

Advocacy for the Development and Survival of Library and Library Services: A Roadmap for Zimbabwe.

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Abstract

This paper deals with the advocacy for the library and library services. The objective is to raise public awareness by appealing to the various sectors of the community so that this cause can gain support socially, politically, economically and technologically. It has been discovered that for the library and library services to achieve stated goals and objectives given the dynamic environment in which these offer their products and services as open systems, there is the major issue of limited scarce resources which need prioritisation at both grassroots and national level. In order for the advocacy to succeed, it is highlighted that marketing strategies in the form of models and tools in their various forms need to be communicated through media.

Key words: Advocacy, development, survival, library services, roadmap.

1. Introduction

Major objectives of marketing libraries and information services is to identify how they can best grow and become stronger in an increasingly competitive environment. Our aim in this paper is to suggest relevant advocacy strategies for libraries and information services. We seek to explore ways in which libraries can be put on the national agenda through library advocacy in Zimbabwe. We define advocacy from both general and the specific perspectives, and consider marketing as a component of advocacy strategy. We emphasize the need and importance of approaching library advocacy as a group and public campaign for maximum benefit. The paper also asserts that it is imperative for library advocates to interact with the media and public officials including politicians and corporate leadership. Finally the paper concludes by specifying the goal, materials, stories and messages that are necessary to strengthen the library advocacy processes.

2. Defining library, library services and advocacy

There are various definitions and views of what a library is and should be. A narrow definition is that a library is a facility that comprises items and materials that can be accessed for the extraction of information from a specified location which includes the storage mediums of such information. Library services are the offer of information and information facilities to the end users for various purposes in different forms (mediums) and means (delivery mode). According to the Chambers 21st century dictionary (1999), to advocate is to recommend, support an idea or proposal especially in the public. Advocacy is the active public support or recommendation of an idea. Gorman (2005) defines to advocate as to plead in favour of, in support of, promote and defend publicly, and advocacy as “a system of organised support, promotion, and defence of a cause, an association, or an institution in the public arena”. In specific terms, library advocacy therefore translates into public support and promotion of individual libraries or library services in the public domain. This support has to be properly organised, the action has to be concerted and the campaign should be public. There can be individual private support which is helpful, but for advocacy to be fruitful it has to be by organised group action around a clearly stated goal.

Because of the need to be organised, public advocacy is often associated with ‘politicking’. Unfortunately in our part of the world politicking is seen as a dirty game but is also accepted as a way of attaining quick results in any public endeavour. Politicking is a form and means of acquiring limited scarce resources that are competed for. The limited scarce resources are money, materials, machinery, manpower and information.

It is however accepted that the scarce resources can only be allocated on the strength of the success of advocacy

initiatives. Various interest groups, among which libraries are a competing sector, are allocated resources and power on the basis of the strength of their advocacy. In library advocacy those interested in libraries or improved library services must engage in public discourse so that they can be allocated their share of resources which are scarce. Libraries need to be marketed which is a campaign strategy underpinning advocacy by advocates.

3. Advocates

Advocates are activists who have an interest in a particular sector in which they want to raise public awareness for that sector's cause, goals and objectives. In the sector of librarianship, library advocates are those who take an interest in a library or library services. The interest must be strong enough to energise the people into organising others into an advocacy campaign. The group of persons could belong to any of the following categories:

Library users: These people are generally the first to notice the deficiency in the services they expect from the library. They could be school children, parents, researchers, local workers who are pursuing further studies or any member who uses the library. In most cases these people have the concern for the library and are able to change this concern into action in a bid to satisfy a stated need. They normally can campaign by writing petitions testimonials and statements of support to the library funding agency or administration authority who may be:

- trustees and members of public boards: boards responsible for the management of the library with vested interest in the successful management of the library;
- institutional, community and business leaders like councilors, MPs and governors who appreciate the existence of libraries into their areas and would like to see them prosper and therefore they are generally willing to assist whenever called upon to do so; and
- financial bankers, the media, professional associations, employees, trade unions, suppliers, users and clients.

Librarians and library staff: These people work in the library and enjoy personal interest in the functioning of the library. They could be the first to initiate a campaign or they could clandestinely or nichodemously set the ball rolling by using other people where their own position could be in jeopardy if it is known they were involved. There are certain steps they can take to remedy flawed services without involving their superiors or employers, namely organising 'friends' groups, cultural figures, silent supporters for effective advocacy.

4. Advocating for a library

This is a campaign strategy targeted at raising awareness about the library and library services. Marketing models and tools will be used as an aid to advocacy. This is in view of the library and library services being an open system which is self regulatory. As an open system, it is affected by both internal and external environments. For advocacy to succeed as a concept, it has to employ marketing strategies. Kotler (2002) says that marketing deals with identifying and meeting human and social needs. Besant (2002) supports Kotler and argues that librarians and information professionals using this concept are heading for success. It is in this context that marketing strategies will be used for advancing library and library services advocacy. Advocacy as a system that must survive and succeed must be cognitive of its prevailing environment; both internal and external. It must have a vision and a mission in order to employ strategies and actions to the achievements of its stated goals and objectives. The environment comprises of **PEST** which is tabulated below:

- **Politics-** The political environment's effect on library and library services can either be negative or positive for a library to function the political environment must be conducive and supportive.
- **Economy-** The economic environment needs to be adequately resourced in order for the library and library services to benefit.
- **Social-** Society's view and opinion as well as beliefs need to be supportive of the library and library services.
- **Technology-** Technological changes must be facilitative to the enhancement of libraries and their services, for example, Mediatronics in the world of Robotics. How is the age of robotics benefiting library services and the library? Activities must be in tandem with technology (Kotler, 2002).

Also the library and information service's advocacy has to address its strengths and weaknesses and deal with its opportunities and threats (SWOT). Strength occurs when PEST is in favour and support of library and library services. A weakness occurs when PEST is not in favour and support of library and library services. Opportunities occur when the environment can be manipulated to favour and support library and library services given limited competing resources. Threats are seen when the environment is not ready and cannot be easily manipulated to support the library and library services given the limited competing resources and also the emergence of competition such as substitute or direct replacement.

5. Portfolio Management

Portfolio management is a process where in organisations individual products and services contribute to the well being of the whole organisation. In librarianship there is a choice on whether strong services must support weaker ones and whether new services can be developed even further which might replace declining ones. This is a concept of marketing mix. Marketing mix helps to position the library and library services very firmly in the perception of their communities saved. To make the service attractive, the mix comprises of the generic 4Ps (product, place, price and promotion) (McCarthy, 1978). Product is the total package on offer; that is all the product or service characteristics aimed at the target market. Price refers to the real cost to the user, including other costs other than money. Place refers to where the product is including the distance and accessibility to the customer and consumer. Promotion is about the communication mix to reach target market. In addition to McCarthy's 4ps we have 3 extra Ps for services, namely people, physical evidence and processes. People are the individuals who play a part in service delivery. Physical evidence is about the environment for service delivery. Processes are the activities by which service is delivered. The 4Ps can be viewed in light of 4Cs, which are customer value, user convenience, user cost and user communication.

6. Advocacy, marketing models and tools- illustrations

Below are illustrated examples that demonstrate the application of marketing models and tools as a means towards satisfying advocacy. These examples are meant to apply theory into practice.

6.1 Product/ Service Initiation

A town that may not have a library at all may initiate a public campaign for one. This could start as an individual person's campaign by engaging others on this campaign and attracting those in similar disposition with the growth of the campaign group the discourse could take a public stature until it becomes an open arena campaign. The solution could be to set aside library vote by local authority or find a new source of revenue. This can only happen when the local leadership both at political level and at local authority level is drawn into the campaign and give it their support.

6.2 Advocating for under-funded library

Where the users of this facility decide there is need to extend certain services but only if extra funds could be made available, a campaign can be organised. This may be to extend opening hours, shortage of staff and/or an ageing collection of books or material is evident. The problem may be easily diagnosed but the solution may take a little longer to get. The solution may be to find an extra source of money or to increase taxes to accommodate the library need. A concerted advocacy campaign could be the only method the affected people can use to arrive at the necessary solution; an increase in financial resource allocation.

6.3 Advocating for funds to enhance service delivery.

In a situation where library users decide there is need for the addition of a library section or collection of material in the library the solution could be through concerted public action. A public advocacy campaign can be mounted and with time could suck in the local political leadership and other interested parties until a solution is found. This solution invariably means there is need for additional funds but this could pose for a few challenges because either the central government or the local authority must take up the challenge to find extra funds, either through an increase in taxes or from other sources.

6.4 Threats of generation gap

Low levels of literacy among young people. The business community could start a public advocacy campaign to revamp literacy by engaging local schools to provide highly literate workforce. This campaign could take many forms and could result in a number of resolutions and a new allocation of resources to make the local library function properly or add to its collection.

6.5 Raising support and awareness of the library services

Raise public awareness on the fundamental value of a library. A concerted library advocacy campaign could be started to educate people on the fundamental value of a library, which is that people in a free society have the right to read and view whatever they wish. The viewing and reading should not be monitored, made public or be interfered with. The government must observe the people's rights to privacy and intellectual freedom. An organised advocacy campaign can be used to achieve desired results.

6.6 Organised action.

Organised action is very important as a tool of advocacy but it must be structured into a coordinated campaign that is planned. This means there has to be a person or people who initiate and coordinate this campaign and these people must be prepared to work very hard in marshalling the human and other resources needed for the campaign to be successful. The initiator(s) must provide the necessary leadership otherwise the campaign falls on its face. The leader must be able to draw up a plan of action or strategy and champion the cause in visible and convincing manner. This strategy must be of necessity, bear a clearly spelt outcome, objective or target which those who support it should identify with. There should be a succinct outline of roles and duties for those in leadership and bear a clear timetable of events together with anticipated outcomes. For the action to be effective, efficient and economic, information must be disseminated. This will involve media in its various forms and roles.

7. Dealing with the media and telling the library story

The media is an important vehicle for library advocacy. Anyone who desires to create a library advocacy campaign must have a clear and appealing message. This should be so simply expressed as to be easily understood. The message should be based on considered issues, not emotive pronouncements like scientifically determined community opinion. This should be informed by what the community thinks its library should do for them. In most cases this opinion should be a result of deliberate empirical community research. Evidently this opinion would receive a lot of support and end in a very successful campaign. When an advocacy campaign basis its action on stories of lies of people which were changed by using the library the result is likely to be positive. People join that campaign because they relate to the people in the story and appreciate the role the library played and hope the same could happen in their lives. This campaign could create brochures that contain clear vivid and convincing testimonials of those helped by the library to be believed. These stories could be recounted in newspapers, on the radio and television. The stories of how their lives were changed by the librarians informed the community about the library strength and benefits. When the next issue of funds is raised the community will be found ready to help. The awareness should be used to start a continuing mutual relationship with the library, the journalists and their media personalities who write these stories. This is done to create a favorable image of the library in the eyes of the community and advance the objectives of the advocacy. This involves a process of politicking, where a public relations plan is employed. Publics are various groups with converging or diverse interest on the library who are found in the community it serves. Public relations plan aim at attracting attention and creating a positive attitude in the target market. A communication model is a useful tool to this end. A communication mix for a promotion or for public relations should aim at making the user aware, or at changing user perceptions or actually encouraging the user to do something. One such model is AIDA which is categorized as Awareness, Interest, Desire, and Action. Communication in advancing the advocacy of librarianship is assisted by Agenda-Setting theory. The idea underpinning this theory is that the media can control public thinking and it also advances the idea that the media can shape the thinking and behaviour of the public.

8. The role of politics in library advocacy

As alluded to in the opening section, politicking can be involved in library advocacy. Politics per se has no role to play in advocacy but it is the political will and action that is required and activities that support that action. What this

means is that campaigners should engage with the legislative and public figures in government the church and other civic society groups or organisations. This engagement should start at grassroots local government levels up to national levels and central government. An example is where at local level, the mayor and councilors being engaged with local librarians in building rapport that promotes a spirit of community service through library service.

9. Advocacy material

These should include posters, bookmarks, buttons, banners, messages on websites and any other material used on the political front

10. Recommendations

In advocating for the development, growth and survival of library and library services, the following recommendations are useful.

- Advocacy is a necessity since library and library services are an open system within a dynamic environment where it has to compete for limited scarce resources.
- In order to be able to deal with various stakeholders, politicking becomes an order of the day.
- The environment must be managed in order to adopt and adapt to changes, both planned and unplanned.
- For the advocacy to be effective in aiding development, growth and survival, it is necessary to use marketing models and tools.
- It is recommended that marketing models and tools encompass media communication (agenda-setting theory) as well as public relations.

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