Strategies for marketing information and knowledge services of electronic learning centres in the City of Johannesburg Public Libraries

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In many instances, electronic learning centres (ELC) in public libraries are not utilised optimally as patrons are not aware of such facilities. As a result, marketing of services is critical for maximum use is needed. The study aimed to establish the marketing of information and knowledge services of Electronic Learning Centres (ELCs) in the City of Johannesburg (COJ) public libraries. Adopting a Technology Acceptance Model (TAM) for this study, a quantitative research approach was employed, and data was collected through an open-ended questionnaire. The target population for this study was electronic learning (e-learning) librarians and e-learning users. The findings revealed that computer services, free Wi-Fi, free internet, and e-resources were among the information and knowledge services accessible to the users of the COJ public libraries in the 21st century. Library pages, and word of mouth from e-learning staff and other users were some of the strategies used to market the information and knowledge services available and accessible. Marketing information and knowledge services offered in the e-learning information centres enhance such centres' optimal usage, therefore, marketing is instrumental as one of the tools for the use of the centres particularly in the 21st century. Suggestions are made on how to enhance the marketing of information and knowledge services.

Keywords: Information and knowledge services; electronic learning centres; marketing strategies; City of Johannesburg, libraries

1 Introduction

In recent years, marketing information and knowledge services have remained a heated topic in the field of Library and Information Services (LIS) (Prasad & Saigal 2019; Jha 2021). The notion of marketing information and knowledge services of public libraries comprises of activities such as determining user needs, designing appropriate services to meet their needs, and communication and distribution to inform, and serve the users (Otobrise & Omagbon 2019).

According to Otobrise and Omagbon (2019), marketing refers to the management process which identifies, anticipates, and supplies user needs efficiently and profitably. Furthermore, the system encourages users to communicate and optimise the learning experience (Bhatnagar 2016). According to Kumbhar (2009), e-learning marketing refers to the promotion of e-learning services through one or more forms of electronic media. Computers, networks, telecommunications, storage, and sharing technology are all utilised in the e-learning educational system.

Public libraries, globally, are adopting the use of e-learning to improve services offered to 21st-century users who are glued to technologies and need timely services. Therefore, marketing information and knowledge services to users particularly in this day and age of technology leads to optimal usage of e-learning centres. ELCs in public libraries are enhancing services to users by ensuring that services are available to them quickly and efficiently (Mbambo, Jiyane & Zungu 2021). This topic has been studied in the literature from many perspectives. Abbasi and Zardary (2012), Han and Yates (2016), Otobrise and Omagbon (2019) have addressed the marketing of services in libraries. They were interested in the marketing of libraries, information and knowledge products and services in supporting e-learning.

This includes the ELCs' marketing information and knowledge services for the public to the internet, tablets, computers, and e-learning programmes. ELCs promote resource-sharing for under-resourced libraries. Through the shift to mobile technologies and the paradigm shift from textbooks to tablets, the marketing information and knowledge services of ELCs in public libraries have the opportunity to draw the attention of users and create awareness for them of the information and knowledge services available to them, and also provide users with open online courses, a learning venue, and effective learning content. As such, in most public libraries, having access to ELCs has improved service delivery (Dzandza 2019:

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79; Mbambo et al. 2021). This study investigates strategies for marketing information and knowledge services of ELCs in the City of Johannesburg Public Libraries

2 Contextual setting

The study was conducted within the public libraries in the City of Johannesburg Metropolitan Municipality (COJMM), and these libraries are regarded as educational hubs, providing users with access to books, magazines, and audio-visual materials to help them with their studies, careers, businesses, and personal growth. The COJMM is located in the Gauteng province of South Africa and serves a total of 4.9 million people (Stats SA Community Survey 2016). The current population makes it the biggest metro by population size in South Africa. The City of Johannesburg Library and Information Services (COJLIS) forms part of community development under the city's Human and Social Development Cluster. COJLIS is expected to contribute programmes that address some of the cluster's mandates such as illiteracy, lack of information literacy skills, increasing digital citizenry in the 4th Industrial Revolution (4IR) by bridging the digital divide, implementing e-Learning programmes (City's smart city's strategy) and inequality in library service provision (Mpendulo & Ramela 2018: 4).

The LIS is one of the directorates of the Community Development Department in the COJ which oversees and manages 90 public libraries and three support sections responsible for delivering library services to its 4.9 million residents. It is important to note that it was only in the 1970s that the Johannesburg Public Library opened its doors to black users (Mhlongo 2018). In the 2006/07 financial year, the COJ restructured into seven regions, namely: Regions A-G, including the Johannesburg City Library, which became part of Region F to ensure equitable levels of access to public library services and resources in compliance with the minimum norms and standards for public libraries in the COJ (Johannesburg City Library 2012).

There are seven regions with a total of 90 libraries servicing the COJ's communities. In the 12 regional libraries, there are 12 e-learning classrooms which are computer laboratories that provide training for all age groups. There are two to three Champions per region and also at the City Library (total of 24) who are responsible for 'championing' e-learning to their region's library staff. There are a number of e-learning programmes rolled out that vary from region to region and library to library, depending on the needs of the community and the available resources.

The study was restricted to the COJ Libraries ELCs. The reason for choosing the library's ELCs in the municipality was due to accessibility, time constraints and costs involved when conducting the study. Other libraries such as academic, special, and mobile libraries did not form part of the study because they did not open to all members of society like public libraries. The study reports part of the findings from the bigger master's project conducted in the COJMM.

3 Problem statement

Patrons find it distressing to use and reap the known benefits of ELCs in public libraries if they are not aware of such facilities, hence marketing of services is critical for maximum use. The use of ELCs benefits not only e-learning users in the public library, but it also allows the public library ELCs to fulfil their purpose and quantify the benefits of investing in these resources as an organisation (Moyo 2017: 2). According to Abbasi and Zardary (2012), ELCs in public libraries could provide both digitised services and e-resources to assist with e-learning. More users than ever before have turned to public libraries for space, access to materials, and access to internet resources, especially with the introduction of technology and the onset of the COVID-19 pandemic.

The COJ has adopted a variety of marketing strategies to promote its services so that many users can benefit from the extensive services provided by the ELCs in public libraries. The study intended to find a solution to the challenges by delving into the world of marketing of information and knowledge services in ELCs, to make these services available and accessible to users. Thus, the study did not only raise library users' awareness of the products and services offered by public libraries in the City of Johannesburg Metropolitan Municipality (COJMM), but also provided a platform for the public libraries to increase their overall value in society through marketing.

4 Aim and objectives of the study

The study aimed to investigate the marketing of information and knowledge services of electronic learning centres in the City of Johannesburg public libraries. The specific objectives were to:
- identify types of information and knowledge services in e-learning centres of the COJ public libraries.
- determine the strategies for awareness and use of information and knowledge services in the e-learning centres of the COJ public libraries.
- suggest guidelines for enhanced marketing of information and knowledge services in e-learning centres.

5 Theoretical framework

This section presents the theoretical support underpinning this study on marketing information and knowledge services of ELCs in the 21st century. The TAM was used to determine the marketing, awareness, and use of ELCs by library users in Johannesburg. TAM is an information technology (IT) theory that simulates how users come to accept and use technology. Ocholla and Le Roux (2011: 61) describe a theoretical framework as "the structure that holds and supports the theory of a research work." A theoretical framework is generally built on one overarching theory, according to Ngulube (2018: 1). Davis modified TRA in 1986 to develop the TAM. As a result, users' decisions to adopt and use technologies for e-learning are influenced by two main aspects. Perceived usefulness and perceived ease of use are two of these factors (Davis 1989: 319).

Perceived Usefulness (PU) is the point at which a person believes that using a specific system would enrich his or her job performance" (Venkatesh & Davis, 2000). Therefore, when users of the e-learning centres are aware of the services, the uptake in the use of services is increased. Perceived Ease of Use (PEOU) is the point at which a person believes that using a specific system would be free of effort (Sciarelli, Prisco, Gheith & Muto 2022). Users of COJ e-learning centres would realise this notion only when the information and knowledge services are marketed, and they are aware of them and become interested to find out how the system could help them use it with less effort. Also, they would believe that the system is worth using as the librarians would not market services of e-learning centres if they were not of benefit to them. TAM is extensively used to underpin studies on the acceptance and use of technologies for e-learning and has developed as a predominant model of choice.

6 Literature review

The literature for this study was conducted following Opeyemi (2018: 13) views and was reviewed within the following areas: different types of information and knowledge services in COJ Electronic Learning Centres; the strategies for awareness and use of Electronic Learning Centres; and ways to enhance the marketing of information and knowledge services in Electronic Learning Centres.

6.1 Types of information and knowledge services in the Electronic Learning Centres

According to Mbambo et al., (2021), the value of e-learning centres in libraries is defined not only by the amount and breadth of their contents, but also by how their e-learning services are consumed. These information and knowledge services are designed to allow users (from Africa and around the world) to enrol in e-learning courses. On the same note, Abumandour (2020: 178) observes that public libraries aspire to be a place of interaction, learning, tolerance, and understanding.

The ELCs offer a wide range of services to their users. Some literature has identified information and knowledge services provided by e-learning centres in public libraries as follows:

Free computers, Internet access and free Wi-Fi
Users can access the internet and Wi-Fi through their ELCs computers (Opeyemi 2018: 134). Public libraries have improved their information and knowledge services through electronic learning. The rapid growth of the internet and the web has altered information generation, storage, and retrieval methods (Mbambo et al. 2021), as well as increasing demand for ELCs among library users.

Electronic resources: open and closed access
Library users can access online resources such as e-books, online newspapers, and articles from the e-resources collection that are subscribed to by public libraries (Moyo 2017: 18). Desktop computers and various mobile devices such as mobile phones, palmtops, laptops, notebooks, i-pads, and other miniature devices can be used to access e-resources remotely. According to Mbambo et al., (2021), ELCs at public libraries can host a mobile e-resource library, bringing education to one of the most remote parts of the world where knowledge is needed.

Printing and copying centres
In the ELCs, patrons can type, print, and copy their work. The main objective of this service is to allow users of ELCs in public libraries (from all over Africa and the world) to access the services offered by these ELCs (Abumandour 2020: 190).

Specialised courses for librarians and users
Library staff undergo techno-literacy training to provide them with all of the required abilities to assist users (Mpendulo & Ramela 2018: 7). Electronic learning programmes such as Siyafunda, Goethe M-Literacy, Microsoft, IBM, Vodacom, FunDza Literacy Trust, and Google SA are imparted to library professionals (Mpendulo 2017). Librarians impart these skills

to users when they need assistance. Furthermore, the programmes available introduce users to the concept of self-learning and encourage them to pursue personal growth.

6.2 Awareness and use of electronic learning centres
It is difficult to overestimate the importance of awareness in the lives of library users (Opeyemi 2018: 17). For information and knowledge services to be utilised optimally, users of the services should have full awareness. Users must be aware of numerous elements such as typing, printing, photocopying, and scanning in e-learning centres to gain information and knowledge of usage (Moyo 2017: 2).

Despite its importance in today's sociocultural learning theories, the importance of social awareness in e-learning has only recently been studied (Abumandour 2020: 179). According to Mbambo et al. (2021), effective ELCs should consider not just information and knowledge transfer, but also social and dialogical interactions among users. As a result, the design of such environments influences the kinds of social interactions that might occur and thus can enhance or inhibit learning.

6.3 Ways to enhance the marketing of information and knowledge services in electronic learning centres
According to Otobrise and Omagbon (2019), marketing information products and knowledge services is a concept of delicately fulfilling and satisfying the needs of all users involved in education, scholarship, research, and self-development. Libraries should have a well-defined strategy for promoting information and knowledge services to their patrons. Digital media, such as Overdrive (e-books), e-journals, e-theses, and e-dissertations, PressReader (e-magazines, e-newspapers), e-research reports, e-bibliographic databases, e-Britannica, and conference proceedings, are promotional tools that public libraries can use to promote their services and resources (City of Johannesburg case study 2018/19).

To improve the marketing of ELCs' information and knowledge services, computing, digital, technical, and information literacy skills are necessary (Moyo 2017: 30; Dzandza 2019: 49). According to Otobrise and Omagbon (2019), the primary purpose of library marketing is to fulfil the library's mission, meet the needs of users, attract new and current users, highlight distinctive programmes, and promote the use of a library of information and knowledge services of ELCs.

7 Methodology
This study employed a positivist paradigm, employing a quantitative research approach to obtain primary data from respondents through questionnaires. The target population were all the users of the ELCs, as well as librarians. The stratified sampling technique was adopted, and data was collected using closed-ended and open-ended questions. 60 users and 24 librarians were selected to form part of the population. The users were all selected through the stratified sampling technique from the entire public library user population due to their homogeneous strata of e-learning centres use.   These libraries included Ivory Park Library; Diepsloot Library; Cosmo City Library; Emndeni North: Emndeni Library; Jabavu Library; Sandton Library; Alexandra 8th Ave Library; Johannesburg City Library; Westbury Library; Eldorado Park Ext 5 Library; Orange Farm Library and Poortjie Library.

They are denoted as regional libraries of Johannesburg due to their size and resources. The users were selected because they use the e-learning centres for a variety of reasons, including job advancement, personal development, and online or offline studying. It was vital to include librarians working in the e-learning centres since they are in charge of monitoring and ensuring that the e-learning centres are functional, accessible, secure, dependable, and authentic to use. According to Creswell and Creswell (2018), the stratified sampling technique ensures that diverse groups of the population are adequately represented in the sample. It is used when the sample accurately reflects the genuine percentage of people with specified characteristics in the population (Etikan & Bala 2017).

The study consisted of sixty (60) e-learning library users and twenty-four (24) e-learning librarians from 12 regional libraries. A total of 84 copies of the questionnaire were distributed to 60 e-learning library users and 24 librarians. All the copies (84) of the questionnaire were returned, giving a 100% response rate. The Statistical Packages for the Social Sciences (SPSS) for descriptive statistics were used to analyse quantitative data, resulting in the use of bar charts, pie charts, tables, frequencies, and percentages.

8 Findings
The findings for this study cover the following themes.

8.1 Types of information and knowledge services in the COJ Electronic Learning Centres
To identify types of information and knowledge services, the respondents were asked the two following questions:

Which information and knowledge services are offered in the COJ e-learning centres?

Multiple responses were provided on the types of information and knowledge services offered in e-learning centres as provided in Figure 1.
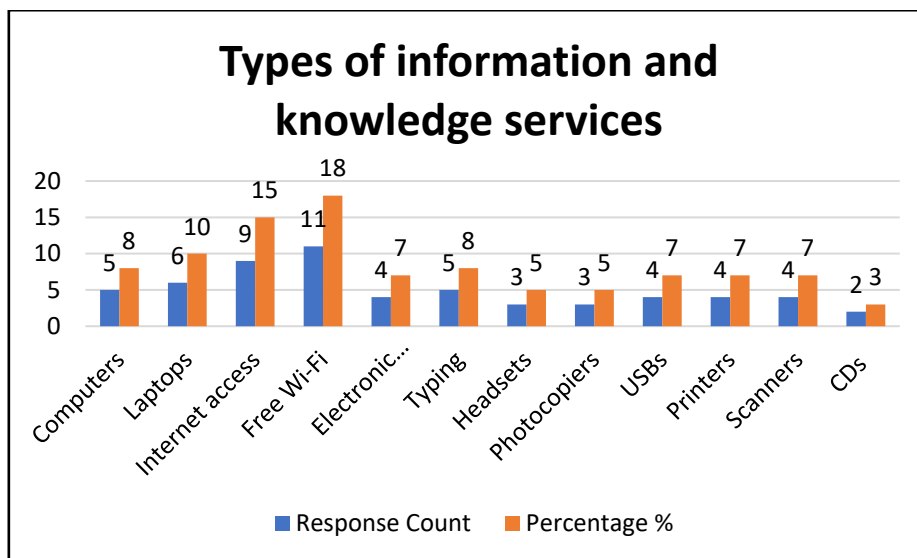

Figure 1: Types of information and knowledge services (N=60)

The majority, 11 (18%), of the respondents accessed information and knowledge services such as free Wi-Fi, followed by 9 (15%) respondents who accessed information and knowledge services for internet services. A further 6 (10%) respondents indicated that they accessed information and knowledge services from laptops, followed by 5 (8%) who accessed information and knowledge services from computers and 5 (8%) respondents for typing, while 5 (8%) respondents accessed e-learning services from computers. Four (7%) respondents accessed information and knowledge services from USBs and four (7%) respondents indicated that they accessed printers. Four (7%) respondents indicated that they accessed e-learning services scanners, 4 (7%) respondents from e-resources and 3 (5%) respondents accessed photocopiers.

It was interesting to note that only 3 (5%) respondents indicated that they accessed information and knowledge services from headsets, while 2 (3%) respondents accessed information and knowledge services from CDs. The findings indicated that most, 11 (18%) of the users made use of the information and knowledge services because of Wi-Fi, Internet access and laptop services. These findings are in line with Mbambo et al. (2021); and Abumandour (2020: 184), who noted that there are numerous benefits of information and knowledge services in ELCs not available in other institutions.

The users' responses are on par with those from the librarians who have articulated that they use them for internet and printing; for Wi-Fi and e-resources; to assist users to meet their needs; and for training users on coding, writing and cloud-based learning. Perceived Usefulness asserts that a person believes that using a specific system would improve their performance (Sciarelli et al. 2022). Perceived ease of use points out that a person believes that using a specific system would be effortless.

The respondents made use of information and knowledge services in ELCs to maximise their potential performance.

8.2 Awareness and use of e-learning centres by the users of the COJ Libraries
To know the marketing strategies used for marketing the information and knowledge services, the respondents were asked the following question:

What awareness strategies are used for marketing the information and knowledge services?

It was important that the respondents share what is used as ways of creating awareness for them on the e-learning centres. This question sought to establish if awareness increased usage by any means. The respondents became aware of the information and knowledge services in the e-learning centres in COJ Libraries as presented in Table 1.

Answer Options	Response Count	Percentage %
Personal Discovery	15	25
From Friends	12	20
From Library Staff	20	33
User Orientation	2	3
Direct Mailing To Users	1	2
Through The Electronic Library Webpage	2	3
Electronic Mail	1	2
Library Social Media Tools (e.g. Facebook, Twitter, etc.)	4	7
Other e-learning centres' users	3	5

The findings in Table 1 show that the users learnt about the e-learning centres through the library staff (20: 33%), followed by 15 (25%) respondents who personally discovered information and knowledge services in the e-learning centres. Twelve (20%) respondents learnt from friends about information and knowledge services in the e-learning centres; 4 (7%) respondents became aware of the information and knowledge services in the e-learning centres through library social media tools and 3 (5%) respondents learnt about information and knowledge services from other e-learning centres users. It is evident from the findings that most (20: 33%) users of the e-learning information centres at the COJ public libraries became aware of the information and knowledge services from library staff.

 A significant number of respondents (15: 25%) personally discovered these information and knowledge services in the e-learning centres, while a few (2: 3%) respondents learnt from User Orientation, (2: 3%) respondents learnt about information and knowledge services through The Electronic Library Webpage. However, the Electronic Mail and Direct Mailing to Users indicated a very low response (1: 2%). This is in line with Otobrise and Omagbon (2019), whose study revealed that most librarians in public libraries do not engage in awareness of library information and knowledge services.

The responses from librarians regarding the strategies for awareness and use of e-learning centres are on par with those of users, as they concur that users became aware through the library staff (17: 71%); personal discovery (11: 46%); through library social media tools (15: 63%); from friends (12: 50%); and other e-learning services (4: 17%). According to Opeyemi (2018: 127), the majority (52: 88%) of remote users are not aware of the information and knowledge services in the e-learning centres in their libraries. This implies that over the years there has been no significant improvement in remote users' strategies for awareness of the information and knowledge services in the e-learning centres in COJ libraries.

8.3 Ways for enhanced marketing of information and knowledge services in e-learning centres

In order to determine the marketing of information and knowledge services in e-learning centres, the librarians were asked the following question:

What ways for marketing of information and knowledge services in e-learning centres *are used?*

The following responses were provided on marketing of information and knowledge services in e-learning centres as provided in Figure 2.
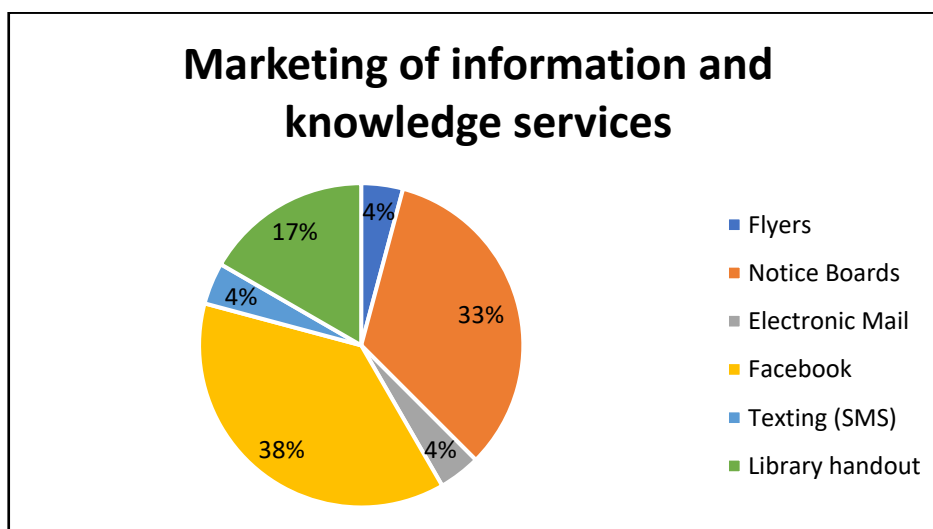

Figure 2: Marketing of information and knowledge e-learning services (N=24)

The majority of the respondents selected Facebook (9: 38%), followed by Notice Board (8: 33%), while 4 (17%) respondents indicated that library handouts were used for the marketing of information and knowledge services, 1 (4%) respondent that flyers were used for the marketing of information and knowledge services and 1 (4%) that texting (SMS) is used to market information and knowledge services. The findings indicated that Facebook and notice boards were the most common platforms for the marketing of information and knowledge services used in e-learning centres. The marketing of information and knowledge services is very low. Marketing of library information and knowledge services is poorly carried out in public libraries.

The response to the enhancement of marketing of information and knowledge services in e-learning centres COJLIS included the following question:

How can marketing of information and knowledge services in e-learning centres be supported by use of technology?

The librarians specified other platforms for marketing information and knowledge services as WhatsApp; Google Allo; advertisements; delicious, LinkedIn; and Pinterest. It is, therefore, important to explore other platforms for marketing information and knowledge services of e-learning centres, where a user's portal platform may be integrated into the library webpage. This is in line with Jha (2021) who indicated that library marketing can be done on its website. Mutual benefits can be obtained by a user and a librarian as well with the use of an effective webpage.

Apart from digital marketing, Mbambo et al. (2021), state that more marketing information and knowledge services of e-learning centres through regular noticeboards updates, flyers, and direct marketing of e-learning centres are equally as important as marketing information and knowledge services on the online platforms and websites to bridge the digital divide gap. Moreover, advocacy on information and knowledge services of e-learning centres is required as COVID-19 has derailed the progress of digital transformation.

According to Prasad and Saigal (2019), library marketing is one of the important subsets of how libraries happen to reach out to patrons in a globalised world with information as one of the main assets being considered in the scheme of things and knowledge. The advent of the fourth industrial revolution introduced new possibilities for information services, and this has revolutionised the function of the librarian from the dawn of time.

9 Conclusion and recommendations

There are several information and knowledge services offered by e-learning centres of the COJ public libraries. They include computers, laptops, e-resources, stable internet access and free Wi-Fi. This is due to the increased usage of libraries, partially because they have created this useful space of e-learning centres with added and improved technological services to attract more users.

The awareness of e-learning centres' information and knowledge services was done through a variety of significant remote ways. Using remote ways for users to be aware of information and knowledge services in the e-learning centres was very poor. This could be due to the fact that users were aware of e-learning centres' information and knowledge services through self-effort and one-on-one interaction with the library staff. Evidently, marketing information and knowledge services of e-learning centres is required to maximise awareness and optimal utilisation. However, if the strategies are not aligned with those used and preferred by users, they will not be effective.

Moreover, the strategies for marketing, awareness and use of e-learning centres information and knowledge services may act as a potential method of establishing a relationship with patrons, if used accordingly. It was clear from the findings that users of information and knowledge services found in the e-learning information centres value the services. Therefore, marketing should be viewed as an important component of public libraries in e-learning information centres. E-learning librarians should focus more on digital marketing of libraries, information, and knowledge services, as this would attract more users to public libraries e-learning centres and reach out to a wider range of users.

The study recommends that public libraries should create more e-learning centres within COJ public libraries and acquire more funds from the provincial government to purchase more computers, laptops, e-resources, sustainable free Wi-Fi and free internet for information and knowledge services.

It is recommended that librarians in the e-learning centres information and knowledge services should make time to ensure they interact with users as a significant number indicated they prefer to interact with the librarians. It is further recommended that there must be collaboration between the Department of Art and Culture and the e-learning unit for funding, training programmes such as Overdrive (e-books) and Pressreader (e-magazines, e-newspapers).

To strengthen the country's economy, the COJ libraries should compel COJ network providers to provide standard and efficient services so that more internet marketing strategies can be conducted across all COJ public libraries with e-learning information centres.

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