

Product/Service Diversification Potentials in Academic Libraries of Sri Lanka

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Constant innovation of technology and changing of consumer behavior and social attitudes have made customer-needs are divers and variety seeking. In economic view, this 'Turbulence of Environment' has created a competition among entrepreneurs and therefore, many companies today utilize various strategic application to their businesses to win this competition. This move is also common to the Library and Information Service sector. As a result, users today have many options for information seeking other than the library and academic libraries face with budgetary restrictions from their parent organizations and declining user interest towards the conventional services they provide. Librarians are compelled to seek for survival potentials and response to issues of retaining user-interest and cost recovery avenues. Like business companies, academic libraries have to apply innovative strategies to expand the market share and one of these strategic applications is to diversify their products /services in accordance with the diversity of user needs.

The purpose of this paper is to examine how far the academic librarians in Sri Lanka have understood the potential of product/service diversification in their libraries and discuss of the potential framework that helps them apply the diversification strategies in academic library sector. A questionnaire based survey was administered with 51 academic librarians in Sri Lanka in order to check the already available services, possible services and impossible services against a list of services determined by literature review and professional experience of the author. The check list included three categories of services: directly related library services, indirectly related library services and unrelated services. Commonly expected services from any academic library were considered as directly related services while indirectly related services were the services which are not compulsory, but can be provided by the library. Unrelated services were the non-information services that can be provided as additional services by the library for cost recovery of profit earning purposes. Results indicated that as an average directly related services of the library were available (68%) or possible to provide (22%) by 90% libraries. Indirectly related services were available in 41% libraries and were possible by 29 % libraries while 30% libraries are not able implement them. Unrelated services were available in 13% libraries and 18% of librarians perceived them as possible in libraries. However in average 69% of

librarians perceived this as impossible in their libraries. Interpretation of the study reveals that academic librarians are mostly strict to the directly related library services and have quite concern about indirectly related services. Although there are many avenues to diversify their directly or indirectly related service to serve the diversity of needs of users, only a few librarians have concentrated on diversification strategy. Unrelated services which have cost recovery potentials were very poorly implemented. Capability issues such as capital restrictions, technological barriers, lack of interest and support from higher authorities, lack of entrepreneurial view among librarians and reluctance to take risk in unrelated services were seen as issues to implement service diversification strategies. It is recommended to train librarians on areas of entrepreneurship, creative thinking and leveraging of resource capabilities.

Keywords: Academic libraries, Product/Service Diversification, Diversification potentials, Strategic Application, Information Marketing