# Academic Libraries and the Marketing Mix

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**Abstract:** *Non- profit organisations are usually philanthropic in scope (Wetfeet, 2003). Marketing involves all key procedures used by businesses and non-profit organisations in order to identify and satisfy customer needs and therefore, support products and services. Libraries, as non-profit organisations, should adopt marketing strategies in order to meet user needs and demands.  During the past two decades libraries showed a great interest in adopting marketing strategies to advance their services. Especially, academic libraries, as integral part of their academic communities, realised early the importance of the adoption of marketing strategies.  Research also suggests that, in the information age "librarians should be empowered, decisive and less introverted in order to survive and market their libraries and in order to justify their professional position" (Aharony, 2009: 48).*

*The aim of the present study is to review the existing literature on the topic of marketing mix by providing guidance for its implementation to academic libraries. Then, it examines how the marketing mix elements can be translated, adopted and matched with those of academic libraries services provision. Finally, it discusses the managerial implications of the marketing mix elements (7Ps) implementation in academic libraries.*

*More specifically, the paper summarises the literature on the marketing mix (7Ps) for academic libraries (e.g. Product, Place, Pricing, Promotion, People Physical evidence and Process) attempting to "translate" them into useful policies that should be adopted by academic libraries.*

**Keywords:** *marketing, academic libraries, strategic planning, services marketing, marketing mix, 7Ps*

## 1. INTRODUCTION

Early writings on marketing services can be traced back in the 1970s (McCarthy, 1964), however, in the 80s their further development established it as a new academic field (Berry and Parasuraman, 1995).  Marketing  services has "witnessed an incredible growth of interest in non-profit service providers such as libraries" during the past two decades (Kim and Park, 2006).  The concept of marketing non-profit organisations was initially introduced by Kotler and Levy (1969). According to Kotler (1982: 27) "marketing is the skill of knowing how to plan and manage the organisation's exchange relations with its various publics".

The scope of non- profit organisations is usually philanthropic (Wetfeet, 2003). Non-profit organisations produce services rather than goods. Therefore, marketing of non-profit organisations (such as museum, hospitals, universities, libraries) should be focused on strategic marketing planning (Ewers & Austen, 2004; Kotler, 1982; Wood and Young, 1998). However, non- profit organisations have been slow in adopting marketing processes and procedures (Garoufallou at al., 2009; Adeyoyin, 2005; Litten, 1980; Kotler, 1979).  According to Yorke (1993: 17) marketing is more like "corporate philosophy" and "it is there to achieve its corporate objectives by giving customer satisfaction".

Libraries, as non-profit organisations, should adopt marketing strategies in order to meet user needs and demands, such as, view their users as customers (Rowley, 2000) understand their needs, the environment in which they operate and the social factors influencing them (Ewers and Austen, 2004).  Additionally, they need to shift their attention "from the size of the library collection to the services being offered" (Jose and Bhat, 2007) and focus to product development and customer satisfaction (Gupta, 2003).  Research also suggests that, in the information age "librarians should be empowered, decisive and less introverted in order to survive, to market their libraries and in order to justify their professional position" (Aharony, 2009: 48).

## 2. AIM/METHODOLOGY OF THE PAPER

The main aim of the present study is to review the existing literature on the topic of marketing mix by providing guidance for its implementation to academic libraries. In other words, this forms a conceptual paper that aims to summarise and synthesise the main arguments and ideas presented in the existing literature of marketing mix, seeking to ensure that

requirements of the marketing mix can be translated, adopted and matched with those of academic libraries services provision. Then, it examines the managerial implications of the marketing mix elements (7Ps) implementation in academic libraries.

This study mainly surveyed scholarly articles and books presenting their critical points. However, it needs to be pointed out that the literature linking together "marketing mix" and "academic libraries" is limited. Furthermore, Greek literature or even Greek research published in English does not exist. Therefore, the present paper can be used by academic librarians as a tool aiming to assist them in pursuing marketing objectives and adopting the marketing mix elements.

## 3. THE MARKETING MIX APPLICATION TO ACADEMIC LIBRARIES

The Marketing mix is the concept of identifying a number of policies to be adopted by managers to suit consumers' needs in providing marketing strategies and programmes (Palmer, 2004). The 7Ps of service marketing can be identified as: **P**roduct, **P**rice, **P**rocesses, **P**lace, **P**hysical Evidence, **P**romotion and **P**eople.

### 3.1 Product

The product offered by an academic library could be represented by a number of services such as: Traditional services (loans, photocopying and printing facilities, reference desk, information processing, provision of computer facilities) Electronic services (electronic journals, online databases, Web access 24/7 and website navigability (Ewers and Austen, 2004) virtual reference services, social media virtual learning environment) Educational services (active support of educational process, user training and education, support of distance-learners, organising seminars and events).

Easy and timely access to library information resources is of paramount importance contributing to the overall user satisfaction (McKnight, 2008; Saunders, 2008). Literature also indicates that longer opening hours are required in order to match student work load and assignments (Balabanidou et al., 2009; Breivik and Gee, 2006; Gardner and Eng, 2005; Gibbons, 2001; Jordon, 1998).

Additionally, ICT provides libraries with the unique opportunity "to reach their customers in faster and efficient ways" (Jose and Bhat, 2007: 25). In this context the ProSeBiCA project suggested a conjoint analysis as a tool for the strategic development of German academic libraries (Hermelbracht and Koeper, 2006). The project generated a list with more than 250 services' ideas including:

- Unique user card for all electronic library systems, Home delivery service for books, Media work stations in the library, Virtual "ask a librarian" agents on the web, Information about loan accounts via SMS Online auctions with used old books from students, Water dispensers in the library, Provision of video conferencing, Online self-administration of user accounts, 3D multimodal search engine, Support for voice-enabled browsing, Web cam communication with libraries, Open access platform for scientific publishing (Hermelbracht and Senst, 2006: 302).

Furthermore, Ewers and Austen (2004) suggest that client segmentation is also important in identifying different service requirements of each segment, applying appropriate communications strategies, allocating resources accordingly and deciding on the most "critical" client segment. They propose that academic library user segmentation should be based on type, level of studies, information seeking behaviors, attendance and age.

### 3.2 Price

Literature discusses factors affecting pricing decisions and pricing policies (Rowley, 1997) and also suggests that there are pros and cons of pricing library services, providing arguments in support of both sides of the debate in favor of and against user fees. However, pricing policies are mainly linked to profit maximization and user benefits (Casper, 1979).

Libraries are usually "reluctant" in pricing their products and users believe that library services should be free. However, "people may not mind spending on services if they are convinced of its worth" (Jose, 1995: 25). Therefore, libraries could adopt a pricing policy for different types of services (Jose and Bhat, 2007: 25).
Academic libraries could charge specific types of services such as on-line services, use of photocopying, use of printers and books delays, interlibrary loans, and charges for external users.

### 3.3 Place

In marketing mix literature the element of "place" mainly refers to the way in which the product reaches the costumer, namely, the distribution channels, as well as the coverage and the outlet locations (Kotler, 1976). Evidence from the information science literature suggests that the concepts of 'place' and 'physical evidence' are used interchangeably, as authors do not seem to differentiate between them (Jose and Bhat, 2007; Ewers and Austen, 2004).

In academic libraries literature "place", mainly refers to the distribution of the library services through its various branches (if any).  Issues to be considered are the location of the branches, their accessibility by the library users, and the provision of different services by different branches.  Ewers and Austen (2004) comment that a signage policy can ensure that both permanent and temporary signs are consistent and clear across all branches. Additionally, promotional signs and library promotional publications should be professionally designed and displayed in purpose built display units.

### 3.4 Promotion

Promotion is the marketing communication and the creation of messages based on the characteristics and preferences of the target audience. The choice of the promotion policies is based on a number of criteria such as cost, size and user profile. The policy profile should be consistent with the image of the message to be broadcasted.  According to Ewers and Austen (2004) marketing communication falls into two broad categories, the promotion of a specific or new service and the ongoing promotions and communications of existing ones. Therefore, libraries should use all the communication channels that users may be accustomed to.  For example the increasing popularity of social media use, among youths, has already driven academic libraries in the adoption of such media (Facebook, Twitter etc).

Promotion policies should include advertising, posters, fliers, the library website, the organisation of seminars, workshops and conferences, event planning, and the participation in state, European and international programs. According to Jose and Bhat, (2007: 25) "library which is dedicated to achieving complete customer satisfaction indirectly promotes its services". After all, positive "word of mouth" is considered to be one of the strongest and most effective promotional policies.

Communication strategies applied by Australian University libraries included Web News (about new resources or services through the library's website), print newsletters  (circulated to academic staff and postgraduate students), Web Page assistance, personal selling (service points, visits and email contacts with academic staff), publications, email lists, broadcast emails (as reminders of services) (Ewers and Austen, 2004).

International library associations such as IFLA (International Federation of Library Associations and Institutions) and ALA (American Library Association) provide information material toolkits, procedures and  strategies, marketing resources, promotional materials, best practices and communication plan workbooks, all  aiming to encourage  promotion strategies of library services (ALA, 2011; IFLA, 2011).  Examples of best promotional practices and campaigns in academic libraries and marketing application cases can also be found in the literature (Mu, 2007; Broady-Preston *et al*., 2006; Song, 2006; Helton and Esrock, 1998).  Slebodnik (2006) created a "webliography", including promotional publications such as brochures, newsletters, blogs, and web pages of library liaison programs, aiming "to provide examples of materials and approaches that are being used for marketing and outreach" by science and technology libraries.

### 3.5 People

In services marketing, the human factor plays a key role in the type of service experienced by the customer and the quality of services offered. The customer (library user) contacts daily the library staff, that is the producer of services, therefore, staff appearance and especially behaviour is an important element, which moulds and shapes the experience of users. Several studies have repeatedly shown that user satisfaction on provision of services heavily relies on the librarian's behaviour (Kuruppu, 2007; Radford, 2006; Jardine, 1995; Dewdney & Sheldrick, 1994). Even if a specific information need is satisfied, if the librarian's behaviour is not "appropriate" the user tends to leave the library dissatisfied (Siatri, 2004; Gatten & Ratcliff, 2001). Other aspects that academic libraries should pay attention to in  relation to their personnel characteristics, that may affect the People feature of the marketing mix, is life-long learning, appropriate and updated training in services provision, appearance, courtesy, work efficiency, communication skills and interpersonal behaviour, commitment, incentives and attitudes (Booms and Bitner, 1981).

### 3.6 Physical Evidence

Physical Evidence is considered to be a separate element of the marketing mix.  The customer's perceptions are based on received stimuli from the environment in which services are provided.  User impressions and the library image are significantly affected by the library building itself, its architecture, entrance, size, location, its accessibility provision for the disabled and interior architecture.  Physical Evidence also considered being the aspects of the internal decoration such as furnishing, colours, lighting, air conditioning, ergonomics, the allocated space for individual study, space layout, the relaxation area etc.

Ewers and Austen (2004) emphasised the need for spaces suitable for individual and group study, training, lounges, eating and socialising areas. Australian university libraries, recognising the need in recent years, introduced such spaces through building renovation and in any new buildings constructed. Booms and Bitner (1981) examined aspects relating to furnishing, colour, layout, noise level, facilitating goods.   Location accessibility and distribution coverage is discussed by

Kotler (1976). Support of silent study (Morgan and Atkinson, 2000) and facilitation of group work (Vondracek, 2007; Gardner and Eng, 2005; Morgan and Atkinson, 2000) are also considered essential factors.

Brophy (2005) introduces the flexible use of workstations and computers, and Gardner and Eng (2005) viewed academic libraries as spaces for social interaction encouraging the creation of new services as cafes. In a recent study by Jones et al. (2011) visibility of the book collection assisted by furniture changes, rotation of themed book displays and provision of digital and print signage was found to increased circulation of books. Additionally, infrastructure namely equipment, software updates, provision of Internet access, Internet speeds also play an important role as nowadays, academic libraries also need to consider what is called a "Virtual space" (Jose and Bhat, 2007).

### 3.7 Process
Processes in academic libraries are the procedures, policies and flow of activities by which services are acquired (Booms and Bitner, 1981). Inefficient procedures do not leave indifferent customers. They can cause resentments that might pose a threat to the relationship between library and its users. On the contrary, efficient procedures are perceived as a quality element and a comparative advantage. The effectiveness of library procedures could be measured through automation procedures aiming to user satisfaction, borrowing procedures that can be huddled by the user himself, on-line reservations and renewals, on-line applications for loans, interlibrary loans, reservations, and book renewal, on-line application for library card, user friendly web sites, frequent website updates, provision of electronic services and electronic resources, "Ask the Librarian" services, application of Lib 2.0 tools. According to Jose and Bhat (2007) customer-focused help services (face-to-face, email and telephone) with a problem solving approach are also important.

### 4. CONCLUDINGS REMARKS AND MANAGERIAL IMPLICATIONS
The literature review has exposed the lack of marketing strategic planning in libraries. This issue needs to be addressed if libraries want to exploit the full potential of their provided services. Librarians need to be educated through seminars and training courses as an "answer for removing the library marketing barriers at the conceptual and operational levels so that marketing becomes a higher priority" (Singh, 2009: 25).

Adopting the marketing mix elements brings several implications to academic libraries services and outlines strategies and policies that can be summarised in the following steps. Initially, the academic library should focus on identifying and understanding its customer needs mainly through market research applying both quantitative and qualitative research. Then it needs to pay attention to each marketing mix element individually. Based on the finding of the market research on what the customers require, the academic library should:

- create useful products and services aiming to assist the users (product)
- distribute library services through its various branches, understanding what the users want and where they want to use it (place)
- aim to have satisfied users and then plan effective marketing strategies using the appropriate communication channels adopted by the users themselves (web 2.0 tools nowadays) (promotion)
- pay attention to personnel behavior and communication skills, information services skills, and train personnel accordingly (people)
- consider the environment as an important element strongly linked to user satisfaction and pay attention to both internal and external architecture, physical and virtual space (physical evidence)
- develop effective procedures, policies and flow of activities that aim to user satisfaction, by paying attention to automation procedures and procedures that can be handled by the users themselves (process)
- charge specific types of services if necessary (price).

And last but not least there is a need for constant vigilance and evaluation of predetermined aims and objectives. Does current practices and services still correspond to their initial aim? Does the situation call for a shift in practice? What do my users need? These are some questions that is important to be answered and evaluated accordingly on a regular basis in order to achieve the highest possible rate of satisfied users.

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