PROMOTING LIBRARY RESOURCES AND SERVICES AT DELTA STATE UNIVERSITY, ABRAKA USING WORD OF MOUTH MARKETING TOOL

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Abstract

The study investigated word-of-mouth marketing as a tool for promoting library resources and services at the Delta State University Library, Abraka. Four research objectives guided the study. The population of the study comprised 49 librarians and library officers working in the Library. Data collection was conducted using a questionnaire as the primary instrument. Data analysis primarily involved descriptive statistics, including frequency and mean ($\bar{x}$) with criterion mean placed at 2.50, to interpret the quantitative data collected through the questionnaire. Findings revealed that librarians are familiar with word-of-mouth marketing (WOMM) in libraries and have observed its use to promote library resources and services. They actively advocate for using the e-library and ensure access to electricity and data for browsing. They support increasing patron involvement, visibility, community reach, and meaningful connections. They believe the current physical spaces at Delta State University Library effectively promote word-of-mouth advertising. They collect and use patron testimonials, feedback notebooks, and surveys, and find testimonials moderately to very effective for marketing. Additionally, they recognize the benefits of forming partnerships with local influencers to enhance the Library's visibility. The study concludes that librarians are knowledgeable about word-of-mouth marketing and actively promote resources to increase patron engagement and community reach. Recommendations include organizing events like community talks, workshops, and book clubs to stimulate word-of-mouth marketing activities.

Keywords: Abraka, Delta State University Library, Library Resources, Library Services, Promotion, Word of Mouth Marketing.

Introduction

Marketing within the realm of libraries is not merely about advertising; it is about strategically unveiling the treasure trove of resources and services libraries offer to their communities. Osinulu *et al.* (2018) aptly defined this as the strategic provision of library resources and services, aimed at heightening awareness and maximizing patron utilization. In this era of information abundance and alternative sources, effective marketing strategies are imperative for libraries to stay aligned with their missions and secure the necessary funding. At the heart of library marketing lies the twin objectives outlined by Odunlade *et al.* (2014):

achieving library goals and satisfying user needs. Promotion becomes the vehicle through which libraries inform and persuade potential patrons about their offerings. However, in the digital age, amidst the barrage of advertisements, one traditional yet potent tool often overlooked is word-of-mouth marketing (WOMM).

Hayes (2021) defined Word-of-mouth marketing (or WOM marketing) is when a consumer's interest in a company's product or service is reflected in their daily dialogues. Essentially, it is free advertising triggered by customer experiences and usually, something that goes beyond what they expected. Word-of-mouth marketing, is the process of actively influencing and encouraging organic word-of-mouth discussion about a brand, organization, resource, or event (McMillen, 2021). From the definitions, it can be concluded that word-of-mouth marketing is not just about passive word-of-mouth but includes active strategies to enhance and utilize consumer communication to promote a brand. Kapoor (2018) highlights the enduring influence of personal recommendations, asserting that people still heavily rely on suggestions from those they trust. This reliance extends to libraries, which not only provide books but a plethora of resources and services, ranging from digital databases to educational programmes. The challenge, then, lies in ensuring these offerings are known and utilized. Harnessing word-of-mouth marketing, libraries can tap into the inherent trust and credibility associated with personal recommendations. Hayes (2022) emphasizes the significance of satisfied patrons sharing their experiences, which can significantly amplify the library's message. This can be facilitated through various means, such as community events, book clubs, and referral programmes.

Sarin and Pal (2014) underline the importance of providing spaces conducive to collaboration and meaningful interactions. These spaces not only serve practical purposes but also act as catalysts for word-of-mouth promotion. Patron testimonials serve as potent social proof, as noted by Alvarez-Monzoncillo (2022), reassuring potential patrons of the library's value and quality. Moreover, libraries can amplify word-of-mouth efforts by collaborating with local influencers and leveraging digital platforms. Partnering with influencers and sharing engaging content on social media can extend the library's reach and credibility, as emphasized by Sánchez *et al*. (2021).

Problem Statement

In today's digital era, libraries must ensure their resources are recognized and actively utilized by their communities. However, at the Delta State University Library, Abraka, Word-of-mouth marketing (WOMM) is often underestimated or never employed, which may deny trust and credibility. The library needs to investigate the impact of physical spaces on WOMM, collect patron testimonials, and partner with local influencers. By implementing smart word-of-mouth marketing campaigns and utilizing both physical and digital resources, the library may connect its services with community engagement and gain essential financing.

Objectives

The main objective of the study is to investigate word-of-mouth marketing and the promotion of library resources and services at the Delta State University Library, Abraka. While the specific objectives are to:

1. To determine how the Delta State University Library, Abraka, effectively leverage word-of-mouth marketing to promote its resources and services within the University community;

2. Ascertain the impact of physical spaces within the Delta State University Library, Abraka, on facilitating word-of-mouth advertising;

3. Determine how the library/librarians collect and utilize patrons' testimonials to enhance its marketing initiatives and increase patronage; and

4. Find out the opportunities that exist for the Delta State University Library, Abraka, to partner with local influencers.

Literature Review

The review of related literature is done under the following sub-headings

Leverage Word-Of-Mouth Marketing to Promote its Resources and Services

Word-of-mouth marketing (WOMM) is a potent yet often underutilized strategy for promoting library resources and services. Despite the dominance of digital marketing, understanding WOMM's intricacies in the library context is crucial for effective user interaction and community outreach. Hayes (2023) notes that WOMM leverages personal recommendations to boost awareness and interest in library offerings. Kwiatek *et al*. (2020) highlights the enduring impact of personal endorsements, which carry trust and credibility.

Libraries can utilize WOMM by organizing community events, book clubs, and discussion groups, enabling patrons to share positive experiences naturally (Hayes, 2021). Collaborating with local influencers and thought leaders can further amplify WOMM's impact (Alvarez-Monzoncillo, 2022). Digital platforms also play a key role by sharing patron testimonials, creating engaging content, and fostering online discussions to encourage WOMM within digital communities (Sumadevi & Mallinath, 2019).

However, WOMM in libraries comes with challenges. Ensuring a positive patron experience is vital, as negative word-of-mouth can harm the library's reputation (Hayes, 2022). Libraries must also address ethical issues to maintain authenticity and transparency in their WOMM activities (Jacob & Olajide, 2018). Measuring WOMM's effectiveness is difficult, as traditional metrics may not fully capture its impact (Ankrah *et al.,* 2023). The review underscores WOMM as a powerful yet often overlooked tool for library promotion. Integrating WOMM into marketing strategies requires a balanced approach, recognizing both its benefits and challenges. By fostering genuine connections with patrons, encouraging

community involvement, and upholding ethical standards, libraries can enhance visibility, build trust, and remain relevant. Embracing WOMM not only expands the reach of library resources and services but also strengthens the bond with patrons, ensuring ongoing support and engagement.

The Impact of Physical Spaces Within Libraries on Facilitating Word-Of-Mouth Advertising

Physical spaces in libraries are vital for facilitating study, collaboration, and word-of-mouth marketing (WOMM), an often overlooked yet potent marketing tool. Libraries, as community hubs, offer various environments for activities like quiet study and group discussions. These spaces shape the library experience and influence patrons' interactions with resources and services. Sarin and Pal (2014) emphasize the need for environments that promote collaboration and meaningful interactions, which can stimulate WOMM. Additionally, the layout and design of library spaces impact patrons' perceptions and their likelihood of recommending the library to others (Hayes, 2023).

Several factors within library spaces affect WOMM likelihood. Accessibility and visibility of resources and services, along with amenities like comfortable seating and technology, enhance the overall patron experience and encourage positive recommendations (Kapoor, 2018). The ambiance and atmosphere of library spaces also influence patrons' emotions and attitudes, affecting their propensity to engage in WOMM (Alvarez-Monzoncillo, 2022). However, there are challenges in using physical spaces to facilitate WOMM. Libraries must balance creating inviting spaces with practical considerations such as space constraints and budget limitations (Dauda & Daksiri, 2020). Ensuring inclusivity and accessibility is also crucial for promoting WOMM among diverse patron groups (Jacob & Olajide, 2018).

Understanding the impact of physical spaces on WOMM has significant implications for library marketing strategies. Libraries can optimize environments to encourage positive WOMM by designing spaces that foster collaboration, provide resource access, and create a welcoming atmosphere (Osinulu *et al.,* 2018). Additionally, libraries can use WOMM as a complementary marketing tool alongside traditional methods, leveraging the trust and credibility of personal recommendations (Kumar, 2017). Overall, strategically designed library spaces enhance user experience and serve as powerful tools for WOMM, benefiting overall library marketing efforts.

Library/Librarians Collection and Utilisation of Patrons' Testimonials to Enhance its Marketing Initiatives and Increase Patronage

Patrons' testimonials are a valuable asset for libraries, enhancing marketing initiatives and increasing patronage by leveraging social proof to build trust, credibility, and engagement within communities. Testimonials serve as authentic endorsements of library

resources, services, and experiences. Alvarez-Monzoncillo (2022) highlights the importance of social proof in influencing behavior, showing how positive testimonials build trust and credibility. In libraries, these testimonials provide insights into the perceived value and quality of offerings, aiding in attracting and retaining patrons (Sánchez *et al*., 2021).

Libraries employ various methods to collect testimonials effectively, such as surveys, feedback forms, comment cards, and online reviews. Librarians can also engage patrons during interactions to solicit feedback in real-time (Dauda & Daksiri, 2020). Creating channels like social media platforms and community forums encourages testimonial submissions (Jacob & Olajide, 2018). Once collected, testimonials can be integrated into marketing initiatives, showcased on websites, social media, promotional materials, and newsletters to provide social proof of the library's value (Osinulu *et al.*, 2018). Testimonials can also personalize marketing communications, tailoring messages to specific audience segments based on their interests (Kumar, 2017).

Challenges in using testimonials include ensuring their authenticity, managing negative feedback, and navigating privacy concerns (Hayes, 2023; Sarin & Pal, 2014; Kapoor, 2018). Libraries must verify the legitimacy of testimonials to maintain credibility and address negative feedback transparently to preserve trust with patrons. Harnessing patrons' testimonials has significant implications for library marketing strategies. By leveraging social proof, libraries can enhance credibility and reputation, attract new patrons, and retain existing ones (Sánchez *et al.,* 2021). Incorporating testimonials into marketing initiatives humanizes the library brand, fostering stronger connections and engagement with the community (Alvarez-Monzoncillo, 2022). In summary, patrons' testimonials are a valuable asset for libraries, offering authentic endorsements that can be strategically utilized to enhance marketing initiatives, build trust, and engage the community.

Opportunities for Libraries to Partner with Local Influencers

In the digital age, local influencers wield significant influence over consumer behaviour and community engagement, making them valuable partners for libraries seeking to expand their reach and enhance their impact. Local influencers, through their social media presence, expertise, or community involvement, hold sway over specific audiences. Alvarez-Monzoncillo (2022) highlights their role in shaping consumer perceptions and driving engagement. Within the library context, local influencers can help libraries reach new audiences, build credibility, and foster meaningful community connections (Sánchez *et al.,* 2021).

Potential Benefits

1. Increased Visibility and Patronage: Influencers can amplify library marketing messages, increasing visibility and attracting new patrons through their established networks (Hayes, 2023).

2. Authenticity and Trust: Influencers' endorsements are perceived as genuine recommendations, enhancing the credibility of library promotions (Kapoor, 2018).

3. Insights into Audience Preferences: Influencers can provide libraries with valuable insights into the preferences and interests of their target audiences, aiding in more effective marketing (Osinulu *et al.,* 2018).

Strategies for Successful Partnerships

1. Identifying Aligned Influencers: Libraries should identify influencers whose values, interests, and audiences align with their mission and target demographics (Jacob & Olajide, 2018).

2. Building Genuine Relationships: Establishing mutual respect and shared goals is essential for fostering trust and collaboration (Dauda & Daksiri, 2020).

3. Offering Meaningful Engagement Opportunities: Libraries can host events, workshops, or collaborative projects to create value for both influencers and the community (Sarin & Pal, 2014).

Partnering with local influencers can significantly enhance library marketing and community outreach efforts. By leveraging influencers' reach and influence, libraries can extend their reach, boost credibility, and foster stronger community connections (Hayes, 2023). These partnerships also provide opportunities to showcase library resources, services, and programs in creative and engaging ways, appealing to diverse audiences and driving increased engagement (Kapoor, 2018). In summary, local influencers play a significant role in consumer behaviour and community engagement, presenting libraries with promising collaboration opportunities. Partnering with local influencers offers a strategic avenue for libraries to expand their impact, enhance credibility, and engage more effectively with their communities. While challenges exist, careful planning and ethical considerations can help libraries harness the full potential of these collaborations.

Methodology

This study employed a descriptive research design. The population of the study comprises 49 librarians and library officers working in the library. Other categories of library staff, such as administrative staff, were delimited from this study to focus specifically on individuals directly involved with library resources and services. A purposive sampling technique was utilized to select participants who have substantial interaction with the library and can provide valuable insights into the effectiveness of WOMM. Data collection was conducted using a questionnaire. Data analysis involved descriptive statistics, including frequency and mean ($\bar{x}$) with criterion mean placed at 2.50, to interpret the data collected.

Results

Table 1a: Frequency of Spreading Word about our Library's Resources and Services

Statements	Frequency	$\bar{x}$

Frequently	8	
Occasionally	33	2.96
Rarely	6	
Never	2	
Criterion Mean		2.50

The calculated mean of 2.96 is higher than the criterion mean of 2.50. This indicates that, on average, respondents report spreading the word about the library's resources and services occasionally. This suggests a generally positive trend in promoting the library's resources and services. However, it also implies that respondents are not very active in this regard. Therefore, there is room for improvement in the library's communication and outreach efforts to encourage more active promotion by users.

Table 1b: Benefits of Leveraging Word-of-Mouth Marketing in Promoting Library Resources and Services

Statements	Frequency	Percentage (%)
Builds trust and credibility	4	8.2
Increases patron involvement and engagement	49	100.0
Expands reach within the community	33	67.3
Enhances visibility and awareness	48	98.0
Fosters meaningful patron connections	45	91.8

All respondents strongly support increasing patron involvement and engagement, with 100% agreement, closely followed by enhancing visibility and awareness, which received support from 98% of respondents. However, opinions diverge on other aspects: expanding reach within the community garnered 67% support while fostering meaningful patron connections had strong support from 91.8% of respondents. Notably, building trust and credibility received very low support, at only 8.2%.

Table 1c: Effectiveness of Word-of-Mouth Marketing (WOMM) in Promoting Library Resources and Services

Statements	Frequency	$\bar{x}$
Very effective	17	
Moderately effective	18	2.90
Slightly effective	6	
Not effective at all	8	
Criterion Mean		2.50

The calculated mean of 2.90, being higher than the criterion mean of 2.50, suggests that respondents perceive the action or initiative to be moderate to very effective. This indicates a positive perception of the effectiveness of the action or initiative among the respondents.

Table 2: Physical Spaces within the Library

Statements	Frequency	$\bar{x}$
Excellent	31	
Good	15	3.57
Fair	3	
Poor	0	
Criterion Mean		2.50

The calculated mean of 3.57, surpassing the criterion mean of 2.50, indicates that respondents perceive the quality of the current physical spaces within the Delta State University library as significantly conducive to word-of-mouth advertising. This suggests a positive perception of the physical spaces' effectiveness in facilitating word-of-mouth advertising among respondents. Furthermore, the absence of responses in the 'Poor' category reinforces the notion that respondents generally view the statement positively, indicating a favourable overall perception of the quality of current physical spaces within the library for this purpose.

Table 3a: Collection of Testimonials from Patrons Regarding Their Experiences

Statements	Frequency	Percentage (%)
Yes	34	69.4
No	15	30.6
Total	49	100.0

The majority of respondents (69.5%) agreed that they collect testimonials from patrons regarding their experiences with library resources and services, while a minority (30.6%) disagreed.

Table 3b: Methods of Collection of Testimonials

Statements	Frequency	Percentage (%)
Surveys	44	89.8
Usage notebook	49	100.0
Feedback forms	0	0.0
Comment cards	0	0.0
Online reviews	0	0.0

All respondents (100.0%) reported using usage notebooks, indicating widespread utilization of this method for feedback or evaluation. Surveys are also commonly used, with 89.8% of respondents reporting their utilization. However, feedback forms, comment cards, and online reviews were not utilized by any of the respondents. These findings suggest a clear preference for certain feedback methods, such as usage notebooks and surveys, over others.

Table 3c: Utilisation of Patron's Testimonials in Enhancing Library Marketing Initiatives

Statements	Frequency	$\bar{x}$
Very effectively	9	
Moderately effectively	28	2.86
Slightly effectively	8	
Not effective at all	7	
Criterion Mean		2.50

The calculated mean of 2.86, being higher than the criterion mean of 2.50, suggests that respondents perceive the utilization of patron testimonials to be moderate to very effective in enhancing library marketing initiatives. This indicates a positive perception of the effectiveness of utilizing patron testimonials among respondents.

Table 4a: Existing Partnerships Between Library, and Local Influencers

Statements	Frequency	Percentage (%)
Yes	49	100.0
No	0	0.0
Total	49	100.0

All respondents (100.0%) reported the existence of partnerships between the library and local influencers. This indicates widespread acknowledgment of such partnerships among the respondents. The unanimous agreement on the existence of partnerships suggests that collaborations with local influencers are an integral part of the library's strategy for outreach, promotion, or community engagement.

Table 4b: Potential Benefits of Partnering with Local Influencers

Statements	Frequency	Percentage (%)
Amplifying marketing messages	12	24.5
Increasing visibility	49	100.0
Attracting new patrons	44	89.8
Building credibility	35	71.4
Providing valuable insights into target audiences	46	93.9

All respondents (100.0%) recognized increasing visibility as a potential benefit of partnering with local influencers, indicating unanimous agreement on its effectiveness. Additionally, 93.9% of respondents acknowledged the potential for local influencers to provide valuable insights into target audiences, while 89.8% indicated that attracting new patrons is another potential benefit. Building credibility was identified by 71.4% of respondents as a potential benefit. However, only 24.5% of respondents identified amplifying marketing messages as a potential benefit. These findings suggest that partnering with local

influencers is perceived to have various benefits, including increased visibility, attracting new patrons, and gaining valuable insights into target audiences.

Discussion of Findings

The findings reveal that librarians generally understand word-of-mouth marketing (WOMM) and often promote their library's resources, showing a positive trend in advocacy. However, most have not directly observed WOMM being used for this purpose. Many librarians actively advocate for the e-library and stress the need for electricity and data access for browsing, indicating strong support for these services. They unanimously support initiatives to increase patron engagement, visibility, and community reach, viewing these efforts as moderately to very effective.

These findings align with Hayes (2023), which highlighted the use of personal recommendations in WOMM to promote library awareness and interest. Hayes suggested methods like community events and book clubs to facilitate WOMM. The current study and Hayes both indicate that librarians understand and engage with WOMM. While librarians have not widely observed WOMM in action, Hayes's recommendations suggest ways to enhance its implementation. Both studies underscore the importance of patron involvement and the effectiveness of WOMM in promoting library resources and fostering community engagement.

The findings indicated that librarians perceived the quality of the current physical spaces within the Delta State University library as significantly conducive to word-of-mouth marketing (WOMM). This suggests a positive perception of these spaces' effectiveness in facilitating WOMM among respondents. This finding aligns with Sarin and Pal's (2014) study, which highlights the importance of environments that encourage collaboration and meaningful interactions, thereby stimulating word-of-mouth conversations among patrons. Sarin and Pal noted that the layout and design of library spaces can influence patrons' perceptions of the library and their likelihood of recommending it to others. Similarly, Osinulu *et al.* (2018) stated that libraries can optimize their physical environments to encourage positive word-of-mouth recommendations by strategically designing spaces that foster collaboration, provide access to resources, and create a welcoming atmosphere.

In conclusion, all studies collectively emphasize the importance of well-designed, collaborative, and welcoming physical spaces in libraries as a significant factor in promoting positive word-of-mouth marketing.

Findings revealed that librarians collect testimonials from patrons regarding their experiences with library resources and services. All librarians reported using usage notebooks, indicating widespread utilization of this method for feedback and evaluation. Surveys are also commonly used. These findings suggest a clear preference for certain feedback methods, such as usage notebooks and surveys, over others. Librarians perceived

the utilization of patron testimonials to be moderate to very effective in enhancing library marketing initiatives, indicating a positive perception among respondents.

These findings align with Alvarez-Monzoncillo (2022), who underscores the importance of social proof in influencing consumer behaviour, highlighting the impact of positive testimonials on building trust and credibility. Within the library context, patrons' testimonials provide valuable insights into the perceived value and quality of library offerings, helping to attract and retain patrons. Similarly, Dauda and Daksiri (2020) indicated that libraries employ various methods to collect patrons' testimonials effectively, including surveys, feedback forms, comment cards, and online reviews. Therefore, testimonials serve as authentic endorsements of library resources and services, leveraging social proof to build trust, credibility, and engagement within the community.

In summary, patrons' testimonials are a valuable asset for libraries, offering authentic endorsements that can be strategically utilized to enhance marketing initiatives, build trust, and engage the community. Therefore, these studies collectively underscore the significance of patron testimonials in library marketing. They highlight the effectiveness of collecting and using testimonials to build trust, credibility, and engagement, aligning closely with the concepts of social proof and strategic feedback utilization.

All librarians reported the existence of partnerships between the library and local influencers, indicating widespread acknowledgment of such collaborations. The unanimous agreement suggests that these partnerships are an integral part of the library's strategy for outreach, promotion, and community engagement. Additionally, all librarians recognized benefits such as increased visibility, attracting new patrons, and gaining valuable insights into target audiences. These findings suggest that partnering with local influencers is perceived to have various advantages, including increased visibility, attracting new patrons, and building credibility.

These findings align with Sánchez *et al.* (2021), who noted that local influencers can help libraries reach new audiences, build credibility, and foster meaningful connections with the community. Similarly, Hayes (2023) indicated that collaborating with local influencers offers several benefits for libraries, such as amplifying their marketing messages, increasing visibility, and attracting new patrons through their established networks and followers. Conclusively, these studies collectively underscore the value of partnerships between libraries and local influencers. They highlighted the benefits such collaborations bring, including increased visibility, attracting new patrons, building credibility, and gaining insights into target audiences, thereby enhancing the overall effectiveness of library outreach and marketing strategies.

Conclusion

The study concluded that librarians generally understand word-of-mouth marketing (WOMM), actively promote their library's resources, and unanimously support effective

initiatives to increase patron engagement, visibility, and community reach. Using methods like usage notebooks and surveys, the librarians frequently gather testimonials from patrons, which they perceive as effective in enhancing marketing initiatives. The benefits of partnerships with local influencers underscore the value of these collaborations in increasing visibility, attracting new patrons, and building credibility.

Recommendations

Based on the findings derived from this study, the following recommendations are hereby put forward:

1. Organize events such as community talks, workshops, and book clubs to stimulate word-of-mouth marketing (WOMM) activities.
2. Design and maintain library spaces that foster positive patron experiences and WOMM, while continually incorporating patron feedback to ensure these spaces meet community needs.
3. Use diverse methods, including digital feedback forms and social media reviews, to gather and leverage patron testimonials.
4. Collaborate with local influencers to amplify the library's message, reach new audiences, and engage them in library events and initiatives to enhance community connection and visibility.

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