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Original Article

Assessing the Familiarity of Librarians with the Factors Influencing Users' Awareness of the Brand of Libraries and Information Centers of Iranian Universities of Medical Sciences

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Abstract

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Background: Libraries need effective branding strategies due to the challenges of competition with other information providers. Due to the rapid changes in information technology, branding is essential in these libraries. The present study investigated the level of familiarity of librarians and library managers of medical sciences universities in Iran with the factors that increased branding awareness in 2023.

Methods: This study used a descriptive survey method. The research community consisted of librarians and library managers from medical sciences universities in Iran. The sample size was 167 people using the available sampling method. The data collection tool was a researcher-made questionnaire containing twenty-one questions. Data were collected through Porsline and analyzed with SPSS software version 24.

Results: The results revealed that librarians and library managers are familiar with factors affecting awareness of the libraries' branding, which are librarians' abilities and characteristics (mean score of 28.41 equivalent to 93.3%), library services (mean score of 23.22 equivalent to 91.1%), library technologies (mean score of 22.12, equivalent to 85.6%), and architecture and equipment (mean score of 22.56, equivalent to 87.8%). The overall score of librarians' familiarity with the branding was 96.21 (89.5%).

Conclusion: Branding is an effective tool for achieving the goals of libraries and changing their image in users' minds. Librarians are familiar with branding concepts but need more training in library technologies. Diverse services, new technologies, and appropriate architecture affect the promotion of branding awareness and the improvement of user experience. Therefore, using the latest technologies and holding training courses helps to improve branding and user satisfaction. The results can help managers to design branding improvement programs.

Introduction

With the rapid development of information, libraries play a vital role in providing information services. Increasing the quality of library services based on users' needs is essential, especially in health information (1). Because of its

importance in economic, social, cultural, and health issues, applied knowledge is demanding in today's societies, and libraries and information institutions play an essential role in knowledge-oriented societies (2). With the development of information



technology, the demand for health information has also increased, and libraries should pay more attention to these needs (3). Technological advances and social changes have significantly impacted the landscape of libraries (4), and they are facing the challenge of decreasing user attendance due to online information access and lack of funding (5). In order to compete and attract users' satisfaction, libraries should provide better services and use a customer-oriented and marketing approach (6). In today's competitive world, they must prioritize branding to gain a competitive advantage and survive (7). Branding helps libraries strengthen their position in users' minds and contribute to their sustainability through innovation, marketing, and extensive services (8, 9). It can also be used as a powerful tool in marketing the services of academic libraries and health sciences (10).

"Aaker" explains the characteristics of branding in four main elements, including brand awareness, brand loyalty, perceived quality, and brand association (11). Brand awareness is the first step in creating a brand, and it positively affects the quality of customer understanding and communication with the product (12, 13). In this way, brand awareness is one of the main dimensions of the brand, which gives credibility to the product or service and can create a sustainable competitive advantage and long-term value. Undoubtedly, branding for libraries means that all aspects of the library that users expect from it are expressed in the best possible way, and this recognizable image of the library is created in users' minds. Branding in libraries has been an essential issue for three decades and has helped improve the library's image, increase the morale of librarians, attract users, and maintain the position of libraries (14). The survival of libraries in the competitive environment depends on their performance, the positive attitude of users towards the library brand, and the awareness of its services (15). Awareness and positive attitude of users can lead to loyalty and improve brand performance (16). If the library brand is only associated with bookshelves in users' minds, more comprehensive sources of information are ignored. Therefore, libraries should increase users' awareness of their diverse services (17).

Branding in medical libraries is influenced by the four main areas: librarians, services, buildings and equipment, and technology (15). Librarians can turn libraries into dynamic, attractive institutions with creativity and proper branding (18). Social media and providing high-quality and welfare services increase users' awareness of the library brand (19-21). New technologies and modern standards in university library building architecture can help brand and attract users (22-25). Cooperation between librarians and administrators, attention to users' needs, and updating communication tools can improve users' awareness of the library brand. However, the review shows little information on developing medical library services to increase brand awareness in four main areas (librarians, services, buildings and equipment, and technology). Therefore, this study aims to investigate the familiarity of medical library managers and librarians with the factors that increase users' awareness of the library brand to identify weaknesses and needs and provide suggestions for improvement. Libraries of medical sciences universities in Iran are important in providing quality services, and to maintain this role, they should do extensive activities to increase users' awareness of their performance.

Methods

This descriptive-analytical research was conducted in 2023 on the managers and librarians of the libraries of medical sciences universities in Iran. This study aimed to investigate the familiarity of library managers and librarians with factors affecting brand awareness. The research community included all librarians and library managers of medical sciences universities in Iran. The sample size was estimated to be 167 people using GPower software version 3.1.9.4, considering the type I error of 0.05, the type II error of 0.2, and the effect size of 0.25. The inclusion criteria were working librarians and managers with more than one year of employment history and willingness to participate in the study. The exclusion criteria were incomplete questionnaires or those with distorted data. Sampling was done using the available sampling method until the number of completed questionnaires reached 167.

The data collection tool was a researcher-made questionnaire with twenty-one five-choice questions. The questions scored from five to fifty-one, and the answers ranged from strongly disagree to strongly agree. Ten experts checked the validity of the content of the questionnaire. Questionnaire items were designed in four dimensions and 19 items. Six items were related to the dimension of librarians (awareness, information literacy, educational skills, information consultation, recognition of user information needs, and clinical information literacy), five were related to the service dimension (providing educational services, welfare services, specialized services, high-quality services and sound treatment with users and virtual services), five were related to the technology dimension (library web software, automatic loan and return systems, library account in virtual networks, artificial intelligence and sending emails) and five were related to the architectural dimension and library equipment (creating special spaces for individuals, groups, women, the blind, as well as the stability of the location of the building and transportation facilities for the disabled, storage, education and entertainment for children, green space and library area, and conference and convention hall.). The range of answers to the questions was from strongly agree to strongly disagree. Therefore, five points were assigned to the first option (strongly agree) and one to the last (strongly disagree). The total score range of the questionnaire was calculated from twenty-one to 167. The subscale score range in the dimension of librarians was six to thirty, services from five to twenty-five, technology from five to twenty-five, and buildings and equipment from five to twenty-five. The content validity ratio (CVR) and content validity index (CVI) were calculated to check the validity of the questionnaire, which were higher than 0.79 for all the questions and indicate the validity of the questionnaire questions. Cronbach's alpha coefficient was also used to check reliability. In general, Cronbach's alpha coefficient

was calculated as 0.93 for the questionnaire and 0.91, 0.82, 0.85, and 0.79 for the subscale of librarians, materials, technology, and equipment, respectively, which indicated the adequate reliability of the questionnaire.

In order to distribute and collect the questionnaires, the questionnaire was first shared through Porsline in the social networks related to the managers and heads of the libraries of the Ministry of Health, and some managers completed the questionnaires. Then, through managers and other friendly methods, the email and contact numbers of all librarians of medical sciences universities were received, and the link to the questionnaires was sent to them via email. In the email sent, while explaining the study's objectives and ensuring the confidentiality of the participants' information, they were asked to respond to the email regarding whether or not to complete the questionnaires. They were contacted if the authors did not receive an email response, and a reminder email was sent again. Finally, 167 questionnaires were completed and analyzed. SPSS version 24 was used for data analysis. Descriptive statistics, including mean and standard deviation, as well as frequency and percentage, were used to describe the data.

Results

According to the data in Table 1, the most frequent educational level of the participants in the study was a master's degree (51.5%). Most of the subjects of the participants in the study were medical library and information science (seventy-six people, which is 45.5%), followed by library and information science (sixty-seven people, which is 40.1%). Most people (seventy-eight people, which is 46.7%) had a service history between ten and twenty years, and the service history of a few (ten people, which is 6%) was two to five years. The service post of most of the participants was a librarian (sixty-one people, which is 36.5%) and then a library manager (fifty-four people, which is 32.3%).



Table 1. Status of demographic variables

Variable		Frequency	Percentage
Education level	Diploma	6	3.6
	Bachelor's degree	42	25.1
	Master's degree	86	51.5
	PhD	33	19.8
Field of study	Medical library and information science	76	45.5
	Library and information science	67	40.1
	Other	24	14.4
Service post	Librarian	61	36.5
	Library manager	54	32.3
	Non-librarian expert	38	22.8
	Other	14	8.4
Service history	1 and 2 years	18	10.7
	2 to 5 years	10	6
	5 to 10 years	15	9
	10 to 20 years	78	46.7
	More than 20 years	40	24
	Lost data	6	3.6

As Table 2 illustrates, familiarity with factors related to the characteristics and abilities of librarians is equal to 28.41 (93.3%) more than other factors related to the brand. In addition, the lowest level of familiarity with technology is expressed with an average score of 22.12 (85.6%). Additionally,

the study revealed that factors related to knowledge of library services have an average score of 23.22 (91.1%), and factors related to familiarity with the library building and equipment have an average score of 22.49 (87.8%). The overall score of librarians' familiarity with the brand was 96.21 (89.5%).

Table 2. The level of familiarity of librarians of medical science libraries in Iran with factors related to raising users' awareness of the brand

Dimensions	Range of grades	Minimum	Maximum	Average (percentage)	Standard deviation
Getting to know the factors related to the ability and characteristics of librarians	6-30	20	30	(93.3) 28.41	2.41
Getting to know the factors related to library services	5-25	11	25	(91.1) 23.22	2.22
Getting to know the factors related to library technologies	5-25	13	25	(85.6) 22.12	2.83
Familiarity with factors related to building architecture and library equipment	5-25	14	25	(87.8) 22.49	2.56
Total score	21-105	59	105	(89.5) 96.21	8.42

Table 3 shows that most of the respondents chose the strongly agree and agree option for the skills related to the abilities and characteristics of librarians to increase users' awareness of the library brand. The findings show that the majority of respondents agreed with the importance of

the role of information literacy skills (72.5%), information consultation skills (77%), educational skills (75.4%), recognizing the user's information needs (72.5%), and clinical information literacy skills (75.4%) in increasing the awareness of the library brand.

Table 3. Distribution of the frequency and percentage of respondents regarding librarians' familiarity with factors related to librarians' abilities and characteristics to increase users' awareness of the library brand

Object	Strongly agree		Agree		Unsure		Disagree		Strongly disagree		Total	
	Frequency	Percentage	Frequency	Percentage	Frequency	Percentage	Frequency	Percentage	Frequency	Percentage	Frequency	Percentage
Information literacy skills	121	72.5	45	26.9	1	0.6	0	0	0	0	167	100
Information consulting skills	130	77	34	20	2	1.2	1	0.6	0	0	167	100
educational skills	126	75.4	38	22.8	2	1.2	1	0.6	0	0	167	100
The skill of recognizing the user's information needs	121	72.5	45	26.9	1	0.6	0	0	0	0	167	100
Clinical information literacy skills	126	75.4	38	22.8	2	1.2	1	0.6	0	0	167	100

Table 4 demonstrates that most respondents chose the option of strongly agree and agree for the skills related to library services to increase users' awareness of the library brand. The findings show that subjects mostly chose the strongly agree option over the high-quality service item (68.3%), followed by specialized service items (including consulting in research, retrieving articles, and searching for a systematic review of

medical information) with 67%, educational services (including specialized workshops for incoming students and residents, individual and group training, computer skills training, essay writing workshops, and health literacy training) with 63%, virtual reference services such as online response (58.7%), and welfare services (including water coolers, internet, buffet, rest area, parking, book fair) with 57.5%.

Table 4. Distribution of the frequency and percentage of respondents regarding librarians' familiarity with factors related to library services to increase users' awareness of the library brand

Object	Strongly agree		Agree		Unsure		Disagree		Strongly disagree		Total	
	Frequ ency	Perce ntage	Frequ ency	Perce ntage	Frequ ency	Perce ntage	Frequ ency	Perce ntage	Frequ ency	Perce ntage	Frequ ency	Perce ntage
Educational services	105	63	56	33.5	5	3	1	0.5	0	0	167	100
Welfare services	96	57.5	62	37.2	8	4.8	1	0.5	0	0	167	100
Specialized services	112	67	45	27	9	5.4	1	0.6	0	0	167	100
Quality service	114	68.3	49	29.3	4	2.4	0	0	0	0	167	100
Virtual reference services	98	58.7	60	35.9	6	3.6	3	1.8	0	0	167	100

Table 5 shows that the majority of the respondents chose the strongly agree and agree options with the factors related to technology to increase users' awareness of the library brand. The findings reveal that subjects mostly chose the strongly agree option over the web software item (64.1%). In comparison,

the automatic loan and return systems items (55.1%), the library account in virtual networks (51.5%), and artificial intelligence (53.3%) have received very favorable options. Information systems have also received the lowest number of strongly agree options (45.5%).

Table 5. Distribution of the frequency and percentage of respondents regarding librarians' familiarity with factors related to library technologies to increase users' awareness of the library brand

Object	Strongly agree		Agree		Unsure		Disagree		Strongly disagree		Total	
	Frequ ency	Perce ntage	Frequ ency	Perce ntage	Frequ ency	Perce ntage	Frequ ency	Perce ntage	Frequ ency	Perce ntage	Frequ ency	Perce ntage
Web-based software	107	64.1	51	30.5	7	4.2	2	1.2	0	0	167	100
Automated deposit and return systems	92	55.1	64	38.3	6	3.6	5	3	0	0	167	100
Library accounts in virtual networks	86	51.5	66	39.5	11	6.6	4	2.4	0	0	167	100
Artificial intelligence	89	53.3	56	33.5	20	12	2	1.2	0	0	167	100
Information systems	76	45.5	69	41.3	16	9.6	6	3.6	0	0	167	100

Table 6 shows that the majority of the respondents chose the option of strongly agree and agree with the factors related to the architecture of the building and the library equipment to raise the users' awareness about the library brand. The findings show that

most people chose the strongly agree option over equipping the library with a conference room and an electronic resource training room (65.3%), while the children's education and entertainment option got the lowest rate in this regard (47.9%).

Table 6. Distribution of the frequency and percentage of respondents regarding librarians' familiarity with the related factors of building architecture and library equipment to make users aware of the library brand

Object	Strongly agree		Agree		Unsure		Disagree		Strongly disagree		Total	
	Frequ ency	Perce ntage	Frequ ency	Perce ntage	Frequ ency	Perce ntage	Frequ ency	Perce ntage	Frequ ency	Perce ntage	Frequ ency	Perce ntage
Creating special individual and group spaces	104	62.3	54	32.3	6	3.60	3	1.8	0	0	167	100
The stability of the location of the building and transportation facilities for the disabled	100	59.9	60	35.9	7	4.20	0	0	0	0	167	100
Education and entertainment of children	80	47.9	56	33.5	19	4.11	12	7.2	0	0	167	100
Green space and library area,	101	60.5	58	34.7	7	4.20	1	0.6	0	0	167	100
Conference hall	109	63.3	53	31.7	5	3	0	0	0	0	167	100

Discussion

The present study was conducted to determine the level of familiarity of librarians and library managers of medical sciences universities in Iran with the factors that increase awareness of the brand of libraries. The investigated dimensions included librarians' abilities and characteristics, services, technology, and library architecture and equipment. The findings showed that librarians and library managers know the importance of factors related to raising users' awareness of the library brand. According to previous studies (26-28), branding can help to change the image and identity of the library in the minds of users and thereby gain more loyalty from users. The research findings are consistent with this research and show that the librarians of the medical sciences universities of Iran generally have sufficient knowledge of branding concepts, but in some areas, such as library technologies, they need to be more familiar. In addition, the importance of librarians' key skills, such as information literacy, information consultation, and understanding the information needs of users in promoting the awareness of the library brand, was emphasized, which is in line with the results of studies by Tajadini and Amirtaimory (21) and Sefaei et al. (1).

In the field of services, the research results showed that from librarians' point of view, various services such as educational, welfare, specialized, high-quality, and virtual services have a positive and significant effect on increasing users' awareness of the library brand. In particular, providing educational services, including specialized workshops, individual and group training, computer skills training, and health literacy, will increase users' awareness of the library brand. In addition, welfare services such as installing a water cooler, free internet access, a buffet, and a resting place for users also help to improve users' awareness of the library brand. The results showed that libraries' diverse and high-quality services are important in increasing users' awareness of the library brand. Providing diverse educational services and welfare and using new technologies can help strengthen libraries' position in users' minds. These results are in line with the studies of AlAwadhi and Al-Daihani (19) and Ogbonnaya (29).

In the field of technology, the results showed that the use of library web software and automatic loan and return systems makes it possible to improve users' awareness of the library brand. In addition, using library accounts in social networks and artificial

intelligence to store and retrieve information were recognized as other tools that helped raise users' awareness of the library brand. Research conducted by Kalbandeh (22) and Sefaei et al. (23) has also confirmed the importance of digital technologies in branding libraries and improving user awareness. Using new technologies and social media tools helps promote library information services, improve user relationships, and increase branding. Therefore, using library technologies to enhance users' awareness of the library brand is of great importance and can help libraries be introduced as leading sources of information in society and create more added value for their users.

The library architecture and equipment research results show that librarians and managers are also familiar with the factors related to library architecture and equipment. Furthermore, the results showed that a suitable conference hall, appropriate group and individual spaces, and independent building are necessary for libraries to improve service quality and increase user satisfaction. Creating pleasant and educational spaces (green spaces and gazebos) for children, facilities for the disabled, and amenities, as well as appropriate design and efficient equipment, can improve the user experience and increase their satisfaction and awareness of the library brand. These spaces can help the mood and concentration of users and create a feeling of peace and balance. Previous researchers such as Mwanu and Wendo (24), Singh and Ovsak (25) have also emphasized the importance of welfare services and creating a calm environment and easy access for users in increasing the awareness of the library brand, which show that library architecture and equipment play a key role in promoting the library brand. In addition, the importance of the location of the building and transportation facilities for the disabled and users shows the librarians' attention to the different needs of users. Easy and convenient access to the library can improve users' experience and play an important role in increasing awareness and attracting new users.

Conclusion

The findings of this research emphasize the

importance of training and professional development of librarians in branding and marketing. Improving librarians' awareness of factors affecting library branding can increase user satisfaction and greater productivity of library resources. It is suggested that regular training programs and specialized workshops be held in this field and librarians be encouraged to use new technologies and social media. This research showed that the librarians and managers of Iran's academic libraries of medical sciences focus on the key skills and characteristics related to the brand, have an influential role in improving users' awareness of the library brand. Improving the level of awareness of the library brand in the four dimensions of librarians, services, technology and architecture, and building and equipment is not only raised as an important management challenge but also has a vital and effective role in improving the quality of services and increasing user satisfaction. Therefore, paying attention to the skills and characteristics of librarians is very important to improve the brand of libraries and improve users' awareness of them, and it can facilitate the improvement and development of library management.

The results of this research can help library officials and managers to provide appropriate programs to raise awareness and improve library branding. Creating related training courses and workshops, providing educational resources and materials, and creating spaces for exchanging ideas and experiences among colleagues can help improve this situation. Finally, it can be concluded that libraries and medical information centers should focus on strengthening the skills and abilities of librarians, improving services, using new technologies, and improving library architecture and equipment so that they can play an essential role in improving the level of knowledge and awareness of society. In this way, libraries can become dynamic, attractive, and user-centered institutions that meet users' information needs and increase their satisfaction and loyalty.

Declaration

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Conflicts of Interests

The authors declare no conflict of interest.

Ethical Statement

The current research is extracted from the master's

thesis. The information of the participants and the names of the libraries remained confidential. Code of ethics for IR research. BPUMS. REC. It was 101.187.

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Authors' contributions

All authors participated in all phases of this study.

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