

## **RELATIONSHIP MARKETING AS A TOOL FOR THE MODERNIZATION OF LIBRARY SERVICES**

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**Abstract:** The development of libraries is closely linked to the profound transformations of the digital society and the need to adapt quickly to the dynamics of the information market. Digitization, rising prices of information resources and increased competition from the online environment are both major challenges and opportunities for libraries. At the same time, the situation is complicated by factors such as insufficient state financial support, the ageing of human resources, the slow process of renewing collections and the increased costs of traditional and electronic resources. All these difficulties contribute to the migration of users to the Internet, where access to information is faster and more convenient, although they do not always guarantee its quality. In this context, libraries in the Republic of Moldova, especially university ones, use modern marketing, management and information technology tools to maintain their relevance and meet the needs of the academic community. Relationship marketing is becoming a key tool, able to support user loyalty, attract new audiences, strengthen institutional image and create innovative information products and services. In addition, by using fundraising strategies and engaging in projects, libraries can obtain additional resources for development and modernization. Thus, Relationship marketing is shaping up as a strategic platform for the development of university libraries, through which sustainable and beneficial relationships with users and institutional partners can be built. The application of this concept allows the modernization of library services and their active integration in the educational and scientific system, contributing to the creation of a synergistic framework for the dissemination and valorization of quality information.

**Keywords:** Relationship marketing, university libraries, library services, digitization, information resources.

**JEL Classification:** M31, D83, I23

### **1 Introduction**

The development of libraries in the 21st century is strongly influenced by the transformations of the digital society, the rapid changes in the information market, and the growing competition generated by the online environment. Digitization, diversification of information products and services, as well as the rising costs of traditional and electronic resources, represent both challenges and opportunities for libraries. At the same time, weak financial support, the aging of human resources, and the slow pace of collection renewal exacerbate the difficulties of information institutions, leading users to migrate to the Internet, where access is easier but often at the expense of information quality.

To meet these challenges, libraries in the Republic of Moldova, especially university libraries, rely on modern tools of marketing, management, and information technology. In this

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context, relationship marketing emerges as a strategic tool capable of supporting user loyalty, attracting new audience segments, strengthening institutional image, and creating innovative information products and services. At the same time, by using fundraising techniques and participating in project-based activities, libraries obtain additional resources for development and modernization.

University libraries are distinguished by the need to build durable and complex relationships with various segments of the academic community – from students, master’s and doctoral candidates, to teaching staff, departments, faculties, and rectorates. At the same time, they collaborate with external partners, authorities, and various categories of contact audiences, relationships that are important for strengthening their institutional role. However, the specific nature of these interactions is constantly changing, requiring adaptation of collaboration strategies and a solid theoretical and practical basis for managing transformations. The ability of libraries to integrate these changes determines their long-term success and contributes to their dynamic development.

Relationship marketing stands out as an important conceptual and operational framework for the development and strengthening of university libraries. Through it, information institutions can build and maintain long-term relationships based on trust, cooperation, and mutual benefits. In an educational and scientific context marked by rapid changes, applying the principles of relationship marketing is both a strategic option and a necessity to respond to the new demands of the academic and informational environment.

The concept of *relationship marketing* was introduced into the literature in the 1980s by L. Berry, who emphasized its role in “attracting customers, maintaining and strengthening relationships with them” (Berry, 1983). Later, Philip Kotler developed this approach, defining relationship marketing as “the practice of building long-term, mutually beneficial relationships with key market partners: consumers, suppliers, distributors, with the goal of establishing privileged and lasting ties” (Kotler and Keller, 2012). In a broader sense, the concept represents a continuous process of creating, maintaining, and expanding valuable relationships with users and institutional partners on multiple levels: economic, institutional, and social (Baron, 2010; Baron, Conway and Warnaby, 2010; Gummesson, 2002; Harris and Ogbonna, 2008; Sheth, 2002; Валько, 2013; Кошурникова, 2013). Local authors regard relationship marketing as a modern approach to management, developing as an element of organizational development strategy (Remeşovschi, 2024; Райлян, 2016). Integrating this concept into library practice contributes to the reconfiguration and modernization of services, orienting them toward the real and dynamic needs of users (Хвостова, Штратникова and Уржумова, 2020).

Relationship marketing promotes the transformation of libraries into active players in the educational and scientific system, strengthening their role in generating, disseminating, and capitalizing on quality information. By creating a synergistic framework based on collaboration and interdependence between libraries and the communities they serve, new opportunities for innovation, sustainability, and institutional development are opened. Relationship marketing emerges as the foundation on which university libraries can build durable, harmonious, and efficient interactions with all segments of the academic community. By applying it, libraries respond to users’ immediate needs and create a real framework in which quality information products and services are generated and enhanced through cooperation and mutual involvement.

This perspective is particularly relevant for university libraries, which, by their nature, must cultivate lasting relationships within the academic community and with external partners. Thus, relationship marketing becomes both a relationship management tool and a catalyst for the modernization and adaptation of library services to current realities.

## **2 The Evolution of Relationship Marketing in University Libraries**

User loyalty is one of the fundamental objectives of relationship marketing in university libraries. Building and maintaining this loyalty is not limited to offering quality information services; it also involves cultivating the emotional dimension of the relationship between the library and its community. Users become attached to the library not only because of the resources and services provided but also due to the atmosphere of trust, openness, and cooperation. These are built gradually through constant and personalized dialogue. Developing close partnerships is rooted in this emotional component, which gives consistency and authenticity to institutional relationships, making it possible to transform formal interactions into lasting and beneficial collaborations.

Extending across all areas of library activity, the emotional component of relationship marketing becomes an indispensable element of successful development. It strengthens the library’s position within the academic environment, ensures visibility and relevance in relation to external partners, and contributes to the modernization and adaptation of the institution to the current demands of the information society.

The evolution of relationship marketing in university libraries in the Republic of Moldova can be analyzed dynamically, by outlining three representative stages:

**Pre-digital stage (until 2000)** – characterized by the library’s traditional role as an information provider. Activity was centered on operational efficiency, where the main criteria were the speed of service delivery and the completeness of resources made available. The relationship with users was mainly formal, unilateral, and oriented toward meeting punctual information requests.

**Initial transformation stage (2001-2020)** – marks the beginning of marketing tools being applied in libraries. In this period, the first studies on the needs and preferences of different categories of users were conducted. At the same time, more consistent partnerships began to develop with the university’s internal structures: departments, faculties, publishing houses, and other subdivisions, consolidating the library’s role in the academic process.

**Contemporary stage (2021 – present)** – defined by a strategic orientation toward the user, with clear segmentation (students, teaching staff, doctoral candidates) and the adaptation of services to the needs of each group. The necessity of building lasting, trust-based relationships with users is increasingly recognized. The library becomes an active player in institutional projects, editorial activities, and the promotion of scientific research results. At the same time, libraries are increasingly involved in university PR actions, contributing to the visibility and prestige of the academic institution (*Table 1*).

**Table 1. The Stages of the Evolution of Relationship Marketing in University Libraries in the Republic of Moldova**

Stage	Period	Main characteristics	Development directions
<b>Pre-digital</b>	Until 2000	Library perceived as information provider; unilateral relationship with the user	Speed of services; completeness of information
<b>Initial transformation</b>	2001–2020	First applications of marketing tools; research on users’ needs	Strengthening partnerships with departments, university publishing houses, subdivisions
<b>Contemporary</b>	2021 – present	User segmentation; personalized services	Building lasting relationships; involvement in projects, editorial activities, and university PR

Source: own work

The study of the application of relationship marketing elements at the Scientific Library of the Academy of Economic Studies of Moldova (ASEM) was based on a combination of methods:

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analysis of secondary information, direct observation, and empirical research. Recognized as the most important university institution with an economic profile in the country, the library was among the first to initiate a modernization process through the integration of relationship marketing, starting in the 2000s.

The awareness that the user is the central element of the library service system spurred the need for a deeper understanding of their requirements and expectations. One of the landmark studies was conducted in 2004 and aimed at evaluating students' satisfaction with the services of the Multimedia Center, involving a sample of over 450 respondents. The results highlighted both strengths and areas needing improvement, thus guiding the library toward diversifying and enhancing its multimedia services.

Subsequently, surveys and periodic consultations with various user segments – students, teaching staff, researchers – became an integrated practice in library management. Through these efforts, the ASEM Scientific Library managed to adjust its services to the real needs of the academic community and build trust-based relationships, founded on dialogue and collaboration, thereby consolidating its role as an active partner in the educational and research process.

The results of opinion research provided the foundation for the development and implementation of marketing strategies oriented toward the sustainable development of the ASEM Scientific Library. These strategies included diversifying the service portfolio, introducing new facilities, and adapting the offer to users' needs. At the same time, the library began providing paid services to external users, which became both an additional source of resources and proof of the institution's flexibility in relation to the dynamics of the information environment.

### **3 Relationship Marketing Strategies**

One of the basic objectives of library management is the creation and maintenance of a loyal audience that continues to use library services even after graduation, including on a paid basis. This loyalty-building process is developed gradually, starting from the moment students are admitted to the university. Introductory courses in Information Culture, thematic competitions, and other educational activities contribute to the gradual integration of students into the library's information system. Information about student groups is managed through specialized databases, which allows for personalized communication and the adaptation of services to users' real needs.

Maintaining constant contact with the public is ensured through a variety of communication tools: e-mail, social networks, and other direct marketing methods. In parallel, public relations activities and the organization of joint cultural events dedicated to significant moments and dates strengthen the emotional bond between the library and the academic community. This affective dimension becomes a key factor in user loyalty and in consolidating the library's image as an indispensable partner of the educational and cultural process.

Serving advanced user categories – master's students, doctoral candidates, and teaching staff – is based on the application of an individualized model of response to information needs. In this framework, user information is ensured through selective dissemination mechanisms that correlate the resources provided with the ongoing research topics. The ASEM Scientific Library provides these segments with both traditional and electronic resources, adapting services to the particularities and specialization level of each group. Segmentation and individualization strategies thus represent fundamental components of relationship marketing, as they contribute to creating strong and long-lasting relationships between the institution and the academic community.

The transformations recorded in university libraries over the past decade, including at the ASEM Scientific Library, are also reflected in the expansion of partnership relations, both within the university and at the national and international levels. Partnerships developed with various academic structures, professional organizations, and cultural institutions demonstrate the library's capacity to adapt to a dynamic context and to respond to the multiple expectations of the community.

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According to the principles of relationship marketing, strengthening and diversifying partnerships ensure the efficient and sustainable functioning of the organization, contributing to the increase of its visibility and prestige. In the case of the ASEM Scientific Library, these processes have generated a favorable image in the academic environment and in the broader social and informational space, confirming its role as an important actor in the educational and research infrastructure of the Republic of Moldova (*Table 2*).

**Table 2. Relationship Marketing Strategies**

User segments	Strategies applied	Results
<b>Master’s students</b>	Segmentation based on research topics; provision of traditional and electronic resources; selective dissemination of information	Quick access to specialized resources; increased user satisfaction; development of library loyalty
<b>Doctoral candidates</b>	Individualized approach to information needs; personalized research assistance; promotion of advanced scientific resources	Effective support for scientific activity; strengthening of trust-based relationships with the library; increased use of electronic resources
<b>Teaching staff</b>	Information through selective dissemination; resources adapted to teaching and research areas; collaboration in projects and partnerships	Support in teaching and research; involvement in collection development; increased visibility and prestige of the library

Source: own work

Thus, this table demonstrates that relationship marketing strategies (segmentation + individualization) allow services to be adapted to each user category. The results translate into satisfaction, loyalty, and the strengthening of the ASEM Scientific Library’s image as an important partner in education and research. Internal and external partnerships multiply the effects of these strategies, increasing institutional recognition.

#### **4 Directions of Partnership of the Library**

The ASEM Scientific Library has developed, in the external environment, a solid network of professional collaborations that contribute to strengthening its image and visibility at the national and international levels. Among its institutional partners are: the Association of Librarians of the Republic of Moldova, the Association of Librarians of Romania, the EIFL International Consortium, the REM National Consortium, as well as prestigious organizations such as the World Bank and the European Commission. A particularly important aspect is the partnership agreements for the exchange of publications and documentary resources. At present, the ASEM Scientific Library has concluded 25 international partnerships, which include collaborations with libraries from Norway, Germany, France, the United States of America, Lithuania, Bulgaria, Ukraine, as well as with 18 libraries in Romania. These cooperation relationships facilitate access to diversified and up-to-date information and contribute to the development of a professional climate based on the exchange of good practices, experiences, and successful models. In this way, the library manages to diversify its information offer and strengthen its role as an active actor in the international knowledge circuit.

Within the internal environment of the university, collaborative relationships have also been developed and strengthened with the following subdivisions (*Table 3*).

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**Table 3. Directions of Partnership of the ASEM Scientific Library with University Subdivisions**

No.	Partner subdivision	Functions and new roles of the library in the partnership
1	<b>ASEM Publishing House</b>	Promotes articles published in the university’s scientific journals on Open Access platforms. Compiles bibliographic collections and biobibliographies. Contributes to the visibility and impact of university research by integrating it into international databases. Prepares bibliographic references and assigns UDC classifications to articles published in institutional journals.
2	<b>Research-Development-Innovation Department</b>	Provides support in writing and capitalizing on research results (conferences, reports, studies). Is an active partner in scientific and innovation projects. Supports monitoring of scientific productivity through bibliometric tools. Organizes exhibitions during scientific events. Checks doctoral theses and institutional publications (monographs, conference proceedings, and journals such as <i>Economica</i> , <i>Eastern European Journal of European Studies</i> , and <i>Economy and Sociology</i> ) in anti-plagiarism systems.
3	<b>Faculties and departments</b>	Prepares support files for the accreditation process of study programs. Provides information resources adapted to courses and curricula.
4	<b>Department of Quality Management, Curriculum Development and Studies</b>	Contributes to the design and updating of curricula by identifying relevant information resources. Participates in the evaluation of the quality of educational resources and their integration into teaching-learning processes. Actively participates in the university’s Quality Management System by developing and implementing internal procedures, monitoring performance indicators, and contributing to self-evaluation reports.
5	<b>Doctoral School</b>	Provides doctoral training in information management and scientific publishing. Ensures access to academic databases and resources for thesis writing. Supports dissemination of scientific results through Open Access. Prepares bibliographies and assigns UDC classifications to doctoral theses.
6	<b>School of Continuing Education</b>	Supports lifelong learning by providing resources and digital tools. Develops joint training programs for librarians.
7	<b>National College of Commerce</b>	Integrates library resources into vocational training. Organizes extracurricular and cultural activities for students and teaching staff.
8	<b>IT Department</b>	Collaborates on collection digitization and the implementation of modern technologies in services. Develops the institutional repository IREK. Integrates e-learning tools and digital platforms for fast access to resources (Moodle).
9	<b>Republican Technical-Scientific Library</b>	Strategic partner for the exchange of publications and resources. Collaborates in the field of bibliometrics and access to electronic databases.
10	<b>Marketing, Partnerships, and Career Service</b>	Collaborates in organizing cultural and scientific events. Supports career guidance activities through information resources and training. Participates in strengthening the university’s public image through joint PR actions.

Source: own work

Thus, it can be stated that the ASEM Scientific Library actively applies the principles of relationship marketing in its interaction with various categories of users. The library’s activity is undergoing a profound transformation, becoming more complex, more intellectualized, and more diversified, in accordance with the demands of the academic environment and the information society. The library demonstrates an increased ability to adapt to rapid changes in the external environment, which allows it to develop sustainable partnerships and initiate various forms of collaboration.

By strengthening relationships with user segments and focusing on quality information services, the library succeeds in creating a climate of trust and loyalty. At the same time, by

cultivating a positive institutional image and diversifying partnership activities, the library strengthens its role as an important element in the academic system. This approach reflects the transition from the traditional model of information provision to a relational and collaborative one, centered on interaction, co-creation, and added value for users.

### **5 Difficulties and Development Perspectives of Relationship Marketing in Library Activity**

However, the implementation of relationship marketing in libraries is not without difficulties. Among the main problems identified are:

**Limited resources** – both financial and material, which restrict the library’s ability to invest in modern technologies, professional training, and the development of innovative services.

**Aging staff structure** – which affects institutional dynamics and reduces the readiness to quickly integrate new digital and relational approaches.

**Insufficient professional competencies** – the lack of advanced knowledge in fields such as marketing, communication, data management, or the use of advanced digital tools may limit the efficiency of user-oriented activities.

**Weak collaboration with university top management** – which leads to the underestimation of the library’s strategic role and difficulties in integrating it into major decision-making processes.

These challenges highlight the need for an integrated institutional vision in which the library is recognized as a strategic partner of the university, and relationship marketing is supported through resources, training, and appropriate managerial policies.

Despite current difficulties, the ASEM Scientific Library has clear prospects for strengthening and expanding relationship marketing. Priority directions include:

Adopting an integrated system of interaction with users, through which all communication, service, and partnership activities are coordinated based on a unified strategic vision.

Continuous training and professional development of staff to improve digital, communication, and marketing skills necessary for engaging with modern users.

Investments in the library’s digital infrastructure, oriented toward electronic service platforms, resource management systems, and solutions for analyzing service usage data.

Conducting periodic marketing research to collect direct user feedback, understand the evolution of their needs, and adapt the service offer in real time.

Integrating relationship marketing into the library’s strategic documents by explicitly including it in institutional development plans, thereby granting it the status of a priority management tool.

By applying these directions, the ASEM Scientific Library can strengthen its role in the academic system, becoming an active player in supporting the educational process and scientific research, as well as a model of good practice within the university library network.

### **6 Conclusions**

Relationship marketing, as a modern approach to library management, emerges as the foundation for ensuring the effective presence of libraries on the information market. In this context, the service delivery process is no longer unilateral, but involves active interaction between librarian and user, which introduces an important emotional component and contributes to audience loyalty.

The ASEM Scientific Library demonstrates a consistent and diversified application of relationship marketing, through the conduct of marketing studies, the strengthening of internal and external partnerships, and active involvement in international projects. The institution’s top management adopts mechanisms for adapting to transformations in the academic and information environment, supporting the gradual transition to a relational development model.

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Nevertheless, there are significant difficulties that slow down the full implementation of this approach. Among them are limited resources, an aging staff structure, and insufficient professional skills to meet the increasingly dynamic demands of users and the challenges of the digital environment.

Under these conditions, relationship marketing remains a strategic tool capable of supporting the modernization and adaptation of university libraries to the new realities of the digital age, through user orientation, sustainable partnerships, and quality information services.

The future use of relationship marketing in the ASEM Scientific Library must rely on several strategic directions: consolidating a systemic approach in user relations, continuous training and motivation of staff, modernization of digital infrastructure, conducting marketing research, as well as integrating the principles of relationship marketing into the institution’s strategic documents and development plans.

Strengthening partnerships and consolidating relationships with users and external collaborators will contribute to increasing the visibility and positive image of the ASEM Scientific Library, to building a community of loyal users, and to fortifying its position in the information market of the Republic of Moldova.

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