Harnessing Innovations in Nigerian Academic Libraries: A Survival Strategy

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Abstract
Academic libraries can no longer continue to assume that their services had such intrinsic merit that users automatically resort to them; neither can they afford to use yesterday's method to meet today's information needs. For academic libraries to do either of these is to prepare to go into extinction. Times have changed so much, and users and their needs have changed so much more. For the library to remain relevant therefore it has to change with the times and one of the authentic ways to achieve that is to innovate. This paper is about harnessing innovations in Nigerian academic libraries as a survival strategy. The paper defined key concepts, highlighted reasons for innovation in academic libraries, discussed harnessing innovations in academic libraries in general and Nigerian academic libraries in particular. Lack of awareness of benefits of innovation and the absence of innovation content in Nigerian library schools' curricula were among the challenges facing innovation in Nigerian academic libraries. Based on the challenges identified, recommendations were made to address the challenges.

Key words: Academic libraries, Innovation, Nigeria, Survival strategy

1.1 Introduction

The phrase 'Innovate or die' is a popular slogan in the business world, which profit oriented firms and nonprofit organizations alike must not take for granted if they must survive in the prevailing stiff competitive business environment. Academic libraries have long enjoyed the reputation as the "heart of the university". Library users traditionally visited a library building to conduct research, locate and retrieve items from the collection, or consult a librarian at the reference desk. But the advent of digital technologies has brought with itself the emergence of what is referred to as disruptive innovations that are gradually replacing academic libraries in the information seeking process. Yeh and Walter (2016) observed that the emergence of various Internet-related innovations such as Google Scholar, has been gradually moving faculty and students away from their libraries altogether: Instead of walking up to a reference desk or using the chat program to seek help from a reference librarian, they rely on various free web resources as the first step

in information seeking; instead of using library materials, they rely on Google Scholar to locate resources and instead of utilizing library subscribed journals, they peruse open journals and repositories.

As this trend continues, academic libraries are brought under mounting pressure to demonstrate their value. Library professionals as a whole are increasingly concerned that academic libraries may one day become largely irrelevant to their users. It is interesting to note however, that the seemingly challenge of the advent of the digital technologies has also brought with itself opportunities for libraries to look inward and take responsive actions that will get them back as the life-wire of the institutions of higher learning, to which they are attached. It is noted that libraries of all status and sizes are living in a moment in which they are juxtaposed between their traditional role as a respected cultural institution and their emerging role as a dynamic platform for progress.

In this knowledge-based economy innovation is no longer simply the "creation of something new" but also a panacea for the solution of broad range of problems. For academic libraries to achieve and sustain improvement on their services to meet the changing information needs of the academic community, innovation becomes imperative. It is the view of Brundy (2015) that the urgency to innovate affects both academic libraries of different status and sizes.

The focus of this paper is harnessing innovations in academic libraries in Nigeria as a survival strategy. The paper presents the background and definition of key concepts. It discusses reasons for innovation in academic libraries, harnessing innovations in Nigerian academic libraries as survival strategy, as well as highlights challenges of engaging in innovation in academic libraries. The paper finally proffers some recommendations and draws a conclusion.

2.1 Review of Related Literature

Academic libraries are libraries that are attached to institutions of higher learning to serve two complementary purposes of supporting the curriculum of the institutions and to support the research activities of the institutions' staff and students. Academic libraries play a very essential and fundamental role in higher education. These libraries acquire, process and organize the basic information sources and disseminate the vital information to students, staff and the research scholars for the growth of the higher education.

Innovation is the adoption of ideas, practices and technologies perceived to be new by an organization involved (Damanpour and Gopalakrishnan, 1998). Rogers (1995:11) defines innovation as "any idea, practice or object that is perceived to be new by an individual or other unit of adoption". Innovation involves adoption of new products and/or processes to increase competitiveness and profitability. It is a process that involves new ways of identifying the needs of new and existing clients. It is implementing something new that adds value or quantifiable gain (Horth & Vehar, 2014).

Innovation in the service sector such as the library is defined as a process of producing or delivering services as well as significant difference in the way services are delivered or produced. In the context of the academic libraries specifically, innovation may be broadly defined as including changes in existing library service programs according to the changing needs of users, new service programs that are enabled by new digital technologies and new services that support new paradigms of teaching and research.

Walter and Lankes (2015), note that the development of social media generates volumes of data that could be utilized for teaching and research. However, efficient access to those data requires commercial tools that are currently, for the most part, not

supported by academic libraries. Academic libraries can support research needs for social media data by redefining their services to include access to tools that are needed for data collection. In addition to the foregoing, myriad public and private secondary data sets are available for teaching and research. However, identifying those secondary data sources or obtaining them is a service innovation that will fill a gaping hole in users' information needs. Furthermore, there are a good number of people, including staff and students in the academic setting who do not know anything about the services of the libraries, marketing the library services to such potential users will equally fill a significant gap. Today's academic librarians should no longer be contented with sitting behind the reference desk answering mere reference questions but should rather be active marketers who sell the library's services to members of the academic community at every given opportunity.

2.2 Types of Innovation

Innovation may be categorized into as many types as a particular author views the concept. The major categories that are also relevant to the library and information profession are briefly discussed below:

i.   *Service innovation:* a process of producing or delivering services as well as significant difference in the way services are delivered or produced. Kjos (2013) defined service innovation as a multi-stage process whereby organizations transform ideas into new or improved services in order to advance, compete and differentiate themselves successfully in their marketplace.

ii. *Process innovation:* implementing new or significantly improved production or delivery methods

iii. *Organizational innovation:* creating or changing business structures, practices and models

iv. *Marketing innovation:* developing alternative marketing techniques to deliver improved product and or services and

v.   *Technological innovation:* a process of adopting technological tools for improved product and or service delivery.

2.3 Innovation Process

Process is a word that simply means series of activities that are undertaken in order to achieve a desired result. Innovation process therefore implies all the stages that an idea needs to pass through to become innovation. It is a sort of cycle that begins with idea conception through to implementation, and in the case of failure, goes back to the stage of idea conception or generation again. Depending on the author's opinion, the innovation process can be categorized into a number of stages. Basically we have about four or five stages of innovation process, these are:

1. *Idea generation and mobilization:* This is the stage when new ideas are created and moved to different physical or logical location, such as outside the organization or another department within the organization.

2. *Advocacy and screening:* It is obvious that not all ideas generated are worth implementing. This stage therefore affords the organization to evaluate an idea and measure its potential benefits and problems. The future of an idea is formed or decided at this stage. Neese (2015) asserts that the joint processes of advocacy and screening has the advantage of refinement. He posits that if the idea has potentials, discussions and arguments help enhance it.

3. *Experimentation stage:* This is the stage at which the idea is tested with prototype or pilot test. It is important to note here that the experimentation does not test an idea's objective merits, but the suitability for a particular organization at a particular time. Neese (2015) notes that some ideas might be ahead of their time or beyond the current capacity of the organization, such ideas he said might be set aside into an idea bank or idea library for development at a later time.

4. *Commercialization stage:* This stage aims to create market value for an idea by focusing on its potential impact. This step makes the idea appealing to the audience, such as by packaging an idea with other ideas, clarifying how and when the idea can be used, and using data or prototypes from experiments to demonstrate benefits.

5. *Diffusion and implementation stage:* Diffusion is the company-wide acceptance of an innovative idea, and implementation sets up everything needed to develop and utilize or produce the innovation. Neese (2015) points out that the use or application of the innovation should be demonstrated by the end of this stage, along with acceptance of the innovation. For the innovation to succeed, it will need the proper resources, a marketing plan for customers and an open culture with strong advocacy. Also important to diffusion and implementation is the opportunity for future ideas; this final stage allows the organization to determine the next set of needs for customers. Receiving feedback, in addition to indicators for success metrics and other benchmarks, enables the organization to stimulate the innovation process once again.

The Chartered Institute of Management Accountants has categorized innovation into the following four stages:

1. *Concept stage:* This stage is concerned about idea generation and concepts and assessing the ideas so generated against strategic fit, market opportunity, organizational impact and the chances of success to decide which are worth exploring further

2. *Feasibility stage:* At this stage selected projects are further developed based on an evaluation of market acceptability. The investment risk/reward, and the availability of the required resources such as people, facilities and finance

3. *Development stage:* This stage relies on satisfactory feedback of product prototype or pilot test, evaluation of likely competitor response, and ability to deliver the required supply chain, marketing and pricing/margins which will determine market launch and

4. *Implementation stage:* This stage is concerned with execution of the innovation business plan, monitoring the launch and performing post launch reviews to understand whether the implementation has been successful and what changes need to be made.

2.4 Why Academic Libraries need to Innovate

There are numerous new technologies that are having major influence on the way libraries provide services and new application of established technologies are constantly emerging, giving rise to increased decline in patronage of academic libraries. For instance, library users are increasingly becoming more and more comfortable just staying with their computers or Android phones to browse the net rather than come to the libraries with large stock of outdated materials. "The pace of

technological innovation as presented indifferent formats has become necessary for libraries of higher institutions in Nigeria to use computers, computer networks and other associated technologies in their organization for providing information services to enhance learning, teaching and research at all levels of education in Nigeria" (Esew & Ikyembe,2013).If the understanding of the library's value is based solely on 'getting information' (in a traditional form like a book or through the latest digital technologies); then the long-term health of libraries appears to be at risk. He stressed that competitors with modern business models like Amazon and Google often do a better job of delivering information when and where it is needed.

Similarly, the library users and their needs are constantly changing. For instance, the 21st century library users and their needs are significantly different from those of the 19th or even 20th century, the university community that academic libraries serve is largely made up of youths, majority of whom, are ICT natives or at worst immigrants. This user category wants their information needs met in split seconds. Their lives are characterized by speed (speed of light) to say the least. It is therefore pertinent for academic libraries to understand the new users and their new needs, and to achieve this requires innovation.

In addition, the unprecedented and alarming growing competition in the information sector in this 21st century suggests that the academic libraries will lose their relevance except a drastic change is done to the way they deliver services. The focal point of the competition is access. More than ever, users want to access information relevant to their needs, that is reliable and to access it with less efforts and in a timely manner. So they are ready to stay with whoever can give them what they want. If it is the library that offers them what they desire, they patronize the library, if it is the IT specialist, and if it is Google, they stay with Google. They are just about ready to take it wherever available.

The interaction among all these factors discussed above has brought academic libraries all over the world under mounting pressure to justify their existence. This has left the libraries with no option but to change with the changing world, and changing learning environment. In other words, the only hope of survival for the academic libraries is to innovate to create responsive and convenient services. Although libraries are perceived as structured institutions that are slow to change, today's libraries aim to improve the whole society through promoting knowledge creation and distribution. In line with these trends, libraries need to take the initiative in innovative practices in order to meet the needs of their new role.

Beyond looking great on resume, the emergence of the knowledge-based society which is an environment characterized by rapid change in social, economic, and political influences suggests that only few organizations can remain static and survive with innovation. Unfortunately, the library is not one of such organizations. For the library to remain static is to choose to go into extinction. During the last half of the 20th century, many researchers and practitioners alike were of the opinion that academic libraries must make dramatic changes or face the possibility of being marginalized. Thompson (1982) points out that the pressure for change comes not just from the potentiality of the unrelenting, pervasive impact of technology on library services and collections, but also from the professional paralysis which has made most libraries largely unusable. Jantz (2011) posits that the environments in which the academic libraries find themselves pose unique and significant challenges with regard to identifying the need for major change, providing motivation for

that need, and taking the required action to institutionalize the change. He further emphasized that beyond the boundaries of the institution, the rapid change in information and communication technologies are driving change in the library.

Although Stoffle, Renaud, and Veldof (1996) do not use the language of innovation, they insist that there must be fundamental and irreversible change in what the academic libraries do and how they do it, and that these changes need to come quickly. Neal (2006) reiterates this by suggesting that there will need to be 'a heightened attention to innovation' within the academic library (p. 3). Moreover, Jantz (2011) observes that institutions such as academic libraries do not have the benefit of quantifying their services in terms of profit/loss statements to provide very visual evidence for the need to change; neither do they have a reliable mechanism for measuring outcomes, hence the only proven evidence they have to show is render innovative services. Moreover, the academic library users (students and faculties) comprise a very diverse group who do not typically voice dissatisfaction when they receive mediocre or low quality service, hence high patronage which often comes with innovative services becomes about the only way to measure users' level of satisfaction.

Competitive threats from the external environment may also not be recognized as requiring a response and the need for major change. However, we should always keep in mind that only satisfied customers come back and there are greater chances that a customer who is dissatisfied will find some other suppliers of information to meet his information needs. In order to remain relevant to their customers, Scupola (2010) posits that libraries must follow the fundamental rule of business, which is to supply what is demanded by the market. Hence, it is imperative for academic libraries to innovate in order to keep pace with the needs of a modern information

society.

In a nutshell, it is evident that the advent of modern ICT devices and the ever changing information needs have brought about the stiff competition both from within and without the library; it is also evident that the value of academic libraries is to fulfill users' information needs in teaching and research that are not met elsewhere. Since those unfulfilled information needs have changed and are still changing due to disruptive digital innovations, academic libraries must adopt the response strategy of accelerating innovations that serve the information needs of university community that are unmet elsewhere. Their focus, therefore, must be for the academic libraries to desperately seek to revamp and re-engineer their methods of delivering services to the user community by switching over traditional practices to electronic information systems and services through an innovative approach.

2.5 Harnessing Innovations in Academic Libraries

Academic libraries need to differentiate themselves from other players in the information market. One authentic way to achieve such feat is by harnessing innovations aggressively to meet information needs of their customers like no competitor can. Like broom sticks that are very tiny and incapable of any impact standing individually, but perform wonders of clearing heaps of debris when collected and bound together, so it is with innovation in the library. Individual innovative activities may not make much visible impact but when all the bits are harnessed, the impact can be transformational. The word "harness" is an English word that means to control and use the force or strength of something to produce power or to achieve something. To harness innovations therefore implies, leveraging on new or improved, value-oriented library

services that give the academic libraries' competitors a showdown thereby justifying the existence and essence of the libraries. It is obvious that with increased competition in the world of information, innovation is a factor for survival. Different libraries are engaged with different forms of innovative activities in order to ensure they stay relevant to the institutions they are established to serve. While some are adopting a hybrid approach whereby they are using both traditional as well as new library services, others have radically taken a switch from traditional to new library services, with the sole aim of meeting the new needs of the users.

The new library users still want basic services, which include: competence, reliability, responsiveness, timeliness, honesty and a caring approach. They want assistance with information access, and to be able to use materials in both print and online formats. They want to use library resources effectively with minimum efforts and in a timely manner. To this end, librarians are advised to learn from shops, restaurants and internet cafes and consider a series of strategies. Schmidt suggested the following two strategies:

1. *Badging the library*: she suggested that libraries should employ the use of promotional strategy of branding and badging just like the commercial sectors. The current paper proposes that something as simple as putting up banners at the university's main gate, the library gate as well as around the hostels with the inscription "I welcome both old and new students to school! Please visit me as regularly as possible, every hour spent with me takes you closer to being a 1st class student, I await your visits. Your life-long friend. The Library", could be a good starting point. This kind of thing may go a long way in increasing patronage of the library's resources.

2. *Promotional strategies for new products*: For over the past decade most promotional strategies in the libraries today have been targeted at traditional library services, such as interlibrary loans, special collection and information literacy programs. But new products such as convenient integration of iPods should be developed to meet users' changing requirements. The traditional library services need to change to accommodate users who normally seek the information they need in one place at a time. A search of most libraries' catalogue will help one notice one distinctive change, which is that, libraries have started cataloguing not only items that reside in libraries, but also remote resources, such as electronic and internet resources. This is as a result of cataloguing rules changing slowly to respond to users' need for one-stop shopping, which in itself is innovation.

3.1 Nigerian Academic Libraries Scenario

Nigerian academic libraries like many others around the world have historically been confident that their products had such intrinsic merit that should automatically attract users. They believed that people should use the library anyway. This kind of thinking is regarded by Weingand (1999) as yesterday's thinking. With the mushrooming of new information providers such as cyber cafes, mega-bookstores, online book dealers, the Internet community, consultants and other web-based commercial services operators, libraries cannot continue to assume that they are the only sources of information that people will consult. Hence, libraries are expected to, as a matter of urgency embrace responsive changes in the way they deliver services.

It is true that the Nigerian academic libraries have not proactively engaged in innovation services as they should, it is also

true that not all the academic libraries in Nigeria are oblivious of the times they are in, and the need to seek ways to survive the time,Zaid and Oyelude (2012) note that many academic libraries in Nigeria have creatively and innovatively improved upon their service delivery using a variety of ways and approaches. The challenge is that the innovations are mostly uncoordinated and fragmented. To this end, we see a little innovative service here and there, ranging from automation of housekeeping routines to digitization, to provision of online sources and to marketing.

In Nigeria, the first attempt to automate library operation was made in 1970s. Omoniwa (2001) reported thatsuccessful efforts of first automation of serials records and circulation operations were in 1972 and 1976 respectively at Ahmadu Bello University Library. Bozimo (2006) explains that digitization is alsogaining momentum in Nigeria, to theextent that University libraries of Jos, Obafemi Awolowo and Ahmadu BelloUniversity have digitized their theses and dissertations. Okojie (2007) equally remarks that digitization has made many usersto ignore library catalogues for full texts. Universities of Lagos and Ibadan libraries, for instance, have since provided their users with OPAC. As a matter of fact, the Kenneth Dike Library, University of Ibadan has been fully automated. University of Lagos, University of Ibadan, University of Jos, Obafemi Awolowo University, and Ahmadu Bello University are among the many Nigerian universities whose libraries provide access to e-resources and e-resource centre with internet connectivity that allows users access to global information resources. The study of Anunobi and Onyebinama (2016) reveals that though Federal University of Technology Owerri has gone technological, but this is at the expense of other types of innovations.

3.2 Reasons why Academic Libraries Need to Market their Products

Most Nigerian academic libraries that demonstrate understanding of what is required of them to survive the times, pay so much attention to technological innovation at the expense of other types of innovations as highlighted earlier in this paper. Although a few of them have employed marketing innovation as a strategy for survival. Librarians and other information professionals have to adopt marketing as a tool if they have to exist in the tomorrow environment. The essence of marketing involves finding out what the users want, then setting out to meet those needs.Notably,the librarian of the 21st century is no longerone that sits behind the reference desk answering mere reference questions butrather an active marketer who sells the library's products and services to hiscommunity at every opportunity.It has been pointed out that as librarians we all participate in this process of assessing our users' needs and trying to fulfill then. By so doing, we are already marketing our library information products and services. Prominent among the reasons academic libraries need to market their products and services are:

- Library is no longer the only information service industry. The mega-bookstores, online book dealers, information consultants, the Internet services providers, free web accessproviders and individual customers will not hesitate to market to potential library customers or users.
- Academic libraries compete with other subsets or departments such as faculties and other university units and projects for funds.
- Academic libraries have to market because of the need to maintain relevance and remain connected to the communities they serve.

We must not forget that as individual sticks of broom cannot impact on environment except they are collected and bound together, no more can any single type of innovation bring about the desired change in academic library services, except the different types of innovations applicable to the academic libraries are consciously harnessed.

3.3 Benefits of harnessing innovations

The benefits of harnessing innovations include among others:

- increased use
- institutional visibility
- trainings which the institution will gladly support
- full disposal to fund allocation , and
- there is assurance of survival for any library that dares to harness innovations.

3.4 Challenges of harnessinginnovation in Nigerian academic libraries

- the traditional structured nature of libraries that respects status quo
- fear of failure
- lack of support from library management
- the norms of the profession appear to create a framework with certain boundaries, some of which impact the ability to innovate
- lack of awareness of the benefits of innovation by library staff
- reluctance of librarians and other information professionals to engage in innovation
- absence of innovation content in library schools' curricula etc.

Conclusion

It is very obvious that innovation has past being an option to becoming a necessity for any academic library that wants to continue to be relevant in this 21st century. It must be noted that, although, engaging in innovative practices could be tasking, its benefits outweigh all the troubles. A challenge to every academic librarian in Nigeria is that no one should wait for anyone to take the initiative. The orientation should be "let me be the one to start something new". That way we shall be on our way to becoming innovative academic libraries. Moreover, finance should not be seen as a barrier because, we can actually start doing something before the need for finance will come up. Marketing our services to faculty and students for instance, does not cost money. At least, talking is free. More so, some little things like the use of banner this paper proposed earlier will only take a negligible percentage of the library's monthly impress. Once you start doing something that the university management can feel, you do not need to preach any long sermon to get the required funds released, the will power is all that is required.

Recommendations

The following recommendations are made based on the above challenges and many more not captured in this paper:

- libraries/librarians should be encouraged to shift from status quo and embrace change.
- Librarians should learn to deal with their fear of failure, by realizing that fear limits success.
- library managers who label younger, vibrant librarians with all sorts of names ranging from 'overzealous' to 'sabi sabi' should desist from such attitude.
- library managers should endeavour to fire the imagination of the library staff to the benefits inherent in innovation
- librarians should brace up to the reality of today's information environment and embrace innovation; finally
- innovation should be incorporated into the library schools' curricula in Nigeria.

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