

# Evaluating marketing strategies for promoting information products and services in selected public libraries in Eswatini

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**Abstract :** This study aimed to evaluate the marketing strategies used to promote library and information services in public libraries in Eswatini. Specifically, the study sought to: (1) identify the information products and services offered by these libraries, (2) establish the marketing strategies employed to promote information products and services, and (3) assess the effectiveness of these strategies in enhancing user engagement. The study adopted a positivist paradigm and employed a quantitative research approach, using questionnaires containing closed-ended questions as the primary data collection instrument. A total of sixteen questionnaires were completed by librarians from the Mbabane Public Library, while nine questionnaires were completed by librarians from the Manzini Public Library. The collected data were analysed using Microsoft Excel, with findings presented through tables and figures. The study revealed that public libraries in Eswatini offer a range of information services, including lending, reservation, translation, reference, referral, and children's library services. The information products provided include printed books, newspapers, magazines, and government gazettes. Regarding marketing strategies, the study found that Eswatini public libraries employ several approaches to promote their information products and services. These strategies include organising trainings, seminars, and workshops to educate librarians on marketing practices; creating and maintaining library web pages; providing electronic access to information; enhancing interpersonal relationships between staff and users; conducting one-on-one discussions with users; having representatives participate in institutional functions; advertising through print and electronic media; promoting staff friendliness towards users; providing suggestion boxes; and ensuring that librarians are appropriately attired. The study recommended a need to have a library website and maintain it. A well-designed website serves as a crucial marketing tool, providing users with easy access to information about library services.

**Keywords:** Eswatini, information products, library services, public libraries, marketing strategies

## Introduction

A library may be defined as a facility that serves as a storehouse of information, where printed and non-printed materials are organised in a systematic way to cater for the information requirements of users (Osinulu, Adekunmisi, Okewale and Oyewusi, 2018). Libraries make efforts to ensure that resources and services are efficiently marketed to patrons. The marketing of library and information services involves raising awareness among library patrons about the availability of up-to-date information and new services. A study by Zhang, Lo, So and Chiu (2020) highlighted that the promotion of library and information services encompasses several responsibilities, including the identification of user requirements, the provision of suitable services or resources to meet those requirements, and effective communication and service delivery to consumers. This means that the primary objective

of marketing library and information services is to discern and engage both existing and prospective clients, with the aim of establishing a rapport with them. Prior to accessing the library and using its resources, it is vital for users to possess a comprehensive understanding of the resources available to them.

To ensure maximum use of their services by their customers, libraries and information experts continue to actively devise marketing strategies (Oduor & Maina 2022). Hence, they have established connections and foster engagement with their users to disseminate information on the libraries' activities and to acquire a deeper understanding of the community they serve (Zhang, Lo, So and Chiu, 2020). Librarians have the responsibility of advocating for libraries, promoting the availability of resources and services, and convincing library customers of the library's worth and importance. This is because public libraries are established with the purpose of facilitating access to information goods and services. This necessitates actively pursuing customers, rather than adopting a passive approach to waiting for them. Numerous libraries worldwide have diligently sought out users in various public spaces such as streets, parks, shopping malls, and marketplaces. Public libraries have shown a proactive approach in promoting public libraries by adopting a business-oriented perspective, as reflected in the word "marketing," which entails the sale of goods and services to customers (Heshmati, 2020).

According to Horsfall (2020), libraries in general are witnessing a decline in patronage as a result of inefficient marketing strategies and the increasing inclination of users to rely on Google, rather than physically visiting public libraries. According to Malek-zadeh, Zavareghi and Atapour (2022), public libraries facilitate direct access to wisdom, knowledge and intellectual works through a variety of resources and services, thereby making them accessible to individuals from all segments of society, irrespective of their ethnicity, national origin, level of maturity, gender, religious beliefs, dialect, disabilities, socioeconomic status, or academic achievements. However, the use of marketing strategies by some public libraries to effectively address their customers' demands remains uncertain in underdeveloped countries (Kutu and Olabode, 2017; Horsfall, 2020). In that light, public libraries in Eswatini are still lagging behind in terms of information provision that satisfies their customers. Again, their strategies for marketing information products are not known. Hence this study considered it a necessity to assess the marketing strategies used by public libraries in Eswatini, in order to fulfil the information needs of their customers.

### **Research problem**

Public libraries are experiencing poor use of their information products and services because customers seem to be unfamiliar with what specific services and products are provided. There seems to be stiff competition between public libraries and some public websites like google which provides information seekers with a variety of options to meet their information needs. As a result, libraries no longer have the traditional monopoly of being the only providers of information. New technologies have presented librarians and information professionals with major challenges to survive and thrive in this digital age in which the user community can access online information resources anytime and from anywhere. For example, public library users prefer to use public search engines such as Google because they find timely and relevant information that meets their expectations (Gupta, 2017). According to Adekunmisi (2017), a lack of marketing of information products and services has led to public library customers using public search engines. The decline in usage rates of public libraries has therefore been reducing for decades. Some suggestions are that public libraries have failed to evolve and adapt to trends in the information sector because of a lack of skills and drive to adapt to new ways of marketing information products and services (Gandawa, Mukuka, Chilemo, Simasiku and Zulu, 2018). According to Adekunmisi (2017), in public libraries, most librarians do not promote library resources, services and products effectively due to a lack of training and poor knowledge of marketing tools and techniques, as well as the fear of commercial publicity. These factors have contributed to the low patronage and underutilisation of library information resources, products, and services.

Malekana and Chuma (2025) noted that one of the problems faced by libraries is the improper dissemination of library services to target audiences, which is one of the reasons for the low use of library materials and resources. The study further showed that in as much as some public libraries have an extensive collection of information resources, however, their utilisation is very poor. Ntogo-Saghanen and Echedom, (2023) further explained that public library customers are not using information products and services because of lack awareness. This has created a gap between library users and information resources in the Eswatini public libraries, which has affected the use of information resources. The researchers noted with concern that the use of library information products and services are underutilised due to poor marketing by librarians. A study conducted in Eswatini by Hlatshwako and Tsabedze (2024) highlighted that the absence of technological tools, particularly artificial intelligence, for marketing information products and services in public libraries negatively affects library users and limits their ability to fully access and

utilise the resources offered. Similarly, Horsfall (2020) reported that library resources are so expensive but often underutilised, resulting in a waste of money, time, energy and space.

Unfortunately, a lack of comprehensive studies conducted in Eswatini public libraries regarding the marketing information products and services offered to users. In Eswatini, a more recent study by Hlatshwako and Tsabedze (2024) was conducted entitled “Unlocking the Future: Exploring Librarian’s Perspectives and Readiness for Artificial Intelligence Integration in Eswatini Libraries.” The focus of the aforementioned study above was much more on technology than marketing of library materials and services. Hence, the study of this nature was essential as it has provided an insight into the current state of marketing of information products and services offered by Eswatini public libraries. It has also offered recommendations for improving the marketing of public libraries for the benefit of their users.

### **Aim of the study**

The aim of the study was to assess the marketing strategies employed by Eswatini public libraries to improve the use of information products and services.

### **Research objectives**

- To identify the information products and services offered by these libraries;
- To establish the marketing strategies employed to promote information products and services; and
- To assess the effectiveness of these strategies in enhancing user engagement.

### **Marketing Mix Theory**

It must be noted that Marketing Mix is a widely used model that helps firms such as Coca-Cola and Nando’s, to mention a few, which strategically develop and implement their marketing initiatives. The theory, originally developed by E. Jerome McCarthy in 1960, has since gained substantial popularity and continues to be applied not only in commercial settings but also within information enterprises seeking to strengthen the promotion and delivery of their products and services. The Marketing Mix Theory posits that firms possess the ability to exert control over four fundamental factors, namely product, pricing, place and promotion, in order to exert influence over the efficacy of their marketing endeavours (Kotler, 1997). The aforementioned components are often denoted as the four Ps of marketing. The product component entails the process of creating and designing a product that effectively satisfies the demands and desires of the designated target market. The pricing component entails the process of establishing an optimal price for a product that effectively appeals to buyers while concurrently creating a profitable outcome. The location component of marketing strategy is concerned with the strategic selection and optimisation of distribution channels to ensure efficient and effective availability of the product to the targeted consumers. Finally, the promotional aspect encompasses the development and execution of marketing communication strategies aimed at informing and convincing consumers about the product (Rowley, 1997). Collectively, these four components provide an all-encompassing marketing strategy that enterprises may use to accomplish their marketing objectives.

Marketing Mix Theory has undergone evolutionary changes in order to adapt to the evolving demands of organisations and the marketplace. During the 1970s, Philip Kotler made a significant contribution to the marketing mix by introducing three more elements, namely people, process and physical evidence. These supplementary components acknowledge the significance of customer service and the whole client experience. The "people" component pertains to the personnel and their function in providing high-quality service (Purbohastuti, 2021). The term "process" underscores the significance of implementing streamlined and productive procedures in order to successfully offer a product or service. Lastly, the concept of "physical evidence" pertains to the observable and experiential aspects that consumers encounter, such as the ambience of a shop or the packaging of a product (Purbohastuti, 2021). By taking into account these supplementary factors, enterprises may effectively augment their marketing plans and more effectively cater to the ever-changing demands of their clientele.

Dhiman and Sharma (2009) defined the marketing mix as the planned package of elements that make up the product or service offered on the market. These elements include the product itself, the price at which it is offered, the place or distribution channels through which it is made available, and the promotion or communication strategies used to advertise it. The marketing mix is a crucial tool for companies to effectively position their products in the market and gain a competitive advantage (Purbohastuti, 2021). It allows them to analyse and adjust each element to meet the specific needs and preferences of their target market, ultimately leading to increased sales and customer satisfaction.

The marketing mix helps position the library very firmly in the perception of the communities it serves (Kutu and Olabode, 2018). By utilising the marketing mix, libraries can create tailored promotional campaigns that resonate with their target audience. For instance, they can utilise social media platforms to engage with younger patrons and highlight the library's digital resources. Additionally, libraries can collaborate with local schools and community organisations to host events and workshops, further strengthening their position as a valuable resource within the community. Ultimately, the marketing mix allows libraries to effectively communicate their offerings, resulting in increased awareness, foot traffic, and overall customer satisfaction.



Figure 1: 4Ps Model of Marketing Mix

Source: (McCarthy, 1960)

In this model, the target market refers to users and potential users, which in this study refers to library users. The target market is important to identify as it helps in understanding their needs and preferences as library users. This information can then be used to develop strategies and initiatives that cater to their specific requirements. By focusing on the target market, libraries can enhance user experience, increase user engagement, and ultimately attract more potential users (Kutu and Olabode, 2018). The target market appears in the middle because it is the most significant element in the marketing mix.

According to Kutu and Olabode (2018), the concept of products in the context of libraries refers to a range of services that are tailored to meet the needs of specific user groups. These services encompass various offerings such as databases, the selective dissemination of information, current awareness services, indexing and abstracting services, interlibrary loan, photocopy services, and Internet services. Additionally, libraries provide user assistance, reference and information services, compilation of bibliographies, maintenance of databases, and act as intermediaries between users and the library's resources.

According to Dhiman and Sharma (2009), place is defined as the specific geographical location where customers may access and acquire a certain product. The allocation of library items and services pertains to the temporal, spatial and modal aspects of their accessibility for users (Kutu and Olabode, 2018). The accessibility and convenience of library

sites are crucial factors that contribute to their use and appeal. It is essential that library facilities be readily identifiable, easily accessible, and provide a comfortable experience for visitors. The design of the building must prioritise user comfort and provide accessibility for all individuals, including those with disabilities, to facilitate unimpeded entry into the premises. Kutu and Olabode (2018) underscored the notion that the concept of location has evolved beyond its traditional physical connotation. They advocate for the indispensability of establishing a robust online presence.

According to Nazifa (2019), promotion in the context of a library refers to the many methods used to communicate information about the library's offerings and amenities to its patrons. Promotion refers to the use of innovative strategies aimed at enhancing the visibility of library goods and services among users (Zhixian, 2016). In her study, Nazifa (2019) categorised promotion into five distinct components, including advertising, publicity, human interaction, incentives and the creation of an atmospheric atmosphere. The promotion of library goods and services yields many advantages, such as heightened use, enhanced organisational value, user education, and altered attitudes (Zhixian, 2016). According to Kutu and Olabode (2018), the primary objective of library promotion is to identify an effective strategy that can motivate users to engage with library resources and services. It is important to ensure that potential consumers are adequately informed about the presence and advantages of information goods and services via promotional activities. Promotional activities have the potential to attract new patrons to the library and motivate current patrons to engage with a wider range of resources. Through the strategic promotion of library goods and services, a broader audience may be informed on the wealth of rich information at their disposal, hence resulting in heightened utilisation. Furthermore, the promotion of library services may serve as a means to alter prevailing ideas around libraries, presenting them as vibrant and forward-thinking environments that effectively address the varied requirements of their patrons.

Zhixian (2016) asserted that pricing is a crucial marketing endeavour that plays a pivotal role in determining the profitability of a firm, upon which its existence hinges. According to Kutu and Olabode (2018), the cost of library items encompasses several components such as membership fees, penalties, expenses related to photocopying, and prices associated with database searches. Hence, it is important for libraries to meticulously assess and establish their pricing policies in order to guarantee fiscal stability and long-term viability. Furthermore, it is essential that price selections include not just the expenses borne by the library, but also encompass the value and perceived advantages that consumers get from using library goods and services. By strategically aligning pricing strategies with consumer expectations and market realities, libraries may effectively maximise their production income while simultaneously preserving a competitive advantage within the industry. The marketing mix is of utmost importance in the promotion of library services.

## **Methodology**

The study employed a positivism research paradigm, which is grounded in the belief that social phenomena can be measured objectively and that empirical evidence can be used to explain patterns of behaviour. This paradigm was deemed suitable for the study as it enabled the researchers to systematically evaluate the marketing strategies used to promote library and information services in public libraries in Eswatini. In line with the positivist stance, a quantitative research approach was adopted to ensure that data could be collected, analysed, and interpreted in a structured and statistical manner.

The study was conducted among librarians and library assistants from the Mbabane and Manzini public libraries, which were purposively selected because they are the busiest and most accessible in public libraries in Eswatini, serving diverse user populations. A total of twenty-five questionnaires were distributed to librarians and library assistants across the two sites, and all the twenty-five questionnaires distributed were returned. The questionnaire served as the primary data collection instrument and included closed-ended questions to generate measurable data for statistical analysis. To ensure inclusivity and adequate representation, the study employed judgmental random sampling, which enabled the researchers to purposively select librarians and library assistants who were above two years working in the library because they were considered knowledgeable about marketing library services. Through this sampling process, sixteen (16) completed questionnaires were obtained from librarians and library assistants in Mbabane and nine (9) from those in Manzini. Due to the small size of the population, the entire population was used as a sample size for the study. This was based on Israel's (2013) observation that when the population of a study is small (that is, below 50), the entire population can be used as a sample size. Therefore, the use of the sample size (25) was based on Israel's (2013) study. The librarians and library assistants from the Mbabane and Manzini in Eswatini public libraries were selected using a census sampling technique. This technique was chosen because it enabled all librarians and library assistants with two years working experience in the two public libraries to have an equal chance

to be involved in the study. Again, census is one of the best effective sampling techniques that provides comprehensive and highly accurate data, while also eliminating sampling errors.

Data analysis was conducted using Microsoft Excel, which facilitated the coding, tabulation, and graphical presentation of the results. The findings were presented using tables, pie charts, and figures to provide clear visual interpretation of emerging patterns, trends, and frequencies. This analytical approach enhanced both the clarity and reliability of the results, enabling meaningful conclusions about the effectiveness of marketing strategies employed in Eswatini's public libraries.

In order to mitigate internal biases during data collection, several measures were implemented. Clear, standardised, and neutral questionnaires were designed and administered uniformly to all participants to ensure consistency and objectivity. Prior to the main data collection phase, pilot testing was conducted to identify and eliminate ambiguous or leading questions. This process allowed the research instrument to be refined, thereby minimising the risk of systematic bias. In addition, a careful sampling technique was employed to ensure that the selected sample fairly represented the target population and prevented the overrepresentation of particular groups or viewpoints. Given that the data were collected from librarians who were colleagues of the researchers, ensuring anonymity and confidentiality was prioritised to encourage honest and unbiased responses. As such, the questionnaires did not require the disclosure of sensitive personal information, such as names, surnames, or identity numbers. This study forms part of a master's dissertation, the involvement of supervisors and external examiners provided an additional layer of oversight. Their guidance and review of the data collection and analysis processes helped to identify potential biases and enhance the credibility of the study. Finally, transparent reporting was ensured by clearly documenting the research procedures, limitations, and potential sources of bias, enabling readers to assess the study's trustworthiness.

### Demographic Profile

**Table 1: Demographic profile of librarians**

Variables	Mbabane N=16		Manzini N=9	
	F	%	F	%
<b>Gender</b>				
Male	6	37.5%	2	22%
Female	10	62.5%	7	78%
<b>Total</b>	16	100%	9	100%
<b>Age</b>				
Less than 19 yrs.	0	0	0	0
20-24 yrs.	2	12.5%	0	0
25-29 yrs.	4	25%	0	0
30-34 yrs.	8	50%	6	67%
35-39 yrs.	2	12.5%	3	33%
Above 40	0	0	0	0
<b>Total</b>	16	100%	9	100%
<b>Educational background</b>				
High school	6	37.5%	2	22%
Diploma	5	31.25	4	45%

1 <sup>st</sup> Degree	3	18.75	2	22%
2 <sup>nd</sup> Degree	1	6.25%	1	11%
Masters, or higher	1	6.25%	0	0
<b>Total</b>	16	100%	9	100%
<b>Years of experience in the library</b>				
2-5 yrs.	1	6.25%	1	
6-10 yrs.	7	43.75	2	
11-15 yrs.	4	25%	3	
16-20 yrs.	4	25%	2	
Above 20 yrs.	0	0	1	
<b>Total</b>	16	100%	9	100%
<b>Cadre</b>				
Junior staff	10	62.5%	5	56%
Senior staff	2	12.5%	1	11%
Management	4	25%	3	33%
<b>Total</b>	16	100%	9	100%

## Findings and discussion

### Library services available in the two public libraries in Eswatini

In this section, respondents were requested to identify the library services available in their respective libraries. Librarians were allowed to select multiple services and were also given the option to include any additional services that were not listed in the questionnaire. The summary of their responses is presented in Table 2 below.

**Table 2: Library services available in the Eswatini public libraries**

Variables	Mbabane N=16		Manzini N=9	
	F	%	F	%
Lending services.	16	100%	9	100%
Reservation Services	16	100%	9	100%
Translation services	16	100%	9	100%
Provision of sitting and studying facility	16	100%	9	100%

Reference services	16	100%	9	100%
User education	16	100%	9	100%
Online Information services	16	100%	9	100%
Referral services	16	100%	9	100%
Children library service	16	100%	9	100%
Information products and service for special needs	16	100%	9	100%

According to the Marketing Mix Theory, it is essential for a product to align with the needs and desires of the target market segments while also delivering value and satisfaction to these consumers (McCarthy, 1960). As such, the study findings demonstrated that in Mbabane, all 16 (100%) and in Manzini, nine (9) (100%) of the respondents indicated that there were library services available in their respective libraries. These library services were identified as Table 2 above which included lending services, reservation services, translation services, the provision of sitting and studying facilities, reference services, user education, referral services, children's library services, information products, and services for special needs. It was noted that each library service received a 100% response rate from both libraries (see Table 2).

These findings concurred with various authors (Darmawan, 2020; Oduor and Maina, 2022; Kutu and Olabode, 2018) who revealed that public libraries have a variety of services available to their clients. For example, library lending services are the services that libraries provide to allow their users to borrow and return books and other materials (Jones, 2020). According to Syn, Sinn and Kim (2023), public libraries have various types of lending services, including borrowing and requesting library material, delivery of requested material, inter library loan and article delivery services, reservation services, and book collections and their conditions of use.

In line with Osinulu's (2018), study findings, public libraries should include the library service of user education to support new users as soon as they want to start using the library. User education services provided by the library are services that aim to teach library users how to effectively use the library resources and services for their information needs (Park and Oh, 2023). Additionally, according to Kutu and Olabode (2018), public libraries in the south-west of Nigeria offer referral services, which aligns with the findings of this study in Eswatini. This suggests that referral services are a common practice in public libraries across different regions.

Regarding information products and services for special needs, the study finding was consistent with Mutia (2018), who examined the condition of special library services for people with disabilities. Mutia (2018) found that the availability of information products and services for special needs in public libraries is crucial for promoting inclusivity and accessibility. Moreover, apart from services for disabilities, Kutu and Olabode's (2018) study also reported the presence of comfortable seating areas and the availability of peaceful study rooms, supporting this finding. Jones et al. (2023) also highlighted that libraries usually have pleasant and noise-free study environments which support higher levels of productivity and overall satisfaction with their educational endeavours.

### **Information products available in Eswatini Public Libraries**

Respondents were asked to indicate the information products available in their respective public libraries in Eswatini. Similar to the previous variable, they were allowed to select more than one option, as libraries typically offer multiple information products simultaneously. The results of their responses are presented in Table 3 below.

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**Table 3: Information products available in Eswatini public libraries**

Variables	Mbabane		Manzini	
	N=16		N=9	
	F	%	F	%
Printed books	16	100%	9	100%
E-books	0	0%	0	0%
Databases	0	0%	0	0%
Journals	0	0%	0	0%
Newspapers	16	100%	9	100%
Magazines	16	100%	0	0%
Government Gazette	16	100%	0	0%

The study findings revealed that from both Mbabane and Manzini public libraries, there are several information products available to be used by their users. It was discovered that information products such as printed books, newspapers, magazines, and government gazettes were available in these libraries (see Table 3). The findings depict that from both libraries, the information products received 100% support from the respondents, indicating their availability in these libraries. These findings were consistent with Okolo (2020), Otuu and Unegbu (2022) whose findings also revealed that libraries have a variety of information products, which include textbooks, periodicals and newspapers, posters and pictures, audio and video materials, records and cassettes, non-fiction books, and records and tapes.

It was regrettable that e-books, databases, and journals were not available at any of the public libraries surveyed in both Mbabane and Manzini (see Table 3). These findings were not in line with the American Library Association (2022) which revealed that public libraries should not only have printed material but must have electronic books, electronic journals and e-databases. It must be mentioned that one of the reasons public libraries in Eswatini are still lagging behind in terms of electronic resources compared to what is available in the literature might that some countries where the studies were conducted is in developed countries where their public libraries are advanced. This means that well developed countries have an impact on their public libraries to also develop.

#### **Awareness of marketing strategies used for promoting information products and services**

The librarians from Eswatini's public libraries were asked whether they were aware of the marketing strategies employed by their libraries to promote information products and services to users. This question served as a precursor to a follow-up item that required librarians to identify the specific strategies used in their respective libraries. Table 4 below summarises the respondents' level of awareness regarding the marketing strategies implemented to promote library products and services.

**Table 4: Awareness of marketing strategies used by Eswatini public libraries to promote information products and services**

Variables	Mbabane N=16		Manzini N=9	
	F	%	F	%
Yes	16	100%	9	100%
No	0	0	0	0
<b>Total</b>	16	100%	9	100%

The study findings revealed 100 per cent awareness of marketing strategies for promoting information products and services exist at both sites of the study. This high level of awareness indicates that these libraries are likely to effectively promote their offerings to the public. These findings concurred with Otuu and Unegbu (2022) study which also indicated a high level of awareness of marketing strategies for promoting information products and services in the university libraries in south-west Nigeria. According to Kutu and Olabode (2018), it is insufficient to merely possess awareness of marketing strategies; it is essential to effectively implement these strategies to attain their intended objectives.

#### **Types of marketing strategies used by Eswatini public libraries to promote information products and services**

Respondents were given the option to select the types of marketing strategies used by Eswatini public libraries to promote information products and services. They were also allowed to add any additional strategies they felt were not included in the list provided. These additional responses are particularly valuable, as they contribute to the generation of new knowledge. The findings are presented in Table 5 below.

**Table 5: Types of marketing strategies used by Eswatini public libraries**

Variables	Mbabane N=16		Manzini N=9	
	F	%	F	%
Organising training, seminars and workshops to educate librarians on the marketing of library services	16	100%	9	100%
Provision of electronic access to information.	16	100%	9	100%
Advertising in print and electronic media.	16	100%	9	100%
Having a representative at institutional functions.	16	100%	6	67%
Staff friendliness to users.	15	94%	7	78%
Provision of suggestion boxes.	15	94%	9	100%

Increase in interpersonal relationship between staff and users.	15	94%	9	100%
One-on-one discussions with users.	15	94%	9	100%
Librarians are always properly dressed.	15	94%	9	100%
Using a library web page.	15	94%	9	100%
Use of leaflets and posters.	5	31%	3	33%
Organising library week.	3	19%	1	11%
Sending out brochure or flyers.	0	0%	2	22%
Organising user education.	1	6%	0	0%
Requesting contributions from users while making acquisition.	0	0%	0	0%

Table 5 above establishes marketing strategies such as organising training, seminars and workshops to educate librarians on the marketing of library services; the provision of electronic access to information; and advertising in print and electronic media, all scored 100% each. Again, in Mbabane public library, a strategy on having a representative at institutional functions also recorded 100% from the respondents, while other strategies that received 100% from Manzini public librarians, yet 94% was received in responses from the Mbabane public librarians, were the provision of suggestion boxes; an increase in interpersonal relationship between staff and users; one-on-one discussions with users; librarians were always properly dressed and using a library web page. Other marketing strategies which received very small percentages: 5 & 3(31% & 33%); 3&1 (19% & 11%); 2(22%); and 1(6%) in responses were the use of leaflets and posters; organising library week; sending out brochure or flyers; and organising user education.

Concerning the types of marketing strategies for promoting information products and services, across both libraries the marketing strategies included organising training, seminars and workshops to educate librarians on the marketing of library services; provision of electronic access to information; and advertising in print and electronic media, scored 100% each. The findings of the study further indicated that in the Mbabane public library, a strategy on having a representative at institutional functions also recorded 100% of the response rate, while other strategies that received 100% from Manzini public library, but, a 94% response rate from Mbabane public library were provision of suggestion boxes; an increase in the interpersonal relationship between staff and users; one-on-one discussion with users; librarians are always properly dressed; and using library webpages. It was also discovered that there were other marketing strategies which received a very low response rate, which were the use of leaflets and posters; organising library week; sending out brochure or flyers; and organising user education (see Table 5). These findings were in line with Kutu and Olabode's (2018) study which also revealed that libraries which have marketing strategies in place have a high potential of their users to make use of their information products and services. A study by Oduor and Maina (2022) indicated that by equipping librarians with the necessary skills and knowledge, libraries can better promote their products and services, expand their reach, and attract new users, thereby ultimately fulfilling their mission of providing equitable access to information and empowering individuals to thrive in an information-driven world, as posited by the marketing mix model. Dlamini and Sibiyi (2023) study also indicated that libraries whose information products and services are available on websites and social media are more frequently used by their users.

The provision of electronic access to information aligns with McCarthy (1960), whose marketing mix model indicated that the library's products and services offerings, would expand their reach and have a high potential in attracting new users who prefer digital formats and value convenience. Additionally, Borishade, Ogunnaike, Kehinde and Aka (2022) highlighted that fostering interpersonal relationships between library staff and users enhances the overall user experience and contributes to positive word-of-mouth marketing. While a study conducted by Nazifa (2019) found that one-on-one discussions with users are very effective because users could be taught on various aspects of a library

context. Furthermore, one-on-one discussions with users align with the Marketing Mix Theory by enhancing the relevance and personalisation of the library's products and services, creating a welcoming and supportive environment, and promoting effective communication and targeted marketing to attract and retain users (Kotler, 1997).

### **The Effective marketing strategies in promoting information products and services in Eswatini public libraries**

After the response of librarians by identifying the marketing strategies used by Eswatini public libraries, it became crucial to find out if the marketing strategies in place were effective. The responses of librarians were classified in Table 6 below as follows:

**Table 6: Views on whether marketing strategies were effective in promoting information products and services**

Variables	Mbabane		Manzini	
	N=16		N=9	
	F	%	F	%
Yes	0	0	1	11%
Sometimes	5	31.25%	1	11%
No	11	68.75%	7	78%
Total	16	100%	9	100%

The study findings demonstrated that the responses from both Mbabane and Manzini public libraries indicated that the marketing strategies were not effective. The majority, i.e. eleven (11) (68.75%), of the respondents from Mbabane indicated that the marketing strategies were not effective and only five (5) (31.25%) noted effectiveness. Again, the findings of the study showed that in Manzini, the majority of seven (7) (78%) noted that the marketing strategies were not effective and only two (2) (22%) noted effectiveness (see Table 6). These findings aligned with those of Lolade et al. (2018) whose study also established that marketing should not be just taken lightly. They suggest building a strong relationship with the community, collaborating with other institutions, and continuously evaluating and improving the library's services to meet the evolving needs of its patrons. A study by Deshapriya and Senevirathne (2023) also demonstrated that marketing strategies in libraries cannot be effective if librarians are not informed about the latest trends in libraries.

### **Rating marketing strategies used by Eswatini public libraries**

It was important for the study to assess how the marketing strategies used by Eswatini public libraries are rated. Therefore, librarians were asked to indicate how these strategies are perceived in their respective libraries. Table 6 below provides a summary of their responses.

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**Table 6: Rating marketing strategies used by Mbabane public library**

Mbabane public library N=16								
Marketing techniques	Very effective		Effective		Less effective		Not effective	
	F	%	F	%	F	%	F	%
Exhibitions and display of new arrivals.	10	62.5%	4	25%	2	12.5%	0	0
Use of leaflets and posters.	4	25%	1	6.25%	9	56.25%	2	12.5%
Sending out brochure or flyers.	0	0%	0	0%	12	75%	4	25%
Organising user education.	0	0%	1	6.25%	13	81.25%	2	12.5%
Creating a library web page.	12	75%	0	0%	4	25%	0	0%
Provision of electronic access to information.	14	87.5%	2	12.5%	0	0%	0	0%
Requesting contributions from users while making acquisition.	0	0%	0	0%	0	0%	16	100%
Increase interpersonal relationship between staff and users.	14	87.5%	1	6.25%	1	6.25%	0	0%
One-on-one discussions with users.	10	62.5%	4	25%	0	0%	2	12.5%
Having representative at institutional functions.	14	87.5%	2	12.5%	0	0%	0	0%
Advertising in print and electronic media.	13	81.25	3	18.75	0	0%	0	0%
Staff friendliness to users.	14	87.5%	1	6.25%	0	0%	1	6.25%
Provision of suggestion boxes.	13	81.25	2	12.5%	1	6.25%	0	0%
Librarians should be properly dressed.	4	25%	10	62.5%	2	12.5%	0	0%
Organising library week.	1	6.25%	2	12.5%	7	43.75	6	37.5%

**Table 7: Rating marketing strategies used by Manzini public libraries**

Manzini public library N=9								
Marketing techniques	Very effective		Effective		Less effective		Not effective	
	F	%	F	%	F	%	F	%
Exhibitions and display of new arrivals.	6	67%	1	11%	2	22%	0	0%
Use of leaflets and posters.	2	22%	1	11%	0	0%	6	67%
Sending out brochure or flyers.	0	0%	2	22%	1	11%	6	67%
Organising user education.	0	0%	0	0%	4	44%	5	56%
Creating a library web page.	9	100%	0	0%	0	0%	0	0%
Provision of electronic access to information.	1	11%	8	89%	0	0%	0	0%
Requesting contributions from users while making acquisition.	0	0%	0	0%	0	0%	9	100%
Increase interpersonal relationship between staff and users.	9	100%	0	0%	0	0%	0	0%
One-on-one discussions with users.	9	100%	0	0%	0	0%	0	0%
Having a representative at institutional functions.	0	0%	6	67%	1	11%	2	22%
Advertising in print and electronic media.	6	67%	3	33%	0	0%	0	0%
Staff friendliness to users.	7	78%	0	0%	2	22%	0	0%
Provision of suggestion boxes.	9	100%	0	0%	0	0%	0	0%
Librarians should be properly dressed.	1	11%	0	0%	2	22%	6	67%
Organising library week.	1	11%	0	0%	1	11%	7	78%

The majority of the respondents in Mbabane (95.6%) rated the use of leaflets and posters as “less effective,” and the majority (66.7%) in Manzini also rated this technique as “not effective.” (see Table 6 & 7). Previous research conducted by Agboke, Olorunfemi, and Ipadeola (2018), Eyerinmene and Zaccheaus (2023) demonstrated that leaflets and posters were effective in marketing information products and services, which contradicts these findings.

When it comes to rating exhibitions and displays of new resource arrivals, the study findings showed that the majority of respondents from both Mbabane and Manzini, specifically 10 (62.5%) and six (6) (67%), respectively, rated exhibitions and displays of new arrivals as effective marketing strategies (see Table 6 & 7). The marketing mix model,

consisting of product, price, place, and promotion, provides a comprehensive framework for analysing the effectiveness of marketing strategies (Kotler & Armstrong, 2020). This is significant in this study because marketing mix theory shows that library customers become aware and use information products if they are effectively marketed using available platforms of the library. In this case, exhibitions and displays play a crucial role in promoting information products of the libraries under study.

Furthermore, respondents evaluated the effectiveness of distributing brochures or fliers. The findings of the study revealed that in the context of the Mbabane public library, a significant majority of 75% of the respondents considered distribution of brochures or fliers as less effective, while in the Manzini public library, 67% of the respondents expressed the belief that it is "not effective" (see Table 6 & 7). It was noted that similar findings on this were demonstrated in a study by Labake and Effiong (2020), who revealed that distribution of brochures or fliers was no longer effective in present-day society.

When it came to organising user education as an effective marketing strategy to promote library services and products, there were no responses from Mbabane public library, while all (100%) of the respondents in Manzini felt it was not effective (see Tables 6 & 7). However, a study by Kutu and Olabode (2018) found that user education programmes led to increased awareness and usage of information products and services. This may imply difference in different contexts across libraries.

Concerning the extent to which one-on-one discussions with users were effective or not effective, the study findings indicated that all (100%) of the respondents from Manzini public library and 14 (87.7%) from Mbabane public library, rated one-on-one discussions as "very effective" (see Tables 6 & 7). The high ratings given to one-on-one discussions by respondents in Manzini and Mbabane indicate that this strategy was indeed valued by the librarians and could greatly enhance the promotion of information products and services (see Tables 6 & 7). These findings concurred with Fagan, Hsueh and Chiu (2020), whose study also found that one-on-one discussions with users helped to build relationships between librarians and users, which in turn leads to increased user engagement with the library's resources and services. Furthermore, Kutu and Olabode (2018) revealed that discussions with patrons were particularly effective in addressing individual information needs and tailoring library resources to meet specific user requirements. This means that librarians get to know the needs of users when they frequently interact with their users in order to fulfil their information needs.

When it came to rating whether having representatives at institutional functions was effective or not effective, the findings of the study indicated that this strategy was rated very effective. This was expressed by a larger majority of respondents in Mbabane (87.5%) and another majority in Manzini (67%), respectively (see Tables 6 & 7). The ratings from the respondents in Mbabane and Manzini indicated that a significant proportion of individuals in both cities found having representatives in institutional functions to be highly effective. This suggests that this strategy was widely recognised as successful, particularly in Mbabane, where the majority of respondents rated it as "very effective." Olorunfemi and Ipadeola's (2018) study discovered that the participation of representatives at institutional functions significantly improved the efficiency of marketing library information products and services. Their study attested to that having representatives at institutional functions makes it easier to build trusting relationships with potential users, which improves knowledge of library resources. This is also inline with marketing mix theory which encourages the promotion of information products and services offered to benefit customers (Kotler et al., 2017).

The librarians also rated advertising in print and electronic media as being important for the marketing of library information products and services. The findings of the study showed that both Mbabane (81.25%) and Manzini (67%) public libraries rated this strategy as "very effective" (see Tables 6 & 7). The librarians recognised that advertising in print and electronic media played a crucial role in reaching a wider audience and increasing awareness about library information products and services. The study findings resonate with Olorunfemi and Ipadeola (2018), who also found that this technique significantly captivated attention and fostered interest across different demographics. The results of this study were consistent with the findings reported by Kutu and Olabode (2018), and Olorunfemi and Ipadeola (2018). Furthermore, this aligned with the promotional element of the marketing mix whereby Kutu and Olabode (2018) emphasised that the promotion of products and services benefits the targeted customers who use both products and services.

With regard to ranking staff friendliness to users as a marketing strategy, the findings of the study revealed that in Mbabane and Manzini public libraries, librarians ranked staff friendliness towards users as very effective and/or effective. This was revealed in the rate in how they responded to this question - in Mbabane (87.5%) and Manzini (78%), this strategy was rated as "very effective" (see Tables 6 & 7). The librarians in Mbabane and Manzini also highlighted that staff friendliness played a crucial role in the promotion of library information products and services.

According to Rudijav (2022), there is a direct link between employee satisfaction, customer satisfaction, and financial success. When library staff are friendly and helpful, they create a positive interaction with users, leading to higher levels of customer satisfaction. This, in turn, can result in increased usage of library services and a positive impact on the library's reputation. In relationship marketing, the goal is to build strong connections with customers, turning them into loyal advocates for the library. By being friendly and approachable, library staff can create a sense of trust and loyalty in users, encouraging them to continue using library services and recommending them to others. This can result in positive word-of-mouth advertising and growth in the library's user base.

Furthermore, regarding ranking of the provision of suggestion boxes as a marketing strategy to promote library information products and services, the study findings indicated that both Mbabane public library (81.25%) and Manzini public library (100%) rated this strategy as "very effective" (see Tables 6 & 7). The high effectiveness rating of suggestion boxes as a marketing strategy highlighted the potential impact it has in increasing awareness and usage of library information products and services. This positive response from librarians suggests that implementing suggestion boxes could be a valuable and cost-effective approach to promoting the library's offerings in Eswatini public libraries. The Marketing Mix Theory supports the effectiveness of suggestion boxes in the concept of customer engagement during product development and promotion. According to the study conducted by Kutu and Olabode (2018), when customers are actively involved in providing feedback and suggestions, they develop a stronger connection with the brand or organisation. By implementing suggestion boxes, libraries are providing a platform for customers to engage with the library and contribute to its improvement (Kutu and Olabode, 2018). This engagement can lead to increased awareness and use of library information products and services, as customers feel a sense of ownership and investment in the library's offerings. Additionally, several studies have found that suggestion boxes can significantly impact customer satisfaction and loyalty. Merritt and Zhao (2020) also reported that suggestion boxes increase customer satisfaction levels and the likelihood of repeat purchases.

In another rated marketing strategy that librarians should dress appropriately, the findings of the study revealed that in Mbabane, 87.5% noted this strategy was effective, while in Manzini, 87% declared it as not effective. However, when considering the overall response rate among the public libraries, the findings of the study still proved that 60% of the respondents across the two public libraries were of the view that when librarians are dressed properly, it promotes the use of information products and services (see Tables 6 & 7). It cannot be ignored that the disparity in the perception of the librarians may have been due to the geographic locations of the two cities. Olorunfemi and Ipadeola (2018) also reported in their study that dressing librarians in formal attire, compared to casual attire, increased consumers' perception of the library as professional and trustworthy. This supports the idea that the appearance of librarians can influence consumer perceptions and potentially impact the success of marketing strategies.

Finally, librarians rated whether they believed organising library week was an effective or less effective marketing strategy. The findings of the study revealed that the respondents in the public libraries in both Mbabane (81%) and Manzini (89%) felt that this strategy was less effective and/or not effective at all (see Tables 6 & 7). These results suggested that the perception of the effectiveness of organising library week was that it would not work as a strategy for marketing information products and services. The findings of the study were not consistent with the findings of Olorunfemi and Ipadeola (2018), which established that organising library week was a very effective technique in marketing information products and services. The study explored how the techniques raise awareness and visibility of the library and its offerings among the public, the media and decision-makers.

### **Conclusion and recommendations**

The study revealed that public libraries in Eswatini offer similar information products and services to their users. It can be concluded that the information services provided extend beyond basic lending and reservation services to include translation services, provision of study and seating facilities, reference services, user education, and referral services. In terms of information products, the libraries primarily offer printed books, newspapers, magazines, and government gazettes. While the literature acknowledges that these are common types of information products and services offered by public libraries, it also highlights a broader range of products and services that were not observed in the two public libraries studied in Eswatini.

The study showed that librarians in Eswatini public libraries were generally aware of the marketing strategies used to promote information products and services. Interestingly, the strategies employed included organising trainings, seminars, and workshops to educate librarians; providing electronic access to information; advertising through print and electronic media; maintaining a presence at institutional functions; installing suggestion boxes; enhancing interpersonal relationships between staff and users; conducting one-on-one discussions with users; ensuring librarians are professionally dressed; and maintaining a library web page. These findings are supported by literature, which

identifies similar marketing strategies in public libraries. However, the strategies described in the literature are generally more advanced than those observed in the Mbabane and Manzini public libraries. This discrepancy can be attributed to differences in development, as public libraries in more developed countries often have greater resources and technological infrastructure compared to those in underdeveloped countries, such as Eswatini.

Concerning mitigation of internal biases in the quantitative data, this study adopted a rigorous and systematic research design throughout the data collection and analysis processes. Firstly, a well-structured and standardised questionnaire was used to collect data from librarians and library assistants. Secondly, the researchers ensured uniformity in the administration of the research instrument across selected public libraries in Eswatini. The questionnaire consisted primarily of closed-ended questions and Likert-scale items, which reduced the possibility of researcher influence and respondent misinterpretation, thereby enhancing objectivity. Quantitative data were analysed using appropriate descriptive statistical techniques, including frequencies and percentages, to identify patterns and trends related to the effectiveness of marketing strategies employed by public libraries. To avoid bias, the researchers allowed respondents to tick or choose only one answer that they were most familiar with in the sections they were working. Based on the statistically supported trends observed, the study concludes that marketing strategies such as training, seminars, and workshops for librarians on marketing library services; provision of electronic access to information; advertising through print and electronic media; friendly and user-focused staff play a crucial role in increasing public awareness and utilization of information products and services in Eswatini public libraries. These findings provide evidence-based insights that can guide library management and policymakers in improving marketing practices and enhancing service delivery within the public library sector in Eswatini.

The study recommended that the public libraries in Eswatini need to do the following:

- Create a social media calendar and post regularly on platforms such as Facebook, Twitter, and Instagram. Consistent social media engagement can increase awareness of available information products and services, thereby stimulating interest and encouraging users to make greater use of library resources.
- Develop and maintain a library website. A well-designed website serves as a crucial marketing tool, providing users with easy access to information about library services. Given the increasing preference of users for online information, an effective online presence can enhance visibility, generate interest, and motivate the use of library products and services.

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