# USER SATISFACTION AS A MARKETING STRATEGY IN THE 21<sup>ST</sup> CENTURY LIBRARY

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## Abstract

*The introduction of information technology and globalization has led to an increase in competition among the information providers. Libraries must improve the quality of their services to enable them take the challenges of information in the 21$^{st}$ century. This therefore calls for a better understanding of the specific needs of the library users in order to provide the appropriate type and level of service that meets those needs. This paper takes an insight into how library user needs can be satisfied with the services provided by the library, factors that affect user satisfaction and recommendation were also given on how to ensure that the library meet up with the users' expectations.*

**Keywords:** Library, library services, ICT, 21$^{st}$ century, marketing strategy, user and user satisfaction

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**Introduction**

Libraries are established with the aim of providing information resources and services to meet the users" information and knowledge needs. Meeting the information needs of the users requires that the library provides the actual information resources and services that will satisfy the needs of its users. But one of the greatest challenges for libraries today is how to re-establish themselves as one of the first and foremost gateways to which users can turn for assistance in navigating their way through the vast amount of information that is available in a variety of formats (Naidu 2009). The very existence of libraries is dependent on users" satisfaction. How well this purpose is served is a measure of the effectiveness of that information service. To provide an efficient service, a library should identify specific community needs which it will target its services as different users need different services. This identification is essential for the systematic development of the needed resources and the planning of suitable services for the effective utilization of such resources.

This paper therefore, examines how libraries can fulfil the purpose of their existence by providing quality services to its users to ensure that they are satisfied. The library user and the different services offered by the library are also discussed. Factors that could influence a user from patronizing the library like competence, tangible, assurance, accessibility are examined. The paper submits that the best form of marketing library services is user satisfaction.

**The library user**

The user of a library is its most crucial component as the library processes revolve around them. Aina (2004) describes a "user" as a term broadly used to include all those

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who make adequate and effective use of the services offered by a library and the term also encompasses various terms such as patrons, client, reader, customer, consumer, e.t.c. According to Nwalo (as cited in Anyira, 2011), the library user is undisputedly, the most important person in any library setting. Nwalo (as cited in Anyira, 2011) further states a library user is anybody who visits the library with the purpose of exploiting its resources to satisfy his information need. The underlined word "visits" as used in the 21st century, include remote access to the library portal or website. A library user is anybody who visits the library to make use of one or more of the library's services and they have been categorized by different authors. Whitakers (as cited in Anyira, 2011) classified users into general readers, subject readers, special readers and non-reading users. Aina (2004) categorized users into children, pupils, students, adults, professionals, researchers and lecturers, policy makers and planners, artisans (urban and rural-based), hearing and visually handicapped, and physically handicapped. Anyira (2011) also categorized users based on their skills and the groups are unskilled user or computer illiterate user, semi-skilled user or semi-computer literate user, skilled user or computer literate user.

As the users have been categorized based on different issues, they also have their different information needs which a library must strive to meet. Library users, whether literate or non-literate, skilled or unskilled, children, professionals and other categories make use of the library for one reason or the other. Kumar and Phil (2009) opined that the major objective of every library or information system is to satisfy the information needs of its users. Information need of a user refers to that specific information needed by a user that is critical to survival. It can also mean information that will enable the user resolve uncertainties and problems. The information need of a user can be influenced by some

factors like the discipline of a user, the use in which the information is to be put, the range of information sources and services available, the background, motivation, professional orientation and other individual characteristics of the user, the consequences of information use and the social, political and economic system surrounding the user.

A user can require information regarding his profession or how to update his knowledge in his chosen profession. A user can equally visit the library to seek for information on job vacancies. Library users in an academic library usually visit the library for information on their research work, assignments and general reading for personal self development. A user"s information need can be on what is happening in his country and the government policies and plans and examines how those plans and policies affects him (Anyira, 2011). For instance, in this era of the removal of fuel subsidy, a user can visit the library for information concerning the issue of fuel subsidy removal, its meaning, benefits and its effects on the masses. Also, a library user who is a farmer can require information on the farming practices that are best for his type of land in order to yield bountiful harvest. A user can seek information on how to stay healthy and also understand the causes of most major ailments and how to avoid them. For instance, a user that has information that hand washing with soap and water can prevent diseases like diarrhoea will always strive to abide by it. Also, information on HIV/AIDS will enable a user to accommodate patients living with HIV/AIDS. A library user can also require general information on how to perform some creative acts like crafts making, tailoring, carving, painting; e.t.c. Users can also require information on the location of some strategic and recreational places in a city or a country. In general, library users

make use of the library for different purposes and reasons and it is therefore expected that a library will provide services that will meet these different information needs.

## Library services in 21st century

The developing role of the library has created a set of new and complex challenges for those delivering library buildings and services. The libraries of the 21st century are no longer simply familiar repositories for books. They have changed and expanded, been rethought and redesigned. Libraries now provide an increasing range of different services, using a multitude of media, and reach a more diverse audience than ever before. (Worpole, 2004).

In view of the above statement, Libraries in this 21st century should be seen to be pro active in-terms of the services deliver to their users. The library as an institution is saddled with the responsibility of providing resources and services that will meet the needs and expectations of its users. The exact nature and intensity of the services provided by a library depends on the mission of the library, the category of its users and the library type. Corroborating this, Basser (1996) stated that as the library rapidly evolves into something that looks quite different than it did just a few decades ago, it is critical that librarians not only become aware of this evolution, but that they actively intervene to help reshape the institution in ways that are consistent with the core mission of libraries. Changes to libraries are inevitable, and if librarians do not get actively involved in shaping those changes, it is likely that the 21st century library will carry very few of the core missions and values that have historically been associated with libraries. In addition to the role and expectation of library services in the 21st century, The University of the State of New York (2010) reports indicate that libraries continue to

undergo tremendous transition as they move to virtual services in response to changes in technology and the expectations of their patrons, and as they facilitate not only the use of existing information, but also production of new information through online communities and efforts to preserve local history.

However, to be able to achieve the goal of library service delivery in the 21$^{st}$ century and beyond, adapting the report of The University of the State of New York (2010) to assure that tomorrow‟s libraries continue to be a vibrant and vital part of all lifelong learning experience, all libraries must:

➢ Improve the marketing of library services to all clientele and communities by rebranding libraries while addressing the erroneous perceptions about the need for

   libraries in a digital world.

➢ Develop better tools for advocacy, and identify library champions at all levels of governance:

➢ University and school boards, town and city management, State Education Department, etc.

➢ Collaborate to integrate services and collections of all types of libraries while developing a transparent and seamless world of library services that are

   ubiquitous and instantaneous, yet personalized and flexible, serving all ages and

   needs.

➢ Seek operational and cost efficiencies in light of technological opportunities, energy efficient facilities, and online service delivery methods.

➢ Develop economic justifications for the investments that governments, communities, individuals and philanthropic organizations are asked to make in

libraries, and enhance the role of libraries as economic drivers for their communities.

➢ Recruit technologically savvy staff and train current staff in virtual librarianship while influencing higher education to appropriately educate tomorrow‟s service providers.

➢ Function at the front lines of e-resources (including e-books) purchasing, licensing, digital rights management, digital curation, resource-sharing, and preservation; and advocate for the delivery of open content as embodied in initiatives such as the Digital Public Library of America or the Berlin Declaration on Open Access to Knowledge in the Sciences and Humanities.

➢ Actively address issues concerning the privatization of information and its impact on traditional models of library services, defending residents‟ rights to free access, free lending and the inter-sharing of materials among libraries.

➢ Create collaborative partnerships with all cultural and educational organizations in the state to offer our residents the most comprehensive educational opportunities available anywhere in the world. (The University of the State of New York, 2010).

**User satisfaction and library services**

According to Norliya (2009) satisfying users‟ needs in the academic libraries has been the primary objective of libraries and librarians. The concept of user satisfaction in the library literature likewise has evolved to include a broader focus on the users‟

perspective of the library. In view of this, user satisfaction and library service are seen as sine qua non to effective service delivery in 21$^{st}$ century library.

With the advent of modern technologies like internet, electronic books and CD-ROM, library services are now made easily available and accessible to users who are faced with a variety of alternative channels of information delivery. Ezeala and Yusuff (2011) acknowledged that much of the world's best information are now in electronic form and are only accessible on-line. Only the users of those libraries that have implemented ICTs can benefit from such rich services available for research and development. In the same vein, (A Vision for 21$^{st}$ Century Library Service in British Columbia, n.d) affirm libraries are community hubs, with creative spaces suitable for a number of individual and collaborative activities, only one of which is seeking and accessing information. Library spaces are more adaptable than ever before. Technology enables greater flexibility as physical collections shrink and more information is stored online. Libraries offer relevant, creative, useful and flexible spaces, in which local populations can congregate, interact and create. Library services are less about what products are available in a physical building, and more about the user"s experience while visiting.

More so, libraries also need to ensure that their services meet their users" needs and expectations to the highest degree. Hence, libraries are now forced to compete with other agencies in terms of service quality and user satisfaction. Business or internet service centres now attempt to provide some of the services traditionally offered by libraries. Whittaker (as cited in Naidu, 2009) agree that "undoubtedly any library that aims at reaching the highest level of service, that is, to provide for the needs of users as individuals is attempting to be user centered".

Quality of service is a user‟s perception of how well a service meet or exceeds his /her expectations. It can equally mean a service which satisfies the user‟s expectation resulting in a good experience. Cullen (as cited in Norliya, 2009) stated attention to customers and the services they want and receive are of utmost importance. The library needs to ensure that it‟s "services both meet customer needs and customer expectations to the highest degree. This means that the library needs to compete both in terms of service quality and customer satisfaction". Library service is the combination of services process and its delivery and the quality should start from the top management and carried uniformly to the security man in the library. Thus, for a library to deliver quality services to its users, the user‟s personal needs and expectations have to be incorporated into the development library program and services. Therefore, quality in the library service is defined as permanent user satisfaction because it is only a user who regards the services of the library as being of a high quality from his subjective point of view that will remain a satisfied library user in the long run. The very existence of libraries is dependent on user‟s satisfaction. For instance, a user who has some unpleasant experiences from the library may give up patronising same library. Therefore, it is very necessary for libraries and librarians to understand the users and their information needs.

Reham, Shafique and Mahmood (2011) maintain user satisfaction and optimization of resources have become important areas for libraries to maintain awareness of. Many libraries especially the university libraries are focusing on evaluation of the users‟ needs and their satisfaction with their services. User surveys can provide useful perceptions of service quality in libraries. Based on this assertion, Rust and Oliver (as cited in Geetika,

2010) define satisfaction as the "customer fulfillment response," which is an evaluation as well as an emotion-based response to a service.

Therefore, to meet users" satisfaction means finding out what users want and concentrate upon providing it. User satisfaction in library

**Factors influencing user satisfaction**

Simmonds (as cited in Adeniran, 2011) stated several factors that can influence user"s satisfaction; these factors include responsiveness, competence and assurances, tangibles and resources. In a divergent view, Ball (2007) mentioned that particular influence has been exerted by the diversification of media and technology in the past five to ten years. A number of new services offered to the customer today arose on the basis of digital data. However, since traditional library services have been complemented rather than replaced, the range of library services has multiplied as a result of modern technology and new media. Affirming the above assertion, Covey (as cited in Naidu, 2009) mentions that the World Wide Web has made a dramatic change to library collections and services. This rapid development in information and communication technology and the changes in needs and expectations of users mean changing roles for libraries and librarians. This rapid change has enabled Higher education institutions and library personnel to understand the importance of assessment in improving the quality of library services and meeting the needs and expectations of users.

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**Ways to satisfy users in the library**

For users in the library to be satisfied with the services rendered by the library, the library should study and know its users and their information needs. Thus, the library

should conduct user studies. Aina (2004) is of the opinion that user studies help the library to know their users, determine their information needs, their information seeking behaviours and also sources of information that will be used in meeting their information needs. According to Rocio, Libia and Ivan (1987) the first step in any user study is to determine clearly and precisely what it is intended to achieve with basic objectives should be:

- to determine types of users;

- to identify their information needs;

- to establish priorities in relation to these needs;

- to establish the level of satisfaction of needs;

- to determine user behaviour in relation to information,

- to evaluate the services provided for the restructuring of information and/or the establishment of new services if necessary.

However, in his study, Thakuria (2007) mentions of the methods that can be used to conduct user studies to measure users" satisfaction, which are:

I) Conducting sample survey.

II) Data collection.

III) Process and analysis of data.

IV) Interpret and present the

data. V) Finding out result.

Other method includes:

The feedback obtained from the above methods enables a library to evaluate its services, know who its users are, their information needs and how to satisfy them adequately. To

improve the quality of its services and satisfy its users, Thakuria (2007) opine the users" satisfaction is based on many factors like:

a) A source of up- to-date information, knowledge, accessing facilities and assistance.

b) The library should organize its facilities visible to the users; otherwise they may not have it and get dissatisfied.

c) Accessibility: The library resources and services should be easily accessible. Books should be arranged in shelves in proper classified order, so that the users can locate books quickly. In case of electronic library the electronic database like OPAC will help the users to find out the books in stacks.

d) Tangibles: The tangibles of libraries, namely the building, furniture and other physical facilities, collection, staff, machines etc. should be sufficient and appropriate and useful for the users.

e) Courtesy / Friendliness: The library staff should be very courteous and friendly with the users.

f) Physical appearance / Atmosphere/ Cleanliness/ Comfort: The appearance of library, its facilities, collection, staff and services should be attractive and pleasant. A Welcoming atmosphere should be must Furniture, floor, racks, documents etc. should be neat and clean.

g) Process- Reliability / Communications: The processing part of the library should be dependable and efficient that suffices the expectations of the users. The way of communication, assistance and guidance also greatly affect the satisfaction of the users.

h) Some useful criteria to measure users" experience in a library are:

i) Speed of services delivery (Access time, location, processing, etc.)

ii) Value added services such as Xerox service, CAS, SDI etc.

iii) Technology used.

**Conclusion**

The existence of library users is the raisin d'être of the library. Hence various types of libraries should identify their users and their information needs and determine how to satisfy those needs as a library. Therefore, the users of a library should be constantly studied to determine whether they are satisfied with the services provided by the library or not, and in order improve upon these services. Also, User satisfaction depends to a large extent on the ability of the library to integrate user needs into the development of the library. When this is done, it is possible to provide richer information and to totally fulfil the information needs of our users. This therefore, means that for users information needs to be met, the right type of teaching and research materials, equipment, Information and Communication facilities, furniture and qualified personnel, relevant to the information needs of the users must be procured and made available to the users. In carrying out this study, we have found the under listed as useful recommendations that would help libraries achieve the goal of satisfying the needs of their users.

✓ there should be appropriate interaction and effective communication between the library and the users to enable the users' needs to be known and addressed

promptly.

✓

  the library should continuously monitor changing user-behaviours and needs over an extensive period of time. This will help to recognize the gap between current library services and actual users" needs.

✓

  the library management should ensure that the right professionals are selected and recruited for the handling of the library"s services. The recruited staffs should be trained, developed and empowered to satisfy the users by solving their problems.

✓

  user education and library orientation programme should be organised constantly so as to introduce users to library resources and services in order to sensitize them to their importance, and how they can make use of the resources and services in solving their information needs.

✓

  the management of the library in an academic library should seek audience with the academic staff on what the library should provide in order to ensure that what is needed is what is provided.

✓

  the library management should also provide suggestion boxes in the library as this will go a very long way in meeting the needs of their users.

✓

  marketing strategies, public relations and the concept of customer care training should be imbibed by the library staff from the top management to the security staff in the library.

Finally, fulfilling user needs is an important aspect of library management and regular evaluation of user needs against existing services and the library collection is a necessary management technique for the continuous upgrading of the services provided by the library. Therefore, the management staff in academic libraries should be aware of

the current requirements of their clients/users and work towards providing the needed

information resources to satisfy them.

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