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MANAGEMENT AND MARKETING AT THE UNIVERSITY LIBRARIES

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# COMMUNITY OUTREACH AND ENGAGEMENT IN THE TIME OF COVID 19: EFFORTS & APPROACHES OF ACADEMIC LIBRARIES

**Objective.** This paper aims to investigate the types and scope of community engagement and outreach activities of academic libraries while the physical library spaces remain closed or operating on a limited capacity. It also looks at the tools and methods employed to implement such activities. The paper also attempts to uncover patterns or emerging themes as libraries explore innovative ideas and take new initiatives for the betterment of the community they serve. **Methods.** The study employs a website and Facebook page survey of AUN (ASEAN University Network) Inter-Library Online (AUNILO) member-libraries. The following six outreach categories will be utilized: (1) Collection-Based Outreach; (2) Instruction &amp; Services-Based Outreach; (3) "Whole Person" Outreach; (4) Just for Fun Outreach; (5) Partnerships and Community-Focused Outreach; and (6) Multi-Pronged Themed Events and Programming. Said categories were derived from Farrell and Mastel (2016) paper entitled "Considering Outreach Assessment: Strategies, Sample Scenarios, And A Call to Action." **Results.** Findings of the study will offer some insights on how libraries strengthen their roles in transforming societies as they provide opportunities to bring about positive change in their communities. Moreover, this paper will also challenge libraries to take a closer look at their own activities and consider how they can design creative and inspiring ways to connect with their communities. **Conclusions.** In response to the COVID-19 crisis, libraries are proactively pivoting their community engagement and outreach efforts online and are finding new ways to serve faculty, students, and partners. Libraries are committed to strengthening the resilience and recovery of the community through working collaboratively with its members and building partnerships with relevant organizations.

*Keywords:* academic libraries; educational activities; COVID-19; community involvement; innovation

## Introduction

Libraries have been staunch partners of universities, institutions, and organizations in the advancement of the communities' goals and aspirations. Libraries, more than ever, are being recognized as an important hub to facilitate development and transformation. As Ashraf (2018) described, libraries empower and democratize institutions to engage communities by "outreaching and [taking] up expansive roles which are confined to not only serving as information resource but much more. It is found that as a powerful social institution with [a] sizable presence, libraries have started engaging with local communities by transforming themselves as socio-cultural & capacity building hubs globally". Such presence equates to continued innovation, strategic inclusive representations and carefully thought out programs and services.

Community outreach and engagement is at the heart of every library advocacy strategy. These activities inform and engage people about our services and programs. As defined by literature:

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MANAGEMENT AND MARKETING AT THE UNIVERSITY LIBRARIES

> Community engagement is the process of working collaboratively with
>
> community members – be they library customers, residents, faculty,
>
> students or partner organizations – to address issues for the betterment of
>
> the community. (American Library Association [ALA], n.d.)
>
> Outreach are services designed to reach patrons outside of the library –
>
> wherever they are accessing, evaluating, or manipulating information.
>
> (Westbrook & Waldman, 1993)

Academic libraries' are suitably positioned in higher education as these institutions are mainly committed to supporting diversity through education, outreach, and advocacy. It is important then that libraries dedicate to practice "turning outward", a step-by-step process developed by The Harwood Institute for Public Innovation. The process enables libraries to immerse themselves in steps to better understand communities; participate and encourage conversations that are community-focused; being proactive to community issues; and putting community aspirations first (The Harwood Institute for Public Innovation, 2013).

Libraries are poised to amplify such efforts as librarians worldwide positively contributed to the International Federation of Library Associations and Institutions (IFLA) Global Vision (2017), an extensive site that compiles ideas of librarians. IFLA marked the importance of understanding community needs to better design our services as an opportunity for a united global action to address challenges. This then serves as an opportunity for libraries to explore and expand library outreach – engage new stakeholders, build tailor-made programs with measurable impact on peoples' lives (IFLA, n.d.).

Despite this momentum and ideas for actions in the library field, the inevitable pandemic crisis halted and crippled most of the library operations worldwide. Suspension of onsite services left students, staff, and faculty with only the available remote library support. If onsite access is still an option, services are delivered with less space as libraries now have to maintain a safe distance to comply with health protocols. Such arrangements gave rise to a more complex problem for developing countries – shift from physical to digital. Many libraries are faced with infrastructure, technology, and budget constraints to even continue operations remotely. (Chakraborty & Jana, 2021; Rafiq, Batool, Ali, & Ullah., 2021; Walsh & Rana, 2020).

Given this predicament, this study was launched to investigate the types and scope of community engagement and outreach activities of academic libraries while the physical library spaces remain closed or operating in a limited capacity. It will also uncover patterns or emerging themes as libraries explore innovative ideas and take new initiatives for the betterment of the community they serve.

## Methods

The study employed a website and Facebook page survey to gather and analyze the different outreach activities conducted by the AUN (ASEAN University Network) Inter-Library Online (AUNILO) member-libraries. The list of the members was retrieved from https://aunilo.net/member-libraries/.

Among the thirty (30) member libraries (see Table 1), 7 libraries were excluded from the study because of website or Facebook inaccessibility and 2) website and Facebook pages are not up-to-date. As a result only 23 libraries were surveyed in this study (see Table 3).

Table 1

### AUNILO member-countries

| Countries | Count of Countries |
|---|---|
| Brunei Darussalam | |
| Cambodia | 1 |
| Indonesia | 2 |
| Laos | 4 |
| Malaysia | 1 |
| Myanmar | 5 |
| Philippines | 3 |
| Singapore | 3 |
| Thailand | 3 |
| Vietnam | 5 |
| | 3 |
| **Total** | **30** |

Based on the literature review conducted, the authors gained an overview of various outreach activities and adopted the outreach categories presented by Farrell and Mastel (2016) in their paper entitled "Considering Outreach Assessment: Strategies, Sample Scenarios, And A Call to Action" as follows: (1) Collection-Based Outreach; (2) Instruction &amp; Services-Based Outreach; (3) "Whole Person" Outreach; (4) Just for Fun Outreach; (5) Partnerships and Community-Focused Outreach; and (6) Multi-Pronged Themed Events and Programming. Said categories were derived from Farrell and Mastel (2016) paper entitled "Considering Outreach Assessment: Strategies, Sample Scenarios, And A Call to Action" (see table 2)

The investigation was conducted from May 1-31, 2021. Websites and Facebook pages of the AUNILO member-libraries were accessed and comprehensively browsed for posts related to community engagement and outreach. Only posts that from March 2020 to April 2021 were collected and imported into Excel and categorized. Aside from categorizing the outreach activities, the different platforms used for implementing the outreach and engagement activities were also noted. The data gathered were then tabulated and analyzed using basic percentages, frequencies, and rankings.

The limitation posed by this method is that it is possible that other activities are not fully presented in their website and Facebook pages and those activities were not included in the results of this study.

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MANAGEMENT AND MARKETING AT THE UNIVERSITY LIBRARIES

Table 2

## Outreach categories used in this study (Farrell and Mastel (2016)

| Categories | Scope |
|---|---|
| Collection-Based Outreach | Activities in this category are those that are linked to a library's collection, or parts of a library's collection. |
| Instruction & Services-Based Outreach | Activities in this category focus on presentations and public guidance regarding library services and resources. |
| "Whole Person" Outreach | Activities in this category are primarily concerned with helping people on an individual level and helping them make personal progress in some aspect of their life. |
| Just For Fun Outreach | Activities in this category are those that are typically "just for fun". |
| Partnerships and Community-Focused Outreach | Activities in this category are primarily focused on creating partnerships and working with community groups. |
| Multi-Pronged Themed Events and Programming | Activities in this category take place on a large scale and usually involve numerous activities and levels of support, frequently over several days. |

## Results and Discussion

Despite the challenges brought about by Covid-19 pandemic, many libraries are still actively engaged in performing various outreach activities. The following AUN (ASEAN University Network) Inter-Library Online (AUNILO) member-libraries' website and Facebook pages were reviewed (see Table 3).

Table 3

## AUNILO member-libraries activities

| | Name of Library | University | Country |
|---|---|---|---|
| 1 | Universiti Brunei Darussalam Library | Universiti Brunei Darussalam | Brunei Darussalam |
| 2 | University Library | RoyalUniversityof Law and Economics | Cambodia |
| 3 | Universitas Gadjah Mada Library | Universitas Gadjah Mada | Indonesia |

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MANAGEMENT AND MARKETING AT THE UNIVERSITY LIBRARIES

| 4 | Central Library of Institut Teknologi Bandung | UPT Perpustakaan Institut Teknologi Bandung | Indonesia |
| 5 | Universitas Airlangga Library | Universitas Airlangga | Indonesia |
| 6 | Universiti Malaya Library | Universiti Malaya | Malaysia |
| 7 | Perpustakaan Hamzah Sendut | Universiti Sains Malaysia | Malaysia |
| 8 | Tun Seri Lanang Library | Universiti Kebangsaan Malaysia | Malaysia |
| 9 | Universiti Putra Malaysia Library | Universiti Putra Malaysia | Malaysia |
| 10 | Sultanah Bahiyah Library | Universiti Utara Malaysia | Malaysia |
| 11 | University of Yangon Library | University of Yangon | Myanmar |
| 12 | De La Salle University Libraries | De La Salle University | Philippines |
| 13 | University of the Philippines Library | University of the Philippines | Philippines |
| 14 | Rizal Library | Ateneo de Manila University | Philippines |
| 15 | Nanyang Technological University Library | Nanyang Technological University | Singapore |
| 16 | National University of Singapore Libraries | National University of Singapore | Singapore |
| 17 | Singapore Management University Library | Singapore Management University | Singapore |
| 18 | Burapha University Library | Burapha University | Thailand |
| 19 | Office of Academic Resources | Chulalongkorn University | Thailand |
| 20 | Mahidol University Library and Knowledge Center | Mahidol University | Thailand |
| 21 | Chiang Mai University Library | Chiang Mai University | Thailand |
| 22 | Khunying Long Athakravisunthorn Learning Resources Center | Prince of Songkla University | Thailand |
| 23 | HCM Library | Vietnam National University - HCM | Vietnam |

After scouring the posts through their sites, here is the breakdown of their outreach and engagement activities. See Table 4.

Table 4

**Outreach and engagement activities per category**

| Categories | No. of Libraries | % |
| --- | --- | --- |
| Instruction & Services-Based Outreach | 23 | 100.00% |
| Collection-based Outreach | 21 | 91.30% |
| "Whole Person" Outreach | 16 | 69.57% |
| Partnerships and Community-Focused Outreach | 16 | 69.57% |

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UniLibNSD-2021

MANAGEMENT AND MARKETING AT THE UNIVERSITY LIBRARIES

| | | |
|---|---|---|
| Just For Fun Outreach | 12 | 52.17% |
| Multi-Pronged Themed Events and Programming | 2 | 8.70% |

As seen from Table 4, all member libraries are still able to deliver instruction & services-based outreach. This is positively reassuring, given the global crisis we are facing, libraries continue to deliver remote services to the community. Closely followed by collection-based outreach at 91.30%, data shows that libraries put a premium on building awareness and providing information about the resources and services that are available despite the hard condition. Interestingly, outreach and engagement activities during these times also paved the way to focus on a more holistic approach to programming – community driven and geared towards helping people achieve personal progress. Evidently, 69.57% or more than half of the libraries decided to offer such outreach programs belonging to the "whole person" and partnerships and community-focused outreach. Lastly, the least used type of outreach was under the category of multi-pronged themed events and programming. Quite understandably the lowest performed as activities in this category take place on a large scale with numerous activities and varied levels of support, frequently over several days. This type of programming poses a great challenge most specially at a time where everyone is still adapting to the new normal.

Table 5

**Platforms used by libraries in the delivery of outreach activities**

| Platforms | No. of Libraries | % |
|---|---|---|
| Online Meeting Platforms | 23 | 100.00% |
| Facebook | 20 | 86.96% |
| Instagram | 10 | 43.48% |
| YouTube | 8 | 34.78% |
| TikTok | 3 | 13.04% |

*multiple responses

Such outreach and engagement activities were all performed online as seen on Table 5. Fully utilized in the delivery of outreach and engagement activities were various online meeting platforms. These include the use of Zoom, Google Meet, MS Teams among others. Among the social media platforms, Facebook (86.96%) leads as the most utilized online space through posts or even live streamed content. Tiktok at 13.04%, despite being least used in this category, is still a well received move at a time where we must reach and amplify efforts to online spaces where our patrons are.

MANAGEMENT AND MARKETING AT THE UNIVERSITY LIBRARIES

**Implementation of outreach and community engagement programs in AUNILO member-libraries**

**Collection-Based Outreach**

As described above, collection based outreach are those activities that are centered in promoting the library collections and reading. In the survey, activities found in this category include books fairs, book exhibits, book reviews and book talks. This also includes read together programs and some quizzes or scavenger hunts that make use of the library collections.

Traditionally, these activities are done face-to-face and within the library premises but activities mentioned above were mostly conducted online making use of meeting platforms and various social media channels. For example, Universitas Airlangga (UNAIR) Library in Indonesia hosts its book talk program #CeritaBuku, which means "storybook" when translated in English, using Zoom and broadcasted live via Facebook. They also use Instagram live to talk to authors for this program. (Instagram is a free, online photo-sharing application and social network platform that was acquired by Facebook in 2012.) Another novel way that UNAIR does to post book recommendations is through TikTok, a popular social networking app for making and sharing short videos. Singapore Management University Library (Singapore) also uses Instagram to promote their online databases in partnership with their Library Peer Advisors (students). Burapha University Library in Thailand, on the other hand, creates podcasts for their book review and makes them available in SoundCloud.

**Instruction & Services-Based Outreach**

Providing instructions that promotes the services and resources of the library is essentially part of the core service of the library. Expectedly, all libraries surveyed implement this type of outreach that ranges from training and workshops, video tutorials, podcasts and even contests.

Common topics tackled include online resources, research writing and publishing, research and data analysis tools as well as information and digital literacy skills. Some sessions were conducted in partnerships with vendors or publishers but majority were facilitated by the librarians themselves. Singapore Management University offers a series of "bite-sized" library workshops on such topics usually scheduled weekly. Universiti Sains Malaysia Library conducts a program called "10-minute Research Hacks," live streamed on Facebook and YouTube. Similarly, Nanyang Technological University (Singapore) offers advanced research support training such as using Python for basic data analysis, Tableau for data visualization and Mendeley and Zotero for reference management. They also offer trainings on digital scholarship, productivity tools, and open data sharing and scholarship

On the other hand, Chiang Mai University Library (CMUL) in Thailand has a podcast published on Youtube called "Hello Library" that allows patrons to "get to know the library" more. Also in Thailand, Chulalongkorn University Library livestreams it's program series called "Chula Library Share" in YouTube and Facebook that also promotes the resources and services of the library. Libraries surveyed also provide instructions beyond the usual scope of library resources like workshops on using digital tools like Canva and Microsoft Office.

**"Whole Person" Outreach**

Libraries not only target meeting the information needs of its community but also concern themselves with helping people on an individual level. The survey revealed that "whole Person" outreach activities revolved around addressing physical and mental health and gender sensitivity.

As an example, University of the Philippines Diliman hosted an online conversation about women and gender; Universitas Gadjah Mada Library (Indonesia) has a project related to women

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UniLibNSD-2021

MANAGEMENT AND MARKETING AT THE UNIVERSITY LIBRARIES

empowerment while Universiti Malaya Library (Malaysia) had a suicide prevention campaign. Further, Chiang Mai University Library (CMUL) in Thailand offers meditation and dance sessions and Burapha University Library (Thailand) offers a weekly "Fit and Firm" activity.

### Just For Fun Outreach

From games and contests to arts and crafts, libraries do not run out ideas to create activities to engage the community. Around 52% of the libraries surveyed offer this type of activity. For example, Singapore Management University (Singapore) organized a DIY lanyard making contest using recyclable materials as part of their go-green initiative. Another DIY activity was held by Chiang Mai University Library (CMUL) (Thailand) on creating knitted plant holders.

Also a fun event, the #LibraryFriendsLibraryFan Burapha University (Thailand) hosts contests with raffle prizes on their Facebook page. The University of the Philippines Diliman Library created a Meme challenge on "Hapit Mode/Backlogs" as part of their eKapihan (or virtual meet up over coffee).

### Partnerships and Community-Focused Outreach

Libraries have always been about collaborations and partnerships. Reaching out to the community and participating in civic activities have become an integral part of the libraries' outreach and community engagement programs.

Libraries surveyed offer various activities under this category such as book donation programs, book drives, roadshows, virtual tours and even reading programs. Some have organized feeding programs, blood donation drives and even participated in go-green initiatives in the local community.

The Universiti Brunei Darussalam Library (Brunei Darussalam) partnered with their local medical center for a blood donation drive. The Burapha University Library held various activities that fall under partnerships and community-focused category. For example, they partnered with their local elderly club and organized an activity that promotes reading. They also joined the local volunteers to collect trash from one of their beaches in their municipality. Further, BU Library participated in local tradition and offering ceremonies, and donated books to select students in one of the schools in their province and many other similar projects.

There were a number of initiatives that promotes environmental awareness and sustainability including Chiang Mai University Library's seed distribution and tree planting activity; Sultanah Bahiyah Library's recycling #trashforcash project; and Universiti Malaya Library's #UMZeroWasteCampaign.

### Multi-Pronged Themed Events and Programming

Activities in this category fall under multiple themes usually spread out throughout the week. Organizing such activities require more resources and involve more extensive preparation and coordination, many libraries appear to offer less of this kind of project.

The book fair activity held by Universiti Brunei Darussalam Library qualifies in this category as they also organized training-workshops and blood donation as part of the activity. Another good example is De La Salle University Libraries' IAmInfoSMART, an information literacy campaign held during the Library and Information Services (LIS) month, with a theme DQ Deconstructed. Part of this program were daily games, database training and outreach to public school students that are all centered around digital citizenship.

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UniLibNSD-2021
MANAGEMENT AND MARKETING AT THE UNIVERSITY LIBRARIES

## Conclusions

The global crisis faced by the world crippled industries, institutions, and organizations with libraries facing new challenges and problems head on. However, this study revealed that libraries remain resilient despite the challenges and limitations brought about by the Covid-19 pandemic. It was found out that libraries covered and were able to explore various types and scope of community engagement and outreach activities. Highly used forms of outreach are Instruction & Services Based Outreach followed by Collection-Based Outreach with increased focus on "Whole Person" and Partnership and Community-focused outreach. Least used at this time is the Multi-Pronged Themed Events and Programming. Such a feat affirms libraries' capability to adapt in whatever situation they are in.

In addition, given the limitations, libraries are innovative as they continue to deliver and find novel ways to implement initiatives. The member libraries included in this study exemplified the agility in adopting appropriate technologies that will facilitate delivery outreach activities while maintaining and maximizing the spirit of collaboration and partnerships. Likewise, continued dedication to learning and adopting new digital skills also play an essential role in bringing about new avenues to conduct community engagement and outreach.

With the increased demand on the remote delivery of services and programs, libraries are simultaneously turning their focus outward by heightened emphasis on outreach activities that revolve around the theme of "coming together" as a community – an important facet in today's society as we deal with the crisis together.

Moving forward, libraries can further expand their reach and amplify their role in the society as long as they focus on engaging the community to understand their needs and aspirations. Clear setting of objectives and sound development of strategies that leverages partnerships and collaborations can greatly assist in mobilizing resources despite the limitations experienced in this crisis.

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MANAGEMENT AND MARKETING AT THE UNIVERSITY LIBRARIES

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## ПРОСВІТНИЦЬКА ДІЯЛЬНІСТЬ ТА ЗАЛУЧЕННЯ ГРОМАДИ ПІД ЧАС COVID-19: ЗУСИЛЛЯ ТА ПІДХОДИ АКАДЕМІЧНИХ БІБЛІОТЕК

**Мета.** Цей документ спрямований на вивчення типів і масштабів залучення громади та інформаційно-пропагандистської діяльності академічних бібліотек, коли фізичні приміщення бібліотеки залишаються закритими або працюють з обмеженими можливостями. Також розглядаються інструменти та методи, що використовуються для реалізації таких дій. У документі також робиться спроба виявити закономірності або теми, що виникають в міру того, як бібліотеки досліджують інноваційні ідеї та роблять нові ініціативи для покращення обслуговування громади, якій вони служать. **Методика.** У дослідженні використовується огляд веб-сайту та Facebook-сторінки міжбібліотечних онлайн-бібліотек AUN (Мережа університетів АСЕАН) (AUNILO). Аналізуються такі шість категорій охоплення: (1) Інформаційна діяльність на основі збору інформації; (2) Інструкція та amp; Інформаційно-пропагандистська діяльність; (3) Інформаційно-пропагандистська кампанія «Whole Person»; (4) Інформаційно-пропагандистська діяльність "Просто для розваги"; (5) Партнерство та інформаційно-пропагандистська діяльність, орієнтована на громалу; та (6) Багатосторонні тематичні заходи та програмування. Зазначені категорії були взяті зі статті Фаррелла та Мастела (2016), під назвою «Considering Outreach Assessment: Strategies, Sample Scenarios, And A Call to Action». **Результати.** Результати дослідження дадуть певне уявлення про те, як бібліотеки посилюють свою роль у перетворенні суспільства, оскільки вони надають можливість позитивних змін у своїх громадах. Крім того, цей документ також спонукає бібліотеки уважніше придивитися до своєї діяльності та подумати про те, як вони можуть створювати творчі та надихаючі способи комунікації зі своїми користувачами. **Висновки.** У відповідь на кризу COVID-19 бібліотеки активно змінюють свою участь у суспільній та інформаційно-пропагандистській діяльності в Інтернеті та знаходять нові способи обслуговування викладачів, студентів та інших користувачів. Бібліотеки віддані зміцненню стійкості та відновленню громади шляхом спільної роботи з її членами та побудови партнерських відносин з відповідними організаціями.

*Ключові слова:* академічні бібліотеки; просвітницька діяльність; COVID-19; залучення громади; інновації