Article

## Nigerian university libraries and the question of marketing: reconciling the salient issues

**Goodluck Ifijeh**
*Covenant University, Nigeria*

**Oyeronke Adebayo**
*Covenant University, Nigeria*

**Julie Ilogho**
*Covenant University, Nigeria*

**Aderonke Asaolu**
*Covenant University, Nigeria*

**Happiness Chijioke Michael-Onuoha**
*Covenant University, Nigeria*

### Abstract

This paper makes a case for marketing library and information services in Nigerian University Libraries. It examines the practice and problems of marketing library and information services in Nigerian Universities as well as chart the way forward in dealing with identified problems. It further posits that if carefully planned and executed, marketing could help the library improve on its public perception and win more readerships.

**Keywords:** marketing, university libraries, users, services, Nigeria

### Introduction

University Libraries in Nigeria have grown in number, infrastructure, personnel and services over the last sixty years when the first University was established. Though marketing of library services is a concept of comparatively recent origin, it has now emerged as an important phenomenon for university libraries in Nigeria. Marketing covers those activities that connect the

organization to those parts of its outside world that use, buy, sell or influence the outputs it produces and the benefits and services it offers (Joseph and Parameswari, 2002). Though marketing has no generally accepted definition, Kotler (1997)'s definition appears more appropriate in our context. He viewed marketing as:

> *The analysis, planning and implementation, and control of carefully designed programmes to establish voluntary value – transactions with target markets in order to meet the objectives of Organization. In the first place, the organization needs to be well equipped in order to be able to respond to the needs, wishes and requirements of the chosen market. Secondly, price setting, communication and distribution should make appropriate to effectively inform, motivate and serve the chosen market.*

The above view of marketing highlights the following issues crucial to marketing of library and information services – the need to meet the objectives of the organization, the importance of target markets, the nature of price – setting, communication and distribution.

The library can be called an information market and the library user is a consumer of information. Library acquisition, organization and dissemination of information should therefore be based on the concept and practice of marketing in order to achieve reader satisfaction. In a time when the Internet and other information and communication technology (ICT) facilities tend to be getting more of users' attention, the library should endeavor to nurture the culture of customer service to enhance its image in the eyes of users. As Kotler (1995) points out, organizations such as museums, universities, libraries and charities need to market their causes and their products to gain political, social as well as economic support.

**Development of university libraries in Nigeria**

A university library aims at the advancement of objectives of its parent body by rendering a cost – effective information service and providing knowledge products to its respective community. Development of university libraries in Nigeria cannot be separated from the evolution and growth of universities in the country. The history of university library development in Nigeria

dates back to pre – independence time when the University of Ibadan and its library were established in 1948. As pointed out by Aguolu (1996), since independence in 1960, there has been an unrelenting upsurge in the establishment of educational institutions at all levels, especially university education. University libraries, being integral academic parts of the universities, generally emerged simultaneously with their parent institutions. At independence in 1960, the Federal Government of Nigeria decided to establish a university in each of the geo – political region as at then. This brought about the establishment of the university of Nigeria, Nsukka, University of Ife (now Obafemi Awolowo University), Ile – Ife, and Ahmadu Bello University, Zaria. These universities all established libraries to meet the needs of their students and staff. Over the years, universities and by extension university libraries have increased. Federal and State Governments have opened more universities, while private individuals and organizations are now licensed to operate universities. Presently, there are one hundred and forty-two universities (by

extension university libraries) in Nigeria (NUC, 2016).

University Libraries especially in government-owned universities are suffering from low budgetary allocation. An analysis of the Federal Government allocation to education sector in the last nine years portrays the gory state of the sector in Nigeria. Between year 2000 and 2008, Government's allocation to education was an average of 9 % (Mordi, 2008). An editorial of the Punch Newspaper (2008) report on the funding of Federal Universities reveals that out of the N738 billion the federal government allocated to the sector between 1999 and 2007, the federal ministry of education spent about N472 billion on salaries and wages, leaving a meager N265 billion for the development of Infrastructure in these universities over a period of eight years. Unfortunately, six years after, the challenge of funding remained unresolved (Deji-Folutile & Oketola, 2014). MacArthur Foundation (2005) reported that with low funding, universities are not able to provide adequate funds to operate libraries with first class services. As a result, there are no adequate facilities and information resources, so students use the

libraries mainly for study space. Few faculty members use the libraries' resources regularly and most seem unaware of new developments and resources within the library. The library staff is struggling to provide access to electronic resources while coping with unreliable power, fluctuating access to the internet and low bandwidth. Many view the library as weak and unable to support teaching and research (MacArthur Foundation, 2005).

University libraries are faced with several challenges in trying to fit into the present information society. The above challenges can be met by developing strategies for survival and growth so that stakeholders recognize the role of librarians and their value to society. The challenges can also be met by creating clear vision and values, defining mission and objectives, with customer focus and quality management for effective and efficient service (Nkanga, 1999). University libraries in Nigeria must begin to realize that marketing of information products and services is important, especially as a means for improving user satisfaction and promoting the use of services by current and potential users. If carefully planned,

marketing has the potential to increase University libraries' chances of survival and help them flourish through relevance and productivity.

**Marketing library products and services in universities**

The concept of marketing in libraries is often misunderstood. Many, even among librarians associate it with profit motive only or see it as promotion of library services (Okogwu, 2006); while both views are not entirely wrong, they do not reflect the broad nature of marketing. Olson and Moseman (1997) in Okogwu (2006) posits that marketing includes determining market niches, defining products and services, setting prices, promoting services and building good public relations. Marketing library and information services entails understanding the objectives of the library, the needs of the target market, packaging the library and its services to meet these needs, promotion of the library and its services to attract target market and pricing.

## Objectives of the library

To be able to market its services effectively, the library must take into consideration its objectives. All the processes of marketing undertaken by the library must be guided by these objectives. The marketing process begins at the library's core, namely, the library's mission statement. The mission statement reflects the values of the library and explicitly states the service philosophy (Lee 2001).

Ifidon and Ifidon (2007) outline the major objectives of university libraries in Nigeria as:

- Provision of materials in support of the learning process.
- Provision of materials for research for students and faculty
- Provision of materials to help library users in their personal self development
- Co-operation with other libraries to broaden access to materials for the benefit of Users
- Meeting the specialized information needs of the university community

The users need to appreciate these functions and services in relation to their academic progression. This is the essence of marketing. The library must be seen to be carrying out these functions and services if it must attract readership and justify its existence.

## The target market

In marketing information services, the library should study the target market's needs, design appropriate products, services and means to inform, motivate and serve the market. These activities can be done through market segmentation. Market segmentation is the division of the market or consumers into certain categories according to their buying habits (Peter Collin Dictionary of Marketing, 2000). In carrying out this, the library identifies its distinct groups of users and their expectations of the library and librarians. For university libraries, the target market comprises its various users which include:

- Members of faculty: This includes academic staff of various ranks such as professors, readers, senior lecturers, lecturers 1 and 2, assistant lecturers and graduate assistants.
- Students: This comprises of undergraduate and postgraduate students.
- Non academic staff
- External users

In categorizing these users and their needs, the library should be able to answer the following questions:

- Who uses your services the most?
- What are the top 10 subject areas?
- What are the most common competitive tasks?
- What are some recent customer complaints?
- Are there any recurring complaints?

Identifying the distinct groups of users and their needs will help the library to concentrate on the most productive market services and think of better ways to answer other more tangential needs.

In Nigerian University libraries, the target market is made up of:

- Junior academics: this comprises mainly academics with masters' degrees in various subject fields. They rank from graduate assistants to lecturer 2.

- Senior academics: These are members of faculty with PhD degrees in various fields. They rank from lecturer 1 to professor.

- Undergraduate and postgraduate students

- Non academic staff ranging from administrative to technical cadre

- External users

Each of these groups of users has distinct needs and user behavior which must be taken into consideration for proper and effective marketing to be carried by libraries. Adeyemi (2009) in her research on impact of electronic resources in academic libraries in Nigeria observed that senior academics (especially those between the age of 55 and 65 years) rarely make use of electronic resources due to poor eyesight, lack of internet search skills or inability to use the computer. This implies that they prefer to make use of hard copies (print) rather than soft copies (non print) versions of information resources in the library. Consequently, for effective marketing of library's resources and services to senior academics in Nigeria, libraries should either focus on use of print materials or collaborate with relevant agencies to organize seminars and training workshops on internet and database search skills as well as use of computer. However, junior academics are favorably disposed towards the use of both electronic and print resources

Ilo and Ifijeh (2010) posited that Nigerian students make use of electronic resources especially the internet in their academic pursuit. Thus, University libraries can take

advantage of the use of the internet in driving their marketing efforts towards this target group. The provision of electronic media centers in libraries will in no small measure boost marketing efforts as well as increase patronage for junior academics, students and other members of the university community. In the words of Omekwu (2002):

> *The concepts of virtual libraries, digital libraries, paperless systems, electronic books(e-books),CD-ROMs and information communication technology, are all suggesting to libraries and librarians in Nigeria that it can no longer be the era of meek and apologetic librarianship as usual but the new era of "aggressive and active" librarianship*

Libraries and librarians must evolve strategies that will make them remain relevant to their users.

**Packaging the library and its services**

Packaging here implies putting things in place to attract customers (users) and enhance marketing. Some of the facilities and resources that should be considered in packaging include:

- The library building
  The library building houses library staff, readers, information

resources and equipment. Each of these has needs which the building must meet, if the library services must be effective and efficient. Ideally, the library building should occupy a central location on campus for easy accessibility to users. Though, users may access the library through information and communication (ICT) facilities, they may need to visit the library itself from time to time. The reading rooms must be neat, well ventilated and comfortable so as to encourage readership.

Currently, except for a few, most university library buildings especially those of government own universities are in poor shape due to lack of maintenance culture occasioned by poor funding (Mordi, 2008). There is a dire need to renovate these buildings and install relevant facilities if libraries must market their collections and services effectively and increase patronage.

- Information resources
  The library should be stocked with good information resources in

various fields of study offered in the university. These should be in print and non print formats. The Library's Stock should be able to compete with those of other information resource centers. The library should also be equipped with Internet and e-learning facilities. Reports indicate that most libraries are well stocked with print materials but deficient in electronic resources (Unagha, 2006). This anomaly must be corrected so as to promote marketing.

- Staffing

  The library must have adequate professional librarians. The librarians should possess skills for marketing library and information services. Such skills include ability to perceive user needs, obtain feed back from users, technical knowledge of librarianship and knowledge of marketing strategies. Reference librarians/front desk officers must possess good communication skills as well as exhibit courtesy in interactions with users. The minimum

qualification for academic librarians in Nigeria is masters degree in library and information science. University libraries must therefore explore these rich human resources in driving and boosting marketing efforts.

**Promotion/publicity**

Promotion is the activity that covers all aids to sales. It involves mechanisms that inform the target groups about the resources available, services and products offered by the library (Joseph and Parameswari 2002). The library needs to make its users aware of the services it provides. In carrying out promotional activities, the library should emphasize its area of strength and competitive advantage, taking into consideration unique benefits users' gain from its services. Some promotional activities the library could embark on include the following:

- Publishing and distribution of hand bills
- Publishing and distribution of newsletters
- Mailing Lists programs
- Use of portable computers like circuit – rider librarians for demonstrations in peoples offices

- Placing posters in strategic places
- Use of bill boards
- Library awareness programs like library week and library orientation etc
- The use of social media platforms

In a competitive domain like information services, it has become necessary for the libraries to back up their products and services with warranties and guarantees. Examples could include the following:

- A promise to deliver hard copy information resources (where electronic copies are not available) to users' home or offices.
- A guarantee that a search of the libraries' bibliographic databases will provide needed information quickly and accurately

**Pricing**

Pricing is the marketing activity that determines the price of the product/service. This is done on the basis of cost of production as well as market factors like distribution channels, competitor's prices and ability or willingness of customers to pay. This is a very delicate subject which must be handled with care in the context of libraries in Nigeria. Users especially at the university level view the library as an agency which offer services free of charge. Though the library is not profit oriented, the reality of today's world in terms of cost of acquisitions and services makes it inevitable for the library to charge users for services rendered. However, the amount to be charged should be minimal and for certain specialized services only. Such services may include:

- Registration
- Selective dissemination of information
- Use of the library's internet facilities
- Specialized abstracting and indexing services for individual user etc

Libraries may also charge fees for overdue loans and final year students' clearance. It is important to note that funds generated from such charges will help to provide better facilities and services for users.

**Problems of marketing in university libraries in Nigeria**

**Funding**

Packaging the library to make it marketable requires a lot of funds. For most universities in Nigeria, funds are not readily available. Aguolu(1996) posits that universities' budgets are so meager that they are barely sufficient to pay staff salaries, not to talk of equipping libraries

and providing funds for effective marketing of its services. This has hampered professional library services and frustrated marketing efforts. Many university libraries cannot compete with other information providing centers due to poor infrastructure, low morale among librarians and lack of quality learning resources, occasioned by lack of funds (Mac Arthur Foundation, 2005)

### Image of libraries

MacArthur foundation (2005) in its report on university libraries stated that many students and faculty view the libraries as weak and unable to support research. Such mindsets make most of them use the library for study space. Marketing the library and its services therefore becomes a herculean task. Similarly, Okogwu (2006) said libraries are perceived as giving information away "for free"; and in our culture, Nigerians do not seem to attach importance or value to what they receive as free. Changing this notion is also a huge task for libraries.

### Poor/lack of marketing skills among librarians

Most librarians lack business expertise (Joseph and Parameswari 2002). Thus, they only carry out traditional schedule of acquisition, cataloguing, classification, user education and shelving; and thereafter, maintain 'sit down look' posture, waiting for users (customers) instead of launching out to attract users through professional marketing skills.

### The way forward

- **Create a marketing plan and strategy**: Effective Marketing of library services in Nigeria University Libraries should begin with each library putting in place a written marketing strategy. This will involve creating and implementing library marketing plan. The marketing plan should revolve round a mission statement. This will give the library staff a sense of direction and accomplishment. The effects of marketing library services will be more pronounced if library staff follow a predetermined marketing plan.

- **Marketing on tight budget** : Marketing demands enormous

funding, the library needs to generate funds in order to compete with other information resource centers, instead of waiting for allocation from Government or its parent body. This could be from library development levies (from students), consultancy services, library fines, registration fees and donor agencies. Funds provided and generated should be well managed. Libraries may opt for use of handbills and other cheap materials in carrying out promotions and publicity, instead of erecting expensive bill boards. They may also use e-mails to publicize their activities. This is relatively cheaper than other sources of publicity. University library managers must cut wastes and excesses in order to minimize cost and promote effectiveness and efficiency. The University Alumni and other friends of the library should be involved in library development programmes. The case of special libraries in Botswana as reported by Nkanga(1999) is a clear example of marketing on tight budget.

- **Staff training**: Librarians need to acquire professional skills for marketing. This can be achieved through in-house retraining programmes and attending short-term marketing courses. Library schools should incorporate marketing courses in their curricula to equip graduate librarians for marketing practice. Ifidon (2008) rightly observed that Nigerian Library schools need to review their curriculum to reflect modern day realities.

- **Maximizing social media platforms**: Social media platforms have become ready tools for marketing products and services. Platforms like facebook, twitter and instagram among others can be used by libraries to publicize and market products and services. These platforms also provide unique opportunities for libraries to interact and get feed backs from patrons. They are also easily accessed on handy gadgets like

mobile phones. The use of social media helps libraries take their products and services right to where the users are.

As Librarians improve on their service delivery and engage in promotions/publicity, the library's poor public image will gradually improve. Improving on service delivery will involve the library ensuring that greater effort is devoted to designing and implementing suitable methods for finding out what users want and expect from the library.

## Conclusion

University libraries in Nigeria need to fully embrace the concept of marketing in order to achieve its primary objective of disseminating information to its users. Though libraries never claim the monopoly of information, the advent of Information and Communication Technology (ICT) has brought about competition in the domain and primary functions of the library. University Libraries should therefore employ the vital tool of marketing their services if they must be relevant to the overall objectives of the University. Librarians

should train to be experts who will package library services such that users would place value on and even pay for them.

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## Author biography

**Goodluck Ifijeh**  MLS  is  Senior Librarian, Centre for Learning Resources, Covenant University, Nigeria.  He has published numerous research papers in both local and international journals, and has also contributed chapters in books. He can be reached goodluck.ifijeh@covenantuniversity.edu.ng .

 **Oyeronke Adebayo** MLS is Circulation Librarian, Centre for Learning Resources, Covenant University, Nigeria. She has published numerous articles in reputable local and international journals. She can be reached @ oyeronke.adebayo@covenantuniversity.edu.ng

**Julie Ilogho**  MLS  M.Sc is currently Serials Librarian, Centre for Learning Resources, Covenant University Nigeria. She has published many research papers in journals and has contributed chapters in books. She  is currently a Doctoral student in Covenant University. She can be reached @ julie.ilogho@covenantuniversity.edu.ng

 **Aderonke Asaolu** MLS is Head, Reference and Repository services, Centre for Learning Resources, Covenant University, Nigeria. She has published numerous research papers in reputable international and local journals. She can be reached aderonke.asaolu@covenantuniversity.edu.ng

 **Happiness Chijioke Michael-Onuoha** MLS is  Librarian in the Technical Services unit of the Centre for Learning Resources, Covenant University, Nigeria. She has made scholarly contributions in both local and international journals. She can be reached through happiness.michael-onuoha@covenantuniversity.edu.ng