

The Emergence, Development, and Transformation of Library Marketing in European Countries

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Abstract: The article explores the history of the emergence and development of library marketing in European countries, including the United Kingdom, Germany, Spain, and Scandinavian countries such as Denmark, Norway, Finland, and Sweden. Special attention is given to the processes of integrating marketing strategies into library activities and their transformation under the influence of economic, social, and technological factors. The key stages in the evolution of library marketing are described, from early steps in the UK in the 19th century to its current state in Europe. The study highlights the differences and commonalities in the development of library marketing in various cultural contexts.

Keywords: library marketing, European libraries, public libraries, marketing strategies in libraries, integration of marketing in libraries.

Library work has been an important institution for preserving and disseminating knowledge for centuries. However, with changing technologies, user preferences, and economic conditions, libraries faced new challenges. There arose the need to find ways to attract audiences, improve service quality, and enhance the efficiency of library operations. One of the key tools for this was marketing, which was adapted for the library sector in various countries.

This article examines the history and transformation of library marketing through the lens of the United Kingdom, Germany, Spain, and several Scandinavian countries. Special attention is paid to how different economic, social, and technological conditions influenced the development of this area in various regions of Europe. An important aspect is the analysis of how each country adapted marketing tools in their libraries and what lessons can be learned from their experiences.

United Kingdom

The prerequisites for integrating marketing into the library sector arose in the 19th century in America when library science was called "library economy," and the first educational institutions for training industry specialists were known as "Schools of Library Economy" [5]. This was partly due to the types of libraries at that time (18th century) and how they operated: subscription libraries required quarterly or annual reader contributions; libraries in bookstores and publishing houses loaned books with collateral; proprietary libraries, which were joint-stock institutions, distributed property among reader-owners in the form of shares [2]. With the emergence of public libraries, the philosophy of library and information services changed. Libraries began to be funded by taxes collected from the entire population, offering their services free of charge. As a result, the information contained in literary works became publicly accessible and was regarded as public property [3].

The development of public libraries coincided with the economic boom in the United States at the end of the 19th century and the emergence of scientific and technical libraries at private and government institutions, enterprises, and organizations, where different principles applied: these libraries worked not for society but for themselves. They were the first to realize that information is a commodity and resource that is not provided for free, actively incorporating business efficiency principles and teaching information management [4].

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Over time, universities also began to charge for providing information. For example, in 1930, the interlibrary loan service at Stanford University became fee-based [5, p. 150]. Further technological advances in libraries (photocopiers, fax machines) only reinforced the commercialization of information, distancing it from traditional library services. Libraries shifted from information provision to trade and mediation. Thus, in the early stages of library marketing development in the UK, the focus was on evaluating libraries' economic efficiency from the perspective of commercial marketing. Only in the 1970s did it become clear that libraries needed to provide quality, comprehensive, and relevant information, seeking not economic but social impact, as this period saw the informatization of society and the diversification of the information market [6].

Moreover, there was a realization that the emphasis should be on improving public library services, effectively utilizing financial and material resources for society's benefit rather than simply increasing book circulation. Scholars believe that the "oil crisis of 1973" prompted these thoughts ("The most unusual and attractive library projects often emerge during financial crises. Problem-solving happens faster when there are structural and personnel cuts") [7].

In terms of library marketing publications in the UK, the earliest is considered to be an article on "methods and ways of advertising libraries and promoting them to the reading public" (1877) [8]. In a more mature period of library marketing development, much attention was paid to the report from the Hillingdon Project on Public Library Effectiveness, titled "The Effective Library" by Barry Totterdell and Jean Bird [9]. At the time of the research in the UK (1976), effectiveness was understood as the degree to which readers' needs were satisfied. The project report found that reader satisfaction was minimal because most reader requests were simple and repetitive, while librarians exhibited a lax attitude toward unmet requests. Furthermore, the understanding of "library marketing" differed between librarians and readers, leading to a misguided direction for library work.

As a result of the project, both in the UK and the US, there was an improvement in mass work with readers and the development of relationships between libraries and the public [10, 11].

Germany

In Germany, library marketing issues began to be addressed at the level of public libraries in the early 1980s. The first publication in German appeared in 1982 [12], aimed at optimizing mass library services. Opinions on the use of marketing tools in German libraries were divided: similar to Western countries, West German (FRG) librarians did not have a clear understanding of library marketing, and those who were inspired by the idea lacked a concept of forward-looking actions. In 1985, a document resulting from a colloquium organized by the Bertelsmann Foundation in 1984 [13] provided a significant impetus for FRG libraries and their staff to grasp the concept of "marketing" and "goal-setting."

Denmark

In the 1970s and 80s, when library marketing was taking shape in some European countries and corresponding research was being conducted in the US, Denmark did not see the need to maintain the popularity of library services. The concept of legitimacy at that time served as a kind of immunity for Danish libraries—library institutions were considered legitimate and respected in the eyes of the state, civil society, and the market, meaning libraries were in demand and necessary for society [14]. This trend was the result of productive collaboration between Danish libraries and stable state funding [15].

Denmark's library marketing concept began to form at the end of the 20th and beginning of the 21st century with the introduction of the Internet, which allowed for the creation of digital libraries based on the collections of individual institutions. This was facilitated by a new library law passed by the Danish Parliament in 2000 [16]. The country then shifted towards acquiring media instead of traditional books for more effective consolidated access, resulting in platforms like "bibliotek.dk" and "deff.dk" [17]. Thus, Denmark's libraries became not only information institutions but also centers for computer and information literacy.



Another method of promoting library services at the start of the 21st century was formal marketing: investments in posters displayed on buses and in public spaces with bold statements like "Public Library—jungles of entertainment and knowledge" or "The library has the answer." After the launch of www.bibliotek.dk, the Danish National Library Authority sent postcards with information about the new service to all households in the country. Another method for promoting the entire public library network was the creation of the internet portal www.fng.dk. This is an abbreviation for Folkebibliotekernes net guide (Public Libraries' Internet Guide), a collaborative product of several public libraries promoting themselves as a guide to quality-controlled resources. In this context, it is worth mentioning the digital service www.biblioteksvagten.dk (Library Information Consultant), a digital reference service operated by a consortium of public and scientific libraries [18]. Additionally, an important component of Danish library marketing was the creation and maintenance of public library websites, which preceded the efforts of the CIS and Europe by 10–15 years. Furthermore, public relations efforts, such as organizing integration events for refugees, immigrants, and holding activities in public institutions (schools, kindergartens, nursing homes), played a vital role.

Norway

Since the early 2000s, a similar trend has been observed in Norway—libraries, through free internet access, have become centers of user attraction [19]. Library promotion was also conducted via the Internet. Notably, Norwegian libraries began using the Internet and developing individual library websites well before it became mandatory at the state level [19].

Before 1991, marketing was taught at the Oslo Library School, which was the only one in Norway at the time. There was a separate course on communication and marketing in public libraries, covering one semester in the final year of study. In subsequent years, despite an increase in institutions offering library education (University of Tromsø and Bergen University College), communication, public relations, or marketing courses were rarely mentioned in the curriculum [19].

Since the 1990s, Norwegian librarians have actively promoted their libraries in local newspapers, reporting on events and inviting journalists to visit libraries. Children are an important target group for public and school libraries. Many public libraries in Norway work closely with kindergartens and local health services to inform parents about the importance of early reading for children's development.

In the early 2000s, the Norwegian government developed a strategy to stimulate students' interest in reading and improve their reading skills. As part of this strategy, various campaigns were conducted, with libraries involved in one way or another, such as "The Cultural Rucksack," "READ!," "Into the Text," and "Free Choice" [20]. The Minister of Education promoted these campaigns, emphasizing the importance of school libraries, although the role of public libraries received little attention in national media coverage.

In 1994, the NLA's board hired a well-known communications and marketing firm to develop an information strategy for the NLA. The company concluded that Norwegian libraries lacked the tradition or knowledge of how to advertise their services. They also noted that specialists were enthusiastic and idealistic but lacked the ability to set clear priorities. The report prompted the NLA council to establish clear priorities. A large-scale campaign was launched to improve school libraries. All NLA branches cooperated, and posters and brochures were sent to all schools and local politicians. Full-page advertisements were placed in national and regional newspapers, the NLA president wrote an article for the country's largest newspaper, and there were reports and debates on major radio news programs. The president was also invited to speak to teachers in different regions about school libraries. This was the most professional, large, and expensive NLA campaign in recent years, largely thanks to sponsorship from the Norwegian Library Bureau and the Confederation of Norwegian Enterprise.

During its existence, the NLA Marketing Committee published a small brochure called "Myth Busting" (1996), which was widely distributed throughout the country.



Spain

Initial research on library marketing in Spain appeared in the 1940s with the works of Lasso de la Vega and some articles and digests published in the "Revista de archivos, bibliotecas y museos" (1946), such as Bostwick's famous work "The Public Library in the United States" [21]. Librarians had to wait until 1970 for an article and, shortly after, an original book dedicated specifically to this topic. However, neither generated significant interest from the library community.

Despite the limited theoretical base, the reality of the time pushed Spanish librarians to act in two directions. On the one hand, they organized promotional and entertainment events, reading promotion, etc., along with corresponding advertising. On the other hand, they began conducting user surveys, mainly satisfaction surveys, to learn about the public, though not yet about potential users [22].

Speaking of marketing in the context of promotion, in the 20th century, campaigns in Spain focused more on promoting reading in general rather than specific library institutions. For example, in one of the earliest reading promotion campaigns, the slogan "The Book Helps Achieve Victory" (1969) associated reading with practical information, emphasizing that better education would lead to economic improvement and social advancement. Another national campaign a decade later used the slogan "Live by Reading," focusing on reading as a daily practice necessary for all aspects of life. Perhaps this slogan was more appropriate than the previous one, despite its commanding tone. The Ministry of Culture allocated significant funds for this campaign, which included many posters designed by renowned illustrators. However, the results were mixed, and in some cases, frankly unsuccessful. Several more similar campaigns were held until the early 21st century, but like previous ones, they focused more on promoting reading rather than library services [23].

Attempts directly related to promoting library services in the broadest sense began to appear in the late 1970s. Although there had been precedents, such as posters announcing events and bookmarks with instructive messages, only in the 1970s did librarians feel a more pressing need to promote libraries' potential to the public [24]. However, these years of high hopes coincided with an economic crisis characterized by 15% annual inflation, significant budget cuts, political uncertainty, and a lack of clear directives. All this hindered the ability to promote the image of libraries, which had long required improvement, alongside service enhancements.

Librarians' promotional efforts in Spain began with a clear intent to inform potential users about available resources. Librarians had long been concerned about how to convey to the public the existence, content, schedules, services, etc., of libraries. Initially, promotional activities were limited to providing information about their services, which was considered the best possible solution given the circumstances and limited funding. At this stage, the goal was to increase the visibility of library services available to the public, and the most appropriate tool for this was the information brochure. This traditional folded brochure, containing basic information about the library, hours of operation, services, address, and requirements for obtaining a library card, is one of the oldest methods of disseminating information—followed by reading lists to highlight the collection and thus increase its use. At the same time, posters advertising events began to be used more frequently: at first, they advertised traditional events that had proven effective, then promoted events aimed at new public segments and their needs.

A shortage of both human and material resources, along with some reluctance to use "commercial" techniques, kept Spanish librarians from fully embracing marketing, although they did use advertising techniques. Similar to what happened in the United States in the first half of the 20th century, Spanish libraries began using advertising techniques in the 1950s. These included posters announcing events, library collection exhibitions, participation in local radio programs, and more [24].

New concepts, which were barely mentioned earlier, included using information and communication technologies in libraries and political messages to promote values that were believed could be advanced along with equal access to information. The "Think Freely" campaign (Castilla-La Mancha Library Network in 1997) used comic-style techniques to showcase various activities taking place in the library, from more traditional ones to those involving ICT. The "Conect@mos. Libraries of



Extremadura. Not a Village without a Library" campaign was of a mixed nature: the long slogan was accompanied by a modern image of ICT alongside graphic representations of traditional and rare books and globes [23].

By the late 1990s, efforts to differentiate between general campaigns and those aimed at specific categories of the public—mainly youth—began to appear. Many general campaigns focused on resource accessibility ("70 public libraries at your disposal" Region of Murcia) ("We have a million books" Province of Barcelona). Among those targeting specific groups were campaigns like "bibliomarkets," "bibliopools," etc., which sought to attract new types of readers: housewives, vacation readers, etc. Accordingly, flyers published in 2000 in Barcelona had the same goal when they mentioned the diversity of documents at "price 0." The aim was to emphasize that the service was free, and the campaign was primarily aimed at population segments for whom paying for services was a more critical issue, such as youth, retirees, etc. [23].

At the end of the 20th century, user satisfaction research began to develop to assess libraries. One of the first such studies was the Library Analysis Program (PAB), created by the private Bertelsmann Foundation in cooperation with local Spanish administrations managing public libraries. Established in 1994, this program engaged users through evaluation, as it attempted to help libraries in self-assessment and performance analysis [25].

The exploration of library marketing in European countries reveals a diverse landscape of practices and approaches, reflecting the unique historical, cultural, and socio-economic contexts of each nation. In Scandinavia, especially Norway, library marketing has evolved from a modest public outreach effort to a sophisticated, strategic initiative. The Norwegian Library Association (NLA) has been at the forefront of these developments, utilizing professional marketing strategies to advocate for library services and enhance public awareness. Despite challenges, such as limited tradition in marketing and economic constraints, Norway's comprehensive campaigns have significantly impacted the visibility and perception of libraries.

In Spain, the journey of library marketing has been marked by gradual progress. Initial efforts in the mid-20th century were primarily focused on promoting reading rather than specific library services. It was not until the late 1970s and early 1980s that Spanish librarians began to actively promote library services through various means, including informational brochures and advertising campaigns. These efforts have evolved over the years to include innovative approaches, such as leveraging information and communication technologies and targeting specific demographic groups. Despite financial and resource limitations, Spanish libraries have made notable strides in raising awareness and engaging with the public.

Overall, the experiences of these European countries highlight the importance of tailored marketing strategies that consider local needs and contexts. While each country has faced its own set of challenges, the collective efforts to enhance library visibility and public engagement demonstrate a commitment to improving library services and fostering a culture of reading and information access. As libraries continue to adapt to changing environments and technological advancements, the lessons learned from these marketing efforts will be invaluable in shaping future strategies and ensuring that libraries remain relevant and accessible to all.

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