Marketing the Libraries in Iran: An Ideal Opportunity in 21st Century

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Abstract

The present study investigates the feasibility of implementing marketing principles within the academic libraries of government-sponsored universities in Tehran. The study focused on the attitude of library managers towards this issue. A survey method, using a questionnaire as a data collection tool was used. Findings demonstrated that the level of managerial familiarity with the concept of marketing in libraries was average. However there was more than average familiarity with the components of a marketing plan. Findings regarding the application propensity for each of the 4Ps marketing mix in libraries indicated that the product, place, promotion, and price were the focus of library managers. With respect to the feasibility of implementation of marketing principles, it was average.

Keywords: Marketing, Academic Libraries, Library Managers.

Introduction

"To be effective in achieving its aims, any organization needs to understand the environment in which it operates. For a commercial company, this means knowing its customers and competitors; for libraries, it means mainly (but by no means only) understanding their users and their potential users. A thorough environmental scan will guide a library in developing and marketing its services appropriately, and can be crucial to a library's health and effectiveness".

Chris Pringle, Publisher, Social Sciences, Elsevier, Oxford, UK

Marketing is an important functional area in business. Products and services that are not marketed effectively may not be heavily patronized. Revenue may be lost and the business will face problems of survival (Mrtey, 2000).

So, if marketing is a functional area in *business*, why do we need it in our libraries and information centers today?!

Shontz, Parker and Parker (2004) implied that "there has been some controversy over whether marketing is an appropriate activity for libraries, or whether marketing should be

restricted to for-profit businesses?", and – citing the worthwhile article[1] of Kotler and Levy in January 1969 in *Journal of Marketing* – concluded that marketing insights could be applied to all kinds of organizations.

Marketing of library services and products becomes imperative and must not only be vigorously canvassed for, but also must be conscientiously executed. The fast growing sectors of the economy of the world such as fast foods, banking, advertising and electronics, information and communication technology got to where they are today not because they offer free services and products, but because of their "flexibility", "compromise" and "borrowed-leave" attitude (Adeyoyin, 2005).

In an age where we need to compete among the myriad of Internet content providers and fight for the limited attention span of our library patrons, marketing and promotion of our services are paramount to our survival (Wee, 2003).

Martey (2000) stated that libraries must survive and thrive because they still have a role to play in the community. Librarians like all other professionals have to adapt to and cope with the changes taking place in the environment in which they operate.

The growth in services has not been matched by service management's understanding or acceptance of the marketing concept. Service organizations have been slow to adopt marketing programs and techniques that, in product marketing, have brought satisfaction to consumers and profits to producers (Adeyoyin, 2005).

Concept of Marketing

The concept of marketing within the business sector of United States society originated in the 1950s. Prior to this, emphasis was placed on producing products without regard for consumer needs or demand, coupled with the intent to sell that same product to an undefined market for a profit (Koontz, Gupta, & Webber, 2006). The marketing concept is founded on customer satisfaction; this involves identifying customer needs and requirements and then attempting to meet those needs (Rowley, 1995). Perhaps, Peter Drucker gave the shortest definition on marketing- "business looked at from the customer's point of view" (Drayton, 1997, p.13; cited in Chu, 1999).

Marketing is both theory and process (Weiner, 2000). Kotler (1994) defined marketing concept as the key to achieving organizational goals consist in determining the needs and wants of target market and delivering the desired satisfactions more effectively and efficiently than the competitors; the marketing concept rests on four main pillars, namely target market, customer needs, coordinated marketing and profitability (cited in Kaur & Rani, 2008). The marketing concept should affect all areas and activities of the organization and not just the marketing activities. It is therefore important that top management adopt the marketing concept wholeheartedly and the marketing concept must become the basis for all the goals and decisions that are set for the organization (Rowley, 1995).

Nkanga (2002) by using Kotler -Andreasen-Keiser approach submitted six steps for marketing the organizations-- both for-profit organizations and non-profit organizations:

1) *The marketing environment* which is divided into the external environment, the operating environment, and the internal environment.

2) *Information needs assessment*: The organization identifies different types of users and prospective users in order to determining if there are information needs specific to each client group.

3) *Resources assessment*: This evaluates the organization based on its mission and objectives using the strength, weakness, opportunities, and threat (SWOT) analysis technique.

4) *Market opportunity analysis*: It is based on client needs and the capability of the organization to provide additional products and services.

5) *The development of an operational marketing program*: This includes making decisions on what we call "controllable variables". These are product, price, place and promotion and should be consistent with the client behavior associated with product or service being marketed.

6) *The evaluation of the strategic marketing process*: This involves monitoring organization's environment, competitors, and clients' strength and weakness.

According to the American Marketing Association, Marketing is a social and managerial process by which individuals and groups obtain what they need and want through creating, offering and exchanging of products of value with others (Kaane, 2006). Adeyoyin (2005) derived that concept of marketing revolves on three pillars namely, marketing: (1) is consumer-centered; (2) is profit-centered; and (3) is anticipating of changes through time.

Marketing in libraries

We live in the "information society"; technological changes have created information explosion, as a result of which the clientele interested in information services and products has been continuously increasing (Singh, 2003). According to Spalding and Wang (2006) libraries around the world are facing rising costs and dwindling budgets due to technological advances and today's dynamic economic climate. As a result, marketing concepts are increasingly adapted within the library environment.

In the LIS sphere this is nothing new as good customer service is at the core of the profession (Henderson, 2005).

Weingand (1999) noted that librarians have historically been confident that their products had such intrinsic merit that users would automatically be attracted; they believed

that people should use the library. However, this is now yesterday's thinking (cited in Kim & Park, 2006).

Martey (2000) mentioned three reasons that marketing principles should be applied to the running of a service organization like the library. In the first place, those who fund libraries want to know how well funds allocated to the library are being utilized to meet the information needs of its clientele. For continuing financial support, they must be informed. Information in annual reports such as statistics on how many books were added to stock and the number of appointments and resignations during the year may not make much of an impact on those who administer the funds for the management of the library. Secondly, use of the library by the academic community must be encouraged especially at a time when there is competition from other information providers. An effective marketing strategy directed at all segments of the market may encourage heavy use of the service. Thirdly, there is now more than ever the need for professional librarians to run libraries like business organizations.

The basis of library services should be to help its users in solving their information gathering and processing needs. This the library can do only if it relies on systematic information collection, procedure and policies and adjusts its products, services and organizational policies and procedures to the demands of the users (Kaur &Runi, 2008). Marketing in the library service sector intends the performances of planning, organizing, dissemination and controlling of information services on a proactive and user oriented way that ensures the user satisfaction while achieving the objectives of the parent organization (Jinadas, 2000).

Ojiambo (1994) stated that the marketing concept can be seen as a philosophy of action for managers, forcing them to reorient the administration of the organization needs, to offer them a good product/service, and look for feedback.

Kaur and Runi (2008) notified that under the marketing concept, the patron is the focus and not the librarian, for the patron is the reason for the library professionals being there. Marketing is concerned with customers and the satisfaction of their needs with appropriate products and services.

Marketing Mix

The marketing mix consists of four decision variables: product, place (or distribution), promotion and price. The primary goal is to create and maintain a marketing mix that satisfies the customers. The most appropriate marketing mix depends on the buyer, and is influenced by the environmental variables (Rowley, 1995). McCarthy (1964) defined the marketing mix as a combination of all of the factors at marketing manager's command to satisfy the target market; and more recently, McCarthy and Perreault (1987) have defined the marketing mix as the controllable variables that an organization can co-ordinate to

satisfy its target market (cited in Kim And Park, 2006). According to Adeyoyin (2005) "any variable under the control of the firm that can influence the level of customer response is a marketing mix variable. In the general studies of marketing, there is a conventional approach of laying emphasis on what is generally referred to as the "4Ps" of marketing mix – product, promotion, place and price. These components as De Saez (2002) described are:

Product: Product refers to the services which the library generally offers to its clienteles and prospective users. In the general sense, library services encompass the following:

• Loaning: charging and discharging of library materials.

• Referral services: offering reference services to the library patrons.

• Organization of library materials: cataloging and classification of materials. That is giving the physical description of library materials and collocating them accordingly, that is, grouping the like materials together while the unlike materials are separated.

. Inter-library loan: this is the method through which unavailable materials needed by the patrons are sourced and borrowed in another library.

Promotion: Owing to the increased level of competition (from other sources such as compact disks, the internet, etc.) the library needs to promote the services it offers. This could be in form of advertisement, public enlightenment, sponsorship of events, etc. It is imperative to appreciate the present and as a matter of fact shift ground from the library's publicity approach of traditional book jacket display, window display and unimpressive book exhibition that hardly communicates, to a more vibrant and dynamic approach. The traditional approach is no longer tenable in this "global village". Aggressive marketing of library services is required if the significance of the library's contribution to the development of the intellectual world in particular and economic in general is ever to be acknowledged, appreciated and reciprocated.

Place: This refers to the convenient locations where the patrons could conveniently obtain various library services. This is the reason why a library needs to have network outlook. For instance, for a university library to be able to serve the academic environment to which it belongs effectively and efficiently, LAN is crucial to its operational system. The various faculty and departmental libraries should be properly networked to enhance proximity to the information, avoid congestion in the main or central library. This also ensures the convenience of the students, lecturers, researchers and faculty members.

Price: This refers to the cost outlay plus the mark-up to cover the outlay and the expected profit. Pricing information services in the library sounds repugnant to some people, but the economic indices world-wide clearly show that quantitative and qualitative library services can no longer remain absolutely free. A recent survey among the Nigerian library patrons revealed that more people are embracing the provision of library services at a subsidized rate. However, the survey also revealed that they hate to be bugged by the idea of full commercialization of library services.

Marketing Plan

A good marketing plan begins with a mission statement that defines the objectives of the library or the information centre, which includes an identification of the target market segments. Realistic and measurable targets set should be subjected to ongoing evaluation process as part of the marketing plan, and used to adjust or revise the marketing activities. Evaluations can be in the form of official measurement systems including financial accounting, computerized usage tracking, user satisfaction surveys, or the less structured methods of verbal or written feedback from users (Wee, 2003). Fisher and Pride (2007) proposed 8 steps for designing a successful marketing plan:

1. Overview
2. Environmental Scan or situation analysis
3. Market Research
4. Defining the goals and objectives
5. Designing marketing strategies
6. Action plan
7. Implementation, evaluation, and control
8. Financial projections and budgeting

Review of Literature

Nkanga (2002), in his study revealed that a majority of selected information providing centers in particular special libraries in Botswana were in favor of marketing their services to their users.

Rowley (2002) in her study analyzed the role of information in the marketing processes associated with digital world. An analysis of different levels of product demonstrated that information is often used to augment services or goods, and that it may be difficult to delineate the category "information products".

Kanaujia (2004) in her paper discussed the role of marketing information products/services with the help of survey in libraries and information centers of India. Her findings revealed that librarians have a

positive attitude towards the different aspects of marketing of a library's information products/services.

Shontz, Parker and Parker (2004) in their research identified public librarians toward the marketing of library services and related these attitudes to selected independent variables. Their findings showed that although most of the respondents generally had positive attitudes toward library marketing, there were some significant differences between subgroups.

Mi and Nesta (2006) in their research found that libraries can apply classic marketing principles to attract and better serve new generations of users. Although libraries no longer have a monopoly on information sources, libraries do offer value-added services.

Methodology

This study focused on the attitude of library managers towards the implementing marketing principles within the central and faculty libraries of government-sponsored universities in Tehran. The population was drawn from the ranks of library managers on 10 universities. A survey method, using self-administered questionnaire –with 32 questions- as a data collection tool was used. Due to the small population size, no sampling technique was used and the questionnaire had been sent to 102 managers. 80 questionnaires were analyzed, using SPSS as a data analysis tool.

Research Questions

1) How much the familiarity of managers with the concept of marketing?
2) How much the familiarity of managers with the components of marketing plan?
3) How much the application propensity for each of the 4Ps marketing mix in libraries?
4) How much the feasibility of implementation of marketing principles in libraries?

Findings and Results

This study aimed to investigate the feasibility of implementing marketing principles in government-sponsored universities in Tehran. The first part of the questionnaire (questions 1 to 5) was measured familiarity of managers with the concept of marketing. Findings demonstrated that the level of managerial familiarity with the concept of marketing in libraries was average (See Table 1).

Table1

Singled-variable t for familiarity of managers with the concept of marketing

Scale	N	Mean	T	df	Difference of Mean
Concept of Marketing	80	17/04	7/256	79	2/043

Also, in Table 2 we can see frequency and percentage for managers' acquaintance with the concept of marketing.

Table 2

Frequency and percentage for familiarity of managers with the concept of marketing

	Low		Medium		High	
Concept of Marketing	percentage	frequency	percentage	frequency	percentage	frequency
	18/75	15	76/25	61	5/00	4

The second part of the questionnaire (questions 6 to 9) was measured familiarity of managers with the components of a marketing plan. Also, here findings demonstrated that the level of managerial familiarity with the components of a marketing plan was more than average (See Table 3).

Table 3

Singled-variable t for familiarity of managers with the components of marketing plan

Scale	N	Mean	T	df	Difference of Mean
Components of Marketing Plan	80	15/50	20/166	79	3/500

In addition, in Table 4 we can see frequency and percentage for managers' acquaintance with the components of marketing plan.

Table 4

Frequency and percentage for familiarity of managers with the components of marketing plan

	Low		Medium		High	
Components of Marketing Plan	percentage	frequency	percentage	frequency	percentage	frequency
	1/25	1	17/50	14	81/25	65

The third part of the questionnaire (questions 10 to 32) measured application for each of the 4Ps marketing mix (product, place, promotion, and price) in the libraries. Findings regarding the application propensity for each of the 4Ps marketing mix in libraries indicated that product, place, promotion, and price were the focus of library managers (See Table 5).

Table 5

Singled-variable T for application propensity each of the 4p marketing mix

Scale	N	Mean	T	df	Difference of Mean
product	80	29/228	6/982	79	5/228
place	80	18/285	7/142	79	3/285
promotion	80	12/300	0/601	79	0/300
price	80	8/700	-7/264	79	-3/300

Finally, with respect to the feasibility of implementation of marketing principles in libraries, the whole questionnaire – with all 32 questions- was analyzed; results showed that the feasibility of implementation of marketing principles in libraries was average (See Table 6).

Table 6

Singled-variable T for implementation of marketing principles

Scale	N	Mean	T	df	Difference of Mean
Feasibility of implementation of marketing principles	80	108/642	6/564	79	12/642

Also, in Table 7 we can see frequency and percentage for the feasibility of implementation of marketing principles in academic libraries.

Table 7

Frequency and percentage for the feasibility of implementation of marketing principles

	Low		Medium		High	
Feasibility of implementation of marketing principles	percentage	frequency	percentage	frequency	percentage	frequency
	5	4	65	52	30	24

Conclusion

Libraries are operating in a rapidly changing environment. New promotional and marketing strategies are required to ensure that libraries continue to reach their users and maintain the relevance of their service offerings; In such environment librarians themselves must also change to gain new skills, attitudes and knowledge to operate effectively in this changing environment so that user needs are understood and met (Schmidt, 2007).

We are in an increasingly competitive environment where the libraries need to present customer cases, and supported by customer performance. It is important for the library to have a formal marketing strategy and a marketing plan. Without these, the marketing activities are likely to lack coherence and focus (Wee, 2003).

Libraries are becoming obsolescence owing to poor approach of modern marketing strategies. New business information enterprises have emerged to challenge and compete with libraries. Therefore, in order to survive and surpass other competitors, libraries must have to follow modern marketing principles (Jinadas, 2000).

The findings of this research show that in academic libraries of Tehran:

1. The level of managerial familiarity with the concept of marketing in libraries is average;

2. The level of managerial familiarity with the components of a marketing plan is more than average;

3. The priority of the application for each of the 4Ps marketing mix in libraries indicates that the product, place, promotion, and price are the focus of library managers;

4. The feasibility of implementation of marketing principles is average.

So, we can conclude that libraries managers' knowledge about marketing the academic libraries in Tehran- small sample of academic libraries in whole country of Iran- are good and acceptable but we should remember that it is not sufficient. It is just the first step. Some other elements like the perception of necessity of applying marketing principles in academic libraries by parent bodies, suitable infrastructures, not equaling the *marketing* concept only with *fee-based* services, and the most important of these recognizing the target markets (or library population) and their needs are the factors that affect the process of marketing in our libraries.

Endnote

1. The name of that article was: "Broadening of the marketing concept"

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