

Influence of Library Marketing Strategies on the Utilization of Library Virtual Reference Service

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ABSTRACT: *Virtual reference services in the library needs to be more utilized during the pandemic era as library users had to go online. This research study determined the influence of library marketing strategies to the library users' utilization of virtual reference service. The concurrent nested mixed method of research was used. Participants of the study were the 206 students at a state university in the province of Bukidnon during the school year, 2021-2022. Descriptive statistics and regression analysis were used to organize the data of the study. Findings reveal that the participants assessed as high all the library marketing strategies high, and it was also found out the utilization of library virtual reference services was rated to a high extent. Moreover, the combination of library marketing strategies significantly influenced the variability in the utilization of library virtual reference service. The study concludes that through social media, the library can encourage library users to avail of its varied information sources. Marketing strategies significantly influence the library users' utilization. This confirms the theory of confirmation expectancy which suggests that perceptions are influenced by pre-use expectations (marketing strategies) and consequently directly impact confirmation (utilization of the library virtual services). Based from the findings, the university library may consider other forms of social media such as Google hangouts, Twitter, and YouTube to enhance its virtual services and to attract more patrons to use its services.*

KEYWORDS: library marketing strategies, library virtual reference service, influence of library marketing strategies, social media, video marketing

INTRODUCTION

Pivoting to full digital library services because of the COVID-19 pandemic was a novel experience for all librarians. While libraries provided electronic resources like online databases and eBooks, providing full digital services was something new for both librarians and library users. But when classes had to be closed and turned to online learning because of certain quarantine restrictions and health protocols, libraries had to go online, and librarians had to

come up with services that support the new mode of learning for both students and faculty in academic institutions.

In the library where the researcher is currently working, the Library Supervisor along with the library staff planned and implemented a number of digital services. One of the services created is the digital reference service, which is an electronic, typically real-time, synchronous, and asynchronous, reference service. There are different names given to this virtual reference services such that of LORA, LiRA,, Lib-VISAI, and VIULA. The name given to the researcher's virtual reference service is ViRA which stands for Virtual Reference Assistant.

ViRA was introduced at the start of the online classes in August 2020, where it caters the following virtual services such as email, Facebook, and SMS. The students were accustomed already to traditional library services prior to pandemic. However, after ViRA was launched it introduces them to virtual reference services of the library. Because of this, librarians had to come up with marketing strategies that would introduce ViRA. Specifically, the following modes of marketing strategies were used: traditional print, social media, and video.

Accordingly, the success of a virtual reference depends on how people use the information supplied and their satisfaction to the actual services (Evans and Alire, 2013). Therefore, marketing activities are, needed to "introduce, maintain, and enhance customer satisfaction" (Gronroos, 2007). It is important that librarians use marketing strategies so that when library users need information for research, they would think first of the library than searching in Google (Jones and Harvey, 2016). Moreover, effective marketing of virtual reference services will enable users to increase their awareness on the advantages and benefits that the services provide to them (Vilelle, 2008).

Since the introduction of ViRA and the use of marketing strategies, there has been no formal assessment of the effect of marketing strategies on the utilization of the virtual reference services (Bamigbola, 2013). This is why this study intends to investigate this problem. It is imperative for the researcher to determine whether library users are using the services offered by ViRA. It is also necessary to find out whether the marketing strategies that are employed raised the awareness of the users about ViRA as a result of their utilization of the services. Thus far, since the institution has been financially supportive of the library, the results of the study could provide evidence to the administration of the usefulness of the virtual reference services. Furthermore, this study could add to the existing literature about marketing of virtual reference services. While there have been a lot of studies conducted on the subject, there is a dearth of literature on library marketing strategies influencing the use of virtual reference services (Ramos and Abrigo, 2011). Through this study, the researcher hopes to add empirical evidence on the subject.

Statement of the Problem

This study aimed to determine the influence of library marketing strategies to the library users' utilization of virtual reference service in a state university in Bukidnon during the academic year, 2021-2022. Specifically, this study sought to answer the following questions: 1) What is

the participants' assessment of library marketing strategies in terms of Traditional print media, Social media, and Video marketing? 2) To what extent do the participants utilize the library virtual reference service?

3) Do the participants' assessments of the library marketing strategies significantly influence their utilization of library virtual reference service? 4) Were the library marketing strategies using traditional print media, social media, and video marketing helpful to you? In what ways were they helpful?

Theoretical and Conceptual Framework

This research is anchored on the "7Ps" of the marketing mix model devised by E. Jerome McCarthy (1960). The methods proposed by this model aim to work together to achieve the objectives of a marketing strategy. The application of marketing to virtual reference services is made through the marketing mix elements. Five out of seven elements of the 7Ps marketing mix are used in this study: product, promotion, place, people, and process. A library marketing strategy is a plan of action designed to achieve stated goals of promoting the library service to its users (Osinulu et al., 2018) through traditional print media, social media, and video marketing as applied in this study. Additionally, this study used the consumer expectancy theory. The expectation theory was established by Oliver (1977). The expectation confirmation theory is used for the utilization of the virtual reference services. The theory suggests that expectations, along with perceived performance, may result in satisfaction. This outcome is intermediated through positive or negative confirmation of expectations by performance. If a service exceeds expectations, positive results will take form but if a service fails to meet expectations, a negative result is probable. In this study, expectation is represented by the students' view about the library virtual services. According to the expectation confirmation hypothesis, students' perceptions are influenced by pre-use expectations, which are represented by marketing techniques. As explained by Salubi, Okemwa and Nekhwevha (2018) users' usage intention result after their initial introduction to a particular product creates a positive relationship between preconceived perception and intention to utilize library services.

METHODOLOGY

Research Design

The concurrent nested mixed method of research was used in this study. This research design involves gathering, analyzing, and interpreting both qualitative and quantitative data (Creswell & Clark, 2007).

Participants of the study

Participants of the study were the undergraduate students of a state university in Malaybalay City, Bukidnon during the school year, 2021-2022. The researcher employed the Taro Yamane formula to get the sample population. There were two hundred six (206) nursing students randomly selected as participants in the study.

Research Instruments. The instrument used was a questionnaire which used the guidelines and standards set by the International Federation Library Association (IFLA) *Digital Reference Guidelines* and the *Guidelines for Implementing and Maintaining Virtual Reference Services* by Reference and User Services Association (RUSA). The first and second part of the instrument applies the quantitative method. The first part of the instrument deals with the participants' assessment of the library marketing strategies. It is made up of thirty-three (33) items divided into three categories, namely: *traditional print media*, *social media*, and *video marketing*. The second part of the questionnaire assesses the extent of library users' utilization of the library virtual reference service made up of six questions. Lastly, the third part of the questionnaire was the interview consisting of an open-ended question which asked if the library marketing strategies were helpful and in what ways they were helpful.

Data Gathering Procedure and Ethical Considerations

The researcher formally asked permission to conduct the study from the Supervisor of Libraries. The researcher requested to the University Registrar the consolidated summary of the enrolled students in the second semester for the school year 2021-2022. The actual study began with the researcher sending a letter through email to the Dean of the College of Nursing (CON). Moreover, the researcher formally approached the College of Nursing Chair in person, asking the Chairperson to allow the researcher to join in the virtual classes of the students to disseminate the survey link of the study. This request was approved, and the researcher was able to disseminate the survey link of Google form with the assistance of the College of Nursing Secretary.

Regarding the ethical considerations of this study, the researcher made sure to secure the consent of the participants to cooperate with the study. The researcher was mindful that the participants were given the discretion whether to participate or not. The participants were informed that partaking in the study would cost them nothing, that it was completely voluntary, and that they would not be compensated. Furthermore, the participants were assured that their responses would be kept in utmost confidentiality in compliance with the Data Protection Act (RA 10173). All information received from them will be secured, acknowledged, and respected.

Statistical Treatment of the Data

This study used descriptive statistics to describe, analyze and interpret the collected data in the dimensions of the library marketing strategies. It also used multiple regression analysis to find out if the library's marketing strategies significantly influence the participants' utilization of library virtual reference services. The qualitative data used thematic analysis. The responses were transcribed verbatim using Microsoft Excel document. The researcher created codes and categorized the data and afterwards identified and analyzed recurring themes arising from the responses during the conduct of the interview.

RESULT AND DISCUSSION

Problem 1. What is the participants' assessment of library marketing strategies in terms of traditional print media, Social media, and video marketing?

Table 1 presents the frequency, percentage and mean distribution of the participants' assessment of library marketing services considering the traditional print media. Results reveal that participants rated highly the traditional print media as a library marketing service as indicated by an overall mean of 4.19. This high assessment can be attributed to the fact that the participants were already familiar with the traditional marketing strategies prior to pandemic. The bulletin board displays, flyers, and newsletters had already been set up by the librarians before the pandemic. As a result, the participants were already familiar with the libraries' conventional marketing strategies.

Table 1. Frequency, Percentage, and Mean Distribution of the Participants' Assessment of Library Marketing Strategy (Traditional Print Media)

Range	Description	Frequency	Percentage
4.51-5.00	Very High	81	39.32
3.51-4.50	High	91	44.17
2.51-3.50	Moderate	30	14.56
1.51-2.50	Low	4	1.94
1.00-1.50	Very Low	0	0
Total		206	100.00
Overall Mean		4.19	
Interpretation		High	
SD		0.71	

All indicators on the extent of library marketing strategies in terms of traditional print media were rated high. The two highest means were: *consistently provides updates of new library resources* (M=4.26, SD=0.78) and *enlightens about the relevance of library use* (M=4.25, SD=0.77). This may be understood to suggest that conventional print media informed participants about new library resources as well as the importance of utilizing the library.

Table 2 presents the participants' assessment of library marketing services using social media. The data reveal an overall mean of 4.22 which is interpreted as "high". This means that the participants are highly aware of the library resources through social media like Facebook, Facebook Messenger SMS, and email. They are grateful for the librarians' use of social media to communicate with them. As Tagarda (2021) commented, social media tools are effective platforms allowing the library to promote its services and resources.

Table 2. Frequency, Percentage, and Mean Distribution of the Participants' Assessment of Library Marketing Strategy (Social Media)

Range	Description	Frequency	Percentage
4.51-5.00	Very High	88	42.72
3.51-4.50	High	81	39.32
2.51-3.50	Moderate	33	16.02
1.51-2.50	Low	3	1.46
1.00-1.50	Very Low	1	0.49
Total		206	100.00
Overall Mean		4.22	
Interpretation		High	
SD		0.73	

The indicators that had the highest mean were on *helping the students in locating the library research resources* (M=4.30); *provides immediate information on library services and resources* (M=4.27), and *facilitating knowledge sharing* (M=4.27), *exchange of information in a convenient way* (4.25). The findings show that individuals can have fast access to library resources and information via social media. Because of the synchronous nature of various social media, information is swiftly exchanged and sent to users, and access to information is also concurrent. In addition, sharing of knowledge is highly facilitated. Phillips (2015) commented that it is the role of professional librarians to effectively focus the use of social media to promote library services and resources.

Table 3 reveals the participants' assessment of the library video marketing strategies. The findings show that the participants rated "high" the library video marketing strategies with an overall mean of 4.21. This means that the promotional activities conducted by the librarians using video are well accepted by the students. It increases their awareness of the services and resources of the library. Video, according to Arnott (2021), is an excellent approach to disseminate a lot of information about the library, particularly during this time of the pandemic.

Table 3. Frequency, Percentage, and Mean Distribution of the Participants' Assessment of Library Marketing Strategy (Video Marketing)

Range	Description	Frequency	Percentage
4.51-5.00	Very High	85	41.26
3.51-4.50	High	87	42.23
2.51-3.50	Moderate	28	13.59
1.51-2.50	Low	6	2.91
1.00-1.50	Very Low	0	0.00
Total		206	100.0
Overall Mean		4.21	
Interpretation		High	
SD		0.75	

All of the specific indicators of the library video marketing were assessed as “high”. The indicator with the highest mean is *library tour videos are informative* (M=4.29). This may imply that videos used for library tours are effective in providing the necessary information about the various areas or sections of the library. Short video clips are said to allow better memory recall and thus marketing through video could serve as an effective platform for providing needed information (Bevan, 2020).

Table 4. Frequency, Percentage, and Mean Distribution of the Participants’ Utilization of Library Virtual Reference Services

Range	Description	Frequency	Percentage
4.51-5.00	Very High Extent	43	20.87
3.51-4.50	High Extent	79	38.35
2.51-3.50	Moderate Extent	70	33.98
1.51-2.50	Low Extent	9	4.37
1.00-1.50	Very Low Extent	5	2.43
Total		206	100.0
Overall Mean		3.77	
Interpretation		High	
SD		0.89	

All the six indicators on utilization of virtual reference services have been assessed as high by participants. The top three high indicators are given to online *document delivery services* (M=3.87), *email reference through Gmail using ViRA* (M=3.86), and *ViRA through Facebook* (M=3.84). The findings are significant to the participants in terms of their utilization of the library virtual reference services specifically online document delivery (DDS) and virtual reference assistance (ViRA) using email reference and Facebook. They find the services easy to use and quick to obtain, and the librarians provide prompt feedback to them. According to Cassell (2017) convenience is a significant factor among patrons when accessing the virtual reference services.

Problem 3. Do the participants’ assessments of the library marketing strategies significantly influence their utilization of library virtual reference service?

H₀₁: The participants’ assessments of the library marketing strategies significantly influence their utilization of library virtual reference service.

Table 5. Regression Analysis of the Influence of Assessment of the Library Marketing Strategies on the Utilization of Library Virtual Reference Services

Library Marketing Strategies	Unstandardized Coefficients		Standardized Coefficients	T	Sig.
	B	Std. Error	Beta		
(Constant)	.837	.324		2.58	.010
Traditional	.144	.143	.114	1.01	.316
Social	.670	.169	.548	3.98**	.000
Video	-.119	.170	-.100	-.701	.484

Model Summary

R = .557 R² = .310 Adjusted R² = .300 F = 30.31 p = .000

**significant at 0.01 level

Results reveal that the whole model was significant ($F=30.31$, $p = .000$) with 30 percent of the variability in the utilization of library virtual services as accounted for by a combination of the library marketing strategies. Thus, the null hypothesis can be rejected. There is sufficient evidence to show that participants who rated the library marketing strategies as high may also be attributed to their high utilization of the library's virtual reference services. Tagarda (2021) concluded in her study that library online services and extent of utilization of digital marketing strategies were significantly influenced on their online engagement. Taken singly, it is the social media marketing strategy that significantly influences the utilization of the library virtual services indicating that for every unit increase in their assessment of the social marketing strategies, there is a corresponding .670 increase in their utilization of the virtual services ($B=.670$, $t= 3.98$, $p=.000$). The use of social media, like Facebook, offers an important means of communication to the participants especially in this time of the pandemic. Furthermore, the participants in this study are millennials who are frequent users of social media platforms. As a result of the library's social media marketing strategy, they, as millennials, would be more aware of these virtual reference services offered by the university library. According to Vogels (2019), millennials are the most active users of social media and thus libraries should leverage this medium to encourage patrons to use all of the library's resources and services.

Problem 4. Were the library marketing strategies using traditional print media, social media and video marketing helpful to you? In what ways were they helpful?

From the responses of the participants on the helpful ways of library marketing strategies, the following themes were drawn: 1) Provision of informative and credible sources; 2) These strategies serve as guide and update; and 3) These are convenient and easy accessible.

Provision of informative and credible sources

The responses indicated that the participants of this study viewed the library marketing strategies as informative and credible sources. Some participants pointed this out as being informative and entertaining as it helps in marketing the library. The sources provide knowledge as valid, relevant, accurate, purposeful and useful and appealing to some students. With regard to being informative and have credible sources, the study of Ternenge (2019)

suggests that librarians need to be careful and mindful on posting to the public making it more marketable, dynamic, and informative (Shettar, 2018). The findings of the study are similar to the study of Kitamura (2013), which revealed that the role of traditional media cannot be replaced by the Internet access. In this technological age, it is noteworthy to consider that print media is still relevant and preferred by people as discussed by the participants. Additionally, in connection to the theme provision of informative sources, it integrates the essence of video marketing strategy results in problem 1 which delineated that four videos are informative. This means further that using videos, participants would be knowledgeable on the resources and services of the library. Therefore, the library serves as mediator that provides a vital link in the information cycle as it disseminates trustworthy academic information (Barner, 2011) through library marketing strategies.

These serve as guides and updates

Most of the participants need guides and updates for their library marketing strategies. A good guide should offer clear and concise instructions. Librarians may design or provide guidelines to keep students informed about library updates. This being said Yi (2016) expressed that guide is efficiently used to endorse library services and resources. Library updates through social media constitute the most popular service used by the libraries for promotion purposes (Mandrekar & Carvalhoe-Rodrigues, 2020). A library strives to increase public access and awareness of library services through marketing strategies such as public announcements (Yusuf, 2015). This validates the response that a participant needs announcement to be updated on the trend of library marketing strategies. In disseminating of information, the study is also supported by Omeluzor and colleagues (2022) who observed that libraries use traditional print media such as posters and flyers to have guides on the latest information. However, one respondent is not aware of the library marketing strategies. In addition, same as in the study of Garoufallou et al. (2013), participants were not often updated about any library service and resource. It lacks updates from the library.

These are convenient and accessible

A good number of the participants claimed that the library marketing strategies contributed and helped the them access information in a convenient and easy manner. This is a useful feature or function for them. In fact, they stated that it is convenient to receive information in a way that resources can be quickly accessible through online search. As such, social media marketing gives instant and speedier access to information (Jones & Harvey, 2019). Odine (2011) suggests that to have effective library marketing, a library must offer services that are accessible and successful in meeting users' information needs through the provision of traditional and hybrid library marketing services. Khalid (2019) supports this view espousing that access to information is readily available with technological advancements. Libraries must make all necessary information available to patrons in a timely basis. Thus, a library marketing service should incorporate ease of use and simple access to information to ensure quality.

CONCLUSION

The findings reveal a significant influence of the library marketing strategies in the utilization of the library virtual services implying the positive feedback on the marketing strategies employed by the library. Specifically, social media is the significant factor that contributes in the utilization and usage of library virtual services. The foregoing premise is attributed to the nature of the clients who are millennials and who use social media most of the time. Through social media, librarians and library staff can encourage library users to avail the varied information sources offered by the library. Thus, the result of the study confirms the theory of confirmation expectancy which suggests that perceptions are influenced by pre-use expectations (marketing strategies) and consequently directly impact confirmation (utilization of the library virtual services).

Recommendations

Based on the conclusions drawn from the study, the following recommendations are proposed:

1. That Library Administrator may consider using other forms of social media such as YouTube, Twitter, and Google Hangout to enhance the library virtual services and to attract more use of the services.
2. That Librarians may be more involved in the marketing of the library virtual services by conducting special sessions on the use of the library virtual services.
3. That Faculty may encourage their students to utilize the library virtual services by assigning academic activities that require the use of such services.
4. That Future researchers may conduct such studies as usability study on the forms of virtual reference students prefer, types of questions being asked within the library's virtual reference, or what type of information the library users want to access on the library's virtual services.

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