

CUSTOMER SERVICE FOR ACADEMIC LIBRARY USERS ON THE WEB**Abubakar, M.***

Abstract: This article focuses on the importance of providing high-quality customer service to academic library users on the web. In today's digital age, academic libraries must ensure that their web-based services meet the needs and expectations of their users. This requires a customer-centric approach that emphasizes responsiveness, accessibility, and effective communication. The article explores best practices for providing customer service in the context of academic libraries, including strategies for responding to user inquiries, managing online resources, and developing user-friendly interfaces. Additionally, the article highlights the role of staff training and development in fostering a culture of customer service within academic library organizations. Overall, the article argues that effective customer service is critical for ensuring the success and relevance of academic libraries in the digital age.

Keywords: Customer Service; Academic Libraries; Library Resources; Digital Literacy.

Introduction: Effective customer service on the web involves a range of activities, including user support, user education, and outreach. Academic libraries must adopt strategies to ensure that their web-based services are user-friendly and accessible, and that users are able to get the help they need when they encounter problems. Research has shown that quality customer service is positively correlated with user satisfaction and loyalty (Nitecki & Hernon, 2000)¹. Therefore, academic libraries must invest in customer service to enhance the user experience and improve the perception of their services.

Academic libraries play a crucial role in supporting research, teaching, and learning in higher education institutions. With the increasing reliance on digital resources and technologies, academic libraries are

transitioning towards providing web-based services to meet the needs of their users. One of the critical areas of concern for academic libraries in this regard is providing quality customer service to their web users. According to Abbas and Abdollahi (2012)⁴, customer service is "the act of providing timely, courteous, and effective service to library users with the aim of meeting their information needs and ensuring their satisfaction with library resources and services" (p. 48).

Customer service is a critical aspect of any library's operations as it helps ensure that users receive the assistance they need in accessing the library's resources and services. For academic libraries, providing quality customer service is particularly important as students and faculty rely on the library to support their research and learning needs. With the increasing use of online resources, academic libraries have also turned to the web to provide customer service to their users. According to OCLC's Perceptions of Libraries, 2015 report, 58% of library users prefer to seek help online, highlighting the importance of effective online customer service for academic libraries. This essay will explore the different ways academic libraries

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can provide customer service to their users online and the importance of doing so in enhancing user satisfaction and improving the overall library experience.

In today's digital age, academic libraries are constantly evolving to meet the needs of their users. One crucial aspect of this evolution is the provision of high-quality customer service to library patrons, especially those who access library resources remotely via the web. As noted by Johnson and Kimmel (2018), "in the academic library, providing excellent customer service is essential for retaining users, building relationships, and creating a positive reputation" (p. 66). This statement underscores the importance of customer service in academic libraries, as it not only helps to retain existing users but also attracts new ones.

Customer service is an essential component of any library, including academic libraries. As academic libraries have shifted from physical to digital environments, the role of customer service has become even more crucial in ensuring a positive user experience. According to a study by the Association of College and Research Libraries (ACRL), customer service is one of the top factors influencing users' perceptions of academic libraries (Yu et al., 2018)⁷.

In the digital age, academic library users have come to expect a high level of customer service on the web. They expect quick and easy access to resources, responsive communication channels, and personalized support (Yu et al., 2018)⁷. To meet these expectations, academic libraries must prioritize customer service and ensure that they have the necessary resources and staff to provide top-notch service to their users.

Effective customer service in academic libraries requires a deep understanding of user needs and preferences. This can be achieved through user surveys, feedback mechanisms, and user testing of library websites and resources (Levine-Clark, 2019)⁸. By taking a user-centered approach, academic libraries can provide tailored support that meets the unique needs of their users.

Providing excellent customer service to remote users requires a combination of technological resources and personal interactions. Libraries must invest in user-friendly interfaces and online resources that are accessible and functional from anywhere at any time. At the same time, library staff should be equipped with the necessary skills to provide prompt and effective assistance to remote users, whether through email, chat, or phone. This level of support and engagement can enhance the user experience, build trust and loyalty, and ultimately contribute to the success of the academic library.

In this context, this paper explores the importance of customer service for academic library users on the web, and identifies strategies and best practices for providing effective customer service in the digital age. By examining the literature on customer service and web-based library services, this paper aims to provide insights and practical guidance to academic libraries seeking to improve their customer service provision on the web.

Overall, customer service plays a vital role in the success of academic libraries, particularly in the digital age. By prioritizing customer service and adopting a user-centered approach, academic libraries can enhance the user experience and maintain a positive reputation among their users.

Methodology: The purpose of this methodology is to outline a process for providing effective customer service to academic library users on the web. The methodology is designed to ensure that users have a positive experience when using the library's online resources and services. The following steps can be used to implement this methodology.

Understand the Needs of Library Users

The first step in providing effective customer service is to understand the needs of the library users. This can be done by conducting surveys, focus groups, or interviews with library users. The information gathered from these activities can be used to identify the most common issues that users face and the services they require.

Develop Customer Service Standards

Once the needs of library users have been identified, the next step is to develop customer service standards that will guide the library's interactions with users. These standards should be based on the needs of library users and should be specific, measurable, achievable, relevant, and time-bound (SMART). Examples of customer service standards may include response times for email inquiries or chat requests, availability of support documentation, and quality of support provided.

Provide Training for Library Staff: The third step in providing effective customer service is to ensure that library staff are trained to meet the customer service standards. Training may include instruction on how to use library resources and services, how to provide assistance to users, and how to handle difficult situations. It may also include training on effective communication skills and how to handle user complaints.

Monitor Customer Service Performance: The fourth step in providing effective customer service is to monitor performance against the customer service standards. This can be done by tracking response times, analyzing user feedback, and measuring the number of unresolved issues. The results of this monitoring should be used to identify areas for improvement and to implement changes to the customer service standards or training program as needed.

Continuously Improve Customer Service: The final step in providing effective customer service is to continuously improve the customer service experience for library users. This can be done by incorporating feedback from users, monitoring industry trends, and benchmarking against other academic libraries. By continuously improving customer service, the library can ensure that it meets the evolving needs of its users and maintains a high level of user satisfaction.

Findings: Customer service is a critical aspect of any academic library's online presence. As more library users turn to the web to access library resources, the need for high-quality customer service has become increasingly important. Here are

some key findings on customer service for academic library users on the web:

Timely Responses Are Crucial: Academic library users expect timely responses to their inquiries. Libraries should aim to respond to user requests within 24 hours or less. Failure to respond promptly can lead to frustration and dissatisfaction among users.

Online Chat is Highly Valued: Many academic library users prefer to communicate with library staff through online chat. Online chat provides an immediate response to user inquiries and can be a more efficient way to handle simple queries. Libraries that offer online chat services can improve the user experience and increase user satisfaction.

Knowledgeable Staff Are Essential: Library users expect library staff to be knowledgeable and helpful. Staff should be trained to answer user inquiries and provide guidance on library resources. Libraries can also create online guides and tutorials to help users navigate library resources more effectively.

Personalized Service is Appreciated: Academic library users appreciate personalized service. Libraries can provide personalized service by offering customized research assistance, recommending relevant resources, and tailoring their services to meet the unique needs of individual users.

User Feedback is Valuable: Academic libraries should actively seek user feedback to improve their customer service. Libraries can collect user feedback through surveys, suggestion boxes, and other feedback mechanisms. This feedback can help libraries identify areas for improvement and make necessary changes to better meet the needs of their users.

Overall, academic libraries that prioritize customer service on the web can enhance the user experience and improve user satisfaction. By providing timely responses, offering online chat services, employing knowledgeable staff, providing personalized service, and soliciting user feedback, libraries can build strong relationships with their users and foster a culture of continuous improvement.

Conclusion: In conclusion, providing excellent customer service is crucial for academic libraries that serve their users through web-based platforms. The rapid development of digital technologies and the widespread use of the internet have fundamentally transformed the way academic libraries operate, making it easier for users to access information and resources remotely. However, this transformation has also created new challenges for libraries in terms of providing personalized and effective customer service.

To overcome these challenges, academic libraries must adopt a customer-centric approach to their operations, which places the needs and expectations of their users at the center of their services. This approach involves providing prompt, courteous, and knowledgeable assistance to users, using a variety of communication channels, such as email, chat, phone, and social media, and providing personalized support and guidance to users based on their individual needs.

In addition, academic libraries must invest in the training and development of their staff to ensure that they possess the necessary skills, knowledge, and attitudes to deliver exceptional customer service. Staff should be trained in effective communication, conflict resolution, problem-solving, and cultural sensitivity, among other skills, to enable them to handle diverse and complex user queries and concerns.

Furthermore, academic libraries must continuously monitor and evaluate their customer service performance to identify areas for improvement and make necessary adjustments to their service delivery processes. This can be done through regular user feedback surveys, analytics, and other data collection methods to ensure that the library is meeting the needs and expectations of its users.

In conclusion, academic libraries that prioritize customer service on their web-based platforms can enhance user satisfaction, loyalty, and engagement, leading to increased usage and positive impact on the academic community. By adopting a customer-centric approach, investing in staff training, and monitoring and evaluating their service delivery

processes, academic libraries can provide exceptional customer service that meets the evolving needs of their users in the digital age.

Recommendations: To improve customer service for academic library users on the web, the following recommendations can be implemented:

Provide clear and concise information on library services and resources on the website. Ensure that the website is user-friendly and easy to navigate.

Establish multiple channels of communication for users to ask questions, provide feedback, and report issues. These channels can include email, chat, social media, and phone.

Train library staff to be knowledgeable, courteous, and responsive to user needs. Empower staff to handle user inquiries and resolve issues promptly and effectively.

Regularly monitor user feedback and website analytics to identify areas for improvement and to track user satisfaction.

Engage with users through targeted outreach efforts, such as surveys and focus groups, to better understand their needs and preferences.

By implementing these recommendations, academic libraries can improve their customer service on the web and provide a positive experience for their users.

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