CHALLENGES IN MARKETING INFORMATION PRODUCTS AND SERVICES WITHIN UNIVERSITY LIBRARIES IN SRI LANKA

H.K.I. Sewwandi
Senior Lecturer
Department of Library and Information Science, University of Kelaniya
isewwandi@kln.ac.lk

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Abstract: Academic libraries, particularly those located within universities, serve a critical role in learning. University libraries frequently encounter challenges in delivering information sources and services to their users. Identifying these challenges is imperative for efficient service delivery, and applying marketing principles is essential. This research paper aims to shed light on the obstacles associated with marketing information products and services within university libraries in Sri Lanka. Data were gathered by administering a questionnaire distributed to chief librarians employed at state university libraries. The qualitative findings were subsequently examined and categorized into distinct themes. Marketing information products and services in university libraries in Sri Lanka need to be revised. A study has revealed that while librarians possess adequate knowledge of information marketing, most libraries lack a defined information marketing policy. Furthermore, significant issues such as inadequate staffing, lack of public relations skills among university library staff, insufficient needs assessment, limited focus on promotional methods, and a lack of a clear societal perception of the library are identified as major impediments in the marketing of information products and services in Sri Lankan university libraries. Academic libraries constitute an integral component of the educational process, playing a fundamental role in disseminating knowledge. Library marketing entails the meticulous planning, organization, widespread dissemination, and effective control of information products and services aimed at inspiring and fulfilling users' needs and desires while aligning with the organization's overarching mission. The implications of this study are anticipated to offer insights into overcoming these challenges and optimizing information marketing in university libraries in Sri Lanka. Moreover, these insights also broadly apply to other developing nations' academic libraries.

Keywords: information marketing, information sources, information products, information services, barriers of information marketing
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1.0 Introduction
Libraries and information centres are facing significant competition from commercial information service providers. In today's viable information landscape, information is crucial for socioeconomic expansion. The growth of scientific and technical information is rapidly increasing, and patrons often need help finding the exact information at the right time. Consequently, libraries have dedicated considerable effort to designing information products and services for effective and efficient distribution. Due to social, economic, and technological changes, libraries and information centres have realized that marketing information products and services are essential to their administration. The information outbreak, high-tech transformation, and expanding library expenditures have prompted the library profession to adopt a professional marketing approach to its operations and services.

2.0 Background of the study
Here is the background information related to the research problem and introduce the final research problem.

2.1 Information Revolution: The concept of "information" plays a crucial role in various aspects of human activity (Power, 2008), involving the acquisition, processing, storage, retrieval, and communication of information across diverse fields such as research, promotion, industry, business, government, education, and training. To assist any country's economic, social, and overall progress, the free exchange and dissemination of scientific, technological, economic, and political information, facilitated by necessary infrastructure, is essential, particularly for developing countries. The emphasis on research and development in developed nations has driven their rapid progress, with information as a fundamental element in this process (Hiremath, 2003). In modern society, information from human intellectual endeavours significantly expands knowledge in various spheres, including political, economic, social, and educational research (Garusing Arachchige, J. J., 2002).

According to Hiremath (2003), the modern economic model relies heavily on information. The ongoing progress of human society results from the continually expanding body of information generated by human activities. This information is primarily created, disseminated, stored, and accessed by the societies and economies in which we reside. It is essential to consider information on human activity in every field (Garusing Arachchige, J. J., 2002). Regardless of the area, be it research, industry, business, diplomacy, education, or information management, processing, storage, and communication are all vital (Jayatissa, 1999). The digital information revolution has revolutionized approaches to global education, business, and disease treatment (World Bank, 2009). In these scenarios, businesses and companies must allocate significant resources to gather and disseminate information for their users' needs (Hiremath, 2003). In today's globalized world, thanks to the rapid development of information technology, time, space, location, and distance are no longer barriers to any task (Adegoke, 2015). This includes accessing new resources and services, creating new access points, and offering diverse information products and services to user requirements (Adegoke, 2015). Various methods of exchanging and distributing information have emerged with the change in information technology. These include text, sound, graphics, and drawings. Additionally, various databases can be created to quickly meet user needs (Garusing Arachchige, J. J., 2002). The development of Internet-based hypertext and GUI-based libraries has empowered professionals to use modern technology to provide information in the current digital age. Many libraries now offer 24-hour access to information (Chandratre, 2015).

2.2 Library and Information Marketing: Organizations such as museums, universities, libraries, and information centres strive to improve the worth of their products and services cost-effectively, socially conscious, and politically aware (Kotlar, 1994). The Research Library Association emphasizes that marketing plays a vital role in ensuring the efficient operation of library services, fostering the development and dissemination of innovative ideas, providing goods and services effectively, and attaining organizational goals (Association of Research Libraries, 1999). Furthermore, there needs to be more awareness regarding the significance of a library and its resources within society and a need for more information about the current information flow within the library among present-day librarians (Helinsky, 2008). Marketing goes beyond promotion; it should focus on the underlying meaning rather than just the surface. It involves identifying customer needs, taking appropriate measures, and evaluating them promptly (Gupta & Sarard, 2010). Awareness about library resources, services, and user expectations should be adequately understood, as each user has their own needs and expectations. The goal is to attract and retain future users in the library, which aligns with the marketing concept (Duke & Tucker, 2007).

The existence of a library is reliant upon the backing it receives from the community. As a result, libraries should proactively interact with their patrons and effectively disseminate information. Furthermore, library patrons should acknowledge and use the available resources to fulfil their information requirements. Librarians ought to be committed to meeting the evolving information requirements of the public and understanding the types of information users seek. This should be accomplished while considering different service types and structures. Information and documentation professionals must cater to user needs across various domains. Aberibigbe (2015) points out several crucial areas where libraries should concentrate their marketing efforts for information resources and services:

- Highlighting the library's role as an information provider.
- Collaborating with others to market library resources and services effectively.
- Addressing challenges and barriers through information marketing.
- Enhancing the library's reputation by promoting its services and resources.
- Shifting user perceptions and increasing awareness of the library's offerings.

To succeed in the market, trading companies should focus on four crucial factors, as outlined by Renborg (2009):
- Prioritizing customer needs
- Embracing a long-term perspective
- Making full use of available resources
- Innovating for better market management

Renborg (2009) also emphasizes that the marketing of libraries aims to transform the traditional approach to information acquisition, organization, processing, and retrieval. Library services are tailored to assist users in gathering and processing information effectively.

2.3 Information Sources and Services Marketing in University Libraries: The library of an academic institution can be described as a particular type of institution established nationally and internationally. University libraries hold a distinct position as they are part of the university itself (Jayatissa, 2014). The core purpose of university libraries is to offer relevant information and services to undergraduate and postgraduate students and academic and non-academic users with fundamental teaching, learning, and research requirements (Adegoke, 2015). Failing to provide appropriate information to these user groups at the right time can lessen the effectiveness of these services (Adegoke, 2015).

The university library staff needs to be faster to retrieve and deliver published information to users, as noted by Powers (2016). They appear to be hesitant to adopt innovative approaches and adapt to the technological advancements in society, as highlighted by Ikonne (2013). This resistance to change has hindered the progress of libraries, particularly in meeting users' evolving demands and experiences during the information revolution, globalization, and privatization. Furthermore, there is a challenge in securing the necessary economic resources for investing in information and technology, as well as developing alternative revenue streams to better address the complex needs of users. The primary goal of marketing, an essential part of management, is to accomplish organizational goals, objectives, and targets. Prioritizing meeting user needs, enhancing user satisfaction, and service performance is crucial. As per Narayan (1991), the library's existence relies on the image that users have of it.

Globally, university libraries place considerable emphasis on information marketing (Sharma, 2007). This involves focusing on various aspects such as enhancing operational efficiency, improving library service quality, offering modern services, developing library management, managing physical and financial resources, enhancing the university library's reputation, maximizing user satisfaction, and ensuring appropriate access to information products and services. Effective marketing tactics and techniques are highlighted for promoting and distributing products and incorporating sales concepts in university libraries (Sharma, 2007). In university libraries, the implementation of information marketing is still in its early stages (Kaur, 2014). Kaur observes that this is primarily due to a need for a thorough assessment of user needs, a casual manner of disseminating information to prospective users, and a limited understanding of how information products and services can enrich research and scholarly pursuits (Kaur, 2014). Many library experts contend that these institutions should consistently leverage their parent institutions to offer and promote services. Madhusudan (2009) contends that librarians and information professionals continue encountering challenges in marketing information and should first be acquainted with this concept.

When evaluating university libraries in Sri Lanka, a significant portion of their budget is dedicated to obtaining printed and electronic resources, other essential library materials, and staff training (Block, 2002). The libraries operate with full automation. Even in a recently modernized library with substantial investment, the fundamental goal should be to offer information resources that enhance user satisfaction. In today's age of growing internet needs and knowledge-driven products, university libraries encounter various challenges, such as financial constraints, expensive information resources, inadequate staffing, and budget limitations set by their parent institutions. Nevertheless, despite these obstacles, libraries are expected to fulfil user needs and advance their field (Block, 2002). The library induction programs introduced by university libraries in Sri Lanka have struggled to capture users' interest because they must meet nationally or internationally recognized standards (Wickramanayake, 2015). Consequently, the university library needs to meet the needs of its users. Block (2002) highlights one of the challenges libraries face: the inability to deliver adequate information services to the intended reader community, leading to a gradual decrease in library visitors.

In the field of library services, university libraries have faced challenges in delivering effective services because of the prompt increase in information, technological advancements, and soaring library operational costs (Taylor, 2016). Consequently, users have shifted away from utilizing libraries, predominantly using the university library solely for studying personal notes during examination periods (Garusinghe Arachchige, J.J., 2000). This shift has resulted in a strained relationship between the library and the users. Despite the efforts of university libraries to implement innovative facilities, they have yet to achieve an acceptable level of engagement. Therefore, it is essential to recognize these challenges and deficiencies to provide formal and efficient library services.

3.0 Methodology

The study employed a mixed research methodology to examine and recognize obstacles in university library marketing information products and services. A case study approach was adopted, and the sample comprised 15 state university librarians in Sri Lanka. Primary data was gathered through a questionnaire. The paper's analysis concentrates specifically on the qualitative data obtained from the study.

4.0 Findings
The study has uncovered several facts regarding marketing information products and services and how they are applied in university libraries in Sri Lanka.

4.1 Lack of professional human resources: Knowledgeable human resources are needed to be adequate in information marketing in university libraries. Librarians and library staff are vital in library information marketing (Taylor, 2016). Therefore, it is crucial to prioritize professional expertise in this area. With this, the development of information marketing in these libraries will be successful. Information marketing encompasses various elements, including marketing mix, marketing tactic, brand name, information services and product design, and user commitment. The integration of these components forms the basis for effective information marketing. However, the knowledge of information marketing among librarians in university libraries in Sri Lanka needs to be revised.

4.2 The concept of libraries has yet to be accepted: Modern society has developed a negative attitude towards the idea of a library because of the rapid growth of information technology. User attitudes have changed, and there needs to be more recognition that the library is the Centre of knowledge. This shows that society has not been able to create a positive image of the library or its staff. People's behaviour shows constant negative attitudes toward libraries (Adekunmisi, 2013).

4.3 Staff in one library section must know the activities of other sections: Job rotation is rare in university libraries, and staff members are usually confined to specific sections, limiting their awareness of other areas' activities. All library staff must regularly stay informed about the work happening throughout the library. This responsibility should not rest solely with one person but should be shared among all staff members.

4.4 Lack of understanding of public relations: The university library staff have encountered challenges in effectively utilizing public relations to achieve their objectives. A significant issue is the need for librarians to understand public relations better. When engaging in public relations, librarians must prioritize external and internal communication. Internally, public relations can be a powerful tool to address budget constraints, and library management must acknowledge the library's significance. Additionally, librarians often need specialized training, such as creating newsletters and engaging in extracurricular activities (Mahesh, 2002). Another obstacle is the need for more recognition of the importance of public relations by top management, which results in the library needing to be more socially isolated. Librarians must be equipped to position the library as a vital institution in society and establish strong links with other institutions and individuals.

4.5 Financial Barriers: The library is encountering challenges stemming from limited funding from the parent organization. Consequently, it has been challenging to allocate resources for new information technology, stay competitive, and promptly fulfil readers' information requests. Moreover, only a tiny proportion of users are taking advantage of the databases acquired through University Library funding, and some users need help accessing the information sources as anticipated. As a result, there has been a decrease in financial resources. To tackle these challenges, the library should enhance communication regarding its information sources, products, and services, increase user awareness, and actively promote utilizing available resources.

5.0 Lack of information marketing strategies in the library: Users have yet to fully benefit from library services due to the ineffective marketing strategies provided by university libraries and the lack of training in information marketing. The absence of an understanding of marketing tools and techniques and marketing concepts between libraries may contribute to the underutilization of information marketing strategies. Boakye (1999) emphasized the need for improved strategies to convey information to library users.

5.1 Lack of user analysis: Failure to assess the opinions of university library users is a common issue in information marketing. Often, libraries need help to identify the needs of their users accurately. While the primary focus of libraries is the development and management of resources, this is not always aligned with the needs and

expectations of the users. Library administrators do not regularly conduct formal or informal surveys to gauge the needs of their users (Mahesh, 2002). Quality plays a critical role in determining the utilization of services by users, as they are inclined to use high-quality products and services. Therefore, information products and services must align with the users' information requirements.

5.2 Lack of adequately trained workforce in the university library: The university library is encountering challenges in information marketing because of a need for more well-trained staff. The library's administrative framework comprises senior assistant librarians, assistant librarians, and support staff. Ideally, this structure should consist of professionals with diverse levels of education and experience. A study has revealed that while some librarians know about information marketing, others have misconceptions. As highlighted by Garusing Arachchige (2002), this situation adversely impacts the information marketing programs organized by the library administration. The underperformance of library staff is attributed to their need for knowledge, skills, and expertise in their profession.

5.3 Failure of promotional programs used by the library: Advertising is vital in disseminating information about the library's resources, products, and services and ensuring readers know the available books, resources, collections, and services. The library should focus on promoting not only the existing sources of information and how to utilize them but also the overall reputation of the library. Traditional methods university libraries employ to educate users include advertisements, posters, pamphlets, guidebooks, exhibitions, meetings, articles, and oral communication. With the advancement of technology, the Internet has emerged as a powerful tool for library advertising, serving as a means of information distribution and publicity.

5.4 Lack of a specific marketing policy for libraries: The challenges in updating knowledge related to information marketing stem from the limited facilities and resources available. Moreover, the absence of guidelines for information marketing awareness in university libraries exacerbates this issue. The parent organization's failure to incentivize its libraries and mandate information marketing further deprives librarians and their staff of the opportunity to enhance their knowledge in this area. In addition, the lack of a robust information marketing policy increases the likelihood of disorganized information distribution and inadequate service organization.

5.5 The competitive nature of database designers: Considering the privatization of information services, numerous private institutions aim to capitalize on providing information. This has led to university libraries facing competition from these institutions offering similar information. Consequently, university libraries must now prioritize the implementation of information marketing methods and strategies to tackle these competitive challenges effectively.

6.0 Conclusion and Recommendation
University libraries need to recognize the significance of marketing. Many library staff members may need more clarification on information marketing principles, leading to misconceptions about its purpose. It is essential to dispel the belief that marketing is solely about buying and selling items for profit. Inclusive and effective tactics should be implemented to promote information products and services to overcome this misunderstanding. Librarians should recognize the vital role marketing plays in raising awareness of library services and allocate more effort to promoting their offerings. Several suggestions were proposed to improve the quality of marketing library resources and information services in academic libraries. First and foremost, we must develop and execute a comprehensive marketing strategy and increase awareness through programs involving the library's information literacy service as a distinct unit. Moreover, it supports library users in staying informed about innovations by offering various information services and products. Furthermore, an effective feedback procedure must be established to assess the value of information services and products and ensure that library administration regularly communicates with users to encourage them to visit the library. Nevertheless, the official marketing position at the library should be established, and regular seminars, workshops, and training programs should be held for information professionals to familiarise them with modern marketing techniques, enabling them to meet user requirements better.

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