

Marketing Strategies for the University Libraries in Kerala

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ABSTRACT

Libraries have been putting considerable efforts in the design of information products and services and distributing the same effectively and efficiently. In view of the social, economic, and technological changes, library and information centers have begun to realise that marketing of information products and services is an integral part of administration. This paper attempts to work out marketing strategies for the university libraries in Kerala by analysing the marketing orientation through a user survey. The data for the study was collected from a sample of 842 users of the university libraries in Kerala such as Kerala University Library (KUL), Mahatma Gandhi University Library (MGUL), Cochin University of Science and Technology Library (CUSATL), and CH Mohammed Koya Library of University of Calicut (CHMKL). The study found that most of the respondents are willing to pay for information services since they rely more on the quality of information services than the existing fee services. The preferred pricing policy is to provide necessary subsidy to the extent of 50 % based on the payment capacity of various user segments. The survey found that only a few users are aware of existing service offered by the university libraries and there is need for effective promotional strategies. The study suggested various strategies for repositioning the university libraries in Kerala for marketing.

Keywords: Marketing strategies, university libraries, segmentation, pricing strategy, promotional strategy, repositioning, Kerala

1. INTRODUCTION

Libraries are facing serious competition from commercial information service providers and use of the resources available from libraries and analyse and repackage the same for customised use by the users. Online resources are emerging in a big way that will question the role and form of libraries in future¹. Thus libraries have been putting considerable efforts in the design of information products and services and distributing the same effectively and efficiently in the changing social, economic and technological scenario. The technological revolution and escalating library costs are responsible for encouraging the library profession to develop a professional marketing approach in its operations and services with an effort to develop an appropriate marketing plan. Marketing planning involves deciding on marketing strategies that will help the institution attain its overall strategic objectives.

2. OBJECTIVES

The specific objectives of the study are to:

- (a) Identify the market segments of the university libraries in Kerala
- (b) Work out a strategies for the marketing of information products and services of the university libraries in Kerala.

- (c) Analyse the attitude of the users with respect to their willingness to pay for information services and products.
- (d) Identify the present charging pattern of the university libraries.
- (e) Make suggestions for reorienting the libraries for marketing their services and products.

3. SCOPE AND METHODOLOGY

Questionnaire method was used for collecting data from different category of users. Multi-stage stratified random sampling technique has been used to ensure representation of all the categories. The four university libraries in Kerala, viz., Kerala University Library (KUL), Mahatma Gandhi University Library (MGUL), Cochin University of Science and Technology Library (CUSATL) and CH Mohammed Koya Library of University of Calicut (CHMKL) are under the study. Out of the 1000 questionnaires distributed (250 each to 4 universities), 842 questionnaires were returned back for this study.

4. REVIEW OF RELATED LITERATURE

Wenhong² studied the marketing and service promotion practices in the Library of Chinese Academy of Sciences and explored and evaluated the use

of marketing tools, service promotion experiences and new techniques in a large library context. He explored the boundaries between real and virtual libraries and service provision. Garusing Arachchige³ identified the role of libraries in Sri Lanka for the process of improving lifelong learning and strategies applicable from the e-marketing concept. Mu⁴ suggested the strategies for marketing academic library resources and information services to Asian International students and revealed that libraries need to market their services and resources proactively to students who were not familiar with the services and resources in a western academic library. Robinson⁵ suggested six golden rules for marketing information service successfully based on the personal experience of the author in setting up a new information service. Liu & Shu⁶ investigated library user's needs and promotion strategies of electronic resources and identified the most effective ways of marketing. Shukla & Tripathi⁷ discussed on new marketing strategies of information services in university libraries with a set of principles in the field of marketing strategy.

5. MARKETING RESEARCH

Marketing research provides the systematic design, collection, analysis and reporting of data relevant to a specific marketing situation facing an organisation⁸. It is a vehicle by which information is obtained about present and prospective marketing mixes, the changing character of the external environment and the degree to which existing marketing programme are achieving their goals and is essential in university libraries.

5.1 Market Segmentation

The clients of the university libraries in Kerala can be segmented as students (primary), researchers, teachers, public, and non-teaching staff. Degree holders are numerically the largest group. However, post-graduate students have very similar information needs, behaviours, and so many services directed at the main client group will benefit the smaller market segment. Therefore, marketing strategies can be directed at these segments. Academic community (research scholars, students, and teachers) and others have quite different information needs for which tailored services and marketing strategies are required. The segmentation is as follows:

- (i) Students- consisting of students of colleges affiliated to the universities in Kerala and university teaching departments.
- (ii) Research Scholars- consisting of those doing research in the university teaching departments, affiliated colleges and centers recognised by the universities.

- (iii) Teachers- Teachers and Research Guides of affiliated colleges, university teaching departments and research centers recognised by the universities.
- (iv) Non-teaching Staff-Consists of administrative staff and other officials of the universities.
- (v) Others-those who cannot be included under the above categories. This includes graduate members, personel working in the nearby offices, and members of the senate, syndicate, and other statutory bodies.

Table 1 shows an increasing trend in the number of users from 2009 to 2011 in all the university libraries, which is a positive sign for marketing.

Table 1. Market segments of university libraries in Kerala during 2009-2011

Members	Year	KUL	MGUL	CUSATL	CHMKL
Students	2009	3166	930	1401	1049
	2010	3500	837	1564	1100
	2011	3635	910	1875	1264
Research Scholars	2009	191	275	56	28
	2010	151	121	78	68
Teachers	2009	178	198	116	78
	2010	59	82	7	43
	2011	48	41	29	24
Non-teaching Staff	2009	84	59	32	34
	2010	84	43	21	38
	2011	17	25	17	24
Others	2009	32	32	09	46
	2009	1032	NIL	65	209
	2010	1258	NIL	25	193
Total	2011	1326	NIL	48	175
	2009	4532	1330	1550	1367
	2010	4974	1024	1713	1409
	2011	5255	1199	2080	1597

5.2 User Behaviour Analysis

Knowledge of consumer behaviour would render immense help for planning and implementing marketing strategies. The behaviour of the users, like user's information requirements, willingness to pay, readiness to bear the extent of cost of information products and services, etc, are very important in formulating marketing strategies.

5.3 Positioning of University Libraries

Positioning refers to the services rendered by the library for the various users. Each segment of the users requires separate positioning strategies. Special communication programmes, special events, special service, etc, will enhance the position of the library. A strategic repositioning of libraries should essentially use and focus on the specific core competencies

of university libraries. It is accomplished through market analysis to find out the potential users (or markets) that exist, the groups of customers to serve (target markets), to identify users needs, to identify the products and services to meet their needs, etc. The analysis of the marketing mix elements, viz., place, product, promotion, and price shows that university libraries in Kerala are well positioned in marketing of information services and products⁹.

6. MARKETING STRATEGIES

The initial market strategy of libraries is to identify the current users and encourage them to avail greater use of available information services and products. It has been observed that many users are unaware of the range of library services offered. There are many kinds of strategies like market segmentation strategies, market development strategies, market penetration strategies, and market communication strategy. For each part of the marketing audit, specific strategies are developed by university libraries in Kerala.

6.1 Promotional Strategy

Promotion is used to communicate information about information products and services to target market audiences, thereby, facilitating the exchange process offered by the library and information centres. All types of libraries have employed some form of library guides, pamphlets, accession lists, exhibitions, advertising, displays, talks, etc. Promotion can build up a strong image of the library. A well-planned promotional effort can stimulate potential users to use its products. The promotional activities like e-mail/bulletin board (except in KUL), computer network (except in KUL, MGUL), ILL (except in CHMK), extension services (except in MGUL, CHMK), personal intimation (except in MGL) and Guide book and Display/posters (in all) are done. Communicating what libraries do has always been difficult and as the remote use increases, the new strategies are required. Therefore, the strategies that can be used for marketing communication in the university libraries in Kerala may include the following:

- Hosting of website/web portal-Most of the business organisations have learned that the websites is a significant marketing and promotional tool. Now, KUL and CUSATL have their own websites to propagate their products and services with clarity, conciseness, consistent layout, minimum graphics, and regular updating. Use of Library 2.0 technologies such as blogging, RSS feeds, social networking, etc., act as catalysts.
- Conducting regular user orientation programmes in all the university libraries in Kerala. KUL has a documentary CD called 'WINGS', which explains the various functions, information products and services.

- Production of brochures and posters-The library should prepare attractive brochures, leaflets, and posters that should be distributed to all members.
- Guided library tours for new registered members as well as those interested in the library services are absolutely essential.
- Print newsletters and house journals containing information about new resources and services and to be circulated to all users including public.
- Articles in newspapers and journals-articles published in the daily newspapers and magazines that are likely to read regularly by the actual and potential clients are compiled.
- Demonstrations of the products/services at users' place or during seminars or workshops.
- Exhibition-cum-sale of various information products and services at various conferences and seminars related to users subjects/areas.
- Personal selling-service points; librarian's visits and e-mail contacts with academic community and staff.
- Out-of-library posters about the information products and services, which are appropriately placed and attractive.
- Advertisement in the publications of the parent body and in other university publications.
- E-mail lists or forums-clients can subscribe to an e-mail list that sends a personal e-mail about library news, ranging from new resources to service outages.
- Direct mail can be very effective with some target audiences.
- Library should actively participate in library listserves, online forums, and video-conferencing with other libraries or library associations.
- Online interactive reference service (chat service) and establishment of information desk in university libraries in Kerala have to taken up on a priority basis.
- Celebration of special events like anniversaries of the university library, birth anniversary of Dr SR Ranganathan, World Book Day, National Library Week, Open Access Week etc., in collaboration with library schools and library associations.

6.2 Pricing Strategy

Price can be defined as cost to produce a product or service. Various techniques and factors are involved in pricing the information products and services which can vary from segment to segment. Determining the actual costs involved in any new product or service is the first step in pricing the

service. The cost of the products or services can be calculated as the sum of staff costs, facilities cost, packaging cost, distribution cost, promotion cost, equipment cost, and other cost. The pricing policy of the university libraries in Kerala may be based on the user's willingness to pay for information products and services.

6.2.1 Readiness to Pay for Information Services

Library services have long been considered as free services that have affected the quality of services. This has forced authorities to think of extracting at least a fraction of the cost from the users. Indirectly, the efforts were to enhance the membership fee, annual subscription charges, temporary membership charges and overdue charges, but this had met some resistance and to charge for the various services. From the questionnaire, it has been assessed for the willingness to pay for different types of information services on payment basis are printing frequency 415 (75.3 %), e-journals 406 (73.7 %), digital library 383 (69.5 %), internet 381 (69.1 %), CD/DVD-based 373 (67.7 %), document scanning 335 (60.8 %), document delivery 308 (55.9 %), ILL 299 (54.3 %), reprography 295 (53.5 %), CAS 286 (51.9 %), digital repository and abstracting each 266 (48.3 %), literature search 216 (39.2 %), translation and networking each 210 (38.1 %), consultancy 201 (36.5 %), indexing 197 (35.8 %), bibliography 191 (34.7 %), reference 156 (28.3 %), current contents 154 (27.9 %), user orientation 102 (18.5 %), referral 70 (12.7 %), and SDI 57 (10.3 %). It is clear that more than 60 % of the respondents are willing to pay for IT-enabled services. The analysis shows the positive attitude of the users for charging fee for quality services, especially IT-enabled services in the university libraries in Kerala.

The respondents' readiness (65 %) to pay for information services in different university libraries is given in Table 2. The implication is that they rely more on the quality of information services than the existing services, most of them are freely available. Among the libraries, 70.5 % of the respondents from MGUL are ready to pay for information services followed by 69 % in CUSATL.

Table 2. Readiness to pay for information services- library-wise

	Yes (%) Frequency	No (%) Frequency	χ^2	<i>p</i>
KUL	139 (60.7 %)	90 (39.3 %)	6.76	0.080
MGUL	146 (70.5 %)	61 (29.5 %)		
CUSATL	138 (69.0 %)	62 (31.0 %)		
CHMKL	128 (62.1 %)	78 (37.9 %)		
Total	551 (65.4 %)	291 (34.6 %)		

The Chi-square value of 6.76 and *p*-value of 0.080 shows there is no significance difference between libraries.

It has been studied on willingness of different category of members to pay for information services shows that among the members majority of the non-teaching staff (82.4 %) followed by teachers (81.8 %) and public (75 %) are ready to pay for information services. A sizable proportion of research scholars (69.38 %) and students (53.8 %) are also willing to pay for various information services is against the popular belief that students generally opposed the move of charging fee for information services in the university libraries. Chi-square value of 52.37 and *p*-value, zero shows the significant difference between different category of users opinion about charging the information services at 1 % level of significance. The analysis shows that 65.4 % of the total respondents are ready to pay for information services.

6.2.2 Current Charging Pattern

University libraries can price their information products or services in the form of membership fee, annual subscription, overdue charges, photocopying charge, internet browsing charge, printout charge, etc. To assess the users attitude for the present pricing policy, seven items were asked to the users for their perception in a five point scale which are given in Table 3.

It is found that the charge of all the items identified varies from library to library. At CUSATL, there is no membership deposit and annual subscription for

Table 3. Attitude towards the present charges in the university libraries in Kerala

Items	No response (%)	Very low (%)	Moderate (%)	Slightly higher (%)	Very high (%)
Membership deposit	16 (1.9 %)	249 (29.6 %)	519 (61.6 %)	58 (6.9 %)	0
Annual Subscription fee	69 (8.2 %)	223 (26.5 %)	517 (61.4 %)	33 (3.9 %)	0
Duplicate borrowers ticket /ID card	143 (17 %)	143 (17 %)	433 (51.4)	90 (10.7 %)	33 (3.9 %)
Overdue charges	56 (6.7 %)	191 (22.7 %)	453 (53.8 %)	128 (15.2 %)	14 (1.7 %)
Photocopying charge	15 (1.8 %)	118 (14 %)	417 (49.5 %)	249 (29.6 %)	43 (5.1 %)
Printout charges	300 (35.6)	54 (6.4 %)	316 (37.5 %)	136 (16. %2)	36 (4.3 %)
Internet charges	252 (29.9 %)	220 (26.1 %)	288 (34.2 %)	64 (7.6 %)	18 (2.1 %)

the academic community. 34.2 % of the respondents consider internet service is provided at a moderate rate.

6.2.3 Attitude Towards Extent of Payment

A library as a non-profit organisation does not sell its products or services for profit but for recovery, maintenance, and other related costs. It is found from the study that out of those who are willing to pay for information products or services, most of the users in CHMKL (92.9 %) are ready to bear 50 % and only 7.1 % are willing to pay full cost of the end products/services. In KUL 80.6 % of the respondents are willing to pay 50 % of the cost and 16.3 % are ready to pay for full-cost, while only 4 % has no objection even if the library makes a little profit out of the products or services. Almost same proportion of users in MGUL and CUSAT are ready to pay for half of the cost or full cost, while 6.7 % of the users in CUSAT wishes to make some profit for the library. The Chi-square test shows that there is significant difference in the opinion of users regarding the extent of payment in different university libraries in Kerala. Overall, the response is found to be encouraging.

From the data for the membership-wise analysis, it is found that the students are willing to pay for information products or services 91.6 % (half of the actual cost), 84.4 % of the research scholars and 82.1 % of the public are ready to pay for 50 % of the actual cost while 62.6 % of the teachers and 57.1% of the non-teaching staff are willing to pay half of the cost. Among the respondents who are ready to pay for full cost, majority of them are teachers (31.8 %) and only 7.9 % are the students. Only 5.6 % of the teachers and 11.5 % of the non-teaching staffs have no objection even if the library makes a little profit out of the products or services, since they have more payment capacity than others.

7. STRATEGIES FOR REPOSITIONING UNIVERSITY LIBRARIES IN KERALA

For repositioning the university library system, they have to start with the infrastructure, appearance of the building, furniture, library guides, arrangement of books on the shelves and labelling in the shelves etc. A proactive approach to the information requirements of the users by the staff is also called for. Effective use of the press and other mass communication media and the web is also needed. Some of the suggestions are:

(i) Institutional Repository

Presently, KUL has a digital repository of rare collections of Kerala studies named as 'LIBMAS' but MGUL and CUSATL have institutional repository (IR) of their thesis. It should be the primary responsibility

as a channel for each university library to make them available and to preserve them with full responsibilities.

(ii) Preparation of Guidelines for Research Publications

Each university library in Kerala should prepare the guidelines for the research publications and make it available to the academic community through printed form, e-form or webpage/web portal.

(iii) Organisation of Information Literacy Programmes

The development of information literacy skills and knowledge throughout the university community should take up as an initiative for supporting literacy skills. For the successful implementation they have to collaborate with academic staff to introduce, develop and evaluate information literacy within the curriculum and with external partners such as the Centre for Information Literacy Studies, University of Kerala and share expertise by providing a range of information literacy services.

(iv) Building Library Website

Promoting library's services, information products, resources, and programme through online becomes a lot easier with the help of library website. CUSATL and KUL have already been using their own website for propagating library news, notices, information services and products and other libraries may take similar steps.

8. CONCLUSIONS

University libraries in Kerala are being challenged as never before to maintain their relevance in higher education and to their academic community. However, only if they market their services effectively to their users, they will continue to hold a prime role in fulfilling the information needs. Therefore, they should take up this challenge with proper marketing strategies and techniques and integrate marketing and communication. The use of web technology has to be made profusely for the achievement of this goal.

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