

MARKETING OF INFORMATION SERVICES AND PRODUCTS: A CASE STUDY OF MAHATMA GANDHI UNIVERSITY CENTRAL LIBRARY, KERALA, INDIA

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Abstract

Marketing and promotion are necessary for creating awareness of library and information products and services. This study primarily discusses the central library of Mahatma Gandhi University in regard to the significance of marketing and promotion in academic libraries. The study's objectives are to list the current information resources, services provided by central library and promotion strategies that the library has developed for its resources.

Keywords: Marketing, Promotion, University libraries, Information products, Information services.

INTRODUCTION

The primary goal of a library is to acquire data, process it, and make it available to its target users. However, Kaur and Rani (2007) reported that "library resources are very expensive, but often remain underutilized resulting in wastage of money, time, energy, and space." They further say that "university libraries invest a huge amount of money on collection development, processing, and storage of information resources and to ensure maximum utilization of these resources". In order to encourage the usage of their services, librarians must publicise their client base. Marketing, according to Kotler (1984), is the "process of planning and executing the conception, pricing, promotion, and distribution of goods, services, and ideas to create an exchange with target groups that satisfy the customer and organizational objectives."

Libraries indeed, face necessity to market their resources. Besides, librarians should be aware of marketing their resources. Mahatma Gandhi University Central library is much interested in

user satisfaction with the resources provided by library. Marketing is essential for educating customers about services and goods the library offers. Users may easily identify and access the information they need through marketing which results in user satisfaction.

A Sophisticated System, The Mahatma Gandhi University Central Library Includes the Following:

Central Library

30 department /school libraries within the campus

4 study centres situated on different campuses

The library was established in 1989. It is situated on the main campus of Mahatma Gandhi University, Kerala, India. The MGU Central Library building on the main campus consists of a two-storied building with approximately 20,000 Sq.ft. The central library is organized into eight sections for functional ease. The sections are the following: Acquisition , Technical , Maintenance and Reference, Circulation, Periodical ,

Documentation, Union catalogue, Digital library, and ICT lab.

The Central Library collection includes 62,053 books, 7,338 e-books, 2,408 theses, 392 CDs/DVDs and 7,500 bound volumes of journals, 15,000+ E- Journals under E-Shodh Sindhu. In addition, the library has subscriptions to 320 journal archives, 15 online databases, and 350 current Indian and foreign journals. Over 21,227 people have registered to utilise library. They can be split into four groups: persons, which includes university employees such as professors, students, and non-teaching staff; professors, students, and post-graduate students of linked colleges; accredited journalists as special members; and graduates (for public). The library has thirty-five (35) professional staff and four (4) junior staff (comprising clerical and administrative).

STATEMENT OF THE PROBLEM

Number of studies has found that the majority of academic libraries fail to effectively advertise their information services and products. Carrington (2005) observed that one of the problems or deficiencies faced by the library is the improper dissemination of library services to the target audience and that is one of the reasons for the low usage of library materials and facilities. Due to these factors, it has been seen that Mahatma Gandhi University Central Library has recently seen a significant increase in both its services and user base. To achieve this rapid growth, the library has created a number of marketing methods.

RESEARCH QUESTIONS

Which informational resources and services do the Mahatma Gandhi University Central Library offer?

What promotional techniques has Central Library created?

METHODOLOGY

Present study envisages the following methodologies for collecting data such as literature search, personal interview with the

authorized persons in the concerned sections of the central library, and examination of the library records.

SIGNIFICANCE OF THE RESEARCH

There are no other studies of this kind being carried out, according to the literature. Therefore, this study serves as a foundation for additional investigation in the same topic. The Study's findings add to our understanding of how to advertise library resources. As a result, the study offers an in-depth overview of development of marketing techniques of Mahatma Gandhi University Central Library in Kerala, India as well as its existing environment.

Library and Information Services in Mahatma Gandhi University Central Library

University libraries are designed to offer information resources and services in support of institution's goals. Siti Juryiah, M (2019) stated that "information services encompass services through which librarians directly supply users with information but also interfaces created by librarians through whom users could independently find needed information". Katz (1999) defined library services as "help or assistance given to users in their quest for information resources". The central library is divided into several sections for functional convenience. Some of these areas that are directly involved in advertising library products and services are circulation section, reference section, and documentation section.

CIRCULATION SECTION

One of the most important spaces in the main library to enhancing the library's reputation. Four divisions of this section at the library's entrance are the Property counter, Reception cum Circulation Counter, Membership desk, and Security desk. The following are the division's services and functions:-

- * Enrolment of members
- * Issue and return of books
- * Collection of overdue charges
- * Reservation of books

- *□ Issue of clearance certificate
- *□ Sending reminders to borrowers
- *□ Answering front office queries

Maintenance and Reference Section

The library's main portion is located here. Its job is to maintain and exhibit stacked books that are loaned out and used for reference. The library offers a strong reference section including dictionaries, encyclopaedias, yearbooks, almanacs, atlases, gazetteers, biographies, and other volumes with local, national, and international coverage. The following are the services and functions of this section: -

- *□ Long and short-range reference service
- *□ Referral service
- *□ Display of books
- *□ Issue and return of books
- *□ Maintenance of Theses collection
- *□ Providing facilities to Research Scholars

Documentation Section

This area offers computer-based library services. The various areas of the library are all connected by LAN. The users have access to the already-created database through Online Public Access Catalogue (OPAC). Reprographic services, Internet services, CD-ROM search etc. are just a few of the services provided by this section.

Acquisition Section

The key responsibilities performed with this section are book selection, ordering, and acquisition. This section receives book suggestions from departments and schools. In this area, all received books are physically processed and added to the collection.

Technical Section

Books and bound volumes of journals that are added to library are classified, catalogued, and given additional technical treatment in this department. This section also produces monthly

New Additions List and circulars. Other functions include preparation of library catalogue in KOHA software, maintenance of card catalogue, and shelf list.

Union Catalogue Section

The Union catalogue section coordinates the cataloguing activities of the central library and libraries of schools/departments, pools the metadata and prepares the union catalogue of holdings of the university. It also supervises the works related to the digitization of Ph.D. theses and maintenance of OPAC on the website of the library.

Periodical Section

In this section, newspapers, popular magazines, and international and Indian publications are ordered, purchased, and displayed. Other responsibilities include maintaining bound volumes of newspapers, science periodicals, social science periodicals, and official publications, in addition to binding books and periodicals.

Types Of Resources In Central Library

Mahatma Gandhi University Central Library offers following resources:

(a) Print Resources: This category comprises books, journals, newspapers, magazines, theses, and bound journals.

(b) Electronic - Resources: Also referred to as non-print resources. These are digital versions of the content that can only viewable through ICT (Information and Communication Technology).

(c) Reference Materials: Library offers a strong reference section that includes encyclopaedias, dictionaries, yearbooks, almanacs, atlases, gazetteers, biographies, and other reference materials with both national and worldwide scope.

LITERATURE REVIEW

Marketing of information services has been the subject of much global research. The way that

librarians market their products and services has changed.

LIBRARY SERVICE MARKETING

By creating and providing the right products and services, marketing seeks to understand the clientele, as well as to identify, satisfy, and cater to its requirements and demands. According to Madhusudhan, M (2008) information marketing by university libraries is essential“ to promote the use of information systems in library services; to balance shrinking funds; save libraries from devaluation; to save libraries from declining reader-support and to uphold the dictum that information is power”.

Marketing includes not only creating and advertising new services and products for libraries but also educating users regarding existing systems. Therefore, librarians must market their services and this will lead to the growth and development of library and achieve maximum utilization of library resources. There are seven principles of marketing. These principles are Product, Price, Place, Promotion, Participants, Physical evidence, and Process. These principles are also applicable to library services.

Marketing Strategies Developed by Mahatma Gandhi University Central Library

There are various methods that can be considered to develop a strategy for each and every product offered by library. Some of the methods undertaken by the Mahatma Gandhi University Central library are as follows.-

Development of Products

Physical information distribution

Product and service promotion

Price

Development of Products

Anything that may be sold to a market to fulfil a need or desire qualifies as a product. Library’s offerings include a wide range of books, services, and programmes. A library provides products that are both tangible (e.g.

books) and intangible (e.g. personal assistance). An information product is a product developed by information centers for its clients. Seetharama (1998) considered that, “without products no organization has reason to exist, there is no task to perform”. The product is therefore the most key component in marketing. Mahatma Gandhi University library is prepared to create new items to satisfy client demand. They are listed below:

OPAC (Online Public Access Catalogue): Through library’s website, mgucat.mgu.ac.in, users can search library catalogue, union catalogue of the holdings of central library, and all of University’s Schools/Departments.

Online Information Services: Library is an entirely automated system that uses KOHA as its internal administration system. Through library’s website, mgu.ernet.in, users can search catalogue and union catalogue of all the University’s Schools and Departments collections. Library offers users access to full text of more than 14,500 electronic publications and numerous online databases through the UGC INFONET initiative.

Databases and E-Journals Providing Searchable Full-Text: Library provides access to full text of thousands of e-journals consortiums, provides access to full text of 14,500 + electronic journals, remote access to E-resources, and various online databases. Presently library is having 50 information access terminals for teachers and students to access e-journals and digital libraries. Library has a digital library and ICT Lab with 20 terminals which are exclusively used for user orientation programs, training programs, and providing access to online theses library and UGC INFONET resources

Delnet Services: Library is a member of the Developing Libraries Network (DELNET). DELNET offers access to web-based databases. Using inter library loan (ILL) system, library makes ILL requests from a union catalogue of books (more than 1 million items), journals, databases, and the database of theses and dissertations.

Accessing Sci-Finder: The largest repository of scientific knowledge on the planet, Sci Finder Scholar, is available at Central Library. One of the 20 universities in India, Mahatma Gandhi University Library was the first in Kerala to receive access to Sci-Finder Scholar from NFLIBNET. It has multiple mechanisms for information retrieval as well as for thousands of applications for knowledge processing.

Mahatma Gandhi University Online Theses Digital Library: University Online Theses Digital Library website <http://www.mgutheses.org> which provides Open Access to doctoral dissertations accepted by MG University. To make outputs of doctoral research at university transparent to academics around the world, it became the first Indian university to adopt open access.

Library Website: Library provides web-based services through its website mgu.ernet.in and mgu.theses.org. Access to all the 4,500 research journals from UGC consortia, and various open access journals and digital libraries are provided through the website with access through an alphabetical list of journals, subject-wise list of journals, publisher-wise list of journals, etc. The Open Access Digital Library Ph.D. Theses, even though form a separate site and archives also linked through the library website.

Grammarly Software Service: Central Library now offers Grammarly software service. Grammarly service is available to MGUL members. It is a cross-platform cloud-based writing assistance that checks for punctuation, grammar, and spelling mistakes. Users can also alter their language's style, tone, and context according to their interests.

Physical Information Distribution

Library maintains connections with universities all over India through its Inter Library Loan(ILL) service through DELNET to fill gaps in its collection. Library distributes New Addition List with the title " Latest Addition to Mahatma Gandhi University Library " which provides information on books added to library every month. A new addition list with a cover of selected books and abstracts is prepared and

circulated to different departments a fortnightly. The library displays new books/journals for fifteen days before they are circulated. The books acquired by the library are distributed after the processing through individual loans for home use. A reading room facility for 100 students at a time is provided for textbook reading with the reserved text book collection. Nearly 50 users at a time can use reference collection in the reference section and periodical collection in the periodical section.

Product and Service Promotion

There are four categories of library patrons: Individuals including teachers, students, research scholars, non-teaching staff of university; teachers, research scholars, and post-graduate students of affiliated colleges; accredited journalists as special members; and graduate members (for public). Each segment has its own needs. Promotion plans used by Mahatma Gandhi University Library are listed below.

Publicity

Through a variety of promotional techniques, library's goods and services are highly publicized. Library conducts extension activities for the publicity of library products and services. Exhibitions/Demonstrations etc. are conducted on various occasions for teachers and students as well as school students and public. Periodically specialized orientation lectures are provided on specialized resources as well as for need-based groups. Various teaching programs related to the use of Sci-Finder Scholar, J-Gate Resources, Digital libraries, etc. are conducted regularly at the library. An exhibition of books by and on Mahatma Gandhi as well as digital Archives of his books, audio files of his selected talks, video clippings, film archives, photographs, and manuscripts set in a retrievable system is organized on October 3 in connection with Gandhi Jayanthi Day every year. Exhibitions are also organized in connection with special days like environment day, Library week, etc. as well as during the seminars and conferences

on different subjects organized at the University.

Public Relations

Through a variety of advertising techniques, the library's goods and services receive extensive publicity. Information about library events and projects, including specific initiatives like workshops, seminars, and refresher courses, is communicated via library websites, social media, local newspapers, and magazines. Library has designed a wonderful library brochure and regularly updates it.

Price

Price is important in marketing. Kotler (1983) describes "Four 'Ps' of marketing: Product, Place, Pricing, and Promotion". The "Four Ps" lays the foundation for the modern marketing theory (Jose and Bhat, 2007). Mahatma Gandhi University Library charges yearly library membership fee of Rs.200/- from students, Rs.500/- from teachers, and Rs.1250/- from graduate members. If book is held after the designated time of loan (15 days), a late fee of Rs. 1 per day per volume will be levied. Services like photocopying, printing, material borrowed on interlibrary loan, document delivery services, etc. are charged.

CONCLUSION

Every year, university libraries invest a significant amount of money into increasing their collections and offering services. However, if they are not properly targeted to satisfy user's informational requirements, they are worthless. A marketing strategy can be used to maximize use of services. University libraries can be helped with process of designing, developing, and providing appropriate services and products with the use of a strategic marketing approach. Librarians play a vital role in effectively promoting services and resources. This study revealed that librarians at Mahatma Gandhi University Central Library promoted services and resources through connecting users online and through social media, as well as through displays, exhibitions, and other means.

RECOMMENDATION

The following recommendation was made to enhance quality of marketing in libraries. Libraries should formulate a marketing plan. Librarians must ensure that they are well informed about marketing. They should put more effort to market their services and products.

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