# Users' Perception on Library Products and Services in Special Libraries and Information Centers: A Comparative Study

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#### Abstract

The paper is based on the study on users' perception on library products and services in the Special Libraries and Information Centres (SLICs) of the two cities and presents a comparative study of the users' perception of the offered services and products by the selective SLICs. As part of the survey, questionnaires were distributed among 10 SLICs to collect primary data. The data from these 10 SLICs were collected, collated and analysed accordingly. The study made clear that marketing is a growing area and positively impacts the SLICs. The study comprehends the influence of library promotion and technology on library services and products in SLICs.

**Keywords:** Library Marketing, Library Promotion, Library Outreach, Special Libraries, Library Products, Library Services, User Satisfaction

#### Introduction

Aligning with the rapid pace of technology and the changing competitive environment, it is increasingly important for libraries to adopt a marketing orientation. The success of a library is no longer solely dependent on tasks such as information selection, organisation, storage and dissemination, but also on the establishment of effective communication channels for service delivery. To effectively reach library customers, it is crucial to adopt efficient marketing strategies. Understanding users' needs and interests is essential for successful management and application of marketing in the information and service

sector. Libraries must grasp users' psychology and align it with the best products, services and relevant information, enabling them to formulate effective strategies and plans that lead to user satisfaction.

Moreover, the emphasis on service in the present era calls for a proactive approach rather than a reactive one (Panda, 2021). Libraries should actively promote their services to users, not only to raise awareness about what the library offers but also to provide high-quality services (Joshua & Michael, 2020). By marketing library services in alignment with the teaching and research objectives of academic institutions, librarians can effectively support their overall mission. This proactive stance enables libraries to enhance their impact and ensure that their services meet the needs and expectations of their users.

In context of libraries, marketing is a managerial technique that identifies user needs, provides responsive services, and encourages increased utilisation of library services. It facilitates interaction between the library and the user community, allowing users to share feedback that determines their satisfaction level. According to the revised definition by American Marketing Association (2004), "Marketing is an organisational function and a set of processes for creating, communicating and delivering value to customers and for managing customer relationships in ways that benefit the organisation and its stakeholders."

Libraries must embrace marketing to thrive in the future. Although the term 'marketing' was not traditionally used, library outreach and promotional activities align with modern marketing practices in librarianship (Gupta

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et al., 2018). As Drucker stated, "it is the customer who determines what a business is." It is imperative that libraries understand their customers' values and needs to develop services and provide resources to meet these needs (Robinson, 2012). According to Philip Kotler and Sidney Levy, "Marketing is that function of the organisation that can keep in constant touch with the organisation's consumers, study their needs, develop products that cater to meet these needs, and build a program of communications to express the organisation's purposes" (Kotler & Levy, 1969). Parker (2007) and Sen (2006) conclude that librarians generally have a positive attitude towards marketing. However, some negative attitudes still linger. There is not always a clear understanding of marketing in the broader context. (Savard, 1996) opines that "Library professionals have to improve their relationship with marketing in order to be able to face the future. Indeed, without sound marketing practices, one can only speculate about the role of librarians in tomorrow's information society."

Many authors and researchers opined and gave their different interpretations regarding their understanding, and common among all is the urge and the need of marketing concept in the practices. "Periodical orientation has to be provided to the librarians regarding digital information products and services for better marketing" (Chandraiah, 1996). Inder Mohan (1996) states that "marketing of information is described as being an immature stage of development and one of the reasons being the relatively low level of knowledge and lack of agreement on user requirements, wants and needs. Therefore, the study of information consumer behaviour and factors relating to his decision making, in other words his mind has become the central focus of current research." Dhawan (1998) opined "literacy in the marketing concepts and techniques is another important prerequisite which must be addressed seriously if information marketing is to become a permanent feature of library operations."

Libraries have a significant challenge ahead of them, it will be necessary to develop a culture of marketing, a marketing orientation, within libraries in order to ensure long term sustainability.

Marketing is the link between the library user's (LU) needs and its resources and services. As a library marketer, any library can create and build that link. Managerial skills and competencies will help connect the library to its users, who know that they can get information in many other ways without even coming to the library building. Anwar and Zhiwei (2020) in their paper, reviewed the literature and disclosed the close relationship between social media and libraries in terms of marketing of library sources and services. Kaushik and Pandey (2021) in their paper discussed tools and resources available on the internet, to be explored by libraries, to implement marketing activities. Social media has impacted libraries in various forms, especially in connecting with users. Stokić et al. (2019) explained how the effective use of customer relationship management program and its integration with the smart technologies can help leverage the quality of the relationship between public libraries and stakeholders, which in turn would secure their support and loyalty in the future.

AlAwadhi and Al-Daihani (2019), studied the factors related to the use of social media for marketing library information resources and services, for raising awareness and meeting the needs and satisfaction assessments. Anwar and Zhiwei (2020) found a significant impact and correlation between social media and libraries in terms of marketing. The study also highlights challenges and issues in adopting social media for marketing library resources and services.

Social distancing and physical closure during the coronavirus disease 2019 (COVID-19) have posed a threat and challenges worldwide. It has enacted a new normality for the library and its management to bring revolutionary change. Rocco Palumbo (2022), in his paper studied regression models to obtain the factors which affected the capability of different set of libraries in attracting users amidst the COVID-19 pandemic.

Muzvondiwa and Marutha (2022), discovered that having a marketing policy and proper marketing strategy plan can benefit libraries and the information centres by taking advantage of the latest technology, including social media and extended web applications, through which users remain connected and aware about the library resources and services. Wójcik (2022), in his paper explores 'dark academia' as an aesthetic concept creates potential for the promotion of academic libraries, especially those that are more traditional in terms of their architecture, decor or how they offer their services.

Majority of the literature (Rysavy, Joo, Choi & Baek, 2018; Cheng, Lam & Chiu, 2020; Michalak & Daly, 2021; Stephens, 2022) has focused on the effectiveness of social media in library promotion strategies. These social media platforms are extensively used by the libraries as a awareness tool to increase awareness.

# **Research Questions and Methodology**

Two sets of questionnaires were designed, one to study the Special Libraries and Information Centres (SLICs) and their professionals in detail, and other set for users to assess their perception and use SLICs products and services. The key questions for the users were as follows:

- How users access the information products and services of the SLICs?
- How long users are visiting and consulting these SLICs?
- Users' satisfaction level with the SLICs services.
- Performance Measurement of the Library staff and Quality Control and Service Improvement in SLICs.
- Integration of information technology (IT) and impact on the services.

## **Sample Selection and Design**

Two sets of questionnaires in printed and electronic form (by using Google Forms tool) were designed and shared to collect responses by the individuals. The study is survey-based and part of the survey of 10 libraries and information centres (5 Lucknow X 5 Jaipur). A total of 188 responses were received from users of both SLICs. The sample size for the present study are as follows:

- Special Library and Information Centres (SLICs)
   : 10
- Library and Information Professionals (LISPs)
   : 45
- Library Users (LU): 188

## **Response Rate from the Users**

The categorised users in the study are of different profiles. Table 1 below shows 188 users classified into six categories under SLICs of Lucknow/Jaipur users; the highest of (59.0%) belong to 'students' category; followed by researchers (31.9%). The rating of academicians, consultants and professionals are negligible. This is obvious that special libraries users basically belongs to these category and therefore, the result data is encouraging and quite significant.

**Table 1: Categorization of Users of SLICs** 

Sr. Occupations		SLICs of Luc	cknow, n=95	SLICs of Ja	ipur, n=93	Total Responses(TR), n=188
NO.		No. of Respondents	% of Total Responses	No. of Respondents	% of Total Responses	% of Total Responses
1.	Researchers	51	53.7	9	9.7	31.9
2.	Academicians	3	3.2	0	0.0	1.6
3.	Consultants	2	2.1	1	1.1	1.6
4.	Professionals	5	5.3	1	1.1	3.2
5.	Students	30	31.6	81	87.1	59.0
6.	Others	4	4.2	01	1.1	2.7
Total		95	100.0	93	100.0	100.0

# **Findings and Discussions Information Access by Users**

This Table 2 shows the various ways and means of information accessed by the users to know about the collection, products and services rendered by the concerned SLICs on specialised information. The question stands from where they get the information about SLIC. As per the result obtained from the questionnaire there

are seven categories of sources of information such as websites, newspapers, e-mail alerts, magazines, word of mouth, membership and others. The higher sources of information for SLICs of Lucknow users is through website (42.1%), whereas SLICs of Jaipur users get to know the sources of information through word of mouth (48.4%). Overall, word of mouth (34.0%) and websites (29.8%) are highly rated sources of information for users to learn about SLICs.

Table 2: Information Access by Users

G M		How Do	You Know Abo	out Library?		
Sr. No.	Source of Information	Luckno	оw, n=95	Jaipt	ur, n=93	Total Responses, n=188
		TR	% of TR	TR	% of TR	% of TR
1.	Website	40	42.1	16	17.2	29.8
2.	Newspaper	26	27.4	14	15.1	21.3
3.	Email alerts	25	26.3	14	15.1	20.7
4.	Magazine	24	25.3	15	16.1	20.7
5.	Word of Mouth	19	20.0	45	48.4	34.0
6.	Others <sup>1</sup>	28	29.5	17	18.3	23.9
Total			100.0		100.0	

Notes: \*: Total Responses; Others (Lucknow)<sup>1</sup>: My Friends (11) + Library portal (9)+Library Member(8);

Others (Jaipur)<sup>1</sup>: My Friends (7) + Library portal (6)+Library Member(5)

Due to the latest development in information and communications technology (ICTs), a digital revolution has taken place in today's environment. LISPs are expected to enhance their competencies beyond the boundaries of traditional skill sets and practices. It has forced librarians to be more interested and updated on the content covered

in the magazines/books and its co-relation with other sources of information.

# **Response of Users on Consultation Period**

The objective of asking this question to the users of SLICs was to get their reference period (i.e. how long they are using the library). The analysed data is depicted in Table 3.

**Table 3: Responses About Reference Period of Users** 

Sr.	Davis da C Da Carrara	SLICs of Luc	cknow, n=95	SLICs of Jaipur, n=93			
No.	Period of Reference	No. of TR	% of TR	No. of TR	% of TR		
1.	Less than a year	22	23.2	30	32.3		
2.	1-3 years	41	43.2	37	39.8		
3.	Over 3 years	32	33.7	26	28.0		
	Total	95	100.0	93	100.0		

Table 3 clearly shows that the highest number of users (43.2%) from the SLICs of Lucknow are using SLICs within the range of 1-3 years, whereas 33.7% are using library for more than 3 years. Users from SLICs in Jaipur are relatively younger, with 32.3% of them using the SLICs for less than a year. Whereas, the maximum respondents are from the SLICs of Lucknow (33.7%) and Jaipur (28.0%), who have spent more than 3 years in the institution and are well versed with the collection, resources and services of the SLICs.

### **User Visits and Frequencies to SLICs**

As depicted in Table 4 and Fig. 1 the majority of (59.6%) users from both the SLICs of Lucknow and Jaipur have regular visits to special libraries; followed by 21.3%, who consults library when needed depending upon the assignments. The resultant data shows interest of users to visit the library regularly for their information needs.

Sr. No.	Frequency Period		Lucknow, -95	SLICs o	Total Responses TR, n=188	
	Perioa	No. of TR	% of TR	No. of TR	% of TR	% of TR
1.	Regularly	53	45.7	59	63.4	59.6
2.	Weekly	16	9.3	16	17.2	17.0
3.	Monthly	2	2.1	2	2.2	2.1
4.	When needed	24	42.9	16	17.2	21.3
	Total	95	100.0	93	100.0	100.0

**Table 4: Responses of Users' Visit Frequency to SLICs** 

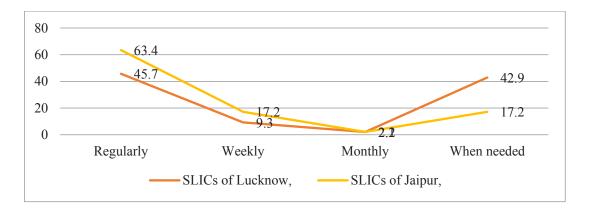


Fig. 1: Users' Visit Frequency to Libraries and Information Centres

The users of the SLICs always hunt for the information related to their assignments from their respective organisations. They only visit other SLICs if their needs cannot be fulfilled within their own organisation. The users of SLICs only visit whenever there is a requirement of information. There is no periodicity defined as such, because it is all demand-based. It could be once in a year or twice in a week.

# Users' Satisfaction Level with the SLICs Services

Creating high value and retaining customers are critical strategic marketing issues for any libraries in today's competitive environment. User satisfaction is the longterm an integral part of quality management in libraries. Whatever products and services are developed by the SLICs, it is to meet the users' needs. One of the major roles of SLICs is not only to store and disseminate information products and services, but also to measure the satisfaction level of the users. Based on the satisfactory level of the users a lot of improvements are induced in the products and services. There is an added advantage of SLICs compared to

other two categories of libraries that the information sources are subject specific and not widely diversified. When both external and internal users visit these libraries, they have a clear objective of seeking correct subject-specific information

Table 5:	Ratings	About	Users'	Satisfaction
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Sr.	SLICs		Fully Mo		Ostly Often Satisfied		Not Satisfied		Total	Average Responses (%)	
No.		No. of TR	% of TR	No. of TR	% of TR	No. of TR	% of TR	No. of TR	% of TR		Responses (%)
1.	Lucknow, n=95	34	35.8	42	44.2	19	20.0	0	0.0	95	50.5
2.	Jaipur, n=93	33	35.5	50	53.8	10	10.8	0	0.0	93	49.5
	Total	67		92		29		0	00	188	100.0

As shown in the Table 5 and Fig. 2, both the SLICs of Lucknow and Jaipur users are either fully or mostly

satisfied with the SLIC products and services.

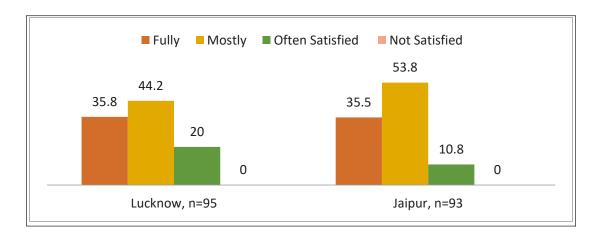


Fig. 2: Users' Level of Satisfaction

As displayed in the Fig. 2, 35.8% users of SLICs in Lucknow and 35.5% users of SLICs in Jaipur are fully satisfied with the products and services. The next data level shows that 44.2% users of SLICs in Lucknow and 53.8% users of SLICs in Jaipur are mostly satisfied with the existing products and services. It shows that the resources and services offered or developed by the SLICs are as per the mandate of the organisation. So the primary surveyed data obtained here is not very encouraging and needs very careful screening and evaluation of products and services. From both the SLICs, no user opined that they are not satisfied.

### **Users' Need Analysis**

Libraries and other information providers should be aware of the users' needs in order to design, offer and improve products or services (Veer & Panda, 2022). It is crucial to align these offerings with user requirements and satisfaction levels. Whatever products or services the library offers in the SLICs, it should meet the requirement of the users as shown in the Table 6. It is very important to satisfy the needs of the users.

Sr. Types of		Completely		Mostly		Partially		A Little		Not At All		Total		Average
	• 1	No. of	% of	No. of	% of	No. of	% of	No.	% of	No. of	% of	No. of	% of	Responses
No. SLICs	TR	TR	TR	TR	TR	TR	of TR	TR	TR	TR	TR	TR	(%)	
1.	Lucknow	35	36.8	47	49.5	12	12.6	01	1.1	00	0.0	95	100.0	50.5
2.	Jaipur	44	47.3	43	46.2	03	3.2	02	2.2	01	1.1	93	100.0	49.5
3.	Total	79		90		15		03		01		188	100.0	100.00

**Table 6: Ratings Upon the Users' Needs Met** 

Table 6 shows the rating of the extent to which purpose of visiting SLICs has been met. Analysis of data regarding the users' need in SLICs of Lucknow shows that 36.8% reported their needs being completely met, 49.5% mostly met and only 1.1% indicated that their needs were only partially met. Whereas in case of users' need of SLICs of Jaipur, 47.3% completely met, 46.2% are mostly met and only 1.1% needs not met at all.

# Performance Measurement of the Library staff in SLICs

Marketing of library services is a systematic process which entails the combination of planning, concentrating on customer needs and satisfaction and offering appropriate products and services. The special library professionals have to play a proactive role in meeting the needs of the users. Users' response to performance of library staff is presented in the following Table 7.

C	Performance		Luc	know (%), 1	n=95			Ja	ipur (%), n=	=93	
Sr. No.	Parameters Parameters	Fully Agree	Agree	Partially Agree	Can't Say	Do Not Agree	Fully Agree	Agree	Partially Agree	Can't Say	Do Not Agree
1.	Enthus <sup>1</sup>	42 (44.2)	36 (37.9)	16 (16.8)	01 (1.1)	00 (0.0)	34 (36.6)	43 (46.2)	13 (14.0)	0 (0.0)	3 (3.2)
2.	UMR <sup>2</sup>	43 (45.3)	41 (43.2)	9 (9.5)	00 (0.0)	02 (2.1)	37 (39.8)	41 (44.1)	13 (14.0)	0 (0.0)	2 (2.2)
3.	WARP <sup>3</sup>	36 (37.9)	41 (43.2)	15 (15.8)	03 (3.2)	00 (0.0)	35 (37.6)	39 (41.9)	16 (17.2)	0 (0.0)	3 (3.2)
4.	WQAAP <sup>4</sup>	38 (40.0)	44 (46.3)	13 (13.7)	00 (0.0)	00 (0.0)	36 (38.7)	39 (41.9)	14 (15.1)	0 (0.0)	4 (4.3)
5.	PCQS <sup>5</sup>	36 (37.9)	49 (51.6)	09 (9.5)	01 (1.1)	00 (0.0)	40 (43.0)	38 (40.9)	12 (12.9)	1 (1.1)	2 (2.2)

Table 7: Responses Against Performance of the Library Staff

Note 1: Enthusiastic; 2: Understood my requirements; 3: Were able to resolve my problems; 4: Were quick to assist me or acknowledge my presence; and 5: Provided a consistent quality of service.

The performance measurement can be best judged by the user's satisfaction level, which has been calculated in the Table 7, based on following five metrics such as -1: Enthusiastic; 2: Understood the requirements; 3: Were able to resolve the problems; 4: Were quickly assisted or acknowledged the presence; and 5: Provided a consistent

quality of service. Based on the data collected from the users of SLICs in Lucknow/Jaipur, 44.2%/36.6% fully agreed that the professionals are enthusiastic, and 45.3%/39.8% fully agree that the professionals understood the requirements.

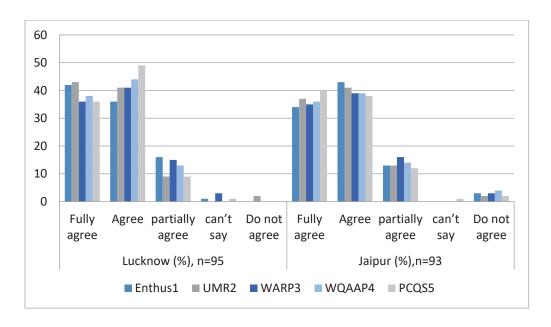


Fig. 3: Users' Satisfaction with the Performance of the Library Staff

Based on the data analysed and depicted in Fig. 3, it is also found that there is a negligible percentage of the users from SLICs in both Lucknow and Jaipur who responded with 'can't say' or 'do not agree' for the performance of library staffs. The resultant data clearly shows that LISPs are enthusiastic and able to understand the need of users, as well as committed to provide quality services.

# **Integration of IT in Quality Services**

SLICs' have been deploying ICT and electronic information resources and services to satisfy the diverse information needs of their users and has also created an

impact on quality and effectiveness services. To provide efficient and effective services to the clientele, the SLICs have developed electronic based (e-based) services. Many of the traditional services are either converted or packaged into e-based services. Because of the penetration of IT in delivering quality service to the clientele, it has reduced the print and duplication cost, as well as the time required for delivery. Services can be delivered quickly, catering to the requirements of multiple users sharing the same area of interest.. The products and services are developed in very less time and suits to the best format of the users. It has also increased the usage of the services into multifold. Users' responses to the role of integration of IT in services is presented in the following table:

Table 8: Significant Role of Integration of IT in Quality Services

C. No	Types of SLICs	Yes		N	o	Total		
Sr. No.	Types of SLICs	No. of TR	% of TR	No. of TR	% of TR	No. of TR	% of TR	
1.	Lucknow (n=95)	76	80.0	19	20.0	95	100.0	
2.	Jaipur (n=93)	83	89.2	10	10.8	93	100.0	
	Total	159		29		188		

As shown in the Table 8 and Fig. 4, 80.0% users of SLICs Lucknow and 89.2% of users of SLICs Jaipur agreed that Information Technology has enhanced the quality services

in the SLIC, whereas, 20.0% users of SLICs Lucknow and 10.8% users of SLICs Jaipur, declined the same.

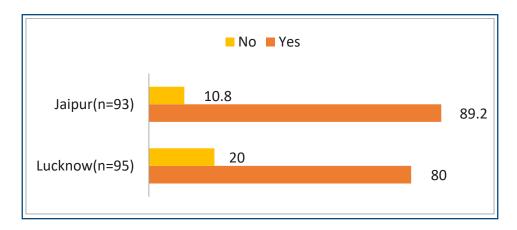


Fig. 4: Role of IT in Improvement of Quality Services

## **Quality Control and Service Improvement**

To provide effective and efficient services in the service sector, continuous improvement is a must. There are some areas identified to bring improvement in the service sector. Users' response to ask for such improvement is shown in the following Table 9.

Sr. No.	Suggestions	SLICs of Luc	cknow, n=59	SLICs of Ja	ipur, n=42	Average of (LU+JU)
<i>Sr.</i> 110.	Suggestions	No. of TR	% of TR	No. of TR	% of TR	(%)
1.	TMLICTO <sup>1</sup>	55	93.2	32	76.2	84.7
2.	MBRWL <sup>2</sup>	42	71.2	37	88.1	79.6
3.	RENAR <sup>3</sup>	27	45.8	22	52.4	49.1
4.	MCR <sup>4</sup>	25	42.4	7	16.7	29.5
5.	CAS <sup>5</sup>	22	37.3	7	16.7	27.0
6.	MOrgd <sup>6</sup>	20	33.9	12	28.6	31.2
7.	ANR <sup>7</sup>	19	32.2	3	7.1	19.7
8.	RDS <sup>8</sup>	15	25.4	12	28.6	27.0
9.	BHAOLJ <sup>9</sup>	14	23.7	7	16.7	20.2
10.	PSSRMW <sup>10</sup>	12	20.3	10	23.8	22.1
11	IntlPub <sup>11</sup>	9	15.3	13	31.0	23.1
12.	SOLSTP <sup>12</sup>	9	15.3	10	23.8	19.5

**Table 9: Quality Control and Service Improvement** 

Note: 1. To make library-men ICT oriented; 2. More books on relevant within the library; 3. Regular Editions to new areas of research; 4. More Collection of Resources; 5. Customer Awareness Services; 6. More organized; 7. Announcements of new releases; 8. Review on different subjects; 9. Be her access to on-line journals; 10. Proactive service from staff is required to meet our works; 11. International Publications; 12. Subscription to on-line Science & Tech periodicals.

The researcher received responses of only 59 users form SLICs in Lucknow and 42 users from SLICs in Jaipur. The opinion and suggestions received from the users were categorised into 12 broad areas, as shown in the Table 9. The areas include: 1. To make library-men ICT oriented; 2. More books on relevant within the library; 3. Regular

editions to new areas of research; 4. More collection of resources; 5. Customer awareness services; 6. More organised; 7. Announcements of new releases; 8. Review on different subjects; 9. Access to online journals; 10. Proactive service from staff is required; 11. International publications; and 12. Subscription to on-line Science and

technology periodicals. The resultant data clearly shows that the following suggestions were prioritized by the users: To make library-men ICT oriented (84.7%); more books on relevant within the library (79.6%); regular editions to new areas of research (49.1%); and, more collection of resources (29.5%).

### Conclusion

Marketing of information products and services can do magnificence only when it is driven and controlled by trained and skilled human intervention because, technology, in whatever extent supreme it may be, can do nothing of its own without human assistance and emerge as a key enabler. It is crucial to recognize that that instead of using technology to automate processes, SLICs need to think about using technology to enhance human interaction. The study explored and added a significant contribution to the body of knowledge, and it is hoped that results of the study can be used as a pointer for further research in this direction. Special libraries and Information centres can play a pragmatic role to cope with the rapid changes in technology, scholarly practices and users' expectations.

# Scope of Further Study

Results of the study also draw attention on users, the way SLICs are used and how the SLIC's assigned for role of LIC professionals in extending their services to the users, those are specifically associated with special libraries, which are built up under the shades of LICs as a whole in addition to some exceptions. The study may give direction to new spheres and dimensions to the study in the field of library marketing.

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