

An investigation into promotional methods of public library services and resources: Users' perspective

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The effect of library promotional methods on clients' use of library services and resources using a checklist and a questionnaire is studied. The target population was the clients of Central Library of Astan Quds Razavi, one of the greatest ancient public libraries in Iran and the Islamic world. It was found that the methods of traditional advertising and electronic direct marketing have a greater effect on using library services.

Keywords: Marketing; Promotion; Public library; Central Library of Astan Quds Razavi; Iran

Introduction

Libraries have been facing important challenges such as declining budgets, impacts of information technologies and the changing information environment. To overcome these challenges, libraries need to consider marketing as an important management tool¹, as marketing is regarded as crucial for improving the recognition and the reputation of libraries². Kotler³ defines marketing "as social and managerial process by which individuals and groups obtain what they need and want through creating, offering and exchanging product of value and others".

Marketing in service organizations includes seven concepts, such as product, place, promotion, price, process, persons, and physical evidence⁴. In this paper we look at promotion, one of the marketing concepts.

The application of promotional methods in libraries includes:

- Increasing the library credit⁵⁻⁶;
- Increasing the exposure of library to the present competitive environment¹;
- Increasing the use of library resources/facilities⁵⁻⁷;

- Training the users;
- Changing the users' expectations⁵;
- Raising the users' awareness of the available services;
- Promoting the users' positive perception of libraries⁶.

According to Rowley⁸, promotion consists of five aspects of public relations, personal selling, advertising, sales promotion, and direct marketing. Ilea⁹ defines public relations as the creation, maintenance, and continuity of mutual understanding between the organization and clients. Further, the author believes that the philosophy of public relations is to have peoples' consent, while the purpose of public relations is to create, maintain, and develop mutual understanding. As a communication bridge between organizations and clients, public relations direct public thoughts through providing mutual relation between people and media. Public relations also familiarize managers with the viewpoints, desires, requirements, and the priorities of their addressees by benefiting from research findings and social studies in which case they can contribute to the

organization's decision and policy making¹⁰. Of the promotional methods in the field of public relations, we can mention the followings:

- Preparing and installing the introductory signs of library services in the library entry¹¹;
- Preparing news reports, video, radio, and TV program on different types of services, resources, and activities of the library¹²;
- Presenting library festival news and events in the library website;
- Preparing and releasing library newsletters⁹.

Another dimension of promotion is personal selling. Personal selling is defined as introducing goods and services verbally with which the presence of one or more possible purchases is possible with the purpose of supplying product and offering services¹³. One of the benefits of this method is the direct feedback and action on the basis of the final market¹⁴.

The advertising dimension is also one of the most important and effective marketing tools which is applied in notifying, informing, convincing, and reminding the clients. It can play an important role in providing the true information about the customers' training and services about the features and qualities of product⁴; it also contributes to the efficacy and effectiveness of the organization activities via making connection with the clients, reforming and modifying clients' thought toward the organization, identifying products to clients, introducing new products, offering information about goods and services, and the features and place of their distribution¹³. Advertising could be done in different ways in a library such as supplying and distributing brochures and guidelines to introduce different services to clients^{11,15-17}, installing signs, banners, and advertising billboards across the city¹⁸, the use of weblog to introduce library and its services, and the use of the library website¹⁹.

Sales promotion includes incentives and short-term motivators to encourage buying and selling products or services. Methods of sales promotion in libraries include the drawing lotteries and granting prizes to individuals, delivering tokens to individuals with discount²⁰, preparing and distributing the advertising items holding emblems, address, contact number, and library website's address such as bag, pen, pencil, notebook, and calendar, and also holding reading contests and competitions¹⁹.

Another dimension of promotion is direct marketing that enables organizations to forward their very private, customized and personal messages to individual customers²¹. Direct marketing also includes using mail, telephone or other non-personal communication devices for connection with customers or receiving certain customers' response⁸. Of direct marketing methods in libraries, we can refer to the following: advertising services via electronic mail to the library members; sending SMS to the library members about library working hours informing about festivals, events, and announcement via cell phone Bluetooth²².

Libraries make use of different methods for promotion of their services and resources. The central library of Astan Quds Razavi located in Mashhad, which is the most important public library of Iran and across the Islamic world, benefits from various methods in advertising and promoting its resources and services. This library with a rich collection of information resources such as printed books, manuscripts, precious books, Braille books, photographic books, copies of lithography, microfilms, CDs, paintings, artworks, handwritten holy Quran, geographic resources (Atlases and maps), theses, photo collections (new and old), new and archived journals on different subjects, different sorts of documents and digital library with rare and precious resources is open to the public every day.

On the basis of the twenty-year vision and its strategic plan, the central library of Astan Quds Razavi attempts to become the richest and the most active library, the museum and also the precious documentary treasure-trove across the region and in the Islamic world. However, the results of Alavifar and Moghadam's research²² shows that the use of book loan services, and study hall of this library was quite optimal. The use of electronic resources, journals and library website was less than optimal. Identifying and applying the most effective promotional methods in this important library has become necessary. The study findings could help the library authorities to further enhance the library usage.

Review of literature

There are numerous studies on library marketing²³⁻²⁷. However, there are not enough studies focusing on the promotion principle of marketing. For example,

through a questionnaire survey, Hood and Henderson²⁸ investigated the branding activity in the UK public library service. They found that better marketing and branding activity would result in attracting current non-users. A study on the academic library websites for a marketing approach, promotional and public relations activities showed that promotional activities of Malaysian academic libraries were adequate²⁹.

Social media have been studied as a library promotion tool. For example, Fasola³⁰ examined librarians' perception and acceptance of the use of Facebook and Twitter in promoting library services in Oyo State, Nigeria. Most libraries had Facebook profiles, while only a few had Twitter accounts. The librarians acknowledged using Facebook and Twitter to promote library services. Further, an online survey by Yi¹ confirmed that library websites and social media were the most effective promotion techniques from the Australian academic librarians' perspectives. Ramos-Eclevia³¹ states that channels of communication between librarians and users must be open and accessible to build relationship marketing. Therefore, she surveyed university librarians' attitudes towards *LibRadio* as a marketing tool. It was found that the library radio show could be an effective communication channel to promote library resources and services, and to break stereotypes about librarians and libraries in the academic community.

Review of literature reveals that although clients and providing services to them is the philosophy of library' existence, no research has been done on the effectiveness of library promotional methods from the library clients' perspective. Hence, this study on promotional methods in an important public library in Iran from the users' perspective has been undertaken.

Objectives of the study

- To determine the effect of promotional methods on clients' use of library services and resources; and
- To identify the efficient promotional methods in terms of clients' use of library services and resources.

Methodology

The target population of this survey was the clients of the central library of Astan Quds Razavi. A sample

of 180 users was selected using Cochran formula for unlimited population. The members were selected by applying random cluster sampling. Different sections of the library where the users receive services (such as the study hall of ladies and gentlemen, youth and teenagers' study room, printed books stacks, researchers' hall, etc.) were regarded as clusters, and the sample participants were selected out of these clusters.

In order to collect the necessary data, the promotion methods used by the library were listed. The methods were categorized into electronic and traditional methods. The first section of the questionnaire was related to the demographic variables of the respondents, including gender, age, and library membership background while the second section was related to the effect of each method on using the library services and resources (37 items). The content validity of the questionnaire was confirmed by management, and library and information science experts. Reliability of the questionnaire was confirmed through Alpha Cronbach (96%) in a pilot study that was an indication of high reliability. One hundred and eighty questionnaires were distributed in person to the library clients and 171 valid questionnaires were collected. Data were analyzed using SPSS.

Results

The age of respondents (75.3%) was less than thirty years old and 57.6% respondents were female. About 63% of the respondents had a bachelor and a master's degree.

With respect to the estimated mean for each method at the research sample level (Table 1), it can be inferred that among traditional promotional methods, "signs, banners or library advertising billboards around the city" have the smallest effect, whereas "responding and guiding the library clients" has the greatest effect on the clients' use of library services. This is in accordance with the findings of Yi¹ where, one-to-one conversation with the librarian was identified as the most effective method for promotion of library services. To generalize the results to the research population, the parametric one sample T test was used (Table 2). From Table 2, it can be concluded that the methods of advertising category in terms of using library services have influenced

Table 1—The effect of traditional methods on library usage

	Sl. no.	Method	Mean	Std. Deviation
Public relations	1	Signs or banners in the library entrance that introduce different library services and resources	3.07	1.29
	2	Getting comments and receiving respondents' suggestions and critiques about library services, staff behaviors and the like	3.04	1.29
	3	Inspecting respondents' complaints in person	3.16	1.40
	4	Responding and guiding the library clients	3.77	1.21
	5	Holding workshop on using library for new members	3.06	1.43
	6	Holding book fairs on different occasions	3.06	1.33
	7	Festivals celebrated in library	2.91	1.30
	8	Releasing library news and information in press and media	3.06	1.32
	9	Publishing reports about activities in library	2.89	1.32
	10	Library billboard	3.11	1.24
Advertising	11	Printed guidelines and brochures for introducing library services and sections	3.27	1.42
	12	Printed guidelines for using library resources	3.48	1.38
	13	Self-learning or instructional brochures	3.44	1.31
	14	Library guide boards in corridors and halls of holy shrine	3.18	1.45
	15	Signs, banners or library advertising billboards around the city	2.73	1.43
	16	One on one introduction of library services by librarians	3.30	1.38
Sales promotion	17	Conducting lottery and rewarding active library members	2.82	1.57
	18	Granting discount coupons for using Astan Quds' museums to library members	3.01	1.55
	19	Preparing and distributing advertising items holding mark, address, contact number and library website address	2.84	1.51
	20	Exposure of new or the most used resources on the vitrine or closet near the entrance door	3.23	1.43
		Total	3.12	0.83

Table 2—Comparison of the effect of traditional methods on library usage with average extent

Category	Mean	Std. Deviation	Mean difference	t	p-value
Public relations	3.11	0.82	0.11	1.81	0.07
Advertising	3.23	0.99	0.23	3.07	0.00*
Sales promotion	2.96	1.29	-0.03	-0.34	0.72
Total	3.12	0.83	0.12	1.90	0.05

Note:*=Significant, degree of freedom=170

more than the average extent. This result is opposed to Yi's research results, as the use of pamphlets, newsletters, and advertisements from the librarian's perspective was not found highly effective in Yi's study.

Further, the methods of public relations and sales promotion categories have influenced clients' use of library services and resources at an average level. These results are to some extent in line with Shapoori's research³². As far as this study is

concerned, there was a significant relation between the number of promotional methods and the amount of using library in Iranian public libraries.

The effect of electronic methods on library usage

Table 3 indicates that among electronic methods, radio and TV channel interviews with the library head and directors have the smallest effect and library website has the greatest effect on the respondents' use of library services. Regarding the young clients of this library which is integrated with technology, this result seems to be logical. This result is also parallel to Yi's findings¹. In Yi's study, the library website was known as the second quite efficient method for

promotion of the library services (after a one-to-one conversation with librarians) from the viewpoint of Australian academic librarians. Further, in a survey conducted by Garoufallou et al.³³, the library website was the second most successful marketing method used in Greek libraries.

From Table 3 it is noted that although the effect of electronic promotional methods on the respondents' use of library services has been generally more than the average extent, one sample T-test was administrated to infer the results better and generalize them to the research population. According to the calculated mean difference and p value (Table 4), it can be inferred that in terms of the clients' use of

Table 3—Effect of electronic methods on library usage

	Sl. no.	Method	Mean	Std. Deviation
Public relations	1	Receiving clients' critics and suggestions through phone, electronic mail, and SMS	3.02	1.39
	2	Preparing news reports or TV/ radio programs about types of library services, resources and activities	2.74	1.37
	3	Radio and TV interviews with library head/directors	2.71	1.32
	4	Holding "ask and answer" sessions of library directors /head with media groups	2.78	1.41
	5	News coverage of library ceremonies and events on the library website	2.94	1.31
	6	Library logo in the library website	2.97	1.42
Direct marketing	7	SMS to members onlibrary working time and other alerts	3.44	1.53
	8	Announcing festivals, fairs etc through SMS to members	3.06	1.54
Advertising	9	Advertising library services through electronic newsletters	2.85	1.37
	10	Electronic bulletin board in the city to introduce library and its services	2.89	1.48
	11	Library website	3.54	1.31
	12	Adding pictures from different sections of the library on the library website	3.10	1.31
	13	Placing guide and instructional files for using different library services on the website	3.36	1.37
	14	Informing new library resources via the library website	3.36	1.30
	15	Library news in the library website	3.28	1.33
	16	Direct link to news, fairs and library new collections in the library website	2.92	1.29
	17	Email link and contact number with library on the library website	2.94	1.39
	Total	3.05	0.94	

Table 4—Comparison of the effect of electronic methods on library usage with average extent

Category	Mean	Std. Deviation	Mean difference	t	df	p-value
Public relations	2.83	1.02	-0.16	-2.08	170	0.03*
Advertising	3.11	1.02	0.11	1.46	170	0.14
Direct marketing	3.25	1.40	0.25	2.34	170	0.02*
Total	3.05	0.94	0.05	0.75	170	0.45

Note:*=Significant, degree of freedom=170

Table 5—Comparison of the effect of electronic and traditional methods on library usage

Variables	Paired differences				
	Mean	Std. deviation	t	df	Sig.
Electronic and traditional methods	0.067	0.557	1.580	170	0.116

library services the methods of direct marketing, public relations, and advertising categories have influenced more than average extent, less than average extent, and average extent throughout the research population, respectively.

The comparison of the effect of traditional and electronic methods on library usage

The results of paired-sample T-test in Table 5 show that there is no significant difference between the effect of electronic and traditional promotional methods on using library services. However, the central library of Astan Quds Razavi uses more traditional promotional methods (67.85) in comparison with the electronic ones (44.18)³⁴; therefore, it can be concluded that the electronic methods in clients' use of library services have been more effective. With respect to the respondents' demographic information, which shows that most of the clients are young, it is expected that the electronic promotional methods have more effect on the clients' use of library services.

Conclusion

This study investigated library clients' views concerning the effect of library promotional methods on using the library services and resources. The findings indicate that "guiding and responding clients" have the greatest effect on the clients' use of library resources and services. As such, we can realize the importance of personal interaction between the librarian and the clients while being familiarized with the services and encouraged to use the services. Therefore, employing numerous librarians with high communication skills would be highly important.

Of the traditional promotional methods, the advertising category methods have also been more effective in persuading clients to use the library services. It may be due to their high quality materials or their large and available number. On the other hand, the client benefitting from these tools achieves the ability to use the resources continuously, independently, and without relying on others. However, the effect of the public relations and sales promotion category (traditional) methods on using library services have not been sufficient; therefore, a major revision is highly recommended in this regard.

Of the electronic promotional methods, "library website" has greatly influenced the clients' use of library services; therefore, further attention needs to be given to the appearance, quality, and richness of the library website and other aspects by website designers and other individuals in charge. Furthermore, the effect of direct marketing (electronic) on the use of library services is at an optimal level. It may be due to the fact that the connection with library clients is done directly and cheaply via this method (i.e. SMS). In this sense, the library should continue to apply these methods. However, the public relations and advertising category (electronic) methods have not had much impact on the clients' use of library services and resources. It may be due to lack of correct application or weak function of the library in using these methods. Thus, a thorough revision of these methods is highly recommended.

Generally speaking, the effect of electronic and traditional promotional methods on using library services and resources has been in an average extent

among which the advertising (traditional) and direct marketing (electronic) categories have had the greatest influence. Moreover, the electronic promotional methods in comparison with the traditional ones have been more effective in terms of the clients' use of library services. In fact, this clarifies the necessity of more attention and more use of the electronic promotional methods regarding young clients' use of the library more than ever. Given the obtained results and the methods suggested in this paper, the library authorities can bring about more use of clients from the wide resources and services of this library through which they can contribute to this library to achieve its goals and also reach out for its actual scientific and academic position.

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