

TRENDS IN MARKETING LIBRARY SERVICES IN URBAN AREAS: A CASE STUDY OF SELECTED LIBRARIES IN KAMPALA CITY, UGANDA

Sophie Bangi Kamoshu,
Information Officer at the American Center, Kampala, Uganda

and

I.M.N. Kigongo-Bukenya,
Professor of Library and Information Science
Makerere University

Abstract

This article presents the findings of a study that was undertaken in Kampala City, Uganda, in nine libraries belonging to the private sector, government, academic and diplomatic- related institutions. The aim of the study was to establish trends in marketing library services in urban areas with a view to identify marketing strategies of library services in Kampala City, and to establish the opportunities available and challenges that librarians encounter when marketing library services. Data was collected using questionnaires, interviews, focus group discussion, observation, and document content analysis. The study revealed that, overall, librarians in Kampala City appreciate the importance of marketing library services in the competitive information market. However, many librarians face challenges, among which is lack of marketing skills. The study recommends, among others, the retraining of library staff in marketing techniques.

Introduction

Globally, libraries are increasingly becoming more important as they are a gateway of information. In this competitive era, information has become very powerful and is viewed as a commodity just like any other commodities in the market that need to be carefully sold to the right customers. Today, knowing who your customers are, identifying market segments, defining and promoting products, and adding value to increase customer satisfaction are becoming the basic principles of library marketing. Society is now more enlightened and can easily access alternative options of finding information more especially through the use of the Internet. To counteract this trend, it is critical that libraries develop unique products and services to reach out to new customers and enhance services to keep current customers happy.

Whereas libraries have achieved significant progressive results in some countries, in Uganda, more especially in Kampala, the opportunities for librarians to achieve lasting impression on the urban communities have not been fully exploited. Despite the fact that information is becoming a

powerful tool for organizations' success in the global market, most libraries in Kampala are under-utilized and under-funded. Some libraries in Kampala are not given adequate resources to enable them buy information resources that meet users' information needs. Overall library infrastructure in Kampala remains undeveloped. Library studies carried out in Uganda indicate that libraries are not moving at the same pace of development. According to Ikoja (2002:311) in Uganda, there is no comprehensive library policy. Ikoja asserts that the existing policy seems to be overly concerned with the press and too little on libraries.

This particular study had the following specific objectives:

- To identify the various marketing activities carried out by librarians in Kampala City.
- To establish whether libraries carry out customer satisfaction surveys to assess information needs of the existing and potential users.
- To determine the level of awareness of librarians about the importance of marketing of library services to both internal and external customers.
- To describe the attitudes of librarians towards marketing of library services.
- To identify the opportunities available, and challenges librarians encounter in the marketing of library services in Kampala.
- Provide recommendations to enhance effective marketing of library services in future.

Literature Review

Unlike in the past, today's society has become more enlightened and more demanding for quality information. For instance, Internet has become the biggest threat and the fastest growing competitor of the libraries in Kampala. Potential library users are increasingly turning to computers as an alternative to using the printed materials. As Nims (1999: 250) rightly puts it, these customers can now use the internet to easily access volumes of information over the computer at home or office or from anywhere in the world without coming into the library building or interacting with a librarian at all. The modern information users believe that the internet is the ultimate solution to their information needs because the internet provides fast access to information and provides quick answers to their questions. Apart from competition, libraries are facing the challenge of budget cuts when required to justify their existence. However, it is worthy noting that, not all is lost for libraries, the same trends are offering opportunities for librarians to sell library services and products due to the increased demand for information. Brown (2004:35) observes that although this means that libraries face increasing competition, it presents an opportunity for libraries to help library users to choose the right source of information from among the growing number of services. Gessesse (1997:90) points out that

librarians have a unique opportunity to take leadership role in helping to prepare the information user community for the information age. From the literature available, many librarians worldwide have not yet fully incorporated the marketing planning process in their libraries. Mukiibi (2004:5) in his study of Public Libraries in Uganda observed that there is a limited strategy to market public library services to the current and potential users.

A library study carried out by Nkanga (2002:307) in Botswana revealed that 37% of the respondents did not market their library services. The reason being that their libraries were provided exclusively for members of staff, who were already aware of the services provided. Nkanga found out that most respondents who did not market their services indicated that they lacked knowledge of marketing because they had never had training in marketing; consequently did not know how to go about it.

It is worthy noting that the literature available indicates that, unlike in the past when libraries had failed to market their services largely because of the notion that libraries were the natural places to turn to fulfill information needs, today, libraries are under pressure to justify their existence through provision of quality library services based on customer-orientation. Competition in the market place is increasing the demand for information, while the budgets for libraries are decreasing. "Library and information sectors have to increase their fight for every budget dollar, and some struggle to justify their existence" (Thompson, 2004).

Effective marketing according to (Sauha, 2001:3), increases library funding, increases usage of library services, educates customers and potential customers, changes perceptions and enhances the reputation of the library and its staff. Lee (2000) notes that:

"Regardless of the type of library, the need to develop a customer-centred and strategic marketing planning has now become part of effective library management". Cronin (1996:125) observes that it is only by using and adopting such marketing techniques that librarians will achieve the "recognition needed from your master and gain the resource you require to achieve maximum service. Enjoy public recognition and thus get their facilities used."

Previous information marketing studies such as those carried out in Botswana (Nkanga 1990:304) and Kenya (Kavulya 2004:125) indicate that very few libraries undertake formal marketing planning and prepare marketing plans. "Marketing was therefore unplanned and promotion was the most commonly used element of marketing mix" (Nkanga, 1990:304). Nkanga's study revealed that many librarians in Gaborone, Botswana are

unaware of the significance of formal marketing. Information studies carried out in Kenya showed that:

“University libraries in Kenya tend to concentrate more on public relations and advertising, thus defining marketing in terms of informing users what is available instead of finding out customers’ expectations of the information service” (Kavulya, 2004:125).

What generally emerges from the literature review is that the majority of librarians are in favour of marketing their library services to both internal and external users. However, it appears that very few undertake formal marketing activities and do not prepare market plans that include challenges and opportunities. In summary, whereas there is consensus with regard to the need to market library services, few studies have focused on the different marketing strategies used and the opportunities and challenges that librarians encounter in carrying out marketing function in urban areas. This study attempted to address these critical issues that had been left out in many library studies in Uganda.

Methodology

The research design adopted the triangulation approach. The term triangulation is used to refer to a research strategies and research designs involving more than one research method or more than one technique or style of inquiry, recognizing that the use of two or more ways of gathering information tells more than using one” (Pons, 1992: 588). To get a wider perspective of the subject under study, the researcher, purposively, selected a sample of nine libraries from the following sectors: legal, banking, diplomatic missions, academic, government and public libraries. These categories were considered to form a representative sample of libraries in Kampala City. The population under study consisted of 48 participants including library staff and users. For convenience and flexibility, purposive sampling strategy was employed to obtain participants who were willing to provide information, were knowledgeable about the area of study and were conveniently to reachable without much hassle.

Data collection took place over a period of three months. The data was collected using both primary and secondary sources using multiple methods to ensure accuracy and reliability. Secondary data was obtained through document content analysis while primary data collection involved administering a questionnaire, interviews, focus group discussion and observation. A semi-structured questionnaire was used to obtain both qualitative and quantitative data. The questionnaire was mostly useful in gathering background information from the respondents. Focus Group discussion employed on six librarians helped in harmonizing unclear issues

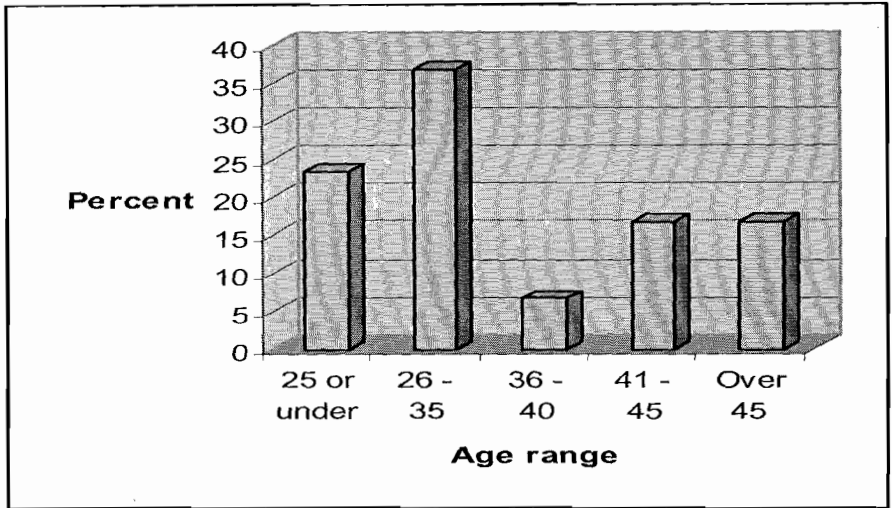
that were collected using the semi-structured questionnaires and observation guide. The previous information marketing studies carried out in Kenya and Botswana by Kavulya (2004) and Nkanga (2002) respectively used these research methods and found them adequate in gathering similar information.

Discussion of the Findings

The distribution of the respondents that formed the total sample was as follows: Head of libraries (9), Library staff (21), and Library users (18). Out of the 34 questionnaires distributed to members of library staff, 30 questionnaires were completed and returned, giving a response rate of 88%. There was 100% response rate from library users. From the background details of the respondents, it was noted that the job titles of the respondents working in libraries varied widely, with most government-related and academic libraries still maintaining the traditional titles of “the librarian” while as library staff from diplomatic missions and the private sector had titles like Customer Services Manager, Information Specialist, Director of Information, to mention but a few. The variations in job titles were mostly based on the variety of library services offered and level of responsibility of a member of staff.

The study revealed that vibrant young and well-qualified members of staff managed libraries in Kampala. Approximately 16.7% of the respondents reported having a Master of Library and Information Science Degree while 36.7% had Bachelor’s Degree in Library and Information Science, and 13.3% had other qualifications including MBA, Bachelor’s Degree in Arts (Social Sciences) and Business Administration.

Figure 1: Distribution of age of respondents
n=30



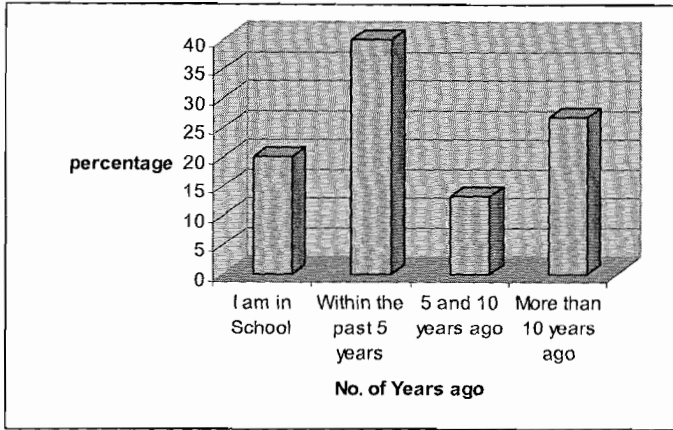
Source: Field Data

The findings revealed an interesting trend about the respondents working in the library sector, with a majority of 60% being a group of young and energetic professionals within the age range of 25 or under, to 36. This is a positive trend considering the rapid developments in information field. However, it was interesting to note that only 6.7% of the librarians were within the age range of 36 and 40. There is need to undertake a tracer study to find out what librarians do after the age of 35.

Respondents were asked how long ago they had completed their education. 40% had completed their studies less than five years to the time of study, while 20% were still in school. (Refer to Figure 2). It is interesting to note that among the respondents who had indicated that they were in school, one respondent was over 45 years old. This is an indicator that library and information work is not static and therefore there is need for continuing education to be able to cope with the rapid changes in the information field, no matter at what age.

Figure 2: How many years ago did you complete education?

n=30



Source: Field Data

Responding to the question of primary job responsibilities, a majority of the respondents having Bachelor's Degree in Library and Information Science indicated that their main job responsibilities were: processing new materials, shelving, cataloguing and classification, circulation desk, registering members or answering inquiries. Some senior members of the library staff with Masters Degree were responsible for either administrative work, budgeting, or selection and ordering of library materials. Only one respondent indicated that her/his main job responsibilities were to prepare the marketing plan and market-related activity to external audiences. This clearly reveals that most library staff in Kampala City are not fully utilized to do more work beyond their library profession including marketing even though they are highly educated. This is a problem in the library sector, in that the modern competitive world now requires a human resource that is multi-skilled.

While librarians' main job duties did not include marketing, the study revealed that the heads of institutions recognize the need for libraries to make themselves more visible to decision makers through aggressive marketing with a view to obtaining more budgetary support. The top executives interviewed indicated appreciation of the role marketing plays in raising the profile of library services, the librarian and that of the organization. The general view from the top executives was that librarians were not doing much to market their services and products hence were of the view that most librarians were introverts and lacked initiative to make the libraries visible. This attitude may possibly explain why there was generally low perception of libraries and the librarians.

To verify the comments made by the heads of institutions, respondents were asked if they had taken courses in marketing during their library education. Approximately 50% of the respondents indicated that marketing was not part of their education during their library studies. Asked whether they had attended a seminar or workshop in marketing in the past five years, 53.3% of the respondents indicated that they had never taken such a marketing course or workshop, 30% had taken one in the past five years and another 8% indicated having taken one more than five years before the study. This explains why major job responsibilities by most members of library staff do not include marketing. Lack of marketing skills could also explain why librarians did not market their library services. Apart from lack of marketing skills, librarians indicated that they lacked funds to do marketing. Much as the libraries had a budget, no budget was set aside for the marketing function. A majority of respondents were not involved in deciding the library budget and so did not have a way of explaining the need for extra funds for the marketing function.

In summary, although there were considerable variations on each of the background details, the overall profile of the respondents was that most tended to be middle aged or younger, majority with experience of less than five years and with at least a first degree. From this analysis, there is clear evidence that the library sector in Kampala has a large proportion of aspiring young educated professionals who, if well facilitated, could transform the library sector.

Strategic Marketing Process

Much as libraries in Kampala had carried out a number of marketing-related activities in the past three years, none of the major marketing-related activities were geared towards making the potential and existing customers aware of the resources available. The major marketing activities were purchase of stock (43%), renovation of the library building (13.3%) and bought furniture (13.3%). Over 60% of the libraries that participated in the study had not prepared marketing plans. Only Diplomatic Mission related libraries had brochures and were carrying out other marketing activities that include: outreach visits, presentations to external institutions, theme weeks, open days, regular refurbishment of the libraries, panel and video discussion programmes, keeping in touch with customers through e-mail and customer care. Despite the availability of these marketing activities, there is clear evidence that there is no formal marketing of library services in Kampala, which possibly explains the under-utilization of library services. Overall, this situation clearly indicates that there is a problem of connecting information seekers with the services and products offered by libraries.

The findings revealed that approximately 10% of the respondents had carried out the User Satisfaction Survey. The general assumption from the respondents was that libraries knew the kind of information the users were looking for. A comment by one of the respondents concerning the question of how they determined the kind of services and how they got to know the resources library users wanted was "It depends on the organizations' needs and consideration of the users' needs who are mainly students. We have a specialized collection and some books can not be found elsewhere" Although 80% of the respondents had not carried out User Satisfaction Survey, the majority to some extent tended to know what the existing customers were looking for. They got this information from the library users' inquiries and daily attendants register.

Respondents were asked to indicate the different kinds of services that their libraries offered their customers. This study clearly reveals that 100% of the libraries in Kampala offer lending of books and enquiry answering services. Only 11% of the libraries were offering Digital Video Conferencing service; 22% offer online databases. This is bad news because most libraries globally need to offer more of these modern information services in order to compete favourably with other information providers.

On the question concerning the marketing tools that libraries used to promote their services, majority of the libraries indicated that they rarely used the media to market their services. About 63.3% of the respondents indicated that Radio and Television Talk Shows were never part of their work. When asked whether there were some librarians that marketed their services internally, none of the librarians that attended the focus group discussion admitted to have performed this activity.

Table 1: Marketing tools used by libraries in Kampala City in percent

N = 9

Marketing Tool	Private sector	Diplomatic	Academic	Government	No response
Brochures	3.3%	46.7%	26.7%	3.3%	23..3%
Newsletters	0	0	0	30%	70%
Advertising in the media	0	16.7%	3.3%	3.3%	76.7%
Word of Mouth	3.3%	20%	23..3%	33..3%	20%
Websites	0	46.7%	3.3%	3%	47%
Exhibitions	3.3%	23..3%	10%	36.7%	
At events	0	63..3%	0	16.7%	20%
No need to market	3.3%	0	0	0	96.7%
Notice Board	3.3%	13..3%	26.7%	36.7%	20%
Mailing lists	3.3%	20%	3.3%	23..3%	50%

Source: Field data

Much as the librarians were not marketing enough, a majority of the respondents showed positive attitude towards marketing of library services and also indicated that they had knowledge of marketing even though most of them had not taken a course in marketing.

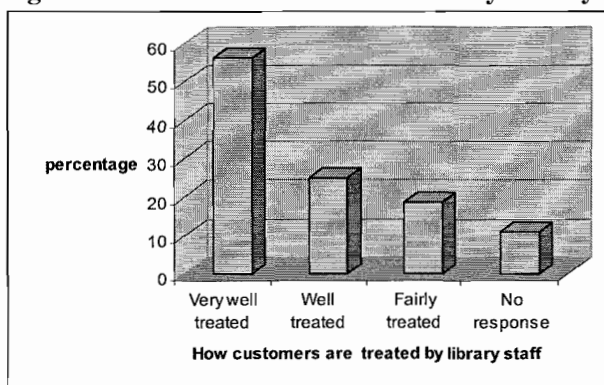
Responding to the question about whether it was important for librarians to go out and market library services, one of the respondents had this to say: "Yes, Marketing is essential in order to make potential customers know what you have. Information is first of all like any other service, which people need to be introduced to. Marketing ensures that opportunity for potential members to join, at the same time, retain the existing customers". Commenting on the marketing of library services study, one respondent said "Information managers should see library services as any other products that need to be marketed. We should never assume that people know what they want so they can first get in the library and find it. We need to create awareness to people. It is good that for the first time, somebody has taken that initiative to do a research in marketing of library services".

Whereas majority of the librarians indicated that they were very much involved in marketing-related activities, when asked to indicate the extent

to which the marketing activities were part of their work, a majority of the librarians indicated that some marketing activities were not part their work; others indicated that marketing was rarely part of their work. Only few respondents indicated that they were involved in marketing.

To reconfirm the library marketing tools used by libraries in Kampala, the researcher interviewed 18 library users who were mainly University lecturers and students, researchers from non-governmental organizations, politicians, government officials and professionals from the private sector. Library users were asked to give their views on the service level of the libraries and how they felt treated. No single library user indicated mistreatment by members of library staff. See figure 4 below.

Figure 4: How customers feel treated by library staff

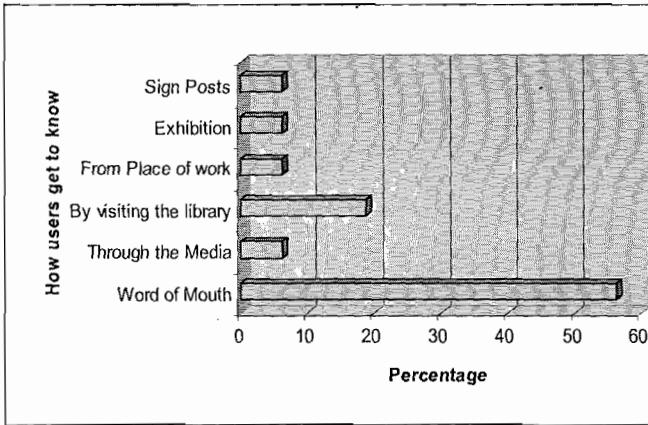


Source: Field data

Responding to the question of what users liked most about the particular libraries they were using, 61% of the library users indicated that they liked a good and quiet environment for study that was convenient to access. What they disliked most included: inadequate sanitation facilities, limited or lack of computers and Internet facilities, and limited library stock. Due to limited information resources and poor library infrastructure, possibly many would-be users of the libraries do not take full advantage of library services. On the question on how the library users came to know about the libraries they were using, 56.3% of the respondents indicated that they had heard about the library by word of mouth while 18.8 % just bumped into the library by chance not knowing what to find.

Figure 5: How library users get to know about library services

n = 18



Source: Field Data

This is a clear indication that there is a big marketing problem in the library sector that needs to be urgently addressed. If customers can get to know about services by word of mouth possibly through a relative or friend, there is high risk of losing customers especially when they visit the library and find that the services do not meet their expectations.

ATTITUDES AND KNOWLEDGE OF MARKETING

Members of the library staff were asked to indicate their level of agreement with several statements related to attitudes towards marketing of library services, as well as their level of knowledge about marketing and their involvement in the marketing activities. Most respondents agreed with the statements indicating positive attitudes towards marketing of library services. Approximately 60% of the respondents strongly agreed with the statement that marketing and public relations should be a compulsory subject in a library course. About 63.3% of the respondents strongly agreed to the statements that marketing was relevant to the needs of libraries and that librarians must find better ways of serving customers to sustain their interests. (See Table 4 below for details).

Benefits of Marketing Library Services in a City

Many of the respondents indicated that it was important for librarians to go out and inform people about the existence of the library services so that the potential users can make use of the library resources. The following are some of the responses given:

- Information services provision has become competitive. Libraries that do not market cannot survive the competition. So librarians should start marketing.
- Agree. Libraries like other entities need to make their presence felt especially when you consider the many other factors and developments that call for people's attention.

Responding to the question about the benefits of marketing library services to the community in Kampala City, some librarians made the comments:

- Urban customers have money to pay for the services and literacy in urban area is also high. Therefore, libraries are likely to win more customers. More customers will in turn put pressure on the ability of libraries to develop wide range of products and services.
- Urban communities are ambitious people with hopes and desire to further their education. So marketing in an urban area has this added advantage.

Challenges of Marketing Library Services

Despite the fact that the librarians are aware of the benefits of marketing library services, most of the respondents were reluctant to do marketing due to fear of competition, fear of managing numbers and failing to meet the users' expectations because librarians lacked adequate resources and marketing skills. One of the major challenges of marketing library services revealed in the study was lack of adequate financial resources. In relation to this, one of the respondents said: "We lack financial resources to carry out a marketing function. Marketing is a costly adventure".

Most of the librarians participating in the study pointed out that their institutions were not giving adequate support to libraries the results of which was lack of motivation and interest by members of staff. Apart from inadequate financial resources, respondents also indicated lack of human resource with adequate competencies to carry out the marketing function as another challenge. Commenting on this one of the respondents said that there was lack of experienced staff to put a message across effectively; and also lack of marketing techniques by library staff.

Other Marketing challenges identified were that people in Kampala City had poor perception of libraries in general, because they could get information elsewhere. In addition, they were too busy to make use of

library services. Marketing function was therefore thought to be a waste of time. However the researcher is of the view that most of these challenges hinge around lack of marketing skills by members of library staff and limited financial resources.

Major Findings of the Study

Following from the above analysis and discussion of data, the synopsis of major findings could be stated as follows:

- **Lack of institutional support**

Much as information is globally recognized as a vital resource, most of the government related libraries visited in Kampala City were in a poor physical state; the buildings and stock looked very outdated. These libraries did not portray an image of a modern dynamic and growing library that was moving with time.

- **Lack of marketing skills**

The study found out that most of the times, librarians were reluctant to market due to fear of the outside. Some librarians were still reactive rather than being proactive. Over 70% of the libraries that participated in the survey did not have marketing plans. Without a marketing plan, it is difficult to convince the people who control funds to allocate adequate funds for the marketing function. Lack of funds was however indicated as main reason or excuse for not to marketing. Library marketing is matter of improving customers' experience, welcoming them or sending them a thank you letter. This does not require money at all but initiative and customer care skills on the part of the librarian.

- **Under-utilization of information professionals**

One of the major findings of the study is that young well-qualified and knowledgeable information professionals now manage libraries in Kampala City. Most of the young professionals are multi-skilled having computer skills, interpersonal and communication skills. However, the findings also revealed that library staffs were under-utilized. For example many of the respondents indicated that they had knowledge of marketing but they were not performing the marketing function because it was not part of their main job responsibilities.

Recommendations

From the literature, it is said that many librarians lack knowledge of marketing, have negative attitude towards marketing, or believe that marketing is relevant only to business, but not to libraries. The findings from this study revealed the contrary. Most of the respondents expressed positive attitudes toward marketing. For instance, 57% of the respondents

indicated that libraries should be marketed as any other business while 80% indicated that the study of marketing should be compulsory for all students taking library education. This study therefore recommends the following:

- **Courses in Marketing**

Marketing should be a compulsory subject for all students undertaking Library and Information Studies. The School of Library and Information Science at Makerere University should also introduce short marketing courses for those library professionals in the field who have never had an opportunity to study marketing.

- **Marketing Research**

More marketing studies need to be carried out especially with regard to attitudes of senior management and the urban communities towards libraries and librarianship as a profession. Such a study would help to identify key factors that may assist to link up the libraries and the community.

- **Marketing of Library services**

The Uganda Library Association should inform people at higher levels of government, especially policymakers, about marketing of library services. This will involve lobbying the policymakers to come out in support of and promote library policies.

Further Research

Librarians in Kampala City are becoming more aware of the importance of marketing library services to the public and to the internal users especially to the top executives. Few studies have examined the challenges encountered by librarians in marketing library services. This study covered only nine libraries, which is a small sample; a bigger study needs to be carried out covering all libraries in Kampala City so as to get to the bottom of the challenges of marketing library services.

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