

MARKET ORIENTATION AS A STRATEGY FOR SERVICE DELIVERY IN PUBLIC LIBRARIES: A CASE STUDY OF THE NORTHERN REGION IN KWAZULU-NATAL, SOUTH AFRICA

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ABSTRACT

Public libraries face a plethora of challenges in the information age. However, in spite of that, they are expected to deliver library services and to maintain their relationship with both current and potential users. The purpose of this study was to investigate the implementation of market orientation (MO) in library services provision in public libraries in the Northern Region of KwaZulu-Natal (KZN), South Africa. Using both quantitative and qualitative approaches, questionnaires and interview guides were used to collect data from the managers and librarians in the public libraries of the Northern Region of KZN. The collected data was tabulated in headings and sub-headings, and presented using themes, tables and frequencies. The study established that MO is still a developing concept for non-profit making organisations, such as public libraries. The managers and librarians as professionals in different levels have limited understanding of the



concept and its implications. This calls into question the implementation of this strategy in the provision of library services tailor-made for users. Although there are policies which guide MO and the provision of library services, it is doubtful that they are consulted and implemented. There are challenges which hinder the public libraries in this region from fully implementing MO for the benefit of the users. There is a need to create awareness of MO and its benefits to public libraries. Training librarians, and allocating funding for resources and infrastructure that will improve the implementation of all the strategies for improved library services, are some of the recommendations of the study.

Keywords: market orientation, marketing strategy, public libraries, library services, KwaZulu-Natal, South Africa

1. INTRODUCTION AND BACKGROUND

Although public libraries are non-profit organisations, they need to attract and retain users with the quality service they provide; thus, market orientation (MO) becomes imperative. Maydeu-Olivares and Lado (2003) define MO as a set of activities developed by companies permanently to monitor, analyse and respond to market changes. According to Lambin (2008), a distinction is made between a cultural and an instrumental definition of the MO concept. As an organisational culture, MO is a corporate business philosophy that puts the customer's satisfaction first, considering the role played by the other market actors. Lambin (2008) further explains that MO as an instrumental function can be defined as a set of capabilities, activities and behaviours needed to implement a strong MO. A distinction is made between two types of capabilities in the instrumental function, namely: strategic marketing and operational marketing capabilities. A library differs from other organisations in the products and services it provides. Its success or failure is largely measured by its ability to spot, follow and shape the market. Hallberg and Sipos-Zackrisson (2010) opine that effective MO can improve the service quality of the public library sector. MO provides a strategy that decision-makers such as library managers can employ to cope with the changes facing public libraries and in enhancing service delivery. Changes facing libraries have been observed and discussed worldwide (Gupta and Jambhekar 2002; Robinson 2003) and these changes have led to the: increasing demand on libraries' services; increasing competitive environment; need for accountability; pressure on resources; and ever more demanding customer base. Sheth (2011) asserts that an MO that provides for market-focused strategic flexibility to sustain competitive advantage is a strategic solution for public libraries to gain insight from their customers and to use that knowledge to enhance the number of customers and to become a customer-centric organisation. This makes the customer an integral part of their organisation's strategy and decision-making. Mantel (2011), Robey et al. (2012) and Rao (2012) argue that public libraries are faced with shrinking

budgets, demands for service delivery from the users and the need for accountability. A carefully thought-out strategy has to be devised to work with limited resources for the sake of sustainability.

It has been noticed that the government does not have sufficient capacity to deliver and sustain a quality service to its citizens (Jaeger et al. 2011), generally in South Africa and KwaZulu-Natal (KZN) in particular especially as the country is still a fledgling democracy (Raju and Raju 2010). The public service departments in South Africa, including public libraries, are among the list of suppliers or providers of information or knowledge services that the citizens need. Sewdass (2012) argues that government sectors have no direct competition, and they usually do not close down, nor do they depend on the customer for their survival. Sewdass (2012) further contends that in government department sectors, one sees little emphasis on improving customer relations or service delivery. On the other hand, Hallberg and Sipos-Zackrisson (2010) are of the view that public libraries are faced with a challenge to satisfy and exceed the need and expectation of its users. Hence, Wright, Chew and Hines (2012) opine that market-led orientation and the various elements of a strategic marketing approach to management can have a potential impact on service outcomes and value. In the same vein, Germano and Stretch-Stephenson (2012) contend that because of the competitive nature of business and the environmental changes that have occurred and continue to occur at an increasing rate, marketing has become a key functional area within most enterprises' strategic plans. Germano and Stretch-Stephenson (2012) further assert that marketing is useful for libraries if they are to engage in beneficial and viable strategic planning of their own. Unfortunately, libraries, as non-profit service organisations, are rarely in a position to create revenue-based strategies. Instead, libraries must focus on strategies that encourage value creation (Careless 2012; Germano and Stretch-Stephenson 2012; Inkster 2012; Jose and Bhatt 2007; Pankl 2010).

Libraries have been adaptive and changing organisations as they have attempted to meet the needs of their patrons, their communities, and society at large. Libraries have served a range of societal needs throughout history, functioning as repositories, information providers, educational institutions, and social advocates. The public library is a social creation and an agency that binds members of a community and its constituent community members together. Pankl (2010) offers a novel view of the library as the institution of multiple chances. He further states that library resources can give a framework and flesh to creative entrepreneurial ideas. In addition, librarians are 'consultants' for the fledgling entrepreneur.

The marketing concept has been widely regarded as the cornerstone of modern marketing thought. Narver and Slater (1990) define MO as the competitive strategy that most efficiently generates the right kinds of behaviour to create enhanced value for the customer and therefore assures better long term results for corporations. Based on this view, Jaworski and Kohli (1993) identify the three structural components of MO as:

- generation and analysis of all relevant information about the market;
- dissemination of this information among the various departments of the organisation in order to coordinate and arrange strategic planning; and
- implementation of strategic initiatives designed to satisfy the market.

The role of MO as an antecedent of innovation performance has been extensively documented in the literature (Jaworski and Kohli 1993; Wang 2015). The concept of MO has attracted various organisations across different sectors, including academics. This is because marketing academics have wisdom that could help MO to provide an organisation with a better understanding of its customers, competitors and environments, which subsequently leads to enhanced organisational performance (Javalgi et al. 2005; Kolar 2006; Sheth 2011; Sofaer and Hibbard 2010). However, despite the growing body of evidence on this relationship, the contingent value of MO in the public library contexts is still subject to debate. Modi and Mishra (2010) perceive MO as a valuable organisational culture that enhances customer value. Kolar (2006), Jaworski and Kohli (1993), and Narver and Slater (1990) outline MO as the organisation-wide generation of market intelligence pertaining to current and future needs of customers, dissemination of intelligence within an organisation and responsiveness to it.

Over the past two decades, governmental cost-cutting, on the one hand, and growing public pressure, on the other hand, have led to the need to continuously improve or modernise the efficiency and effectiveness of public services. Despite the growing need for understanding the MO phenomenon in public sector settings (Jaworski and Kohli 1993), not much research has been conducted to explore the nature, antecedents and consequences of a potential service MO discrepancy in public libraries. When successful implementation of MO is in question, another very practical issue is the amount of energy available to accomplish this aim. By incorporating sustainability into MO, the goal of strategic alignment of sustainability with marketing strategies is achieved to create a competitive advantage.

2. CONTEXTUAL SETTING

The Northern Region Library Depot was formerly known as the Coastal Depot and is situated in KZN, which is one of the nine provinces that make up South Africa. It consists of three public library districts, namely, Zululand, UMkhanyakude and uThungulu districts. The region has 69 public libraries.

3. PROBLEM STATEMENT

Public libraries exist in a highly competitive and rapidly changing environment in which they need to create competitive advantage and organise their acts as if

they were profit-making organisations if they are to survive in this day and age. There is no doubt that technology has brought about change in the way libraries provide their services, and a swift-change is needed in public libraries. Wright et al. (2012) and Sarrafzadeh, Martin and Hazeri (2010) view the developments in information technologies, and social and economic changes as some of the obstacles that challenge the status of public libraries. In the same vein, Kolar (2006), Jaworski and Kohli (1993), and Narver and Slater (1990) opine that public sectors such as public libraries, need a different market approach and enlarge the range and diversity of their information products and services. Kolar (2006) affirms that organisational goals and values impact marketing effectiveness and suggests that a supportive environment is needed for market-oriented strategies.

There have been some initiatives to redress the limitations of the past in terms of skilling and upskilling the librarians, putting infrastructure in place to enhance working conditions and improve service provision to capacitate public libraries personnel in South Africa, for example the Conditional Grant from the National Department of Arts and Culture (Staffing, infrastructure, capacity building, collection development and ICT equipment) and Equitable Share budget (training, library maintenance, programmes, overdrive) given to all public libraries to increase capacity and skill librarians. However, with all the technology-driven shift in service provision, such funding and support to improve library services, and a need to adopt a MO approach to providing services to users, public libraries in the Northern Region Library Depot, seem to be not ready to embrace MO in order to enhance services they provide to their users. Therefore, in order for the public libraries in the Northern Libraries Depot to remain relevant and stay competitive as service providers, it is important for them to adopt an MO approach. However, Sarvard (1996) laments that often the librarian's understanding of the marketing concept is inaccurate and not sufficiently developed. Therefore, the study investigated the application of MO in public libraries as a strategy for library services provision.

4. AIM AND OBJECTIVES

The aim of the study was to determine the significance of MO as a strategy for library services provision in public libraries in the Northern Region Libraries Depot in KZN. The objectives of the study were to:

- Establish the understanding of MO by public library managers and librarians in the Northern Region Libraries Depot in KZN.
- Explore the MO strategies and policies currently implemented in public libraries of the Northern Region Libraries Depot in KZN.
- Ascertain the effectiveness of the use of MO in public libraries of the Northern Region Libraries Depot in KZN.

- Determine the level of government support in implementing MO in public libraries in the Northern Region Libraries Depot in KZN.
- Examine challenges experienced by librarians in implementation MO in the Northern Region Libraries Depot in KZN.
- Propose what could be done to address them in order to improve library services in public libraries in the Northern Region Libraries Depot in KZN.

5. CONCEPTUALISING MARKET ORIENTATION AND RELATED STUDIES

This section conceptualises MO and reviews previous works of various scholars that have driven the development of marketing thought. Furthermore, this article considers how MO can be constructed to sustain the roles of public libraries.

5.1. The concept of MO

The concept of MO has been researched widely in the fields of management and marketing. It has been found to have a positive relationship with organisational performance and business profitability (Kolar 2006; Sheth 2011). In this regard, many managers today recognise that the ability to succeed in the marketplace requires more than just sales techniques. In addition, customers rarely respond to a sales pitch, but rather want their circumstances to be acknowledged and their needs to be satisfied (Crittenden et al. 2011; Germano and Stretch-Stephenson 2012; Modi and Mishra 2010). Like public libraries, users' needs, desires and particular circumstances should be the main focus of the market-oriented organisation.

Jaworski and Kohli (1993) define MO as being composed of three sets of activities, namely: organisation-wide generation of intelligence; dissemination of the intelligence, and organisation-wide responsiveness to the intelligence MO is concerned with; and achieving business value through a clear understanding of the customers, the organisation and the wider business environment. Services concerned with the provision of information to the public have seen a rise in demand, which has led to an increase in the number of information suppliers seeking to utilise the available market opportunities. Attaining business sustainability remains a key concern for senior managers. According to Kumar et al. (2011), the key objective of MO is to deliver superior customer value, which is based on knowledge derived from customer and competitor analyses and the process by which this knowledge is gained and disseminated throughout the organisation.

The key to any successful strategy is the ability of an organisation to identify, develop and sustain a competitive advantage in relation to its competitors. Adopting a market-oriented strategy is posited as a way of successfully managing the impact

of changes in the library domain and ensuring their survival. The survival of libraries has been the focus of a number of recent reports, which call for new strategic directions if libraries wish to sustain their roles well into the future (Germano and Stretch-Stephenson 2012; Javalgi et al. 2005; Modi and Mishra 2010; Sen 2006). Sen (2006) contends that once it is determined how library professionals define and understand MO, then progress can be made in exploring the extent to which library services are market oriented and the benefits or problems experienced.

In understanding MO, it is of paramount importance to explore the extent to which library services are market oriented and to determine the benefits or problems experienced. Utilising the Resource-Advantage Theory of Competitive Advantage, Hunt and Morgan (1996), and the two pioneering conceptual definitions of Jaworski and Kohli (1993) and Narver and Slater (1990), as the underlying theoretical foundation and drawing on literature from a variety of disciplines, we developed a market-oriented sustainability framework. The two pioneering conceptual definitions have been widely used in many MO studies owing to their wide adoption in the management of literature.

According to Hunt and Morgan (1995), using the Resource-Advantage Theory determines that a market-oriented organisation can achieve a position of a competitive advantage and enhance long-run performance. With respect to sustainability, Kuosmanen and Kuosmanen (2009) state that sustainability is nowadays generally accepted as one of the key success factors in the long-term business strategy of the firm. Strategy theorists share the view that the strategic imperative of a firm should be sustained, and there should be superior financial performance and the belief that this goal can be achieved through a sustainable competitive advantage in the market place (Barney 1991). Jaworski and Kohli (1993), Deshpande, Farley and Webster (1993) and Homburg, Workman and Krohme (2000) support this contention. They found that MO is an important determinant of a firm's performance.

The theories have parallels, both being concerned with customers, organisational management and intelligence. However, Jaworski and Kohli (1993) discuss them as having an activity focus and therefore being operational in outlook. The two pioneering conceptual definitions, Jaworski and Kohli's (1993) and Narver and Slater's (1990), have been used to support the research owing to their wide adoption in management literature. They provide a framework to determine whether library professionals define MO in the same way as marketing and management professionals.

5.2. MO and public library perspectives

Panlibus (2012), Pankl (2010) and Kelley (2012) argue that strategic market planning has become a necessity for libraries, rather than an option. The aim of such activity is to match organisational strengths with customer needs through the creation of an

effective marketing strategy, thus benefiting both the service provider and its clients. Hallberg and Sipos-Zackrisson (2010) state that it is crucial for public libraries to provide a framework for applying marketing principles to their management and service operations.

There has been much discussion on the changes facing libraries and the increasing demand on their services, the increasingly competitive environment, and the need for accountability, the pressure on resources and an ever more demanding customer base. As a result, it is widely assumed that in the context of increasing competition, public libraries need to adopt strategic management (Hane 2012; Inkster 2012). Adopting a market-orientated strategy is posited as a way of successfully managing the impact of changes in the library domain.

The survival of libraries has been the focus of a number of recent research reports, which call for new strategic directions if libraries wish to sustain their role in the future. This includes ensuring their future funding, relevance, existence and competitiveness. By so doing, libraries are looking outside their professional boundaries for new insights, models and benchmarks as guidelines on making new strategies for their current operation as well as for their future development (Hallberg and Sipos-Zackrisson 2010; Modi and Mishra 2010; Sarrafzadeh et al. 2010; Wright et al. 2012).

Predominant to the services, a marketing concept is that of matching service capabilities and strengths with the needs of customers and to provide services that satisfy their requisites. Like all organisations, a library's strategic marketing plan involves a series of activities which attempt to find answers to questions relating to the current stand of a library, its environment, its future, and the means in which goals may be achieved (Careless 2012; Gatehouse and Price 2013). Germano and Stretch-Stephenson (2012) concur, adding that libraries exist to serve the public; however, they emphasise that, due to limited resources, it is impossible for libraries to provide services that guarantee customer satisfaction in every instance. This marks the significance of a good strategy to be employed in order for a library to identify the sectors of the market that it is competent to serve better than its competitors. By so doing, marketing tools should be employed to differentiate their service offering from that of the direct competition.

Moreover, a public library must put users' interests first, while it raises the libraries' awareness of the need to obtain information about competitors and establish a means to satisfy its users' needs in order to gain a competitive environment (Inkster 2012; Kelley 2012; Luther 2011). One of the tacit missions of a public library, as a unit of government, is (or should be) arguably to contribute to the functioning of the economy of its community (Pankl 2010). The inability to sense and respond to market changes by public libraries has led to the decline in satisfying users' needs. This has led to users becoming despondent with public libraries. Mantel (2011) argues that if libraries fail to match service capabilities to customer needs; they risk becoming

marginalised and being perceived as irrelevant. This will result in customers looking for competitive offerings in order to satisfy their multifaceted needs. Robey et al. (2012) assert that in such a time of a radically changing environment, libraries must use marketing techniques to create and sustain competitive advantage, if they are in line with continuously-changing knowledge-based economy. They should turn around the trepidation of change into opportunities.

Pankl (2010), Hane (2012) and Eryaman (2010) view a public library as a prominent figure because it contributes to the cultivation of the country's economy. Lankes (2016) explains that a library is a mandated and facilitated space supported by the community, stewarded by librarians and dedicated to knowledge creation. The Oxford English Dictionary (2016) expands this by defining the library as a place set apart to contain books for reading, study, and reference or, a building, room, or set of rooms, containing a collection of books for the use of the public or of some particular portion of it, or of the members of some society or the like; a public institution or establishment, charged with the care of a collection of books, and the duty of rendering the books accessible to those who require to use them. Various types exist providing a variety of information, which include academic, business, and so on. In that regard, the resources of the library help businesses discover how to generate more revenue. This translates into tax revenue, which in turn helps support government. On that note, it is essential that library managers identify and understand strategic orientations that enable the library to sustain performance, in particular in the presence of swift changes in market conditions.

One of the major barriers to operating a profitable information business is the lack of business expertise among librarians and information scientists (Jestin and Parameswari 2002, 1). Decision-makers at every level of the economy need relevant and up-to-date information to assist them. The dissemination of this vital information requires effective marketing skills so that those who need information are aware of its existence and acquire it on time (Crittenden et al. 2011; Leo 2013; Mantel 2011; Modi and Mishra 2010). Pankl (2010) opines that librarians and information professionals in developing countries still need to enhance their marketing skills to be able to apply marketing principles to their management and service operation. Ewers and Austen (2004) argue that most libraries have lacked strategies to translate marketing management into the functional management of their operations. Germano (2010) concurs with Ewers and Austen (2004) and Pankl (2010) that the role, impact or outcome of sophisticated marketing programmes on library effectiveness are altogether limited. Germano (2010) further argues that despite the economic downturn, the greater obstacles to meaningful library marketing are a lack of vision, strategy, expectation, and expertise.

Hallberg and Sipos-Zackrisson (2010) affirm that some information service managers feel that marketing is unfavourable to the nature of their activities. Panlibus (2012) acknowledges that with increased competition in the world of information,

marketing is a factor for survival. Panlibus (2012) further explains that the marketing of information services in any library is most significant in a competitive environment. The librarians and information professionals are responsible for enhancing the use of their resources and services to maintain their relevance to their prime clientele.

As public libraries face various formidable challenges, including financial constraints and the shifts in the nature and needs of library users, if they are to evolve rapidly enough to meet these challenges; they will have to make careful strategic decisions and persevere in implementing those decisions. For a public library to improve its implementation of MO, it must make strategic choices and create a vision that it believes will enable it to best serve its patrons and its community.

Levien (2011) suggests that a public library should change its physical form to a virtual dimension form. The current public libraries require what Levien (2011) believes is the most realistic situation where the physical to virtual continuum is a physical library that has added a web presence to its substantial physical facilities. Levien (2011) is of the opinion that once the library is able to satisfy the needs of its individual clients, where it may offer the use of technologies that are unavailable to most individuals because of cost or difficulty of use, such as book printers, very large displays, or high-end game machines, then it will be playing an active role in shaping its future. By so doing, public libraries will have the competitive advantage (Gatehouse and Price 2013).

The library's vision for the future should be based on strategic imperatives that derive from an assessment of the view of the world and the view of the library taken together. While the strategy is being implemented, it should be monitored. These strengths encompass both what it does or its core competencies, and what it possesses or its strategic assets. Together, these strengths constitute the major portion of the view of the library, therefore sustaining the role of the public library (Gatehouse and Price 2013; Hallberg and Sipos-Zackrisson 2010; Levien 2011).

According to Gatehouse and Price (2013), for a public library to be market oriented, the development of the next generation of leaders will perceive innovation as core to delivery and will have insight into how to manage the bumpy road that innovation often has to travel. Furthermore, the library should mobilise the capacities within civil society and the private sector to support public innovation more effectively. In addition, the public library should create innovation budgets so that the commitment to innovate can be matched with resources and incentives. In so doing, the library will be the central construct behind successful marketing management and strategy (Gatehouse and Price 2013; Hallberg and Sipos-Zackrisson 2010; Levien 2011).

6. METHODOLOGY

The study largely employed the qualitative approach. As a research method, a case study was used to collect data at the Northern Region in KZN. Use of a case study is described by Blanche, Durrheim and Painter (2006) as intensive investigation of particular individuals. A questionnaire was sent to the regional manager, deputy regional manager and assistant regional manager as well as the senior librarians. The criteria for choosing these respondents was that they were involved in the management of public libraries in the Northern Region and this involved policy formulation, budgeting, provision of library materials and training.

An interview schedule collected data from the librarians during the visits. It followed the questionnaires which did not yield much response rate in terms of returns. This group implemented policies formulated by the senior management (SM) and it was a group that touched base with the users, therefore it was important to include them in the study.

The data was collected in 2014 and 2015 and included a sample size of 71 participants, including managers and librarians in their various positions.

It was imperative that the literature related to MO be reviewed. Therefore, content analysis focused on obtaining secondary data by reviewing literature on the concept of MO and its relevance and application for the provision of library services in public libraries.

The regional manager, deputy managers, assistant managers, senior librarians and librarians of public libraries in their respective positions, falling within the Northern Region Libraries Depot, made up the population for the study. The study targeted one regional manager, or the deputy regional manager, or the assistant regional manager plus librarians in the 69 public libraries that make up the Northern Region. The sampling was multi-staged (Nyasulu 2014) and the first sample was for the regions. The Northern Region was purposively sampled because it had a high number of public libraries as compared to other depots. Convenience sampling was thereafter employed for the regional manager, senior librarians and librarians as described by Etikan, Musa and Alkassim (2016). This was to ensure that whoever was available between the regional manager, deputy or assistant managers as well as senior librarians, as decision-makers, could participate. This technique was also applicable with librarians in their respective titles and positions. This was done in order to interview the senior librarian or other librarians who were available at the time of the data collection. The inclusion of any level of librarians was done with the understanding that even the senior library assistants and library assistants perform the actual MO activities based on the instructions from the management of senior colleagues and with the qualified librarians.

7. FINDINGS AND DISCUSSION

The deputy regional manager and one senior librarian, who represented the SM, were interviewed. The questionnaire was emailed to 69 public librarians, but only 14 (20%) replied to the email. Thereafter, 26 follow-up interviews were conducted due to the low response rate.

7.1. Understanding of MO

The respondents were asked to give their understanding of the concept 'market orientation' (MO). The SM understood the concept; however, the librarians demonstrated a limited understanding of the concept MO. Other concepts which, according to them, were related to MO were given from both the questionnaire and interviews. The popular concepts were user studies, user profiling, and needs analysis.

Understanding of MO was deemed very important. Services are supposed to be tailor-made for users. If there is a limited understanding of the market and users, irrelevant information and services could be provided. The SM, as decision-makers, play a crucial role in shaping services that are offered to information users. Their understanding of the concept gives a picture of the extent to which services are tailor-made for users.

7.2. Policy on MO in public libraries in the Northern Region Library Depot

The participants were asked if there were policies regulating activities relating to MO in their libraries. This was to determine whether planning and activities performed for MO purposes were in line with the acceptable standards and guidelines. Both members of the SM interviewed indicated that there were policies and procedures that guided their MO activities. This means that if, at the decision-making levels the SM were aware of the policies in place guiding MO and its practice in their libraries, the policies were used and the MO activities were done within the accepted standard procedures. This could be a positive reflection on the extent to which services are guided by policy in many public libraries and are performed according to certain standards. It is an indication that policies are planned with the users and competitors in mind, as suggested by Gatehouse and Price (2013). Librarians also indicated during the follow-up interviews that their libraries have policies which they referred to and which guided them in implementing the MO activities. This is in line with the observation that for a public library to choose a vision for the future of being market oriented, a number of key factors should be considered. The library mission and goals, its specific character and the needs of the patrons and the community should be clearly established. Moreover, the significant external trends and forces that will

probably affect it in the foreseeable future must be carefully considered. In addition, the library must perform a critical assessment of what strengths or advantages it possesses relative to its likely competitors (Careless 2012; Gatehouse and Price 2013).

7.3. Effectiveness of MO to public library services

In today’s complex, competitive environment, libraries are expected to match their capabilities to the needs of their customers to ensure their survival and prosperity in a dynamic environment categorised by escalating competition. All 69 (100%) librarians indicated the activities they perform in their libraries to show that they were market oriented. These activities are themed in Table 1.

Table 1: Effectiveness of MO to public library services

Activities	Responsibility	Frequency
Hold meetings and discussions regarding the market and services	Deputy manager, Deputy manager: Promotions, Assistant manager with librarians	At the beginning of the year, quarterly or every six months
Disseminate needed information	Deputy manager, Deputy manager: Promotions, Assistant manager, Librarians to the libraries, and users	As per the need
Supply material and training and involve users in events that they relate to	Deputy manager: Promotions, Librarians, Library assistants, Drivers	All the time as per the need
Conduct satisfactory surveys	Deputy manager: Promotions, Librarians	Annually

It was further important to know if the participants could observe the effectiveness of MO on library services. Thirty-nine (56.5%) librarians indicated that the effectiveness could not be recorded in all areas and activities performed. For example, one librarian indicated that:

... due to limited funding, it is not always easy to keep track of the effectiveness of market orientation on the services we offer to our users ..., this is because funding budgeted for libraries, is not the same every year ... planning is compromised ... sometimes shock comes before the plan has been done ... re-planning to fit the budget at hand has to be done ... that delays some activities to be carried as urgently as their needs ...

In the same vein:

... in as much as we plan to improve what we do and how we do it ... our hands are tight in most instances, we heavily rely on the funding which not always predictable, and planning is not always possible ... And besides, in order to see the impact or effect of a thing ... one

needs to observe it over time ... with equal opportunities, resources and skills ... which is not always the case with us.

The effectiveness of MO from the interviews was different. There were areas where responses from the participants were very positive with some, of course, not giving hope. For example, the following statements emerged:

- ... conducting surveys annually to collect information about the users, and see if there are new users with new needs, and so on, is always crucial and the most important activity that could drive MO successfully ... however, due to limited funds such an important activity is never realised ...
- In a way we are seen as people who always provide poor service, irrelevant service or even no service ... Sometimes we do not even know why we do those surveys ... we collect, collect, collect but we do not do anything about the profiles in a wider scale ... just those little things we can do at our small level ... which may not go far with our users ...

On a positive note, the following also emerged:

... we have different services for children and youth and also teachers, although not always satisfactorily, it is always there when compared to other patrons, unlike students from FETs or some universities ... theirs are so unique ... specialised or ...even complicated ..., so we fail them ... we fail not because we want to ... but because there aren't any resources ...

Another participant indicated:

The meetings that we do regularly ... in a way ... help us discuss the needs ... and see how much could be done ... and do what we could, with what we have ...

These statements are in line with what transpired in the interviews with the SM. They clearly indicated that limited funding made it difficult to serve the users accordingly; however, they 'make do with the resources we have', the senior librarian echoed.

7.4. Level of government support in implementation of MO policy and activities

The participants had to tell us if they received support from the government, especially the municipality to which libraries report and what kind of support they received. The SM indicated that the support was there. However, the librarians have seen and experienced the government's support in a limited way. For example, one librarian indicated that:

... there is support from the government, though limited ... resources used during promotions, campaigns, events, etc. were provided from the Government funds which had been allocated to such events ...

Albeit trickling support, the statements above concur with observations by Jaeger et al. (2011), and Sewdass (2012) on the inabilities of governments to finance public services departments. Organisations such as museums, universities, libraries, and charities need to market their causes and their products to gain political and social support as well as economic support (Kotler in Joseph and Parameswari 2002, 1).

7.5. Challenges in the application of MO

The participants were asked to indicate the challenges they experienced in implementing MO strategy in their libraries to improve library services. From the returned questionnaires, funding was mentioned by 43 (100) librarians as the most common challenge. Other challenges included time (29: 67%) and limited resources (30: 69.7%) such as transport and staff to carry out the activities. From the interview, librarians' responses related to the ones from the SM. For example, one librarian reiterated that

... due to limited funding, some market orientation strategies were not practised to the fullest ...

The librarians further mentioned challenges related to limited funds (40; 91%), the demand to meet users' needs (39: 90%) and a shortage of staff (43; 100%) were mentioned as challenges. All this ties in with Mantel's (2011) observation that the squeeze on library funding is occurring amid unprecedented social and technological changes that are altering the reading and researching habits of library patrons and causing many libraries to rethink their mission. Pankl (2010) concurs with Mantel (2011) that public libraries have been unable to escape the recession's lingering effects. They claim that challenges of budget cuts, increased user base, rapid growth of material, rising costs, networking demands, competition by database vendors, and complexity in information requirements are forcing the library professionals to adopt marketing to improve the management of library and information services, yet this comes with challenges of its own.

Lack of business expertise among librarians and information scientists was indicated as one of the major barriers to operating a profitable information business. For example, the senior librarian as one of the SM indicated that:

... limited number of librarians and experienced librarians poses a challenge in executing some activities for the benefit of users, even though the MO policies are in place ...

This observation concurs with Jestin and Parameswari (2002) on the need to inculcate a culture of expertise in business information provision. It could also be due to the fact that libraries have always been regarded as non-profit making entities and as such, the need to think 'market' and 'competitors' had not been in their vocabulary both in training and practice.

7.6. Suggestions to improve implementation of MO in public libraries

However, the respondents had suggestions for improved implementation of MO in public libraries. They thought that if there were adequate resources, they would be better positioned to implement MO. For example, some suggestions from the interview with the SM were that the:

LIS schools should have a module or a section in a module addressing business and marketing in libraries ... this should not just be a mere mentioning of marketing however, a practical component should accompany such a module ... so that the new graduates realise that mind-sets have to be shifted to competitive thinking and marketing and that users as the market were to be achieved ...

... if the LIS curricula do not prepare graduates, they will reach practice sector and maintain the 'status quo' ...

The librarians were aware as well that the public libraries were challenged by the various formidable challenges; including financial constraints and the shifts in the nature and needs of library users, and that they were to evolve rapidly enough to meet these challenges. Other suggestions were that:

... they would have to make careful strategic decisions and persevere in implementing decisions and policies, and to deal with staff shortages and stressed funding ...

... for a public library to improve its implementation of MO, it must make strategic choices and create a vision that it believes will enable it to best serve its patrons and its community ...

In the same vein, Luther (2011) contends that dealing with documents and content management are not the only points of convergence for librarians and information professionals in the digital domain. They need to expand and fine-tune their skill sets to meet the changing digital environment in other areas as well. They need skills such as commercial and legal skills (acquiring licenses and negotiating digital rights management issues), technical skills (using metadata effectively, setting up e-book platforms, designing authentication systems for users), statistical skills (evaluating the use and utility of digital resources), and communication skills (working with end-users).

For a library to gain a competitive environment, it is necessary that it responds to the need to deliver new and traditional services, digitizing collections and shifting to digital content. One librarian during the interview indicated

... library managers in the Region, must maintain service provision funds despite tight budgets, ... so that we librarians at the grassroots levels, and who are directly in contact with users, do not find ourselves having to answer endless questions regarding broken equipment,

limited resources, such as computers, outdated material, shortage of seating and reading spaces ...

Participants further indicated that:

... while we recognise changes brought by the information technology, we should keep up with them by first accepting that technology is one of our competitors and only market orientation could help us stay afloat and relevant ...

... in addition, a library should remain optimistic, focus on supporting and enhancing core services, and follow its strategic plan while it is clear on the goals and the challenges ahead ...

8. CONCLUSION

MO has been widely known and practised in the Management Sciences and in the areas where profit is expected. Since public libraries have been known as non-profit making organisations, there has not been much attention paid to the consideration of employing MO as a strategy to cater for users. Therefore, there is a need for the decision-makers to create awareness of MO in the true sense of the concept and its implications within this Library Region and train service providers who are directly in contact with users.

Policies are important in public libraries for guidance and procedural benefit. They should be used for guidance on what should be done, by whom, with which funds and when. Furthermore, more librarians should be employed so that other librarians specialise in MO awareness campaigns and implementation so that its efficiency and effectiveness are realised.

With regard to challenges, economic conditions in the country are challenges that affect public libraries as well. Funding cuts limit librarians in carrying out some MO strategies and the efforts of improved library services are defeated. There is a need for the government to allocate enough resources to public libraries, by allocating budget for both human resources and infrastructure this could ensure the adoption of MO as a strategy to improve library services provision in public libraries.

9. SUGGESTIONS FOR FUTURE RESEARCH

Whereas the current study focused on one of the four regions of KZN, an extended study focusing on the state of MO of public libraries at national level is proposed. This would also enable a comparison off urban and rural settings. This is important as aptly explained by Jestin and Parameswari (2002, 1) that

libraries and information centres have begun to realize that marketing of information products and services is an integral part of administration, especially as a means for improving user satisfaction and promoting the use of services by current and potential users.

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