



REBRANDING LIBRARIES: A MARKETING STRATEGY FOR INCREASED USER PATRONAGE OF UNIVERSITY LIBRARIES IN NIGERIA

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ABSTRACT

The paper explores the concept of rebranding university libraries in Nigeria as a marketing strategy to increase user patronage. It highlights the benefits of rebranding, strategies for achieving it, and provides examples of successful rebranding efforts. The paper emphasizes the importance of understanding the user base and improving the library experience for the university community. The Toronto Public Library, Anythink Libraries, and Richland Library are presented as examples of successful library rebranding efforts that involved a combination of visual and auditory elements and targeted marketing campaigns. The paper concludes that by investing in rebranding initiatives, university libraries in Nigeria can increase awareness of their services, attract new users, and remain relevant in a changing knowledge, information storage and retrieval landscape.

Keywords: Rebranding, Marketing, Marketing strategy, Patronage, University libraries

Introduction

Libraries, especially university libraries are well-known for their role in spreading knowledge, supporting research, teaching, learning and other activities. By offering a wide range of



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information resources and services, university libraries play a significant part in assisting students, lecturers, and researchers in their academic endeavours. However, in recent years, the role of libraries in the university community has been threatened by digital technology, as many students and researchers prefer to rely on online sources for their research needs or other alternative methods of research. In Nigeria, this trend has been particularly evident, with many university libraries struggling to attract and retain users. To address these challenges, a potential marketing strategy is to rebrand university libraries in Nigeria. Rebranding libraries involves changing the way these institutions are perceived by the public, with the aim of making them more attractive and relevant to the needs and expectations of modern users. By rebranding libraries, university library authorities can focus on promoting the services and resources available in their libraries, highlighting the unique benefits of using these resources and facilities. This could involve redesigning library spaces, introducing new services and technologies, and developing marketing campaigns that target specific user groups to enhance patronage.

User patronage refers to the extent to which individuals utilize the resources and services offered by libraries either by physically visiting the library or via remote access. It is a measure of how frequently and extensively library users make use of the available library resources, as well as their overall satisfaction with the quality of services offered. User patronage is crucial to the success of university libraries as it indicates the level of value that the library provides to its users. University libraries serve as a central hub for research and knowledge dissemination, offering students, faculty members, and researchers a wealth of information resources and services that are instrumental in advancing their academic and professional goals. They provide access to a wide range of scholarly materials, including books, journals, databases, and other electronic resources. University libraries in Nigeria can distinguish themselves from other information providers by conveying their value offer to their target audience with the aid of a well-planned and a well-implemented rebranding campaign. Additionally, it can improve user experience, attract new users, keep existing ones, and build a favourable perception of the library among stakeholders like students, faculty, and the larger academic community. The sustainability of libraries can be positively impacted by rebranding and suitable marketing communication that matches current trends (Hommerová, Srédí & Dbalá, 2020).

Therefore, library administrators looking to enhance the performance and visibility of their libraries should take into consideration rebranding libraries as a relevant and practical strategy for boosting user patronage of university libraries in Nigeria. This paper aims to explore the concept of rebranding university libraries as a marketing strategy for increasing user patronage in Nigeria. It will discuss the benefits of rebranding libraries, the key strategies that can be employed to achieve this goal as well as some examples of successful university library rebranding efforts.

Understanding the Concept of Rebranding

A brand is a set of perceptions and associations that consumers have about a product or service. Brands are what the company or organization owners want their target customers to think and feel about their products or service (Mindrut, Manolica & Roman, 2015). The American Marketing Association (AMA) (2023) defines a brand as a name, term, design, symbol, or any other feature that identifies one seller's good or services as distinct from those of other sellers. In addition to this definition, it emphasizes that a brand is not just a product or a logo, but rather it is



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the entire experience that customers have with a company. This includes the way a company communicates with customers, the quality of its products or services, the level of customer service it provides, and the values and personality that the brand embodies. Building a strong brand is crucial for any organization as it creates a set of expectations in the minds of customers. However, the success of a brand is not solely determined by how well it is initially established, but rather by how well it continues to meet and exceed customers' or patrons' expectations over time. It is also important to recognize that brands and customer expectations can change over time. This is why rebranding is just as crucial as building a strong brand in the initial stages of an organization's development.

Rebranding is the process of giving a brand a new identity, often including a new name, logo, and messaging, while retaining its core values and brand promise. Rebranding can be a strategic tool for organizations to refresh and redesign their image to better align with current customer expectations or to appeal to a new target audience and differentiate themselves from competitors. Singh, Tripathi and Yadav (2012) posited that rebranding is the practice of building afresh, a name representative of a differentiated position in the mind frame of stakeholders and a distinctive identity form competitor. As submitted by Storey (n. d), repositioning a brand involves marketing activities designed to give an existing company, product or service a new position in customers' minds in an attempt to change a product or company's market potential. Rebranding typically requires a significant investment of time, money, and resources, as it involves a complete or partial overhaul of a company's visual and messaging identity.

However, if done successfully, rebranding can have a significant impact on the success of an organization by helping it to stand out from its competitors, better connect with its target audience, and build stronger brand recognition and loyalty. Nana, Tobias-Mamina, Chiliya, and Maziriri (2019), *citing* Petburikul avers that re-positioning a brand occurs when customer preference changes arise, and new competitors enter the market. Having a strong brand enhances positive evaluations of a product's quality, maintains a high level of product awareness, and provides a consistent image or brand personality. According to Muzellec and Lambkin (2006), rebranding can be characterized as evolutionary and revolutionary. Evolutionary rebranding describes a fairly minor development in the company's positioning and aesthetics that is so gradual that it is hardly perceptible to outside observers. On the other hand, revolutionary rebranding describes a major identifiable change in positioning and aesthetics that fundamentally redefines the company. They further noted that rebranding can occur at three different levels in an organization's hierarchy, namely:

1. corporate level in which rebranding does not affect any other level in the hierarchy, but applies to the whole entity- corporation;
2. business unit level. A brand change on this level concerns a whole department in a larger organization; and
3. product level. Product branding applies only to a change in the brand of individual products and a change in the product name.



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When all three levels of rebranding align, the organization can present a consistent and cohesive brand image across all levels, which can lead to increased brand recognition, customer loyalty, and overall success. The primary goal for rebranding is to replicate a change in the business and to foster a new image; hence, it is a proposition for innovation and development (Muzellec & Lambkin, cited in *Nana, Tobias-Mamina, Chiliya, & Maziriri, 2019*). However, rebranding is not only relevant to businesses but also to non-profit organizations like university libraries.

Rebranding in the University Library

Rebranding in the context of university libraries in Nigeria refers to the process of revamping or transforming the image, perception, and services of a university library to align with current trends, needs, and expectations of its users, stakeholders, and the broader society. It involves repositioning the library as a modern, dynamic, and relevant institution that meets the changing information needs of its users in the digital age. The goal of rebranding is to create a more positive and dynamic image of the library in the minds of its patrons and the community at large. In university libraries, rebranding can be characterized as being evolutionary or revolutionary. This is dependent on the extent of change in positioning and aesthetics. For instance, evolutionary rebranding could involve minor changes to the library's website, logo, and promotional materials over a period of time, while revolutionary rebranding could involve a complete overhaul of the library's identity and services. Rebranding can also occur at different levels of the library hierarchy, similar to the corporate, business unit, and product levels as described by Muzellec and Lambkin (2006).

At the corporate level, rebranding would involve a change in the branding and identity of the entire library system, including all colleges/faculties and campuses. This type of rebranding could be initiated by a strategic decision from the library leadership to reflect a change in the library's name, mission or values. For example, a university library might undergo a corporate rebranding to better align with the university's overall brand image and messaging. At the business unit level, rebranding would involve a change in branding and identity for a specific department within the library system. This type of rebranding could be driven by changes in the department's mission or to better align with the overall library brand. For example, a library might rebrand its Information and Communication Technology (ICT) department to reflect a new focus on innovative technology solutions for students and faculty.

Finally, at the product level, rebranding could apply to specific library resources, such as databases, archives, digital collections or research guides. This type of rebranding could be driven by changes in the resource's content or usage. For example, a library might rebrand a digital collection of historical documents to reflect a new focus on research and scholarship in a particular academic field. When all three levels of rebranding align, the library system can present a consistent and cohesive brand image across all levels, which can lead to increased brand recognition, customer loyalty, and overall success. For example, a library system that has undergone corporate, business unit and product rebranding to reflect a new focus on innovative technology solutions for students and faculty can build a strong and recognizable brand that



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resonates with its target audience. Though, rebranding can be a substantial investment in terms of time, cost, and resources, its benefits make it a worthwhile endeavour for university libraries in Nigeria looking to improve their image and services.

Benefits of Rebranding University Libraries in Nigeria

Rebranding leads to a cohesive and consistent brand image. Rebranding can have a large impact on a company's identity and reputation, and its impact is often underestimated (Isanovic & Rotkirch (2018). A well-branded university library can build its reputation as a center of academic excellence, research, and innovation. This can attract more talented students and faculty, as well as funding and partnerships with other institutions. A well-executed rebranding effort can demonstrate the library's commitment to its mission and values, and showcase its relevance and importance in the community.

As an organisation grows, its target audience may increase or vary. Rebranding however, enables businesses to broaden their reach, enhance visibility and usage, and appeal to new client categories. Supporting this assertion, Hommerová, Šrédli, and Dbalá, (2020) posited that libraries may benefit greatly from a well set up rebranding strategy, which contribute to significantly increasing the awareness of a brand, improving its image, keeping existing customers, approaching new target groups, and improving the options for fundraising. A strong brand can help enhance the visibility of university libraries, making them more visible and accessible to students, faculty, and the wider community. This can increase usage of the library and help ensure that its resources are being fully utilized. By creating a more compelling and distinctive image, the library can attract new students, faculty, and staff, and increase awareness of its services and resources. Moreover, a successful rebranding campaign can attract increased funding opportunities from donors, sponsors, and other sources. This can help the library to improve its facilities, resources, and services, further enhancing the user experience.

Lischer (2023) rightly stated that one of the most valuable benefits of rebranding is that it can help you clearly define your key differentiators, including your competitive advantage. Similarly, Kimbarovsky (2023) remarked that it is impossible to build brand loyalty if your customers and prospective customers cannot differentiate your brand from your competitors, especially if your product offerings are identical or similar. In many communities, libraries are seen as traditional and out-dated institutions, and rebranding can help to dispel this image. Thus, rebranding can help university libraries differentiate themselves from competitors and establish a unique identity. It can help them in positioning themselves as modern and innovative institutions; attract the attention of potential users and partners and increase their relevance in the community.

A successful rebranding campaign can lead to increased audience reach, improved communication and engagement with content, and memorable brand identity (Ulfa, Hariyati & Akbari, 2023). A clear and consistent brand identity can help libraries to communicate effectively with their users and stakeholders, and to build stronger relationships with them. Rebranding can also help to improve user experience by making it easier for users to find and access resources. This is particularly important in an era where online resources are increasingly important, and users expect easy and intuitive access to them. Rebranding can help to create a more user-



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friendly website and interface, as well as more effective marketing and communication strategies that target the library's key audiences. Ultimately, rebranding for libraries is a strategic approach that can help libraries to transform their image, perception, and services to better serve their users and support the mission of their institutions. By undertaking a well-executed rebranding strategy, university libraries in Nigeria can remain relevant, competitive, and impactful in the rapidly changing information landscape.

Case Studies of Successful Library Rebranding Initiatives

In 2017, the Toronto Public Library underwent a rebranding initiative that aimed at helping meet the changing needs of its customer base and connect them with the full range of services it offers. The library launched a new visual identity, as well as a new tagline. The library's new visual identity was designed to be more modern and flexible, with a brighter colour palette. The "Activate Something Great" tagline was intended to convey the library's commitment to helping its users reach their full potential through its wide range of services and programs. The campaign was successful in increasing awareness of the library's services and attracting new users (Bowles, 2019; Dallaire, 2019). Singh (2011) noted that some libraries lately have moved towards the adoption of "bookstore model" for providing better accessibility to their community. One example cited was the "Anythink" libraries in different locations of Colorado which have recently changed their name from "Rangeview Public Libraries" to the Anythink Libraries by adopting an unconventional "bookstore model" approach. They reorganized their library collections and resources in order to enhance the library experience for members of their communities. This appears to be one of the strategies to create a new brand identity

Another successful library rebranding effort as reported by Roughen (2016) was that of the Richland Library, formerly known as Richland County Public Library. Richland Library is a public library in Columbia, South Carolina, serving a population of around 320,000. The library's system brand has undergone three major phases. The first phase, called the "Love Your Library" phase, began in 1979 and was centered on the message of love for the library. The library's leadership promoted this brand through mass media and other means, leading to a major expansion of the library. In 1989, a bond referendum was held, which was a triumph for the library, and the new main library was opened with a festive parade and activities reflecting the "Love Your Library" theme. The second phase began in 2000 with a marketing campaign called "RCPL Spells...", in which the library partnered with local businesses to advertise the library's services. The Richland County Public Library's brand was impacted by the emergence of the Internet, leading the library to explore innovative ways of using the "RCPL" acronym. For instance, the library introduced "MyRCPL" to convey personalized services offered through new library technologies. The library invested heavily in marketing efforts to establish a strong connection in the mind of the public, between the "RCPL" system acronym and the public library, including the creation of a catchy jingle.

Through both visual and auditory elements, the library reinforced awareness of its system brand among the public. These strategies helped the library to adapt to the digital age and remain



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relevant in the minds of its patrons. The third and final phase was the Richland Library phase, when the library's name was shortened. As part of the overall changes made by the Richland Library, the library's set of values and mission statement underwent a revision, and a new vision statement was introduced. In addition to this, the library's website was also revamped with a fresh and updated "look and feel." During this phase, the library focused on providing personalized services and increasing visibility among non-traditional library users. Generally, the library's system brand has evolved to reflect changes in the library's services and to connect with the community.

Ultimately, effective rebranding initiatives for libraries, such as those implemented by the Toronto Public Library, Anythink Libraries, and Richland Library, offer useful insights that can be applied to university libraries in Nigeria. Nigerian university libraries can adapt to the changing demands of its patrons by adopting a contemporary visual identity, placing an emphasis on personalized services, developing a strong brand recognition, using cutting-edge technologies, and offering a distinctive library experience.

Steps to Rebranding University Libraries in Nigeria

Rebranding libraries can be a complex and multi-faceted process that requires careful planning, stakeholder engagement, and effective implementation. Smith (2015) outlined some considerations which may help ensure a smooth rebranding effort in libraries. They are as follows:

1. **Solicit feedback from stakeholders:** Before beginning the rebranding process, gather feedback from all groups that have a stake in your library. This includes staff, patrons, the library board, local schools, and community centers. Use various methods such as social media, surveys, and meetings to ensure you capture feedback in all languages present in your community. Udonde, Ibok and Eke (2022) averred that rebranding requires the participation of several actors both inside and outside the organization. To get started, the key success factor is to incorporate the internal stakeholders to the process. A company must develop both communications and training programs, to spread the new brand message internally throughout all levels of the company. Additionally, the company can extend its efforts to external stakeholders by offering customer and journalist promotion packages, employing advertising strategies, and incorporating sponsorships into its promotional approach.
2. **Stay true to mission and vision:** Throughout the rebranding process, ensure that your library expresses and upholds its mission and vision statements. Arguably, for non-profit entities such as the university library, the most important part of branding is the expression of the mission and vision of the organization in a clear, comprehensible, and compact way to stakeholders (Roughen, 2016). The expression of the mission and vision serves as the guiding light for shaping its identity and fostering meaningful connections with stakeholders, laying the groundwork for a strong and impactful brand presence in the university community. In essence the library's mission and vision should be the unwavering compass throughout the rebranding process.
3. **Consider finances:** Consider how much you are willing to spend on the rebranding effort and whether it aligns with the library's budget. Heininger (2021) remarked that just as you would



compile a business case to support any other corporate initiative and investment, it is important to develop a rebranding business case to determine costs associated with the initiative and whether the organization can invest appropriately to do it right. Rebranding involves various costs, such as redesigning logos, updating signage, creating new marketing materials, staff training, potentially revamping the library's online presence and so on. A thorough business case would itemize these costs, helping the university library assess its financial capacity to undertake the rebranding.

4. Look at other library rebranding efforts: Study other library rebranding efforts to identify what worked and what didn't. Talk to librarians who have undergone the process.
5. Establish an advisory committee: Consider creating an advisory committee comprising staff members to improve staff buy-in and ensure that staff opinions are considered. Users and other stakeholders of the university community should also be included in the committee. They should be involved in the rebranding process to review the directions and strategies being considered. Capture their feedback and incorporate it into the process. This additional perspective helps the university library keep the users at the center of all decisions and avoid blind spots (Domenz, 2019).
6. Keep stakeholders involved, especially staff: Continue to accept input from key groups and make the rebranding initiative as transparent as possible. Hold regular meetings and share progress via social media to keep your community updated and involved. Joseph, Gupta, Wang, and Schoefer (2021) posited that corporate rebranding needs to consider all forms of corporate communication that includes external as well as internal stakeholders especially employees as they are instrumental in communicating the corporate brand promise to customers. Particularly, library staff have a major role to play, as brand ambassadors as well as users of the system. The library staff should be trained on the new system and be key collaborators on strategies and activities that will engage other stakeholders in the rebranding experience (Bowles, 2019).
7. Work with the press. Work with the press to ensure that the message about the rebranding initiative is communicated effectively.
8. Be open to adaptation: Realize that you will not be able to anticipate everything ahead of time, and be open to adapting the process as necessary.

Similarly, Bowles (2019) highlighted three phases adopted by Toronto Public Library in refining the library's brand identity to support awareness, discovery and engagement across all service channels. The first phase was to gather feedback and gain insight into what a transformed customer experience would look like. The second stage was to create a visual identity system that would support the Library's ability to deliver that transformed customer experience. The third phase was an implementation process that engaged staff as brand ambassadors and co-creators of the roll-out strategy.

However, university libraries can consider the following for effective rebranding:

1. Defining the goals and objectives of the rebranding: The library should first identify the



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specific reasons why it is considering rebranding and define clear, measurable goals and objectives that align with the library's mission, vision, and values. This will help to ensure that the rebranding effort is focused, relevant, and effective.

2. Conducting a thorough assessment of the library's current brand: To ensure a successful rebranding process for a library, it is essential to conduct comprehensive research beforehand. This research should aim to understand the library's existing brand perception and identify areas where improvements can be made. To achieve this, the library should assess its current brand identity, including its visual and conceptual elements, messaging, communication channels, user feedback, and competitive landscape. This analysis will allow the library to identify its brand's strengths, weaknesses, opportunities, and threats, which will inform the development of an effective rebranding strategy.
3. Developing a new brand strategy: Based on the goals and assessment, the library should develop a new brand strategy that defines the library's new brand identity, including its vision, mission, values, positioning, visual and conceptual elements, messaging, and communication strategy. This strategy should be informed by the library's user needs, preferences, and expectations, as well as the competitive landscape.
4. Engaging stakeholders and users: The library should engage key stakeholders and user groups, including faculty, students, staff, and community partners, to gather feedback, input, and buy-in for the new brand strategy. This engagement can be done through surveys, focus groups, interviews, and other methods.
5. Developing a rebranding plan: The library should develop a detailed rebranding plan that outlines the specific steps, timeline, budget, and resources required to implement the new brand strategy. The plan should include the design and production of new visual and conceptual elements, updating of communication channels, training of staff, and marketing and outreach to users and stakeholders.
6. Implementing the rebranding plan: Once the strategic plan and marketing plan are in place, it is time to implement the rebranding. This involves updating the library's physical and digital assets, such as signage, websites, social media accounts, and marketing materials. It may also involve training staff on the new brand identity and messaging.
7. Monitoring and evaluating the effectiveness of the rebranding: After implementing the rebranding, the library should monitor and evaluate the effectiveness of the new brand strategy through user feedback, usage statistics, and other metrics. This will help to identify areas of success and improvement and inform future rebranding efforts.

By following these steps, university libraries in Nigeria can develop and implement a successful rebranding strategy that enhances their visibility, relevance, and impact in the academic and research community.

Conclusion

This paper advocated for rebranding university libraries in Nigeria to increase user patronage. Rebranding involves changing the perception of the library to make it more attractive and relevant to modern users, which can differentiate it from other information providers or sources, retain new users, and enhance user experience. Successful rebranding requires careful



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planning, stakeholder engagement, and effective implementation. Examples from other libraries revealed that effective branding strategies involves a thorough understanding of the user base and a focus on improving the library experience for the community through targeted marketing campaigns. University libraries may raise awareness of their services, attract new users, and stay relevant in a changing environment by investing in these rebranding activities.

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Dr. Isaac M. Ogbonna is the University Librarian of Michael Okpara University of Agriculture, Umudike, Abia State. He is a librarian with over three decades of work experience in both the Public and Academic types of libraries. He started his work experience as a Library Assistant and progressed through the ranks to the position of University Librarian. Dr Ogbonna obtained B.Sc. in Library Science/Biology, MLS (Information Science), and Ph.D. (Library and Information Science). He was certified/chartered as a Librarian by the Librarians' Registration Council of Nigeria (LRCN). He is a member of the Nigerian Library Association; a Fellow, Institute of Corporate Resource Management (crmi); and a Fellow, Institute of Policy Management Development (IPMD). He previously headed the Federal College of Education, Eha-Amufu Library for over ten years and also was appointed in 2006 as the Director/Chief Executive of the Enugu State Library Board, Enugu. He voluntarily resigned from the appointment at the Enugu State Library Board after four years in the position. He also headed the library of a higher institution that was modelled in a Polytechnic pattern - the Federal College of Dental Technology and Therapy, Enugu - as the Institution's Librarian from 2018 to 2021. His area of academic specialization is Library Development and Advocacy while his areas of professional/research interest include Bibliographic Control Services; Community Library Development; Reference Services; and Library Management. He has several academic publications in reputable professional journals and has also authored textbooks and chapter contributions in textbooks. Dr Ogbonna is married to one female wife and the union is blessed with four children.