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Developments in International Library Marketing Theory and Practice over the Past Decade and Their Implications: Postprint

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Abstract

[Purpose/Significance] By summarizing the advances in marketing theory research within the international library community over the past decade and the successful experiences gained in professional practice, this study provides reference and guidance for promoting extensive marketing initiatives in Chinese libraries.

[Method/Process] Employing bibliometric analysis, this study examines the temporal distribution, themes, and keywords of relevant papers on foreign library marketing theory research from the past decade. Combined with a systematic review of high-impact literature, it identifies hotspot trends and principal perspectives in this research field. Web-based investigation was conducted to conduct in-depth exploration of classic marketing promotion cases in the international library sector in recent years, summarizing experiences gained by the foreign library community in marketing practice and delineating characteristics of development trends in library marketing operations.

[Results/Conclusion] The extensive development of marketing initiatives will inevitably facilitate the transformation of libraries' roles and functions, vigorously promote knowledge dissemination, and foster service innovation. The development of library marketing in China has broad prospects. It should adhere to a user-centered approach, and under scientific and rational marketing strategic planning, comprehensively integrate brand marketing, integrated marketing, and digital marketing to forge a path of library service innovation with Chinese characteristics.

Full Text

Preamble

The Progress and Enlightenment of Foreign Library Marketing Theory and Practice in the Last Decade

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Abstract:

[Purpose/Significance] By summarizing the progress of foreign library marketing theory research and valuable practical experience gained in the past decade, this paper provides reference for promoting extensive marketing and promotion efforts in Chinese libraries. [Method/Process] Using bibliometric analysis, this study analyzed the annual distribution, topics, and keywords of relevant papers on foreign library marketing theory research from 2010-2019. Combined with content analysis of high-impact literature, hotspot trends and main viewpoints in this research field were identified. Network surveys were conducted to deeply investigate classic marketing cases in the international library field in recent years, summarizing experiences gained in foreign library marketing practices and identifying characteristics of recent library marketing business development trends. [Result/Conclusion] The extensive development of marketing promotion will promote the transformation of library roles and functions, effectively stimulate knowledge dissemination, and support service innovation. Chinese library marketing has broad development prospects. Adhering to a user-demand-centered approach and under scientific and reasonable marketing strategic planning, libraries should integrate brand marketing, integrated marketing, and digital marketing to forge a path of library service innovation with Chinese characteristics.

Keywords: library marketing; service innovation; user demand; brand marketing; marketing strategy

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The promotion of products and services has accompanied human commodity economies since their inception. With the unprecedented prosperity of commercial civilization, “marketing” was conceptualized and academicized, forming a theoretical system. In 1953, American scholar N.H. Borden first proposed the concept of the marketing mix, marking the birth of marketing theory [1]. In 1960, marketing master E.J. McCarthy proposed the classic 4Ps theory, which states that enterprises should, according to market needs, use appropriate products, prices, places, and promotions to satisfy consumer psychology and achieve product sales, laying the foundation for marketing research [2]. Since the 1970s, marketing theory gradually attracted the attention of the library community. As social and cultural service institutions, libraries have natural public welfare

attributes, making their marketing activities different from general corporate behavior. Library marketing involves a series of interactive activities aimed at promoting positive and timely responses between libraries, information providers, and users or potential users, facilitating the widespread dissemination of knowledge and information, enhancing user attention, service satisfaction, and brand reputation, thereby ensuring and promoting the survival and development of libraries themselves and realizing their social value.

Entering the second decade of the 21st century, with the rapid development of information technology, a new era of socialized omnichannel marketing based on location services, relationship matching, experiential consumption, and information sharing has arrived, with marketing activities entering a new period based on mobile internet. This provides new development ideas for non-profit institutions such as libraries. In the upcoming 14th Five-Year Plan period, the development of new-generation information technologies including mobile internet, smart terminals, big data, cloud computing, and high-end chips will drive transformation and innovation across numerous industries, gradually blurring boundaries between different sectors. China's library industry faces new opportunities and challenges. Under these new circumstances, how libraries can better transform resource advantages into service capabilities and evolve into innovative organizations that promote knowledge circulation, emphasize multiple literacies, and stimulate community vitality has become a key focus of academic research. Deepening theoretical research and practical exploration of marketing work is essential to achieving this goal. Therefore, this paper examines foreign research perspectives to summarize relevant developments in foreign library marketing over the past decade from both theoretical and practical dimensions, providing reference for domestic business development.

2. Foreign Library Marketing Theory Research Hotspots

To comprehensively understand recent theoretical research progress in foreign library marketing, we used CiteSpace software to conduct visual analysis of relevant literature and summarized high-impact papers.

2.1 Data Acquisition

Between May 25 and June 2, 2020, we searched Scopus and Web of Science databases for relevant academic papers published between 2010-2019. In Scopus, we used (TITLE-ABS-KEY (library AND marketing) OR TITLE-ABS-KEY (library AND promotion)) AND DOCTYPE(ar) AND PUBYEAR > 2009 AND PUBYEAR < 2020, selecting subject categories strongly related to "library marketing," obtaining 1,439 documents. In Web of Science, we used TS=(library AND marketing) OR TS=(library AND promotion); PT=article, obtaining 678 documents in relevant disciplines. After manual screening and deduplication, 1,438 documents were obtained as the basic research sample.

2.2 Research Topic Distribution

Keyword-based hotspot analysis can reflect current research status and directions. We extracted keywords from sample literature, setting parameters as “Years Per Slice=1; Term Source=Title AND Abstract AND Author Keywords AND Keywords Plus; Strength=Cosine; Selection Criteria=TopN (Select top 50 levels).” As shown in Table 1, active research topics include academic libraries, social media, librarians, humanization, promotion, library services, information literacy, outreach services, students, digital libraries, education, ebooks, collaboration, information services, marketing strategy, and internet. In addition to library marketing itself, five keywords—academic library, public library, librarian, library service, and information service—have centrality exceeding 0.1, representing “transportation hub” nodes that form co-citation relationships across multiple documents [4].

2.3 Research Hotspot Time Distribution

Introducing time elements into keyword co-occurrence analysis helps grasp changing trends. Using CiteSpace’s Timeline function, we completed automatic clustering and labeling of keywords, positioning nodes according to their cluster (vertical axis) and publication year (horizontal axis) to generate a timeline view. Keyword relevance strength is represented by line thickness and node color density (thicker lines and darker colors indicate stronger relevance). As shown in Figure 1 [Figure 1: see original paper], 2010-2014 was a crucial stage for the birth and development of digital marketing theory and a key period for social media penetration and integration with library business. The dense keyword network structure demonstrates the industry’s attention to library marketing issues and reflects high convergence of research hotspots. From 2015-2019, intra-cluster correlation decreased, connections between nodes became relatively loose, and research topics became more diversified. IFLA’s 2016 International Marketing Award criteria specifically stated: “The jury will fully recognize cases where libraries in resource-scarce developing countries actively attempt marketing” [5]. During this period, with the rapid development of information industry revolutions represented by cloud computing, big data, and artificial intelligence, scholarly research on “technology,” “strategy,” and “demand” continuously expanded in depth. Keywords such as mobile services (2017), virtual communities (2017), digital citizenship (2018), library homepage (2018), user participation (2019), and market research (2019) frequently appeared in clusters, with digital technology’s influence on library marketing business penetrating deeper and scholarly research exploring innovation.

Notably, academic libraries have strong relevance with marketing, being one of the most frequent and central theme words in recent foreign literature. This differs from the traditional view that public libraries pay more attention to marketing work. Based on relevant papers we examined, foreign scholars’ analysis of academic library marketing activities has become more in-depth and specific, benefiting from academic libraries’ strong research capabilities and reflecting

their leadership in concept innovation and practical exploration. This is partly because academic libraries generally have strong organizational backing and relatively abundant resource support. On the other hand, against a backdrop of tight overall budgets and limited research funding, foreign universities and research institutions have stronger internal needs to shape public image, enhance brand reputation, and secure funding support. Using library services as a window to connect closely with the public has become a common approach. Different types of libraries' marketing work characteristics warrant further research.

2.4 High-Impact Paper Analysis

We comprehensively analyzed papers from Scopus and Web of Science within the time frame, ranking them by citation count and manually excluding weakly relevant literature to identify the top 10 high-impact papers (see Table 2). The most cited was L.K. Ozanne et al.' s 2010 paper "Sharing as a form of anti-consumption? An examination of toy library users" published in *Journal of Consumer Behaviour*, with 119 citations. Based on "anti-consumption" theory, this paper proposed suggestions for addressing different community groups' needs to help librarians better serve users [6].

We identified four distinctive characteristics in these high-impact papers: First, "cross-boundary" research is increasingly emerging. Foreign scholars widely draw on theories from related disciplines to enrich the academic connotation of library marketing research, particularly from computer and management fields. This high degree of "disciplinary permeability" is a major feature of current library and information science research. For example, L. Vincent et al. found that in 2010, nearly 60% of authors publishing in LIS journals had also published in another discipline, and LIS scholars cite and accept more citations from other fields than from LIS itself [7]. Second, focus on new technology applications. Digital technology and social media development provide libraries with possibilities to reach massive users in virtual space, and how to fully leverage technological innovation is a key concern. T.B. Jacobson used statistical methods to examine 12 libraries' use of Facebook for marketing activities, comparing differences between action goals and user perceptions, and proposed treating social media as a library "toolkit" to build content and image display windows deeply integrated into marketing activities [8]. K. Mahmood et al. surveyed websites of 100 ARL member libraries in the US, analyzing various Web 2.0 tool usage, concluding that new technology greatly enhances two-way interaction between readers and information service providers, and that system interfaces and information interaction methods should be designed to attract users through more convenient and friendly platforms [9]. Third, emphasis on quantitative analysis and strategy research. S. Annamdevula et al. proposed that student satisfaction could describe the relationship between library service quality and student loyalty to help management develop business strategies [10]. E.D. Cassidy et al. found through statistical analysis that library ebook usage is closely related to librari-

ans' marketing promotion activities, demonstrating the necessity of developing targeted marketing plans for specific user groups [11]. B. Cox et al. used the University of Wollongong's "Library Cube" project as an example to evaluate the relationship between student performance and library usage by integrating discrete systems and datasets, pointing out that libraries should develop personalized marketing strategies for different users' social variables (such as gender, age, and citizenship) [12]. Fourth, in-depth national surveys. Authors of the top 10 cited papers came from New Zealand, Canada, Spain, and other countries, reflecting broad international attention to this topic. Some authors conducted in-depth surveys based on national conditions. S.A. Khan et al. analyzed social media application in Pakistani library and information institutions' marketing activities, summarizing five major "pain points" in the country's information service field, and pointed out that social media is significant for information equality in emerging countries, with action goals focusing on attracting public attention, helping remote learning, and promoting knowledge sharing [14]. A.R. Riza AYU et al. introduced Facebook application in Malaysian university libraries, analyzed user behavior characteristics through measurement methods, and proposed that libraries should move beyond temporary and informal use of social media technology to treat it as a fundamental element of marketing strategy [15].

In summary, under the tide of disciplinary integration, foreign library scholars advance research through model building, data analysis, and questionnaire surveys to seek scientific methods for organically integrating marketing theory with library practice. However, these studies also show strong "convergence," with keyword co-occurrence maps presenting highly centralized characteristics. Scholars' attention often concentrates on a few main themes such as social media and digital technology, while empirical and specific research on how to integrate digital technology platforms and social media channels, how to effectively communicate library service information, and how to meet real and potential user demands still needs continuous deepening.

3. Foreign Library Marketing Strategy and Case Analysis

Library marketing is essentially a practical activity that cannot be separated from case analysis. Considering library type, geographical distribution, institutional setup, and marketing project awards, we systematically surveyed four institutions: New York Public Library (<https://www.nypl.org/>), University of British Columbia Library (<http://www.library.ubc.ca/>), Singapore National Library Board (<https://www.nlb.gov.sg/>), and Oxford University Bodleian Library (<https://visit.bodleian.ox.ac.uk/>), focusing on their marketing strategy development and specific work implementation.

3.1 New York Public Library

Founded in 1895, the New York Public Library (NYPL) is the largest public library system in the US, with 88 community branches and 4 academic research

centers, serving over 17 million readers annually and organizing 93,000 events. To adapt to rapid environmental changes, in 2016 NYPL conducted a large-scale survey called “Building for You,” collecting public opinions and suggestions through street interviews and group meetings, and launched the largest reader survey in its history, collecting over 19,000 questionnaires. Supported by detailed demand data, NYPL’s board and senior management led 250 staff members in developing the 2017-2021 five-year development plan. This plan identified “access, reading, learning, and creation” as the “four core pillars” of library services, further strengthening a user-demand-centered orientation, placing marketing promotion activities in an important position in overall library work, and forming a detailed work roadmap and timeline [17].

We summarized the marketing promotion content as shown in Table 3 . As seen in Table 3, NYPL developed diverse marketing promotion plans for different groups, creating distinctive service brands. Demonstrating humanistic care for readers and creating a good community-home atmosphere is a main thread throughout. In marketing, “brand” is a comprehensive reflection in individual consciousness that distinguishes an organization or product from others, representing consumer cognition. If a library can make users aware of its unique differences from other libraries through certain activities, thereby generating competitive advantages, this identifiable uniqueness is the library’s characteristic brand. In recent years, more libraries have taken shaping unique brand culture as an important way to break development bottlenecks and improve service efficiency, shifting marketing focus from “product marketing” for specific services to “brand marketing” for image shaping and social recognition enhancement. NYPL’s series of marketing activities represents such a case.

In the first year of strategic plan implementation, NYPL organized a citywide youth activity called “2017 NYC Youth Fine Amnesty.” Statistics showed that among 927,000 regular youth cardholders in 2017, 161,000 (about 17%) had their borrowing privileges suspended due to accumulated fines exceeding \$15. This project waived all fines for youth under 18 and cleared related records from membership cards to encourage suspended youth readers to return to the library. Meanwhile, five NYPL branches held a series of events inviting parents and children to learn about collections, services, and borrowing procedures, reshaping NYPL’s brand image as fair, community-serving, and humane. With strong social support, approximately 41,000 youth readers reactivated their cards, achieving the goal of “fair, unrestricted access to information, resources, and library activities” for more readers. The project won the 2018 IFLA International Marketing Award First Prize [18].

3.2 University of British Columbia Library

The University of British Columbia Library (UBCL) is Canada’s largest academic library, with 15 branches and over 6 million volumes. For over a century, it has continuously provided knowledge services to faculty and students, occupying an important position in Canada’s national education and research system

and social culture [19]. Since the 21st century, the library' s development approach has undergone adjustments. In June 2019, guided by UBC' s overall strategic plan, the library formulated and released a new strategic framework clarifying future development directions and core business objectives: (1) Value marketing promotion activities, promoting library image, mission, and values to help the public understand and enter the library; cooperate closely with social institutions to build a communication platform between school and community, forming mutually beneficial partnerships to help users access richer knowledge resources and improve public quality of life. (2) Reconstruct library spatial forms, renovating physical layouts, adding innovation spaces, encouraging new research, teaching, and learning methods; expanding virtual spaces, enriching display forms and content, and improving online service experience. (3) Promote integrated utilization of information resources, providing multi-language, multi-format collections to meet different user needs; building specialized databases for characteristic resources and key disciplines to promote widespread sharing of collection information; collecting user needs to dynamically adjust information resource service models. (4) Inspire learning, discussion, and research exploration, establishing scholarships and reward systems to encourage library user collaborative innovation; guiding readers to cultivate lifelong learning interests and providing more convenient learning channels; developing data management tools and investing in collection content that supports research and learning. (5) Innovate organizational models, strengthening multi-department collaboration within the library to improve organizational flexibility; discovering and cultivating innovative cultural institutions with growth potential and establishing cooperative relationships [20].

In this strategic framework, UBC Library not only treats marketing promotion as a central task but also attaches great importance to exchanges and cooperation with readers, communities, enterprises, and social institutions as an important path to achieving development goals. In 2018, the library planned a creative integrated marketing campaign: the “2018 UBC Library Digital Colouring Books Campaign.” This project selected the unique creative point of coloring historical books, aiming to bridge the gap between paper resources and the digital era, making more readers interested in and utilizing precious historical documents. Once launched, the project attracted widespread attention on social media. The creative coloring activity brought libraries closer to the public and provided a stage for readers to showcase their creativity. To further enrich resource supply, the project has recently invited institutions including the New York Academy of Medicine Library to participate, transforming a batch of artworks and physical collections into digital coloring books to meet readers' creative needs [21].

In marketing practice, cooperation between different organizations to improve resource allocation efficiency and overcome deficiencies in funding, channels, and skills is an important way to enhance marketing effectiveness [22]. In recent IFLA Marketing Award-winning projects, joint planning, broad participation, and resource sharing among different types of institutions have become impor-

tant trends, with the concept of cooperative marketing taking root.

3.3 Singapore National Library Board

The Singapore National Library Board (NLB) is one of the few statutory board library systems in the world, adopting a typical corporate governance model. The system consists of the National Library and 26 public libraries, providing trusted, accessible, and globally-covered knowledge information services to Singapore's public [23]. Due to its unique management model and innovative concepts, NLB has gained widespread international recognition, with scholars from various countries extensively studying its operation and management model, even featuring it as a classic case in MBA curricula at Harvard Business School. In 2001, NLB was named Singapore's Innovative Organization of the Year by the Singapore government, winning the country's first "National Innovation Award," highlighting its position in the national innovation system [24].

Marketing theory holds that demand is the original driver of user behavior. User demand for products or services can be divided into characteristic appeal, experience appeal, and value appeal, with value appeal being the sustained influence and benefits users obtain after consuming products or services, representing the core element for establishing long-term user relationships [25]. Currently, under external environmental influences, library users' behavioral cognition regarding information needs, channel preferences, and value recognition is undergoing profound changes. Tracking these demand changes, providing positive feedback, and actively cultivating user demand have become important focuses of library marketing [26].

As a government agency, NLB not only undertakes administrative management of Singapore's public library system but also aims to "develop commercial information services and promote sustained economic growth" by cultivating national reading habits, improving public information literacy, and carrying out knowledge sharing to enhance the country's knowledge innovation and international competitiveness, making Singapore a knowledge-based nation and elegant society. In this sense, "active empowerment" is the core essence and distinctive feature of NLB's marketing activities.

The 2014 "S.U.R.E.—Promoting Information Literacy Awareness to Singaporeans" program, led by NLB, was a strategic-level marketing activity and a bold attempt by a public cultural service institution to support national development. The four letters respectively represent Source, Understand, Research, and Evaluate, aiming to improve Singaporeans' information literacy and build "a nation that can correctly identify and use information." In the promotion phase, NLB built digital communities for online audiences, conducted search engine marketing, placed web banners and mobile ads, and posted numerous posters in public places and on buses to arouse social attention to information literacy issues, making the slogan "Let's be Super SURE!" deeply ingrained in public consciousness. In implementation, through cooperation with the Singapore

Media Development Authority, Ministry of Education, and multiple universities, NLB developed and implemented education and training plans for students and the public, establishing SURE clubs in 23 schools. Through joint efforts, by 2016, 135 meetings, lectures, and information literacy workshops had been held, covering 27,000 students. In mechanism building, a long-term plan for national information literacy education was formed, introducing multi-language resources including Chinese, Malay, and Tamil, and incorporating information literacy modules into newly compiled middle school textbooks. NLB integrated this work with concurrently implemented programs such as READ, KidsREAD, and Singapore Memory to further stimulate widespread attention from all sectors, forming a mutually reinforcing and organically integrated national reading and information literacy education system [27]. In recent years, Singapore has ranked high in UN Human Development Index and global competitiveness rankings, particularly excelling in education. Reports show Singaporean students' average performance in reading, mathematics, and science leads the world [28]. NLB's leading role in national information literacy education has contributed significantly to these achievements. The S.U.R.E. program won the 2014 IFLA International Marketing Award First Prize.

3.4 Oxford University Bodleian Library

Founded in 1602, the Oxford University Bodleian Library is the UK's largest university library and one of Europe's oldest. Since its establishment, the Bodleian has been committed to providing excellent service to Oxford faculty and students, supporting teaching and research through rich collections. In recent years, with the deepening concept of socialized services in higher education, the ubiquitous library model aimed at meeting reader needs has been widely implemented, continuously expanding the functional boundaries of university library services [29]. Facing new service demands, the Bodleian is committed to supporting Oxford's core mission of wider engagement with society and has formulated an organizational development strategic plan. The library's 2018-2022 vision includes three key goals: (1) Assist Oxford in maintaining its leading position in global academic research; (2) Play a leadership role in social informatization and broader library development; (3) Promote the library's own sustainable operation and development [30]. Based on this, the Bodleian has formed a user-demand-based cultural promotion policy, including: promoting Oxford's history and academic status; showcasing the library's history and rich collections; providing Oxford faculty, students, and researchers with exchange and cooperation opportunities with other social, cultural, and academic institutions; providing convenient information service channels for community residents; and helping young people master library-based learning methods [31].

We summarized the Bodleian's recent marketing promotion activities as follows: First, deep exploration and exhibition utilization of collections. In recent years, the Bodleian has attached great importance to exhibition services, dedicating special venues to regularly introduce collections to the public and share human

cultural heritage. For example, the 2018 exhibition “Tolkien: Maker of Middle-earth” recreated the fantasy world of the Lord of the Rings author; the 2019 exhibition “Shikshapatri” displayed the Sanskrit religious manuscript by Shree Swaminarayan, founder of the Hindu Swaminarayan sect, with extremely high historical and cultural value and religious significance. In fiscal year 2017-2018, physical exhibition visits reached a record 369,842, successfully shaping Oxford University’ s cultural brand image [32]. Second, public welfare services and educational activities. In 2017-2018, the Bodleian held over 120 public events for surrounding schools and communities, conducting academic exchanges and cultural forums with more than 10,000 participants. These included displays and introductions of Persian art and medieval manuscripts, thematic interest lectures on King Alfred and the Oxford national bibliography dictionary, and practical courses guiding primary and secondary school students to use the Bodleian printing press for typesetting and printing. Additionally, the Bodleian Library itself is a famous landmark in Oxford and the UK. Since the new building opened to the public in March 2015, it has attracted over 2.6 million visitors from around the world, greatly deepening and expanding public understanding of library image and functions [33]. Third, promoting global sharing of academic resources. Since 1995, the Bodleian has provided digital resource services to university faculty and students, gradually opening these resources to the public. Currently, the Bodleian database provides access to over 500 datasets. In 2008, the library implemented the Oxford University Research Archive (ORA) program, opening some Oxford research team archives to global researchers. By 2018, ORA had over 41,000 complete archives open to the public with more than 200,000 annual downloads. Future ORA promotion activities will expand the scope of open archives and promote knowledge resource sharing [33].

The Bodleian’ s service work has undergone transformation from resource-led to demand-led. Traditional library promotion activities start from collections, focusing on knowledge product supply, while new marketing concepts advocate transforming traditional business models according to users’ changing needs and developing new value-added services to demonstrate library value. As marketing master McCarthy pointed out, “Customers are not part of marketing activities but the goal around which all marketing behavior should revolve and strive for.” Successful marketing activities should form a closed loop of “discovering user needs—selecting/producing products that meet needs—choosing appropriate channels—conducting promotion—satisfying user needs” [34]. In this sense, user-demand-centered marketing activities represent a “supply-side reform” in the library world.

Analysis of these four institutions shows that foreign library marketing is undergoing profound transformation from product marketing to brand marketing, from resource-led to demand-led, from passive supply to active empowerment, and from independent implementation to collaborative sharing. This transformation represents the foreign library community’ s exploration and answer to how libraries can exist, develop, and realize their value in the information age, providing beneficial references for our work.

4. Suggestions for China' s Library Marketing Work

In recent years, China' s library community has actively explored marketing promotion, producing a batch of successful cases widely recognized internationally. In 2012, Tsinghua University Library' s “Fall in Love with the Library” project won the IFLA International Marketing Award First Prize, the first time a Chinese library received this award. In 2016, Xiamen University Library' s “Mackerel · Time” won second prize, and in 2017, the top three awards were swept by Beijing University of Science and Technology Library, Shanghai Library, and Wuhan University Library. These projects have been praised by international peers for their personalized content design, thorough activity planning, refined organizational operations, and efficient project execution capabilities. However, we should also clearly recognize that library marketing started relatively late in China, research on the inherent laws of marketing activities is relatively weak, and professional capabilities still have considerable room for improvement. Based on judgments of China' s library industry development trends during the 14th Five-Year Plan period, we propose the following suggestions to better guide current and future marketing practice.

4.1 Focus on Building Characteristics to Establish Brand Marketing Concepts

David Ogilvy, founder of Ogilvy & Mather, believed that brand is the sum of all consumer feelings about a product, and producers and sellers should use marketing promotion and other methods to establish the most favorable image for products [35]. Different libraries have different basic conditions and resource endowments. Brand marketing aims to promote readers' specific “path dependence” through characteristic knowledge services, creating subconscious associations in user behavior to achieve brand shaping.

Reviewing international library marketing practices, brand building is a systematic project requiring precise positioning of one' s own characteristics and clear core competitiveness. On this basis, marketing plans should be improved according to real and potential user needs to form personalized features distinguishing the institution from similar ones. We counted 28 award-winning projects in the IFLA Marketing Awards from 2010-2019, of which 23 involved promoting existing library services, improving user experience, exploring user needs, and innovating service concepts. In contrast, China' s library services show relatively serious homogenization, with insufficient supply capacity for innovative and characteristic services. “One face for a thousand libraries” cannot adapt to readers' personalized needs. Therefore, we must break through thinking limitations, establish brand awareness, improve brand strategy, and enhance libraries' characteristic competitiveness.

China' s library community has also conducted many beneficial explorations in brand building. For example, Shanghai Library' s annual “Open Data Application Development Competition,” based on massive historical and humanities

data collected in Shanghai Library's knowledge database, solicits excellent mobile application prototypes and service concepts from society. This activity not only reflects Shanghai Library's thinking and exploration on public library transformation and innovation in the big data era but also leads technological innovation trends, adding luster to the Shanghai Library brand [36]. This shows that only by deeply understanding user needs, identifying one's own advantages and specialties, and fully exploring internal potential can libraries truly polish their characteristic service brands.

4.2 Take User Demand as the Guide to Promote Marketing System Construction

User demand is the foundation of library survival and development. In the Web 2.0 era, technological development has greatly expanded users' information access channels, user groups are increasingly fragmented, and people's knowledge needs and usage habits show increasingly strong personalized characteristics. Information service providers must track these needs in a timely manner, flexibly adjust strategies to meet challenges, and achieve large-scale, systematic marketing activities through establishing smooth multi-department collaboration mechanisms, efficient process management, and scientific performance assessment methods.

In recent years, China has seen a batch of excellent marketing cases, but relatively few can be sustained long-term and scaled up, mainly because marketing planning teams have relatively limited resources to ensure long-term efficient activity implementation. A survey of 47 public libraries at or above the sub-provincial level in China showed that only about 40% have departments responsible for marketing promotion or related functions. The absence of institutional settings results in most libraries lacking the capacity to effectively carry out comprehensive marketing activities [37].

Facing new situations and tasks, we should adhere to user-demand orientation and focus on building a library marketing promotion system that suits China's national conditions. Based on users' "perception—acquisition—application—sharing" behavioral process, this system mainly includes four modules: marketing strategic planning, marketing organization management, business process planning, and marketing performance assessment and financial cost accounting. Marketing strategic planning aims to clarify the main content (brand image, products or services), targets (different user group needs), and available channels (promotion and cooperation media) of library marketing activities—namely "to whom," "using what methods," and "promoting what products." Marketing organization management mainly addresses division of labor and collaboration issues inside and outside the library, establishing a multi-department linkage mechanism centered on marketing business departments to fully leverage various advantages and achieve optimal marketing effects within limited cost space. Business process planning involves developing full-process business planning schemes for specific marketing activities, including theme planning, budget for-

mulation and management, promotion channel selection, implementation plans, and feedback methods. Finally, measuring marketing success requires post-activity performance assessment and cost evaluation, which are very important factors. Based on effect feedback collected after activities, we should scientifically assess whether marketing goals were achieved while strictly conducting cost accounting (product/service costs, promotion costs, capital turnover costs, management audit costs, team operation costs, etc.) to ensure reasonable input-output cost-effectiveness ratios. See Figure 2 [Figure 2: see original paper] for details.

At the institutional and personnel level, specialized departments should be established to actually undertake marketing promotion and public relations activities, with professional marketing personnel such as marketing managers and public relations managers hired. Meanwhile, library marketing system construction should not be a solo effort by marketing departments but should mobilize resources from all aspects, enhance participation and contribution rates from all library departments, and promote efficient work with systematic thinking. Reader demand response rate and achievement degree should be used as important indicators for measuring work.

4.3 Use Integrated Marketing as a Means to Promote Efficient Knowledge Resource Transformation

Integrated marketing is a marketing concept and method that systematically uses various marketing tools and means, makes immediate dynamic adjustments according to the environment, and enables both parties in the exchange to achieve value-added interaction [38]. Library integrated marketing refers to the strategic planning formed by libraries linking internal and external resources for marketing activities in business development and management operations. It includes not only internal multi-department integration but also external multi-institution collaboration, as well as integration of various forms and content activities within a certain period, representing a business development concept of co-consultation, co-construction, and sharing.

Currently, integrating resources, extensive sharing, and efficient promotion are important trends in library knowledge services, with digitalization, networking, platformization, integration, and ubiquity being distinctive features. As a leader in China's library marketing practice, Shanghai Library has gradually cultivated an integrated marketing system characterized by "horizontal cluster arrays" over the past decade. In terms of brand activities, there are Shanghai Library Lectures and Exhibitions for the general public; Shanghai Intelligence Service Platform and "Innovation Source" SME information services for research groups and enterprises; Shanghai Library Express and media evaluation for party and government decision-making departments; and "Shanghai Window" for the world. Through integrated marketing, each brand operates independently while complementing each other, each with its own characteristics while forming an integrated whole [39]. Another example is the "Chinese Academy

of Sciences Science and Technology Innovation Annual Tour” series organized by the Chinese Academy of Sciences and undertaken by the Science Communication Bureau and Documentation and Information Center. This activity extensively integrates internal resources of the CAS system to popularize scientific knowledge and showcase China’s cutting-edge scientific and technological innovation achievements to the public in vivid and intuitive ways, bridging the gap between the public and science. Currently, the exhibition has covered more than 20 provinces and municipalities directly under the central government and radiated to neighboring countries and regions, creating a characteristic brand in the field of science communication, enriching and expanding library knowledge service models and business organizational forms, and demonstrating librarians’ mission and responsibility to serve national development strategies [40].

4.4 Rely on Data Resources to Achieve Digital Marketing Transformation

Digital marketing refers to the use of digital technology to formulate marketing strategies, effectively allocate resources, and meet user needs. It represents the transformation and innovation of traditional marketing theory in the information age. With the emergence of new communication technologies and data collection tools, massive amounts of consumer behavior data are collected and accumulated daily. These behavioral data actually represent countless connection points with customers. Understanding and satisfying the needs represented by these connection points to help customers achieve personalized needs is the key issue that marketing activities need to address [41]. For library marketing, in the planning stage, organizers need to formulate digital demand frameworks based on marketing goals, label user group characteristics, and match them with marketing methods and channels. In the implementation stage, organizers need to collect various data related to marketing projects in real time, compare them with the demand framework from the planning stage, monitor the effect curve throughout the project process, and promptly identify useless links or negative feedback for adjustment.

Our investigation found that domestic research on library marketing mainly focuses on discussing development processes, analyzing marketing strategies, and exploring organizational implementation, with few authoritative data analysis models as support. These data analysis models include both library user group demand models and marketing effect assessment models, as well as regression analysis models for judging whether marketing strategies meet expectations. In the interconnected network environment, data analysis providers and professional tools have emerged in large numbers, making large-scale data sample acquisition more convenient. We believe that with the continuous deepening of digital marketing theory and practice, decision-making based on data analysis will further narrow the distance between libraries and user groups, achieving widespread access to knowledge resources and convenient acquisition of information services.

In conclusion, library business forms are undergoing profound changes, and the importance of marketing work is increasingly prominent. A series of new concepts, ideas, and measures formed by foreign library communities in marketing theory research and practical innovation are worth learning from. Looking forward, the extensive development of marketing business will promote the transformation of library roles and functions, effectively stimulate knowledge dissemination, and support service innovation. The development prospects for related domestic library businesses are broad. Adhering to a user-demand-centered approach and under scientific and reasonable marketing strategic planning, libraries should integrate brand marketing, integrated marketing, and digital marketing to forge a path of innovative library development with Chinese characteristics.

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Author Contributions

Wang Zheng: Responsible for proposing research topics, establishing research frameworks, and paper writing;

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Note: Figure translations are in progress. See original paper for figures.

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