



USER ENGAGEMENT WITH PROMOTIONAL ACTIVITIES: A CASE STUDY OF THE OPEN UNIVERSITY OF SRI LANKA KANDY REGIONAL CENTRE LIBRARY

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Academic libraries play a vital role in promoting intellectual development and rely on modern marketing techniques to keep users informed and engaged. The Kandy Regional Centre (KRC) library of the Open University of Sri Lanka strives to attract, engage, and retain users through promotional and marketing efforts. However, the effectiveness of these activities has not been systematically studied, restricting the library from tailoring strategies to address user demands. This study examined user engagement with promotional activities at KRC Library to provide improvement recommendations. The specific objectives were to evaluate user awareness of promotional activities, identify effective communication channels, analyze user engagement levels, and examine factors influencing engagement. A random sample of 214 library members was selected from 518 Level 3 (first year) students, for whom most promotional strategies are focused. The questionnaire, yielding 100 completed responses, resulted in a 46.7% response rate. Findings revealed that while 75% of respondents initially indicated high awareness of promotional activities (perceived awareness), detailed assessment of their knowledge across specific activities revealed only partial awareness in practice, with library orientation programs and email notifications being most recognized. Social media is the most effective communication channel, while other digital and physical modes remain moderately effective. User engagement was high for single-time promotional events like orientation programs and registration desk outreach. However, engagement with routine promotional activities such as checking email notifications, social media posts, library digital screen, and notice board was moderate. Interactive activities, such as participating in events, workshops, and one-on-one services, had the lowest engagement scores, suggesting students are less likely to be actively involved. Academic workload was identified as a major factor affecting engagement levels. These findings reveal a gap between awareness and engagement that must be bridged. Strategies to improve engagement were derived from motivating factors and barriers reported by students. These insights emphasize the importance of ensuring library promotional activities directly address students' academic and personal needs, provide recognition opportunities and remove participation barriers, while enhancing communication strategies.

Keywords: academic libraries, library marketing, library promotions, marketing communication, service marketing, user awareness

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INTRODUCTION

Libraries must employ marketing strategies to remain competitive and advance institutional objectives. According to Khan et al. (2023), university library marketing improves librarian-user relationships, identifies information needs, and promotes library awareness. Recent studies (Ihejirika, 2021; Sewwandi & Suraweera, 2022; Kumar et al., 2024; Vandi et al, 2024) demonstrate that libraries must actively promote services through social media, workshops, and outreach to compete with digital alternatives. Such promotional activities create informed, engaged users while fostering learning cultures that support institutional missions.

The Kandy Regional Centre Library actively promotes its resources and services, yet understanding of user engagement with these activities remains limited. Factors such as awareness levels, digital literacy, and demographics may influence engagement, but without systematic evaluation, the library cannot assess promotional effectiveness or adapt to changing user needs. This study analyzes user engagement with promotional activities to help the library refine strategies and enhance resource utilization.

This research assesses user engagement with promotional activities at the Kandy Regional Centre Library of the Open University of Sri Lanka to identify effective promotional methods for connecting users with the library.

Specific Objectives:

1. To evaluate user awareness of promotional activities
2. To identify the most effective communication channels for user awareness
3. To analyze user engagement levels with promotional activities
4. To determine factors influencing user engagement with library promotions

METHODOLOGY

A random sample of 214 members was selected from 518 Level 3 students registered at the KRC Library in 2024 using the Morgan table criteria. A Likert scale questionnaire was distributed physically and digitally, yielding 100 responses (46.7% response rate). Distance learning students' irregular academic engagement limited data collection. Despite lower-than-ideal responses, random sampling ensures representativeness, making the data adequate for exploratory analysis.

RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

3.1 Awareness levels of participants on various library promotional activities



While 75% of respondents indicated high promotional activity awareness (perceived awareness), detailed assessment revealed only partial actual awareness. Library orientation programs and email notifications were most recognized, while most other promotional activities received low awareness scores, highlighting the need to improve visibility and communication (Table 1a).

3.2 Effectiveness of communication channels in creating awareness

Social media was found to be the most effective communication channel, while other digital modes (emails) and physical modes (posters, library registration, staff, word of mouth) remain moderately effective (Table 1b).

3.3 User engagement level

User engagement was high for single-time promotional events for new students. Registration desk outreach achieved the highest engagement (74%), demonstrating point-of-service promotion effectiveness. Library orientation programs showed moderate participation (53%), while online awareness programs had low attendance (23%), suggesting students prefer in-person, mandatory interactions over voluntary digital engagements.

Engagement with routine promotional activities such as email notifications, social media posts, digital screens, and notice boards was moderate. Interactive activities like events, workshops, and one-on-one services had the lowest engagement scores, suggesting students avoid active involvement (Table 1c).

3.4 Factors motivating user engagement with library promotional activities

Students are highly motivated to engage when promotional activities relate to academic needs and personal interests. They are also motivated by well-timed events that provide platforms for sharing talents and receiving rewards (Table 2a).

3.5 Factors preventing user engagement with library promotional activities

Heavy academic workload was the primary barrier preventing student engagement, followed by lack of awareness (Table 2b). Other factors, such as promotional appeal, timing, relevance, and accessibility, were adequate, suggesting well-planned activities can fail if students are too busy or inadequately informed

Table 1: Mean scores and interpretation of user responses on awareness, effectiveness of communication channels, and engagement with promotional activities.

Activity	Mean	Interpretation*
(a) Awareness		
Orientation Programme	3.40	Highly aware
E-mail alerts on services, notices, etc.	3.35	
Registration desk outs post at the new registration day	3.13	Partially aware
Online Awareness Programme	2.75	



New Arrivals Videos and other posts on FB	2.66	
Messages sent through coordinator's WhatsApp group	2.48	Minimally aware
Workshops on skill-building and research support	2.45	
messages on the library notice board in the lobby	2.43	
Special events/ Exhibitions of the library	2.42	
Library display screen in the lobby	2.4	
Monthly themes of the library and related activities	2.26	
One-On-One Help Desk for personalized help	2.05	
Overall awareness level	2.65	Partially aware
(b) Effective Channels		
Social media posts and flyers	3.27	Highly effective
Posters displayed physically	3.23	Moderate
Email notifications	3.19	
At the library registration time	3.05	
During library visits from staff	3.01	
Word of mouth (peers)	2.51	
	3.04	Mod. Effective
(c) Engagement		
Checking email alerts sent by the library	2.69	Moderate
Noticing messages on the library display screen at the lobby	2.64	
Accessing the library's FB page	2.58	
Reading messages on the library notice board	2.58	
Attending One-on-One Help Desk sessions	2.4	Low
Receiving library messages through WhatsApp group	2.21	
Participating in workshops organized by the library	2.2	
Engaging in monthly library themes and related activities	2.18	
Taking part in special events and exhibitions	2.15	
	2.39	Low engagement

* Mean range of 4-point Likert Scale: High = 3.25–4.00, Moderate/Partial = 2.50 – 3.24, Minimal/Low = 1.75–2.49, Not at all = 1.00 – 1.74

Table 2: Mean scores and interpretation of user responses on motivational factors and barriers to engage with library promotional activities

	Activity		Mean*
(a) Motivational factors	Relevance of promoted events to academic studies	4.63	Very High agreement
	Alignment of promoted events with personal interest or enthusiasm	4.40	
	Timeliness of activities in relation to academic need (e.g., research support)	4.21	High agreement



	Opportunities to showcase talents or receive reward (e.g., prizes, certificates)	3.96	
(b) Barriers	Academic workload limits availability to participate in events	4.43	Very High agreement
	Lack of awareness about library activities	4.17	High Agreement

* Mean range of - point Likert Scale on agreement 4.25-5.0: Very High Agreement; 3.5-4.24: High Agreement; 2.75-3.49: Moderate Agreement; 2.0-2.74: Low Agreement; 1.0-1.99: Very Low Agreement

CONCLUSION AND RECOMMENDATIONS

The findings indicate that while some promotional strategies like orientation sessions, outposts, social media and email alerts are effective in raising awareness, overall engagement remain low due to academic workload and low awareness. To enhance the effectiveness of promotional strategies, efforts should focus on improving communication, aligning activities with students' academic needs and personal desires, giving opportunities for recognition, and addressing key barriers to participation.

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