
Users' Engagement Practices in Young Mizo Association Libraries (YMA) of Aizawl City, Mizoram

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Abstract

The present paper discussed about the user engagement practices by the Young Mizo Association (YMA) libraries of Aizawl city. It is a survey-based research and questionnaire method was used and distributed among 83 YMA libraries and 76 were responded. The findings of the study discovered that the majority of them lack a librarian, rarely conduct feedback surveys and do not provide staff training for user interaction. Among the various ways users have contributed to the enhancement of library services, orientation programs rank top among the categories, followed by gifts and donations. The study suggests that the libraries in each Branch YMA should receive consistent funding, recruit professional librarians or library staff and more training sessions and conclude that there needs to be more growth in different aspects for more engaged users.

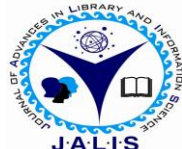
Keywords

User engagement; community engagement; User engagement practices; public library; Non-Governmental Organization libraries

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1. Introduction

User engagement refers to the emotional, cognitive, and behavioural connection between users and resources, influencing their reactions to services. It correlates with profitability, as more interaction indicates product value. The user of a library is a valuable resource and therefore information providers must create compelling experiences rather than only show content. In a choice environment, the absence of user interaction results in no resource utilization and no information transmission, leading individuals to seek alternatives. In India, public libraries are social institutions that give the entire public free access to information. As time has progressed, despite the availability of libraries, there have been notable shifts in how users seek information. To establish a clear objective for attracting more users, the individuals working in these libraries play a crucial role. At times, resources can be constrained; however, it is essential to explore methods for optimizing the utilization of the resources that are already available. Library professionals must demonstrate the service's worth promptly to retain users. In order to find out the present situation, user engagement practices by the YMA libraries of Aizawl city have been taken up for the study.

2. Public Libraries in Mizoram

The public library contributes significantly to the growth and upkeep of a democracy by providing people with access to a vast array of information, viewpoints, and ideas. The state of Mizoram is located in the North-Eastern part of India where Aizawl is its capital. The Mizoram Public Libraries Bill was passed on January 6, 1993. Till date, financial limitations and other issues have prevented the Government of Mizoram from implementing the Mizoram Public Libraries Act, 1993.

Public libraries in Mizoram are categorized into State, District, and Village libraries where Village libraries are managed by local organizations, while state and district libraries are under state government. Remarkably, NGO libraries have become dynamic, with 512 recognized libraries, mainly managed by the Young Mizo Association (YMA), which functions 445 of them in Mizoram. Aizawl District has 135 YMA libraries, with 83 located in Aizawl city, which has been taken up for the study.

3. Review of Literature

Mutuma et al. (2024) studied user engagement challenges in Meru University and Kenya Methodist University libraries. Using a descriptive survey, findings discovered effective resource usage of public catalogues and online databases, but noted difficulties with e-journals and institutional repositories due to inadequate digital quality and usability. The study concludes that user engagement demands improvements in the serviceability and eminence of digital platforms. Sharma (2024) studied the library programmes, explores user motives, and also suggests evidence-based strategies for improvement in user engagement. It aims to qualify libraries to flourish in the digital era and carry on being important centres for connection, learning, and discovery by attending to user necessities and creating a prosperous community around them. The study results deliver useful material that libraries may utilize to exploit modern skills, launch welcoming spaces, and adjust to everchanging user behaviors. Narimani et al. (2022) examined the link between user engagement and content on Instagram pages of Iranian public libraries by analysing 10,132 posts from 110 libraries. The study found that posts which announce upcoming programmes, library resources, and accomplished events received the maximum user engagement. Text and photo formats were found to be engaging, trailed by video. The study concludes that user engagement rises with active hashtag use, interesting content formats, and user-friendly substantial such as event announcements and expressive messages.

Kandhasamy & Bhatt (2021) examines the role of both governmental and non-governmental organizations in advancing India's public library system. According to the report, the government of post-independence India has taken a number of actions, including creating plans, rules, committees, and a distinct autonomous agency for public libraries. Additionally, each state's public libraries are analysed to determine the effects of library laws, as well as to identify solutions for current shortcomings and possible obstacles in the establishment of new libraries. Maurya, et.al. (2018) stressed that Mizoram's rural public libraries are unsatisfactory to meet the needs of their users. According to the study, Mizo people read extremely little, which has an effect on how often they utilize libraries. According to the findings, the novelty of public libraries may contribute to the lack of advancement in socioeconomic growth. The majority of people in rural areas rely heavily on rural public libraries since they cannot afford to buy books to read. It implies

that public libraries should be maintained by the government since they are crucial to the dissemination of knowledge in society. Zou & Dey (2015) studied Twitter's function in attracting people by emphasizing public libraries. Library user engagement initiatives are divided into four groups using topic-modelling techniques: literature exhibits, community development, engaging subjects, and library showcasing. A sentiment analysis of tweets gathered from ten public libraries is used to reexamine these four engagement tactics. The study examines how libraries use user engagement tactics on Twitter using data mining of tweets and offers best practices for libraries interested in following social media initiatives to effectively engage their users. Sung & Hepworth (2013) studied on concepts relating to community engagement in public libraries in the United Kingdom. The model created for this study identifies two underlying variables: "influence of authority" and "willingness to learn." It was discovered that "influence of authority" had a necessary impact on CE and recommended that the CE process place more emphasis on community ownership and leadership, while "willingness to learn" had a central impact on CE. It emphasized how crucial it is to have an open mind and adopt a collaborative, participative style while working with partnership organizations and the community. Additionally, this research points to an organic and community-driven form of CE.

4. Objectives

The objectives of the study are to:

1. Comprehend how the public libraries are currently being used and what services they offer.
2. Examine the methods by which the YMA libraries under study engage their users.
3. Identify difficulties libraries encounter and provide methods for enhancing user engagement in the YMA libraries

5. Research Methodology

A semi-structured questionnaire was used to collect data from respondents for this survey-based research. Every YMA Library in Aizawl City, Mizoram, has received a questionnaire. 76 (91.56%) of the 83 questionnaires that were distributed were answered, and the data was analysed using Microsoft Excel.

6. Data Analysis and Interpretation

- a) Library administration of YMA Libraries in Aizawl City.

Table 2. Library Administration

Sl. No.	Category	No. of Response (N=76)	% within category
1	Librarian	3	3.95%
2	Library Sub-committee	75	98.68%
3	Others	1	1.31%

Table. 2 indicates that majority of the YMA libraries i.e, 75 (98.68%) are run by Library Sub-Committee. 3 (3.95%) have librarian which shows that extra efforts are taken by these libraries although they are already having Library sub-committee while 1 (1.31%) claimed to be run by other methods. It is clear that almost all libraries are in need of a proper librarian.

b) Source of Finance

Table 3. Source of Finance

Sl. No.	Financial Source	No. of Response	% within category
1	Branch YMA/Parent Organization	29	38.15%
2	Membership Fee	59	77.63%
3	Govt. Funding	3	3.95%
4	RRRLF Funding	38	50.00%
5	MP/MLA Fund	6	7.90%
6	Any other Source	0	0.00%

Table. 3 indicates that Branch YMA/parent Organization allocates funds to 29 (38.15%) libraries. Membership registration fee is collected by 59 (77.63%) libraries, Government funding is received by 3 (3.95%), RRRLF funding by 38 (50.00%) libraries and MP/MLA Fund is received by 6 (7.90%) libraries. It can be summed up that funding from both Branch YMA and RRRLF is a need of the hour for proper functioning and maintenance of the libraries.

c) Number of times library opens in a week

Table 4. No. of times library opens in a week

Sl. No.	No. of times	No. of Response	Percentage
1	Once in a week	48	63.16%
2	Twice in a week	19	25%
3	Thrice a week	7	9.21%
4	Four times a week	0	0%

5	Five times a week	0	0%
6	Daily	0	0%
7	No Response	2	2.63%
	Total	76	100.00%

From the Table. 4, it can be seen that 48 (63.16%) of the libraries remain open for one day, 19 (25%) libraries are opened two times and 7 (9.21%) libraries are opened three times. No response is received by 2 (2.63%). This analysis implies that libraries are opened very few within a week.

d) Library Automation

Table 5. Library automation

Sl. No.	Library automation	No. of Response	Percentage
1	Fully Automated	4	5.26%
2	Partially Automated	10	13.16%
3	Not Automated	62	81.58%
	Total	76	100%

The above table shows that only 4 (5.26%) are fully automated and 10 (13.16%) libraries are partially automated. The fact that the majority of the libraries 62 (81.58%) have not begun automation is regrettable.

e) Library services provided

Table 6. Library services provided

Sl. No.	Type of Library service	No. of Response (N=76)	% within category
1	Circulation	76	100.00%
2	Cataloguing	3	3.95%
3	Reading	22	28.95%
4	Reference	15	19.74%
5	Others	1	1.31%

It was observed after data analysis that every library offers circulation services. Reading service is provided by 22 (28.95%), 15 (19.74%) libraries offer reference services, but just 3 (3.95%) libraries offer cataloguing services. Among the other type of library service provided the YMA library in Bethlehem offers documentation service which is 1.31%. It is

clear that the libraries need to put more effort for improvement of the library services to engage users.

f) Use of social media for library user engagement

Table 7. Types of social media used

Sl. No.	Types of social media	No. of Response (N=76)	% Within category
1	Facebook	40	30.4%
2	Instagram	7	5.32%
3	Twitter	0	0%
4	Whatsapp	52	39.52%
5	Any other	18	23.68%

From the Table 7, it can be seen that Whatsapp is used by majority i.e, 52 (39.52%), 40 (30.4%) of the libraries used Facebook, 7 (5.32%) libraries used Instagram. Other type of social media is used by 18 (23.68%).

g) Activities or extension programme performed for user engagement

Table 8. Activities/extension programme performed

Sl. No.	Category	No. of Response	Percentage
1	Yes	41	53.95%
2	No	35	46.05%
	Total	76	100%

The above table shows that 41 (53.95%) libraries have performed activities/extension programme while 35 (46.05%) libraries do not have any activity for user engagement.

h) User Engagement training programme for library staff

Table 9. User Engagement training programme for library staff

Sl. No.	Category	No. of Response	Percentage
1	Yes	18	23.68%
2	No	68	89.47%
	Total	76	100%

Table 9 makes it evident that only few libraries 18 (23.68%) have training programme for library staff

while majority of the libraries 68 (89.47%) do not have at all.

i) How users are engaged in improving the library services

Table 10. Different ways users are engaged in improving the library services

Sl. No.	Category	No. of Response (N=76)	% within category
1	Orientation Programme	16	21.05%
2	Organizing Book Exhibition	3	3.95%
3	Essay and Quiz competition	1	1.31%
4	Best Volunteer Award	1	1.31%
5	Requesting users for gifts and donations	15	19.74%
6	Raising funds from different sources	2	2.63%
7	Best Library User Award	3	3.95%

The above table shows that 16 (21.05%) have conducted Orientation Programme, requesting users for gifts and donations is done by 15 (19.74%), Organizing Book Exhibition and Best Library User Award is done by 3 (3.95%) respectively. Raising funds from different sources by 2 (2.63%) libraries; and Essay and Quiz competition and Best Volunteer Award by 1 (1.31%) library respectively.

j) Feedback Survey of the library services

Table 11. Feedback Survey of the library services

Sl. No.	Category	No. of Response	Percentage
1	Yes	18	23.68%
2	No	68	89.47%
	Total	76	100%

According to the table above, majority of the libraries i.e, 68 (89.47%) have not conducted feedback survey while 18 (23.68%) libraries have conducted.

k) Problems faced by YMA Libraries: Inadequate budget, subpar facilities and equipment, restricted access to technology and the internet, outdated and insufficient library collections, staff training needs, and a lack of qualified librarians and staff are some of the issues that YMA libraries confront.

7. Findings

A group of volunteers known as the Library Subcommittee oversees the administration of most libraries, and the majority of them lack a librarian. Most library services, including memberships, are self-funded. While many of the libraries receive funding from RRRLF, some of them do not receive and used money as the initial balance of their accounts from the parent organization or branch YMA. The majority of the libraries are only open once a week, and the automation rate is quite low. The circulation service offered by YMA libraries is available in all of the libraries, but the low reading service suggests that the libraries are not physically attracting users. WhatsApp is a popular social media channel for user interaction, and half of the libraries in the survey also use it for engagement activities. However, the majority of libraries do not provide staff training for user interaction. Among the different ways users are engaged in improving the library services, orientation programs rank top among the categories, followed by gifts and donations. The majority of libraries rarely conduct feedback surveys, which is a significant barrier to user involvement.

8. Suggestions & Conclusion

From the findings, the study suggests that the libraries in each Branch YMA should receive consistent funding by collecting monthly library cess from the local community and the state government should take initiatives to increase the amount of state contributions towards RRRLF matching scheme, so that more libraries get the benefit. All branch YMA should recruit professional librarians or library staff with a suitable salary to ensure at least one regular employee per library, aiming for improved service and management. There should be more training sessions for library committee members and library employees frequently.

User engagement practices in public libraries refer to the strategies, activities, and services designed to involve users in the library's services, programs, and decision-making processes. The goal is to create a user-centred environment that nurtures a sense of community, promotes literacy, and supports lifelong learning. In case of YMA libraries in Aizawl city, every year more and more libraries are recognised, but there seems to be a high decrease in library user which shows that more user engaging programmes must be organised. The overall evaluation indicates

that the YMA libraries in Aizawl City still have a lot of room to grow and improve. If more engaging programmes such as book exhibition, best library user award and others are performed more by each YMA libraries, it will draw more attention of the library users and find themselves to be more engaged than before.

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