

Commercial advertising in Greek libraries: an alternative funding strategy

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Abstract: Libraries in Greece have lost much of their already limited funding due to the recent global economic crisis. It has therefore become necessary for them to seek alternative sources of income. One such strategy could be commercial advertising, which constitutes the renting of space within or outside the library or using the library's website to place ads. However, an application of commercial advertising in libraries can trigger negative reactions from library patrons. In this context, the aim of this paper is to investigate stakeholders' views regarding the use of commercial advertising by Greek libraries, using a quantitative methodology. The results reveal that commercial advertising is considered as a possible profitable strategy for Greek libraries by both respondent groups, information professionals and users, alike.

Keywords: Commercial advertising, Libraries, Leadership, Marketing, Greece

1. Introduction

The global economic crisis that begun in 2008 brought many financial problems in Europe and the USA (Sikorski, 2011). Greece has experienced a very bad financial situation, mainly from 2009 onwards, with large cuts in public funding. Greek public libraries were particularly affected by the recession, shrinking even further their already limited budget (Giannakopoulos, Koulouris and Kokkinos, 2014; Kondylis, 2014; Kostagiolas, Margiola and Avramidou, 2011) and staff, as many employees were furloughed (Kouzis, 2013). On top of that, libraries must struggle with outdated organisational structures (Kostagiolas and Korkidi, 2008), limiting even further their ability to offer services of high value to their patrons.

Considering these problems, a first step towards a viable solution is for libraries to actively seek other, non-public, sources of income. In this context, this paper explores commercial advertising as an alternative revenue source, which

essentially means the renting of space within or outside the library or using the library's website to place ads for a product or a service. More specifically, library stakeholders' views regarding the use of commercial advertising in Greek libraries is empirically examined. To the best of the authors' knowledge no similar research has been published to date.

2. Literature Review

The global financial crisis has caused devastating problems to both public and private organisations, with libraries being no exception to the rule. Since they almost exclusively rely on government funding, Greek libraries struggle to operate with extremely limited funds and staff shortage, that have severely crippled their ability to offer high quality of services to users. Finding alternative, private sources of income may be the only viable solution to this problem. Several income generating activities have been proposed, including fee-based services, fundraising, "friends of the library", consultancies and information brokerage, and commercial advertising (Boadi, 2006; Cuillier and Stoffle, 2001; Pautz, 2014) especially online, but also outdoor and ambient.

Outdoor advertising is the placement of ads in public places such as streets, buses and other relevant carriers (McDonald et al., 2006) that come in the form of posters, billboards and illuminated signs (Zotos, 2008). Outdoor advertising is generally considered to be a convenient medium of advertising (Shavitt, Vargas and Lowrey, 2004). On the other hand, ambient advertising is "the placement of advertising in unusual and unexpected places (location) often with unconventional methods (execution) and being first or only ad execution to do so (temporal)" (Luxton and Drummond, 2000). Examples of ambient advertising include the backside of a ticket or painted train wagons (Shankar and Horton, 1999; Zotos, 2008), in books or on library cards (Lomax et al., 1997, cited in Pautz, 2014). Finally, online advertising is every paid form of projection and promotion of ideas, goods or services conducted on the internet, with several advantages over traditional advertising methods, including lower cost and the ability to send personalized or mass interpersonal messages (Palla, 2008).

The employment of commercial advertising by libraries is a controversial matter, posing many challenges for libraries. Švenčionytė (2005) surveyed 243 library websites and found that nearly 31% have some form of internet advertising, however self-advertising was the most prominent type. Pautz and Poulter's (2014) study also showed that 10% of the surveyed libraries have employed commercial advertising (space renting) and of these only 20% consider it as a successful revenue generator. Placement of third-party ads and other income generating activities that have been considered at times, such as fees and charges, are seen by library professionals as incompatible with the public library ethos (Pautz and Poulter, 2014). Moxley et al. (2004, cited in Švenčionytė, 2005) argue that commercial advertising may cause patrons to lose trust in libraries, much the same as they have lost trust in search engines. In fact,

there have been many cases where advertisements have created moral dilemmas, which may lead to problems between the organisation and the receiver of the advertisement's message (O'Barr, 2007). The scarcity of commercial advertising in libraries is also because businesses do not consider it as a cost-effective advertising solution (Švenčionytė, 2005).

For all the aforementioned reasons libraries are avoiding, in general, to employ commercial advertising in their environment and their services. One of the exceptions to this rule is the Toronto Public Library, which has already adopted this alternative funding technique. To ensure that such agreements are in keeping with its mission, the Library has issued an advertising policy¹, which outlines the advertising scope, and provides specific directives for the advertising process. More specifically, the policy states that the quality of the library services will not change and explains that all financial benefits obtained are intended to facilitate the provision of services to the public. The advertising programme taken up on the Toronto Public Library has raised many reactions, it has however increased the income of the library (Goldberg, 2013).

3. Methodology

As previously mentioned, the basic aim of this study was to investigate the perceptions of two public library stakeholder groups, i.e. employees and users, regarding the adoption of commercial advertising as an alternative strategy to increase revenue. To achieve this goal, the survey research method was employed. In more detail, an on-line structured questionnaire was developed, using Google Forms, which comprised twenty-four (24) closed-end questions; answers were given in a 5-point Likert-type scale. The instrument's content validity was established via pretesting, where six individuals (three librarians and three library users) were asked to comment on questionnaire content (Chatzoglou et al., 2009); slight wording modifications were made, accordingly. The questionnaire was distributed electronically, via mailing lists and social networks. Overall, 370 questionnaires suitable for analysis were returned. The final sample comprised 203 information professionals and 167 users. The demographic characteristics of the sample are presented in Table 1.

The data collected were analysed through descriptive as well as inductive statistics, using the SPSS® statistical package.

Measure	Items	Information Professionals (%)	Users (%)
Gender	Male	29.1	44.9

¹Advertising Policy: Library Policies & Terms of Use. (2012). Retrieved from <https://www.torontopubliclibrary.ca/terms-of-use/library-policies/advertising-policy.jsp> [date accessed: 24/10/2019]

	Female	70.9	55.1
Age	18-30	32	62.9
	31-40	30.5	14.4
	41-54	32.5	16.2
	55+	4.9	6.6
	Education level	High School	-
	Batchelor's	54.7	69.5
	Master's	35	14.4
	PhD & Post-doc	10.4	7.2

Table 1. Sample Demographics

4. Results

Results regarding the attitude of information professionals and users towards commercial advertising in libraries are presented in Tables 2 and 3, respectively. Findings indicate a strong consensus within both groups of respondents that finding alternative sources of income is necessary, and that commercial advertising could be a good source of revenue for libraries. However, there is a divergence in the views of both surveyed groups as to whether it is ethical to place commercial ads in the library. Prior studies have shown that library professionals feel that advertisements "...conflict with their ethos as public librarians" (Pautz and Poulter, 2014, p.31).

Item	Strongly disagree (%)	Disagree (%)	Neutral (%)	Agree (%)	Strongly agree (%)	M	IQ
						D	R
						N	
Finding alternative sources of income is necessary	3	2.5	11.8	40.4	42.4	4	1
Commercial advertising is a good source of revenue	5.4	11.8	23.2	40.9	18.7	4	1
Ad placement in libraries is ethical	10.8	21.2	35.5	26.1	6.4	3	2
Commercial advertising as an obstacle to the work of the	7.4	29.6	30.5	24.6	7.9	3	2

library							
Commercial advertising can be profitable for libraries	2.5	7.4	27.1	54.2	8.9	4	1
Commercial advertising may be contrary to the policies of the parent organisation	2.5	25.1	41.4	27.6	3.4	3	2

Table 2. Information Professionals' Attitude Toward Commercial Advertising

Item	Strongly disagree (%)	Disagree (%)	Neutral (%)	Agree (%)	Strongly agree (%)	M	IQ
						D	R
						N	
Finding alternative sources of income is necessary	3	3.6	21.6	56.3	15.6	4	1
Commercial advertising is a good source of revenue	6	9	26.9	50.9	7.2	4	1
Ad placement in libraries is ethical	7.2	19.8	44.9	25.7	2.4	3	2
Commercial advertising as an obstacle to the work of the library	5.4	35.9	37.7	17.4	3.6	3	1
Commercial advertising can be profitable	1.2	7.8	27.5	59.3	4.2	4	1
Commercial advertising may be contrary to the policies of the parent organisation	1.2	34.7	42.5	19.8	1.8	3	1

Table 3. Users' Attitude Toward Commercial Advertising

To test whether there is consensus in the attitudes of the two groups of respondents, an independent samples t-test was performed (Table 4). Results of the analysis indicate that respondent groups agree that commercial advertising could be a good source of revenue for libraries, but information professionals are more aware of the need to find alternative sources of funding. Moreover, as one might expect, information professionals are more concerned that adopting this alternative funding strategy may cause problems with the parent organisation.

Regarding what is considered an appropriate type of advertising, mean scores indicate that both respondent groups believe that online advertising is slightly more appropriate for libraries, compared to outdoor or ambient advertising (Table 5). Library websites have been argued to be the most effective means for income generation through such methods as advertising or web-based fundraising (Pautz, 2014). T-test results also indicate that the views of the two groups on the matter converge.

Item	Information professionals (Mean/SD)	Users (Mean/SD)	Mean difference	t	Significance (Two-tailed)
Finding alternative sources of income is necessary	4.17/ 0.940	3.78/ 0.860	0.389	4.117	0.000
Commercial advertising is a good source of revenue	3.56/ 1.090	3.44/ 0.967	0.114	1.049	0.295
Ad placement in libraries is ethical	2.96/ 1.080	2.96/ 0.918	-0.003	- 0.034	0.973
Commercial advertising as an obstacle to the work of the library	2.96/ 1.076	2.78/ 0.921	0.182	1.728	0.085
Commercial advertising can be profitable for libraries	3.60/ 0.847	3.57/ 0.748	0.021	0.253	0.801
Commercial advertising may be contrary to the policies of	3.04/ 0.875	2.86/ 0.806	0.182	2.064	0.040

the parent organisation

Table 4. Attitudes Toward Commercial Advertising Comparison

Item	Information professionals (Mean/SD)	Users (Mean/SD)	Mean difference	t	Significance (Two-tailed)
Outdoor advertising	3.21/ 1.085	3.21/ 0.974	0.022	0.021	0.983
Ambient advertising	3.15/ 1.098	3.19/ 1.040	-0.043	-0.391	0.696
Online advertising	3.26/ 1.122	3.45/ 0.986	-0.198	-1.813	0.071

Table 5. Advertisement Types

Finally, as regards to which product is best suited for advertising in libraries, both respondent groups favour the advertising of cultural events, followed by the advertising of publishers and services (Table 6). The results of the independent samples t-test showed once again that the views of the two groups on the matter are in agreement. Švenčionytė (2005) found advertisements of medical and health care products, as well as of new publications on several library websites. University of Arizona (UA) Libraries have also considered selling space to local businesses (Cuillier and Stoffle, 2011).

Item	Information professionals (Mean/SD)	Users (Mean/SD)	Mean difference	t	Significance (Two-tailed)
Product Advertising	2.55/ 1.025	2.59/ 0.964	-0.410	-0.394	0.692
Services advertising	3.01/ 1.080	3.19/ 1.023	-0.181	-1.649	0.100
Advertising of publishers	3.42/ 1.098	3.37/ 1.101	0.046	0.101	0.686
Local businesses advertising	2.78/ 1.107	2.90/ 1.059	-0.116	-1.022	0.307
Advertising of cultural events	4.17/ 0.803	4.19/ 0.793	-0.030	-0.361	0.718
Advertising of	1.99/ 1.083	2.17/	-0.182	-1.487	0.138

political events	1.245
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Table 6. Advertised Products

5. Discussion and Conclusions

The global financial crisis has severely affected the already limited budget of libraries, worldwide. Therefore, for libraries to continue to provide high quality of services to their patrons they need to come up with new ways to enhance their income. One such strategy could be commercial advertising. In this context, the current study examined the views of two library stakeholder groups on the matter, namely information professionals and users. Results indicated that both information professionals and users believe that commercial advertising may prove to be profitable for libraries. As could be expected, information professionals are more aware of the need for finding alternative sources of income, compared to users. Moreover, the findings of the study showed that both stakeholder groups agree that placing ads on the library website is the most appropriate type of advertising. Finally, both respondent groups believe that advertising cultural events is the most suitable product to be advertised.

The findings of the current study show that library leadership should seriously consider commercial advertising as a strategy for supplementing income. However, despite the positive stakeholder attitudes indicated by the results, the implementation of the strategy must be done with caution to avoid potential negative reactions. First and foremost, library leadership should ensure the support of internal stakeholders, i.e. top management of the parent organisation and library staff. To achieve this, library leaders should be able to convince internal audience about the necessity of the endeavour and that there are many chances of success, by setting clear goals and a well-prepared implementation plan. Moreover, a strict advertising policy, adhering to the ethical standards of the library and the parent organisation, should be established and followed faithfully.

Considering the limitations of the current study and given the lack of relevant empirical research, future studies should further investigate the issue. To form a more in depth understanding of stakeholder attitudes, a qualitative approach may be employed and include not only library stakeholder groups, but also marketing experts. Moreover, further research should investigate potential divergences among the views of library patrons of different library type, as they may vary significantly.

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