraries and that working documents be implemented in an all-inclusive manner to include staff at the operational, tactical and strategic levels who should be well trained to survive in the electronic environment.

Key Words: Marketing, Academic Libraries, Users, Needs, Communication, Technologies.

1. Introduction

One of the most challenging aspects for almost every organisation in the digital age is marketing of goods and services. Libraries and other information services are not exempted. Raul, Belapurkar and Munnolli (2016) explain that marketing is a continuous process of creating a connection between the library resources and its potential users. According to Yi (2016), it is a managerial tool which assists libraries to face challenges now and in the future. With the geometric rate of information explosion today, users of academic libraries who are more likely to sort for Internet sources of information today, users of academic libraries who are more likely to sort for Internet sources of information to satisfy their needs could easily side-line rich content held in their libraries and go for sources whose quality is not guaranteed. In line with this, Jerome, Nkiko and Ifeakachuku (2017) argue that to gain competitive advantage among higher education institutions, one of the parameters considered is the quality of the academic library. Having a quality library alone is not enough but ensuring that users benefit fully from available information resources and services will ensure that the library achieves her goals. Arumuru (2015) states that libraries are shifting from a product or service-oriented approach to a customer or need oriented approach. As Patil and Pradhan (2014) put forth, libraries need to extend promotion and cooperation to users and market their services to attract more and more users.

Statement of the Problem

Despite several studies that have emphasised the necessity of marketing and promotion of libraries and information services especially in the 21st century, observations have shown that the practice is dangling. Many individuals in academic institutions especially in developing countries (students, faculty members, staff, researchers and others) still have very little knowledge about the existence of available libraries and the services rendered. Users of academic libraries are no longer conscious of the presence of the library since the present technologies have drastically reduced the patronage (Aloysius, 2019) and shifted the focus of most users from sourcing for information in library platforms to sourcing on electronic non-library platforms. The
question then arises as to what strategies such libraries implement in marketing their services; how efficient they are and what challenges they face in marketing for effective service delivery and user satisfaction.

Research Objectives
The specific objectives of this study were to:

1. Identify the marketing strategies implemented by Academic Libraries in Cameroon;
2. Determine the efficiency of marketing strategies implemented by Academic Libraries in Cameroon;
3. Define the challenges faced by Academic Libraries in Cameroon in marketing their services.

Research Questions
For this study, the following research questions were raised:

1. What marketing strategies are implemented by Academic Libraries in Cameroon?
2. How efficient are the marketing strategies implemented by Academic Libraries in Cameroon?
3. What are the challenges faced by Academic Libraries in Cameroon in marketing their services?

Literature Review
Marketing of Libraries and their Services
According to Patil and Pradhan (2014), there exists several ways to promote the usage and marketing of services in libraries such as: organisation of information literacy programme on regular basis at various levels; organisation of workshops/training programmes about awareness of resources available; organisation of training programmes for library staff with modern technologies and expertise; organising exhibitions of new books. Similarly, strategies to enhance effective marketing in academic libraries according to Aderibigbe and Farouk (2017) include; publicity and public relation strategy, pasting of new information on the notice board, enhancing the image of libraries, using user’s orientation, devising training programme, advertising in print media or directories, sending out newsletters, brochures and flyers, word of mouth endorsement and also personal sales by the librarians.

Helinsky (2008) warns that if libraries do not act now to demonstrate how important they are and how significant a resource they constitute for the whole of society, they will just not be noticed in the ongoing information flow. Yi (2016) expressed that to attract clients, generate non-user awareness, and raise awareness of available services and resources, libraries need to find ways to promote services and resources to clients as effectively as possible. Patil and Pradhan (2014) argue that the basic purpose behind promotion in academic libraries is to educate students and faculty members on how to use the library and its resources, and that it is difficult to work out single marketing strategy for all categories of users.

As expressed by Lewis (2007), every strategy for maintaining the library as a vibrant enterprise worthy of support should consist of five parts which dwell around complete migration from print to electronic collections; retirement of legacy print collections in a way that efficiently provides for their long-term preservation and access; redevelopment of the library as the primary informal learning space; repositioning library and information tools, resources, and expertise so that they are embedded into the teaching, learning and research enterprises, and migrating the focus of collections from purchasing materials to curating content. To Arumuru (2015), marketing of academic library services is part of the library’s day to day activities. Marketing of library services is well established in the developed world but is still struggling in developing countries. For effective marketing to occur, academic librarians must provide services considering the actual and projected needs of their users since failure could leave an impression in potential users that the library is not important.

Needs Assessment
A few decades ago, information needs as described by Devadason and Lingam (1996) was considered to be driven by day-to-day work and lack of self-sufficiency, and these needs could be categorized as expressed or unexpressed. According to Aina (2004) every individual, regardless of their literacy level has information needs for day-to-day activities, survival and completion of tasks, recreation or leisure. Since information needs could be triggered by knowledge of available resources and services, facilities and materials (Kebede,
marketing of libraries, their resources and services is of prime importance. Librarians must carry out needs assessment to determine the actual information needs of users through strategies and techniques embedded in marketing in order to ensure effective service delivery (Arumuru, 2015).

Needs assessment is vital since different classes of users consume different kinds of information for different purposes (Bopape, Dikotla, Mahlatji, Ntsala & Makgahlela, 2017). In academic libraries, since users are most often classified as students, lecturers, faculty among others, identifying their needs ahead of time plays a vital role in implementing marketing strategies. Since information needs are diverse, constantly changing and cannot be generalised (Haruna & Mabawunku, 2001), the range of information sources available, uses to which the information will be put, background and motivation of users, their professional experience and individual characteristics must be included in the marketing process. Although information need is sometimes not separated from information (Omiunu, 2014), they are different, and individuals would hardly seek information if there is no information need. Information services must market what information resources and services they have to support the needs of users.

Using Information and Communication Technologies (ICTs) in Marketing Libraries

The existence of Information and Communication Technologies (ICTs) has transformed the face of marketing for libraries just like other organisations. Yi (2016) put forth that academic libraries are no longer the only choice for students, faculty, staff and other clients to go to for information. This is because rapid changes in technological advancement, information explosion and reading habits make it inevitable for libraries to engage in proper marketing in the efforts to achieve their goals. Particularly, Information technology has caused many libraries and information centres to own websites on which all kinds of material are made accessible with bibliographic details (Patil & Pradhan, 2014). ICTs have facilitated ways in which libraries market themselves such as creating a web page, using e-mail services, reference services and selective dissemination of information to meet user academic needs, providing links on web pages where users can get needed information, just to name a few (Sharma & Bhardwaj, 2009).

Academic libraries could use digital media, print materials, events and other tools such as library publications, contests, brochures, direct mail, Web 2.0 applications and displays to market their services (Fisher & Pride, 2006; Mathews, 2009). Olorunfemi and Adeola (2018) stated that academic libraries have a responsibility to communicate the resources and expertise they have both on campus and in society especially with the complex nature of the information environment today. Such communication can be achieved through marketing. As such, knowledge of user needs, marketing strategies and use of the Internet and related technologies is essential for effective marketing (Adekunmisi, 2013). Given that marketing I can be understood as communicating the right message on a given resource or product to the right persons at the right time and using the right channel, one of the most efficient approaches to marketing is the marketing communication mix.

The Marketing Communications Mix Theory

The marketing communications mix involves all the ways or tools used by organisations to communicate with customers or potential customers (in our case users and potential users). One of the early definitions was put forth by McCarthy in 1998 referring to it as a specific combination of elements: advertising, personal selling, sales promotion, public relations and direct marketing that companies use to implement their targets for advertising and marketing (Todorova, 2015). In recent times, direct marketing is combined with digital marketing. The five aforementioned elements of the marketing communication mix are presented in the following diagram and further described below:
Figure 1: The Marketing Communications Mix

Advertising
Advertising could be accomplished through various means such as television, radio, press, or any other avenue which an academic library can use even if it means paying to market its services to potential users. Its functions are to inform, persuade, remind and create additional utility impact on people's perceptions (Todorova, 2015).

Direct Marketing and Digital Marketing
With direct marketing, digital marketing could be used by libraries to segment target groups and reach out to each accordingly with the right message appropriate for them. Direct marketing is cheaper today thanks to ICTs that have brought to existence digital marketing whereby social media and online techniques are used. Social media falls under direct marketing and could be used to advertise, gather feedback from library users, retain or gain new users.

Public Relations
It enables libraries to turn brand messages into stories that appeal to the media and its target audiences and enhancing good communication, understanding, acceptance and cooperation. Campaigns, advocacy and other communication strategies suitable for marketing library services are valuable and libraries are encouraged to use them to present a positive view of their libraries.

Personal Selling
This is selling through a person (face-to-face) and libraries use persons, representatives, brand ambassadors or influencers who have experience or are specialists to encourage and persuade targeted audience to make use of their services.

Sales Promotion
It involves the use of outlets whether online or offline for a limited period of time to stimulate short-term sales and consumption of a good or service. Product packaging has high significant impact here and could include visual design, writings on items marketed, size and materials.

Methodology
This study was strictly qualitative in nature. It made use of an exploratory research design. As such, the main method used to collect data for this study was the interview method as data were collected using one main instrument, an interview guide. The interview guide was validated by subject experts, an information
professional and a specialist in marketing. The participants of the study were administrators and heads of staff of 2 academic libraries in Fako Division of the South West Region of Cameroon. These libraries are the University of Buea Library and the National School of Local Administration Library. Among the interview participants were a Library Director, a Chief Librarian, 2 Chiefs of Service and 2 Programme Officers. Data collected were analysed thematically and results presented in prose form. For ethical reasons, the identity of study participants was coded and pseudonyms used instead. Participants were coded, “interviewee 1” to “interviewee 6” in no particular order.

Presentation of Findings
After an introduction to confirm the position of the staff and various services rendered in the library, three main parts followed suit to obtain data in line with the three research questions under study. The libraries were found to render all information services relating to an academic library including but not limited to circulation, reference, further education guidance, language learning, cultural programming, community outreach, reading services, current awareness services, research assistance, information literacy and reprographic services. The findings on each of the research questions are presented and discussed below.

Marketing Strategies Implemented by Academic Libraries
In order to get the marketing strategies which these academic libraries use, interviewees were asked if they have a documented marketing plan and if the plan is already being implemented. Only staff of 1 academic library agreed to have a documented and already implemented marketing plan. The others did not have a documented marketing plan but stated that they implemented some marketing strategies since other policies touch aspects of marketing. On the marketing channels implemented, several non-electronic and electronic channels used by these academic libraries were identified.

Five main themes were obtained in line with non-electronic marketing strategies and these are: orientation, information bills, seminars & workshops, effective services and community outreach. Interviewee 1 indicated that, “one of the non-electronic channels we use for marketing is library orientation which is done annually”. Similarly, sensitization and talks were mentioned by other interviewees. On the second theme which is information bills, one of the striking responses was again from interviewee 1 who expressed that, “we also use information bills carrying information on various services rendered”, and closely related to this, interviewee 2 stated that, “We market non-electronically through notices on boards and adverts in magazines like our institutional magazine”.

On the use of workshops and seminars, Interviewee 3 was one of those who mentioned this in the words, “we take advantage of workshops and seminars whether organised by the library or other persons making use of the library premises to market our services”. On marketing through quality service delivery, interviewee 4 explained that, “Non-electronic marketing for us is achieved mainly by rendering quality information services which encourage patrons to keep coming back and telling others about our services”. Finally, community outreach was mentioned by most interviewees such as interviewee 5 who stated that, “community outreach to community members is an effective channel through which we market our services to the community”.

In line with the electronic channels used by these academic libraries for marketing, several themes were generated including: email, text messages, website, library management software, Facebook, WhatsApp, e-learning platform and blogs. To substantiate this, responses such as, “We use emails, text messages, WhatsApp and electronic notices addressed to individual users as the need arises”, were obtained from interviewee 1. “We mainly market electronically through the institutions’s website and the e-learning portal” was another response gotten from interviewee 2. Interviewee 5 also indicated that, “Platforms like Facebook, WhatsApp and Gmail are the main e-marketing channels we use”. On the other hand, Interviewee 3 mentioned the use of library management software and blogs by explaining that, “Electronic marketing is achieved by our library through the use of our library management software, ‘ForMyLibrary’ where we put out notices on the catalogue interface, and we also use blogs”.

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The findings here are similar to the opinion of Aderigbe and Farouk (2017) who out spelled several strategies to enhance effective marketing of services in academic libraries including those obtained from participants of this study. The diverse nature of the implemented strategies also supports Patil and Pradhan (2014) who stated that it is difficult to work out single marketing strategy for all categories of library users. In line with the marketing mix, these academic libraries could be said to be in line with advertising, direct and digital marketing, public relations and personal selling. Nevertheless, the libraries have not fully exploited electronic avenues such as web sites and other popular social media channels.

Efficiency of Marketing Strategies Implemented by Academic Libraries

To determine the efficiency of the implemented marketing strategies, participants were asked if the channels they use for marketing were sufficient to achieve their marketing goals and how they planned to outshine given the competitiveness in the ICT age. On a general note, while most interviewees were of the opinion that the marketing strategies employed by their libraries were close to being sufficient and efficient, some of them indicated that they were inefficient. In support of the view that they are sufficient, interviewee 1 stated that, “We have been satisfied with these channels but there is need to use a combination of marketing channels as each one has its advantages and there are some that we have not used but plan to include such as Facebook”. This supports the point raised by Patil and Pradhan (2014) that it is difficult to work out single marketing strategy for all categories/segments of library users. Interviewee 4 also expressed that, “The channels are efficient because the number of patrons increases on a daily basis”. On the other hand, other interviewees like interviewee 2 indicated that, “our marketing channels at the moment are not satisfactory since we have not exploited electronic options like use of social media accounts, we do not yet have a well-established email list and we have limited opportunities for talks and sensitization”. This shows the need to exploit ICTs which have facilitated marketing through creation of web pages, using email services, providing help links among other functions as suggested by Sharma and Bhardqaj (2009), so as to exploit opportunities to raise awareness of available services and resources as proposed by Yi (2006).

On what the academic libraries were doing to outshine or hold a unique spot in the market for information service delivery in the ICT age, the following 7 themes were obtained: tech tools, networking and consortium building, information officers, ICT training, access to e-collection, 24/7 e-support and social media. In the words of interviewee 1, “we are doing all to employ as many technological tools as possible that can keep us visible and at the same wave length to enable us deliver services that can be counted”. Interviewee 4 and Interviewee 3 in support of networking and consortium building expressed that, “We intend to continue networking with foreign libraries” and “We will participate in library consortia across the globe so as to be able to meet up where our resources are lacking”. In relation to using information officers, one response to support this was from interviewee 5 who said that, “Making use of information officers will help us to understand the needs of our users and know ways to meet up to them. This will make us unique”. This is important since academic libraries are no longer the only choice for students, faculty, staff and other clients as was put forth by Yi (2016).

Most of the interviewees suggested that they intend to keep improving the ICT skills of staff and users. Interviewee 6 for example stated that, “Since most staff and users are technophobic and struggling with their ICT skills, our marketing plan lays emphasis on improving these skills and I believe this will make us stand out”. Again, interviewees 2 and 5 were among those who supported the improvement of resources in the electronic collection in the claims, “By laying a solid e-library foundation, facilitating access to online databases and providing 24/7 user support, we will hold our place in the market”, and “We hope to provide more access to electronic resources and leverage different electronic databases which we have subscribed to”. Aside from this, interviewee 4 indicated that, “we are making efforts to improve upon our print and electronic collection in our primary areas of specialty so as to stand out in providing information services in these areas”. All participants expressed the need to engage in social media platforms so as to stand out unique. Interviewee 6 for example explained that, “Aside from improving on our e-collection, we will have an active social media presence since most of our users spend much time there”.

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Challenges Faced by Academic Libraries in Marketing

Participants of this study were asked first what challenges their libraries faced in marketing and secondly, what efforts they had made to overcome the challenges. On the marketing challenges faced, a number of themes were generated such as: users’ attitude, technophobia, poor ICT infrastructure, poor working environment, limited budget, lack of technological training, epileptic power supply, lack of trained information and marketing professionals, limited bandwidth and low level of information literacy. The most significant challenges were poor IT infrastructure and insufficient information and marketing professionals. As indicated by interviewee 1, “Attitude of users, inaccurate or non-functional emails, and technophobic nature of most users, poor ICT environment and poor working environment” are some of the challenges faced. A poor ICT environment contradicts what Sharma and Bhardway (2017) suggested that ICTs have facilitated ways in which libraries could market themselves.

In relation to power supply, interviewee 3 expressed that, “epileptic power supply is a serious challenge which affects marketing of our library and services”. Interviewee 5 expressed that, “insufficient trained professionals in library and information science and in marketing is greatly affecting our marketing strategy”. This was supported by interviewee 4 who stated that, “There are insufficient Library and Information Science professionals”. Interviewee 4 also expressed in line with information literacy that, “most of our users have a low level of information literacy and hardly visit information sites where we display our services and how they can benefit from them”. This is vital and supports the claim of Bopape, et. al. (2017) that different classes of users consume different kinds of information for different purposes.

As a means to overcome some of these marketing challenges, the following themes were raised: capacity building, partnerships, standby power supply, marketing tools and policy. All respondents mentioned the need to improve the capacity of staff. Interviewee 3 for example explained that, “the library has been trying to train its workers following evolving technological trends from manual setup to digital setup”. This proves the point of Patil and Pradhan (2014) that libraries need to organise information literacy programmes and train staff technologically in their marketing drive. In addition, interviewee 1 was among those who supported the need for partnerships and capacity building as stated that, “we are trying to overcome some of our challenges through partnerships, trying to get external grants and building capacities of our users and staff through workshops”. Interviewee 3 mentioned among others the need for a standby power supply in the words, “although we do not yet have one, there is need for a standby power supply to ensure continues online presence in various marketing platforms”. On marketing tools, interviewee 5 expressed that, “we always try to prepare marketing tools ahead of time to facilitate the marketing process for us”. Interviewee 4 was the only one who emphasized that, “we are working on adopting a library marketing policy to serve as a road map for our marketing strategy”.

Conclusions and Recommendations

Conclusions

This study set out with 3 specific objectives which were to: identify the marketing strategies implemented by Academic Libraries in Cameroon; determine the efficiency of marketing strategies implemented by Academic Libraries in Cameroon; and define the challenges faced by Academic Libraries in Cameroon in marketing their services. The study found in line with the first objective that marketing strategies implemented were both non-electronic (orientation, information bills, seminars and workshops, rendering effective services and community outreach) and electronic (using emails, text messages, websites, library management software, Facebook, Whatsapp, E-learning platform and blogs).

The study also found in relation to the second objective that although these strategies went a long way to enable the academic libraries achieve their marketing goals, they were inefficient as participants expressed the need for: employment of more technological tools, networking and consortium building, use of information officers, more ICT training, improvement of access to e-collections, 24/7 e-support and engagement in social media. As concerns the third objective, the study found that the academic libraries faced several challenges in marketing. These include poor users’ attitude, technophobia, poor ICT
infrastructure, poor working environment, limited budget, lack of technological training, epileptic power supply, insufficient information and marketing professionals, limited bandwidth and low levels of information literacy.

**Recommendations**

As recommendations, the findings of this study portray the need for capacity building, partnerships, standby power supply, marketing tools and policy creation. Additionally, the researcher proposes that academic libraries should periodically review and revamp their marketing working documents to flow with current ICT trends. Moreover, marketing of the library and services should not be limited to experts, but should be inclusive of all staff at the operational, tactical and strategic levels who should be well trained to survive in the electronic environment. Marketing plans of these libraries should borrow from the marketing communication mix to ensure that advertisement, direct and digital marketing, public relations, personal selling and sales promotion are effectively covered. By so doing, the library would be placing the users at the centre of their marketing strategy and the likelihood for a positive effect will increase.

**References**