



E-RESOURCE PROMOTION IN ACADEMIC LIBRARIES IN GHANA: UDS IN CONTEXT

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Abstract

This study examined the various ways academic libraries in Ghana promote their e-resources to patrons. The study employed the survey research design using a quantitative approach. The population of the study included 64 library staff (professionals and para-professionals) of the UDS Library. A sample size was not extracted from the population hence, a census was conducted. A well-structured questionnaire was administered to respondents through Google Forms. Responses were analyzed and represented in tables and pie charts with the use of Microsoft Excel. The findings revealed that the UDS Library management engages in various cost-effective activities such as training workshops on e-resources and how to access them, webinars and seminars on the various e-resources and their value in research/academic work, creating social media handles such as Facebook, Twitter, and a YouTube channel where videos on the library services and resources are uploaded to guide users. Fliers and posters are also placed at vantage places to draw user attention. However, the UDS Library suffers some challenges in their attempt to serve their patrons with updated information materials. Some of these challenges include limited budget funds allocated to the Library, weak internet bandwidth, electricity fluctuations that sometimes spoil gadgets, limited or no time allocated to the Library during university and SRC programmes, and poor participation of students and faculty in programmes organized by the Library.

Keywords: E-Resources, Promotion, Academic Libraries, Ghana, UDS Library

Introduction

Before computers and the internet were introduced, information was in print format only and was found mostly in libraries. This gave libraries the power of monopoly in information provision (Otiye et al., 2022). It therefore, meant there was never really the need for libraries to make efforts in marketing themselves. Today, academic libraries are no longer the sole source of information for

students, faculty and other information seekers. With the advent of technology, numerous publication houses, media houses, websites and a whole lot have made information seeking and retrieval an easy task. Borteye et al. (2022) mentioned that information seekers do not necessarily have to move to a library space to access the needed information, they could simply do so remotely

at the comfort of their homes, offices or field through off-campus access provided by academic libraries. This new interest of information seeking remotely by patrons birthed the concept of library without “walls”, which is fast catching up and becoming popular among patrons (Otike & Barat, 2021). In this information centric user community, libraries are expected to provide online access to information in 24/7 mode as they are used more in an online environment (Tofi, 2019). With all the competition currently faced by academic libraries from other information providers, librarians have found the need to explore ways to promote their services and resources to their users (Iwu-James et al., 2020). In view of this, some promotional approaches are employed to create awareness and sell the value of the available resources and services to the target market (information users) efficiently. However, due to the challenge of ongoing budget cuts, librarians have had to find cost-effective ways of promoting these e-resources to users with the hope of gaining user attention and giving them a reason to choose the Library as their source of information over every other option out there.

Problem Statement

Despite the crucial role e-resources play in the 21st century research and studies, and the many benefits derived from them by researchers, available literature on the use of e-resources shows that they are underutilized. Underutilization boils down to one reason, which is lack of awareness. It is therefore believed that if libraries undertake promotional activities on creating awareness of their e-resources, utilization is going to improve tremendously. E-resource subscriptions are expensive especially in developing countries like Ghana where there are continuous budget cuts making finances scarce. It is therefore disappointing if a library

is well furnished with e-resources yet does not get patrons accessing them. For this reason, the study sought to find out the various activities, steps, and measures, if any, put in place by the UDS Library to promote their e-resources in order to avoid underutilization, while staying relevant in the academic environment. This study therefore focused mainly on the following objectives;

- i. To identify the promotional tools employed by the UDS Library
- ii. To find out the challenges faced by the UDS Library in the provision of e-resources
- iii. To ascertain the possible challenges encountered by the UDS Library in their attempt to promote their e-resources.
- iv. To identify newer ways to help improve promotion of the e-resources in the UDS Library.

Review of Related Literature

Promotional Tools Employed by the UDS Library

Academic libraries need to be actively involved in promoting and marketing their resources as there are numerous alternatives that users can acquire information from aside the library. This in effect will help reach their target users, create awareness and increase usage of the library and its resources. The study by Mehmet et al. (2020) supports that employing promotional tools such as digital/online media adverts (library website, mailing lists, podcasts, blogs, Facebook, Instagram, YouTube), print advertising (brochures, bookmarks, flyers), and also library souvenirs and giveaways (pens, mugs, books, wristbands, flash drives) with inscriptions, will serve as reminders to users of the products and services of the library. Word of mouth is another effective way of

advertising where library staff through interactions with users, tell users about the library's resources and services. User-to-user interactions could also promote the products and services among users. It is an undeniable fact that social media has a huge influence on today's generation. Information put on a social media site will gain more attention than one placed on a notice board. The study by Uwandu and Osuji (2022), states that the commonly used tools for promotion by most academic libraries in recent times are library websites, social media handles, brochures/flyers, posters, library tours, seminars, and workshops.

A good library website for example is a unique collection of the library's resources and services. It is the link between the library and its target users, and the services it seeks to promote (Condic, 2021). It also makes communication easy and effective via the e-mailing lists of clients (e.g., Faculty members). Conventional promotional tools like posters, flyers, and brochures can be used to promote events and programmes of the library. While new developments in the library can be introduced in newsletters where current services can be highlighted. Ubogu, (2021) noted that employing e-marketing gives librarians a platform to assist their patrons to access information through electronic media, using a variety of methods such as e-mail, websites, Facebook and similar applications, blogs, chats, etc. This helps improve clients' satisfaction and also ensures consistency of information.

Considering how expensive it is to purchase and subscribe to these e-resources by academic libraries, there is a crucial need for them to be utilized as expected (Ankrah & Atuase, 2018). This can only be realized if the libraries create awareness of these resources available, how to identify and access them by users, their essence and benefits. Running promotional activities such as workshops,

seminars, library fairs, usually aid to spread awareness more effectively. According to Perdana and Prasojo (2020), academic libraries put in a lot of financial effort in processing, storing, and building their digital information collection, but these resources often remain unutilized because after building the collection, the library fails to create awareness of the resources to users. This goes to prove that the absence of promotional activities in a library can lead to underutilization, while the presence of it increases utilization (Mohammed & Ibrahim, 2021). Friday and Ngozi (2020), stated that libraries that engage social media in their provision of services to patrons, have seen an increase and improvement in the awareness and usage of their e-resources especially. Users get to know of the e-resources and how to access them, and they have realised the convenience that comes with using e-resources, leading to a high rate in usage. The study on marketing library and information resources and services in the Covid-19 era by Mandrekar and Rodrigues (2020) revealed that many librarians have adopted social networking tools like websites, YouTube, Facebook, and WhatsApp, as platforms that enhance effective promotion and marketing of library information resources and services to users in this Covid era. Marketing in academic libraries has become a necessity. It is a way of identifying the variety of library patrons' demands and expectations, and leveraging that to serve the increasing potential clientele (Bahader et al., 2021). Osinulu et al. (2018) in their work, mentioned social media tools as a means of creating awareness and encouraged libraries to embrace the use of social media networking sites to build community-based input, interactions, content sharing, discussions and collaborations. They further stated that users of academic libraries (mostly faculty and students) are more familiar with social media, so the library using it as a means

to create awareness of the information resources available at their disposal will be more effective and yield a high utilization. Libraries need to market themselves, not to increase profits, but rather to create awareness of their products and services and increase user satisfaction as well (Nishath & Somaratna, 2021). When libraries engage in marketing and promotional activities, it gives users the opportunity to know what is available, what is of essence to them and at the long run, satisfy their needs.

Challenges Faced in Providing E-resources

Most academic libraries in developing countries like Ghana, face a lot of obstacles in their attempt to keep up to date with the technological evolution and staying relevant (Lynch et al., 2022). The most common of these challenges include inadequate funds to support library budgets, erratic power outages, weak internet connection, inadequate skills in ICT and infrastructure, to mention but a few. Several studies have been done in the Ghanaian academic community which findings go to confirm these claims. Acheampong et al. (2020) identified poor ICT infrastructure and inadequate skills in ICT on the part of some staff as some of the impediments to providing e-resources in their investigation on awareness and use of e-resources among research scientists in Ghana. Kumar and Sutradhar (2020) added that because the subscription fees to these e-resources keep increasing, it becomes a challenge when the library is unable to continue subscription, therefore access to these resources gets denied. Mwilongo et al. (2020) also stated in their study that most African university libraries face challenges like insufficient funds, absence of marketing policies, limited staff with requisite skills, insufficient computers and other ICT equipment. These and others impede academic libraries in their efforts to make

available the required information resources for effective teaching and learning in the universities. Similarly, Ofori (2022) mentioned inadequate facilities and lack of funding as a major challenge facing the libraries of some selected technical universities in Ghana. Aside these, Kumah, Adzadi, and Imoro (2018) in their study of the Cape Coast University Library also mentioned insufficient funds, limited skilled staff, indifferent attitude from staff, lack of training and insufficient knowledge of appropriate tools and lack of training on appropriate practices as challenges needed to be surmounted for a successful library operation. Most libraries are unable to create awareness of their resources to users because of librarians' inability to embrace promotional measures, and this can be linked to challenges like training and knowledge deficiency in marketing, apathy in adopting marketing concepts, and even the idea that marketing is for profit making institutions, and so, not necessary in the library (Mohammed & Ibrahim, 2021). Ofori (2022), equally states in his findings that the library staff of the selected technical universities selected for his study lacked knowledge in marketing and marketing policies. Thus, library staff could not properly market the services and resources available in their libraries. Marketing skills development training for library staff and funding for marketing were recommended. Even in libraries where the need for promoting their resources especially the online resources is critical to them, the ability to engage in some promotional activities becomes a challenge due to lack of funds. Most academic libraries in the developing world face budgetary cuts every now and then, hence the inability to deliver as expected. Nishath and Somaratna (2021) confirmed this in their work. Even though libraries have the intention to promote their resources to their users, financial

constraints make it difficult to realise this objective.

Challenges Faced in Promoting E-resources

Inadequate funds are a major challenge in most academic libraries in developing countries. In promoting e-resources, a number of promotional activities must be done but inasmuch as library management tries to employ cost-effective tools and activities, there are still always some limitations. This is spelled out in the findings of Opeyemi et al. (2014), which stated that most of the challenges encountered by libraries in marketing their services are inadequate funding and lack of internet services. Ofori (2022), equally mentioned financial constraints and low level of library staff interest and skills in marketing as part of the challenges faced by some selected academic libraries in Ghana identified in his study.

New Trends to Help Promote E-resources in the UDS Library

In recent times, newer trends of marketing have been making waves which seem to be reaching target markets effectively (Appel et al., 2020). These trends are mostly social media applications such as TikTok, Instagram Reels and Threads, and even social media influencers. Creating shorter adverts with more images and music seems to get attention easier. For a university library like UDS, which has a majority of its users being students (millennials), adding these new trends to the promotional tools would boost their awareness and reach their target users more easily and effectively. In the study by Munsch (2021), the use of social media influencers to advertise, and also using music and humour helps marketers of products and services targeted at the youth to reach their target market effectively. The library could also engage students who have social influence on campus to make some of the adverts and put them up as well as share with

peers. This could reach a wider range of students and increase awareness.

TikTok is the latest revolution in social media and has already gained popularity and success due to its creative features (Zhou, 2019). With this application, users are able to create their own videos, edit them with variety of themes and upload, and it is even possible to create a collaboration with another user. It has already gained grounds in various disciplines such as art, cooking, fashion, medicine and the likes, due to its easy compatibility with teaching and learning (Facca et al., 2022). The findings from the study by Guarda et al. (2021) on the impact of TikTok on digital marketing showed that adverts created on TikTok had higher responses and returns. This goes to show that TikTok reached their target market effectively as expected. Another study by Akbari et al. (2022) on the marketing power of TikTok in higher education revealed that students visited the institution's TikTok account for information more than any other alternative it used, and from the results, students agreed that contents on TikTok were complete, concise, easy to reach and learn, and interesting. The study by Tan et al. (2021) discloses how TikTok enhances pedagogical strategies in sustaining the teaching of language skills in ESL (English as a Second Language) classrooms. This goes to prove that, the UDS Library could reach a larger audience if it creates a TikTok account where short but concise videos of all the available resources and services as well as how to access them are advertised.

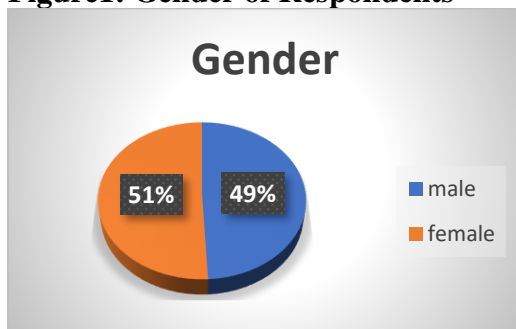
Methodology

The study employed the survey research design using a quantitative approach. The population of the study included 64 library staff (professionals and para-professionals) of the UDS Library. A sample size was not extracted from the population hence, a census

was conducted. A well-structured questionnaire was administered to respondents through Google Forms via email and WhatsApp. 92% (59 out of 64) of respondents completed the forms. Data obtained on Google Forms is automatically analysed so results were transferred on to Microsoft Excel 2016 to be represented in descriptive charts and frequency tables for clearer explanations.

Findings

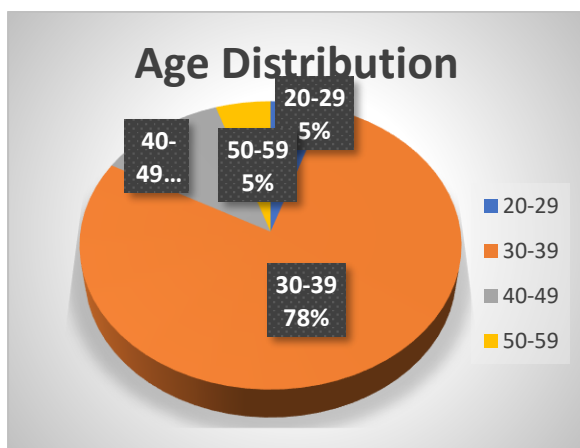
Figure1: Gender of Respondents



Source: field data (2021)

Figure 1 above shows that 29 (49%) of the respondents were male, while 30 (51%) were female. It can be seen from the chart that female staff were the majority of respondents.

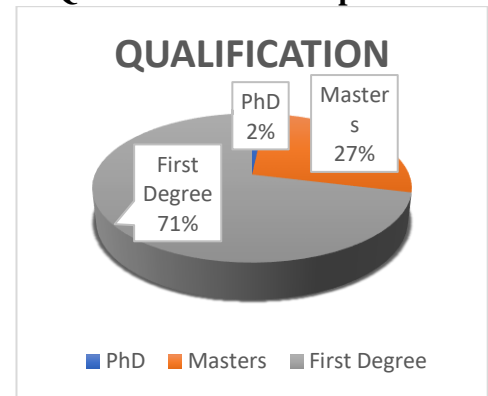
Figure 2: Age Distribution of Respondents



Source: field data (2021)

Figure 2 above represents the age distribution of respondents. Age 20 to 29 was three (3) representing 5% of respondents. 30 to 39 was forty-six (46) representing 78%, making it the majority of the distribution. Age 40 to 49 was seven (7) representing 12% of respondents, while 50 to 59 was three (3) representing 5% of respondents.

Figure 3: Qualifications of Respondents



Source: field data (2021)

Figure 3 above shows the qualifications of the respondents. PhD scored the least with one (1) respondent representing 2%. Master's degree was sixteen respondents representing 27%, with First degree scoring the highest with 42 respondents representing 71%.

Table 1: E-resources Available

E-resource	Frequency	Percent (%)
e-books	59	100
e-thesis and dissertations	59	100
e-journals	59	100
OPAC	59	100
e-reference books	53	89
CD-ROMs	50	84

Source: field data (2021)

As displayed in Table 1, all respondents (100%) mentioned e-books, e-thesis and dissertations, e-journals, and the OPAC as e-

resources available in the UDS Library, while 53 (89%) and 50 (84%) mentioned e-reference books and CD-ROMs respectively as part of the e-resources available.

Table 2: Promotional Tools Employed

Tool	Frequency	Percent (%)
Library website	59	100
Social media	59	100
Mailing lists	18	31
Brochures	59	100
Flyers and posters	59	100
Seminars/trainings	59	100
Library tour	51	86

Source: field data (2021)

From Table 2 above, all staff (100%) mentioned library website, social media, brochures, flyers, and seminars/trainings as promotional tools employed in the UDS Library, while 18 (31%) and 51 (86%) staff mentioned mailing lists and library tour respectively as additional tools being used by the UDS Library in promoting their e-resources to users.

Figure 4: Frequency of Promotion



Source: field data (2021)

Figure 4 above shows that 47 (80%) staff stated that promotion of e-resources in the Library is done as and when there is an opportunity. Eight (8) respondents constituting 13% stated that promotion goes on every day in the Library, while four (4) staff representing 7% stated that promotion is done once every trimester. No respondent stated that promotion was done once an academic year.

Table 3: Challenges in Promoting E-resources

Challenge	Frequency	Percent (%)
Inadequate funds	56	95
Weak internet connection	59	100
Limited/no time allocation to Library during University programmes	43	73
Power fluctuation	52	81

Source: field data (2021)

Table 3 above displays the challenges faced by the UDS Library in promoting their e-resources. All 59 (100%) respondents stated weak internet connection as a challenge. 56 (95%) stated insufficient funds as another pressing challenge, while 52 (81%) stated power fluctuation as a challenge. Limited time allocation in the academic calendar for the Library was equally stated by 43 (73%) respondents as another challenge faced by the UDS Library.

Discussion

The aim of this study was to identify the various ways promotion of resources is being done in academic libraries in Ghana, with UDS being the case study. Findings revealed that promotion takes place in the UDS Library. The researchers identified various promotional tools being used by the UDS

Library. Promotion tools stated by respondents included seminars/webinars and trainings, library website, flyers and posters, brochures, social media accounts, library tours (physical and virtual), and mailing lists. Dube (2023) in her study of promotional strategies in academic libraries stated some of the aforementioned tools as a means of promotion for academic libraries. She also stressed the advancement of technology and the need to focus more on online strategies. Speaking of technological advancement, Odocha and Anyanwu (2023) mentioned that online marketing of academic libraries with the use of social networking tools especially, has proven to be more advantageous and cost-effective as most students are inclined to the various social media platforms. To add to the use of social media and its effectiveness, Kirita and Mwantimwa (2021), stated in their findings that MUHAS and SUA libraries used social media (Facebook and WhatsApp) to market their libraries' resources and services and this has been effective due to their popularity and convenience. Joshua and Michael (2020) stated in their study that the Library of Mustapha Abba, Federal College of Education uses library website, flyers, bookmarks, and other similar tools to promote their resources, while stating that academic libraries could also promote their services and resources by employing the use of electronic billboards, exhibitions, and clientele educational courses as most academic libraries hardly use those. Otuu and Unegbu (2022) discovered in their study that social media, flyers, bookmarks, and posters were the most used tools by Lagos State university libraries to promote their resources and services, while adding that academic libraries that employed promotional tools and marketing strategies had higher awareness and patronage than the few ones that did not.

The researchers also discovered that promotion in the UDS Library is mostly done

when there is an opportunity, even though a daily based promotion takes place especially on the social media accounts, and at the service point at the various units. In most academic libraries in the developing world, promotional activities are not being done regularly largely due to insufficient funds (Onwuekwe, 2022).

There were a number of challenges identified by the researchers from the results of the study. Respondents stated weak internet bandwidth, insufficient budgetary funds, power fluctuation, limited or no time allocation to the library during university programmes, as the challenges faced by the Library. Like most academic libraries in this technological era, UDS Library has most of its resources and services (electronic books and journals, theses and dissertations, library guides and tours, webinars and trainings) being provided online for easy access and convenience to their users. Weak internet connectivity therefore hinders online promotional activities, successful delivery, and satisfaction of users. The case of UDS Library is not different from most academic libraries in Ghana and the developing world as a whole. Budu, Korkuvi and Owusu-Ansah (2020) identified weak internet services and erratic power supply as some of the major challenges faced by Ghanaian university libraries in their quest to market their resources and services. Mohammed and Ibrahim (2021), identified lack of funds and lack of marketing skills by staff as major hinderances of technical university libraries in Ghana in their attempt to promote their resources and services.

Conclusion

Academic libraries need to constantly promote their resources and services to users to create awareness. Marketing and promotional strategies are therefore required to ensure continuous running of these promotional activities, reaching their target users, as well

as staying relevant in information provision. For this reason, the UDS Library has been engaging in promotional activities that create awareness of their resources and services to students, faculty and other information users. Promotional activities and tools identified by the researchers as being used by the UDS Library included social media accounts, library websites, flyers and brochures, webinars/seminars, and training workshops. Despite the UDS Library undertaking these activities, there were some challenges discovered in the data collected. Major challenges included insufficient funds, weak internet bandwidth, power fluctuation, and lack of time allocated to library during university programmes. These challenges affected the running of the various promotional activities of the Library.

Recommendation

In order to stay relevant to their users, the researchers recommended the use of new promotional trends like TikTok to the UDS Library. Due to the fact that majority of its users are students in their youth/prime, TikTok would be a very reliable platform for the UDS Library to promote their resources and services by creating a TikTok account and running its information on it. This together with the already existing social media accounts would go a long way to keep users informed about the Library's relevance and what information needs it can meet.

A standby generator set was recommended by the researchers to the Library management to help curb the power fluctuation problems. The researchers also recommended a more robust internet bandwidth to library management to help with a faster and constant running of online promotional activities. Library management was also encouraged to request for time allocation in the various faculties to engage both faculty and students on the

Library's resources and services, instead of during general university programmes.

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