



ISSN 2278 – 0211 (Online)

Information Pricing and Entrepreneurship in Libraries and Information Centres: The Challenges in Nigeria

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Abstract;

Information pricing and entrepreneurship in library and information profession is a new development in Nigeria. Although, the Nigeria society is still years behind as to modern best practices when compared to the developed nations. Efforts have been made by librarians and information managers to introduce the new trend of pricing and marketing of information, however, this new idea is facing a lot of challenges which is serving as a clog in the wheel of development in library and information profession in Nigeria. This paper examined these challenges with a view to recommending appropriate solution.

Key words: Information pricing, entrepreneurship, information policy, information infrastructure

1. Introduction

Interest in information phenomena has increased dramatically during the 20th century, and today are objects of study in a number of disciplines, including philosophy, physics, biology, linguistics information and computer science, electronic and communication engineering, management science and social sciences. Due to its interdisciplinary nature, each discipline defines information from the perspectives that suits its purposes. Ajibero (2002) defined information as “the facts and opinion provided and received during the course of day life and that one obtains information directly from other living beings, from mass media, from electronic databank and from all sorts of observable phenomena in the surrounding and information organized in according to some logical relationship is referred to as a body of knowledge. Information is the knowledge accumulated by people in different forms and sources which can be used in making rational decision by individuals, civil organizations, governments etc (Okwilagwe, 1993). Atinmo (2001) sees information as a raw data from which knowledge is derived and as what we need when we face a choice and that the amount of information needed depends on the complexity of the choice. We can infer from the above definitions that there are varieties of definitions of information each person looks at it from his/her own perspective. From all the definitions above, information can be defined as the opinion, data, facts and result of study or research derived from any sources or media, gathered processed, analyzed, classified scientifically or empirically established that increased the knowledge of its users, remove uncertainty and enhanced planning, decision-making and control of individuals, civil organization, governments etc.

Libraries and information centers are saddled with the responsibility of providing information services to meet the information needs of people in a given society. The services rendered by these information outlets are basically free since information is regarded as essential commodity and an indispensable instrument for planning, decision making and economic management. The fallout of this system over the years in Nigeria is a continuous growth of sub-standard service delivery due to inadequate resources and finance of library and information centers especially those owned by government.

As a result of the above situation, it then becomes pertinent that libraries and information centers in Nigeria should provide products and services for a fee to make for their inadequate funding and budget provisions. Information dissemination is a business like activity, hence the need for information pricing and entrepreneurship in library and information centers in Nigeria. Popoola (2007) recognized that there is paradigm shift today from the philosophy of free based information services provision to either cost recovery or profit making provision to clients

2. Objectives of the Study

The objectives of this paper are to:

- Do a general overview of pricing and entrepreneurship in library and information centers.
- Examine the challenges faced by information entrepreneurship in library and information centers,
- Make appropriate recommendation.

3. Literature Review

Information has become a critical economic resource and a means of creating wealth. Interest in the phenomenon of information has increased dramatically since the twentieth century till today. They are the objects of study in many disciplines. The significance of information today can be appreciated in the upsurge of information activities culminating in what is now termed the information service industry, world-over. Popoola (1998) is of the view that more than ever before, the role of information is dominating human life, including government and business activities and the provision of information has become the fastest growing service industry. Adetoro (2003) emphasized that information is a commodity like other goods and services that can be exchanged in monetary terms because it possesses a value to the consumer or user who may be an individual or corporate body. He further stated that no society whether developed or developing can aspire to greater heights economically, socially, politically and technologically without adequate and unhindered flow of information. This is a major reason why information now attracts high premium in the scheme of national priority in developed countries.

4. Libraries, Information Centres and Information

While some people regard "library" and information centre" as interchangeable terms, the use of information centre service implies broader function and high levels of service (Christainson, King and Ahrenstold, 1996). From this assertion, it is clear that information centers are library but information centers places more emphasis on information. The common feature of both libraries and information centers is that they are all information system that acquire, analyze, process, store, retrieve and disseminate complete information to individual, organizations, government etc for planning, decision making and control.

A library of whatever type or designation is basically involved in the practical organization and retrieval of information in service to people with information needs. Traditionally, libraries and information centers are associated with collections of books to meet these needs, but today information in many formats has become the stock in trade of libraries and information centers. Such as compact discs, photographs, video tapes, newspapers, magazines, bibliographic databases and internet resources. The new development in science and technology especially information communication technology (ICT) and the emergence of computer and telecommunication infrastructures has widened the scope of operations and the services provided by libraries and information centers as new methods and techniques for acquiring, processing, strong, retrieving and disseminating information has been developed. New dimensions of modern information systems lie in their ability to manipulate information automatically as a result of representing symbolic information in digital forms. Computer – based information systems are able to perform analysis, calculations at levels of complexity and efficiency far exceeding human capacity (New Encyclopedia Britannia, 1998).

Libraries and information centers are moving from being print – centered to electronic – centered; from collecting to accessing and from serving primary in-house and remote users (Abel Kantor and Saracevic, 1996).

The paper collections have given place to networked – computer resident, user searchable collecting like bibliographic databases, Online Public Access Catalogues (OPAC) obliterating the need for the user to visit the library building. With the digitalization of ever increasing number of collections and advances made in computer/communication and software seamless access to digitized information located in geographically diverse locations has become a reality.

From the ongoing, it is obviously seen that libraries and information centers are no longer collections of books and other printed materials alone as their services to their patrons is now beyond library building as users can now access and use the library materials from any geographic location without visiting the library building, the development now tagged or termed virtual or digital library. Through digital or virtual library services like online information services, CD ROM information searching, electronic document delivery service, electronic mail (e-mail) service, internet services, are now available. Popoola (2007) and Aina (2004) list the following information services rendered by libraries and information centers.

- Reference and referral services
- Photocopying services
- Current awareness service
- Document delivery service
- Statistical data analysis
- Postal or courier service
- Telephone/telex service
- Facsimile service
- Selective dissemination of information
- Internet/e-mail service
- Computer word processing
- Bindery and lamination

- Translation
- Consulting
- Video rentals
- Technical writing
- Information working
- Microfilming
- Indexing and abstracting
- Loaning of information materials
- Software production

Nawe, Julita (1993) posits that the mission of libraries and information centers is serving information needs of clientele and communicating information resources is a key element of that mission. Advances in information technology have raised user's expectations of information provision in terms of quality of service and speed delivery. According to Nawe (1993), in the developed countries and in some developing countries, information service no longer recognizes national boundaries. According to her: "It is now possible for most libraries and information centers to use external services of one kind or another on a demand basis to supply many of the needs previously met by anticipatory acquisition and local recordings"

5. Entrepreneurship in Library and Information Centers

The philosophy behind the management and provision of information goods and services is based on two schools of thoughts i.e. the conservative and the liberal schools of thought. The conservatives are of the opinion that information products and services should be made available to users at no extra cost. This notion is based on the belief that information is a public good and the library and information services are social services that should be freely available to users. The view of this school is well represented by Tymbios (1996) when he said: "Charging fee for time and expertise has always been an important part of most professions. Libraries and information centers were since Middle Ages, part of a bigger structure (such as the church or state) and therefore free in terms of users having to pay directly for the use of the libraries. Tymbios statement shows that traditionally libraries and information centers provide free services to their clients and does not charge because the cost is being shouldered by the larger organization. The liberal school of thought however perceives information as a commodity which must be traded in monetary terms. This school of thought also belief that information generation, processing, storage and dissemination to users cost money and must be paid for, either for profit making or at least for cost recovery. This second school of thought holds the view that there must be paradigm change for libraries and information centers to remain relevant and fulfill their responsibilities in the scheme of the new-world order. If the libraries and information centers did not understand the environmental changes and did not effectively position themselves they may become part of history (Verspry, 1994). This view was corroborated by Broughton, Blackburn and Vickers (1991) that "many librarians still remain fiercely protective of tradition of free library service, but they face being pushed out of the market by their commercially minded colleagues in the private sector". The position of these apostles of change was hinged on the new trends in the world especially the New World Order that placed information in a prominent position. Prominent among the factors that informed the position of the new school of thought is the world economic recession. The downturn in the world economy has resulted in decrease budget, reduced capital expenditure, huge debt and debt servicing, total collapse of the social structure etc. As a solution to these myriads of economic imbroglio, many economic recovery measures were introduced like austerity measure and the IMF and World Bank prescribed solution i.e. the Structural Adjustment Programmes (SAP) with its offsprings of privatization and commercialization of public enterprises for profit and self sustenance. Most of the institutions affected by this ugly and unfortunate economic crises and policy measures are funding libraries and information centers under them and the spillover of this misfortune are equally shared by these libraries as paucity of fund has drastically incapacitated them from buying new books, scribes to new journals and renew the old ones automate their libraries for modern and value added services, offset telephone bills and fill the staff vacancies. Alegbeleye (1993) summed up the financial problems of the libraries and archival institutions up when he said "Libraries and Archival institutions have reached a critical stage in their development and maintenance".

With the transition from traditional library operations and services to advanced digital and electronic libraries and services as a result of development of sophisticated information and communication technologies new methods and techniques have emerged, as information hitherto available only in printed form could be made available in different forms and formats like, text, voice, image (still and moving). These technologies are not only expensive in their installation but also in operation and maintenance. From the foregoing, it is glaring that libraries and information centers are confronted with the twin problems of finances and evolution of new technologies which requires a lot of financial resources and which the funding agencies or organizations could not bear. To overcome or at least solve parts of these problems, libraries and information centers have to look elsewhere for ways of generating income internally to make for the shortfall in their finance. Nkanga (1999) posits that "marketing has the potential to increase the special library and information centre chances of survival and help them flourish through relevance and productivity among others". Crawford (1988) in supporting the liberal school of thought asserts that: "If information is power in this wired world, a concept now popular in the corporate world, business must be willing to pay the price and they are. In short when dealing with those who recognize and treat information as a commodity and who use it for profit, libraries and information centers must be prepared to do the same". If the assertions above are to be realized in libraries and information centers as custodians of information and librarians as information professionals there must be a mutually beneficial exchange relationship between the producers and custodians of information on one hand and consumers of information on the other hand. Therefore a holistic process of planning, pricing promotion

and distribution of information goods and services to present and potential consumers must evolve. This is the heart of entrepreneurship. However, Edoke (1991) noted that Nigerian libraries and information centers especially the government owned ones has been reluctant in offering information services for a fee. This hesitation is becoming fatal and a negation of the current world trend in service delivery.

6. Entrepreneurship and Information Pricing

In a general view of entrepreneurship, Alegbeleye (2000) said it is the process through which entrepreneurs create, mature and grow enterprises. He further stated that the entrepreneurship concept has to a reasonable degree initiative, imagination, creativity and willingness on the part of the entrepreneur to think constructively and conceptually so that change can be transformed into opportunities. How can the desired change in information provision through entrepreneurship be beneficial to the library and information center and information users?

7. Information Pricing

Pricing of information basically refers to placing monetary value on information products and services. Adetoro N. (2003) recognizes pricing as a subset of marketing mix which an entrepreneur could use to generate funds or earn revenue in order to achieve desired goals. Geethamanda, H. (1993) defines pricing as: "a dynamic, multistage process in which theoretically, the pricing objective (determined by management with the organization's overall goals in mind) produces pricing policy which is in turn is translating into pricing practices".

Traditionally libraries and information centers service goals have been to minimize costs, to limit losses to a budget amount, and to maintain standards of service. However the entrepreneur's pricing objective is that information services should pay for themselves through:

- Recovering of cost
- Recovering of equipment and management cost
- Profit
- Social benefit

Gethananda (1993) suggested that the pricing structure should be based on costs. In such a situation, the need for accurate and complete cost data need not be stressed. The value of the information, staff costs, equipment costs, printing, and paper postage and in case of electronic retrieval and dissemination of information, the debit time and cost of e-transaction should be built into the cost.

8. Challenges of Information Pricing and Entrepreneurship in Libraries and Formation Centers in Nigeria

Geethananda, Hemamalee (1993) quoting zais, Harriet W. (1977) says "Lack of data on demand for information services when fees are involved, and also because of ignorance in the market as to the value of information. While consumers are accustomed to pay for legal and medical information, until recently there has been no precedent for paying directly for what is considered library type information traditionally provided without a charge to the user - there has been no "known price" in the market place for bibliographic information of the kind dispensed by libraries and information centers"

In Nigeria it is sometimes difficult to find a 'going rate' for bibliographic information on which the entrepreneur can base prices. Again, Mchombu (1991) noted that only about 7.5 percent of the population in Botswana, between 2 and 3 percent of that in Kenya, and not more than 1 to 2 percent in Tanzania use Libraries and information centers. These examples are typical of African countries including Nigeria. The extremely low level of use and the very weak impact of library and information services in Africa is a reflection of serious and complex problems. These may emanate from the service providers or from their consumers or both. The justification for providing services lies in their usefulness which is reflected in the market value. The market value is always determined by the consumers. However, information professionals in

Nigeria cites various problems associated with the consumers of information: -

- Nigerian readers have not developed the reading habit.
- The high rate of illiteracy, especially in rural areas and urban Shanty towns, means that people do not appreciate libraries and information centers and their use.
- Students read only to pass examination and stop reading when their examinations are over.

Furthermore, there is a low level of awareness by Nigerian government on the idea of information as an important factor and strategy in the process of national development. Popoola (2002) posits that "in African countries, national information policy is not given due consideration, the information infrastructure are not developed. They are not considered as social and economic infrastructure to support the production of goods and services". When this happens, a low level of information demand occurs because of low government patronage and the information entrepreneur will face the problem of pricing because of low demand. Another vexing challenge of pricing and entrepreneurship in libraries and Information centers in Nigeria is the overall low competence and propensity in incorporating large amounts of innovative information into goods and services being produced. Popoola (2002) noted that information can be used as a means of improving the productivity and competitiveness of firms. In an organization, the introduction of information through direct access or brokerage can greatly improve the efficiency with which clerical and administrative duties are carried out, thus reducing costs. Also, ensuring that production managers are better informed about flows of work, stocks and inventories and the requirements of customers can increase the efficiency with which equipment and resources are used. Another challenge of information pricing and entrepreneurship in Nigeria is the lack of information infrastructure. The transition to an

information-intensive economic system and the development of the information services sector require investment in the infrastructure. The workforce need to be educated and trained so that information skills are common place in addition to creating and developing a legislative and regulatory framework to provide both protection and the freedom for information services sector to expand (Popoola, 2002).

There is also the need for telecommunications network capable of transmitting information and ready access to the most current information technology. Another recurring challenge of information pricing and entrepreneurship in library and information centers in Nigeria is the inadequate budgetary provision for library and information centre's management. Although information pricing is to complement and possibly remove dependence on budgetary provision from parent bodies, the initial resources needed for takeoff is capital intensive staff must be trained and equipment acquired and various marketing strategies put in place.

9. Conclusion

Information pricing and entrepreneurship in libraries and information centers in Nigeria is at the developmental stage hence the various challenges faced by information entrepreneurs in appropriate pricing policy, while at the same time maintaining their social responsibilities. It is however, imperative from the study that information services have gone beyond the traditional library functions due to the global advancement in Information Communication Technology (ICT). Therefore the cost of information, goods and services are escalating and these costs must be mitigated by cost recovering measures by libraries and information centers in Nigeria.

10. Recommendation

Pricing and marketing information in libraries and information centers in Nigeria should be integrated into our information tasks generally. It should be seen as a strategic option especially in today's information intensive society for the generation of funds to keep information services afloat. The emphasis for this century is to bring the world closer together in information sharing and handling in a rather sophisticated manner than we have ever seen. There is also the need for libraries to join the digital methods of handling information so that added value priced information services can be easily rendered.

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