

Marketing Strategies for Reading Promotion Activities in Academic Libraries: A Case Study of the University of Shanghai for Science and Technology

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Abstract: In the contemporary digital age, traditional reading habits have been compromised by digital media, a situation that has forced academic libraries to adopt proactive marketing approaches to promote reading among students and faculty. This article investigates the implementation of marketing strategies in promoting reading activities within academic libraries, taking the University of Shanghai for Science and Technology as a case study. The paper explores various marketing strategies employed by academic libraries, including market segmentation, utilization of new media platforms, and the creation of personalized content for readers. Drawing from an extensive literature review and real-world examples, the study establishes a framework for marketing reading promotion activities tailored to academic libraries. These findings underscore how effective marketing strategies can enhance user participation, expand library influence, and optimize resource utilization.

Keywords: University libraries; Reading promotion; Marketing strategies; Library services; Case study

Online publication: April 25, 2024

1. Introduction

Academic libraries have always provided services to teachers and students in aspects such as information resources and collection management, playing a key role in knowledge inheritance and cultural promotion. However, with the emergence of digital media and high technology, traditional reading scenes have been disrupted, and paper-based reading is gradually evolving towards digital mobile reading. Faced with an array of attention-grabbing methods, it becomes increasingly important to promote library services and resources through marketing. Consequently, more and more academic libraries are actively responding to challenges and proactively engaging in reading promotion activities. For these libraries, reading promotion activities can increase the volume of reading among teachers and students, enhance the utilization rate of library resources, and improve the coverage of cultural dissemination. Therefore, libraries need to adopt effective marketing

strategies to ensure the smooth implementation of reading promotion activities. This study takes the University of Shanghai for Science and Technology as an example to explore the marketing strategies of library reading promotion activities and provide practical suggestions on how to successfully implement reading promotion activities.

2. Literature review

2.1. Reading promotion activities

Reading promotion activities, originating from library “recommended reading” initiatives, align closely with international library practices, encompassing reading events, storytelling sessions, author meet-and-greets, library promotions, and outreach programs. In general, it is one of the library service approaches aimed at special user groups lacking the willingness and ability to read. Presently, in China, research on library reading promotion can be broadly categorized into three main areas.

Some scholars mainly discussed Reading Promotion Models, scholars such as Qin advocated for understanding readers’ reading habits, identifying their reading needs and interests, planning thematic reading promotion activities, collecting reader feedback, and evaluating the effectiveness of activities ^[1]. Sun and Chen attempted to construct a reading promotion service system, focusing on organizational cooperation, activity planning, service branding, and promotion channels ^[2]. Xiao and Zhu analyzed reading promotion activity models from individual and group perspectives, emphasizing online personalized recommendations and offline one-on-one guidance, as well as identifying “reading leaders” within reader communities ^[3].

Additionally, certain scholars concentrated on analyzing the effectiveness of reading promotion, with Ma and Ding introducing the “4A” (Availability, Accessibility, Acceptability, Adaptability) evaluation framework to assess the accessibility of reading promotion services as a quasi-public product ^[4]. Wan and Ou evaluated the effectiveness of university library WeChat public platforms in reading promotion based on reader participation, satisfaction, and WeChat dissemination index, emphasizing the need for libraries to find their positioning and balance the applicability of information ^[5].

More and more academic libraries have integrated services with new technology platforms. Yuan discussed reading promotion activities from the perspective of media convergence, combining new media with traditional reading promotion to leverage traditional culture’s influence while addressing contemporary issues and promoting campus characteristics ^[6]. Sun and Wang proposed specific strategies for advancing reading promotion activities by harnessing advanced information technology, focusing on responsibility sharing, value co-creation, audience feature reconstruction, precise content targeting, innovative media channels, and comprehensive coverage ^[7]. Jiang advocated for library integration of internal resources, the establishment of reading promotion working groups, and the creation of synergies between library-owned media, campus-level media, and mass media within a broader framework of “big promotion” ^[8].

2.2. Library marketing

Initially, marketing studies were within the domain of management. In the late 19th century, the theory of library marketing gradually drew attention from international academia. In 1983, the “ALA Library and Information Science Dictionary” published by the American Library Association defined library marketing as “a series of purposeful activities conducted by providers of library and information services aimed at actual and potential users of services,” encompassing the scope of offered products, service costs, service methods, and techniques for service promotion. In 2003, the International Federation of Library Associations and Institutions (IFLA) began hosting international marketing awards, attracting active participation from

academic libraries in China.

Scholarly research on library marketing mainly involves areas such as marketing strategies, library brand marketing, and library new media marketing. Many researchers analyze specific marketing cases of libraries based on marketing mix theory. For instance, Zhang and Jia applied the 5 GAP model to research marketing practices at the New York Public Library, starting from understanding user service needs, seeking user understanding, optimizing marketing systems, improving librarian service attitudes, and narrowing the gap between perceived service quality and user demand to increase user satisfaction and loyalty^[9]. Li *et al.* used SWOT analysis to systematically analyze the strengths, weaknesses, opportunities, and threats of brand marketing in Chinese public libraries and constructed a brand marketing model based on the 4C marketing theory^[10].

Additionally, one focus of scholars is how to effectively promote library marketing through new media platforms. Wang *et al.* studied microblog marketing and WeChat marketing in academic libraries, believing that in the process of implementing mobile information service micro-marketing, microblog mobile marketing and WeChat mobile marketing need to be integrated and complementary to maximize the efficiency of mobile information service micro-marketing dissemination^[11]. Hong and Lu analyzed the brand marketing strategies of “Project 211” academic libraries on WeChat public platforms and proposed WeChat marketing strategies that fit the characteristics of libraries, achieving organic integration of WeChat and library brand marketing^[12].

2.3. Application of marketing strategies in library reading promotion

As a non-profit organization, the target of marketing for academic libraries, namely students and teachers, is fixed. The content of marketing includes the library’s collection resources and knowledge services, and the marketing objective is to attract more users, increase resource utilization, and expand influence. Therefore, to enhance the influence of academic libraries, they require breadth and depth of reading promotion activities, realize the systematic nature of marketing content, and integrate it into school teaching and research activities. Some scholars believe that from the perspective of reading promotion, libraries should actively carry out marketing, focus on special user groups, introduce brand marketing and channel marketing concepts, leverage the advantages of libraries, and establish evaluation systems.

Building upon previous research and combining marketing elements such as marketing objectives, market segmentation, marketing mix, performance evaluation, and value creation, this study attempts to establish a reading promotion marketing framework suitable for academic libraries. It analyzes the specific implementation scenarios of the marketing framework using the University of Shanghai for Science and Technology as an example. Therefore, the reading promotion marketing framework of academic libraries in the paper starts from the reader groups, combines the original collection resources of the library, effectively uses new media platforms, constructs media matrices, and provides personalized content for readers. In this process, it is necessary to pay attention to reader trends promptly and adjust marketing directions through feedback to evaluate service content.

3. Marketing strategy analysis of reading promotion activities at the University of Shanghai for Science and Technology

As part of the university’s educational mission, “User First, for Service & Education” is the guiding principle of the University of Shanghai for Science and Technology Library. Through research and analysis of reader demographics, the library has established a series of reading promotion activities each semester. These activities aim to increase user participation, gradually establish a marketing brand, flexibly promote library resources and

services, and enhance the library's influence.

3.1. Restructuring collection resources and utilization

Academic libraries gather core resources for the university, providing knowledge and information resources to students and faculty, thus promoting academic research and cultural activities. Library resources can be divided into physical books and electronic resources. Traditional book resources represent a library's history and heritage. With the increasing demand for electronic resources, universities have increased their budget allocation for electronic resources. However, merely focusing on increasing the quantity is shortsighted. To fully utilize library collection resources, it is necessary to restructure and integrate resources effectively.

In recent years, the borrowing volume of physical books in academic libraries has been declining. Bringing students and faculty closer to books has become an urgent issue for current reading promotion activities. Based on this, librarians at the University of Shanghai for Science and Technology actively explore new paths, exercise subjective initiative to integrate resources and enhance the accessibility of books. For incoming freshmen, the library introduces the "Recommended Reading List of 100 Selected Books for Freshmen" activity, where librarians pre-select books, introduce them during public lectures, and set up display shelves for students to easily borrow the books. Additionally, the library promotes the "Reading Star" selection activity to encourage students to actively borrow books, regularly organizes librarians to write book reviews, recommend books, and display them on large screens in the library throughout the semester.

Although there is a regular and cyclical pattern for new books to be shelved, many new books, once entered the library collection, may not attract high borrowing volumes. To address this issue, the University of Shanghai for Science and Technology places display shelves at the entrance of the library, featuring thematic book displays such as award-winning literary works. Similar display shelves are also placed in student study areas, showcasing the latest books in various disciplines. These measures have proven effective, with many displayed books entering circulation.

The utilization rate of electronic resources by faculty and students at the University of Shanghai for Science and Technology has been increasing yearly. The library compiles annual data on the usage of electronic resources and optimizes and adjusts database resources. Less-utilized databases are discontinued, while databases with high demand are expanded. Alongside increased budget allocation for electronic resources, the library also provides database usage instructions to users, enabling more efficient utilization. For example, collaborations with different departments of the university, organized to host seminars on "ScienceDirect Database Assisting Scientific Research." The library's official journal, "Journal of USST Library," also has a regular column called "Literature Information," which has introduced different databases to readers in each issue.

3.2. User-centric approach

The uniqueness of university libraries lies in their stable and predictable user base. The academic library discovers the needs of faculty and students, organizes activities, and provides personalized resource recommendations.

In recent years, scientific research competitions among university students have been gaining increasing attention. Many students are willing to participate in these competitions. In response to this demand, academic libraries provide research assistance services to expand the usage of library literature resources and enhance the library's influence in guiding students through competition preparation. Currently, the University of Shanghai for Science and Technology primarily offers training in library literature resource search techniques and the use of research assistance software. Librarians lead students in competitions, using professional analysis platforms

to discover and track disciplinary frontiers, assist students in selecting research directions, facilitate discussions, and preliminarily determine several topics.

Resources can be divided into physical book resources and electronic resources to assist students in using library literature materials. Physical literature mainly consists of reference books, while electronic literature includes databases of reference journal papers and instructions for research software usage. Librarians categorize and organize reference books based on the content of university student competition activities and provide them to students through photocopying and borrowing. They also invite faculty members to introduce academic paper writing methods, especially the logical structure demonstrated in papers, guiding students to imitate and learn written expression. Librarians also assist students in using literature management software such as NoteFirst.

Bachelor's degree thesis writing is also a focal point for students. In response to this requirement, the library conducts lectures on relevant topics. Starting from the document requirements of school graduation theses, the lectures introduce students to literature retrieval and writing norms for undergraduate theses through practical operations. Firstly, the focus is on introducing students to Chinese and foreign literature thesis database resources and search methods, as well as the norms for writing theses, including the main content of graduation theses, methods of literature citation, and formats for reference citations. Secondly, students are introduced to services and resources related to thesis writing, including literature delivery services, interlibrary loan services, and databases. Thirdly, students are introduced to the common functions of these software programs to improve the efficiency of thesis writing through practical operations.

3.3. Multi-channel expansion of reading promotion activity influence

The University of Shanghai for Science and Technology Library regularly holds various reading promotion activities, including offline and online activities. Offline activities are comprised of outdoor reading and sharing sessions and book exchange meetings. Outdoor reading and sharing sessions bring students together to share stories and growth experiences related to books, while book exchange meetings provide a platform for students to share insights and experiences gained from reading, enhancing self-awareness and mutual understanding. Various themed lectures also attract considerable attention, with activities such as poetry and literary appreciation bringing in a significant number of participants.

These reading promotion activities are not limited to offline participation by students but also maintain sustained online influence through social media, expanding activities to more audiences through chain reactions. Social media is an indispensable tool in today's society. The library actively utilizes social media platforms such as WeChat and Weibo to disseminate information, photos, and highlights of reading activities. Additionally, interactive voting, lottery draws, and topic tags are used to attract more users and strengthen interaction. Establishing relationships with campus and off-campus partners can also help the academic libraries expand the audience for reading promotion activities. These partners can assist in promoting activities and attracting more participants. Reading promotion activities organized by the University of Shanghai for Science and Technology Library are announced on the library's official WeChat account, as well as displayed on the library's official website and uploaded to the campus intranet.

3.4. Evaluation of effectiveness

The focus of library reading promotion service work has always revolved around the needs of faculty and students. Therefore, establishing a good reader feedback mechanism is crucial. To determine the effectiveness of new marketing strategies, university libraries should pay special attention to audience feedback throughout the entire reading promotion activity process.

For pre-event data collection before conducting reading promotion activities, the University of Shanghai for Science and Technology Library conducts market research through social media, collects user feedback, and monitors changes in activity participation. This data can be used to evaluate the success of strategies and make necessary adjustments. There needs to be convenient reader communication and interaction channels. During reading promotion activities, the library can also discover participants' experiences in real time and adopt feedback mechanisms accordingly. Establishing robust reader research services, categorizing reader groups based on reading needs, and implementing grid management are essential for making bookstore reading promotion services more targeted and related promotional activity designs more efficient. At the end of each academic year's promotional activities, students who frequently participate are invited to a symposium organized by the library. During this event, face-to-face communication is conducted to accept students' opinions and suggestions. This allows for timely follow-up, evaluations, and review of activities.

4. Conclusion

In conclusion, this study explores the marketing strategies of reading promotion activities at the University of Shanghai for Science and Technology. In the digital era, a comprehensive marketing plan is more important than ever for university libraries. Implementing marketing strategies helps increase participation in reading promotion activities, promote cultural activities, and increase the utilization of library resources. By building a long-term reading promotion brand, university libraries can not only embody their core values and cultural connotations but also represent the cultural image of the library. However, it is essential to note that successful marketing strategies are not static and require continuous adjustment and improvement to adapt to evolving user needs and market environments.

In future reading promotion activities, the academic library should establish deeper connections with faculty and students on campus, promote the dissemination of reading culture, and enhance the effective utilization of knowledge resources.

Disclosure statement

The author declares no conflict of interest.

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