

Marketing of Library Resources & Services: A Case Study of Central Library, Sikkim University

Sarbada Pradhan and Avijit Rai

The promotion of usage of resources or marketing of available information products and services are the main concern of every library. There is no dearth of information available, but usage is still below the expected mark despite the facilities being offered by the libraries through the application of technology. This is a case study of the Central Library of Sikkim University discussing various initiatives to unite users and their resources using traditional or modern tools of marketing its resources and services to its clientele and outside users.

Introduction

Universities invest a huge amount of money in the procurement of resources in print and electronic formats. Whatever the quantum and strength of the collection of the resources be, the investment cannot be justified until and unless it reaches the end users. Libraries not only have a role in procurement and hosting the resources but can play a pivotal role in the dissemination through a proper strategy of marketing its resources & services.

As in earlier times, libraries are not only dependent upon the traditional tools and methods for the promotion of the services. Revolution and advancement of technology, especially of the internet has aided in the marketing of the resources by the libraries hence putting forth challenges in implementing the right technological tools and techniques in the best possible way.

Marketing not only includes the promotion of the resources and services but also includes the study of the user's needs, matchmaking needs with the resources, and methods to deliver the same.

2. Literature Review

Ever since the existence of the academic library, the marketing of its resources and services has always been one of the pivotal means of reaching its patrons to fulfill and justify the very objective of the library, i.e. "right book/document/information/data to the right user at the right time". The literature review is based on the related articles available online on the topic under study. The sources for the reviewed articles are Emerald Insight, Research Gate, JSTOR, and other open-access journals.

Srinath (1992) suggested that "the marketing of information can be introduced in university libraries, and provides an overview of the planning process necessary to implement the marketing strategy successfully. He avers that the concept of marketing information can be successfully adopted in libraries if it is considered as a process of satisfying the users' requirements profitably (Srinath, 1992). A literature survey had been

conducted on marketing of library and information services from 1980 to 2008. A total number of 125 articles were identified and studied from 38 journals. In all, 137 individual authors had contributed papers on various facets of marketing such as marketing concept, market analysis, customer satisfaction and behavior, the marketing mix, service quality, technology-supported marketing, marketing in different types of libraries, marketing education for librarians, analysis of literature, etc. More than one-fourth of the papers were published only on the conceptual framework of LIS marketing. The analysis indicated two trends: (i) libraries are facing serious competition from commercial information services providers which essentially use the resources available from libraries and analyse and repackage the same for customised use by the clients and (ii) online resources are emerging in a big way that will question the role and form of libraries in future (Gupta, 2009).

The dynamic needs of the users have a direct impact on the roles and responsibilities of library and information science professionals. They always have to adapt in the information society and adopt the various marketing strategies brought by the ICT at their exposure to serve their clientele in the best possible ways. The librarians can apply marketing concepts like marketing mix in libraries and information centers as indicated at the identified five stages: “determination of purpose and resources or product of library; identification of competitors; identification of users; establishment of a marketing strategy for the library and use of the marketing mix method” (Islam and Islam, 2009; Ojiambo, 1994). Using simple marketing approaches: place and promotion resulted in increased circulation (Jones et al., 2011). “Surveys, pencils, screensavers, signage, college newspaper columns, and e-mail” were described as effective marketing approaches (Verostek, 2005). The study was conducted to investigate marketing techniques for promoting library services and resources in Mustapha Abba Library. The results revealed that the most rated need for marketing library services is to achieve the objectives of the library to identify the information needs of users. Some of the library services which are available and marketed are Reference services, Indexing and Abstracting services, and provision of Internet access, whereas resources such as Books, Journals and Newspapers are all provided. The most widely used technique is electronic access to information, followed by exhibitions and displays of newly arrived materials (Joshua and Daksiri, 2020).

3. Emergence of ICT and Impact on Libraries

With the advent of technology, both the functioning and delivery of the services of libraries have changed drastically. The resources have not only increased in volume but also in different formats, unlike the traditional print formats the task of bringing the virtual resources to the notice of the users is difficult. The problem created by technology is tackled by the use of technology only, as ICT provides many platforms for the promotion of resources.

The library being a social institution, has to shape, reshape, mold, and demold itself to meet society’s dynamic information needs. The library has to be the first preference of its users to visit, whether physically or virtually. Like the saying ‘today’s newspaper is tomorrow’s wastepaper’ information is also short-lived, it

becomes obsolete very quickly. With the advancement in ICT tools and techniques, by implementing the right ICT tools, many academic libraries in the world have automated the library's housekeeping operations like acquisition, cataloging, circulation, and serial control to provide better services to their user community.

Web 2.0 has revolutionized the concept of web technology giving birth to the most dynamic virtual social space, where people can create their content and interact with each other through social media platforms. Facebook, Blogs, Folksonomies, Youtube, Flickr are some of the examples of Web 2.0. Libraries are working beyond the walls and sites by promoting the library's resources and services through different modes and media, improving the usage and adding value to the research output of the parent Institution/Organization.

4. Sikkim University Central Library

Sikkim University does not have its own campus, it is functioning by renting multiple buildings across the Gangtok area. Central Library building is located at 6th Mile, Samdur, covering a floor area of about 1000 sq. ft. it occupies more than 9000 sq ft. accommodating about 70000 books.

The mandate to strengthen the collection and improve the services has been one of the important agendas of the university library since its inception. Despite being only about 14 years young, housed in a rented building, and functioning with minimum staff strength of 15 persons, Teesta-Indus Central Library can be compared to any other old university library of the country so far as modernization and infrastructure facilities are concerned. The concept of modern library implies the sustenance and adaptation in the dynamic technological environment and adoption of new technologies to multiply and simplify the services to the utmost satisfaction of the users which the library has successfully achieved with the vision; mission and motto as: "To act as a resource hub which facilitates in achieving the intellectual, Academic and Cultural goal of the people at the Sikkim University". "To provide quality resources and services which facilitate lifelong learning". Collect, Connect and Communicate (<https://library.cus.ac.in>).

5. Why Marketing?

Marketing acts as a bridge between the resources and potential users and also makes them aware of the resources & services matching their requirements, which in return will increase the usability as well as the value of the library and the organization. In the case of academic libraries, the user community is diverse with diverse needs. Further, dependence on the readily available resources on the internet has put the role of libraries in the backseat. To show the prominence of the library over search engines, an aggressive marketing strategy is required using all the tools and technologies available.

Post COVID-19 pandemic, many studies have highlighted the increased use of electronic resources and organizations are also giving more emphasis to the procurement of the same. The concept of invisible libraries has been already propounded and adopted in Western countries. In the Indian library scenario also hybrid resources are emphasized, user community and stakeholders are gradually accepting the electronic resources. In this situation, the libraries are responsible for making aware the user community about the

non-traditional resources and their advantages in terms of delivery and use. Marketing and promoting libraries' resources and services act as catalysts in accelerating the use of resources thus fulfilling the objective of the library in turn fulfilling the mission of the parent organization.

6. Case Study of Central Library, Sikkim University

Sikkim University is a Central University established by an act of the Parliament of India in 2007 to impart quality higher education. The Central Library of the University is functional since February 2008 and is now one of the State of Art libraries in terms of modernization, infrastructure and facilities. The library has adopted new technologies to multiply and simplify the services to the utmost satisfaction of the users and has also developed some in-house tools and services for marketing of the information resources to outreach its users and stakeholders.

Since its inception the Central Library has deliberated upon the automation of the services and adopted the following innovative methods for management of resources, marketing and delivery:

6.1 OPAC (Online Public Access Catalogue)

The purpose of catalogue is to assist a user in knowing the holdings of the library resources and location of the holdings without visiting the library. Central Library, Sikkim University has developed a very dynamic OPAC service.

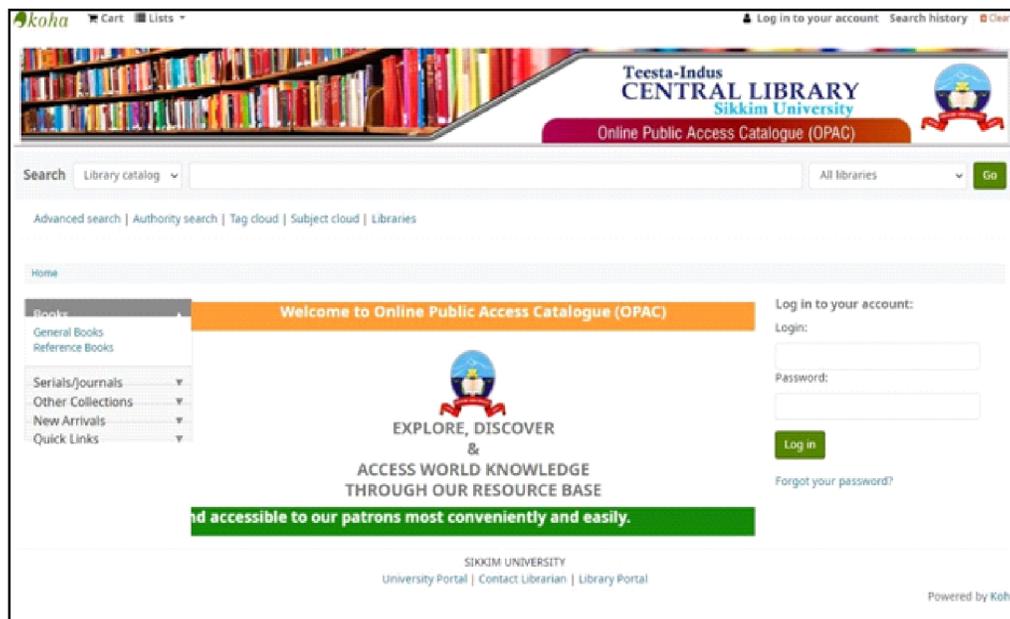


Figure: 1

It provides the following services to the users:

- ❖ Holdings of the library: This shows the total holdings of the library.
- ❖ Discovery platform for the resources (books, journals & eBooks) located in different sub-libraries/ collections.
- ❖ Place Hold facility: A user can hold the checked-out book(s). When the book is checked in, an alert will be sent to the concerned, provided that it should be borrowed within 24 hours.
- ❖ Individual Patron Account: the registered user of the library will be provided with a username and password to log in to an individual account, where a user can change the password; renew books online; tag a book, and even place the requisition for the book with proper justification which library does not hold.

Impact: The OPAC may not serve as the proper marketing platform for resources of the library, however, it promotes them tacitly. Even if the library does not have certain books, the OPAC retrieves the related book(s) which draws the user's attention, borrows it, and even suggests it to others.

6.2 Contents of Books in Library Catalogue

A popular phrase "Don't Judge a Book by its Cover" is practically applicable in the case of library catalogues. The catchy titles of the books are sometimes misleading to the users, keywords are the important indicators to guide the users to know about the subject of a book but it totally depends upon the subject knowledge and expertise of the cataloguer and how s/he interprets the contents of the books.

Impact: This service surely fulfills the notion "right book to the right person" and saves the time of the user. The library has tried a method to give its users an overview of the book without physically flipping the page of the book. The appended contents of the books are displayed in the library catalogue, the users can easily view the contents and assist him/her to assess the relevance of the book.

6.3 Library Website (<https://library.cus.ac.in>)

The central library website was developed with the objective to provide access to the library's resources and services and promote the same. It provides access to OPAC for books, journals, and theses & dissertation links to different e-resources (both subscribed and consortia-based access), digital repository, remote access (IDP), subject & research support services categorized as library services for study; library services for research; and, library services for teaching. It provides a link to the very recently developed interactive assistance platform- Curious: Ask-a-Librarian. The library keeps on updating the content of the website in order to serve the clientele in the best possible ways and to build up strong communication between the library and its users.



Figure : 2

Impact: Library website of Sikkim University acts as the mirror to amplify the library products and services in a much wider and accessible way. This has been an instrumental platform for promoting the library products and transporting online the same to the users since its development.

6.4 Digital Repository

Central Library, Sikkim University has developed in-house digital repository using DSpace software with the objective to archive, promote, and facilitate access to all the publications, current contents of the journals, theses, dissertations and projects of Sikkim University faculty and students.

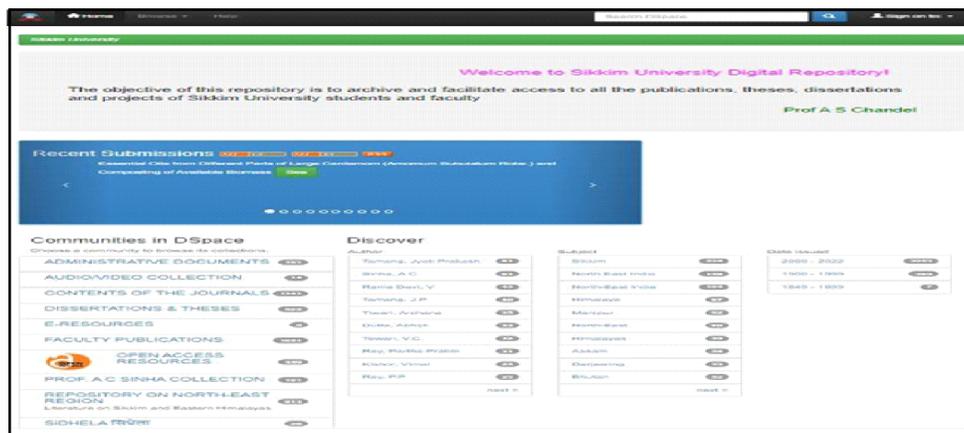


Figure : 3

Impact: The digitisation of Ph.D. & M.phil. theses, faculty publications, current content of journals, university project reports, etc. facilitates visibility, accessibility, usability and productivity of the university students, scholars and teaching & non-teaching faculty members of the university.

6.5 Current Content Services

This is one of the innovative services adopted by the library of Sikkim University. It is a kind of an advanced version of CAS/SDI service for updating the users about the new publications published in the journals subscribed by the library, the service is provided through the Digital Repository created using DSpace software. A separate Community “CONTENTS OF THE JOURNALS’ has been created, under this content of the journals are uploaded once it is received by the library. The main objective of this service is to enable the users to browse the contents of the journals from their workplace and to promote the usability of the subscribed journals.

Impact: This service as a marketing tool helps to retrieve the details of the papers published in the previous issues of the journals which is very useful, especially in the case of print journals, where searching and retrieving the content of the older issues is a tedious task. It also has the advantage of sending an alert notification to the users through email.

6.6 Mobile Applications

The library needs to lead ahead where the user wants to be. In order to connect the library and its resources with users in virtual space, the library has developed a mobile application. This has facilitated reaching out to more users and resulted in better use of the library’s resources.

Impact: Almost every user now possesses a smart phone and has access to the internet. With the use of mobile application, the library has reached out to its users and provides the resources and services anytime, anywhere.

6.7 Social Media

Central Library, Sikkim University has adopted popular social media as a marketing tool, especially through Facebook & Youtube. The resources and activities of the library are marketed on both platforms in the form of posts and videos. Ease of sharing, tagging, and interactive comments, are the features of these social media platforms. The library has been closely monitoring the accounts, evaluating the suggestions given in comments, and trying to incorporate if they benefit the user community of the university as a whole after taking proper approval from the authority.

Impact: This platform has provided an opportunity to both the library and users for inclusive activities. Users highlight the issues and provide suggestions regarding their expectation and needs from the library. The library, in turn, uses the platform to showcase its services and resources.

6.8 Remote Access Services (<http://idp.cus.ac.in>)

Though the remote access services is not a direct tool for marketing purposes, it obviously helps to reach the users and provide the services 24x7 which ultimately results in the better usage of the resources.

The University Library subscribes to electronic resources through e-ShodhSindhu as well as from the other publishers and consortia. The Off-Campus/remote access service is provided to the faculty members, scholars, and students of Sikkim University to access the subscribed scholarly electronic resources from outside the University network. Remote access to the electronic resources is provided through the INFED (INDIAN Access Management FEDeration) platform of INFLIBNET.



Figure : 4

Impact: Due to its geographic location and scattered departments, Central Library has emphasized since its inception to provide access to its resources in remote platform. As a blessing in disguise COVID pandemic has boosted the usability of the remote platform, the increased use is reflected in the usage reports of the resources.

6.9 Orientation and Outreach Programmes

To make the users familiar with the new resources library has an extensive programme for all its clientele under the umbrella of the programme “Lib Connexions”. A series of programmes is conducted throughout the year for marketing of resources, services and user awareness. The programmes cover the interests and the requirements of users as well and organize programmes inviting resource persons and experts from the domain areas. This has been one of the potential platforms where the library is promoting its OPAC, Website, Resources, and other services. The feedback of users also sought to identify the strong and weak areas of the library and to work further towards progress.

From this academic calendar, the library has introduced individualised orientation programme for research scholars and faculty of the university under the name “Library in the Classroom”.

Impact: The outreach programmes has helped the library to physically connect with its users and make them aware about its resources, services and ways to access. It has also served the purpose to interact & understand the expectations of the users and to get feedback of the services provided.

6.10 Posters and Signages

To give a precise indication of the resources and ease to locate them, informative and simple posters, and signage are a must in the libraries. The latter is mostly for the guidance of the users for location but posters can be extensively used for the marketing of the resources as well. It is quite evident that humans are more attracted to images and other presentable formats rather than plain texts and charts.

Central Library, Sikkim University has implemented a user-friendly signage system in the entire 3 storied building for the easy guidance of the users. Signages for Main Classes of the classification system (DDC) are displayed in each floor along with the shelf guides indicating the major collections. The signage services not only help in the display of the resources but also save the time of the readers/users thus fulfilling the fourth law of Library Science.

Posters for the electronic resources, Online Public Access Catalogue (OPAC), and Services Offered by the library are displayed at the convenient areas of the library.



Figure : 5

Impact: The posters and signages have helped the users to know about the services provided by the library, guides to access the resources and also help them to locate the resources easily.

6.11 Digital Signages

Digital Displays or Digital Signage System is the electronic version of the signage system. The main advantage of digital signage is its dynamic nature, the contents can be updated and fed at regular intervals. In the Central Library, Sikkim University a large digital display unit is placed in the main browsing area straight to the entrance gate so that it is visible to the users once entering the library.

Impact: The digital signage system practically helps to draw the attention of the users and in promotion of the resources. The contents include the details of the resources, new services, trial access, upcoming programmes, new arrivals, and the notification circulated by the University and the library. The contents are frequently updated and displayed in an attractive manner.

6.12 Faculty/University Publications

To promote the publication trends of the University, the library has adopted a marketing and promotion strategy in both physical and digital forms. A dedicated shelf is designated in the browsing section of the library which showcases the books published with an affiliation of the Sikkim University. Similarly in the library portal, the works published by the faculty members of the University are displayed.

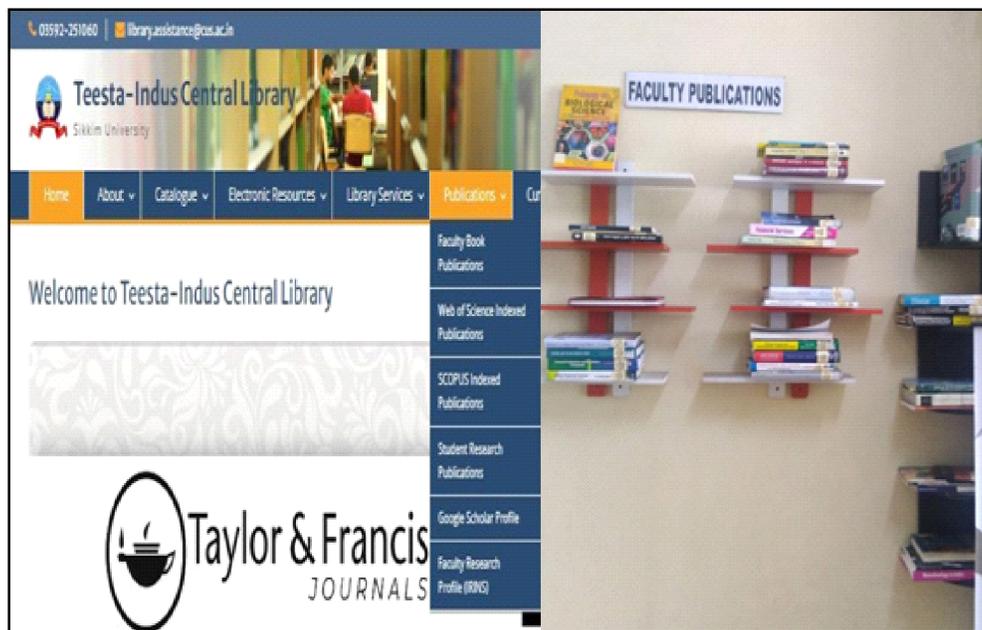


Figure : 6

Impact: It has been noticed that the faculty members are encouraged by this promotional activity. Now the faculty members have started to provide the details of their publication well in advance to display it in digital/physical format. Even the departments have approached the library and started to host their research journals through the library platform.

6.13 Ask-a-Librarian Service (<http://opac.cus.ac.in/curious>): In order to connect and fulfill the needs of the users, Central Library, Sikkim University has created tailor-made platform “Curious” listing all the possible queries and support services in a systematic manner. It is a dedicated e-ticket support service that enables responsible ways to provide solutions and answers of the queries of the library users in a timely manner.

A new user who is not acquainted with the services provided by the library is guided here with the steps to explore the resources.



Figure: 6

Impact: This platform has enabled users to connect with the library regarding their requirements, clarification of doubts related to library resources and services.

Being an e-ticketing platform, users can track the status of their queries.

6.14 Newsletters and Email Groups

Every possible means has to be explored and exploited to reach the users. Central Library, Sikkim University has been promoting its resources through the University newsletter “SU Chronicle” which is a monthly publication.

Resources and services provided by the library are highlighted in the designated column “Library Corner” of the newsletter allotted to the library.



Figure :7

Not only the internally circulated newsletter and brochures, but every programme organized by the library is covered by the Office of the Public Relations Officer of the University and published in the daily newspapers.

Email groups of Students, Scholars and Faculty members come handy in circulation of the news and programs targeted for a special group of users. Library has created different groups for different categories of students for the same, “core communication module” in the SAMARTH platform is also in the process of implementation.

Impact: The main use of newsletter is to bring the activities of the library to the users. The mail groups are serving as first line of communication of the library with the users to inform the users about the services, resources and programmes of the library.

7. Conclusion

The foundation for collection development in the university library system is the recommendation received from different departments and the library has a key role to play in building the communication between the collection and the users. However, the role of libraries is challenged by the internet and also the changing information-seeking habits of the user community. There is no exception for the Central Library, Sikkim University. Since its inception, it has accepted the challenges and has adopted various tools and technologies for the marketing of resources and services to serve its clientele despite many constraints.

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About Authors

Dr. Sarbada Pradhan

Assistant Librarian

Sikkim University

Email: spradhan01@cus.ac.in

Shri Avijit Rai

Assistant Librarian

Sikkim University

Email: arai@cus.ac.in