

Research on the Development Trend and Content Strategy of China Libraries' Marketing under the Background of New Media Marketing

Li Yining

abstract: In recent years, the Chinese library community has repeatedly won the IFLA PressReader International Marketing Award, and library marketing has gradually become a widely discussed topic in the profession. At the same time, as information media and public information behaviors continue to evolve, shifting public information focus often pushes libraries to the periphery of people's information lives. Promoting library resources and services thus becomes a vital component of library practice. Against such a background, the Chinese library community has developed a keen interest in issues surrounding library marketing in recent years.

This study examines the theoretical framework of library marketing, exploring the rationale behind its inclination toward "marketing" or "communication." Through discourse analysis of existing research trends in China, the author employs CiteSpace's visualization tools to analyze keyword co-occurrence and temporal co-occurrence patterns, revealing three distinct developmental dimensions: theoretically, the integration of communication theories with early marketing frameworks; mediatically, the transition from traditional to new media platforms; and content-wise, the expansion of marketing themes from library services into socio-cultural domains. Supported by communication theories, library content marketing strategies in the new media era should align with both macro socio-cultural themes and the fundamental goal of library self-promotion. Drawing on the intersubjectivity of cultural communication and Charles Sanders Peirce's semiotic theory, this research proposes principles for selecting marketing content and development strategies for library-related content.

Introduction

"Library marketing" remains a perennially relevant topic in library operations, serving as a critical component closely tied to the execution of library services and the enhancement of service efficiency. In recent years, libraries have faced mounting challenges to their survival, stemming from evolving information environments, shifting informa-

tion behaviors, and diversified information carriers. Amid these persistent survival crises, library marketing practices and research have demonstrated three key trends: the expansion of theoretical frameworks, the transformation of marketing channels, and the diversification of marketing content. Addressing these emerging trends, this study explores strategies to safeguard marketing objectives through theoretical and content-based dimensions, drawing on the intersubjectivity in cultural communication and the semiotic theory of Marshall McLuhan.¹ This study proposes actionable solutions that counteract the impact of new media developments—including media evolution and content marketing—on the core objectives of library self-promotion.

In existing research and practice, the exploration and application of theoretical foundations for library marketing can be categorized into two approaches. The first approach integrates various marketing models and elements into library marketing operations, primarily based on service marketing and nonprofit institution marketing theories, to construct a systematic framework for library marketing. The Chinese library community has displayed a strong enthusiasm for applying marketing models to the research on library marketing issues, including the 4C, 4I, 4P, and 7P frameworks. Many scholars have conducted studies from different perspectives, applying marketing theories to address library marketing challenges.² Due to the diversity of library marketing businesses and the different focuses of individual studies, the selection of each marketing model

Due to the diversity of library marketing businesses and the different focuses of individual studies, the selection of each marketing model possesses a certain degree of rationality.

possesses a certain degree of rationality. Zheng Yaodan argues that the 4I marketing theory—Engaging, Interests, Interaction, and Individuality—synthesizes key elements of the marketing process, including content development, methodological approaches, audience analysis, and promotional channels. This synthesis reflects the evolution of traditional marketing theories within the digital age, making it particularly suitable for examining contemporary challenges in

library marketing.³ In her research on the operation of reading promotion brands, Zeng Jing found that the 7P marketing theory explicitly focuses on the essential elements in activities. Based on the 4P model (Product, Price, Place, Promotion), the 7P theory adds three additional dimensions, namely People, Physical Evidence, and Process, thereby making it more applicable to improving the effectiveness of reading promotion services.⁴ Li Jian, Lin Jing, Han Chuang, Du Songqi point out that, in contrast to the 4P model, which is mainly applied to tangible products, the 7P model is more suitable for intangible services. Therefore, the 7Ps framework is applicable to constructing a marketing element model and exploring the marketing strategies for regional intellectual property information services in university libraries.⁵ Wen Xiang xiong focused on the service marketing core of the 7Ps model and analyzed the matching degree between this model and library service marketing from seven dimensions, including Product, Price, Place, Promotion, People, Physical Evidence, and Process.⁶

In summary, the selection of marketing theories and corresponding models by the Chinese library community takes the following points into consideration. First is the



evolution of marketing theories and their applicability to the times. For example, with the development of the internet, although library marketing in China is still conducted offline at present, it has largely relied on internet channels. Therefore, the 4I marketing theory, which is applicable to the internet era, can be used as a reference. Meanwhile, library marketing is not “marketing” in the true sense because its purpose lies in the promotion of information and services rather than profit-making. Therefore, “service marketing” has become a consensual footnote for the Chinese library community in understanding library marketing businesses. The 7P marketing theory, which is suitable for service marketing, has demonstrated great competitiveness and adaptability. From the perspective of marketing behavior itself, the current marketing practices of Chinese libraries still focus on publicizing services or resources. For instance, Zheng Yaodan aimed to promote parent-child reading services in public libraries, and Li Jian et al. dedicated themselves to publicizing regional intellectual property information services in university libraries.⁷ There are also studies that deconstruct and construct library marketing itself by integrating the elements of library marketing with marketing models or theories. For example, Zeng Jing focused on the operation of reading promotion brands, Han Jing and Yu Zhun explored strategies for live-streaming marketing, Hu Tingjun concentrated on the operational strategies of reading-related short videos in university libraries, and Chen Feiying paid attention to the new media service marketing strategies of the Shanghai Library.⁸

The Chinese library community has extensively learned from the international experience of the marketing discipline in the field of library marketing. On the one hand, it has fully explored the applicability of various marketing theories and models; on the other hand, it has adhered to the non-profit nature of library marketing and gradually tended to adopt models and tools related to service marketing theories among numerous marketing theories.

The second approach to marketing in libraries draws on communication theory, often combining communication theories with marketing strategies to explore issues such as the effectiveness of library cultural dissemination. In this field, Li Donglai and Zhu Ji, Han Jing, and Gong Zhiyu have conducted research on various themes.⁹

The Dongguan Library, located in Dongguan City, Guangdong Province, China, where Li Donglai works, has attracted widespread public attention due to a reader's message. The incident originated when a migrant worker employed in Dongguan left a message in the library's guestbook, expressing his regret at leaving Dongguan and his deep nostalgia for the pleasant reading time he had spent at the library. In response, Curator Li Donglai noticed the sensational effect behind the incident and mentioned in his research that, due to factors such as libraries' non-profit nature, public welfare, and limited marketing investment, the main marketing pathway for libraries is publicity. By truthfully disseminating their own service and resource information, libraries can help more members of the public understand and make better use of library resources, thereby achieving the goal of meeting public needs. Therefore, effective communication can enhance marketing effectiveness.¹⁰ Curator Li Donglai's viewpoint represents one perspective in China's library community, and the notion that “communication is marketing” has gained extensive consensus in the industry.

In the research of younger scholars, the trend of integration between marketing and communication is particularly evident. On the one hand, they do not deny the communicative attributes of library marketing; on the other hand, they also adopt the application of marketing theories from earlier studies, thus forming a “communication

By truthfully disseminating their own service and resource information, libraries can help more members of the public understand and make better use of library resources, thereby achieving the goal of meeting public needs.

+ marketing” theoretical system for library marketing. Gong Zhiyu further analyzed the effects and mechanism of library marketing, pointing out that library marketing activities aim to connect user needs with library resources, exert the public cultural service function of libraries, and strive to resolve the mismatch between the release of promotional information on library

new media platforms and user needs. Therefore, it is necessary to integrate marketing theories with communication theories to construct a more complex and diverse theoretical system for library marketing.¹¹ Han Jing combined McLuhan’s media theory with the 7Ps marketing theory to study the basic marketing situation and content of public libraries on social media, short video platforms, official websites, live streaming, and other channels in the converged media environment. Therefore, in the context of library marketing, neither marketing theory nor communication theory alone is sufficient to reveal this phenomenon or construct its underlying theoretical system. Some Chinese scholars have attempted to build a composite theoretical system—using marketing theory to establish the framework of library marketing business elements and using communication theory to analyze the content and media attributes of its communication.¹²

In 1997, the International Federation of Library Associations (IFLA) established the “Management and Marketing Professional Group” to better interpret library marketing and promote the concept of library marketing globally. In 2002, to further publicize the theory of library marketing and advance global library information services, the IFLA Management and Marketing Committee began planning the “International Marketing Award” for libraries, recognizing institutions or organizations with outstanding achievements in this field.¹³ As a result, “library marketing” gradually came into view and became one of the important paths for libraries to actively explore and innovate. In 1993, the China Institute of Scientific and Technical Information, with the support of the UNESCO Integrated Information Programme, held the “International Symposium on Marketing Policies for Libraries and Information Service Agencies” in Beijing. The experts at the conference proposed that managers of libraries and information service agencies in both developed and developing countries must adopt marketing methods to provide high-quality services to users.¹⁴ From a temporal perspective, the formation and practice of library marketing concepts in China were no later than those abroad.

It is accepted that library marketing falls under the service marketing category within the theoretical framework of marketing. Within the service marketing framework, library services are recognized as the most distinctive element demonstrating marketing characteristics, while also serving as a key focus of library marketing operations. In the



late 20th century, American scholar Michael Buckland proposed that libraries should provide information services to readers, not only meeting their demand for information resources but also enabling convenient access to required information within complex and diverse information resources.¹⁵ The "IFLA / UNESCO: Guidelines for the Development of Public Library Services" states: "Library administrators can utilize marketing techniques to understand user needs and develop effective strategies to meet them. Libraries must also promote their services to the public, ensuring clear understanding of the book information services they provide."¹⁶ Accordingly, service and promotion constitute the two core themes of library marketing under the theoretical framework of "service marketing."

Under the fundamental principles of service marketing, library marketing, as the name suggests, refers to "the marketing of services." This concept can be divided into two core aspects: promoting library collections and promoting information services.¹⁷ This aligns with the 1983 definition by the American Library Association, which describes library marketing as "a series of purposeful activities conducted by library and information service providers to engage both actual and potential users of their services."¹⁸ This description establishes a clear connection between library marketing and library services, meaning that the goal of library marketing is the promotion and publicity of various services. Supported by service marketing theory, this concept deepens the meaning of "promotion" and positions library services as the primary focus of promotional efforts, thereby forming the foundation of library marketing.

The concept of "marketing as communication" has gained recognition in the library industry, widely attributed to Don Schultz, the father of integrated marketing communications and a professor at Northwestern University.

Schultz famously proposed that "marketing is communication, and communication is marketing."¹⁹ Liu Suxia and Wang Zuofang argue that communication studies and marketing are inherently interconnected. As communication studies examines human behavior and the principles of communication processes, its theories provide new perspectives for reading promotion methods.²⁰ The symbiotic relationship between communication and marketing naturally links "library marketing" and "library communication." Compared to service marketing, the integration of communication theories offers broader possibilities for expanding the promotional and outreach dimensions of library marketing.

Unlike the commercial and operational aspects of "marketing," communication is more closely tied to cultural elements, aligning better with libraries' core functions of cultural dissemination and social education. First, communication and culture are

The symbiotic relationship between communication and marketing naturally links "library marketing" and "library communication." Compared to service marketing, the integration of communication theories offers broader possibilities for expanding the promotional and outreach dimensions of library marketing.

interdependent and inseparable. Chen Xiaoying described their relationship as “two sides of the same coin, mutually reinforcing,” citing American scholar Edward Twitchell Hall’s assertion that “all human communication is inseparable from culture; without communication, there is no culture.”²¹ From the perspective of cultural communication studies communication constitutes the intrinsic attributes and fundamental characteristics of culture, with all cultural forms emerging and evolving through communication processes.²² Zhuang Xiaodong explicitly stated, “Culture is the culture of communication, and communication is the communication of culture. Neither cultural communication without culture nor communication without culture exists.”²³ In this sense, the cultural interdependence in communication studies provides the most direct answer to discussions about library marketing objects, as all promotional activities in library marketing inevitably revolve around cultural dissemination and popularization, with differences in content primarily reflected in sources and materials.

When “culture communication” becomes the main basis of defining the object and basic content of library marketing, the function of library marketing expands from the “propaganda” and “promotion” of service marketing to the level of social memory

When “culture communication” becomes the main basis of defining the object and basic content of library marketing, the function of library marketing expands from the “propaganda” and “promotion” of service marketing to the level of social memory communication and social education function of library.

communication and social education function of library. On one hand, the educational nature of cultural dissemination strengthens libraries’ social educational functions while enriching their marketing with cultural and educational dimensions. As education fundamentally embodies cultural transmission, its core function lies in facilitating cultural exchange between individuals.²⁴ Therefore, library marketing should center on fulfilling

its social educational role. The selection of themes, design of activities, and formulation of marketing content must incorporate educational considerations, thereby enhancing the unique value of libraries in marketing efforts and advancing their educational objectives.

On the other hand, cultural communication, mediated by symbols and grounded in information theory, facilitates deep integration between library marketing and other core operations. Information serves not only as a fundamental concept in information science and information resource management but also as a core concept in communication studies.²⁵ Some research integrates perspectives from social sciences and information science, proposing that “communication refers to the transmission of social information or the operation of social information systems.”²⁶ Within the context of cultural communication, the three fundamental elements of information dissemination—source, destination, and information—are translated into communicators, receivers, and symbols. In this field, symbols serve as the external form and material carriers of information, playing a crucial role where people select, apply, and create symbols during cognitive processes.²⁷ Therefore, cultural symbols, as objects of cultural communication, can also encompass the fundamental themes of marketing content in library marketing. In other words, library



marketing is the dissemination of culture, with its content expressed through cultural symbols. Furthermore, the creativity and intersubjectivity of cultural communication impose specific requirements for innovation and flexibility in library marketing content.

In the context of cultural communication, due to the dynamic and creative nature of cultural symbols, the phenomena of cultural communication and reception between sources and destinations are far more complex than mere information transmission. This is because cultural communication is a creative mental activity involving continuous cultural exchanges between subjects. In this process, communicators and recipients constantly decode, interact with, and interpret cultural symbols.²⁸ During the transmission of symbols, the receiver incorporates their own understanding in the process of receiving and decoding the symbols. As a result, the symbols are continuously rewritten, which is essentially the reinterpretation of the information embedded within them.

The introduction of cultural communication theory has established dual developmental pathways for library marketing in both theoretical and substantive dimensions. Theoretically, it facilitates the reinforcement of libraries' social educational functions while providing comprehensive support for the theoretical framework of communication studies. Practically, cultural communication transcends the boundaries of "libraries" by incorporating broader themes like social culture into library marketing, offering abundant material for content marketing in the new media era. The trend toward content-oriented library marketing can be attributed to the combined effects of theoretical expansion and media evolution. However, "culture" remains a macro concept, while "libraries" as social institutions preserving and disseminating human memory maintain clearly defined functions and missions. How to achieve audience understanding of library services through extensive cultural dissemination remains a critical question requiring consideration in developmental trends.

From a theoretical perspective, semiotic theory provides sound support for the cultural communication attributes of library marketing. Symbols serve as the genetic code and foundational medium for cultural dissemination. In cultural communication, symbols function as both the external form and material carrier of information, playing a pivotal role in information transmission and cultural exchange. Within library marketing strategies, cultural symbols emerge as the content carriers and expressive mediums, prominently featured in marketing narratives.

Theoretically, Peirce's triadic semiotics constructs the concept of "sign" through a hierarchical framework, demonstrating rigorous logic and analytical rigor that serves as a theoretical foundation for sign analysis. Peirce decomposes a sign into three components: the signifier, the signified, and the signifier of interpretation. The relationship among these elements is succinctly described as follows: an object possesses a specific characteristic that

... library marketing is the dissemination of culture, with its content expressed through cultural symbols.

Within library marketing strategies, cultural symbols emerge as the content carriers and expressive mediums, prominently featured in marketing narratives.

enables it to substitute for another object, thereby generating a psychological effect. The object with this characteristic constitutes the signifier, while the psychological effect or thought represents the signified, and the object it signifies constitutes the object.²⁹ Building upon this framework, Peirce further categorizes signs into their “most fundamental divisions” based on their relationship with dynamic objects, classifying them into iconic signs (icons), indexical signs (indices), and symbolic signs (symbols).³⁰ The specific definitions are as follows:

- Icon: Represents an object by showing how similar it is to the object it refers to.
- Index: The function of pointing is achieved through correspondence with facts, while truth is determined by the persistence of events. This persistence may manifest as temporal sequence, spatial adjacency, or logical causality.
- Symbol: A conceptual and conventionally established connection created by the interpreter between a symbol and its object to represent the object, resembling a rule or custom.³¹

In the context of library marketing, the cultural symbols transmitted in cultural communication serve as the representation items, the library content to be conveyed as the object, and the interpretation of cultural symbols during transmission as the explanation items. Based on Peirce's theory of the relationship between symbols and objects, we can further explore the relationship between library content and cultural symbols.

Semiotic theory identifies three effective modes of connection between cultural symbols in marketing content and library resources: similarity (iconic symbols), association (indicative symbols), and normative conventions (symbolic symbols). These relationships enable library content to be seamlessly integrated into marketing materials, subtly evoking user associations. Alternatively, through causal associations or lifestyle design approaches, libraries can weave library services and resources into narrative content to achieve the core objectives of library marketing.

In summary, in the new media era, “content” has become the core and fundamental logic of marketing. In an age where internet traffic reigns supreme, strategies like innovating library marketing content and capturing attention have become inevitable. Admittedly, if library marketing continues to focus on themes like operations, resources, and services, it risks becoming monotonous and unengaging, failing to generate attention or traffic. However, blindly adopting the “viral meme” logic of new media may also fail to establish direct connections with library services, thus missing the goal of library marketing. Therefore, this study examines the content mechanisms of library marketing in the new media era. By analyzing high-frequency keywords from existing research, it explores emerging trends and feasible approaches for constructing library marketing content in the new media environment.

Methods

Data Collection

Wang Zheng, Liu Yiyang, and Cui Ying analyzed the achievements related to library marketing published in Scopus and Web of Science from 2010 to 2019, concluding that the widespread development of marketing services in the future will inevitably promote the transformation of library roles and functions, effectively advance knowledge dis-



semination, and facilitate service innovation.³² To understand the progress and basic consensus of library marketing research in existing domestic studies, this study used China National Knowledge Infrastructure (CNKI) as the data source, with the search conditions “subject=library + marketing + content,” obtaining 880 search results. To focus on the field of library and information science, the discipline was limited to “library and information science and digital libraries,” resulting in a total of 637 documents, with publication dates ranging from 2003 to 2025.

Data Analysis

Co-occurrence Map of Keywords and Analysis of Core Nodes

To examine existing research perspectives on library content marketing, this study employed CiteSpace (version 6.4.R1) for text mining and visualization analysis. It is generally accepted that when conducting topic and domain co-occurrence network analysis using CiteSpace, clustering results are considered reasonable when the modular Q value exceeds 0.3 and the weighted average silhouette coefficient (S) surpasses 0.7.³³ The keyword co-occurrence network analysis parameters in this study are as follows, ensuring the rationality of the clustering results:

Time range: 2003-2025 (slice length=1)

Selection criteria: g-index (k=25), LRF=2.5, L/N=10, LBY=5, e=1.0

Network: N=403, E=730 (density=0.009)

Maximum 1 CCs: 301 (74%)

Marked node: 1.0%

Modular Q value =0.6467

The weighted average contour coefficient S=0.8901

The harmonic mean (Q, S) =0.7491

Meanwhile, this study analyzed the word frequency statistics and the co-occurrence relationship of keywords according to the LLR (Log-Likelihood Ratio) algorithm. The frequency threshold was set at 10, and the author manually filtered out keywords with limited practical relevance, such as “big data,” “empirical research,” “research reports,” “strategic studies,” “countermeasures,” “methods,” “enterprise,” “management,” and “public disclosure,” as well as those that were domain-specific but had minimal impact on specific research content, like “library,” which was the most frequent term. Figures 1 (Chinese) and 2 (English) show the resulting co-occurrence map of keywords, highlighting the key issues of common interest within the field.

As shown in Table 1, centrality measures the frequency of a node being traversed on the shortest path in a network, serving as an indicator of its importance and influence.³⁴ In Table 1, keywords such as “reading promotion” (0.25), “short videos” (0.11), “marketing” (0.12), “marketing strategies” (0.13), and “information services” (0.13) all exhibit centrality values above 0.10, standing out as the most prominent core nodes in current domestic library marketing research. Other keywords demonstrate limited

CiteSpace, v. 5.4.R1 (64-bit) Advanced
 September 17, 2025, 9:31:42 PM CST
 CNKI: D:\data\20250907\data
 Timespan: 2003-2025 (Slice Length=1)
 Selection Criteria: g-index (k=25), LRF=2.5, L/N=10, LBY=5, e=1.0
 Network: N=333, E=730 (Density=0.009)
 Largest CCs: 301 (74%)
 Nodes Labeled: 1.0%
 Pruning: None
 Excluded:

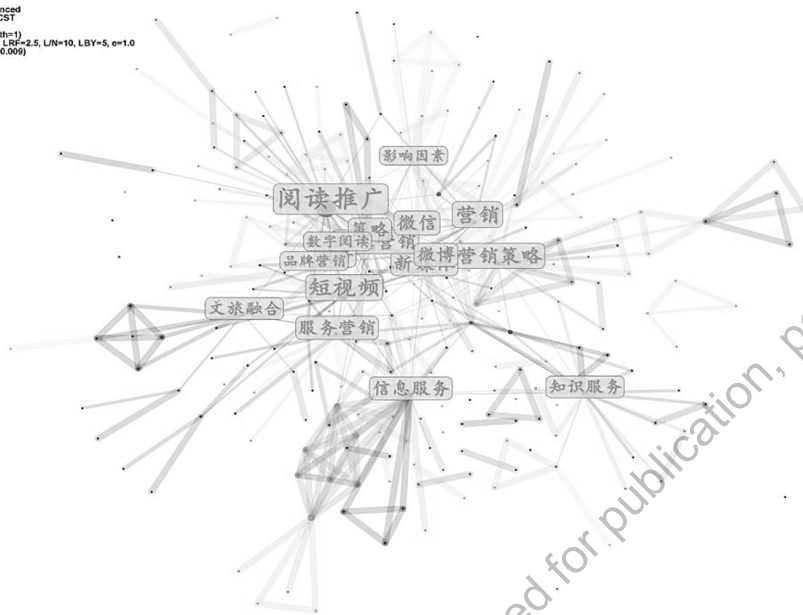


Figure 1. Co-occurrence map of keywords related to the search “subject=library + marketing + content” in China National Knowledge Infrastructure, as analyzed using CiteSpace. (Chinese version)

CiteSpace, v. 5.4.R1 (64-bit) Advanced
 September 17, 2025, 9:31:42 PM CST
 CNKI: D:\data\20250907\data
 Timespan: 2003-2025 (Slice Length=1)
 Selection Criteria: g-index (k=25), LRF=2.5, L/N=10, LBY=5, e=1.0
 Network: N=453, E=725 (Density=0.009)
 Largest CCs: 301 (74%)
 Nodes Labeled: 1.0%
 Pruning: None
 Excluded:

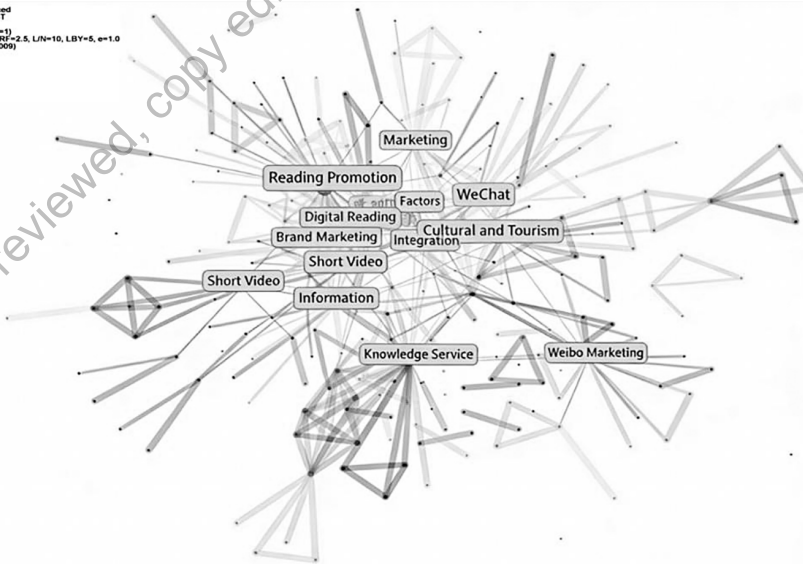


Figure 2. Co-occurrence map of keywords related to the search “subject=library + marketing + content” in China National Knowledge Infrastructure, as analyzed using CiteSpace. (English version)





Table 1.

Top 10 keywords in library content marketing research, in order of word frequency and centrality*

Keywords	Word Frequency	Centrality	First Occurrence Year
reading promotion	81	0.25	2013
short video	43	0.11	2020
marketing	38	0.12	2012
marketing strategy	31	0.13	2006
content marketing	26	0.04	2013
new media	26	0.07	2014
Wechat	24	0.05	2014
service marketing	22	0.06	2005
information service	21	0.13	2003
microblog	19	0.03	2012

* In CiteSpace, Centrality specifically refers to Betweenness Centrality, which measures how frequently a node (e.g., a document, keyword, or author) acts as a bridge on the shortest paths connecting any other two nodes. It is a core indicator for evaluating a node's role as a hub and its structural importance within the network.

influence compared to these. The semantic representation of core node keywords encompasses three sub-themes: the marketing ontology (marketing and marketing strategies), marketing channels (short videos), and library business operations (reading promotion and information services). To further analyze these four themes, this study conducts additional analysis using co-occurrence time-limited graphs, as illustrated in Figures 3 (Chinese) and 4 (English).

Results and Discussion

Development Stage of Research Topics in China Library Marketing

The CiteSpace co-occurrence temporal zone map enables chronological analysis of keywords across different periods. The map in Figures 3 and 4 reveal that research on library marketing in China from 2003 to 2005 can be broadly categorized into three distinct phases:

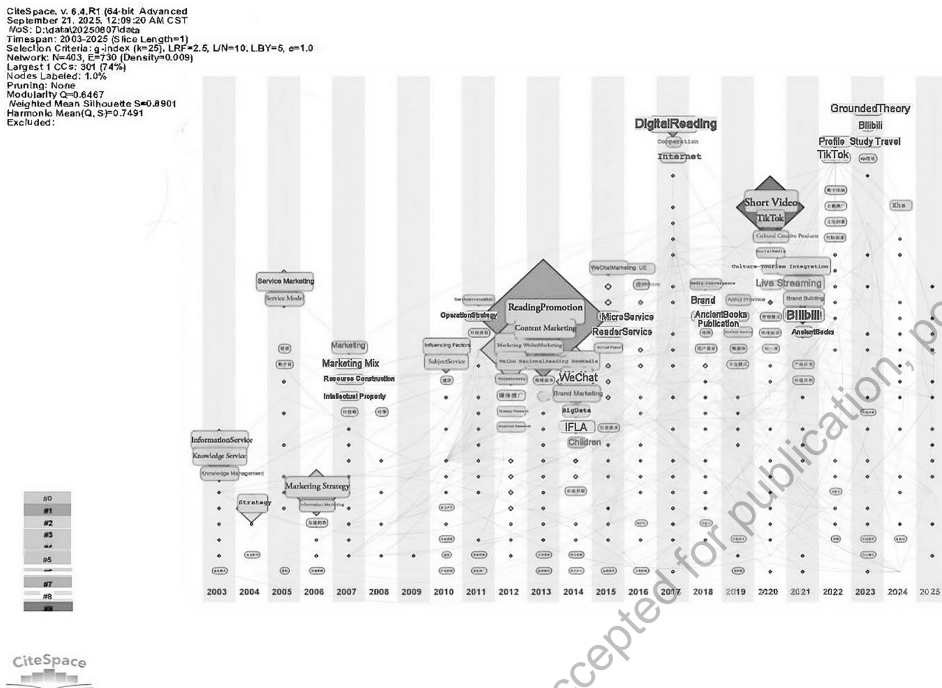


Figure 4. Co-occurrence time-limited graph of keywords related to the search “subject=library + marketing + content” in China National Knowledge Infrastructure, as analyzed using CiteSpace. (English Version)

Development Trends of Library Marketing Research in China

The co-occurrence temporal zone map reveals three distinct developmental phases centered around core nodes listed in Table 1. The first phase focuses on “marketing” (0.12), “marketing strategies” (0.13), and “information services” (0.13). The second phase centers on “reading promotion” (0.25), while the third phase emphasizes “short videos” (0.11). Semantic analysis of key terms indicates that library content marketing research has evolved from initial marketing strategies and library service promotion in the first phase, to the second phase’s focus on “reading promotion” as a contemporary priority. This shift demonstrates the expansion of library marketing perspectives from service delivery to broader societal domains. The third phase centers on new media marketing, supplemented by themes like cultural-tourism integration and cultural creative products that are related to social-cultural life, with both communication theories and marketing theories coexisting. In summary, this development manifests through three dimensions of evolution:

- Media Dimension: From Traditional Media to New Media
- Content Dimension: Expanding the Marketing Theme from Library Business to a Broader Social and Cultural Field
- Theoretical Dimension: From Marketing as the Foundation to the Integration of Communication Theory

In this content-driven era, library marketing has expanded beyond promoting resources and services to encompass broader themes like culture and social engagement.

From a developmental perspective, library marketing is undergoing profound transformations. In terms of communication channels, new media has replaced traditional media as the primary platform and battleground for library marketing. The content demands of new media have catalyzed the evolution of the “content marketing” paradigm, requiring greater depth, breadth, social integration, originality, and entertainment value in marketing materials. In this content-driven era, library marketing has expanded beyond promoting resources and services to encompass broader themes like culture and social engagement. Theoretical frameworks now integrate elements from marketing theory and cultural communication theory, providing robust theoretical support for content marketing in the new media age.

Conclusions

Library marketing services aim to promote library operations and services, a goal closely tied to the development of library services and the challenges they face. Zhang Jing summarized the trends in public library development, emphasizing the growing urgency for libraries to proactively demonstrate their value.³⁵ Cai Yuanxin and Xiao Peng noted that libraries need to enhance their social influence by clearly demonstrating their social benefits.³⁶ It can be argued that the necessity of library self-promotion forms the foundation for effective marketing. Regarding the objectives of library marketing, numerous studies have provided clear definitions. For instance, Jin Dongwang and Li Meiyong proposed that library marketing aims to bridge the gap between library services and information users through information service marketing, maximizing the utilization of library resources and helping more people recognize and appreciate their value.³⁷ Zhai Wen stated that library marketing seeks to better promote the value and services of libraries, encouraging more people to understand and utilize them, thereby enhancing their social benefits.³⁸ Therefore, the purpose of library marketing can be summarized as promoting library operations and services to help readers understand and engage with libraries.

With the rise of new media, content marketing has emerged as the most vital marketing strategy. Unlike the abundant content required by new media, library services, operations, and resources remain limited, making it challenging to compete for attention with micro-series and live-streaming content. Consequently, expanding content systems and diversifying library narratives have become the primary trend in library content marketing.

Generalization of the Topic of Library Marketing Content

Based on the visualization analysis results shared in this study, starting from Stage 2, library marketing themes shifted from promoting library services to centering on “reading promotion.” By Stage 3, new media emerged as a new channel for library marketing,



with content becoming the core. Libraries began incorporating social and cultural themes like cultural-tourism integration and creative industries into the marketing framework. This not only enriched the thematic content of library marketing but also gradually expanded the boundaries of library narratives.

For example, during the period covered by Stage 2, in the field of library marketing themes, Ma Yu conducted a study on WeChat public account content from six art university libraries in China. The analysis revealed that among 482 posts, 355 were reading promotion messages, accounting for 73.65 percent of the total content.³⁹ Zhao Xing, Yu Jing, and Li Shuning analyzed the top 10 most-clicked articles from university library WeChat accounts, identifying that the top 200 most-clicked articles in 2016 fell into several categories: announcements, service information, event updates, special articles, WeChat interactions, book recommendations, lectures, movies, notices, guides, and data statistics.⁴⁰ Qi Ayang investigated the development of social media content in Chinese libraries, finding that library social media content development lagged and exhibited severe homogeneity in both content and format.⁴¹ The survey data primarily covered library operations before 2018, corresponding to Stage 1 and Stage 2 of this study. The findings align with the visualization analysis results, indicating that prior to 2018, library business promotions dominated library marketing, with issues like content monotony and insufficient content development. In other words, library marketing during this period primarily focused on self-promotion objectives.

From a holistic perspective of library development, even during Stage 2, library marketing should extend beyond merely promoting services and operations. A 2013 study by Si Li and Hua Ziao-qin surveyed 39 libraries affiliated with China's Project 985 universities, revealing that video marketing focused on aspects like academic atmosphere and facility layouts. The researchers recommended enhancing RSS marketing content and diversifying featured resource promotions.⁴² Jin Aihong further suggested that libraries could improve Weibo marketing effectiveness by leveraging trending topics and event-driven strategies.⁴³

That Stage 2 occurred during this period is not a surprise. In April 2006, the Publicity Department of the Central Committee of the Communist Party of China, together with eleven other departments including the former General Administration of Press and Publication, jointly initiated the National Reading campaign.⁴⁴ In 2014, the Report on the Work of the Government of the State Council of the People's Republic of China included "National Reading" as a priority for the first time.⁴⁵ During this period, the libraries actively responded to national cultural policies, making reading promotion a key task in its professional development, continuously adjusting its service systems, and adapting to new professional scenarios. As reading promotion inherently possesses the attribute of extensive publicity, it emerged as a high-frequency theme in Stage 2 of the evolution of library marketing themes. Zhou Meng employed a web survey via WeChat to conduct a content analysis of the information pushed by the WeChat public platforms of "Project 985" university libraries. The study indicates that reading promotion was a primary component of the information disseminated by these libraries through new media.⁴⁶ Yu Shu et al., drawing on the reading promotion practices of Sichuan University Library, utilized a user consumption behavior model from the mobile internet era to construct a mobile reading promotion model for university libraries that aligns with the

characteristics of readers' reading behaviors.⁴⁷ Liu Yijun, taking the Changchun Library as an example, presented practical experiences of using WeChat and QQ as channels to build a national reading promotion platform targeting different reader groups.⁴⁸ Wu Nuoman introduced the "Micro Video E-Book" reading promotion initiative conducted by Sichuan University Library through channels such as Weibo, WeChat, and micro-video. This activity invited readers to autonomously film 60-second videos recommending their favorite e-books, thereby enhancing their engagement and interest in reading.⁴⁹

In Stage 2, in addition to "reading promotion," "subject services" also emerged as a significant theme in library marketing. During this period, with the introduction of foreign databases such as the Web of Science provided by Clarivate Analytics, the research horizons of Chinese scholars expanded, placing more specific demands on the timeliness and innovation of academic activities. Subject services centered around specific disciplines—such as novelty searches and citation retrieval services—gradually became a new growth area for libraries, particularly academic libraries. In the initial stages of implementation, these services often required substantial financial investment and personnel training, prompting libraries offering such services to actively promote their subject service offerings. Driven by this practical need, "subject services" progressively became one of the key themes in the marketing strategies of Chinese libraries, especially within academic institutions. For instance, the library of Taizhou College, Nanjing Normal University, adopted the concept of precision marketing to design and implement targeted subject services tailored to the distinct needs of learning-oriented users and teaching-oriented users.⁵⁰ Drawing on marketing theory, Jiangxi Agricultural University adopted user segmentation and precision marketing approaches to deliver specialized subject services for the field of entomology.⁵¹

With the development of new media, the expansion trend of library marketing content has become more concrete. During the Phase 3 period, Shao Yang proposed that library content marketing should focus on the library's core services and high-quality content, utilizing expressive techniques and interactive methods to deliver appropriate subject matter to suitable users at the right time, thereby demonstrating the library's value.⁵² Jiang Xin suggested that libraries should effectively tell three types of stories—library development history, librarian profiles, and typical user experiences—strengthening two-way communication to subtly convey the library's brand philosophy.⁵³ Xu Xinyi proposed that university libraries should develop diverse content including information notifications, resource promotions, knowledge-based popular science, reader interactions, and user-generated content.⁵⁴ From a developmental perspective, by Phase 3, the themes of library content marketing have expanded beyond service promotion to encompass broader areas such as library narratives, science popularization, and cultural engagement.

There are many current examples of Stage 3 library marketing in Chinese libraries. In Community A of Wuhan City, located in China's Hubei Province, there is a private library that primarily serves young children and offers book borrowing, toy rental, and sales as its main services. Yang Shihui conducted an in-depth study of its operations and explored feasible marketing strategies tailored to its unique positioning as a "toy library," reflecting the broad scope of library marketing themes.⁵⁵ In terms of content marketing, the flourishing of self-media has provided an excellent narrative stage for library marketing. A wide variety of stories can find their appropriate place within library



self-media platforms. Yang Xinya and Yang Qianye conducted a survey on the promotion of ancient books via the Douyin short video platform at the National Library of China and various provincial-level libraries. The results indicate that the Douyin accounts of these libraries have developed a content system encompassing ancient book recommendations, event promotions, and popular science knowledge. For instance, the National Library of China began posting short videos related to ancient book promotion on Douyin on June 13, 2019. As of July 17, 2025, it had published 93 such videos, with the highest single video receiving

In terms of content marketing, the flourishing of self-media has provided an excellent narrative stage for library marketing. A wide variety of stories can find their appropriate place within library self-media platforms.

198,000 likes and a total of 439,000 likes across all videos. Among provincial-level libraries, Zhejiang Library posted a total of 41 videos related to ancient books on Douyin, garnering 273,000 likes. The most popular video received 169,000 likes, and 20 videos each accumulated over 1,000 likes, indicating a relatively favorable communication effect.⁵⁶ The Chongqing Library, located in the city of Chongqing, has adopted content marketing as its foundational approach to develop four distinctive branded intellectual properties (IP) for digital reading promotion: “Digital Reading Squad,” “Exploring Digital Resources,” “A Small Study in the Cloud,” and “Sounds Whispering in Your Ears.” The “Digital Reading Squad” digital reading promotion brand, for example, features three character personas: Captain Xiaozhi, and team members Xiaoneng and Xiaoyue. The main storyline follows Captain Xiaozhi leading his team members, who work in seamless coordination, on adventures traveling through the vast knowledge universe of Chongqing Library, resolving knowledge crises along the way.⁵⁷ Nanjing Library in Nanjing, Jiangsu Province, has actively explored the innovative approach of “content plus services.” It has launched the storytelling event brand “Sister Nanjing Library” and leveraged new media platforms to plan and roll out its online version, forging a brand-new reading promotion model characterized by “short video plus.” Featuring carefully selected, high-quality picture book resources, the branded “Sister Nanjing Library” storytelling series integrates enlightenment education, early childhood education, and comprehensive Chinese language education into reading practice, and has gradually established a high-profile public brand.⁵⁸

In recent years, supported by new media technologies, the marketing practices of Chinese libraries have undergone more diversified innovations and developments in terms of content dimension. Libraries have reinvigorated traditional initiatives, such as reading promotion and collection resource recommendations, through formats like animations and short videos. As a result, new media channels more prominently reflect the cultural attributes of library marketing. This evolution allows us to further explore effective approaches to enhancing library promotion objectives based on the fundamental attributes of cultural communication. Cultural communication is a spiritual exchange of information between “subjects” through symbolic and meaningful processes, where intersubjectivity and symbolic mediation constitute its essential characteristics.⁵⁹

Optimizing Marketing Themes Based on Inter-Subjectivity

In sum, in the era of traditional media and the early stage of internet development, library marketing revolved around the promotion of library services and the dissemination of information. Libraries continue to strive to vigorously promote their new services and initiatives through various forms and channels, aiming to enhance the utilization rate of services and resources. However, in the context of cultural dissemination, cultural symbols achieve their transmission through continuous reinterpretation by diverse stakeholders. From the perspective of library marketing, audiences interpret library content through various thematic cultural narratives represented by symbolic elements, gradually expanding reach to broader demographics. Throughout this process of transmission and interpretation, the intersubjectivity of social members constrains the interpretation and dissemination of symbols, thereby influencing the efficacy of cultural communication and user engagement. Under the constraints of intersubjectivity, ensuring effective dissemination of marketing content requires thorough consideration of users' knowledge reserves, value judgments, and interests during the topic selection phase.

At the theoretical level, according to Peirce's semiotic theory, within the interpretant of a symbol, the interpreter's cognitive, interpretive, perceptual, and reactive processes toward the symbol ultimately lead to another symbol representing the same object. This means the interpretant itself becomes a symbol, and interpretation constitutes a process of generating new symbols.⁶⁰ Since interpretants originate from the interpreter's personal experience and understanding, the act of interpretation inherently aims to produce new symbols, continuously expanding and generating new interpretants. Simultaneously, no matter how interpretants evolve, they always involve revisiting and tracing previous interpretants.⁶¹ Intersubjectivity governs this dynamic. Its stable aspect manifests in the shared connotative and denotative meanings among social members, which form the foundation of cultural transmission—without which communication would be impossible.⁶² Thus, effective cultural transmission must be grounded in semantic and value judgments that achieve substantial group consensus. Symbols that gain consensus within specific groups cannot be effectively decoded or disseminated across broader communities. The dynamic aspect reflects that while social groups may share symbols, they cannot share their semantic meanings, as meaning is rooted in individual experience and inherently varies from person to person.⁶³

At the practical level, to address the constraints of intersubjectivity on cultural dissemination and achieve effective communication, new media content must align with societal consensus. Librarians should select themes for content widely accepted by target audiences and construct narrative frameworks. The content should convey values and messages that resonate with public understanding, avoiding overly novel or illogical narrative designs to ensure effective marketing communication.

In the context of library content marketing, intersubjectivity manifests as an information exchange process mediated through new media platforms. Beyond considering the broad cultural consensus of symbolic communication, it is essential to examine how intersubjectivity influences cultural dissemination. Reader evaluations, feedback, and backend metrics like page views and click-through rates all reflect users' attitudes toward library content. These direct or indirect interactions contain readers' opinions



and suggestions regarding marketing content formats, as well as their interest levels in the information itself, constituting a dynamic information exchange process. Libraries should proactively decode these symbolic signals from readers to drive new cultural dissemination, thereby enhancing user engagement and communication effectiveness in the new media environment.

Funding Statement

This research project is supported by the Fundamental Research Funds for the Central Universities of Beijing Language and Culture University (24YB16).

Li Yining is a research librarian at Beijing Language and Culture University Library; email: lenny_lee@126.com.

Notes

1. See Marshall McLuhan, *Understanding Media – The Extensions of Man* (Signet Books, 1966), <https://archive.org/details/ETC0624/page/n1/mode/2up>
2. Zeng Jing, "Research on the Brand Operation Strategies of Reading Promotion in Public Libraries Based on the 7P Marketing Theory," *Journal of Library Science* 47, no. 1 (2025): 73-77; Zheng Yaodan, "On Parent-Child Reading Promotion in Public Libraries Based on 4I Marketing Theory," *Library Journal of Henan* 44, no. 3 (2024): 30-32; Han Jing and Yu Zhun, "Research on the Strategy of Public Library Webcast Marketing Based on 4P Theory," *Library Work and Study* no. 2 (2023): 98-103; Zhang Jing and Ren Jiayi, "On Public Library Strategic Marketing Plans," *Library Tribune* 42, no. 2 (2022): 1-13; Hu Tingjun, "Research on Operation Strategy of Reading Short Video in University Library Based on 4P Marketing Model," *Library Work and Study* no. 12 (2022): 113-119; Chen Feiyin, "Research on service marketing strategy of new media service in public libraries based on 7Ps Theory: a Case Study of Shanghai Library," *Jiangsu Science & Technology Information* 38, no. 4 (2021): 17-19; Li Jian, Lin Jing, Han Chuang, and Du Songqi, "Research on the Marketing Strategy of Regional Intellectual Property Information Services of University Libraries from the Perspective of 7Ps Marketing Mix," *Journal of Academic Library* 39, no. 1 (2021): 69-77; Wen Xiang xiong, "Research on Marketing Strategy of Public Library Service Based on 7Ps Theory," *Journal of Academic Library and Information Science* 38, no. 3 (2020): 54-58; Wu Junying, "Marketing Strategies of Digital Library with 4P and 4C Marketing Mix Integrated," *Library* no. 3 (2009): 86-88.
3. Yaodan, "On Parent-Child Reading Promotion in Public Libraries."
4. Jing, "Research on the Brand Operation Strategies of Reading Promotion in Public Libraries."
5. Jian et al., "Research on the Marketing Strategy of Regional Intellectual Property Information Services."
6. Xiang xiong, "Research on Marketing Strategy of Public Library Service."
7. Yaodan, "On Parent-Child Reading Promotion in Public Libraries"; Jian et al., "Research on the Marketing Strategy of Regional Intellectual Property Information Services."
8. Jing, "Research on the Brand Operation Strategies of Reading Promotion in Public Libraries"; Jing and Zhun, "Research on the Strategy of Public Library Webcast Marketing"; Tingjun, "Research on Operation Strategy of Reading Short Video"; Feiyin, "Research on Service Marketing Strategy of New Media Service."
9. Li Donglai and Zhu Ji, "Thought on Library Marketing from the Event of 'Reader's Message to Dongguan Library,'" *Library and Information Service* 65, no. 1 (2021): 70-75; Han

- Jing, *A Study on the Marketing Strategy of Public Libraries in the Converged Media Environment* (Heilongjiang University, 2024); Gong Zhiyu, *Analysis of Factors Influencing the Development of Library New Media Marketing Based on User Experience* (Tianjin Normal University, 2023).
10. Donglai and Ji, "Thought on Library Marketing from the Event of 'Reader's Message to Dongguan Library.'"
 11. Zhiyu, *Analysis of Factors Influencing the Development of Library New Media Marketing Based on User Experience*.
 12. Jing, *A Study on the Marketing Strategy of Public Libraries in the Converged Media Environment*.
 13. Dai Yanqing, *Research on Marketing of Public Digital Cultural Services Based on User Experience* (Intellectual Property Publishing House, 2020), 8-9.
 14. Liu Jing, *Research on Resource Development and Construction of Public Libraries* (Jilin Science and Technology Publishing House, 2023), 146-147.
 15. Nan Chunjuan, *Research on University Library Work in the Context of Media Convergence* (Beijing University of Technology Press, 2023), 92-95.
 16. Jing, *Research on Resource Development and Construction of Public Libraries*.
 17. Ibid.
 18. Chunjuan, *Research on University Library Work in the Context of Media Convergence*.
 19. Don E. Schultz, Stanley I. Tannenbaum, and Robert F. Lauterborn, *The New Marketing Paradigm*, trans. Wu Lei et al. (China Water & Power Press, 2004), 46-48.
 20. Liu Suxia and Wang Zuofang, *Theoretical and Practical Research on Reading Promotion and Management Services in High School Libraries*. (Jilin Publishing Group Co., Ltd, 2023), 23-24.
 21. Chen Xiaoyin, *Cultural Communication Studies: A Foundational Textbook for Cultural Industries in Higher Education Institutions* (Fujian People's Publishing House, 2017), 10, 24.
 22. Zhuang Xiaodong, *Cultural Communication: History, Theory, and Reality* (People's Publishing House, 2003), 5-6, 51, 99.
 23. Ibid.
 24. Ibid.
 25. Xiaoyin, *Cultural Communication Studies*.
 26. Guo Qingguang, *Communication Studies Course: A Textbook Series for Journalism and Communication in the 21st Century, National Planning Textbook for Regular Higher Education during the 11th Five-Year Plan, 2nd ed.* (China Renmin University Press, 2011), 4.
 27. Xiaodong, *Cultural Communication*.
 28. Ibid.
 29. Zhang Caixia, *An Introduction to Peircean Semiotics of Communication* (Shandong University Press, 2021), 60-61, 84-85, 92-98.
 30. Ibid.
 31. Ibid.
 32. Wang Zheng, Liu Yiyang, and Cui Ying, "The Progress and Enlightenment of Foreign Library Marketing Theory and Practice in the Last Decade," *Library and Information Service* 64, no. 24 (2020): 122-132.
 33. Li Mingxia and Zhang Lei, "A Knowledge Map of Research on the Party's Self-Reform: Current Status, Hotspots, and Prospects—Bibliometric Analysis Based on CNKI Journals (2013-2022)," *Guizhou Social Sciences* no.1 (2023): 31-39.
 34. Zhou Tong, Cao Min, and Zou Xuming, "Research Status, Hotspots, and Prospects of Public Library Service Efficiency: A Visual Analysis Based on CiteSpace," *Library* no. 5 (2025): 15-24.
 35. Zhang Jing, *Development of Librarianship and Construction of Library Science Discipline: From the Perspective of the 14th Five-Year Plan Formulation* (2020), <https://im.nju.edu.cn/7f/48/c26271a491336/page.htm>.
 36. Cai Yuanxin and Xiao Peng, "Library Marketing Centered on Mega-events: Concepts, Cases, Steps and Strategies," *Library & Information* no. 1 (2022):109-117.
 37. Jin Dongwang and Li Meiyong, *Research on Library Information Services* (Xi'an Map Publishing House, 2013), 143.

38. Zhai Wen, *Research on the Transformation of Public Libraries under Cultural and Tourism Integration* (Jilin Photography Publishing House, December 2023), 33.
39. Ma Yu, "Research on the Communication Effect and the Content Analysis of WeChat Reading Promotion in Fine Art University Libraries: Taking Six Fine Art University Libraries as Examples," *Library Research* 48, no. 3 (2018): 1-8.
40. Zhao Xing, Yu Jing, and Li Shuning, "Study on the Wechat Content Marketing Strategies for University Library: Based on 693 Popular Articles," *Journal of Library and Information Science in Agriculture* 30, no. 5 (2018): 98-102.
41. Qi Ayang, *Research on the Model of University Library's Social Media Content Construction*. (Northeast Normal University, 2019).
42. Si Li and Hua Xiao-qin, "New Vision of Library Marketing in Chinese Universities," *Library Tribune* 33, no. 5 (2013): 6-10.
43. Jin Aihong, "Research on Library Marketing via Microblogging," *Library Journal* 35, no. 3 (2016): 55-59.
44. "Joint Proposal on Carrying Out the National Reading Campaign." Ministry of Education of the People's Republic of China, issued April 5, 2006, accessed April 15, 2026, <http://www.moe.gov.cn/>.
45. "Report on the Work of the Government," State Council of the People's Republic of China, presented at the Second Session of the 12th National People's Congress, March 5, 2014, accessed April 15, 2026, https://www.gov.cn/guowuyuan/2014-03/14/content_2638989.htm.
46. Meng Zhou, "Research on University Library Reading Promotion Based on WeChat Public Platform: A Case Study of 'Project 985' University Libraries," (doctoral dissertation, Tianjin Polytechnic University, 2017).
47. Yu Shu, Jiang Xiao, Li Guihua, Li Xiaowei, and Zhao Liang, "Exploration and Practice of Mobile Reading Promotion Based on SI-CAS Mode I in the Library: Taking Sichuan University Library as an Example," *Journal of the National Library of China* 26, no. 6 (2017): 34-42.
48. Liu, Yijun, "Research on the nationwide reading promotion strategy based on the marketing theoretical framework: A case study of Changchun Library," *Journal of Library Science* 38, no. 9 (2016): 5-8.
49. Wu Nuoman, "The Enlightenment of the 4I Marketing Mode in the University Library Reading Promotion: Taking a Series of Sichuan University Library Reading Promotion Activities as an Example," *Library and Information Service* 60, no. 14 (2016) :115-120.
50. Qing Zhang, "Research on the Subject Service Model in University Libraries Based on the Precision Marketing Concept: A Case Study of Taizhou College Library, Nanjing Normal University," *Journal of Library Science* 40, no. 3 (2018): 103-106.
51. Li Dongmei, Wu Xianfu, Guo Yunli, and Ge Tingting, "Exploration of Main Elements of Subject Services Based on Teaching Staff - A Case Study of Subject Service on Entomology in Jiangxi Agricultural University Library," *Science and Technology Square* no. 9 (2015): 139-143.
52. Shao Yang, "Analysis of the Practice Characteristics and Development Strategy of Library Content Marketing," *Library Work and Study* no. 2 (2021): 28-33+49.
53. Jiang Xin, "Study on the Path of High-Quality Content Design in Library From the Perspective of Content Marketing," *Library Work and Study* no. 2 (2022): 96-100, 123.
54. Xu Xinyi and Lu Zhiguo, "Research on Content Marketing Strategies of University Libraries from the Perspective of Media Convergence," *Inside and Outside Lantai* no. 26 (2023): 64-66.
55. Yang Shihui, *The Study on Marketing Strategy of Wuhan A Community Toy Library* (Zhongnan University of Economics and Law, 2023).
56. Yang Xinya and Yang Qianye, "Current Situation and Development Strategy of Ancient Books Promotion of Tiktok Short Video," *Journal of Tianjin Normal University (Social Sciences)* no.6 (2025): 137-146.



57. Fan Yang, "Digital resource promotion strategies in public libraries based on content marketing: A case study of Chongqing Library," *Office Operations* no. 15 (2023):169-171.
58. Zheng Guangfeng and Zheng Beiyi, "Practical Exploration of Children's Picture Book Reading Promotion in Public Libraries Under the New Media Environment: Taking the Nanjing Library 'Team in Role of Elder Sister' Story Telling as an Example," *New Century Library* no. 1: 47-51, 68.
59. Xiaodong, *Cultural Communication*, 51.
60. Caixia, *An Introduction to Peircean Semiotics of Communication*.
61. Ibid.
62. Shu, Xiao, Guihua, Xiaowei, and Liang, "Exploration and Practice of Mobile Reading Promotion," 63.
63. Caixia, *An Introduction to Peircean Semiotics of Communication*.

This mss. is peer reviewed, copy edited, and accepted for publication, portal 26.3.