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Value-added Service to Academic Library Users in 21st Century: Using Competitive Intelligence Approach

Abstract

Higher education in the twenty-first century globally has been characterized and driven on business ethos. The institutions are faced with stiff competition in an attempt to increase their student enrolment, attract international students and faculty, pioneer centres of excellence, showcase outstanding research output, produce astute graduates and get listed in top ranking league tables. The paper therefore examined the effects of leveraging on value-added services to academic library users through competitive intelligence as a predictor of competitive advantage among tertiary institutions. It identified value-added personnel, collection, processing of materials and dissemination of information as constituting specific target selling points to be enriched with the concept. It however noted and x-rayed the concept of competitive intelligence as a critical precondition for achieving effective value-added service delivery in academic libraries. The paper concluded that robust collection coupled with technology-driven retrieval system as well as digital reference services would lead to greater user satisfaction and enhanced patronage of library services. It recommended among other factors the need to benchmark competitor institutions to gain competitive advantage over the market.

Keywords: Value-added Service, Competitive Intelligence, Academic Library,

Library Users,

Introduction

Higher education providers all over the world are in a serious competition. This is predicated on the greater demand for access to tertiary education globally. Consequently, various nations are witnessing heightened pressure in the licensing and establishment of more institutions. In Nigeria for example, there are 138 Universities granted licenses to operate by the government consisting of 40 federal, 39 states and 59 privates. (National Universities Commission, 2015).

Without undermining quality and carrying capacity, the institutions are constantly concerned with increasing enrolment by attracting best brains, stimulating breakthroughs in research, pioneering centres of excellence, production of first rate graduates and getting listed in top ranking league tables. The scenario has brought about a paradigm shift necessitating stiff competition among the institutions. One of the parameters for competitive advantage in the current milieu is the quality of the academic library.

Academic libraries have been unarguably adjudged as the hub on which academic activities, that is, teaching, learning and research revolve. The value of academic library to the users has long been assumed; all library resources, that is both prints and electronics, other services that support teaching and research, the library catalogue are essential to the success of the library users. (Tenopire, 2011). The issue of value-added services defines the continuous relevance of the libraries in conferring prestige and expanding the frontiers of scholarship in their respective parent institutions.

Statement of the Problem

Higher education in the twenty-first century globally has been characterized and driven on business ethos. The institutions are faced with stiff competitions in an attempt to increase their student enrolment and remain relevant. Academic libraries all over the world therefore are in a serious competition to contribute to their parent institution's competitive advantage. The problem is what the libraries can do to have an edge over their competitors and remain relevant as a hub of scholarship in this 21st century business driven environment. It is against this background that the paper seeks to establish the nexus between Competitive Intelligence and value-added services to academic library users.

Objective

The major objective of this work is to discuss value-added service to academic library users in 21st century using competitive intelligence approach. Other specific objectives are to:

- i. Examine the concept of value-added
- ii. Examine Total Quality Management as a framework underpinning for understanding value-added services and Competitive Intelligence (CI)
- iii. Contextualize the application of CI to library services with a view to distilling specific innovations to hitherto routine processes

Theoretical Framework on Value-Added Library Service: Total Quality Management Theory (TQM)

Quality is a competitive priority for any organization / library that must render value-added services to users. Total Quality Management (TQM) is a theory that explains that quality in organization processing and services will lead to value-added services to the customers or users.

Psychogios and Priporas (2007) cited Morgan and Murgatroyd, (1997) defined TQM as the mutual co-operation of everyone in an organization and associated business processes to produce products and services, which meet and, hopefully, exceed the needs and expectations of customers. TQM is both a philosophy and a set of management guiding principles for managing an organization. (p. 42)

TQM theory postulates that the best way to improve organizational output is to continually enhance performance. Quality improvement is not a task that has an end, as it is not static. The emphasis is on seeking improvement opportunities, not just holding the status quo. The focus is on planning, prevention, and anticipation (Psychogios and Priporas, 2007 p. 44 cited Dale, 1996; Goetsch and Davis, 1994; Ho and Fung 1994).

Relevance of this Theory to the Study

Quality is the bedrock of value-added services to users. Any academic library that must remain relevant and be on top of competitors must make sure that their personnel, operations and services to users are of the almost highest quality. TQM theory addresses this pertinent issue, it states that quality processes in organization or library will produce products and services, which

meet and, exceed the needs and expectations of customers. This actually is the concept of value-added services in library and information centres.

Concept of Value-Added services

In an era of increasing choices, academic libraries all over the world are faced with finding the best way to add value to their services so as to attract customers (users) and remain in business.

Steeney (1997) stressed that value added services means that the needs of the majority of people are being met, the new generations of users are passionate for the services, and a scenario set for success, library services that integrate these features will definitely be rendering value added services. He further pointed out that valued added services imply giving users their expected services at the same time surprising them with some unexpected positive functionalities, features and support.

Academic libraries must incorporate new services that provide leap and add value to users. They must find out how many users are satisfied with their services so as to know how to add value to their services and remain relevant in a competitive business environment.

Adding value implies a customer got more than what they expected for the money they pay; adding value to library services implies “creating library services with wow!”, it also means adding value to library user’s lives, this also denotes that libraries must surprise users with additional services which users did not expect; value-added also implies that the services are valuable in relation to the money paid by the user, they are satisfied, impressed and willing to come again for the services. (Steeney, 1997, Yang, Hwang and Chem, 2011; Broady-Preston and

Swain, 2012). Competitive intelligence is a critical precondition for achieving value-added service delivery in library and information centres.

Competitive Intelligence (CI)

Competitive intelligence (CI) is a method of collecting, analyzing and distributing information on the external environment in which an organization operates (Fleshier and Bensoussan, 2007; Jin, 2011). Competitive intelligence “is the process by which organization systematically and legally collects, organizes, analyzes and distributes information about its competitors or competitive environment in order to obtain or maintain competitive advantage on the market place” (Jin, 2011).

Yap and Rashid (2011) defined competitive intelligence in terms of both a process and a product; they explained that as a process it involves the set of legal and ethical imperatives for collecting, analyzing and disseminating actionable information relating to competitors, suppliers and customers. As a product, competitive intelligence is actionable information about the present and future behaviour of the competitor, customers, suppliers, technologies, government, market and general business environment (Vedder and Gugness, 2000, Society of Competitive Intelligence Professionals SCIP 2009, Yap and Rashid, 2011). In the same way, Haliso and Aina (2012) define competitive approach in libraries as the ability to seek information from other counterpart’s libraries and make use of the information to provide quality services and be in a better position than others.

Yap and Rashid (2011) discovered that organizations perceived the acquisition of competitive intelligence about customers to be the most important factor, followed by the competitors,

technology and economics. This is a fact because organizations that must remain competitive in this globalized and twenty-first century business world must know their customers, their competitors, and the technology so as to have an edge over competitors..

Valued-Added Services in Academic Libraries Using Competitive Intelligence Approach

The areas where value can be added in academic library services in this 21st century so as to be on top of competitors and remain in business are listed below:

- Value added library personnel
- Value added collections
- Value added processing of materials
- Value added dissemination of information

Value- Added Library Personnel

The quality of staff in the library will determine the services they will render to the users. Right mixed of staff in the library have a significant relationship with the services they will render to users. Value-added services in libraries starts with the right caliber of staff that understand what service provision implies in the 21st century competitive business environment. Right caliber of staff will always put smile on his or her face when rendering services to users in academic library at the same time they will always go extra miles in meeting user's needs and expectations. Adeniran (2011) stressed that users satisfaction with academic library services is a function of the quality of the personnel and the services of the library, she further pointed out that well qualified and experienced staff will render added value service to the users.

Staff that is knowledgeable will render good service and at the same time ready to respond to users questions, and satisfy user's needs, libraries should allocate resources to improve staff for good service quality and added value service (Nimsomboon and Nagata, 2003, Odion, Idiegbeyan-ose and Adekunjo, 2013)

Value- Added Collections

The nature of the collection of any academic library will define the library services to the clientele. The Library collection is the hub of service delivery. A well stock and current collection incorporating both print and electronic resources will add value to the users. A balanced collection of resources that will meet and add value to 21st century academic users must be balanced in terms of quantity, quality and format. The 21st century academic library that must be on top of competitors and gain more customers must deliberately and constantly acquire quality and quantity information resources that will attract and add value to service users. Well stocked and integrated collection, accuracy, comprehensiveness, currency, reliability, validity are criteria for assessing collection value by customers. (Mathews, 2013)

Steeney (1997) explained that value can be added to library collections in terms of precision, reliability, accuracy, and consistency; these constitute quality collections. The library collection is said to be quality when the collection are current, relevant in meeting the various needs of library users; quality collection should meet high standards, in content, expression and format.

University libraries should acquire current and relevant information resources necessary for teaching, learning and research activities that universities are known for thereby adding value to the services they render to their users, quality information resources in libraries add value to

services to library users. (Nimsomboon and Nagata, 2003; Adeniran 2011; Haliso and Aina 2012).

Valued- Added Processing Systems

The retrieval mechanism of the library which reflects a gamut of activities rendered in processing the information resources will affect value-added services to the users. The cataloguing, classification, abstracting and indexing methods the library adopts will affect the retrieval of the information.

Academic libraries that want to be on top of their competitors must adopt best practices example current trends in the profession like cataloguing, classification; the use of resources description and access (RDA) in cataloguing is an example of value added services to library users; this description mechanism is user centered, libraries which adopt RDA in cataloguing and classification will definitely have value-added services to their clientele as the retrieval process of the information is faster, flexible and user friendly. Steeney,(1997) pointed out that well organized library using appropriate cataloguing and classification systems bearing in mind the interest of users will increase academic library usage and add value to the customers.

Oliver, (2015) stressed that RDA focuses on users and the information they need, it generates records that contain data that are relevant and important to users thereby adding value to the services that the academic libraries render to their clientele. RDA is based on internationally established principles, models and standards. It is designed with the user in mind, using terminology that users understand and it helps in meeting their information needs. (Robare, 2012; Chang 2014)

Value-Added Dissemination of Information

In order to satisfy users of the library, the information that the library resources contain should be disseminated devoid of barriers. In a competitive business environment where libraries and information centres operate today, deliberate attempts should be made to disseminate information most appropriately and professionally so that library users will enjoy value-added services.

Libraries that must compete effectively in this 21st century environment must take advantage of technologies to disseminate information to users so as to have an edge over their competitors. Reference service which is sometimes referred to as the heart of library services should be information technology based; 21st century library that wants to have an edge over their competitors should incorporate social network in reference services.

Libraries that must add value to their services should have catalogues available and accessible anytime and anywhere through technologies. The Web Public Access Catalogue (web PAC) is an example of such catalogue, which enables users to have access to the catalogue anywhere and at anytime through internet access.

Wing (2015) stressed that library catalogue that is interactive using web 2.0 enables the users to have unhindered and unlimited access to the library; similarly, Akpoghome and Idiegbeyan-ose (2010) pointed out that 21st century library should embrace digital catalogue, it enables users to enjoy easy and convenient access to a wide gamut of online library services and resources. This kind of innovativeness enables libraries to have an edge over their competitors.

Matthews (2013) explained that customers perceived value as speed of access, browsing, services, response speed and saving time and immediate. All these are made possible with integration of technologies in libraries. In postulating the need for librarians to deploy web 2.0 to market their library services, he further stressed that Facebook, MySpace are used to promote library services and community building. Facebook enables the library to reach many users and have value added services to them; it increases library impact on users. It is a useful tool for announcement of library services and marketing (Deyrup, 2010; Chan, 2011; Jacobson, 2011; Horn, 2011; Riza and Abrizali 2011). At the same time, it enables the libraries to inform users of library services, communicate with them anytime and anywhere thereby adding value to the services they provide.

Academic libraries can be on competitive edge with the use of social network sites OR media for service delivery in the areas of selective dissemination of information (SDI); abstracting and indexing services, current awareness services (CAS), compilation of bibliography and reading list, new arrival services and so on.

Chen, Chu and Xu (2012) pointed that social network site such as Friendster, LinkedIn, Myspace, Facebook and so on are innovative and effective way of rendering added effective and convenient services to users especially in 21st century.

Ajiah and Kumah (2011) posited that social network sites are technologies that enable the libraries to reach out to their users, they further stressed that libraries use social network sites to announce library services, teach users how to use the library, advertise their newly acquired information resources and so on, these services have embedded value-added inputs to users and enables the libraries to have competitive advantage.

Conclusion

The clamour for widened access and greater demand for higher education in the twenty-first century has necessitated stiff competition among tertiary institutions. Competitive Intelligence approach is required to meticulously scan the competitors' environment with a view to maintaining relevance and gain competitive advantage on the market. It contends that the academic library as a hub of scholarship must constantly seek to apply the principles of value-added services to its operations especially in the area of collection development, processing of library materials and dissemination of information. It is postulated that robust collection coupled with technology driven retrieval system as well as digital reference services would lead to greater user satisfaction and enhanced patronage of library services and resources thereby cumulating to value-added services to the users.

Recommendations

- Library management should think of better ways to render services to users in this 21st century and competitive business environment such as the application of information and communication technologies in library functions and services
- The parent organization should support their library and information centres financially so as to have an edge over their competitors

- Library and information centres should render value-added services to users with the aid of modern technologies that is fast, convenient, outstanding and best practices.
- Library and information centres should practise benchmarking so as to be conversant with best practices and internationalization.
- The management of libraries should carry out Strength, Weakness, opportunity and threat (SWOT) analysis from time to time so as to have competitive edge.
- Training and retraining of staff on best practices in service delivery is essential so as to have competitive advantage over their competitors. This can be on the job and off the job training through well planned staff development programme.

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