STRATEGIC MARKETING ORIENTATION IN PUBLIC UNIVERSITY LIBRARIES OF BANGLADESH: CURRENT PRACTICES AND FUTURE GUIDELINES

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Abstract

Libraries, especially the university libraries, are confronting with several challenges such as budget scarcity, advent of new information technologies in resources management and dissemination, and changing demands of research and teaching. To meet these challenges academic libraries should follow definite market research strategies. This research is an attempt to examine the current marketing orientation of some selected public university library personnel and current market research practices followed by them. Users of these libraries were also studied to understand their orientation with library resources and services. Data analysis revealed that although the libraries' top management responded positively that they have marketing orientation, they are yet to adapt true marketing strategies. Finally, some of the internationally established guidelines are discussed for these libraries.

Keywords

Strategic marketing, Academic libraries, Public University, Bangladesh

Introduction

Academic libraries especially university libraries as the heart of concerned institutions always have the mandate to meet their user requirements fruitfully. Accordingly, academic libraries follow effective methods for collecting study materials and ensure the use of collected materials for providing required services to their clientele. Earlier the collection and service development of these libraries were solely dependent on librarians due to affordable diversity of resources and user demands. The transition of traditional physical library practices toward modern virtual library management poses multiple challenges for the survival of these libraries. With the increase and widespread use of the internet in recent years, the traditional function of the academic library as a physical collection of research

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material is under threat (Alcock, 2011). These days, a large portion of the teaching staff and students are reluctant to view the libraries as the unique repositories of published literature as well as focal point to acquire resources from outside sources. As a result, "libraries are losing their role as the 'primary information provider' as users turn to search engines as their starting point to do research" (De Rosa *et al*., 2005). Many people think that library services are unnecessary as information is freely available on the Internet. This notion is erroneous because quality information is not free, and accessing quality information online requires intensive information literacy and institutional affiliation. Here lies the importance of libraries.

Libraries have been established to accumulate all sorts and forms of information sources on a platform and render user-oriented services along with user education to develop the information literacy skills of the users that help them to search and retrieve required information when needed. In order to sustain as an integral part of an academic institution and attain their aims, academic libraries need to adapt with the changing trends by incorporating new initiatives along with their basic services. Besides meeting diversified demands of the users, academic libraries have to predict future needs and develop innovative services to fulfill those needs. Therefore, the practice of product-oriented librarianship should be given more concentration incorporating precise mechanism for user needs and satisfaction assessment and developing services accordingly. Effective marketing is one way to address this examination of user need (Alcock, 2011).

In spite of librarians' limited concept regarding marketing processes and tools, it is evident from different studies that librarians have been practicing marketing strategies at their work for a long time either consciously or unconsciously. In fact Ranganathan's Five Laws of Library Science are the prime principles of marketing initiatives in library practices. However, many academic libraries still lack marketing plans to achieve organizational goals. It is neither possible for any library to become exhaustive in terms of collection and services nor it should try to be so. But it is the responsibility of every library to meet user demands precisely in order to satisfy the current users and attract potential users. In this regard true marketing could be helpful for successful library operation.

Literature review

The UK Chartered Institute of Marketing (2010), defined marketing as, "the management process responsible for identifying, anticipating and satisfying customer requirements profitably". Customers of an organization become aware about its products and services through the process of marketing. It is the key component that helps to achieve the target of an organization and thereby ensures its sustainability

and growth. Therefore, marketing does not exist as a managerial approach to for-profit organizations only rather, non-profit organizations like public or private charitable organizations, hospitals, libraries etc. are also using marketing principles and strategies through due adjustments to suit for the concerned sector. Enache (2008) articulated that marketing has long been related to the function of selling products with an intention to make a profit and the area of marketing was broaden to encompass non-profit sector along with libraries in the 1960s. Yi (2016) stated marketing initiatives as managerial tools that assist libraries to face the challenges of the digital era and increase the visibility of libraries that eventually help in enhancing the value of the libraries to their parent organization. Yi (2016) also stressed on discovery of ways for promoting library services and resources that would influence current user attraction as well as generate awareness among potential users and non-users. Marketing for library products and services includes understanding client needs, determining market niches, identifying products and services, building client relationships and creating '*marketing mix*' (de Saez, 2002; Rowley, 2003; Welch, 2006; Potter, 2012). Rowley (2003) depicted marketing orientation as a philosophy that leads organizations' activities to revolve around the customers and their needs. According to her, customers always seek convenient offerings that fulfill their needs as a whole. Thus, organizations must address those needs and design appropriate offerings for customers. If organizations neglect the responsibility of creating and holding customers, they undermine their own existence.

Strategic marketing equips libraries with different techniques for conducting market research and shaping library initiatives according to the output of the research. For example, strategic marketing can be used to better understand the viewpoints of donor groups while considering their support for funding, design and deliver user-oriented product and services in most user-appropriated ways, increase libraries visibility to establish librarianship as a prestigious career choice among the fresh university graduates etc. (Spalding and Wang 2006). Based on her analysis of marketing literature, Cheney (2007) mentioned that all the marketing approaches with varying nomenclatures fall into four categories: marketing research, marketing segmentation, marketing mix strategy, and marketing evaluation. Shapiro (1999) observed that the typical marketing mix abbreviated as 4Ps - product, price, place and promotion- can be applied in library and information services marketing as well.

Neglecting the orientation of strategic marketing and subsequent development of marketing tools, library users cannot be expected to become fully aware of library resources and services. Marketing is a bidirectional process that consists of the function of reviewing user needs, development of significant services, and obtaining feedback to assess how effectively the library has addressed the user needs

(Almquist, 2014). Libraries have not been using marketing as a sales tool, rather as a technique of product and service development on the basis of user demand identification, improving awareness of library offerings and gathering feedback for further development. According to Duke and Tucker (2007) there is no dispute regarding the importance of the application of marketing strategies in library services and programs, but marketing activities should not be confined to the distribution of a bookmark or hanging a flyer; rather, marketing must be deeply rooted into overall strategic planning of the library. Cheney (2007) revealed that users' increasing dependency on internet has exposed a critical situation for librarians to pro-actively market their products and services. Almquist (2014) emphasizes that application of the marketing ensures persistent initiatives to actively seek out user needs and designing services to meet those needs. The Department for Culture Media and Sport (DCMS) published a Modernization Review of Public Libraries (2010), which signified marketing as one of the essential skills that modern library workforce should possess to flexibly respond to the needs and expectations of the users. Dubicki, (2007) attempted to explore the importance of marketing in modern library operation from the job advertisement for librarians where qualifications and/or experience in marketing have been sought as one of the prerequisites.

Numerous marketing initiatives and activities have been highlighted in ever increasing literature on marketing in academic libraries. Some has focused on - print marketing materials such as posters, leaflets and tip sheets (Gaffney and Jones, 2007; Peters and Fiander, 2004); others emphasized innovative marketing programs like Fresher's Fair (Bury and Phillips, 2005) and online service development to ensure access to both print and electronic library resources (Oxford, 2009).

Objective

This study aims to examine the level of marketing orientation among library managers and the users' familiarity with the library resources and services in public university libraries of Bangladesh. In this context, the specific objectives of this study are to:

- assess the current marketing pattern in these libraries,
- understand how much the library management is ready to address current issues, and how they plan to initiate marketing practices in these libraries,
- examine user awareness about the extent of library marketing and having their opinion toward better awareness building program,
- acknowledge some of the internationally established guidelines for these libraries.

Methodology

Data were gathered by two separate structured questionnaires for each group and summarized against the objectives of the study. A total of one hundred users and four universities were taken as our sample. Finally, Microsoft Excel was used for the analysis of the data collected through the questionnaire. In order to represent current trend as well as, similarities and dissimilarities among the data, suitable figures and charts were created with the help of Microsoft Excel.

Scope of the study

At present, three types of universities are operating in Bangladesh: public universities, private universities and international universities. According to the University Grants Commission of Bangladesh, the number of public, private and international universities in the country are 37, 91 and 3 respectively. For this research only the following four public university libraries were considered:

1. Dhaka University Library (DUL)
2. Jahangirnagar University Library (JUL)
3. Sher-e-Bangla Agricultural University Library (AUL)
4. Bangladesh University of Engineering and Technology Library (BUETL)

Among these libraries, first two are general universities and the others are special universities. It is significant to mention that all of these libraries are located in Dhaka, the country's capital city.

Data analysis and findings

The data analysis for this research has two segments: 1. public university library personnel's market orientation and current marketing practices 2. user awareness about the extent of library marketing and their opinion toward better awareness building program. The following tables will clarify these issues.

Library managements' marketing orientation and current marketing practices

Significant data from the questionnaire received from the top library management has been distributed in the following table. All positive responses have been shown by tick marks and negative responses through dash sign and analysis has been made accordingly.

Table-1: Library managements' marketing orientation and current marketing practices

Key facts	Components	DUL	JUL	AUL	BUETL
Marketing orientation	Yes	√	√	√	√
	no				
Who has overall responsibility of marketing planning?	University marketing department				
	Library Director/Chief			√	
	Library's senior management team	√	√		√
	Individual or group of library staff dedicated to marketing/PR responsibilities				
	All library staff share the responsibility for planning marketing of library services				
	No designated responsibility				
Any strategic marketing plan exists?	Yes	√		√	
	no				

Key facts	Components	DUL	JUL	AUL	BUETL
Customer research activities to assess used needs.	User needs questionnaires/surveys				√
	Focus group discussion			√	
	Interviews	√			√
	Stakeholder analysis activities				
	Monitoring current usage statistics	√			√
How user satisfaction is measured?	User submitted suggestions/ comment	√	√		
	Library specific user satisfaction survey				
	General user satisfaction survey	√			
	User feedback meetings	√		√	
Is customer feedback feed into future planning?	Yes	√	√	√	√
	no				
Library staff's skill to identify and anticipate user demand	Excellent				
	Satisfactory			√	√
	Average	√	√		
	Not satisfactory				

Key facts	Components	DUL	JUL	AUL	BUETL
Activity for employees' skills development	Arrange staff meetings regularly	√		√	√
	Arrange demonstration classes				
	Ensure in service training	√	√		√
	Sending publicity materials to all staff				

The responses reveal that, all library personnel have acquaintance with the term marketing though practice of strategic marketing is very limited. Some traditional methods are used to determine user demands and few initiatives have been taken to identify user need. The top management mainly designs marketing approaches because the quality of library staff in most of the cases is satisfactory or average.

Users' awareness about library resources and services
Students' positive answers have been shown in the table below.

Table-2: Users' awareness about library resources and services

Fields of user awareness of library facilities		Understand signage		Acquaintance with library stuff		Familiarity with library resources		Address disability		Friendly staff		Convenient library hour		Availability of web-based catalogue		Variety of study space	
User response		No.	%	No.	%	No.	%	No.	%	No.	%	No.	%	No.	%	No.	%
DUL		18	72	18	72	20	80	13	52	20	80	20	80	14	56	18	72

Fields of user awareness of library facilities	Understand signage		Acquaintance with library stuff		Familiarity with library resources		Address disability		Friendly staff		Convenient library hour		Availability of web-based catalogue		Variety of study space	
BUETL	17	68	17	64	13	52	05	20	18	72	18	72	18	72	12	48
JUL	9	36	9	36	13	52	19	76	14	56	14	56	6	24	06	24
AUL	20	80	25	100	21	84	13	52	24	96	21	84	16	64	15	60
Total	64	64	69	69	67	67	50	50	76	76	73	73	54	54	51	51

It is evident that students are very happy with library hour (73%), signage (64%), staff cooperation (76%) whereas disability, variety of study space and web catalogues are less addressed areas of these libraries.

Students' opinion about better awareness programmes/tools
The students were asked to rank some given programmes through which the libraries under study can increase their user awareness.

Table-3: Students' opinion about better awareness programmes/tools

Tools of promotions	Ranking by Respondents	Percentage
Library web	1	26
Exhibits/display	2	20
Advertisement	3	18
Social media	4	17
Newsletter	5	16
Workshop	6	16
Brochure	7	15
Library tour	8	13
Leaflet	9	13
Training session	10	11

The table shows that according to the respondents, library website (26%), advertisement (18%), social media (17%) and exhibition/display are more useful programmes for promoting awareness. However, they have less interest on training (11%).

Future Guidelines

In order to survive and increase their value to the parent organizations as well as the customers, academic libraries need to incorporate modern marketing principles in their strategic planning. According to Narayana (1991), marketing is the instrument that guides libraries toward the fulfillment of their objectives. The use of academic libraries of different public universities in Bangladesh are declining because many services are not considered to be necessary by the users and the libraries have failed to adapt with the sophisticated approach of modern marketing strategies. Despite the librarians' enthusiasm, they often do not fully understand the marketing concept (Almquist, 2014). It is really true in case of Bangladesh. In this article, the authors tried to explain how a library can use marketing concepts in a simple way.

The marketing process of library will be a four-step approach.
- Assessing needs of library customers
- Designing offerings
- Communicating users about offerings
- Measuring performance

Assessing need of library customers

The key to marketing is understanding the market/customer. Modern libraries of the developed countries have encompassed policies in order to be focus on their

customers and their development efforts like designing the products and services always concentrate on identification or anticipation of customer needs and satisfying those needs in an effective way. But almost all academic libraries in Bangladesh are still thinking in a traditional way. However, in order to cope with the competitions, librarians need to understand their customer, such as- the users' articulated or latent needs in study and teaching, users' perception regarding the personnel and services of the library, identification of the lapses and gaps in library operation that should be addressed to improve users' satisfaction and loyalty. To understand the market/customers, libraries can do the following-

Audience Analysis

Koontz (2002) mentioned that library users, customers of the librarians, put forward demand for information resources and choose among library services. Therefore, user or audience analysis is the best way to understand library customers. This helps to anticipate user-specific services that have significant effect toward the fulfillment of users' demand. Librarians have long been categorized their customers into two groups: current customers and potential customers. Thus it should be at the core of maximum library activities to encourage loyal customers so that they use the library to a larger extent than ever, because it is much easier to retain current customers than creating new ones. Besides, libraries should try to find ways to recruit new clients.

Another aspect involves considering how user characteristics such as demographic characteristics, geographic location, and psychological indicators affect library use. Library customers are not identical in terms of their information needs and service requirements to meet their needs. Mathews (2009) identifies five categories of library users: *Lifers*, *Regulars*, *Sporadics*, *One-shots, Absents*. There is no single right way to meet either the demands of different users or the different demands of a single users and intention of doing so will reduce the efficiency of a library. Traditionally, libraries have used such categories as materials (fiction and nonfiction), age groups (children and adults), or volume of use (high and low). Koontz (2002) recommended that librarian can add different levels, such as geographic, demographic, lifestyle, and product value.

Categorization of needs

Mathews (2009) thinks that it is essential to explore how library use fits in with everything else going on in a student's or user's life. According to him, there are seven categories of needs that encompass the wider spectrum of student needs:

- Academic needs.
- Social needs.

- Entertainment and recreational needs.
- Service needs.
- Personal needs.
- Travel needs.
- Rejuvenation needs.

Mathews (2009) argues that, library is not a place of doing research only, rather it should attempt to address all possible needs of the users. In Bangladesh, majority of library users still think that the library is just a building where they can read books and from where books can be borrowed. Library can be positioned in the user's mind as. But, in Mathews' (2009) observation -

> *"Instead of just for doing research, library is the place to start, revise, and finish an assignment. It is a pit stop during the day and a quiet couch late in the afternoon. It is a place to plug in literally to the Web and figuratively to new ideas, advice, and experiences. The library is a shrine of solitude, designed for introspection, discovery, and preparation. And it is also a social hub, filled with friends, activities, surprises, and chance encounters*

Identification of factors affecting user's decision

According to Walters (2004), customer motivation is a difficult thing as it is driven by their insights. Library customers can be motivated by fulfilling their desire to meet certain needs. Externally, customer motivation may be related to price, adequacy of resources, staff assistance, library hours, parking, convenience, easy check-out, or other facilities. Walter also mentioned that costs in time and money, competition, and quality of service all influence the decisions users make about library use. However, outside factors such as politics and the economy can quickly change the circumstances.

Designing offerings

Libraries in developed countries are striving to innovate new library services to ensure effective use of their available resources. However, academic libraries especially in public universities should think to modify traditional services and invent new services to meet these changing needs.

The quest for library resources and services is ever changing. Therefore, it could be difficult to determine upcoming trends of library operation. Mathews (2009) suggested the practice of "cool hunting" to outline the trends first and then incorporating them into library practices. The cool hunting process will gradually proceed through the activities of user observation to identify what the user like to do

in the library, which of the resources they are using, users' process of communication, etc.

One of the easy ways to anticipate new products and services is to conduct a user survey. Library users may be asked regarding their choice of library services through questionnaire, FGDs, etc. However, user interest on particular services should be confirmed before devising that service based on users' listing on a survey.

"Library as product" approach could be another way for the modern librarians to define library services. In his book ***Marketing Today's Academic Library,*** Mathews (2009) introduces such an approach to consider the library as a product that can satisfy user demand if it is designed through the steps of: definition of the product; identification of current inventory; assembling product line and designing portfolio of the product. The diagram below shows the four-step process.

Source: Mathews (2009)

Adapting 7ps for Library offerings is the latest development in library management. Librarians need to break free of their stereotyped role that limits them to collection management and be able to offer value-added services based on identified user needs and expectations (Gupta, 2003; Naqvi, 2004). They should be able to create an action plan to implement 7ps to reduce under-utilization of library services. In Bangladesh, librarians have limited knowledge about how they can implement 7ps for developing a marketing mix for library services.

Much of the existing literature have tried to link the elements of marketing mix, i.e. 7ps with that of different factors of library environment, (Blackstead and Shoaf, 2002; Owens, 2002; Naqvi, 2004). Academic librarians, here in Bangladesh would be able to get better understanding from Zafeiriou et al.'s (2012) illustration:

> *"Paying attention to marketing mix elements the library should create useful products and services aiming to assist the users (*product*); distribute library services through its various branches, understanding what the users want and where they want to use it (*place*); plan effective marketing strategies using the appropriate communication channels adopted by the users themselves (*promotion* – Web 2.0 tools nowadays); pay attention to personnel behavior and communication skills, information services skills, and train personnel accordingly (*people*); consider the environment as an important element strongly linked to user satisfaction and pay attention to both internal and external architecture, physical and virtual space (*physical evidence*); develop effective procedures, policies and flow of activities by paying attention to automation procedures and procedures that can be handled by the users themselves (*process*); and may charge specific types of services if necessary (*price*)"*.

Communicating users about offerings

Notification about available services is an integral part of library marketing that informs users about library offerings and motivates them to take action. For effective ways of notification or marketing communication, librarians need to identify the most appropriate ways to promote their available services. Marketing research could be an effective tool to determine the best way to communicate services for the specific audience. In case of public university libraries of Bangladesh, selecting effective media for communication is a must because of budget limitation. Ottolenghi (2012) suggests using "defensive promotion" which is a no-cost way to promote library services.

Most effective of communication tools for library services mentioned by different authors are summarized in the table below:

Authors	Marketing Communication tools
Amechi (1991)	Posters with a special facet of library services
Shapiro (1999)	display racks with bold and clear labels
Jackson (2001)	leaflets, e-mails, , newsletters, personal contact, meetings, phone calls

Besides, special events like library tour, classes, processions on library day, workshops to teach about library facilities can be used in promotional activities. Moreover, events such as authors' gathering for autograph, book discussions, or book donation programmes may be useful to draw attention to library offerings. Idea quest or idea hunting from professionals or youngsters in the form of contests could be another way of library promotion. Mathews (2009) stated that these types of "experiential" approaches shift us "away from simply telling students what they should know about the library and instead shows them how the library applies to them."

Measuring performance

In order to implement a dynamic strategic marketing plan for a library it is essential to set appropriate tools and techniques where necessary and their successful utilization will benefit the library to fulfill its objectives. To this end, all former initiatives like strategic library planning, strategic marketing planning, marking mix, etc. should be coordinated.

The ultimate effort toward efficient implementation and sustainability of a marketing strategy is evaluation. Weingand (1999, p. 145) underlines two different evaluation approaches: "the process or formative" and "the final or summative" evaluation. The process or formative evaluation is a regular activity which is used during the progress, in order to monitor the fulfillment of the library objectives and allows corrections and adjustments to the previous planning activities. On the other hand, the final or summative evaluation is related to the assessment and is used to determine whether or not an objective was achieved, and then decide if redefining and adjustments are needed. Moreover, the use of feedback methods enables the re-evaluation and monitoring of services (Ojiambo, 1994; Arachchige, 2002a).

Conclusion

It is impossible to meet the widespread interest of university library users without adopting proper marketing strategies. The budget received by the many public university libraries are declining every year. Therefore, if they want to serve maximum users with minimum budget, there is no alternative to adapting effective library marketing practices.

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