A Conceptual Framework of Library Reader Service from Customer Relationship Management Perspective

Chyuan Perng [1], Shiow-Luan Wang[1,2], Wen-Chih Chiou [3]

[1]*Department of Industrial Engineering and Enterprise Information, Tunghai University, Taichung, Taiwan, R.O.C.*

[2]*Department of Information Management, National Formosa University, Huwei, Yunlin, Taiwan, R.O.C.*

[3]*Department of Business Administration, National Chin-Yi University of Technology, Taichung, Taiwan, R.O.C.*
Corresponding author: slwang@nfu.edu.tw

Abstract

University libraries are currently facing their greatest challenge. For more than a decade, university libraries have been under the pressure to change its way of operation and management due to the tight of budget and the appearance of online resources. These situations cause the libraries to value their development of resources and the application of business marketing to better service. How to retain and grow users through enhancement of service becomes the great concern by library managers.

Customer Relationship Management (CRM) is not a tactical or functional approach but a key strategic process. A comprehensive CRM will highlight the preference and learning needs of readers individually for cost saving and enhance the retention and loyalty. We aim to propose an integrated conceptual framework implying with business marketing plan and CRM perspective through literature finding.

1. Introduction

A library is created to provide service to users. It has been transformed a lot in library service features by the effect of digital and networked environment change. The ubiquity of the Internet is used extensively in library surroundings and has a profound effect on library users. Users in every generation and in every stage have always wanted access to library resources. It has been important to know that libraries were there to be used when required, although it was not necessary to visit them very often. The question facing us today is whether the mission libraries have performed in the past is still relevant in today's world.

Numerous studies have demonstrated that the importance of library service is users-oriented and the needs of meeting their demand and expectation [1-8]. The proliferation of information technology (IT) brings users' needs for timelier, convenient, speedy information delivery in recent years. Libraries have to harness the technological change and use it to fulfill their mission to provide access to information when people need it. The popular use of IT also can help libraries to know what their user's need and provide right information to the right user with plenty of resources. Library plays as an interactive role to encourage users to use resources and establish a relationship with library (see Figure 1).
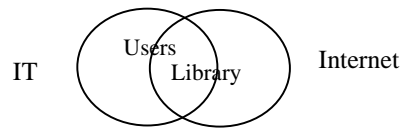
Figure 1: Two-way connections between users and library

University library users are authorized faculty, undergraduate and graduate students, staff, and project/contract assistants included. These groups need library service and there is certainly a barrier to be overcome to manipulate one-to-one relationship model for each user. The library professionals agreed that there were difficulties in providing training for their students because of the large numbers of students, the lack of suitable training rooms and equipment and the shortage of suitable trainers [9]. Users are customers and listening to their voice is a part of library research. Huang stated that library service is a kind of invisible product and it is important to obtain reader's discontent information for improvement of the service [10]. There still lacks a clear definition of library readers and how to relate to a user-oriented service imitating customer based reader service. We aimed to define users/customers as readers while in the academic campus and developed a conceptual framework from CRM perspective which can be applied to academic library service in order to provide better reader service.

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2. Literature Review

Library users' constituencies vary and are considered as customers [11], the new customer is fickle, demanding, informed, and in the driver's seat [12]; their basic purpose is information concerning needs, goals, abilities, and points of view. It is obvious that there is a great necessity of interaction between library and users to know the provided services conforming to the needs. Personal intercourse and relations between librarian and readers are useful in all libraries and have been addressed by Green since 1876 [13]. A good relationship connection between library and users will encourage users to come and use library resources and the relations are valued as the interactive activities. A qualitative survey conducted by Perrien & Richard found that the effectiveness of a relationship strategy varies with the individual within the organization [14]. Therefore, we will attempt to present what is the organizational mechanism for the implementation process in facilitating the integration of library service to improve the efficacy of resources. This section will define the terms of readers and the application of CRM in the library operation and management.

2.1. Reader perspective

Reader is the key subject that we want to define first due to its association with library operation and development. The requirement for library supporting the teaching and research by academic readers is different from citizen to public library. Readers want to use not only the local online catalog but also the catalog for other libraries, carry materials away from the stacks to read at tables or charge them out for use elsewhere, all of which needs a physical space and interactions [15]. Library regarded readers as end-users in the 1980s and meeting their demand was advanced by Ojala in 1986 simultaneously [16].

Viewing users as customers and as an individual was mentioned first by Millson-Martula and Menon in 1995 [17], they found that there exist gaps between the library and its customers. Lack of interaction between library and students and faculty is one of the gaps. While in undergraduate college, students are not familiar with the library setting, anxiety will level down their expectation, satisfaction and impede their library skill. Mellon [18] found that at least 75% of undergraduate students become anxious during their initial library research experiences. She pioneered the term of "library anxiety" and fount at least 75% of undergraduate students experienced this phenomenon. Anxiety is an unpleasant feeling or emotional state with physiological and behavioral concomitants, which comes to the fore in a library setting [19]. Onwuegbuzie [20] aimed at graduate students in library anxiety and found that writing a research proposal is an anxiety-inducing experience for many students. Jiao et al. [21, 22, 23] surveyed graduate and doctoral students and the results showed that anxiety affects their learning style and satisfaction. Graduate students need to be instructed separately, on the other hand, undergraduate students need library instruction along with their class program [24, 25]. Jerabek et al. [26] indicated that library should develop alternative ways of helping library patrons in using resources.

Aimed at the importance of readers to library, researchers put their views on the user needs, customer expectation and satisfaction as the goal setting [27-34]. Since the emergence of network environment, libraries have to pay close attention to their customers' voices [35] and viewpoints [36-38]. Readers have their own requirement as individuals of library service, customer focus conform the belief of academic library just like consumers to business. Internet offers an unprecedented opportunity for personalized customer service [39] and then a one-to-one marketing paradigm provides an organization with the opportunity to engage its customers in interactive communication with IT being the enabling factor [40]. The continuums related to library development and management is drawn on Figure 2.
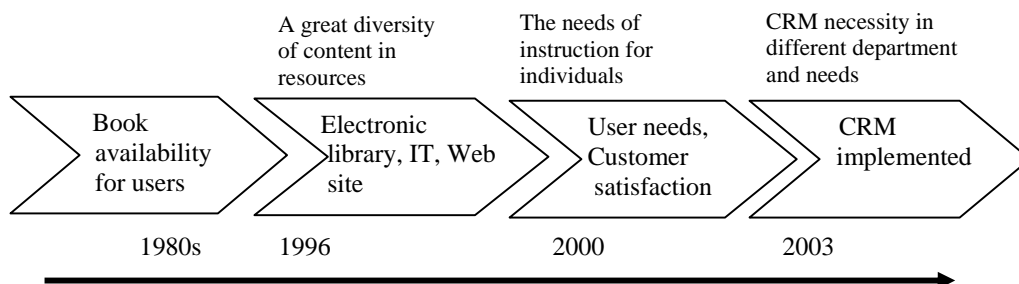

Figure 2. The continuums of library service

In the 1980s, book availability was the only subject addressed by both library and users. However with the pragmatic electronic resources and ubiquitous IT in today's age, user needs became a comprehensive situation. Customer wants and needs have put more importance on

service since the 21st century; there exist some findings from the past research related to user needs, customer expectation and satisfaction (see Table 1).

Table 1. Summary of user needs; customer expectation and satisfaction studies reviewed

Authors and year	Main findings	Conclusions
[41]	Lack of appropriate interaction, absence of goals and communication	Segments of customer; strategies for narrowing gaps
[42]	Lack of personal contact	Need intelligence assistance (personal relationship)
[43]	Gaps between library and customer expectation	Establish benchmarks among organizations
[44]	Lack of communication with users	Building relevant collection and design appropriate service
[45]	Library needs redesign a better integration of space for collections and computers	Plan strategy that integrate digital and print collections
[46]	A danger in a shift of resource allocation and customer loyalty	Listen to the voices of customers and develop benchmark partnerships
[47]	Difficult of retain customers	Improve service quality
[48]	Systems do not provide sufficient information when multiple patrons share the same login/password	Develop strategy of one-to-one relationship management
[49]	Lack of human side of service	Friendly and helpful and professional guidance
[50]	Satisfaction with the information product received and serviced used to retrieve the information product	Well-developed library management method
[51]	Lack proper methods and strategies in dealing with customer care	Develop identified customer care strategies: technology, utility call centers, sales and marketing
[52]	Most of readers know little about e-resources, undergraduate students prefer to obtain printed documents	Teacher or student needs for e-resources is different

Findings from Table 1 concur some issues need to be further explored in the library development, which are applications of business marketing concept, strategy for benchmarks establishing, segmentation of readers, multichannel communication of listening to readers' voice, and adequate library instruction. Satisfying customer expectations and caring for their individual needs require a thorough understanding of strategic direction and CRM concept is a good method to assist library to achieve these goals.

Customer satisfaction represents the degree to which a library has met the user's needs and expectations [53, 54]. Readers are encouraged to use products and services which are offered by library. Readers' satisfactions are considered as library success but there still exists complaining behavior [55, 56]. Library manager should ponder these problems and solve some hiding situation which is usually of neglect.

2.2. CRM in library service

University libraries pondered how to operate and manage reader service in an effective and efficient way. CRM highlights the customer-centric approach and builds relationship with customers to conform to the customer focus in library operation and management both in physical or virtual times. Keating and Hafner [57] addressed the business models that can be applied to libraries of higher education and develop strategy of one-to-one relationship management that provides the libraries with capabilities to change the delivery and role of the university library.

The development of library operation and service aiming at the goals of customer focus is very important to library managers. CRM is the practice of analyzing and utilizing marketing databases and leveraging communication technologies to determine corporate practices and methods that will maximize the lifetime value of each individual customer to the organization [58]. CRM is used popularly in library service and library managers need to concern themselves with collection design in that they arrange their holdings and services in a way that will attract customers to the library. Creating a relationship between how customers expect to use a library is setting as front burner. A relationship is a bond or connection between an organization and its customer [59]. By emphasizing the application of CRM issues in library, researchers use data mining on book recommendation and library marketing [60]; resources usage efficiency [61]; acquisition budget allocation [62]; acquisition and cataloging [63]; reader service [64] and CRM software in e-journal access [65]. Without appropriate CRM, library may misunderstand their readers' service requests and be unable to meet reader expectations. Some libraries have established liaison outreach programs in an attempt to get to know users better while also providing them with a greater amount of information about library program and services [66]. Personalization and liaison agrees with the CRM cerebration but at a passive state, there still lacks active aid of favor reader.

Armed with facts mentioned above, library service is a kind of invisible product and service in which readers participate [67]. It can be seen that this necessitates development both in printed and electronic resources according to readers' separated requirement. Library managers know that libraries are well applicable in the age of Internet and endeavor to catch up the trend. Readers will always be the critical focus of a library and is eager to build relationship with them related to interactive and customer oriented service such as circulation desk, website, reference inquiry, and personalized service. We adopted marketing concept and used 4S model to apply broadly both in library organization and mechanism of reader service which is mentioned on next section.

3. Conceptual Framework

Peter Drucker defined the marketing concepts as "the business as seen from the customer's point of view." Keating & Hafner [68] initiated that business models can be applied to libraries; they draw analogies from business by substituting "library" for "corporation and "user" for "customer". The e-Business domain is being employed extensively in government, library, and non-profit diverse organizations lately. Constantinides (2002) [69] proposed the Web-Marketing Mix (WMM) model to identify the online marketing critical elements and addresses the E-Commerce strategic, operational, organizational and technical issues by: Scope, Site, Synergy and System (4S). The scope identifies the strategic and operational objectives to be addressed. The site proposes a method for drafting realistic and consistent Web marketing plans in order to develop the functional platform of communication, interaction, and transaction with the web customers. The synergy refers to the necessary organization, infrastructure, human resource and knowledge for supporting smooth online operational processes. The system identifies main technological and administrative issues that will underpin online marketing activities.

To illustrate how to implement the 4S into conceptual framework, each of them will be explained further. The "Scope" is acted as a strategic direction for managers to ensure the whole staff follows the organizational predefined goals and objectives. In order to measure an organization's internal processes, then to identify, understand, and adapt external practices for continuous improvement from other organizations, there is a desire to establish benchmarking across institutions [70]. For administering reader profiles and sustaining activities, a

segmentation of readers is helpful to reach the goal setting and position the strategic role of library during the service process. The "Site" transforms a web required to evaluate how well the website's presentation has complied with the presetting functional requirements. Library website (Libweb) is the virtual front doors to collections and services [71], and as a powerful communication channel [72]. Libweb is one of the most important communication channels between library and readers in the digital environment. Library will know readers' behavior and attitude when they are searching on the sites and provide the newest information and recommendation at the same time. The "Synergy" can be applied to all necessary organizational issues such as back-end supports or knowledge capability. Best customers are loyal ones [73], Internet fosters loyal customers and brings organizations with close relationship to their customers [74], and so as to keep cost low while the library understands what their readers' really want and their retention. The "System" can be used to examine whether library surroundings have the necessary technologies to support the technical related to library use during the transactional (borrow/return) processes (see Figure 3).
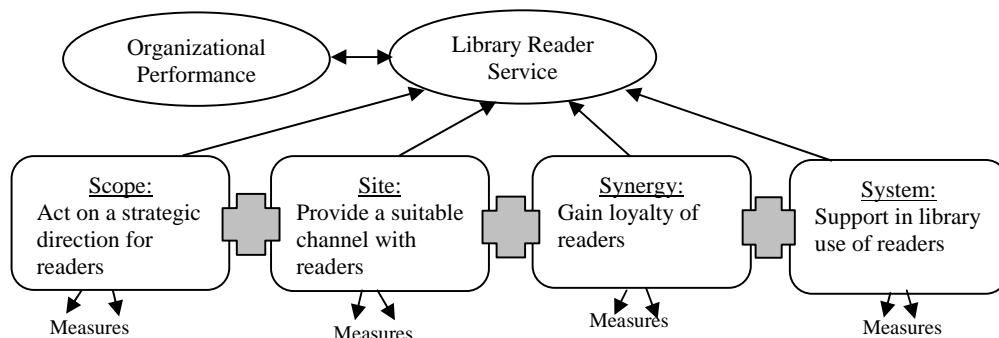

Figure 3. The conceptual framework of 4S in library reader service

4. Conclusion

User valued library's function very much and a report by Bennett [75] suggested that we should consider placing the library as a learning center at the heart of campus. Libraries today must find ways to optimize operations, maximize resources, enhance services, extend 'market' penetration, and serve 'customers' [76]. He also asserted that libraries play an essential, non-partisan role in providing the information that allows citizens to make informed decision. Users' needs and wants are the core center of library service and development. Library administrator is conscious of the trends of user focus and eager to know if the outcome conforming to users' expectation. Hence, evaluation methods come with the tide of fashion. Literature findings showed that only the anxiety and complaining behavior is removed, reader's satisfaction will be reached and the library success is concluded simultaneously. Provide individual instruction to readers is needed by graduate students and elevate the loyalty (library and readers have good relationship). Since the needs for resources exists difference between readers, it is necessary to redesign library resources during the change from physical to electronic mode. To provide just in time assistance for readers is a beginning of relationship management between library and readers. Library education could be improved by several measures, mostly involving greater integration with practice [77].

Therefore, how to develop a comprehensive CRM model will be an issue that needs to be focused. Many libraries provide a series of activities (remote access across multiple databases simultaneously, link seamlessly to database resources, select favorite resources and e-

journals, save searches and records, and set up email alerts, and so forth) toward the goal of servicing users effectively and efficiently. Most libraries build their information system (library automation, electronic database, book recommendation, and so on) from the viewpoint of library itself but did not ask what their users' want. There is no connection between library and users. However, the existent studies don't provide a methodology to assist practitioners effectively improving their websites based on the evaluating results. In addition, most organizations have limited resources to be located into service development so how to effectively allocate resources will be an important issue to focus on. The application of CRM to understand more about users' behavior, preference, interest, and needs is getting more emphasis by library managers. Librarians should realize that they are the knowledge workers, providers, and creators, not just information depository. The creation of new knowledge is a major challenge for all organizations today.

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Authors

Chyuan Perng is an Associate Professor in the Department of Industrial Engineering and Enterprise Information at the Tunghai University in Taiwan. He received his PhD in industrial engineering from the Texas Tech University. His main research lines are e-commerce, production scheduling and information technology application. Perng's articles have appeared in the *Industrial Engineering and Management Systems*, *Int. J. Electronic Business Management* and *Journal of the Chinese Institute of Industrial Engineers*.

Shiow-Luan Wang is a full-time Lecturer in the Department of Information Management at the National Formosa University and in a doctoral programme in the Department of Industrial Engineering and Enterprise Information at the Tunghai University. She is giving the following classes of library instruction, customer relationship management, and management information management. Her research interests include library information science and knowledge management.

Wen-Chih Chiou is an Associate Professor in the Department of Business Administration at the National Chin-Yi University of Technology in Taiwan. He received his PhD in business management from the National Sun Yat-Sen University. His research interests include internet marketing, consumer behavior, and website and mobile usability test. He has published in a variety of journals, including *Int. J. Production Economics*, *Journal of Accounting, Finance and Management Strategy*, *Industrial Engineering and Management Systems*, and *Int. J. Electronic Business*