Librarians as Catalysts for Strategic Approaches to Marketing of Academic Libraries

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Abstract
The paper discussed the catalyst role of librarians in marketing the library. Information seekers have the tendencies to obtain and use information resources that are not authentic and verifiable as alternative to the library. This could be because they do not have awareness about the benefits accruable from using the library. As observed by the authors, Socio-economic factors, overrating of the internet resources/ lack of information literacy and conservative orientation of librarians could be some of the reasons that have led to low patronage of the libraries. Strategic approaches to market the library to students such as departmental seminars from the library, *outreach programmes,* hosting of conference and workshop of library associations among others *were pointed out. The way forward by the authors includes: inclusion of marketing strategies in operations of the library could significantly promote library patronage and training of librarians on soft and hard skills amongst others could significantly improve library patronage*
Keywords: Marketing, Strategic approaches, Catalysts,Academic libraries

Introduction

It appears the level of patronage in academic libraries is dwindling, as users seem to be finding supposed alternatives to library usage. Due to lack of information literacy, users have tendencies to run after information sources that lack authenticity and could make decisions in errors as the information sources used by such users do not originate from the librarians since they are not marketing the library to the users. The heart of any academic institution is the library as all processes of knowledge transfer from the authors to the users are coordinated by the library. The knowledge of the past to understand the present and project into the future are embedded in the library. The flow of information in the 21st century appears to lack control, hence there is high recall but low specificity of information generated through search engines. On this basis, librarians need to market the library to persons in this category. Yi (2014) affirmed that marketing is inevitable in attracting users to libraries.

The principles of marketing, if well adopted, used and maintained could significantly affect the orientation of library patrons and prospective users. Marketing does not just focusing on
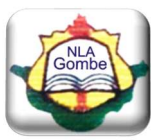
improving sales alone but getting customers to accept and prefer the product above counterparts in the market. As explained by Gupta, Koontz & Massisimo (2013), marketing for librarians and other information professionals is a sub-set of management practices that focuses on identifying the needs of customers and ensure meeting the needs with intention of ensuring customer satisfaction. The new generations of library users are mobile persons who need information on the go. They are active users of current information who are impatient and are prone to using unverified information thereby propagating errors. The recent COVID-19 pandemic has demonstrated the characteristics of information users of the 21st century.

Librarians therefore need to engage several available media such as face book, twister among others to reach the persons as they owe the academic community the duty of educating them on the importance of the library to teaching, learning, research and community development. It is increasingly becoming easy for librarians to engage the academic communities as information and communication technologies have reduced some of the challenges of information dissemination. Websites, social media tools and several technologies could be deployed to educate prospective users and market the library. Aderibigbe and Farouk (2017) noted that several media should be engaged to market library services to prospective clients.

Critical Issues

Library marketing is expedient in the 21st century because of several challenges such as socio-economic issues, such as cost of living, lack of information literacy / misconception about the internet and conservative disposition of librarians.

Socio-economic Issues: users suffer from inability to purchase books and many of them do not know that most of these books are in the library. Li and Qiu (2018) noted that users from poor backgrounds do not have financial capacity to acquire right resources to facilitate the learning process. Those who are not given proper orientation on the importance of the library may find it hard to actually enjoy the embedded benefits of the library. They do not know that the library is mandated to purchase certain volumes of books annually covering every course offered in the schools.

Lack of Information Literacy/Misconception of the Power of Internet

Information seekers have tendency to be desperate as such information may be needed to make quick decision or answer specific questions within specified period. It is not uncommon for users to rush to the internet to look for information to do assignments given to them. On several occasions, the same answer is usually given by students that have copied information from blogs, opinion sites, advertisement pages and many other sites that are not authentic. They need to be educated that there electronic library resources that contain peer reviewed journals that can attend to their information needs for assignments, research, seminars and other academic issues. They are not aware that the internet is convergence of the ideas passed from several persons from all over the world. Anyone can upload anything on the internet. The current issue of the COVID-19 has further exposed the vulnerability of the internet as several conflicting information emanated from several sources on the internet. It has been asserted by Balatzaras (2018) that information literacy should be embarked upon by all librarians as information users consistently need guidance.
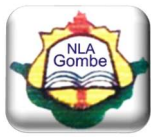
Conservative Disposition of Librarians

Some traditional librarians in some institutions believed that serious students would come to the library while unserious students would not use the library. The library has rules and regulations which are sacrosanct; however they should not be presented to users as draconian laws. Library orientation alone which is done for newly admitted students is not enough. Students need to be engaged from time to time. The use of a space in the library for Current Awareness Service (CAS) is not enough. As a matter of fact, it is not a marketing strategy since it is targeted at those that come mainly to the library. Marketing has to do with making the library appealing to non-users, promoting preference for library and getting users addicted to library. This implies that the marketing strategy should be all-encompassing, catering for the user and non-user alike. The use information and communication technologies should be adopted in libraries for marketing. It is surprising to find that there are librarians who are not on Facebook, Twitter, Telegram, WhatsApp, Instagram and other social media tools. These are platforms that libraries can use to engage existing and prospective patrons.

Library marketing could also assist in the following areas as observed by the authors:

- Help non-users know about the existence of the library

- Help existing users know more about the services of the library, their rights and other opportunities

- Promote preference for the library against emerging unverifiable sources

- Generate finance by exposing users to other services such reprography, translation, editing, data analysis and other services the 21st century libraries render.

- Eliminate misconception about the library as a place to read only

- Encourage researchers to use electronic library databases and electronic books

- Promote high usage of institutional repository and high deposit by members of the institution

Strategic Approaches to Library Marketing

There several approaches that the library could adopt to market the library. Some of them are as follows:

Departmental Seminars from the Library: It is expedient to know that the library is a faculty on its own. It has several departments that also have units attached to them. The Technical Services Department which has attached units such as metadata processing, institutional repository upload, conservation and preservation, reprography services, serials services, data curation and others; the Readers' Services Section which has units such as circulation, user management/human resources, reference services, library marketing and promotion, training and orientation, database management and many more. These departments can organize seminars at specified times to educate members of the institutions they serve on activities in these sections and how they relate to users. This would make patrons to even have better perspectives of activities going on in the library and at the sane time increase the marketing approach of the librarians.
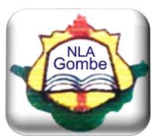
Commemorating Special Days Relating to Library Profession

There are special days that project the image of the profession and the contribution of the library to the society. Some of them are the World Book Day, Library Week, World Literacy Day and many other events that relate to education. The librarians can take advantage of such days to organize special programmes that are targeted at educating the faculty, staff and students.

Outreach Programmes

The librarians needs to also engage in community development which is one of the essence of higher institutions. Reading habit needs to be developed at early stage of learning and students need to know that the library can help them develop such habit. The institution will also see it as a way of popularizing the name of the institution as the library does not carry out programmes that are independent of the institution it serves. Awareness of the fact that the library provides access to reading materials could be a major contribution towards the progress of these students. The higher institution may not have most of secondary school books in their collections, it is however possible to direct them to public libraries, make donations to the secondary school on basic text and or help them to set up school libraries. The librarian ha major role to play in organizing these programme to support the madate of the parent body and at the same time market the library to the users.

**Hosting of Conference and Workshop of Library Associations**

It is pertinent for librarians to be involved in their associations and have right standing by paying required dues that will give them opportunities to better exercise their rights. One of such rights is hosting of annual conferences and workshops of the association. When the librarians hosts such events, it will better project the image of the profession when members of the institutions see different caliber of people that belong to such association. Some persons have myopic view of the library profession and what it stands for, they can be better educated through such events.

Information Literacy Programmes

This is very important for librarians to carry out from time to time. It is not every educated person that has information literacy. Information literacy can be organized across the entire institution and this would give the library a better recognition. The librarians in institutions need to go extra miles in knowledge acquisition and assimilation. When librarians have good working knowledge of information literacy training, they would be better appreciated by other members of faculty who have been able to learn new things through the ytraining organized by the library. When they face challenges in accessing databases, determining the authenticity of sources of information and several other information-related challenges, they would have librarians on their list of solution providers.

Skills Acquisition and Demonstration by Librarians

It is apparent that librarians are interested in protecting the image of the library; however some librarians do not have the technical wherewithal. Soft skills and hard skills are inevitable to excel as professionals. Marketing of library services cannot be left in the hands of third party only as it is applicable in sale of products where non-professionals can market goods perfectly. Librarians need to demonstrate skills that would convince existing and
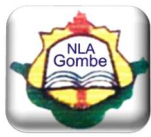
prospective patrons. Specifically, the use of ICT is highly demanded from librarians as the world has gone virtual. Whoever is still tied to traditional approaches may not be able to actually be at the cutting edge of library practice in the 21st century.

Consistent Social Media Presence: There are several platforms that could be used with the help of ICT, however social media is being focused specifically because of the observations and findings that affirm that almost every youth at the tertiary institution in Nigeria has certain social media account and majority have more than one social media tool engaged for information sharing and communication. Librarians need to engage these platforms consciously and consistently to ensure they do not lose their followers. The social media platforms such as Twitter, Instagram, Facebook, WhatsApp, Telegram and others have become virtual communities where interactions takes place. Every organization at the cutting edge has social media presence.

Conclusion

Patronage of the library is hinged on the capability of librarians to market the library, departing from the traditional approaches and embracing technologies. The librarians are central in marketing, hence the need to acquire and demonstrate soft and technical skills that could make existing and prospective patrons to attach value to the library. Information users could make unwholesome decision while in need of information by consulting unverifiable sources for information, however with marketing, library could be at the top of preferred sources of information for information seekers; thereby saving the users from errors and promoting high patronage of the academic library through virtual and physical platforms.

Way Forward

The following recommendations were made based on issues generated through this paper. They are as follows:

- Traditional librarians need to be carried along on emerging ideas and technologies in the library to encourage participation and support for marketing of libraries

- Sponsoring of librarians to conferences and workshops should be given priority in order to allow them learn new skills and embrace opportunities that could further enhance the image of the libraries.

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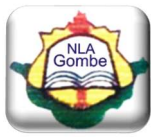
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