

Journal of Integrated Information Management

Vol 8, No 2 (2023)

Jul-Dec 2023



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To cite this article:

Vraimaki, E., Briana, M., Koloniari, M., & Takatoglou, A. (2023). Marketing for Relevance, Visibility, and Sustainability: Exploring the Views of Greek Library Professionals. *Journal of Integrated Information Management*, 8(2), 14–24. Retrieved from <https://ejournals.epublishing.ekt.gr/index.php/jiim/article/view/38071>

Marketing for Relevance, Visibility, and Sustainability: Exploring the Views of Greek Library Professionals

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Article Info

Article history:

Received 21 November 2023

Received in revised form 10 December 2023

Accepted 20 December 2023

<http://dx.doi.org/10.26265/jiim.v8i2.38071>

Abstract:

Purpose - Libraries worldwide are struggling with issues of relevance and necessity. Despite substantial transformations, especially due to the COVID-19 pandemic, their services often fail to meet users' needs or remain largely unknown to the public. This study aims to examine the attitudes, activities, challenges, and competencies related to marketing among Greek library professionals to enhance the relevance, visibility, and sustainability of their libraries.

Design/methodology/approach - This research involves surveying Greek library professionals to gather data on their perceptions and practices regarding marketing. Using a quantitative research design, the study evaluates their recognition of marketing's importance, self-assessed marketing skills, and the extent of marketing activities and planning in their libraries.

Findings - The findings reveal that while library professionals acknowledge the importance of marketing and believe they possess the necessary skills to promote their collections and services, there is a significant lack of prioritization and investment in marketing from library management. Additionally, marketing efforts are often unplanned and sporadic. The study discusses the practical implications of these findings for leadership within libraries and the education provided in Library and Information Science (LIS) programs.

Originality/value - This study provides valuable insights into the marketing practices and challenges faced by Greek library professionals. It underscores the need for better planning and investment in marketing initiatives and highlights the importance of integrating marketing education into LIS programs to prepare future librarians for these crucial tasks.

Index Terms - Library marketing, library professionals, new critical skills, relevance, sustainability, Greek libraries.

that the COVID-19 outbreak had turned into a pandemic marked a pivotal moment for Galleries, Libraries, Archives, and Museums (GLAM), fundamentally altering their operations in unforeseen ways. During the global lockdowns, information organizations had to adapt rapidly to new circumstances and transform their operations [2].

The pandemic highlighted existing skill gaps and library infrastructure deficiencies, necessitating an accelerated evolution in two major areas. Firstly, maintaining a competitive edge in the digital realm became crucial [3]. To stay relevant to their stakeholders, libraries introduced new services, including access to electronic resources, streaming media, virtual programming, health literacy initiatives, and virtual reference services [4], [5], [6]. Secondly, the role of libraries as physical spaces was re-evaluated [7], [8]. Traditionally linked with community engagement [9], [10], [11], libraries are now challenged to rethink the value and sustainability of their physical spaces.

As librarians navigate the balance between physical and digital presences, the discussion on leveraging marketing tools to enhance service value has become more pronounced [12]. A robust customer-service orientation that enhances user experience should be a strategic priority for every library [13]. However, many libraries still struggle to market their collections and services effectively [14]. Given this context, it is essential to investigate the attitudes, skills, and challenges library professionals face regarding marketing.

In this regard, the current study aims at assessing the perceptions of the Greek library professionals concerning:

- the importance of library marketing,
- the skill set required to navigate a competitive landscape, drive change, and demonstrate the value of their library and
- the marketing challenges faced to build better library user experiences.

II. LITERATURE REVIEW

Library and Information Science (LIS) literature has increasingly highlighted the multifaceted roles of libraries.

I. INTRODUCTION

The day the World Health Organization [1] announced

They act as crucial community centers [15], [16], enhancing community development by offering access to information and improving neighborhood stability, safety, and quality of life. Massis [17] emphasizes the importance of libraries maintaining their focus on community service and addressing their relevance through strategic marketing efforts. Library usage is strongly tied to community engagement [9], [10], [11]. In the post-pandemic world, libraries must continually reassess their marketing strategies and re-evaluate their visions, missions, goals, and objectives. This re-evaluation should emphasize social and ethical values such as sustainability, inclusion, equality, long-term viability, strategic flexibility, and meaningful social responsibility in a transformed marketing landscape [18].

It's a common misconception that marketing is only about promotion [19]. In truth, *"marketing is an organizational function and a set of processes for creating, communicating, and delivering value to customers and managing customer relationships in ways that benefit the organization and its stakeholders"* [20, p. 28]. In a library setting, marketing involves identifying community needs, providing tailored products and services to meet those needs, promoting library collections and services to increase library use, outreach and advocacy, and building long-term user relationships via rich experiences [21], [22], [23], [24]. In essence, library marketing is an ongoing conversation with all target audiences and can be effective if implemented in a continuous cycle [25].

A. Marketing Attitudes

Marketing is a powerful tool that can help libraries manage all critical internal and external challenges related to developing and promoting collections and programs [26]. Notwithstanding, the planning and implementation of successful marketing strategies, library professionals need a set of marketing skills and a positive attitude [27].

The perception of marketing within the library profession has historically been mixed. Earlier literature highlighted that librarians have hesitated to adopt and implement marketing strategies, often believing that such activities were unsuitable and possibly unnecessary for libraries [28]. Later studies have generally indicated more favorable attitudes toward marketing [29], [30], [31], [32], but with significant variations among individual libraries and library specialties. For example, Aharony [33] found that school librarians tend to have more positive attitudes toward marketing compared to their counterparts in public and academic libraries. In contrast, the Parker et al. [34] study found public librarians to be more positively inclined. Other research has highlighted that librarians with some marketing training exhibit more favorable marketing attitudes [31] and that these attitudes are influenced by the overall marketing culture within their libraries [35]. Attitudes also varied based on demographic characteristics and personality variables [33], [36].

B. Marketing Competencies and LIS Education

The knowledge and skills required in the LIS field entail a

tremendous number of competencies [37], including technical, IT, and managerial skills [14], [38], [39], [40], [41]. Acquiring, organizing, retrieving, collecting, and disseminating information are the order of the day in the library world [42]. Data analysis, database planning and designing, data visualization, machine learning, data integrity, and communications skills are among the essential skills library professionals working with data should have [43]. Adopting AI in library services is also increasingly important [44], [45], [46]. Soft skills [47], [48], skills to better serve the emerging Communities of Practice [49], curriculum skills [50], and leadership skills [51], [52], [53] are also highlighted in the LIS literature.

Among this highly diverse skillset, marketing competencies are important for contemporary information professionals [54]. And, while advocacy and outreach abilities are deemed foundational for entering the library profession, according to the 2022 'ALA's Core Competences of Librarianship [55], marketing is not explicitly mentioned. Polger [19] suggests that library professionals sometimes confuse advocacy, communication, and outreach initiatives with marketing strategies. Crowley [56] indicates that both are essential to the education of library professionals, as marketing is necessary for assessing and meeting users' needs, while advocacy helps libraries secure the resources required to meet those needs.

However, Singh [57] argues that 'ALA's prioritization of advocacy over marketing, which has also been embraced by those who previously resisted incorporating marketing techniques and terminology in information organizations, has affected the development of LIS curricula, leaving students without sufficient marketing skills because they are not provided with a solid theoretical foundation in marketing. To address this shortcoming, it's necessary not only to update LIS curricula but also to dedicate training to equip working professionals with skills not just in traditional marketing but also in digital marketing strategies, essential for keeping pace with the changing landscape.

C. Marketing Practices and Challenges

Libraries employ a diverse range of traditional and digital marketing practices to increase awareness of their collections, services, and physical spaces. From newsletters, book displays, tours, and events to branded merchandise and engaging social media content, libraries strive to effectively demonstrate their value within their communities [19]. Digital marketing has been advocated to be of special value to libraries [58], with studies indicating its greater effectiveness compared to traditional approaches in enhancing services and resource utilization [59].

Notwithstanding the potential advantages that marketing can confer upon libraries, they encounter numerous challenges in its implementation. The deficiency in marketing competencies among library professionals, stemming from both inadequacies in LIS education and a lack of training, has been identified as one of the most significant obstacles to the effective utilization of marketing strategies

[60], [61], [62]. Other obstacles identified are associated with budget constraints, staff shortages, and lack of management support and marketing dedication [60], [63].

III. RESEARCH METHODS

A. Sampling and Data Collection

The target population of the current study comprised personnel working in Greek libraries of all types. A web-

based structured questionnaire was distributed via electronic mailing lists and social media to collect primary data. The institutional ethics committee approved the survey, and all participants gave informed consent before participating. Altogether, 181 questionnaires suitable for analysis were collected. The demographic profile of respondents is presented in **Table I**.

Table I. Profile of Respondents

		Frequency	Percentage
Gender	Male	27	14.9
	Female	153	84.5
	Other	1	0.6
Age	23-65	Mean: 49.18	SD: 6.96
Education	Lower/Upper Secondary	2	1.1
	Post-secondary non-tertiary	2	1.1
	Bachelor's degree	82	45.3
	Master's Degree	81	44.8
	Doctoral Degree	14	7.7
Specialty	Librarian	161	89
	Administrator	9	5
	Teacher	11	6
Position	Staff member	118	65.2
	Head officer	44	24.3
	Director	18	9.9
	Intern	1	0.6
Experience (years)	Organizational tenure	Mean:17.33	SD: 10.66
	Job tenure	Mean:20.63	SD: 9.93
Library type	Public	86	47.5
	Academic	59	32.6
	Special	34	18.8
	School	2	1.1
Number of employees		Mean: 8.8	SD: 15.83

Table II. Questionnaire Constructs

Constructs	Number of items	References
Attitudes toward Marketing	19	[31]
Marketing Activities	12	[31]
Marketing Challenges	9	[64]
Marketing Competencies	20	[65], [66]

B. Research Instrument and Data Analysis

The questions utilized for the research are based on previous studies (**Table II**). Responses to closed-ended questions were given on a seven-point Likert-type scale, and an additional free-text response option was also included. The collected data were analyzed using descriptive statistics,

namely frequencies, median, and interquartile range (IQR), as they constitute the most appropriate tools to analyze and interpret ordinal data [67], [68]. Questionnaire pre-testing, in which two academics and three LIS professionals participated, was carried out to ensure the instrument's content validity.

IV. RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

A. Marketing Attitudes

Initially, participants were asked to indicate their agreement with 19 statements that assessed their attitudes toward marketing. **Table III** shows that most respondents view marketing as crucial for libraries' relevance and survival. Many agreed that libraries should adopt business-like marketing practices, reflecting a shift towards a marketing culture. Additionally, respondents believe marketing aids in developing new services, setting appropriate charges, promoting services, and discovering innovative ways to serve patrons. This indicates a move towards a comprehensive marketing approach. However, despite their involvement in marketing, many respondents feel they need more knowledge and training in marketing techniques. Therefore, proper and continuous marketing training is necessary for library professionals to face new challenges, as acknowledged in LIS literature [65], [66], [69].

B. Marketing Activities

Participants were asked to assess the importance of 12 marketing activities, with cumulative results shown in **Table IV**. Most respondents indicated that advertising and promotion are essential for raising awareness of library services. Communicating through email and newsletters was deemed very important for providing the public with

relevant information, aligning with marketing experts' views on email as an effective communication tool [70], and the widespread use of newsletters for coordination and awareness [71].

Respondents also emphasized the importance of website design, maintenance, and social media content creation for effectively informing and attracting different user groups. The significance of a well-designed library webpage [72] and social media presence [73] is well-documented. Ashiq et al. [51] found that during the COVID-19 pandemic, tools like library websites, social media, and emails were effective and remain so in the post-pandemic era.

Attracting new patrons and developing new services were crucial, and maintaining a patron database was essential. The findings also highlighted the importance of patron surveys for collecting data to assess service satisfaction and develop user-centered services, moving away from librarians' assumptions about user needs [21]. Events, exhibitions, and educational programs were also identified as strategically important.

In an open-ended question, respondents suggested additional activities such as educational programs, seminars for search skills, library tours, reading clubs, joint events, and community building. All these activities emphasize the library's role as a living cultural hub where people learn, work, and play together, reinforcing the role of libraries as cultural hubs [74].

Table III. Attitudes toward Marketing

	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	Median	IQR
Marketing is relevant to the needs of libraries	1.1	0.0	2.2	4.4	11.6	30.9	49.7	6.0	1.0
I am knowledgeable about marketing techniques	2.8	8.8	13.8	27.6	21.5	14.4	11.0	4.0	3.0
Libraries should market themselves as businesses do	2.2	2.2	6.6	11.0	15.5	26.5	35.9	6.0	2.0
Development of new library products & services is important	0.0	0.0	2.2	3.9	12.7	22.1	59.1	7.0	1.0
Determining how much to charge for some library services is important	2.8	3.9	1.1	16.0	20.4	21.5	34.3	6.0	2.0
Effective promotion of library services is important	0.0	0.6	1.1	3.3	10.5	25.4	59.1	7.0	1.0
Finding new ways to deliver services to patrons is important	0.0	0.0	1.1	2.2	9.4	27.1	60.2	7.0	1.0
I have been personally involved in marketing library services	10.5	12.2	7.2	17.1	21.0	14.4	17.7	5.0	3.0
Marketing is too costly for most libraries	5.0	6.1	13.3	27.6	20.4	20.4	7.2	4.0	2.0
Knowing more about marketing techniques would be helpful to my work	2.8	4.4	7.2	9.9	23.2	24.3	28.2	6.0	2.0
Good public relations activities are important for a library	0.0	0.0	1.1	3.9	11.6	30.4	53.0	7.0	1.0

Marketing tries to satisfy people's wants & needs while also achieving the goals of the organization	0.0	0.6	2.8	11.6	13.8	30.9	40.3	6.0	2.0
Marketing is inconsistent with the professionalism of a librarian	38.1	23.8	12.2	17.7	5.0	1.1	2.2	2.0	3.0
Libraries need marketing to survive in an increasingly competitive environment	2.2	1.1	3.9	9.4	21.0	23.8	38.7	6.0	2.0
Library school programs should require a course in marketing	3.3	1.7	2.2	10.5	14.4	23.2	44.8	6.0	2.0
It is important to constantly monitor the wants and needs of potential patrons	0.0	1.1	0.6	3.3	6.6	23.8	64.6	7.0	1.0
Libraries don't need marketing because people already know what services we offer	38.7	33.1	13.8	8.8	2.8	1.7	1.1	2.0	2.0
Marketing is not a high priority in my library	17.7	18.2	14.4	19.9	12.2	9.9	7.7	3.0	3.0
Library marketing does not require a dedicated marketing officer, as its staff can do it	11.6	19.3	19.3	23.8	13.3	10.5	2.2	3.0	3.0

Notes: Results are given in percentages

1=Strongly disagree, 2=Disagree, 3=Somewhat disagree, 4=Neither agree nor disagree, 5=Somewhat agree, 6=Agree, 7=Strongly agree

Table IV. Importance of Marketing Activities

	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	Median	IQR
Advertising/promotion	0.6	1.1	3.9	7.2	13.3	34.3	39.8	6.0	2.0
Mailings	0.6	1.1	1.1	2.2	8.8	31.5	54.7	7.0	1.0
Newsletters	0.6	0.6	1.7	2.8	14.4	36.5	43.6	6.0	1.0
Patron surveys	0.6	0.0	3.3	6.1	16.0	27.1	47.0	6.0	2.0
Attracting new patrons	1.1	0.0	0.6	1.1	8.3	21.0	68.0	7.0	1.0
Developing new services	0.6	0.0	0.0	1.1	5.5	23.8	69.1	7.0	1.0
Maintaining a patron database	0.6	1.7	0.6	6.1	11.0	30.4	49.7	6.0	1.0
Website design and maintenance	0.6	0.0	0.0	1.7	4.4	19.3	74.0	7.0	1.0
Events	0.6	0.0	0.0	3.9	7.7	28.2	59.7	7.0	1.0
Exhibitions	0.6	0.0	1.1	8.3	13.8	29.8	46.4	6.0	1.0
Educational programs	0.6	0.0	1.1	1.7	6.6	25.4	64.6	7.0	1.0
Content creation for social media	0.6	0.0	0.0	5.5	10.5	27.6	55.8	7.0	1.0

Notes: Results are given in percentages

1=Not at all important, 2=Low importance, 3=Slightly important, 4= Neutral, 5=Moderately important, 6= Very important, 7= Extremely important

C. Marketing Competencies

Participants were asked to rate their agreement with 20 items regarding skills and abilities necessary for effectively marketing library services and collections. Data analysis in **Table V** reveals a consensus on the need for a broad range

of skills, particularly in soft skills, ICT, marketing, and communication, as supported by previous research [42], [75], [76]. Respondents specifically identified communication skills, critical thinking and problem-solving, web page development and maintenance, and event organization as essential for marketing their libraries.

Table V. Marketing Competencies

	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	Median	IQR
Generic Soft Skills									
Communication	0.6	0.0	0.6	3.9	7.7	32	55.2	7	1
Critical thinking and problem-solving	0.6	0.0	1.1	7.2	10.5	29.8	50.8	7	1
Professional initiative	0.6	0.6	1.7	4.4	13.8	35.9	43.1	6	1
Change implementation flexibility	0.6	1.1	1.7	5	15.5	34.8	41.4	6	1
Resourcefulness	0.6	0.0	1.7	3.9	11.6	34.8	47.5	6	1
Networking	0.6	0.6	1.7	8.3	10.5	30.9	47.5	6	1
Time management	1.7	0.6	5.5	8.8	17.7	28.7	37	6	2
ICT Skills									
Web page development and maintenance	0.6	0.6	1.1	5.5	9.9	30.4	51.9	7	1
Social media management	1.1	0.6	1.1	7.7	11	30.9	47.5	6	1
Search engine optimization	1.7	0.6	1.7	9.9	12.7	34.8	38.7	6	2
Analytics	1.7	0.0	2.2	8.8	20.4	28.2	38.7	6	2
Marketing and Communication Skills									
Events organization	0.6	0.0	0.6	6.1	12.7	29.3	50.8	7	1
Services evaluation	1.1	1.1	2.2	8.3	14.4	31.5	41.4	6	2
Complaints handling	1.7	1.1	6.1	9.4	16.6	26	39.2	6	2
Marketing plan development	1.1	2.2	2.8	9.9	17.1	28.7	38.1	6	2
Communication strategy development	1.1	0.0	1.1	7.2	19.3	31.5	39.8	6	2
Library brand development	2.8	1.1	5.5	14.9	20.4	22.1	33.1	6	2
Promotional material creation	1.1	1.1	1.7	7.2	17.7	28.7	42.5	6	2
Writing	1.1	1.1	2.2	11	13.8	30.9	39.8	6	2
Storytelling	3.9	2.2	8.3	12.2	20.4	24.3	28.7	6	3

Notes: Results are given in percentages

1=Strongly disagree, 2=Disagree, 3=Somewhat disagree, 4=Neither agree nor disagree, 5=Somewhat agree, 6=Agree, 7=Strongly agree

D. Marketing Challenges

To assess employee perspectives on marketing challenges, respondents were asked to indicate their level of agreement with nine statements, with results presented in **Table VI**. Consistent with previous research [64], over half of the participants indicated that their lack of knowledge about marketing concepts is a major barrier to applying marketing,

with many expressing confusion about the term. Additionally, more than half noted that marketing is not taught in library schools, a finding that may reflect the age of respondents, as marketing was not typically included in the curriculum when older respondents attended. Many participants also cited a lack of staff and senior management support as significant obstacles to library marketing, corroborating previous studies [14], [26], [77], [78].

Table VI. Marketing Challenges

	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	Median	IQR
Ignorance of marketing concepts	6.1	6.1	6.1	23.8	14.9	20.4	22.7	5.0	2.0
Library management does not support marketing library services	2.0	12.7	13.8	14.4	14.4	18.8	16.6	4.0	3.0
Marketing is costly for academic libraries	11.6	15.5	8.8	24.9	17.7	12.7	8.8	4.0	3.0
Libraries do not deal systematically with attracting new users	8.3	11.0	7.2	16.0	23.8	17.1	16.6	5.0	3.0
Librarians are not taught marketing in library school	4.4	4.4	7.7	26.5	15.5	16.0	25.4	5.0	3.0
Librarians do not have the necessary skills to market library services	14.9	16.6	11.6	21.5	14.4	10.5	10.5	4.0	3.0

Librarians do not know how to communicate what they do	18.2	23.2	12.2	16.0	14.4	7.7	8.3	3.0	3.0
Marketing is difficult because some librarians do not want to part with information	21.0	28.2	9.4	18.8	8.8	8.8	5.0	3.0	2.0
Librarians feel awkward towards marketing because they are afraid of commercial publicity	18.2	26.0	8.8	16.0	17.1	8.8	5.0	3.0	3.0
Librarians are confused about the term marketing	11.0	18.2	11.0	21.5	17.1	12.7	8.3	4.0	3.0
Libraries do not engage in marketing due to lack of staff	3.3	5.5	5.5	20.4	16.6	21.5	27.1	5.0	3.0

Notes: Results are given in percentages

1=Strongly disagree, 2=Disagree, 3=Somewhat disagree, 4=Neither agree nor disagree, 5=Somewhat agree, 6=Agree, 7=Strongly agree

V. CONCLUSIONS

In the aftermath of the pandemic, libraries face the challenge of maintaining their relevance amidst an avalanche of disruptive technologies, fierce competition, and budget cuts. To survive in this highly competitive environment, libraries must embrace marketing to effectively respond to user demands, demonstrate their impact, and ensure sustainability.

This research provides insights into how libraries can leverage marketing to maintain relevance. The findings highlight the library staff's recognition of the critical need for marketing. Effective library marketing requires significant time and effort [79], encompassing the development of mission statements [21], informing patrons about relevant products [80], and building meaningful long-term relationships [3]. Sustainable success in library marketing cannot be achieved through sporadic efforts. The findings also show that library staff understands the transformation of libraries into hubs of knowledge and recreation in the post-COVID era, serving as places for gathering [81], learning [82], working [74], connecting [9], and creating [49]. Despite having the necessary skills, library professionals often lack a solid marketing plan and rely on ad hoc efforts. Libraries should focus on identifying community needs and developing new services, using data gathered from social media and websites [4], [14]. As visibility drives relevance, libraries must transform into valuable institutions and adopt a marketing mindset. Library leaders and professionals should collaborate with marketing experts and develop strategic marketing plans to elevate their services. Enhanced communication, cooperation, and knowledge exchange among library leaders can accelerate this transition.

The staff is crucial for maintaining the relevance of libraries in the evolving information landscape. The need for library professionals to understand and respond strategically to digital transformation is increasingly urgent, as described by Vial [83]. In line with literature in library marketing and management, continuous capacity building and up-skilling of library staff are essential [34], [48], [84], [85], [86]. This ensures that knowledge workers remain relevant by meeting

user needs and empowering digital equality [87]. Library professionals should enhance their skills and competencies, and LIS schools should make marketing a central part of their curricula. As Cherinet [88] describes, the future librarian's mindset will include a blend of old, emerging, and future skills.

This research has some potential limitations. Firstly, self-report data may offer biased estimates of marketing attitudes, challenges, and skills. Comparing the perspectives of library staff with those of users could provide more comprehensive insights. Secondly, this study does not differentiate between the public and private sectors, so examining potential differences in perceptions and practices would be valuable. Lastly, as the study sample is from one country, including library professionals from multiple countries would enable cross-cultural comparisons of library marketing practices.

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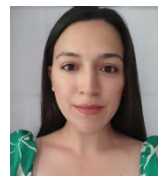


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