

## **VAFa Map: well use of academic library resources and services by providing better visibility, availability, flexibility, and accessibility**

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### **Abstract:**

*Academic libraries are enriched with diversified resources and services. Libraries need to take necessary actions to make the better use of its library materials by every possible mean. The growing information communication landscape has resulted many alternatives for the conventional library services and even more new information services. However, the libraries are still serving the society with equality among different social levels. To withstand and sustained in the competition, librarians need to attract and provide a delightful service to its patrons. showcasing the library products and services to its users is a timely necessity to promote and ensure the better use of library materials. Conventional libraries need to be transformed towards hybrid type of libraries, even a paradigm shift if necessary to secure the competitive advantage over the alternative services in the information services ecosystem. Attracting more users in the community will ensure the sustainability of the library, including funding. Visibility, availability, flexibility, and accessibility (VAFa) are simple but effective strategies for showcasing the intimacy of a library to its society. Libraries can consider about these strategies to visualize it products and services to a larger community and sustain. Thus, this concept paper attempt to map these four strategies to be used by the librarians to lead their libraries towards well used and sustainability. VAFa mapping will contrast the diversity of resources and services available in library, methods that can be adopted to overcome the constraints that prevent their visibility, availability, flexibility, and accessibility from a larger community. Accordingly, libraries can restructure their library processers, and policies to implement new services by overcoming the limiting factors of information dissemination. Making a VAFa map will enable the library to showcase their product and services, attract more community share, lead the library towards the sustainability while becoming a challenging competitor in the information landscape.*

**Keywords:** VAFa Map, visibility, availability, accessibility, flexibility, academic library, library marketing

### **Introduction**

Libraries are bridging the information gap of a society, whatever the social fraction they served (Senevirathna & Fernando, 2021). Academic libraries are special kind that disseminate information with guaranteed precision and responsibility. Specially because academic libraries are providing the information needs of scholars for their studies and research. Academic libraries are taking enormous effects to enrich and ready their library collections to be utilized by the desired users. As Dr. Ranganathen argued, “every book should have a user and every user shall have a book to read” (Haider, 2017). This implies that how much the librarians need to be understood their patrons and their information desires. Thus, they can manage the limited budgets, investigate the reader’s needs, consider about the up-to-date nature about the relevant collections. However, it is also a valid fact that how far librarians are worried about the extent that their collections are accessed or visited by the target population. In the other hand, unless the library has taken a continuous product and services awareness, users miss out the library’s best services.

Library marketing practices can aware the user base of a library effectively (Canzoneri, 2015). However, the new normal situation after the covid pandemic has reshaped the user base of a library not limited to its own region, but many other anonymous users around the world (Panda, 2020). In the other hand, even though the marketing aware the user base, services that limited to the physical visitors its worth less. Thus, the library may need to have a better plan to ensure visibility, availability, and accessibility of their library's resources through all the possible platforms they have.

Visibility of library materials is, how far the library users can see its collections, and services. At the same time, visibility of the library itself in the society is matters. Lor (2014) argues that the visibility of a library in a society is dependent on the type of the library, wealthiness of the country and political landscape (Figure 1). Availability of library materials is dependent on the mode and nature of library materials, time constraints that information is available to its users. Mode of availability can be printed, or non-print, physical or online, free or fee type, open access or closed access. Time constraints, whether it is available for a short period of time and days, or the information is available for 24 hours through the day 365 days per year (24x7x365). Accessibility of library materials is the possibility of access to library materials without a spatial and temporal boundary. Accessibility to library materials is dependent on the capability of mode, type, and time of access to library materials. Renewed focus on the flexibility also matters while the libraries are managing their visibility, accessibility, and availability to information and to collaborate and interact with the other organizations in the information landscape.

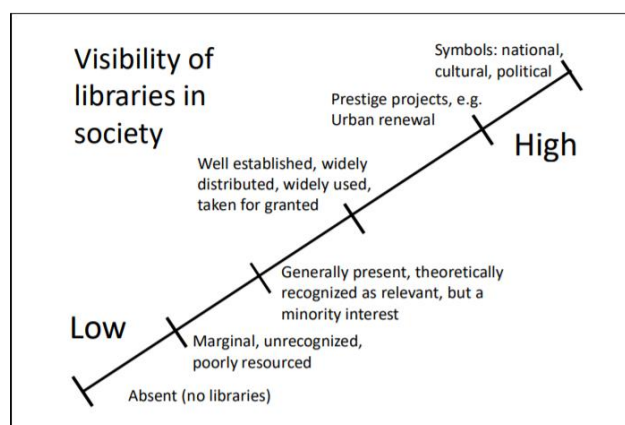


Figure 1: Visibility of Libraries in society

## Problem

Changing information needs of the society has putting immense pressure on academic librarians to keep the library top-of-mind and promote their libraries. It is also a high need that the library is branding and marketing as a relevant, user-oriented, social, and highly visible, accessible, and flexible platform that available any time to access in the context that its matters. Libraries usually conduct SWOT analysis to improve their library services. However, academic librarians shall map their resources and possible strategies aimed to reach to a

larger community to provide a more diverse service to the changing community. There is a lacuna for the concept of mapping library resources and how to reach them to a wider community.

### **Objective**

Study is aimed to introduce the concept of mapping library materials and the possibilities of reaching those materials to a wider community.

### **Method**

This conceptual study is based on the working experiences and theoretical data collected through a literature survey. Literature survey only targets most relevant and recent publications to the concept. Different searching techniques were used to find information related to visibility, availability, accessibility, and flexibility of libraries and its materials. Gathered concepts were mapped using the mind mapping technique to identify and articulate the available materials and possibilities of reaching those materials to a wider community effectively.

### **Results and discussion**

No matter how comprehensive the library collection is, if not provide enough visibility, availability, and accessibility to the library materials consisted, they aren't use by the users effectively. It's not covered the basics principles of the library services. Because, every book (or service) shall have users, and every book (or service) should be used by some user (Haider, 2017). Application of suitable marketing techniques is one of the key approach that can be taken by the librarians to promote their materials and services (Johoran & Somaratna, 2021). Thus, Academic libraries should map their resources and the strategies that can open those library services to a wider patron base. Investigation revealed that, there are multiple channels to make the good use of the academic library resources and services, to get more attention towards the library (Johoran & Somaratna, 2021). At the same time, there are constrains that prevent the library social move and free distribution of its library materials. Some of these constrains and enhancing the Visibility, Availability, Accessibility, and Flexibility are mapped in the figure 2.

Libraries shall identify their resources and services, types, formats, and copyright constrains associated with the library materials they have. Information can be in different formats, printed or non-printed. Non printed library sources and resources can be deposited in multimedia formats or online formats. The online services could be in a remote server, stored in computers of the library, hosted/ outsourced using a cloud platform or available through the internet. All these sources and resources also belongs to different types of information as primary, secondary, grey literature, and tertiary sources. These information sources or resources is under a copyright constrain as, copyrighted, or open source. The opensource materials could be under the creative commons license, or public domain. Identification of "what the library actually has" is the initial step of this mapping.

To make library materials available, accessible, and visible, to a wider community, library needs to control the

factors that prevent those aspects. One of the key constraints that matter is the copyright that prevent sharing of the materials with a larger community. Print nature of resources can be a constraint in situations such as pandemic lockdown times, that prevent physical visitors to the library. Keeping some of the library resources as grey literature is another barrier for its visibility. Theses and dissertation collections are examples for such grey literature. Not adoption of desired software solutions is another preventive measure of public awareness of library resources. Some universities and library administrations may band social media connectivity through the university networks depending on policy issues. Policies that prevent the inter-library or inter organization collaborations to share metadata and other library materials is also a flexibility issue that matters. Academic libraries are closed to the public. If this policy barrier could lift off, library materials will be available to a wider community. Public relations and collaboration with other related institutions should also be considered and included in the mapping is essential.

Information and resources that are copyrighted to the library or the university can be share with a larger community. Institutional repositories, Library management systems, library websites and other possible platforms can be adopted to share library materials with no copyright constraints. Since these copyleft materials can be transformed, if they are available in the printed format, they can digitize and disseminate. Bibliographic information of printed materials can be openly shared using the KOHA integrated library management system. This information can also be shared with collaboration with other libraries in the country as a metadata harvester, metadata provider, or through the OPAC. Digital libraries and institutional repositories can share their metadata via the OAI-PMH protocol. Libraries needs to update their policies more flexible to promote collaboration.

Union catalogue can be formed by collaborating metadata of all the OPACs through an open metadata sharing protocol (OAI-PMH, MARC or Dublin core). Union catalogue will provide more visibility to the library materials available in all the stakeholder universities. This step needs to have the flexibility of the organizations to collaborate and share it resources with the other partner libraries. Library resources under the copyright constraints can disseminate through the Digital Document Delivery Service (DDDS) and Inter Library Loan (ILL) services. Thus, a portion that not enough to reproduce the original work can be digitized and shared to the user for their fair use purposes only. Services such as SMS, emails, real time help support, using social media to connect, disseminate, and resolve the users matters will be a good practice to keep the customer base of the library delighted about the responsiveness of the library.

Social media is the most effective and efficient tool and medium that can be used to take the library to larger community. Social media include number of web 2.0 technologies that most of the world's population relates to. Library can easily adopt these social media links to the library to gain more visibility to its products and services (Johoran & Somaratna, 2021). Social media platforms are different types. Social networking

(Facebook, Twitter, Instagram, Pinterest, WhatsApp, Viber, Imo, etc), Social review sites (Google my business, Facebook, Amazon, Yelp, Trip Advisor, etc), Image sharing site (Instagram, Pinterest, etc), video hosting site (YouTube), Community blogging (Google Blogs, Wordpress, LinkedIn, etc), Discussion sites (Stack Overflow, Quora, Reddit, etc), News sites (Google news, MSN news, local news sites, etc), Business social media platform (LinkedIn, Twitter, etc), Research social media channels (ORCiD, Rresearchgate, Academia, LinkedIn, Author Aid, etc), These services must be used with a responsibility and understanding as be suited with the need of the institution. It is also need to advice to get prior permission before enabling these services and create a dedicated official email address to create and maintain social media links. There are many other similar online platforms that can be used to populate library services. It can use to enhance the visibility of the library and library services. These services are with a huge diversity and intend to perform different tasks. However, there is one thing common in this social media connectivity, that everywhere it connects people. Different people from different social levels and capacity. So, the library can easily reach to vast diversified community over these technologies.

Social outreach of the academic library is the next approach that can be taken to populate and to promote better use of library resources. Social outreach programs, awareness programs, orientations programs, webinars, seminars, library visits, are the popular types of outreach channels. School libraries, public libraries, national library, museums, special libraries, university libraries can collaborate and exchange knowledge and capacity building endeavors. Museums can showcase their key materials using virtual museums (like Google Arts & Culture). It can better use of the library or information centers resources and save lot of money to the country.

Taking the library to the public and use the library resources effectively is a timely necessity of academic libraries. Specially to adapt to the emerging needs of library transformation in the era of Google and the time of 5<sup>th</sup> Industrial revolution. Libraries need to face the growing pressure of the competition from similar services that overtaken the traditional library role. Academic libraries need to restructure its major aspects to gain the competitive advantage in the information service provider's landscape.

This concept paper highlights the validity of conducting a separate mapping based on the libraries SWOT analysis, but separately. University administration and library staff needs to be aware and sometimes trained to achieve some of these aspects of well using the library information over a wider community.

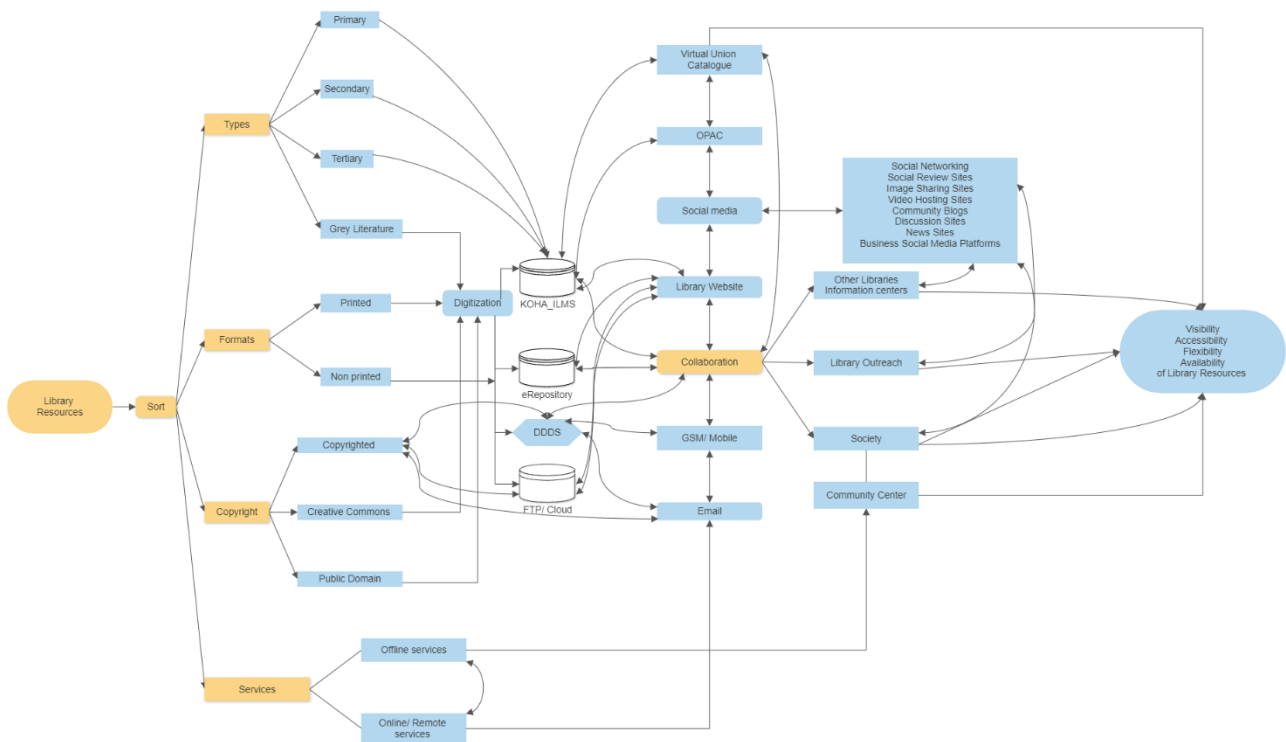
## **Conclusion**

Library is a social aspect that enables everyone to use to fulfil their information needs. It is a major enabler of information democracy of the population. Thus make the library materials and services available anytime from anywhere, let library resources and services visible to a larger community, and enable provisions to access to the library disregarding social and temporal boundaries is essential. Academic libraries can identify and

develop a VAFA Map to ensure the better use of library materials and services would be a timely need. Libraries can use the VAFA map to revise their library processes, and policies accordingly. VAFA maps of each libraries in the country can be overlap to provide a national level network of library service to the national and international library users.

**Recommendations**

Academic libraries can develop an identical VAFA map to their libraries. Accordingly, their processes and policies can be revised. Better communication channels should be established and need to take actions to make the academic library a real social asset.



Source: Author Compiled, 2021

Figure 2: Visibility, Availability, Flexibility, and Accessibility (VAFA) Map

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