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ONLINE PROMOTION AT THE UNIVERSITY LIBRARIES IN VIETNAM: AN APPROACH FROM THE USERS

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ABSTRACT

The purpose of this article is to provide an overview of the online promotion status at the university libraries in Vietnam. Through the result of surveying, this paper also mention to some reviewing and evaluating about the quality of the online promotion and some solutions for enhancing the online promotion quality at these libraries in Vietnam.

INTRODUCTION

Nowadays, the national and area information network is being replaced by the information globalization in databases and international data banks. This issue has brought the world closer together in sharing information in a more sophisticated way than before. This means that libraries particularly academic library face great challenges in library and information activities. Besides, Vietnam is being in its international integration period, libraries and academic libraries are one of the organizations facing these changes, and they need to change their management strategies in order to meet the competition pressure at international level. Moreover, providing information products and services are growing due to advancement in telecommunications which have created significant challenges in the academic library operations. Therefore, academic libraries must become the connection place and narrow the gap between information sources and information needs of users. To eliminate this gap, academic libraries must become a place of filtering, refining, packing information; they must be the place to detect, determine and create the information needs of the users.

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Through these academic libraries can present, introduce and provide individual-oriented information. With the increasing development of information and communications technologies, they have created favorable conditions for agencies and organizations to promote their images, products and services. Libraries and information agencies exploit these technology benefits to build and develop promotional activities to users. Online promotional activities play very indispensable role for libraries, particularly for academic libraries. Until now, many libraries and information agencies in Vietnam are interested in online promotional activities and the academic libraries are no exception. Today, online promotional activities of academic libraries in Vietnam have achieved initial results in attracting users to use the products and services of the library. However, online promotional activities of the academic libraries in Vietnam still exist with restrictions and do not play its important role in connecting the library and users.

Statement of the problem

The academic libraries in Vietnam have made efforts in the development of library activities and attract users. However, at present the online promotional activities of these libraries are still limited due to the following:

In terms of library

- In the Vietnamese academic libraries, there are only few libraries that have marketing department;
- Preparation, planning and implementing marketing plans are relatively limited and unorganized. Besides, libraries do not provide products and services actively to users;
- The interaction issues between librarians and customers are based mainly in the individual customer's opinion, even though academic libraries have expanded their functionality to provide materials and information services system;
- The lack of human resources and financial constraint for marketing activities;
- The lack of marketing knowledge and skills of librarians.

In terms of users

- The limitations in using the products and information services in the academic libraries of staff, faculty and students;
- The nature of the information needs of users nowadays are increasingly diverse;
- The skills in utilizing information resources or products of users is not high, which includes restrictions in using resources that are in foreign languages.

These issues pose variety of factors in the academic library operations, particularly in the promotion of library and information services works, because these works involve researching problems on users' information behavior, habits, needs, their exploitation abilities. Therefore, enhancing the quality of library and information products and services, and develop online promotional activities at the academic libraries in Vietnam are essential issues.

Purpose of the project

The purpose of the project is to find the problems encountered by academic libraries in their promotional activities, then proposing solutions to enhance promotional activities at the academic libraries in Vietnam.

Objectives of the Study

The objectives of the project includes:

- Surveying online promotional activities conducted at the academic libraries in Vietnam;
- Evaluating the effectiveness of online promotional activities at the academic libraries in Vietnam;
- Providing some solutions for developing online promotional activities at the academic libraries in Vietnam.

Significance of the Study

The results of this study have significance in terms of:

- Clarifying the role of online promotional activities at academic libraries;
- Assessing the true state of online promotional activities of academic libraries in Vietnam and developing solutions for

online promotional activities to attract more users to the library. These solutions can be used by other academic libraries to enhance their online promotional activities effectively.

Literature Review

Promotion is the final component of the marketing mix. However, it is equally important to help agencies and organizations in attracting users and in achieving their goals so that they can exist in the competitive environment. Promotion refers to raising customer awareness of a product or brand, generating sales, and creating brand loyalty. It is one of the four basic elements of the marketing mix, which includes the four P's: price, product, promotion, and place. Promotion is also defined as one of five pieces in the promotional mix or promotional plan. These are personal selling, advertising, sales promotion, direct marketing, and publicity. A promotional mix specifies how much attention to pay to each of the five factors, and how much money to budget¹. Promotion involves mechanisms by which the target groups are informed about the resources available, services and products offered by the library or information centre. Essentially, the purpose of promotional activities is said to be to communicate, to convince, and to compete².

Promotion is one of the most attentional activities and directly impact to customers through communications activities and decided the using products of organization. This activity provides many benefits to organization:

- Attract and hold the attention of the clients (both potential and existing)
- Make the clients aware of the product or service and the organization providing it.
- Position the product or service and the organization in the minds of the potential clients in a unique and favourable manner.
- Motivate the clients to actually buy the product or service.
- Constantly reinforce the message on the clients.

The ultimate objective of promotional activity is to build awareness among target customers in order to make them interested, believe and willing to spend money to buy the products. To accomplish this, agencies and organizations must develop not only working to create products and services appropriate to customers, competitive pricing, facilitate distribution, but also appropriate promotional strategies to attract customers. Thus, it is understandable that all communication activities such as advertising, public relations, personal selling, and sales promotion must be performed by agencies or organizations to enhance the customers' perception about their products and services. Through these activities, it encourage customers to use the products of the business and to develop branding in customer's mind.

¹ [https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Promotion_\(marketing\)](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Promotion_(marketing))

² Abhinandan K. Jain (1999), *Marketing Information Products and Services: A Primer for Librarians and Information Professionals*, Tata McGraw-Hill Publishing Company Ltd., New Delhi.

Promotion in the library and information field focuses on methods, techniques and measures by which library and information centre carried out to help users know about the products they need, the benefits of the exploiting and using them, as well as how to exploit and use these products. In other words, promotions have other roles such as tools to perform the communication function to meet customer demand; competitive tools in increasing product value, build user's awareness of products, enhance brand reputation, maintain confidence and good attitude of the public about the organization. The common promotional forms used in library and information centre include public relations, advertising, sale promotion and personal selling.

There were some materials are mentioned about the promotion in the academic library at different aspects:

- Abhinandan K. Jain (1999) analysed the marketing information products and services include marketing strategy, marketing components in the library with four factors: price, product, promotion, and place.
- Gordon C. Bruner II (2010) evaluated promotion's effectiveness in the library; Michalis Gerolimos (2011) analysed online promotion of academic libraries on Facebook though an analysis of users' comments; Nancy J. Marshall (2001) described the public relations in academic libraries.
- Besides, Rainera Carrillo-Boholst (2004) analyzed marketing activities and emphasized on the promotion for libraries; Sarah Houghton-Jan mentioned the online marketing for academic libraries.

MATERIALS AND METHODS

Scopes and limitation of study

Surveying online promotional activities is only done at five academic libraries in Vietnam. Selection criteria are follows:

- Large academic libraries have many information technology applications in library activities;
- Representing for academic libraries at the four different regions in Vietnam;
- Using online promotional forms only.
- Five academic libraries were selected:

Table 1. Academic libraries were surveyed

Number	Academic libraries
1	University of Science Library - Ho Chi Minh City
2	Central Library – Vietnam National University Ho Chi Minh City
3	Learning Resource Center – CanTho University
4	Learning & Information Resource Center – The University of DaNang
5	Learning Resource Center – ThaiNguyen University

With the limitation in space and time issues, the project can only carry out the surveying of online promotional activities at the academic libraries in Vietnam from the user's direction for seeking information through internet.

Therefore, the survey was conducted only based on observations through promotion channels of the academic libraries.

Methodology of the Study

With the aim of surveying the promotional activities of the academic libraries in Vietnam, this study used the following methodology:

- **Observation method:** It is used to understand the status of the online promotional activities at the academic libraries.
- **Analytic and synthetic methods:** It is used to process the collected documents from the survey in order to provide a basis for assessing the online promotional activities, and devise appropriate solutions to develop these activities at academic libraries.

RESULTS

The situation of online promotional activities at the academic libraries in Vietnam

Survey results about the online promotional activities at five academic libraries in Vietnam shows that academic libraries use online promotional tools as follows:

Website

The purpose of advertising via website not only approaches the users within the school and other schools, but also the user community in abroad. Therefore, designing website helps library to promote quickly all the activities, available resources, the products and services not only in the scope in the country but also in the world. Also, the website also is a tool for finding relevant information to serve the teaching, learning, scientific research ... of users. The observation results of the advertising via website at the academic libraries in Vietnam showed as follows:

Most academic library websites provide overview information about the library include information about the establishment year, library address, goals, mission, organizational diagrams, activity diagrams, human resources, opening hours, model and interior library... As long as the introduction of general information, library website homepage also published about the library activity news; introduce new books; links to agencies and other organizations. With library - information products and services, the academic libraries often advertise new document lists on the library website homepage; online catalog OPAC, the databases; services such as reference service, SDI service, internet service, circulation services and so forth. In addition, the digital collections and databases are also provided quite detailed information about how to search for information through these collections and databases. Moreover, the library website is also effective information channel to broadcast the bulletins, the articles about the new technology, new books. Updating information on the website of the academic libraries in Vietnam have difference. Most academic libraries are not defined periodically updated information on the website, only update when they have new information, except for the new book which updated once every month.

Table 2. Online promotional tools at five academic libraries in Vietnam

Academic libraries	Website	Social networks	RSS
University of Science Library Ho Chi Minh City	X		
Central Library – Vietnam National University Ho Chi Minh City	X	X	X
Learning Resource Center – CanTho University	X	X	X
Learning & Information Resource Center – The University of DaNang	X		
Learning Resource Center – ThaiNguyen University	X	X	

Table 3. Social network tools at the academic libraries in Vietnam

Academic libraries	Facebook	Flickr	Delicious	Twitter
Central Library – Vietnam National University Ho Chi Minh City	X	X		
Learning Resource Center – CanTho University	X		X	X
Learning Resource Center – ThaiNguyen University	X			X

Social networks

Based on the surveyed results of observing online promotional tools used by academic libraries in Vietnam shows that among five surveyed libraries, there are only three libraries which advertise through social networking with forms such as Facebook, Flickr, Delicious, Twitter. This table is a summary of the social network tools that the academic libraries in Vietnam has used for promoting:

The aboved table shows that three libraries are using facebook as the second promotional tool as long as website, while other libraries such as University of Science Ho Chi Minh City Library and Learning Resource Center & Information - The University of Danang don't use any advertising forms with exception of the website. Among the promotional tools through social networks, the Learning Resource Center - CanTho University has the most advertising forms via social networks, with 3 forms like Facebook, Delicious, Twitter. Most academic libraries often use social networks to introduce new books, provide information on library activities news; information and images about the workshops, training courses, user training; the contest organized by the library; useful and important products and services.

However, promotional forms through social networking tools of academic libraries still untapped efficiency. Most academic libraries only performs the image promotion activities of the library, or a few products and services which the library provides, introduced new books non-regular. For example, Learning Resource Center – CanTho University only advertised and introduced new books to November 2014. Besides, the limited number of users knew and followed to the library facebook, amount only 653 followers. With Flickr tool: Central Library has done relatively well providing images of seminars, training activities which the library organized, or sightseeing activities in the library, the library activities news. These information are provided very quickly and prompt to the user.

Twitter has become a social network tool which beloved by popularity and ability to spread quickly. Learning Resource Center - CanTho University and Learning Resource Center - University ThaiNguyen often use Twitter to connect with the user.

The aim of this action provides information on products, services and activity news of the library. This is also a promotional tool which is very convenient and fast for the library and its users. However, this tool is not really effective because the number of people using Twitter to track library in Vietnam is still limited.

RSS

RSS is a technology that helps internet users can read the latest news from one or multiple sites without directly on the site. RSS not only brings practical benefits for users, but also as means to promote the most economical website. Of the five academic libraries surveyed, only the Central Library – Vietnam National University HCM City and Learning Resource Center – CanTho University have used RSS as a tool to promote active information to library users quickly and conveniently interests.

DISCUSSION

Reviewing and evaluating

Through the survey results of online promotional activities at the Vietnamese academic libraries, there are some remarks as follows:

Strengths

- The academic libraries are using many forms of online promotional activities as: websites, social networks, RSS to supply information to users,
- The academic library websites provide information quite diverse, adequate about the products, services and activities of the library,
- The news on the website, Flickr, Facebook of some libraries are regularly updated promptly and quickly.

Limitations

- Some academic libraries are only using website to promote the image to the user without using another online promotion as Learning & Information Resource Center – The University of DaNang and University of Science Library Ho Chi Minh City,

- The information provided to users through facebook is not really diverse as Learning Resource Center – CanTho University and Learning Resource Center – ThaiNguyen University,
- Some academic libraries rarely update their information via social networks like Learning Resource Center – CanTho University,
- The number of users following library through social networks like Facebook, Twitter, Flickr is limited.

Some proposals to improve the efficiency of online promotional activities at the academic libraries in Vietnam

Some suggestions based on the survey results of online promotional activities in Vietnamese academic libraries and consideration of the advantages and limitations of this activity at libraries, are:

Improving the quality of online promotional channels

- For library websites: These websites need to be regularly updated such as news, useful articles, information of new books. It's necessary to have regulation of updating and testing, reviewing the information on the websites. Libraries should actively link these informations on social network such as Facebook, Twitter.
- Library's facebook need to be refreshed and updated by its informations to attract more users. Besides, academic libraries should quickly and timely communicate new products, services and new books through its facebook to the users. Users was not use to follow up activities of the library through facebook, so libraries should be more active in updating and connecting with users.

Diversifying online promotional tools

- According to statistics, there are more than 10 millions people in Vietnam using facebook, so academic libraries need to use facebook as an useful channel to advertise their products and services as well as the activities of the academic library.
- Besides, academic libraries also develop other online promotional activities such as designing video for

introducing library, encouraging users in commenting on the website, advertising via Google, Yahoo ... Plus, the mobile phone is also an effective information channel which libraries conduct promotional activities to the users.

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