

The Role of Information and Communication Technology (ICT) in Marketing of Library and Information Products and Services of Academic Libraries

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Abstract

In order to promote the utilization of the available resources of any academic library, information has to be taken to the doorsteps of users and as such Information and Communication Technology will serve as a catalyst in doing that. This paper has explored the role of information and communication technology (ICT) in marketing of library/information products and services of academic libraries. To render quick and quality services to academic library users, ICT is required so as to avoid wasting the precious time of users. The study reviewed some previous research works and observed that not much has been written on marketing of academic libraries' products and services using ICT tools hence this study. Also some useful impacts of ICT in marketing as well as marketing strategies using ICT resources were discussed with particular interest in academic libraries. The paper identified some challenges in using ICT resources to market information products and services of academic libraries such as Limited Financial Resources, lack of ICT Facilities and ICT Skills, epileptic Power Supply to mention but a few. It further recommended that management of academic libraries should provide adequate funds for equipping of libraries, there should be maintenance culture in the operation of library equipment and librarians should be trained in ICT facilities' use.

Keywords: Role, Information, ICT, Academic Library, Marketing, Products, Services

Introduction

In this 21st century, the drastic role of Information and Communication Technology (ICT) in academic libraries' operations cannot be overemphasized. Many academic library routines and operations that are still performed manually are now being considered to be computerized. This means there is a gap in the study that is going to be filled from the recommendation. Therefore the use of ICT in academic libraries' services delivery to provide better and faster services to the end users is a welcome development. Information and Communication Technology (ICT) has remained a catalyst in the issue of national advancement and development. It is worthy of note that the emergence of ICT has impacted greatly on the quality of information products and services provided in the academic libraries. Effective marketing of academic library and information products and services in this digital age is a process whereby Libraries and information centers put lots of effort and energy into designing information services and products and distributing them to satisfy their users. In this era of globalization, in which the world is connected, information gains its power through permanent storage and wide distribution, which could be achieved through ICT. Adoption of ICT in academic libraries is a way of improving on information services provided in libraries. This is an era, when people need to access timely information with ease, and this can only be done through the application



of ICT to library services. Libraries are playing a very important role in facilitating access to global information and knowledge resources, using ICT. It is also a way of contributing to the sustainable development of the nation, since timely and effective provision of useful information can assist in building up a society. A nation without functional libraries and information centers may lack access to information that would enable for sustainable development. Apparently, ICTs are indispensable tools needed for provision of value added information that support sustainable development, although, many institutions and organizations including academic libraries face diverse challenges in the process of integrating ICTs to their services. Nevertheless, information provision is paramount to the development and growth of any nation. It is therefore important that effort is made to enable usability of ICTs in all sectors of the nation and in library services. The world has become a global village and with ICT, many library users now have access to a vast sea of information, without necessarily investing much time or energy and this information could equally be assessed in the comfort of one's bedroom.

The process of generally distributing and disseminating information is now being facilitated through the use of ICT. According to Janakiraman, Ormsby and Subramanian, (2016), the world now experiences a digital scenario in which ICT has changed the possibilities of the academic library job promotions and has brought changes to the expected library performances. The academic library is playing a very important role in facilitating access to global information and knowledge resources using ICT. Adoption of ICT in academic libraries is a way of improving the marketing of information products and services provided in libraries globally. The concept of digital marketing has gained prominence since the advent of the Information and Communication Technology (ICT). According to Rowley (2011), the term marketing refers to the management process which identifies, anticipates, and supplies customer requirements efficiently and profitably. While digital marketing on the other hand refers to the promotion of products or brands via one or more forms of electronic media. For example, advertising mediums that might be used as part of the marketing strategy of a business or organization could include promotional efforts made via the Internet, social media, mobile phones and electronic billboards, as well as via television and radio channels (businessdictionary.com, 2016). The information age has brought with it growth in information generation and use in a period where there is excess information in circulation (information explosion). This has led to unprecedented growth in the information industry, and also drastic growth in services, revenue, and coherence of the information and knowledge industry over the last decade, where a society that consumes and generates the most knowledge and information is perceived as the strongest society. Though the marketing of information products and services is a concept of comparatively recent origin, some academic libraries are yet to embrace ICT facilities in the running of the affairs of their libraries and that is one of the gaps this study intends to fill. Although there are replete studies on ICT use in academic libraries not much has been written on marketing of academic libraries' products and Services in Nigeria. This lack in the literature informed this study in order to fill the gap.

Definition of Terms

- Concept of ICT

The concept of ICT is useful in numerous instances to facilitate the developments of various aspects of the society. Occasionally, the digital age can be used interchangeably with computer age or information age. ICT is a generic term that refers to the technologies that are used to collect, store, edit and communicate information in various formats (Raji, 2018). ICT is a term used in the library to refer to application of computers and other technologies to academic library practices such as acquisition, storage, organization and dissemination of information. The use of ICT improves access to digital information, narrows down the digital device and



also improves standard of living. Most importantly, it provides public information that is useful to the country at large. ICTs are indispensable tools needed for provision of value added information that support sustainable development. There is no doubt that integration of ICT into the provision of academic library services is able to bring great benefits to the entire community and nation. ICT which remains an enabling tool for provision of timely and current library and information services is also indispensable to the sustainable development drive in Nigeria Nwabueze and Ozioko, (2011). ICT can be applied to every aspect of human endeavor to achieve result oriented service delivery. In this digital age, librarians are introduced to the concept of branding and rebranding, its processes, marketing strategies and different online platforms are open to design and market products and services to remain relevant in their role. This has also led to the existence of virtual libraries. Information and communication technology is the application of technologies consisting of hardware, software, network and media for collection, storage processing transmission and presentation of information in vocal, textual, pictorial and multimedia formats, Igwe, (2011). Marketing of academic libraries and information products and services in the digital age requires the application of ICT through the internet etc, to reach out to their clientele.

- Concept of marketing

Marketing is the analysis, planning, execution, and control of carefully formulated programs designed to bring about voluntary exchange of values for the purpose of achieving organizational objectives. It relies heavily on designing the management offering in terms of the target market's desires and requests, and on using effective pricing, communication, and allocation to inform, inspire and service the markets Adegoke, (2015). From the library point of view, it is conceptualized as the process of creating awareness of the existing materials and services in the library using digital technologies. The use of electronic tools such as email and Web 2.0 technologies help to create consciousness of the existing materials and services in the library. To Akinawo (2018), marketing is the process by which individuals or groups obtain what they need by creating, offering and exchanging products and services with others. There is no doubt that integration of ICT into the provision of academic library products and services is able to bring great benefits to the entire community and nation.

Impact of ICT in Effective Marketing of Information Products and Services of Academic Libraries in Nigeria

Globalization driven by ICT is presently having a phenomenal impact on academic library practices. ICTs are significant and useful tools for sustainable development in all fields and all aspects of our society. Information and Communication Technology (ICT), provides the ability to create, organize, manipulate and access information from remote locations across the globe, within a short time. ICT involves incorporation of a range of technologies that are used to support communication and information dissemination. Educational researchers, through the use of ICT can access current literature materials with ease. The advent of ICT is indeed a boost to marketing information products and library services as it now assists many academic librarians to use their ICT potentials to reach academic library users. Yusuf & Iwu-James, (2010) defines some of the ICT based services that are provided by the academic libraries as follows.

1. Provision of web access to OPAC: Libraries are providing access to web-based Online Public Access Catalogue (OPAC) interfaces. The OPAC makes it easier for users to access and use information resources. OPAC is the computer form of library catalogue, to access materials in the library.



2. Electronic Document Delivery: Libraries implement ICT-based interlibrary lending systems, through the use of electronic networks for documents delivery. In essence, the Document Delivery Service (DDS) enables a library to use copies of research papers or other research documents, from other libraries. These documents could be journal articles or other documents, in digital format. They are mainly in portable document format (PDF) and they are delivered to library users' desktops.

3. Online Instruction/User Education: There is implementation of online based bibliographic or library user programmes such as online tutorials on searching online resources and virtual tours of library collections. Libraries can also use the internet or CDROMs to educate users.

4. Online Readers Advisory Services: Libraries now implement web-based versions of reader's advisory services to include informing users about new acquisitions, providing reviews and recommendations and so on in using the web.

5. Networked Information Resources: Libraries now provide users with access to networked information such as databases, data data data data electronic scholarly journals and other publications from various publishers.

6. Reprographic Technology: These are widely used in libraries globally. Reprographic machines are provided in libraries to ease photocopying of documents on demand.

Other benefits of ICT in marketing Information products and services in the academic libraries as stated by Ashikuzzaman (2014) include:

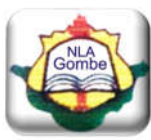
- Provision of speedy and easy access to information.
- Provision of remote and round the clock access to users.
- Provision of access to unlimited information from different sources.
- ICT enables easier, faster, cheaper and more effective library operations.
- ICT helps to manage information overload as information retrieval is made easier in computerized systems.
- Computerization helps the library to save space and reduce paper.

ICT Resources in Academic Libraries for Effective Marketing of Information Products and Services in Nigeria

ICT as an aggregate of computers, telecommunication gadgets, multi-dimensional resources and other related technologies are applied and utilized in the total process of information management and dissemination. The various components of ICT have provided a facelift for the support of varying professional services. Nwabueze and Ozioko, (2011); Umana (2018) identified the following ICT resources:

1) **Computers:** These are essential management tools which can be used to handle different operations more efficiently. Computers can be used for various activities such as information generation, processing, storage, analyzing and information dissemination for sustainable development. The use of computers in the library is noted with great assets such as speedy information transmission, cost effectiveness and optimal utilization of available resources. Other computer accessories include CDs, Flash drives and so on. The computers are used to perform various library operations and routines such as ordering/acquisition, circulation etc.

2) **The Internet:** This ICT resource is a means to speedy flow of information. It is a network of computers, communicating with others. The internet provides a worldwide platform for information sharing among individuals, institutions, and organizations. The use of the internet enables the provision of current and useful information to enhance productivity and good governance.



3) **Electronic Mail (E-mail):** This is the most widely used resource on the internet. It is used for sending and receiving messages otherwise known as mails. The messages are communicated through electronic devices. E-mail enables faster and cheaper communication.

4) **World Wide Web (WWW):** This is also an internet- based resource. Websites help individuals, organizations or institutions find products or information and transact business. Relevant information is made available to members of the public through the websites of many organizations or institutions. Being on the web, places any nation or organization on the right cause of speedy and sustainable development in line with the emergence of changes in technology, economic and political areas.

5) **Video Conferencing:** This enables people at different locations to hold conferences by data communication network. It is convenient and less expensive for conducting a conference between two or more participants situated at different remote locations, Mishra and Mishra, (2014). Application of the above ICT resource to marketing of academic libraries' products and services will go a long way in rendering quality services to users of academic libraries.

Some ICT Based Information Products

- Learned and academic journals
- Professional journals
- Magazines
- Newspapers
- Dictionaries
- Bibliographies and bibliographic databases
- Directories and databanks
- Published reports from Government and other agencies
- Videos
- Music CDs
- DVDs
- Conference proceedings etc.

Strategies of Marketing Academic Libraries' Products and Services via ICT Resources

Information and Communication Technology is a higher form of new knowledge which removes the restrictions of isolation through modern skill tools and becomes helpful in marketing academic library resources and services to the consumers. Promoting marketing of information products and academic library services through ICTs can be achieved using the following strategies as shown below by Tamrakar & Garg (2016):

- 1) **Updating Library Homepage:** Continuously restructuring academic library homepage is a huge help for the advertising of library activities. It acts as an information doorway to access different databases and journals subscribed by the library, right to use WebOPAC, to provide information about academic library collections. Providing links of databases rather than subscribing sources aids the consumers to access free information on the same platform. A mobile friendly website will aid the patrons to access the information through various devices.
- 2) **Library Newsletters and Email Alerts:** Publishing library newsletter with frequency will assist to uphold new activities of the libraries, various proceedings such as webinars taking place around the world; news which is of use to clientele, new awards for students can be dispersed through newsletters. Email alerts about articles which are important to consumers, dissimilar conferences happening around the world, information about new open databases, subscribed databases and online sources prearranged on trial by library can be communicated through Email alerts. The same can also be flashed and connected on the library home page.



- 3) **Pinterest:** Pinterest is an Internet list of opportunities that provide a platform to libraries for marketing and advertising their services. A library can organize its own board and pin photos of the library, audiovisual clips and good looking library posters by creating a library outline. Libraries can also download beautiful notices for display in the library which are available freely on Pinterest.
- 4) **Forum or Discussion Group:** These days many forums and chat groups of various subject areas are accessible on the Internet. Clients can become a member of such groups and can get information about any crisis or subject in his/her field and about fresh research. To benefit from this service a library should organize a list according to the subjects of the consumers. Also, Instant Messaging, chat rooms or videocassette and meeting should be made accessible in a library.
- 5) **E-Query Service:** E-query service is a web reference service which is prearranged to those patrons who possess library membership identity. Here consumers can pose any query connected to library information through email.

Challenges of Integrating ICT in marketing of information products and Services of Academic Libraries

A lot of benefits are derived through the adoption and use of Information and Communication Technologies (ICTs) in marketing information products and academic library services. There are many challenges as well to be addressed. These include:

- **Limited Financial Resources:** The acquisition and maintenance of the relevant equipment depends on the availability of funds. Mostly, there is paucity of funds in many academic libraries in Nigeria thereby, leading to inability to acquire the necessary ICT tools that would enable them to connect to the internet, make subscription to various online databases and obtain software licenses.
- **Shortage of ICT Facilities and ICT Skills:** The computers are used to receive and store large volumes of information. Likewise, internet accessibility is made possible through the use of computers. They are used to access Online Public Access Catalogue (OPAC) and also to perform many other routine activities in the library. Shortage of computers and other facilities remains a big challenge to many academic libraries. Many academic librarians also lack ICT skills and this makes it difficult for them to embrace technological innovations. Lack of ICT skills places a serious restriction on the application of ICT to provision of library services of academic libraries.
- **Poor maintenance of ICT Equipment:** Many academic libraries do not have space and conducive environments for keeping ICT equipment. In addition, most of the ICT facilities are not adequately maintained in most academic libraries as a result of the maintenance cost which is usually very high.
- **Erratic Power Supply:** In developing countries, large areas are still without a reliable supply of electricity and this brings about de-servicing of the academic libraries' users.
- Lack of technical IT knowledge by library staff.
- Constant change of software and hardware.
- Copyright and intellectual property right management.

Conclusion

In conclusion, most academic libraries and information centers are yet to embrace ICT more profoundly than any other field due to several challenges identified in this study such as lack of funds, erratic power supply, lack of maintenance culture etc. The advent of ICT is indeed a boost to marketing information products and academic library services as it now assists many librarians to use their ICT potentials to reach library users. The study showed an insight on the



usefulness or impact of ICT and strategies in marketing academic libraries' products and services such as updating libraries homepage, libraries' newsletters and email etc. While the developed countries are far in front, the developing countries including Nigeria are still far behind with much more work to revolutionize the academic libraries in Nigeria. In Nigeria, the academic libraries are said to be at a crossroad due to the fact that they are operating in an era of dwindling financial resources that are not forthcoming and this affects the effectiveness of their functions. The use of ICT in marketing of information products and services, improves access to digital information, narrows down the digital device and also improves standard of living. Adoption of ICT in academic libraries is a way of improving on information and services provided in the libraries. This is a technological era when people need to access timely information with ease, and this can only be done through the application of ICT to academic library services. It is also a way of contributing to sustainable development of the nation, since timely and effective provision of useful information can assist in building the society. ICT as an enabling tool assists academic libraries provision of information, which is very paramount to development of the various sectors in a nation. They are playing a role in facilitating access to global information and knowledge resources, using ICT but the challenges identified must be addressed following the way forward.

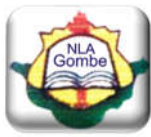
Recommendations

The way forward for easy marketing of academic libraries' products and services include:

- a) Academic Libraries should be provided with adequate funds for the provision of ICT facilities and running of its day-to-day activities to ensure quality services delivery.
- b) There should be adequate ICT facilities and staff with ICT skills to man the academic libraries.
- c) Management of academic libraries should have the spirit of maintenance culture to be able to keep the equipment functional at all times.
- d) There should be steady power supply for effective services to the users and power generating sets should be made available in case of power outage as experienced in Nigeria.

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