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Marketing culture of Finnish research libraries:

Implications for customer satisfaction*

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This paper examines the pertinent issues underlying the marketing culture of Finnish research libraries and the library management's awareness of modern marketing theories and practices. The directors and consumers of 33 academic and special libraries in the south of Finland participated as respondents in this study. The findings show that a genuine marketing culture of a library represents a synthesis of specific marketing attitudes, knowledge and of certain practices which lead to superior service performance. Three kinds of marketing cultures were found: the strong- *the high fliers*; the medium- *the brisk runners*; and the weak- *the slow walkers*. These marketing cultures are explained by analysing the libraries' marketing attitudes, knowledge, and behaviour permeating their organizations. The implication for libraries is that it pays to be market oriented, the ultimate result being higher customer satisfaction.

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Introduction

The application of marketing principles and techniques to the librarianship and information services sector has been a debatable topic for the last 30 years ever since the domain of marketing was expanded to the non-profit organizations by Kotler and Levy (1969); Kotler and Zaltman (1971) and Shapiro (1973). As a result, the library literature consists of a plethora of articles on marketing of library and information services. However, in general, the literature reveals a paucity of empirical based scholarly activity on marketing in managing libraries and information services sector, despite the fact that marketing ideas have been propagating for a long time. Thus far, the literature review shows

that the major part of literature in library world has focused on discussions of the applicability of marketing to libraries or has consisted of guidebooks demonstrating the application of marketing techniques to the libraries (Shontz, Parker and Parker, 2004). A majority of the literature on marketing of libraries and information services are either in the form of "how to" guides, or case studies of practice in specific contexts (Rowley, 2003). Unfortunately, the best of these contributions are superficial (Besant and Sharp, 2000). The recent literature shows the increasing interest of library and information services practitioners in understanding the marketing mentality and attitude (Savard, 1996; Shontz, Parker and Parker, 2004). Simultaneously, some researchers also started to pay attention to understand the domain of market orientation. Lozano (2000) provided a model for customer-orientation from the library managers' point of view. Harrison and Shaw (2004) attempted to study market orientation and marketing culture

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of all staff in a public library of Australia. However, why are some libraries more market-oriented than others? Remarkably, this fundamental issue has not been often addressed in empirical studies especially in the library world (Singh, 2005 a, b). Even in corporate literature, such empirical studies about market orientation only began to appear in 1990 when the domain of market orientation was clearly specified in a rigorous fashion (Kohli and Jaworski, 1990; Narver and Slater, 1990). Thus, so far not much attention has been paid to investigate the pertinent issues underlying the **marketing culture** of libraries in depth due to which it has remained an ill-defined idea for the libraries and information providing institutions.

This paper aims to investigate the pertinent issues underlying the marketing culture of Finnish research libraries and to understand the awareness of the knowledge base of library management concerning contemporary marketing theories and practices. This study is based on the notion that a leader in an organization can have large impact on its culture, which has been suggested in many earlier findings (Block, 2003; Brooks, 1996; Hennessey, 1998; Kasper, 2002; McNeil, 2001; Ogbonna and Harris, 2000) Therefore, it is important to learn about the market orientation that initiates at the top management and flows throughout the whole organization thus resulting in a particular kind of library culture.

The concept of marketing culture

The marketing concept is considered a *business philosophy*, which puts the customer at the centre of overall activities of the organization. The *business philosophy* can be contrasted with its **implementation** reflected in the *activities and behaviours* of an organization. (Kohli and Jaworski, 1990). "Market orientation" (or market-oriented behavior) is a popular term used by marketing practitioners as an indicator of the extent to which an organization implements the "marketing concept" (Kohli and Jaworski, 1990; Pulendran and Speed, 1996). Hence, a market oriented library is one whose actions are consistent with the marketing concept.

The concept of marketing culture is nebulous and has yet to be defined precisely (Luk, 1997). So far, there has been inconsistency in defining the domain of marketing culture. Some scholars consider market orientation as the culture of

business organisation (Narver and Slater, 1990) whereas Kohli and Jaworski (1990) tend to look at market orientation as the managerial behaviour of organisation. Webster (1995) defines marketing culture as that component of a firm's overall culture that refers to the pattern of shared values and beliefs that help employees understand and "feel" the marketing ethos and thereby provides them with norms for behaviour inside the firm. It refers to the importance the firm as a whole places on marketing and to the way in which marketing activities are executed in the firm. Thus all these conceptualisations pose complexities in understanding the domain of marketing culture. As such, the relationship between the marketing culture and market orientation is blurred. One should not get confused about the concept of marketing culture and market orientation. It should be remembered that culture is not the behaviour of individuals in the organisation; rather it is the underlying assumptions and attitudes that shape the behaviour of individuals within the organisation. According to Meldrum (1996), the difference between marketing culture and market orientation is that cultural feature will affect the degree of market orientation, i.e., in what way marketing tasks will be performed.

Thus in keeping with these perspectives, the present research considers market orientation as the prime indicator of the marketing culture and defines marketing culture as the synthesis of specific marketing attitudes, knowledge-underlying beliefs, values and assumption; and of certain marketing practices which leads to superior service performance by organisation.

Methods and materials

The research data were generated from autumn 2002 through spring 2003. The libraries were selected from the home page of *Gateway to Finnish Research Libraries* which consisted of 23 University and 10 special libraries. The library directors and customers from each library participated as respondents in this study. The libraries were chosen from the diverse subject fields representing different disciplines such as art, theology, humanities, social sciences, law, pure sciences, technology, and economics and business so that a broader picture of the marketing cultures of different libraries could be obtained.

A semi-structured interview guide consisting of

both open and close ended questions was created for generating the data from library directors. Most of the quantitative questions were measured on the Likert's scale which comprised of attitudinal, market orientation and other issues concerning with operational policies and activities of libraries. The open-ended questions consisted of mainly the knowledge measuring questions which were concerned about notion and importance of marketing, quality of library services, and awareness of services marketing concept such as public relations, market segmentation, and promotion of services, etc. The interview guide for library directors also requested information about certain personal and professional characteristics such as their experience, marketing education and exposure to marketing seminars and conferences of the respondents. As explained earlier, the sample also consists of customers of these libraries so that libraries' service performance could be analyzed from the customers' viewpoint as well. The research data from library customers were collected randomly with the help of a questionnaire survey. The help of library management was sought in distributing the questionnaire which resulted in a higher feed-back. Overall, 165 questionnaire were returned out of 330 which amounted to 53% of the population. Minimum 3 and maximum 10 questionnaires were returned from each library. Most of the questions were measured on the Likert's scale which consists of major issues concerning the customer satisfaction on service performance of libraries.

This research has used a combination of qualitative as well as quantitative methods in order to understand the overall impression of the library's marketing culture which helped to analyse the required in-depth issues adequately. Since market orientation has been considered an important indicator of library's culture, hence based on the market orientation factor (adapted and modified from Lozano (2000)), libraries were classified into three groups:

- the strong market oriented (the top 25 per cent of market orientation scores)
- the medium market oriented, (the middle 50 per cent of market orientation score), and
- the weak market oriented (the lower 25 per cent of market orientation score)

This classification of market orientation has been further used to analyse libraries' attitudes, knowledge, operational policies and activities, and service performance by a combination of

qualitative and quantitative methods.

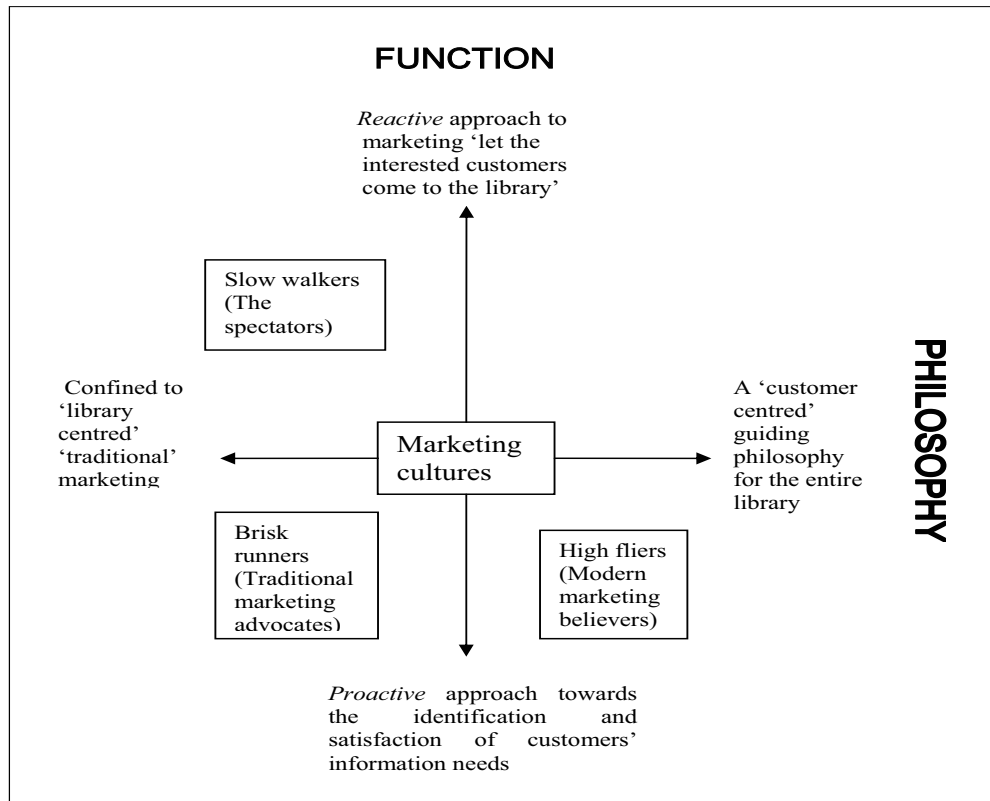
The knowledge measuring answers of respondents were mapped out qualitatively by quantifying their answers. More point were awarded for more marketing knowledge and vice versa. Further, marketing attitudes, knowledge, operational policies and activities, and service performance of libraries were compared against their levels of market orientation in order to explore the relationship between these variables and to understand as to what extent they were consistent with each other. The outcome of the research is mainly qualitative however quantitative measures have also been used to pinpoint causality and relationship, usually between independent and dependent variables.

Thus, in brief, this study examines the marketing culture of libraries by analysing the marketing attitudes, knowledge (underlying beliefs, values and assumptions), behaviour (market orientation), operational policies and activities, and service performance (customer satisfaction) of libraries. The assumption of the study is that if the top management of libraries has market-oriented behaviour, then their attitudes, knowledge, operational activities and service performance should also be reflected accordingly.

Results and implications of the study

This research delineated six dimensions of market orientation which were found to be critical behind the market oriented behaviour of libraries. These are namely, customer philosophy, inter-functional coordination, strategic orientation, responsiveness, competition orientation and pricing orientation. The cultural profiles of the libraries have been analysed by synthesising the findings of their market orientation, marketing attitudes, knowledge, operational policies and activities, and demographic characteristics. This research shows a genuine marketing culture of a library represents a synthesis of specific marketing attitudes, knowledge and of certain practices which lead to superior service performance. Based on their cultural profiles, the three market-oriented groups have been given three different metaphors: the strong market oriented libraries - *the highfliers*; the medium market oriented libraries - *the brisk runners*; and the weak market oriented libraries - *the slow walkers*. An overview of the relationship of the three marketing cultures in relation to their

Figure 1: Marketing approaches of different library cultures



function and philosophy is presented in figure 1.

The High Fliers-The strong market oriented libraries

In most of the dimensions- customer philosophy, inter-functional coordination, strategic orientation, pricing orientation and competition orientation-excluding responsiveness, the strong market oriented libraries perform at a high level. They approach marketing with the prime aim of "identifying and meeting customer information needs". To them, this is the most important activity for survival of libraries. The culture of these libraries could be called "The High Fliers" according to the Hooley and Lynch (1985) who termed the top performing companies of their study as "The High Fliers" and the remaining organizations as "The Also Rans". The marketing culture of the high fliers seems to be 'market oriented' which tries to put the customer at the

heart of their activities. The analysis of market orientation, marketing attitudes, and knowledge of these libraries demonstrates that they keep on stressing the importance of customers as the top priority of the marketing concept.

But, there are some shortcomings in the operational policies and activities of these libraries which pushes them behind the medium market oriented group. However, in sharp contrast with the weak market oriented libraries, the marketing approach of the high fliers is 'pro-active' towards their customers. They believe in fulfilling the call of the information age customer who is asking libraries, "This is what I (*customer*) want, won't you (*library*) please make it" (Kotler, 2003). Therefore, because of their belief in modern marketing values, the high fliers could also be regarded as 'modern marketing believers'. This can be attributed to their marketing education and more exposure to seminar and courses as shown in findings. However, some respondents have also

been found to be strong market oriented without having any formal education in marketing. A majority of the library directors have been found to have professional experience of 16-25 years or more than 26 years. The attitudes of the high fliers shows similarity with a recent study of Shontz, Parker and Parker (2004) who showed that the most positive attitudes towards marketing was associated with higher professional experience of librarians. Moreover, their findings also show that the positive attitudes of marketing were positively related to the respondents' higher exposure to marketing seminar and conferences. The current research supports the findings of Shontz, Parker and Parker (2004) to a larger extent. However, it has also been found that there can be some exceptions when a person can be strong market oriented without such exposures and likewise one can also be weak market oriented in spite of a lot of exposure to marketing seminars and conferences. Briefly, the marketing culture of the high fliers appears to be in line of the emerging notions of contemporary customer centred relationship marketing. This kind of marketing culture has been found mostly in medium libraries but it is also visible in small and large libraries as well.

The Brisk Runners-The medium market oriented libraries

The marketing culture of the medium market oriented libraries is 'library centred'. This kind of marketing culture could also be called "The Brisk Runners" as these libraries are "briskly running" their 'promotional' and 'charging' activities which is at the highest across the three market orientation groups. They put the most concerted efforts towards these goals which satisfy 'traditional marketing approaches'. Due to this, the brisk runners could also be termed 'traditional marketing advocates'. The marketing approach of libraries is more in line of 'production orientation' (Kotler, 1988). It has been revealed throughout the analysis of market orientation, marketing attitudes, knowledge and operational policies that this group keeps on emphasizing the two Ps of classic marketing mix: *pricing* and *promotion*. These two aspects dominated this culture more than anything else. They seem to acknowledge the role of marketing in implementing these two Ps. But, in doing so, the proactive functional orientation of marketing "identifying and meeting customer information needs" is left behind in their inclination towards

library governed policies and procedures. This does not mean that they are ignorant towards their customers. They believe in building relationship with their customers with the means of various promotional efforts. The libraries of this medium group are still in the traditional tool box of marketing. The respondents are having marketing education, and exposure to marketing seminar and conferences. Their professional experience is also in the range of 16-25 or 26=< years like the high fliers. This kind of marketing culture was found in all kinds of libraries, i.e., small, medium and large sized. In brief, the marketing approach of the "brisk runners" towards the customers is in line with the manufacturer of Industrial Revolution who said: "This is what I (*library*) make, won't you please buy (*use*) it" (Kotler, 2003).

The Slow Walkers-The weak market oriented libraries

The weak market oriented libraries have been called as "The Slow Walkers" because of their low profile in market orientation, marketing attitudes, knowledge, operational activities, and service performance. Instead, their library values seem to be focused on issues other than marketing. They have been found to be "slow" when it comes to marketing. In practice, they actually are involved in marketing activities but prefer to call it "disseminating or dividing information" thus reflecting a hesitation in accepting the idea of marketing in libraries. Because of this, the marketing culture of the slow walkers seems to be of "agnostics" which keeps a general picture of marketing as a notion that does not have much to do with libraries. The weak market orientation, attitudes, knowledge and behaviour of these libraries towards marketing go hand in hand. One possible reason behind this could be the lack of adequate marketing education and exposure to marketing seminars and workshops as the findings indicate. The members of this marketing culture also possess less professional experience falling into the range of 1-15 years. Even though a few libraries in this group possess excellent marketing knowledge and deep understanding of the benefits of application of the marketing concept like the high fliers, their knowledge is not reflected in their library operations. Because of this typical characteristics and also the 'wait and see' approach of members in this group, this type of marketing culture could also be termed as

‘The Spectators’ when it comes to implementing marketing philosophy. The libraries belonging to this group have a long way to go in adopting what is generally regarded as a market orientation because they lack a pro-active functional orientation of “identifying and meeting customer information needs” from the marketing viewpoint. However, they try to build relationships with their customers and maintain regular contacts not as a means of increasing their understanding of their customers’ information needs but rather as a “usual service oriented Finnish way” of serving the customers. The slow walkers do not seem to appreciate marketing as a guiding service philosophy either. Their approach of serving to customers is ‘reactive’ and do not manifest the penetration of marketing concept anywhere. “Let the interested customers come to the library” seems to be the hallmark of such culture.

Benefits of being market oriented

This research has shown that there are major differences in the market orientation of the research libraries. The three kinds of marketing cultures have been labelled as: the high fliers, the brisk runners, and the slow walkers. However, the most important question put forward in this research is how beneficial a highly developed marketing culture is to a library. The answer to this question was sought by analysing the opinions of the consumers on different services offered to them by their libraries. The overall picture of the customer satisfaction with the service performance of libraries in three different marketing cultures is displayed in table 1.

The market oriented efforts of the high fliers can be seen in the higher satisfaction of their customers. They stand out from the rest in providing customer

Table 1: Customer satisfaction with the service performance of libraries in three marketing cultures

Service performance indicators of the libraries	The Slow Walkers (The weak market oriented libraries)	The Brisk Runners (The medium market oriented libraries)	The High Fliers (The strong market oriented libraries)
Accessibility of services and products	Lowest	Medium	Highest
Study environment	Medium	Lowest	Highest
Satisfaction with library equipments	Medium	Lowest	Highest
Collections usefulness	Lowest	Medium	Highest
Condition of collections	Highest	Medium	Lowest
Customer centeredness of services	Lowest	Equal to High Fliers	Highest
Staff attributes	Medium	Highest	Lowest
Customer appreciation	Medium	Lowest	Highest
Customers’ opinion on pricing issue -Justification of library to charge fees -Charging external users -Willingness to pay	Medium Highest Lowest	Lowest Lowest Medium	Highest Medium Highest
Overall quality	Lowest	Almost equal to High Fliers	Highest

satisfaction through superior service performance in most of aspects. They put more effort in ensuring the accessibility of library materials by providing adequate promotional guidance to customers. The customers are satisfied with the physical environment and working conditions of different library equipment. The customers acknowledge the usefulness of the library collection in providing solutions to their information problems. The customers also show their satisfaction with various library services such as circulation, inter-library loan, opening hours, promotional activities, computer printers, etc. However, they are quite critical about the staff assistance in helping them to use the learning resources of the libraries as well as the condition of collections even though they show satisfaction with the overall service performance of libraries.

The service performance of the brisk runners is of medium type. Typical of their service performance is the highest customer satisfaction with the staff attributes across the three groups of libraries. The customers are satisfied with the borrowing, inter-library loan, organization of library materials, opening hours and promotional activities of the libraries. However, they are dissatisfied with the working conditions of library equipments and physical study environment. The customers are also critical of the library's collection procurement policy and teaching programmes for users. Nevertheless, they are quite satisfied with the overall service performance of libraries.

Table 1 reveals that the service performance of the slow walkers has not been found to be superior. Instead, it goes in hand in hand with their weak market oriented behaviour. The customer evaluation of libraries has revealed that they do not put enough efforts into raising the accessibility of services and products. Even though, in the attitudinal measurement, such libraries were found to assign low priority to the physical environment but their customers seem to be satisfied with their current physical environment. These libraries' customers are dissatisfied with most of the library activities and services directed towards them. This includes circulation, inter-library loan, staff attributes, promotional activities, usefulness of collection, and working conditions of equipments, etc. Only the conditions of collections were rated superior by the customers. This demonstrates once

again that the primary interest of these libraries is inward and collection bound. In doing so, the concerns of customers are overlooked for whom the library is meant.

Discussion

Thus, based on the discussion of the cultural profiles of three groups it could be assumed that there are considerable variations in the marketing culture of different libraries and also significant variations in their service philosophies. The findings of this research show that the higher market orientation is connected to a higher extent with the service performance and customer satisfaction of libraries though not significant statistically. This finding is particularly important in the sense that it manifests that marketing culture consists of a certain set of beliefs and knowledge (which form a specific attitude towards marketing) and implementation of a certain set of activities that actually materialize the attitude of marketing into practice (market orientation) leading to superior service performance of libraries. The current research is in the line of recent emerging perspective (Krepapa, *et al.*, 2003, Steinman *et al.*, 2000; Webb *et al.*, 2000) which suggests that beneficial strategic insights may be gained when service firms take into account their customers' view on the organization's level of market orientation. A review of the market orientation literature reveals that researchers initially considered and measured market orientation as a management perceived phenomenon (Kohli and Jaworski, 1990; Narver and Slater, 1990). Likewise, Lozano's customer orientation model (2000) also takes into account only the library managers' point of view. In this sense, adopting solely a management-defined view of market orientation is one-sided in that it ignores the vital role that customers play in terms of value recognition (Webb, *et al.*, 2000). Recent thinking, however suggests that because market orientation contains a strong customer focus, an organization can be accurately described as market-oriented only when its customers perceive as such (Krepapa, *et al.*, 2003). Hernon (2002) also argues that "if customers say there is quality service, then there is. If they do not, then there is not. It does not matter what an organization believes about its level of service". Therefore, the findings of the

current research assume importance in the sense that they reveal that the higher level of market orientation of libraries result, may not be in perfect but undoubtedly superior service performance, as the customers' feedback confirm.

Conclusion

The analysis of the whole findings reveals that the concept of marketing has very varied status in the Finnish research libraries. A small proportion of the libraries (the high fliers) find marketing challenging and demanding. These libraries use modern marketing theories and applications to gain a competitive advantage for providing a successful customer centred service. In other libraries, the marketing concept does not always dominate the libraries' organisational thinking. Moreover, the concept of marketing has a poor image in the mind of these libraries. However, the results of this research show that a strong market oriented approach brings in more satisfaction to the customers. Marketing theories can thus be used to bring better strategic and operational marketing knowledge and know-how by the library managers in an understandable and useful way. The ideas of relational marketing better fit in libraries' functions and help in providing appropriate solutions to customers' information needs by delivering value to them which in turn really satisfy their viewpoints. However, it should perhaps be mentioned that this does not mean that the traditional user based service philosophy of Finnish libraries should be abandoned but to further develop more useful and effective means of assistance for them, that is, to build a marketing based system which will help the libraries to become more efficient and effective from the customers' point of view.

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