Marketing Library and Information Services: International Perspectives

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LIBRARY MARKETING IN SPAIN: STATE-OF-THE-ART

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Abstract
This work describes library marketing in Spain, beginning with the first theoretical works on the subject until the present situation, with the daily practices of libraries and related organisations. The current practices include principally the application of empirical knowledge to design tailored services for target groups, as well as promoting specific services and centres, such as reading and libraries in general, and studying the public, especially with user satisfaction studies carried out for the purpose of evaluating services, but which are still underdeveloped in terms of market segmentation studies.

INTRODUCTION: THE THEORETICAL BASE

The initial studies on library marketing in Spain appeared during the 1940s, with the works of Lasso de la Vega [1] and certain articles and digests that appeared in the Revista de archivos, bibliotecasy museos, such as Bostwick’s well-known work: The public library in the United States[2] Librarians would have to wait until 1970 in order to find an article[3] and, slightly later, an original book introducing the topic specifically to them[4].

These works – although separated by almost three decades – can be considered as isolated precedents since, unfortunately, neither one succeeded in awakening much interest on the part of the library community in this topic in subsequent years, other than some occasional isolated contribution.

In spite of the scant theoretical background, the reality of the times pushed Spanish librarians in two directions. On the one hand, they organised promotional and recreational activities, promoting reading, etc. (that clearly can be considered a form of attracting readers to the library—especially to the public library), together with the related publicity. On the other hand, and considerably later, librarians in both university and public libraries have undertaken users studies—generally, as satisfaction studies—that provide a means of learning about the public, although still not about potential users.

The design of appropriate products for specific user segments

During the past 10 years in different parts of the country, we have seen the development of services clearly directed to user segments identified by the library, although not studied systematically. These groups include housewives of between 45 – 65 years of age and dedicated exclusively to home and family (for whom
“bibliomarkets”[5] have been created: Barcelona, Salamanca); people on holiday with spare reading time while pursuing leisure activities for whom “bibliopools”, “bibliobeaches” and other variants have been created) [6]; workers and students who commute by public transportation to work or school, without having time to get to the library (“bibliometro”: [7] Mislata (Valencia), Madrid); or grandparents, etc. responsible for taking care of their grandchildren (parents corner at the “babyteca”[8] Barcelona). Curiously, these very successful services were not based on formal studies, but rather on empirical knowledge of specific market segments. This in no way invalidates the decision to carry them out: on the contrary, though, these cases constitute an example of how librarians with too few resources, nor support, to carry out systematic studies can frequently achieve success through applying empirical knowledge and through their involvement with user communities. Further, along we will see the scope of user studies that have been undertaken in recent years.

PROMOTION AS PART OF THE MARKETING-MIX

Promoting reading: The role of different stakeholders

The first promotional activities on a national level in Spain were the campaigns carried out by the Ministry of Education in the 1970s. (These had a precedent in the campaigns held within book fairs and book days by book dealers during the 1950s and 1960s). The aim behind these was to promote reading as an individual activity, rather than promoting the libraries themselves or any other cultural infrastructure. Gómez Hernández and Saorín[9] noted the great difference between the resources provided by the government for promoting certain habits (eating, health and recently social attitudes towards women, minorities, etc.) and those aimed at cultural activities such as reading, etc. Even so, when the government has decided to carry out such campaigns, it has always opted to address the citizen’s personal responsibility. While similar to the book sellers’ promotions, this type of campaign also seemed more in keeping with the small investment made for promoting reading in libraries, and even less, for other types of uses of these public services[10]. This approach continues to the present-day, as can be seen in the slogan of the 2004 campaign: “If you read, they will read” (referring to the example that parents can give to their children).

In one of the oldest campaigns promoting reading was the slogan: “A book helps one to triumph” (1969), identifying reading with utilitarian information. As such, better learning will lead to economic improvement and social advancement. A very partial view of reading, indeed, bringing to mind the “training” and utilitarian intentions of the first public libraries in Great Britain and North America ... but a full century later.

It was not for another decade that the second national campaign came out, also with a message aimed at the individual: “Live reading”. This campaign focused on reading as a daily practice, necessary for all aspects of life. The slogan was,
perhaps, more appropriate than the previous one, in spite of the tone of its underlying command. The Ministry of Culture contributed substantial funds to this campaign that produced numerous posters designed by well-known illustrators, etc. But the results were uneven and, in some cases, frankly unfortunate[11].

Somewhat later was the institutional campaign run by the Generalitat de Catalunya, the first to air on television and in the press: “Feed your mind.” The slogan was accompanied by images of people reading and the text “It contains vitamins a, b, c...”, in reference to the book being read. In spite of the message of usefulness (linking reading to advantages, not pleasure) and the obvious word play, the campaign did not have a significant effect among the public. The subsequent Spanish broad campaign, at the beginning of the 1990s, had a greater effect although not altogether positive. This campaign had the slogan: “Those of you that can do it, don’t waste it,”; in the poster a chimpanzee places a book on its head as a hat, not knowing what else to do with it. A similar campaign took place in Catalonia with the well-known image of the evolutionary phases between apes and [reading] men, with the slogan of “You who can, ... evolve.” This obvious pejorative allusion to non-readers was paralleled in the late 1990s in a poster referring to the abstention of youth in the elections. It contained a cow that looked out from the poster with this text: “She is 18 years old and doesn’t vote either.” None of the aforementioned campaigns had yet made reference to the use of libraries, but solely limited themselves to promoting reading as an individual activity.

Despite the very different social-political contexts, up to this point the basic attitude of the persons designing and carrying out these promotional campaigns for reading was much the same as Lasso de la Vega’s, in 1946, when he called on his colleagues to make an individual effort to reach out to users, but with no sign of resources from government agencies that could contribute to their initiatives.

The type of aggressive, ironic campaign that attempted to link those not following the posters’ advice to negative images have not been repeated – at least for the time being. On the contrary, the preference has recently been to associate the experience of reading with positive, desirable qualities such as —finally— pleasure (“The pleasure of reading”, with a photo of people reading, in Salamanca, or the older “The book: your adventure”[12], of the Germán Sánchez Ruipérez Foundation at the beginning of the 1980s); personal growth (“Grow reading”, also of the same Foundation, with a lovely image of a large child who no longer fit on the poster, for having read and grown so); opening up of unsuspected possibilities (“Get close to books ... and you’ll see”[13] or the not very original, “You can’t imagine it”); and even expectations over and above the purely rational (“A book is something magical”, from the Basque land at the end of the 1980s).

Along these same lines, and based on collaboration between the private sector and the public administration, the campaign of Madrid publishers and book dealers entitled “Books to the street” has been held annually, with the novelty of
distributing and posting promotional materials in the public transport system of Madrid and surrounding areas[14]. We find their slogan a little off the mark, since it does not make it clear if it is about reading in the street – although no such activities are known of in Madrid’s public space – or rather, about tossing the books out the window!

The latest examples of government campaigns were those carried out by the Ministry of Culture in 2003 and 2004. The first one had the slogan of “Reading gives you more” (turning again to the utilitarian message), which was promoted through posters and bookmarks, and also television ads, etc. In 2004 the Ministry ran the campaign “If you read, they read”, with TV ads and billboards, large signs at bus stops, as well as small format items such as fliers and bookmarks. It is worth pointing out that, for the first time, this campaign ran together with another one on the use and promotion of public libraries. The same dissemination methods were used, this time with the slogan of “Public libraries: come, look, listen, navigate, read”. We will discuss it later.

Also in Barcelona, the City Hall has dedicated the year 2005 to the reading and the book, taking advantage of the celebration of 400 years from the publication of “El Quijote”. The slogan is “More books, more free”, which is a word play in Catalan, also in Spanish. More of 500 activities are scheduled through 2005, most of them at the city’s public libraries[15].

Promoting the use of libraries

The search for cases directly related to the promotion of library service, in its broadest sense, takes us to the end of the 1970s. Though there had been precedents such as posters announcing activities and bookmarks with edifying messages, it was not until the 1970s that librarians felt a more intense need to broadcast the library’s potential. And, following the death of the dictator, Francisco Franco, in 1975, it finally became possible - socially and politically - to do so. Nevertheless, those years of high hopes also coincided with an economic crisis marked by an annual inflation rate of 15%, large budget cuts, political uncertainty, and a lack of clear directives. All of that held back the possibility of promoting an image that was long overdue for a change, in a process parallel to the improvement of services.

Promotional librarian activities in Spain begin with the clear intention of informing potential users of the available resources. Librarians had long been concerned about how to let the public know about the existence and content of libraries, their hours and services, etc. Initially, promotional activities were limited to providing information about their services, considered the best possible, given the circumstances and the shortage of funding. In this phase, the aim was to increase the visibility of library services available to the public, and the most appropriate tool for doing so was the informational flier. This traditional folded flier containing basic facts about the library, hours and services, address, requirements for acquiring a library card, etc., is one of the oldest methods for
dissemination - followed by reading lists - for attracting attention to the collection and thus achieving higher use. At the same time, posters announcing activities were being used more frequently: initially they advertised traditional activities that had proved effective, and later went on to promote activities addressed to new segments of the public and their needs.

The paucity of both human and material resources, as well as a certain aversion towards using “commercial” techniques, kept Spanish librarians away from marketing, but not from publicity. Similar to what had happened in the United States during the first half of the 20th century, in Spain from the 1950s and 60s on, promotional techniques began to be used. These included posters announcing activities, promotional exhibitions of the collection, or the participation of librarians in local radio programmes, etc.[16].

Nevertheless, these attempts were nothing more than isolated initiatives that at times had no continuity beyond the individual that carried them out. Other activities frequently came about as promotional initiatives of single libraries (Castellvell i El Vilar, Barcelona). Also important was the involvement of the public that requested—and achieved—library programmes. Public relations were present in the daily activities of library directors, even if the political climate did not permit much improvement in the services. On the other hand, marketing activities that librarians would have willingly set up—such as use studies or studies of users needs, or market segmentation—were not possible due to the lack of personnel, infrastructure and also—it may as well be said—of ongoing training that marked those years.

One of the first library campaigns was the aforementioned “We have a million books”, by the Network of Public Libraries of the province of Barcelona. Highly criticised at the time for not being quite true—since many of the books included in this number were already obsolete—this campaign had one fundamental accomplishment: the messages about the libraries put them in the public eye. The public began to become accustomed to hearing libraries mentioned, as happens with many other public services.

During those years the province of Barcelona’s Network of Public Libraries published posters and stickers that were distributed through the libraries, without slogans or other messages. The only text was a mention of the institution or, on occasion, the then novel phrase, “Networked libraries”. There was a certain tradition of creating graphic products of this type, which subsequently included bookmarks and other items, for which well-known illustrators provided their services for enhancing the image of public libraries. In addition to the text and slogans were drawings evoking childhood fantasies or tranquillity of reading (Carme Solé Vendrell, Joma)[17], or the diversity of users that could use the library. However, these materials rarely left the libraries or other professional forums and, therefore, did not reach the public at large.

Older yet is the only campaign that we are aware of in Catalonia of the private network of public libraries of La Caixa (a savings bank). This institution
had for many years devoted large amounts of resources toward its institutional image, as was apparent in its reading lists, guides to services, and promotional posters.

During this initial period institutional efforts were devoted to “changing individual behaviour” and transferring cultural competencies to the different autonomous administrations. Following this phase, both the autonomous administrations and the Ministry of Culture began campaigns for promoting the use of public libraries, for disseminating their image, etc. These campaigns were frequently based on the fact that the public at large was unfamiliar with what the library could offer them. This public was the new target of library services that until then had been very limited, serving mainly school children. Therefore, campaigns such as “Come ... you can get [sacar] a lot of things” (Network of Public Municipal Libraries of the city of Murcia) plays with the double meaning of the word “get” in Spanish, representing obtaining something of value and at the same time taking items out temporarily on loan. Several years later, “Come prepared ... you’ll leave loaded [carregat]” of the Libraries of Barcelona. Here there is also a double meaning, with loaded referring to the amount of material that can be taken from the library, as well as the second meaning of being a little drunk, which intended to attract the attention of the youthful user. “Grow with us” (Public Libraries of Burgos) stresses personal growth, as had the earlier campaign of the German Sanchez Ruiperez Foundation—but without mentioning reading although, being a library poster, this was implicit. This slogan also implies the permanence and fidelity of users through their entire life as clients of the library, as well as the change and evolution of the library itself.

New concepts – barely touched upon in the past— included the use of information and communication technologies (ICT) in libraries and of political messages to transmit values that, it was thought, could be promoted together with equal access to information. “To think with freedom” (Network of Libraries of Castilla-La Mancha in 1997) used the technique of comics to show different activities that take place in the library, from the more traditional up to those involving ICT, all framed within strictly classical columns and front, similar to the “Carnegie” style. “Different, equal” (Network of Public Libraries of Castilla-La Mancha, 2000) uses the image of different types of people –by sex, race— with an accompanying text that referred to the basic contents of the library and the statement itself occupying 50% of the surface. “Let’s connect [Conect@mos]. Libraries of Extremadura. Not one village without a library” was of a mixed character, where the long slogan was accompanied by the modern image of ICT together with graphic images of traditional and rare books and globes. At the same time, the style of the textual message was similar to those of political or social protests.

A specific case is that of regional libraries that, given their position within each region, also have the responsibility for promoting each one’s specific culture and identity. This activity, especially prominent in historic regions such as Catalonia or the Basque land, is nevertheless present in all of Spain’s regional libraries,
through the publication of books, bibliographies, etc., as well as promotional material that frequently transmits an advertising-type slogan (“Our knowledge now takes its place”, announcing the new Library of Castilla-La Mancha)[18].

Toward the end of the 1990s we begin to find attempts to differentiate between general campaigns and others addressed to a specific type of public—generally, to young people. Many general campaigns are based on the availability of resources (“70 public libraries at your disposition” Region of Murcia) (“We have a million books” Province of Barcelona). Among those aimed at specific groups, there are campaigns such as the “bibliomarkets”, “bibliopools”, etc. that hope to attract new types of readers: housewives, leisure readers during their summer holidays, etc. Accordingly, the fliers published in 2000 in Barcelona had this same intention when they referred to the variety of documents available for “the price of 0”. The aim was to emphasise that the service was free and, as such, the campaign was aimed primarily at those segments of the population for whom paying for services is a more critical issue, such as the young, retired, etc. An important example of initiatives directed to young people is the Public Library System of Catalonia’s annual “Come to the libraries” campaign. They feature, for the first time in Spain, pictures of famous persons that presumably are library users, such as the actors of soap operas or movies (Montserrat Carulla, Ferran Rañé, Ariadna Gil); theatre actors (Pepe Rubianes); or soccer players (Pep Guardiola), combined with slogans in youthful slang. The latest example of this type of campaign, mounted much more elaborately with ads on TV and in the press, is “Libraries are cool [guai]” of the Barcelona Library Consortium. Here for the first time two levels of language are used: that of the slogan, in a youthful slang, and that of the underlying theme where it is clearly obvious that those who use the libraries are richer culturally, have a greater capacity for using language, etc. A third level can also be discerned, concerning gender (one of the current myths of the sociology of reading) and physical appearance of actors in the TV ad. In it, there is an intelligent girl using the library and a boy whose attitude leads the viewer to assume that he is not a library user. Are we returning to the aggressive campaigns of the past? Initially it might appear so, but—with a difference from the campaigns of the 1980s. Here the immediate focus is placed on the qualities of the libraries rather than those of the individuals.

Last year, in more limited settings, the government of the Communities of Castilla-La Mancha set up an exhibition to transmit the current concept of library, in an attempt to combat the existing unawareness about them: “The public library, door to the information and knowledge society” is its appealing title. As a part of their strategic plan,[19] a book has been also published, with the title “Palabras por la biblioteca pública” (Words for the public library), where a number of writers and experts offer their vision about the social function of the public library. In addition to these specific initiatives, it is worth highlighting the activities for promoting reading and public libraries that the German Sanchez Ruiperez Foundation has carried out over the years. In Catalonia, the most recent campaign
in the province of Barcelona has the title “Now we have one million members”, and is disseminated through posters, bookmarks, and stickers.

Since the middle of the 1980s, promotional campaigns are frequently transmitted using various types of material. Without diminishing its importance, the poster is often accompanied by more transportable objects, such as bookmarks, calendars, stickers, or other printed material (post cards, fliers). As we will see below, the Network of Public Libraries of the province of Barcelona was a pioneer in many of these designs.

Well into the 1990s, the printed material – without disappearing— gave way to objects that are more typical of merchandising: folders, pens, pencils or erasers; containers or cases for pens, bags, and key chains; T-shirts, caps, pins, cut-outs or fans are the most typical examples in recent years. Frequently libraries do not charge for much of this material, but rather give it away. Although in many cases the users can take the items with them directly, in others the library delivers them personally, thereby increasing its visibility on the street. In this sense, the latest campaign of the Ministry of Culture on reading was linked to one that encouraged the use of libraries, with the slogan, “Public libraries: come, see, listen, navigate, read”. This campaign runs through radio and television spots –especially in high audience items, like sports, etc.-, as well as in posters distributed in the bus stops, etc. Its aim is to “enhance the social image of public libraries and to enlarge their utilization through promoting a change of level.”[20] The ads are based on the phrase “How much is it?” , and their aim is underlying the free service. The slogan and the images point to five main activities you can perform in the public library, with the objective to inform the non-user about all he or she can do in the library.

Another recent development has been the use of logos: an image applied extensively on many of the materials mentioned earlier, incorporated onto all documents issued by the library or network, onto letterhead, the web page, etc., as a quick, visual identifier of the institution. One of the first manuals for graphic identity was that of the government of the Communities of Castillay Leon. Meanwhile, there has been a certain evolution of the designs themselves, and consequently of the messages and images libraries want to transmit about themselves. The first libraries used images of books or other documents, in a more or less stylised manner (Network of Public Libraries of Castilla-La Mancha, Public Municipal Libraries of Zaragoza, Library of Aragon, Libraries of the Maresme); with a more or less schematic typography (Municipal Public Library of Zamora, Central Library of La Rioja, National Library of Catalonia, Municipal Library Network of Murcia, Terrassa.... at times, with connotations of images suggesting books: Libraries of Barcelona); with old typography, especially in libraries performing patrimonial functions (National Library, Library of Andalucia). Others used the images of the building housing the library (Library of Castillay Leon, Library of Castilla-La Mancha, Public Library of Vila-Seca) or of another distinguishing feature of the zone, such as the wave used in Cambrils. Recently, Public Libraries of the
State have created their own logo, with a lower case “b” framed within a square – representative of schematic typography for which the usage manual has just been issued[21]. The interest that this topic has awakened has been translated into the creation of a database of logos from around the world, prepared by the Library Network of Murcia[22] that contains more than 300 images to date.

Although addressed to another kind of public, the videos in the collection “Biblioimatges”, co-published by the District of Barcelona administration and the Faculty of Library and Information Sciences of the University of Barcelona, serve both as teaching materials and as a tool for explaining what public libraries are—and are not—through the use of images of recent activities, etc. They are quite appropriate for use as a promotional item at trade fairs, exhibitions, etc.

A NEW RELATIONSHIP WITH THE PUBLICS

But not all are purely promotional objects containing solely the publicity and image. Since the mid-1990s especially, libraries have continued to create a number of documents stemming from the need to provide user satisfaction and to establish a rapport with them. Among the more classic documents, there are those that are merely informative, such as fliers on the library or its services and book lists. Later came information pamphlets, charters of user rights, and other products that attempt to communicate with the end user through the most convenient manner available.

In the middle of the 1990s many libraries also began to issue informative bulletins. These form a part of the local press, the reach of which is directly related to the number of distribution points.

USER STUDIES: A PART OF MARKET RESEARCH

Much more recent is the development of user studies—generally satisfaction studies tending more toward the library evaluation rather than to the segmentation of users or studies of their needs. One of the first was the Programme of Library Analysis (PAB), of the private Bertelsmann Foundation in collaboration with local Spanish administrations that run public libraries. This programme, set up in 1994, approaches users through an evaluation, since it attempts to assist libraries in evaluating themselves and to undertake an analysis of indicators. Furthermore, it is contributing to the redesign of procedures for collecting data in order to adapt them more to the evaluation’s needs[23]. Currently it is in a new phase (2002-) that is attempting to work towards a comparison among libraries of the same network and also among networks, known as “PAB Programme-Networks”[24]. Twenty key indicators have been designed, many of them related to the use of, and impact on, end users. The use of focal groups for studying user satisfaction in public libraries has been introduced.
In 2003, the Studies Group of the province of Barcelona undertook a general study of active users, over 14 years of age, of municipal public libraries. The data of this study are still being explored. This study, based on 400 structured telephone interviews, collected data from citizens of towns with population of over 30,000 and in all ten districts of Barcelona. It was based on another, from January 2001, in which the same population were analysed. The objective, as stated earlier, was for evaluation[25].

Another interesting experience was a telephone survey on user habits and satisfaction that the Public Library of Tarragona carried out in 2002.

Experiences with evaluations involving user studies have also been undertaken in recent years in many university libraries, always within the framework of general university evaluations: noteworthy are those of the Universitat Politècnica de Catalunya,[26] Universidad Carlos III de Madrid, Universitat Pompeu Fabra de Barcelona,[27] etc. All these studies have in common an analysis of use and, especially, the satisfaction of different user segments: teachers, students of varying levels, etc. This tendency can be explained by the pressure – and in some cases, the legal obligation—on institutions to evaluate their libraries. On the other hand, we are unaware of the existence of needs studies or of general studies (demographic, psychographic, etc.) in Spanish libraries.

REFERENCES AND NOTES

1. Lasso de la Vega (J). La propaganda y el servicio público de bibliotecas en los Estados Unidos. Madrid: Revista de bibliografía nacional. 1946. (In fact, this work is, above all, a report on a trip to the US and the situation of libraries there).


5. “Bibliomarkets” are stands, installed by public libraries in city markets, with books, records, etc. available for loan, where persons that are shopping can see, and borrow, recent works on given subjects.

6. Basically, these are service points set up by the public library in centres of leisure, such as public pools, beaches, etc. Space is provided for reading in the open air at the stand, and people are also allowed to take the material to be read at their convenience while stretched out on a towel.

7. Some public libraries have installed stands with books and other materials available on loan in metro stations.
The “babyteca” is a space in the public libraries where adults can look at stories with babies or read them to pre-literate children who are accompanied by their parents, care-givers, or grandparents. Taking advantage of the presence of these adults, collections of materials are installed of interest to educators and other persons responsible for child care within the family.


When compared with posters that were well designed graphically, the message transmitted by some other drawings was, frankly, discouraging. For example, one was a drawing of a man who had cut off his tie to use it as a bookmark – an image that would not stand up well under a Freudian analysis!

A similar idea can be found in the slogan, “The adventure of reading”, that identified a whole series of cultural and recreational activities provided by the libraries of Barcelona; but this is an activities programme on a more complex level.

According to Gomez-Hernández (A J) and Saorín Pérez (T), this campaign “…was not effective in calling attention to reading” (Gómez and Saorín, La información y las bibliotecas en la cultura de masas. València: Biblioteca Valenciana, 2001, p. 62). In addition to the lack of originality of the slogan, the expression of “...and you’ll see” often has, in Spanish, a negative, even threatening, connotation.

Text and images used in that campaign since 1977 are available at http://www.librosalacalle.com/textos.htm.

Information about this campaign is available at http://www.anyllibre2005.bcn.es/.

Pérez-Rioja and Antonio (J). La prensa y la radio como elementos de difusión bibliotecaria: una experiencia provincial. Boletín de la Dirección General de Archivos y Bibliotecas, II: 15 (nov. 1953), p. 5-8, and in Penetración social del concepto “biblioteca.” Madrid: Dirección General de Archivos y Bibliotecas, 1954. (There are reports and reflections on this type of participation)

Both artists are well-known in the international field, especially because of their participation in events like Bologna Fair (Italy), where Carme Solé-Vendrell was awarded with the Price “Critici in Erba” (1992). Their activities reach also the animation and the press.

Gómez-Hernández (JA) and Saorín Perez (T). La información y las bibliotecas en la cultura de masas. Valencia : Biblioteca Valenciana. 2001:
63. There is an obvious reference to the Spanish saying “El saber no ocupa lugar” (Knowledge doesn’t take place).


26. The latest version of this study can be consulted at: http://www.bibliotecnica.upc.es/Enquesta_satisfaccio/informe2003-PDI.pdf.