

Marketing of Library and Information Services through Liaison Programmes in Academic Environment: Prominence and Possibilities

Bharati Pati

Abstract

Being accountable for the precise and timely deliverance of information services, one vital aspect, i.e. 'Marketing' couldn't be disregarded in the academic library environment. Although belonging to a completely service oriented diligence, the promotion of the library products and spreading awareness on optimum usage of the collection would definitely be advantageous for the institution in general and the user community in particular. Through the present study, the authors have tried to figure out the challenges and possibilities of marketing of library resources through liaison programs

Keywords: Embedded Librarianship, Information Services, Liaison Programs, Marketing of Library Resources

1. Introduction

In the continuously upgrading education system of India, the functions of the academic units are also experiencing a paradigm shift. In the last two decades to be precise, the technological parameters are constantly effecting the academic, research and development and communication environment of the education system. Starting from the quantity and quality of learning, to the swift and means of communication has been altering in a super-fast mode. In this ambience of speed and accuracy, it would be really challenging for the academic libraries to persuade their conventional role of information providers. Off lately the significance of an academic librarian has been improved as they no more considered as safeguards of a physical entity (library) or distributors of course books. The role has been emerged out to that of an information

manager, knowledge manager, embedded librarian, liaison librarian, subject librarian, information consultants and many more. This phenomenon of transformation needs a constructive initiative, apposite planning and continuous effort. With all these above-mentioned features, an embracement towards the technological changes would be the call of the hour in addition. Apart from that, being accountable for the precise and timely deliverance of information services, one more aspect, i.e. 'Marketing' couldn't be disregarded. Although belonging to complete service-oriented diligence, the promotion of the library products and spreading awareness on optimum usage of the collection would definitely be advantageous for the institution in general and the user community in particular.

2. Significance of Marketing in the Service Sector

In any service providing industry, 'service' is an intangible article, may not have any material

presence or existence. But an adequate effort of service deliverance might act as the key ingredient of successful and optimum usage of the products. Unlike the profit-making industries, the end result of marketing in the service sector cannot be measured in terms of the profit earned at the end of year. But the consumer satisfaction and usage of materials would be the only dimension in such cases. Again the marketing and promotion in service providing organisations are a continuous and perpetual process which never gets cease within a stipulated time period. The perspective of the users or we can say, customers, do vary from person to person and the requirements also change with time. Thus to match up with the ever-changing customer need and satisfy them with customised products is very vital as a strategy of marketing. The principles of marketing as suggested by Philip Kotler, irrespective of the type of industry we are dealing with, there are six Ps, which are very important for that system to be said as excelling. Those are People, Process, Product, Price, and Promotion.

2.1 People

The human resources of an organisation represent its system and culture. Especially in a service-oriented organisation, people (human resource) have to deal directly with the consumer base. The behaviour and attitude of an employee stand for that of the parent organisation. The interaction might be personal but the impact would be generalised.

2.2 Process

The process of delivery of concerned service in any industry need to be simple and user-friendly. This particular feature eases access to relevant products for the consumers. Here we are talking about the

means or procedure through the consumer has been delivered with their requisite services. In an uncomplicated, less-time consuming and effective process, both the service provider and the recipient get highly benefited and moreover the interpersonal relationships also get to flourish.

2.3 Product

Products either tangible or intangible along with the services are the ultimate requirement for the clients. An article or usable substance which is ready for sale or promotion and having a consumer base can be considered as a 'product' in the philosophy of marketing. A tried and tested product having relevance with the user need is said to be a good product. When the end product ready to be served is up to the mark, it becomes easier for promoting the same.

2.4 Price

In service-providing industries, unlike profit-making organisations, the pricing attribute has a lesser impact, unless they are not publically funded or government-sponsored. Although a minimal amount of service charge from the consumers may contribute to the central budgeting system in the year-end. Being still an economically developing country, concessions in the service and product price attracts the clients to become a member of the organisation.

2.5 Promotion

The most vital component in any trade or establishment is an advertisement. In today's world, the more effort we put on the product promotion; the high the rate of yield could be expected. Besides providing a healthy and handy service to the users, advertising our upgraded merchandise is the call of the hour. Like any other industry, in service sector

also there is a huge scope of promotion and marketing. Through these kinds of events, such as Seminars, Workshops, Outdoor campaigns and Individual Interactions, the target groups are made aware of the new as well as updated products and services.

3. What are Liaison/Embedded Programmes?

The assigning 'term' might differ from case to case, but the concept remains the same. In certain academic libraries, 'Subject Librarianship' or 'Liaison Librarianship' is used instead, for the same service deliverance. There would be plenty of instances globally, where we could find periodical collaborations of library professionals in the institutional research as well in pedagogical assistance. Without any debate, this could be stated that initiation of such extension services for any institution is never an easy task. It takes a lot of effort, support from authorities, financial investments and a highly innovative attitude above all. The role of the professional leading the venture has to go through a vigorous process of decision making, personnel selection, permissible authorisations, product marketing and counselling etc. Moreover choosing a suitable mode of communication which would be compatible for both the service provider and clients is again a vital task to be figured out. Though branch libraries are not a new concept, what matters here is the level of acceptance among the patrons. Some of the contributing skilful services that could be integrated and recognized as those of a liaison are listed below.

- ❖ Assistance in Institutional Research as a core team member.
- ❖ Library Instruction Programmes for Categorized Users.

- ❖ 24*7 Consultations for Resources.
- ❖ Dealing with Citation Management Tools
- ❖ Helping with Library WebGuides
- ❖ Consultation for Class Assignments and Projects.
- ❖ Creation of Q&A and Discussion Boards
- ❖ Course/Syllabus Management (Kvenild, 2012);
- ❖ Working as Liaison Librarians in departments, Canteens and Dormitories (Shumaker, 2012);
- ❖ Content Management in the Web as well as in the Intranet of the organisation (Shumaker & Talley, 2009);
- ❖ Providing Information Literacy to bonafied users(Hall, 2008);
- ❖ Serving the core Research and Development wing as a reliable source of information (Carlson and Kneale 2011);
- ❖ Providing aid (information) to the core research groups (Shumaker & Talley, 2009);
- ❖ Involvement in instructional based classroom teaching(Andrews, 2015);
- ❖ Conducting Seminars and Conferences for the user group(O'Toole, Barham, and Monahan, 2016);
- ❖ Promoting Community Information Services within the locality(Shumaker, 2012);
- ❖ Compilation of quality Learning Management Systems for the students;
- ❖ Designing of Institutional Website and Promotion;
- ❖ Making the significant Research Publications of faculty members displayed and accessible ;

- ❖ Calculating and updating the latest ratings in terms of Impact Factors, H-index, SJR, Altmetrics about the faculties and institutional publications;
- ❖ Creating Social Media Circles (Facebook, Twitter, Whatsapp) for spontaneous communications.

4. The need for Marketing of Library Services and Products:

This could be a debatable topic that if the services and products of a non-profit making organisation like library need advertisement or marketing or not. Since such organisations are moreover service-based and if at all we are considering “Information” as an essential commodity, the requisite varies from user to user. The library professionals are dealing with intangible items which are again perishable in nature. Here the argument raises whether to stratify them into services, goods or both? But as a matter of fact, still there is huge necessity of product promotion in the current academic scenario. The following few points advocates in favour of the concept of marketing of library products:

1. The technological revolution has made every academic member a computer literate. With or without formal education and training, even an undergraduate has become computer savvy and having a Smartphone/laptop/desktop these days. The only undertaking of the library professional is to make a way between the library resources and the gadgets and marketing and promotion would assist in communicating.
2. The rapid and explosive growth of digital materials has created mayhem in the academic spectrum. Especially in the higher education

level, proper guidance on and beyond courses of studies can only be provided by the trained professionals of the academic library. At least these efforts would help the patrons identify and use of authenticated sources of information.

3. The induction of marketing services for the library resources would make the system user-centric and not organisation-centric.
4. The motivation of the participating library professionals would be an added advantage and there would be a challenging environment for them to work with. Due course, the interpersonal skills, such as presentability, communication (both written & verbal), leadership and teamwork will be enhanced.
5. The library budget is an imperative matter to converse for the authorities when the overall planning is concerned. With increase in the usability and thus productivity of the library services, the financial allocations towards library resources get a hike.
6. During the process of assessment and accreditation, councils like NAAC, AICTE, AIU are providing special emphasis on the central institutional library these days. Better the ambience and services of the library, more the reputation of the parent organisation. This could be a motivating factor for the library as well as the parent organisation to invest time, money and energy in developing the library status.

Besides all these above-mentioned points which support the concept of marketing in LIS prospect, ethics of professionalism has to be an established matter of deliberation. Being information providers, it becomes the responsibility of the library

professional to look out for means for optimisation of services and product usage. Disagreement would be obvious as these are ethical considerations and cannot be forcefully inducted. Here the notion of liaison/embedded /subject librarian comes into action. As these services are based on self-motivation and involve initiatives and higher level of enthusiasm, the brand promotion of the resources and services could be best handled by them.

5. Possibilities and Challenges

Whilst accounting on challenges and possibilities of marketing through liaison programmes or embedded librarianship, the emphases would be on the contemporary prominence and futuristic opportunities those can be availed to the utmost. The prime motto of the very concept of liaisons is to justify the role of a librarian as a core academic team member. Competency and creativity have always been questioned when teaching and research are concerned. But by taking some initiatives and developing technological requisites, the librarians can also contribute substantially to the academy. In the following segment, some of the possible measures are discussed stepwise, which can be taken to promote library resources among the users.

5.1 User Study

Before proceeding towards the product promotion or undertake any such assignment, an investigation on the library users has to be done so as to understand the user need and their information-seeking behaviour.

5.2 Strategy Formulation

This is the task of the higher authorities placed in the library committee to formulate strategies that would be implemented during the various promotional events in the near future.

5.3 Team Selection

A competent and dependable team of qualified library professionals has to be formed who can run the activity smoothly as well as be able to counter unexpected situations that might arise during the event.

5.4 Allocation of Liaisons

This would be an important decision to make while selecting the suitable liaison (subject librarians) for the précised piece of work. Here the academic background of a professional can be taken into account and disciplines (science & technology, social sciences, humanities etc.) can be distributed accordingly.

5.5 Training

Before proceeding further to initiate the assignments, a training programme or refresher course for the professionals would be really beneficial.

5.6 User Stratification

The types of users needed to be segregated when information-seeking behaviour is concerned. Consumer groups formed according to course level or designation will help in targeting similar mass at single point.

5.7 Information Literacy Programmes

After making different user groups, such information literacy programmes can be arranged for them in different time slots. Through attaining information literacy, the users would not only be benefited while choosing resources rather they will start availing the accessible library services according to their need and utmost satisfaction.

5.8 Workshops/Seminars

Workshops and seminars are the best ways to market the existing library service and products. These

resourceful gatherings attract outside patrons as well as encourage the library team to showcase their respective expertise on a single platform.

5.9 Product Exhibitions

Among extended versions of library services, exhibitions on regular intervals draw attentions of the clientele base. Through these kinds of initiatives, the library collection moves out of the physical spaces and reaches to the seeking individual.

5.10 Instant Notification

Social media tools are really helpful when instant communication is sought. It becomes the responsibility of the subject librarian to use

technological advances to notify the concerned user about the new arrivals, latest trends, updates and news feeds about the respective disciplines.

5.11 Feedback Collection

The user perspective is of highest significance when product promotion and marketing is concerned. Without the consent and interest of the consumer, no product can be forced onto them. We are taking about understandable and transparent practice of marketing here. Thus feedback collection from the targeted user would be very contributing to formulating further strategies.

A schematic representation of the above-mentioned points is provided beneath.

6. The Strategic Cycle of Library Resource Marketing

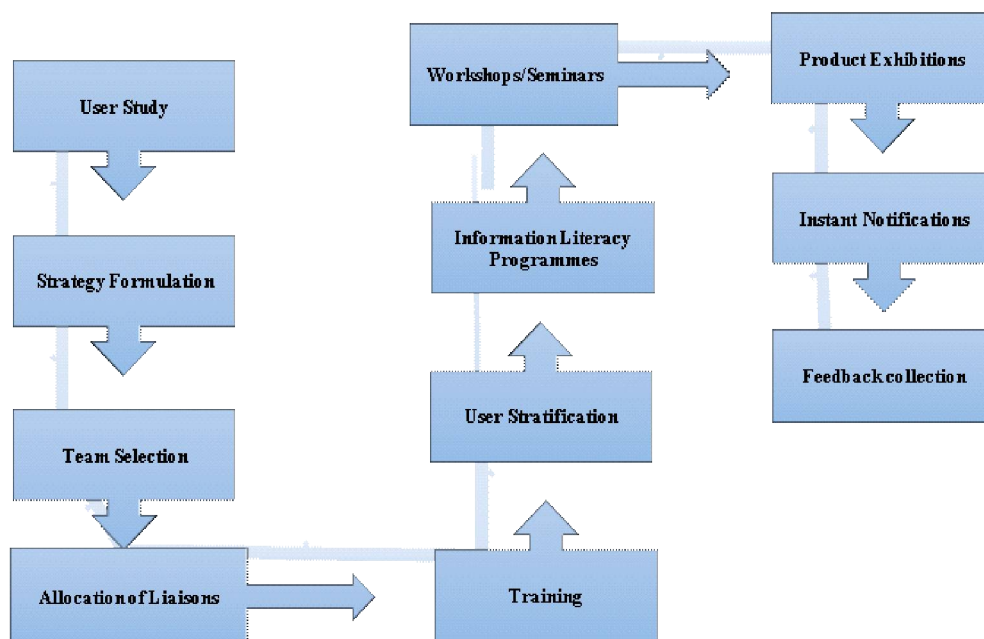


Figure: 1

Although there are numerous possibilities and scope for developing promotional activities in academic libraries, some practical challenges do exist as well. In the Indian context especially, the financial constraint is a major issue. A limited budgetary allocation towards academic libraries is a common barrier for practising marketing approaches. Again, the time management among the library staff could be challenging as these are extended versions of service deliverance. Already, processes like automation and digitisation are ongoing in most organisations besides regular housekeeping operations. The library staffs need to be engaged in training and induction procedures for organising promotional events which might obstruct the library working hours. Eventually, lack of interest, initiatives and motivation dwell in as the crucial hindrance for preparation of such extensive activities.

7. Conclusions

It is high time to break the stereotype of libraries as a physical space having a responsive disposition. With advancement in the information and communication technology, the role of a librarian has rather transformed as a proactive academic member of the institution. There are plenty of academic libraries in India contemporarily which have set instances by accommodating product promotion and marketing. However, that would be another area for further research. Presuming the success of advertising library products and services, induction of such tactics are advocated through the present study. It would be truly advantageous for the information triangle, consisting, the library and it's the brand image, the professionals and their comprehensive growth and most importantly, the

knowledge consumers and their quest for righteous piece of information.

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About Authors

Ms. Bharati Pati, Guest Faculty, Department of Lib & Inf. Sc, G.M. University, Sambalpur, Odisha
Email:pati.bharatilis@gmail.com

Ms. Sabitri Majhi, Asst. Professor, Department of Lib & Inf. Sc, Sambalpur University, Sambalpur, Odisha
Email:sabitriindia@gmail.com

