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## EXPLORING MARKETING LANDSCAPE OF INFORMATION SERVICES IN ACADEMIC LIBRARIES OF PAKISTAN: A MIXED-METHOD APPROACH

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**Abstract**

**Purpose:** The aim of this study was to explore the marketing strategies used by Pakistani academic libraries to promote their resources and services among users. **Methodology:** An explanatory sequential mixed-methods research approach was used to achieve the objectives of the study. The study was completed in two phases. In the first phase, the data was collected through a questionnaire from chief librarians of 24 public and private sector university libraries located in the province of Khyber Pakhtunkhwa. In the second phase, data were gathered through a focus group interview of five prominent library leaders. **Findings:** The findings of this study revealed that academic libraries in Khyber Pakhtunkhwa were using a variety of marketing strategies for the promotion of information resources and services such as the library's website/web OPAC, social media, notice board, and hosting orientation programs for newly enrolled students. This study also explored that only a few libraries had marketing policies in written form while most of them were missing the written marketing policy. The reasons for confined marketing strategies were a lack of awareness among librarians about how to market services and resources, a lack of access to IT, and a dearth of support from the university administration. The study identified that uniform policy, motivation, ICT, collaboration, and awareness are crucial factors for effective and sustainable library marketing. The research findings would be useful for university library administrators to evaluate and improve the marketing strategies for their library resources.

**Keywords:** Marketing Library Services; Academic Libraries Resources And Services; Academic Library Marketing Strategies.

**Introduction and Background of the Study**

The library, functioning as the heart or nervous system of the university, caters to a diverse community comprising teachers, students, research scholars, and administrators. In the digital age, academic libraries face challenges such as financial constraints, the integration of emerging technologies, evolving environments, and changing demands from library users (Yi, 2016). Unlike in the past, university libraries are no longer the sole option for users seeking to physically access information, as stated by Kumar (2017). To attract and raise awareness among both library and non-library users, academic librarians must employ effective marketing strategies to promote available resources and services (Velasquez & Campbell-Meier, 2018). According to Buriro et al. (2018), marketing library resources and services is an important determinant in the field of Library and Information Science (LIS), playing a vital role in keeping users informed about the latest arrivals in libraries. Consequently, developing vibrant marketing skills is essential for enhancing the library's value and expanding its user base (Canzoneri, 2015). Globally, libraries offer innovative tools to provide 24/7 accessibility to resources and services (Abbas et al., 2017; Muhammad & Zhewei, 2022). Various researchers have recommended different types of library resources and services, including reference services, circulation and interlibrary loans, selective dissemination of information, bibliographic information, and abstracting and indexing services (Anaehobi & Odume, 2020). Additionally, customized research and development, current awareness, reader advisory, and information literacy services have been proposed for effective marketing (Withorn et al., 2021).

Academic library marketing involves planning to manage an organization's exchange relations with its clientele or users, as indicated in a study by Lamba (2017). Studies in academic library marketing focus on identifying market needs to design suitable

products or services through effective pricing (user satisfaction), communication, and distribution to inform, motivate, and serve the market, as discussed by Idress et al. (2016). The strategies employed in academic library marketing encompass processes and efforts to attract increased usage from both existing library users and non-users through enhanced promotional activities, as noted by Jesubright and Saravanan (2019). Libraries actively engage in marketing to introduce new features, such as providing more personalized assistance or incorporating different types of media like non-book information materials (video, e-books, e-journals, and virtual library services) to attract a broader clientele (Baden et al., 2020). Trends in academic libraries include changes in services and resources, content delivery, and the reconfiguration and reshaping of library structures. The provision of satisfactory services and resources plays a pivotal role in the success of academic library marketing during this transitional period (Butt et al., 2023).

Marketing of Library Resources and Services (MLRS) is identified as an emerging discipline in library and information science (Buriro et al., 2018). Globally, comprehensive marketing plans are developed for various types of libraries, including academic, public, schools, and special libraries (Muzvondiwa & Marutha, 2022; Samah et al., 2021; Suthiprapa & Tuamsuk, 2021; AlAwadhi & Al-Daihani, 2019). However, despite Pakistani library professionals' familiarity with the concept of marketing strategies, the full implementation of marketing strategies in academic libraries is an aspect that is yet to be realized in its true spirit in the coming years (Soroya & Ameen, 2021; Baber et al., 2020; Abbas et al., 2017; Idrees & Rehman, 2009). In Pakistan, there are 282 universities recognized by the Higher Education Commission (HEC). These universities are categorized into the public and private sectors. Specifically, in Khyber Pakhtunkhwa, a province in the northwest of Pakistan, there are 40 universities recognized by the HEC. Among these, 29 are in the public sector, while the remaining 21 operate in the private sector (Higher Education Commission, 2023). Each university in Khyber Pakhtunkhwa has a central library led by a director or chief librarian. The purpose of the current study is to illuminate the marketing practices employed by university libraries in the province of Khyber Pakhtunkhwa, Pakistan. This research aims to inform other academic and research libraries about diverse marketing strategies implemented across various university libraries in Pakistan. Additionally, it seeks to draw the attention of professional association bodies to this challenge, encouraging positive initiatives to enhance marketing skills within the field of library and information sciences.

### **Literature Review**

Green initially introduced the concept of marketing libraries in 1876 at an American Library Association convention, emphasizing the improvement of personal relations between readers and libraries (Shapiro, 2014). Later, Philip Kotler (1975) introduced marketing services in non-profit organizations. Naseri *et al.* (2023) emphasized the growing importance of digital marketing in library and information science, noting that libraries must modify their marketing plans for the digital era to attract and retain consumers. The study involved experts in digital marketing who rated and weighed individual components, concluding that successful marketing initiatives depend on creating high-quality digital content. Certain elements, such as social media presence and multimedia creation, were deemed crucial for successful digital marketing in libraries. Withorn et al. (2021) examined

library instruction and information literacy, emphasizing their importance in promoting effective use of resources and enhancing information-seeking skills. The article provided an analysis of the latest trends and developments in the field, offering valuable insights for researchers and practitioners. Yi (2016) focuses on effective techniques for promoting library services and resources, emphasizing strategies to raise awareness and engage users. Velasquez and Campbell-Meier (2018) explore marketing practices in Australian libraries, discussing key themes such as branding, communication, target audience identification, and the integration of marketing into library operations. Jeremia and Mwantimwa (2022) examined marketing strategies for hybrid library collections, emphasizing the need for competencies to navigate the changing landscape of academic libraries. They address challenges and stress the importance of tailored marketing initiatives. Suthiprapa and Tuamsuk (2021) recognize the significance of reference services in Thai academic libraries, emphasizing the role of marketing in shaping user experiences. Shapiro (2014) highlights the use of discovery tools as electronic billboards for library marketing, emphasizing customization and user engagement. Samah et al. (2021) explored the self-directed learning traits of research-support librarians in Malaysia, emphasizing the relationship between these traits and competencies, advocating for continuous professional development and marketing policies. These studies collectively offer insights into various aspects of library marketing and user engagement.

Various authors, such as Soroya & Ameen (2021), Baber et al. (2020), and Abbas et al. (2017), have analyzed the content, strategies, or status of university libraries in Pakistan concerning marketing. They examined marketing concepts in libraries, emphasizing the need for marketing introspection in Pakistani academic libraries to meet the demands of the 21st-century society. Their results recommended a shift from product-oriented to customer-oriented and collection-centered to client-centered libraries in Pakistan (Ameen & Waraich, 2007). In 2009, a survey of 52 academic and public libraries in Pakistan assessed various aspects of web 2.0 and library 2.0 using a 77-item checklist. The study found no directory to locate library websites in the country, and there was a lack of scholarly literature on the topic. The absence of uniformity in library websites and standards for content selection was identified as a common barrier (Qutab & Mahmood, 2009). Also in 2009, another study presented a marketing plan for libraries in Pakistan, emphasizing that library services marketing is an emerging discipline in library and information studies in the country. The plan aimed to provide professionals with a method to prepare, present, review, and implement library marketing plans in different types of libraries in Pakistan, introducing a third-party marketing plan as a unique aspect (Idress & Rahman, 2009). In 2011, a research study on Web 2.0 use and its implications for libraries in Pakistan involved an online survey and interviews with information professionals. The findings revealed professionals' commitment to using Web 2.0 applications for better library services, recommending the integration of Web 2.0 components in curricula and hands-on training, along with the inclusion of these elements on library websites for increased awareness and marketing (Rahman & Shafique, 2011). A case study in Pakistan examined the application of social media sites for library marketing, discussing the shift from Web 1.0 to Web 2.0 and new challenges for libraries. The study investigated the attitudes of librarians and LIS school academicians at the Islamia University of Bahawalpur

(IUB) and Bahauddin Zakariya University (BZU), Multan, toward using social media for library marketing. Findings indicated a positive attitude, with the majority supporting the use of social media to capture the attention of online users. The study recommended leveraging social networking sites for marketing various library services in the academic environment (Khan & Bhatti, 2012). Another study explored the challenges faced by LIS professionals at university libraries in South Punjab, Pakistan, in the context of library marketing. Librarians at the university were the target population, and descriptive statistics were used for data analysis with SPSS. Results revealed that many respondents agreed that marketing could be applied in libraries similarly to commercial or profit-making organizations. Some professionals considered marketing primarily for promotion and suggested using new information channels for timely service and product delivery (Asghar & Bhatti, 2014). A descriptive survey method, utilizing a questionnaire, was employed to collect data on the role and implications of web 2.0 technologies for marketing and promotional activities by Pakistani university libraries. Out of 78 responses considered usable for analysis, the study revealed that the primary purpose of Web 2.0 in libraries is to market resources and services, creating awareness about new arrivals. The study recommended that all library professionals in the country should learn Web 2.0 technology to save time for users and enhance the quality of library services (Shah & Ahmad, 2016).

Another study focused on university libraries' websites in Pakistan to assess the extent to which these sites are used for marketing. Reviewing 148 university websites, the quantitative study found that 13% of universities lacked library websites, and only 55% had a direct link to their library websites. Most universities did not use their library websites for marketing, with public sector universities having more developed websites than private ones. Ignorance of the marketing perspective led to many students being unaware of accessing available data. The study recommended that university libraries plan to develop their websites with a student-friendly design to maximize benefits and improve library access through the inclusion of marketing features (Abbas et al., 2017).

Several studies in Pakistan explored the application of marketing approaches in academic and public libraries. In Punjab University libraries, a survey revealed that librarians understand marketing techniques for promotional purposes but do not apply them to the required extent, suggesting the implementation of a marketing mix for resource and service promotion (Soroya & Ameen, 2017). In the province of Punjab, another study examined marketing applications in 46 public libraries, finding that while the marketing mix was not fully utilized, existing services aligned with its principles. The study suggested that library professionals should implement marketing techniques at a higher level for a better community image (Waheed et al., 2017). An analysis of the Marketing Mix application in public sector university libraries in Jamshoro, Sindh, Pakistan, indicated that library users had positive responses toward information services and the 4Ps of marketing. The study recommended adopting various promotional methods to increase the use of library services and resources (Rind & Mirjat, 2020).

### **Problem Statement**

Pakistan faces a critical challenge in its academic libraries: the absence of a stimulated marketing plan as highlighted by Rind and Mirjat (2020) and supported by Soroya and Ameen (2021), stems from inefficient library associations, outdated policies, and curricula.

Further, the main concern is the lack of a strategic marketing plan, exacerbated by challenges such as information explosion, evolving user demands, and changing information requirements. This places academic libraries under immense pressure to adapt effectively. Recognizing the pivotal role of library staff, it becomes imperative to equip them with the necessary knowledge and skills. The current state of marketing practices in Pakistani university libraries, as revealed in the literature, is far from encouraging. With academic libraries serving as vital pillars supporting research, teaching, and learning, a decline in productivity threatens these fundamental objectives. Implementing effective marketing practices holds the potential to yield positive outcomes, supporting organizational goals. The librarian's role as a marketing leader emerges as a key focus in this study, aiming to investigate strategies that not only motivate users but also enhance the capacities of library staff to successfully achieve organizational objectives.

### **Research objectives**

The study main objective of this study was to:

- Know awareness level of academic librarians about the marketing of library resources and services in Khyber Pakhtunkhwa (KP), Pakistan.
- Identify strategies used for marketing library resources and services in academic libraries of KP, Pakistan.
- Explore the challenges faced by the university librarians regarding marketing library resources and services in KP, Pakistan.
- Asses the competencies required by academic librarians for marketing of library resources and service in KP, Pakistan.
- Determine the status of marketing policy in the academic libraries of KP, Pakistan.

### **Research Question**

1. What is the level of awareness among academic librarians about the marketing of library resources and services in Khyber Pakhtunkhwa, Pakistan?
2. What strategies are employed by academic libraries in Khyber Pakhtunkhwa, Pakistan for the marketing of library resources and services?
3. What are the challenges faced by university librarians in Khyber Pakhtunkhwa, Pakistan when marketing their libraries?
4. What competencies are required by academic librarians in Khyber Pakhtunkhwa, Pakistan for effectively marketing library resources and services?
5. What is the status of marketing policies in academic libraries in Khyber Pakhtunkhwa, Pakistan?

### **Research Methodology**

This research study employed a sequential mixed methods research (MMR) design, comprising two phases: a quantitative strand followed by a qualitative strand. In the initial phase, an online survey method was utilized as the quantitative strand, chosen for its effectiveness in quickly collecting information from a geographically dispersed target population (Rafiq et al., 2017). Concurrently, a focus group interview with leading experts from the university library cadre was conducted in the qualitative strand to obtain insights. The adoption of MMR aimed to enhance understanding by combining both qualitative and quantitative methods. While the survey collected quantitative data, the focus group interview provided qualitative insights. Notably, previous studies in other provinces of

Pakistan have explored marketing strategies in university libraries, excluding the Khyber Pakhtunkhwa Province Pakistan (Khan & Bhatti, 2012; Asghar & Bhatti, 2014; Soroya & Ameen, 2017; Abbas et al., 2017; Waheed et al., 2017; Buriro, et al., 2018; Rind & Mirjat, 2020; Soroya & Ameen, 2021; Parveen & Faqir, 2022). Therefore, this study is limited to the Khyber Pakhtunkhwa province and focuses specifically on university main/center libraries recognized by the Higher Education Commission (HEC), listed by the Higher Education Department (HED), and chartered by the Government of KP.

The data collection tool was developed through a comprehensive literature review. A semi-structured questionnaire was created, and pilot testing was conducted with five library and information science professionals/experts to ensure validity. Minor changes suggested by the experts were incorporated into the questionnaire. The questionnaire included six sections, covering demographic data and the required fields for objectives and research questions. The final questionnaire was loaded into Google survey forms for easy, accurate, and timely data collection from the targeted respondents. The list of universities was obtained from the official website of the HEC at <https://hec.gov.pk/>. In Pakistan, there are 282 higher educational institutes authorized to award degrees. In the KP province, 40 institutes of higher studies are chartered by the KP Government and recognized by HEC-Islamabad, with 29 being public sector institutes and the rest serving in the private sector.

For the first phase of survey data collection, the final tested research questionnaire was shared with librarians working in the universities via emails and social media inboxes. Telephonic calls and SMSs (Short Message Services) were used as follow-up tools. Out of the 40 central libraries in KP, only 24 (60%) responded by filling up the questionnaire. Despite several reminders, the remaining respondents did not submit the required data for this research study. Finally, valid responses were entered into Microsoft Excel Sheets to ensure data accuracy. The quantitative data were analyzed using SPSS (Statistical Package for the Social Sciences) and presented in the analysis section using percentages, mean, and standard deviation.

In the second phase, a qualitative strand, a call for focus group (FG) participation was made to ten (10) library heads. Five out of ten responded and agreed to participate. An FG with five experts was conducted using a WhatsApp group call option. An interview guide with four themes was prepared, and the participants' perceptions were explored. The focus group lasted for 45 minutes and focused on the following key themes:

1. Core reasons for the non-availability of a marketing policy in the university library.
2. Strategies for enhancing/improving the marketing skills of library professionals by university management.
3. Possible solutions for challenges faced by university librarians, including lack of funds, limited interest from authorities, absence of marketing policy, and non-inclusion in decision-making regarding libraries.
4. Experiences related to communication, marketing, and ICT as fundamental skills for marketing library resources and services.

The above-mentioned themes were derived from the survey results obtained in the first phase. The focus group interview participants were the head/chief librarians of the library who had agreed to participate. The interviews were conducted by the authors. Themes were

derived from the focus group interviews, which were audio recorded and transcribed. Each participant in the focus group was assigned a unique identifier (FGP1 to FGP5) to ensure anonymity and confidentiality. Thematic content analysis was performed using NVivo software, and codes were assigned to each question. The themes emerged from the analyzed data. After data scanning, analysis, and interpretation, the results were presented in the analysis section and discussed based on the results from both phases of the study, followed by recommendations.

#### Data Analysis and Results

**Table 1:** *Demographic Information of Respondents*

Demographic	Frequency	Percent
Gender		
Male	19	79.17
Female	5	20.83
Age (in years)		
25 to 35	11	45.83
36 to 45	10	41.67
45 and above	3	12.50
Qualification		
MS/M.Phil	10	41.67
MLIS/BS-LIS	14	58.33
Year of Establishment		
Before 1947-2000	5	20.83
2001-2010	12	50.00
2011-2020	7	29.17
University Sector		
Public	17	70.83
Private	7	29.17
Experience (in years)		
Up to 5	4	16.67
6 to 10	7	29.17
11 to 15	9	37.50
16 and above	4	16.67
Job Title		
Assistant Librarian	14	58.33
Librarian	5	20.83
Deputy Librarian	3	12.50
Library In-charge	2	8.33

**Demographic Information:** Out of 24 respondents, 19 (79.17%) were male, and 5 (20.83%) were female. The age group of respondents ranged from 25 to 45 (78.50%) years with experience in librarianship up to 15 (83.33%). Fourteen (58.33%) were Master's Degree holders, followed by 10 (41.67%) who were M.Phil (Master of Philosophy) with eighteen years of professional schooling. (87.50%) Fourteen (58.33%) respondents indicated their job title as assistant librarians, and 5 (20.83%) were librarians. The University library led by non-professionals was 2 (8.33%) in KP. The universities established from 1965 to 2000

were 5 (20.83%) presented in Table 1.

*Status of Marketing Policy:* The respondents asked about the current status of the library marketing policy. Figure 1 presents the current situation of marketing policy at university libraries. The majority of 21 (87.50%) have no policy, while only 3 (12.50%) library heads claim they have a marketing policy for the university library.

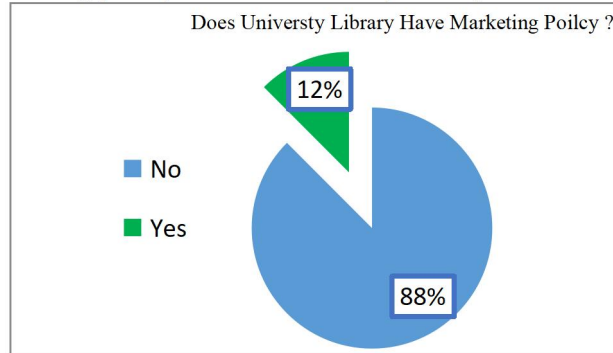


Figure 1: Status of Marketing Policy at University Libraries



Figure 2: Awareness of Respondents about Marketing Strategies

*Awareness about Marketing Strategies:* Respondents of the study were asked to indicate whether they know, don't know, or only heard about mentioned strategies for marketing library resources and services (MLRS) in universities. Figure 2 analysis revealed that the notice boards of the university and website/library web-PAC were the most popular, 20 (83.33%), while 4 (16.67%) admitted they only heard. Nineteen (79.17%) of the respondents indicated that they know social media as a tool used for marketing. The majority of 18 (75%) admitted that orientation exercises and library publications/book exhibitions are the tools used for MLRS at university libraries. About one-fourth (25%) of the participants do not know about the marketing strategy as; friends of the library/reader club, followed by World book & copyright day celebration and pasting posters or flyers for MLRS (16.67%) each.

Table 2: Use of Strategies for Marketing in the Universities Libraries of KP

S. No	Statements	N	Min	Max	Mean	SD
1	Orientation exercise	24	1	5	2.67	1.494
2	Notices board of university	24	1	5	2.71	1.233
3	Flyers/posters	24	1	5	2.12	1.191
4	Library publications/book exhibition	24	1	5	2.54	1.414
5	World book & copyright day	24	1	5	2.12	1.361
6	Friends of library/ reader club	24	1	5	2.00	1.251

7	Library awareness SMS/Emails	24	1	5	2.50	1.615
8	Social media	24	1	5	3.04	1.459
9	Website/library web-PAC	24	1	5	3.08	1.349
10	Radio/TV/newspaper	24	1	5	2.21	1.215

*Strategies Currently Used in Academic Libraries:* Table 2 shows the frequency of utilization of strategies by respondents. The respondents were asked to indicate their level of utilization of strategies in MLRS based on a five points scale from 1 to 5 where (1) = not use and (5) = very frequently use. The results show that the frequently used strategy for MLRS is university website / library web-PAC (M = 3.08, SD = 1.349), followed by social media (M = 3.04, SD = 1.459), and Orientation exercise (M = 2.67, SD = 1.494). Other strategies mentioned were notices board of the university (M = 2.71, SD = 12.33), Library publications / book exhibition (M = 2.45, SD = 1.414) and Library awareness SMS / Emails (M = 2.50, SD = 1.615). The flyer/poster (M = 2.12, SD = 1.191), friends of library / reader club (M = 2.00, SD = 1.251), and celebration of world book & copyright day (M = 2.12, SD = 1.361), these strategies were indicated to be the least used by librarians for marketing.

**Table 3:** *Competencies and Skills Required by Librarians*

S. No.	Statements	Mean	SD
1	Good communication skills	1.38	0.711
2	Information technology skills	1.50	0.780
3	Ability to answer users' queries	1.42	0.776
4	Ability to sell idea/library services	1.75	0.794
5	Ability to question & evaluate library services	1.54	0.721
6	Interpersonal skills	1.50	0.780

*Competencies and Skills Required by Academic Librarians:* Table 3 shows the competencies and skills required by the professional working in the higher educational academic intuitions. The participants were asked to warrant the answers from 1 to 4, where (1) = strongly agree and (4) = disagree. The results shows that most of the responded strongly agree on good communication skills (M = 1.38, SD = 0.711) followed by ability to answer user queries (M = 1.42, SD = 0.776), interpersonal skills and information technology competencies (M = 1.50, SD = 0.780). It is noteworthy that all the skills and competencies were accepted.

**Table 4:** *Challenges Faced by University Librarians*

Statements	Mean	SD
In-adequate fund	1.75	0.847
Management does not have marketing policy	1.71	0.751
Lack of facilities to market library services	1.75	0.737
Lack of media access to marketing of academic library resources & services	1.92	0.717
Poor access to information technology	2.38	0.875
Management does not understand the concept of library marketing	2.00	0.933
Lack of training in marketing	1.54	0.721
Lack of effective communication between librarians and users	1.88	0.741
Librarians do not know how to market library resources & services	2.67	1.049

*Challenges Faced by University Librarians in the Marketing of Libraries:* Table 4 shows the

challenges faced by LIS professionals in implementing strategies for the MLRS. University library heads inquired to state the challenges faced from the Four points Likert scale of agreement from 1 to 4, where (1) = strongly agree and (4) = disagree. The results shows that a good number of the responded strongly agree on the lack of training in marketing (M = 1.54, SD = 0.741), followed by in-adequate funds (M = 1.75, SD = 0.847), university management does not have marketing policy (M = 1.71, SD = 0.751). Some other challenges are the lake of facilities to market library services (M = 1.75, SD = 0.737), management does not understand the concepts of library marketing (M = 2.00, SD = 0.933), lack of effective communication between librarians and users (M = 1.88, SD = 0.741) and lack of media access to marketing of academic library resources & services (M = 1.92, SD = 0.717). The respondents of the study show disagreement and reject the statement that librarians do not know how to market library resources and services (M = 2.67, SD = 1.049).

**Table 5:** *Themes of Suggestion from Respondents for MLRS in University Libraries (n=11)*

S. No	Themes extracted from respondents' suggestions	Frequency	Percent
1	Social media use as a marketing tool	2	11.11
2	Social media management /use	1	5.56
3	Email marketing to researcher	1	5.56
4	Search engines customizing for libraries	1	5.56
5	Video marketing for resources /services	1	5.56
6	Library staff motivation	3	16.67
7	Joint marketing policy for libraries	1	5.56
8	Uniform policy form HEC/HED	1	5.56
9	Developing authorities' interest in libraries	1	5.56
10	Library blogs and social media accounts	1	5.56
11	Involvement of management in marketing	1	5.56
12	Strategic planning for marketing of libraries	1	5.56
13	Showing strength of libraries and librarian	1	5.56
14	Appointment of qualified staff on vacant positions	1	5.56
15	Training of library personals	1	5.56

Table 5 shows themes suggested by respondents for improving the MLRS in university libraries of the province. Out of 24, only eleven give suggestions for uplifting the library's marketing in higher education. The motivation of the library staff was 16.67%, followed by social media use as a tool for marketing in university libraries. Other suggestions were the involvement of management in marketing, library blogs, and social media accounts, uniform policy from HEC/HED (Higher Education Commission/ Higher Education Department), the appointment of qualified staff for vacant positions, video marketing for resources /services, and Training of library personals 5.56% each.

#### **Focus Group Results**

A focus group (FG) discussion was conducted with five academic library experts. Their responses were combined thematically under each FG question.

**FG\_Q1.** *What are the core reasons for non-availability of marketing policy in the university library?*

The focus group question was related to the non-availability of marketing policy in the university library, and the responses from the participants provided various reasons for it. Focus Group Participant (FGP) - 1 mentioned three reasons for the non-availability of marketing policy. Firstly, there is a lack of awareness among LIS professionals about marketing. Secondly, there is less research on marketing of libraries. Lastly, there is no tradition of documentary policy in the library. FGP- 5 identified five reasons for the non-availability of marketing policy. Firstly, lack of resources, including insufficient financial or personnel resources, makes it challenging to create and implement a marketing policy. Secondly, there is a lack of awareness among library staff about the importance and benefits of marketing the library's services and resources. Thirdly, some libraries still rely on traditional methods of promoting their services and resources, such as word of mouth or physical signage, and may not see the need for a marketing policy. Fourthly, library staff does not have the necessary marketing expertise or training to develop a marketing policy. Lastly, some libraries may be resistant to change and hesitant to adopt new marketing strategies. FGP- 2 provided four reasons for the non-availability of marketing policy. Firstly, the products of LIS, including students and curriculum, provide less knowledge about marketing. Secondly, there is a lack of interest from the management. Thirdly, there is less or no interest of library staff in marketing. Lastly, there is limited research on library marketing in Pakistan. FGP- 4 suggested that policy making is not the job of the librarian alone. Rather, government authorities and LIS researchers should work together to produce policy and motivate staff. Additionally, the absence of top professional positions (Managers/chief Librarian) makes it difficult for lower staff to decide on behalf of the library. FGP- 3 also gave three reasons for the non-availability of marketing policy. Firstly, there is non-professional behavior and a lack of awareness about policy drafting. Secondly, the interest of management and affiliation accreditation bodies such as PMC, PNC, HEC, and HERA is necessary for marketing policy. Lastly, non-autonomous librarians are also a reason for the non-availability of marketing policy. Overall, the participants provided multiple reasons for the non-availability of marketing policy in the university library, including a lack of awareness, limited research, a focus on traditional methods, insufficient resources, and resistance to change. The responses suggest that a collaborative effort from government authorities, LIS researchers, management, and library staff is needed to address these issues and develop a marketing policy that can benefit the library and its users. The participants' opinions are shown as Figure 3 below.

Themes	Participants
1- Lack of Awareness and Knowledge	• FGP- 1, 5, 2, 3
2- Lack of Collaborative Effort	• FGP- 4, 3, 5
3- Insufficient Resources	• FGP- 4, 3, 5
4- Limited Research	• FGP- 1, 2
5- Resistance to Change	• FGP- 5

*Figure 3 Reasons for non-availability of marketing policy in the academic library*  
 FG\_Q2. *How, the university management can enhance/improve the marketing skills of library professionals?*

The responses provided by the participants to the focus group question regarding the ways university management can enhance/improve the marketing skills of library professionals reveal several interesting insights. FGP- 3 stresses the collaborative effort required for improving the marketing skills of library professionals. They suggest that library staff must take the initiative to start the process, while policymakers and researchers in the field of LIS need to uncover the marketing role to make management and staff aware of the significance of marketing skills. FGP- 2 highlights the importance of recognizing the efforts of library professionals by the university management. This recognition can motivate library professionals to improve their marketing skills and take initiatives to promote the library's services and resources. FGP- 1 suggests that university management should appoint qualified and experienced professionals to vacant positions and always consider the library as an integral part of the university, not just during accreditation/recognition visits. This recommendation emphasizes the importance of having qualified professionals in key positions to ensure that marketing policies and strategies are effectively implemented. FGP- 5 provides several practical recommendations that university management can adopt to enhance and improve the marketing skills of library professionals. These include providing marketing training and professional development opportunities, encouraging collaboration between the library and other university departments, conducting user research, using social media to promote library services and resources, and evaluating marketing efforts. FGP- 4 recommends that university management should provide trainings, funds, refresher courses, and involve library staff in the policy-making process. This approach would enable library staff to have the necessary skills and knowledge to create and implement effective marketing policies and strategies. Overall, the responses suggest that improving the marketing skills of library professionals requires a collaborative effort involving policymakers, researchers, management, and library staff. Providing training and professional development opportunities, recognizing and rewarding the efforts of library professionals, and involving library staff in policy-making and user research can enhance their marketing skills and help libraries effectively promote their services and resources.

The participants' opinions are shown as Figure 4 below.



*Figure 4 How to improve the marketing skills of professionals*

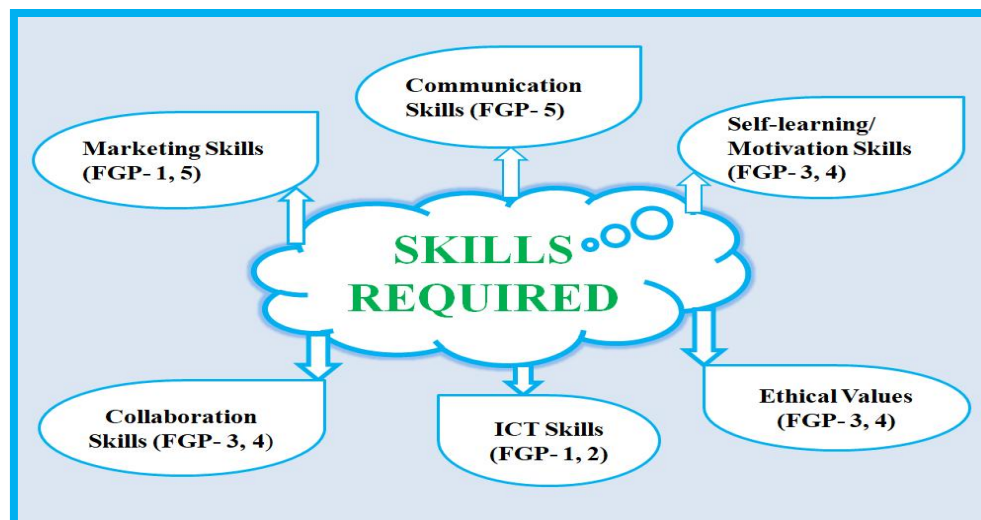
*FG\_Q3. University librarians faced many challenges include lack of funds, the interest of authorities, the absence of marketing policy, and non-inclusion in decision making regarding libraries. What is the possible solution for such challenges?*

The responses from participants in the focus group suggest several possible solutions for challenges faced by university librarians. The first solution suggested by FGP- 1 and 2 is to actively communicate and participate in the tasks of the university, as well as demonstrate the strength and importance of libraries to top management. This solution involves advocacy and collaboration efforts to raise awareness and secure support for libraries. FGP- 3 suggests that librarians can show their strength to stakeholders through services, workshops, seminars, orientations, and by introducing new ideas for research and innovation. This can help persuade university management to give libraries and librarians more space to operate and make decisions. FGP- 5 suggests several solutions, including advocacy, collaboration, partnerships, involvement in decision-making, and data-driven decision-making. These solutions are similar to those suggested by other participants, emphasizing the need for librarians to work collaboratively with other university departments and stakeholders to secure support and funding for libraries. Additionally, data-driven decision-making can help librarians make evidence-based decisions that are more likely to be effective and efficient. FGP- 4 highlights the challenge of absence of library leadership in university libraries. This suggests that a possible solution is to appoint qualified and experienced individuals to leadership positions in the library, who can then provide better direction and decision-making. Overall, the solutions suggested by the participants in the focus group involve a combination of advocacy, collaboration, partnerships, leadership, and data-driven decision-making. These solutions emphasize the importance of working with stakeholders to demonstrate the value of libraries and secure support for their operations. The participants' opinions are shown as Figure 5 below.



*Figure 5 Solutions to Challenges Faced by Academic Library Professional*  
**FG\_Q4. Communication, marketing, and ICT are fundamental skills for marketing library resources and services. Please, share your experiences?**

The participants' responses indicate that effective communication, marketing, and ICT skills are essential for marketing library resources and services. FGP- 1 emphasized the importance of a motivated and skilled staff, modern technologies, and proper use of available resources in promoting library resources and services. FGP- 2 specifically mentioned the importance of ICT skills, including automation, digitization, and social media use, as well as creating comprehensive library websites, social groups on social media, and email/SMS alerts. FGP- 3 highlighted self-learning, motivation, and teamwork with ethical values as key factors for LIS professionals. FGP- 4 emphasized the importance of interpretation skills, motivation, self-confidence, and valuing users' queries to make the library a center of excellence. Finally, FGP- 5 mentioned the crucial role of communication, marketing, and ICT skills in promoting library resources and services, specifically highlighting the need for effective communication, marketing strategies that reach target audiences, and the use of ICT tools to create and disseminate promotional materials and analyze user data. Overall, the responses suggest that to market library resources and services effectively, librarians should possess a variety of skills, including effective communication, marketing, and ICT skills, as well as interpretation, self-confidence, and valuing user queries. Additionally, librarians should be able to work collaboratively with their colleagues and with users to develop and implement marketing strategies that meet their needs and preferences. Finally, self-learning, motivation, teamwork, and ethical values are essential qualities that can help librarians improve their skills and make a positive impact on their library and the wider community. The participants' opinions are shown in Figure 6 below.



*Figure 6 Skills required for effective marketing of libraries.*

### Discussion

Marketing involves sharing and promoting resources and services, extending beyond the physical boundaries of the library (Suchek *et al.*, 2021). This inevitably means bringing library services directly to the patrons' doorsteps. Marketing provides academic libraries with the capability to engage with academia and the scholarly community in various ways (Symes, 2019). This study aims to examine the marketing techniques used by university libraries for their resources and services, assess the level of awareness, competencies or skills required, and the problems experienced by academic librarians. The targeted population of this study was all central/main library heads of higher education institutions in Khyber Pakhtunkhwa (KP), recognized by Higher Education Commission (HEC), Pakistan. The data was collected using a semi-structured questionnaire from the targeted university librarians using a census-based approach, followed by a focus group discussion. Many academic librarians are familiar with the techniques used for marketing library resources and services (MLRS). However, libraries have not fully embraced marketing as a working culture. Research on library marketing is also lagging compared to other emerging areas. The syllabi of master's programs in Library and Information Science (LIS) do not include provisions to discuss case studies that promote the marketing culture in libraries (Soroya & Ameen, 2021). Currently, LIS schools have started teaching marketing at the degree level as an optional subject (Parveen & Faqir, 2022). Developing countries struggle to conduct outreach programs to promote their library resources and services (Bhardwaj & Jain, 2016). Therefore, libraries should formulate a marketing policy and plan along with the annual budget for academic libraries.

The results have highlighted the competencies required by a university-level library professional, such as the ability to answer user queries, interpersonal skills, good communication, and ICT (Information communication technologies) competencies. Similarly, a study examined the skills of LIS professionals in Bangladesh and found similar results (Hossain & Sormunen, 2019), followed by an article from Kuwait (Buarki, 2016). The absence of a marketing policy, ignorance from top management, lack of marketing training, inadequate facilities, and insufficient funds are barriers to MLRS in academic libraries in Pakistan. Another study claimed that the COVID-19 pandemic, open access,

search engines, social media, and the integration of information and communication technologies have created new challenges and opportunities for delivering services to clients (Alajmi & Albudaiwi 2021). The results of the focus group discussion revealed a lack of motivation, vacant positions in top library management, and communication gaps with authorities, lack of interest from professionals, and a lack of in-service courses, workshops, seminars, and conferences. The low ratio of research on library marketing is also an issue faced by academic librarians. Another study supported the findings of the current study and highlighted the low-level use of social media platforms such as Facebook, blogs, Instagram, YouTube, Twitter, and email alerts for marketing (Edewor *et al.*, 2016). Therefore, promoting and marketing resources and services have become essential for libraries.

Accreditation agencies of academic institutions should consider the library marketing plan in grading and evaluation. Introducing marketing as a compulsory subject in the LIS curriculum and providing practical training during internships would be helpful for newcomers. At the same time, funding agencies of institutions should formulate guidelines for MLRS that can be used optimally. Developing a marketing strategy plan is essential for academic librarians. Including basic practical components of marketing, such as messages (emails, texts, voices, and letters), continuous announcements (notice boards, posters, flex, banners), anticipating openings (exhibitions, book fair, events) to market library resources and services, and showing interest in participating in institutional events (Aslam, 2018). Academic librarians are often questioned about expenses, resources, and services, so it is an essential duty of library professionals to develop a solid marketing plan and implement effective promotional practices.

The development of concrete marketing strategies supports the promotion of library resources and services. Everyone in academic libraries recognizes the significant role they play in active promotional plans within the institution and beyond. Successful marketing strategies increase the visibility of the library among faculty members and generate interest in the academic community. As a result, the library is more likely to receive financial support and due respect from the institution. The current study has opened up new avenues for LIS scholars to research the various aspects involved in promoting and marketing library resources and services. Further studies could also target the marketing plans, policies, and effectiveness of academic, public, school, and special libraries in Pakistan. Similar research studies could be carried out at the national level or in different states and provinces of Pakistan. In conclusion, marketing plays a crucial role in extending the reach of library resources and services beyond the physical boundaries of the library. Academic libraries need to adopt marketing as a working culture and formulate marketing policies and plans. Librarians should possess the necessary competencies and skills required for effective marketing, and there should be adequate training and support in this area. Overcoming barriers such as the lack of resources, funding, and support from top management are essential. By developing a solid marketing plan, implementing practical promotional practices, and integrating marketing into library operations, academic libraries can enhance their visibility, engage with the scholarly community, and ensure the optimal utilization of their resources and services.

### Direction for Further Research

The current study has opened new avenues for LIS scholars to explore multiple aspects related to the promotion and marketing of library resources and services. Further research can be conducted to target the marketing plans, policies, and effectiveness of academic, public, school, and special libraries in Pakistan. Comparative analysis can be undertaken to compare the strategies and approaches used in each type of library and assess their impact on resource utilization and user engagement. Additionally, investigating user perception and feedback regarding library marketing efforts, as well as assessing the impact of marketing initiatives on library usage and user satisfaction, would provide valuable insights. It would also be beneficial to identify and analyze successful marketing practices implemented by libraries both within Pakistan and internationally. These research directions will contribute to a deeper understanding of library marketing in Pakistan and facilitate the development of evidence-based strategies for promoting library resources and services.

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