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# **Marketing of Electronic Information Resources (EIRs) in Private Higher Education Institutions (PHEIs) in Ethiopia**

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## *Abstract*

*This research was conducted to investigate the available marketing strategy in the light of increasing the awareness and uptake of Electronic Information Resources (EIRs) by users of PHEIs that are registered in Program for the Enhancement of Research Information (PERI). In an attempt to achieve the research objective, such research questions as “what marketing approaches are used by the libraries to promote the existence of EIRs in the institutions surveyed?”; “are there enabling infrastructures that assist the marketing of EIRs?”; “how do institutional libraries rate the level of support from the top management in their effort to market EIRs?”; “as part of marketing strategies, do institutions link up EIRS with courses in their graduate programs?” and “are there adequate human resource capacities to handle the marketing of EIRs?” were considered. The targeted institutions for the research were St. Mary’s University College (SMUC) and Alpha University College as they were PHEIs that are the only ones currently registered in PERI and delivering postgraduate program education. Survey research methodology was used and review of PERI system and publisher databases to map the contents against the graduates programs were made. Major findings of the study revealed that marketing using electronic communication, physical medium, human interaction and using training are practiced in the surveyed institutions, there is adequate infrastructure in SMUC to market EIRs, level of support from the top management towards marketing of EIRs is minimal in the surveyed institutions and the available human resource is adequate to handle marketing of EIRs generally. It was also concluded that there are positive developments in the marketing of EIRs in the surveyed institutions in the light of maintaining quality in graduate program and research endeavors. Based on the major findings, it was recommended that efforts must be made by PHEIs to integrate marketing of EIRS as part of collection development policy; as part of handling marketing using electronic communication, institutions must strengthen their effort and incorporate utilization of web 2.0; top management must be one of the prime champion in the institutional efforts to market EIRs to maintain quality in graduate program and research; existing effort in AUC in linking up EIRs and graduate programs must be strengthened and SMUC and other PHEIs must also follow suit and Capacity building schemes endeavors must be designed by such stakeholders as Consortium of PHEIs and Consortium of Academic and Research Libraries (CEARL) to enable librarians engage themselves in aggressive marketing of EIRs.*

Keywords: marketing, marketing of EIRs, EIRs, assessment, digital libraries, PHEIs

## **Background**

Digital libraries have been believed to improve the quality of academic and research at higher learning institutions through the provision of quality services and contents. As part of the contents of the digital libraries EIRs have been channeled by these libraries. Delivery of relevant and appropriate contents in par with the existing curricula, research and outreach activities of PHEIs is also one way of ensuring quality. Especially with ever growing graduate programs in PHEIs, EIRs have paramount of importance. Cognizant of this fact, Higher Education Relevant and Quality Agency (HERQA) has made accessibility of EIRs one of the requirements for accreditation of graduate programs (HERQA, 2007). Nevertheless for the effective utilization of these resources, marketing as part of integral management function of the libraries must be taken care of. However well-established function in the traditional service arena of the libraries, marketing of EIRs have been challenging especially in developing countries. Some of the reasons that authorities have acknowledged include but are not linked to absence of skills in delivering in digital environment, lack of adequate infrastructure, and lack of awareness and top management support. As a result of these challenges and others, EIRs have not been well utilized and librarians fail to establish return on investment, one of the living testimonials in Ethiopian case is extremely low statistics from the publishers that participate in the PERI. Nevertheless appropriate marketing of EIRs can be handled through approaches that have been well documented by Kennedy (2011) as marketing through human contact, marketing through physical media, marketing through electronic means and marketing through training (Kennedy, 2011). Such kinds of approaches have been believed to increase the utilization of EIRs. On top of these, incorporation of specific technology based EIRs such as social network has been found paramount of importance (Garoufallou et al 2013).

Despite the available approaches for marketing of EIRs in the world to directly apply in Ethiopia, the level of application of marketing to create awareness and enable appropriate utilization of EIRs is minimal (Aynalem and Wondimeneh 2008; Fanaye 2010). The problem exacerbated since the level of treatment of marketing as a management function for LIS professionals in the curricula was found minimal (Wondimeneh et al 2013). As a result, even though the relevance of contents that are channeled through PERI is dully acknowledged worldwide, the usage statistics

from the publishers side revealed that it is minimal (Aynalem and Wondimeneh 2008; Fanaye 2013). Therefore, this research was undertaken to investigate the available marketing strategy in the light of increasing the awareness and uptake of EIRs by users of PHEIs that are registered in PERI.

## **Statement of the problem**

PHEIs are exerting their level best in the provision of quality education for the nation. The effort has now increased its momentum and there are now PHEIs delivering graduate program education both at distance as well as regular bases. Quality of product of such programs depends on the quality of available inputs for the program. One of such contents is EIRs that are pertinent for the graduate programs and research. However, availability of EIRs is not a guaranty to ensure quality unless institutions make sure that users have utilized them optimally.

Introduction of EIRs in Ethiopia dates back to more than a decade and researches as to their utilization and effectiveness were undertaken (Aynalem and Wondimeneh 2008; Fanaye 2010). Even though these authors have made assessment on the awareness, utilization and barriers to the utilization of EIRS, marketing aspect of EIRs has not been given considerable treatment (Aynalem and Wondimeneh 2008; Fanaye 2010). Even though, these researches have unveiled challenges and opportunities with regard to the provision of EIRs. Such pertinent aspects as specific marketing strategies employed by libraries, availability of infrastructure for handling marketing of EIRs, level of top management support towards marketing of EIRs, whether marketing of EIRs have been integrated in different programs of the targeted institutions, availability of expertise to handle marketing of EIRs were not properly addressed (Aynalem and Wondimeneh 2008; Fanaye 2010). Nonetheless, these studies did only consider public higher learning institutions and by excluding PHEIs as part of their respondents. But some of the recommendations of these researches have also underlined the need for undertaking in-depth research in the issues of marketing of EIRs. On top of these, review of PERI registration system revealed that PHEI are not well represented even though the system is freely accessible. Therefore, in the light of ensuring better uptake and utilization, marketing of EIRs must be

embraced by PHEIs. Nevertheless, there is a knowledge gap as to the available marketing strategy in PHEIs in Ethiopia. Thus, this research was undertaken to fill such a knowledge gap.

### **Objective and Research Questions**

The general objective of the research is to investigate the available marketing strategy in the light of increasing the awareness and uptake of EIRs by users of PHEIs that are registered in PERI.

In an attempt to achieve the objective of the research, the following research questions have been framed:

- What marketing approaches are used by the libraries to promote the existence of EIRs in the institutions surveyed?
- Are there enabling infrastructures that assist the marketing of EIRs?
- How do institutional libraries rate the level of support from the top management in their effort to market EIRs?
- As part of marketing strategies, do institutions link up EIRS with courses in their graduate programs? and
- Are there adequate human resource capacities to handle the marketing of EIRs?

### **Methodology**

In an attempt to answer the above research questions, qualitative survey method was employed. At present, the PHEIs that are providing graduate program education according to HERQA are Alpha University College, International Leadership Institute, Rift Valley University College, SRI SAI, St. Mary's University College, and Unity University. Among these PHEIs, review of PERI registration system revealed that only AUC and SMUC are registered and utilizing PERI resources and thus two interviews for professionals who are responsible in marketing EIRs were made. Qualitative research method was employed as the number of respondents is two and interview has been believed the appropriate method of data collection. The two respondents were the university college librarians.

Review of PERI registration system; and assessment of publishers' databases against the graduate programs by way of mapping was done. Literature reviews were used as part of the methodology to identify recent marketing approaches that served as framework (Kennedy 2011; Garoufallou et al 2013) for the research.

### **Literature review**

Marketing in library and information profession has a well deep rooting (Ashcroft and McIvor 2004; Korobili et al 2006). Among the well-known activities of marketing in LIS we can cite current awareness services and selective dissemination of information (Kanaujia 2004; Ojambo 1994). Librarians have been engaged in making efficient use of marketing in order to promote the resources and services at their disposal (Ashcroft 2000). Based on these premises, this literature review has been organized to document such specific issues as range of electronic information resource, marketing for non-profit making institutions, marketing of electronic information resources, and challenges in marketing electronic information resources.

### **Electronic information resources**

Simply put electronic information resources are resources that we can find in digital format. The digital nature of these resources help us to secure them either online (using the internet infrastructure) and offline through such media as CD-ROM, DVD-ROM etc. (Ashcroft, 2000). The evolving nature of these resources has contributed to their varieties and there are also electronic information resources in multimedia format (for instance tutorial prepared and made available using Utube). The internet landscape is believed to contribute most for the development as well as mushrooming of EIRs. Recognizing EIRs importance in maintaining quality in the delivery of education and conducting of research in HLIs, LIS professionals have made part and parcel of their collection development endeavor (Ashcroft and Watts 2004).

## **Marketing for non-profit making institutions**

According to Kotler (2006) marketing is one aspect of management that helps to make resources and services for customers visible in the light of increasing profit for the institution. In the same vein, marketing for non-profit organization is done with the overall objective of promoting the resources and services available to enable maximum use of them (Adeyoyin 2005; Garoufallou et al 2013). Scholars have testified that marketing in non-profit organizations is an instrument to justify return on investment (ROI) (Sharma and Bhardwaj 2009; Adeyoyin 2005). Library and information centers are considered as non-profit making institutions and they have a long established culture of marketing their resources as well as services (Bhardwaj 2009). For efficient utilization of marketing, it has been noted that there must be administrative aspects of marketing by way of preparing plan, budget, etc. (Kennedy 2011). To make all the efforts exerted in marketing successful, marketing must be done according to different categories of users (segments of users) in the LIS environment (Garoufallou et al 2013).

## **Marketing of EIRs**

The need for marketing of EIRs has been well documented by several scholars (for instance, Aynalem and Wondimeneh 2008; Fanaye 2010; Sharma and Bhardwaj 2009.; Adeyoyin 2005; etc.) in order to increase awareness thereby maximizing utilization of the EIRs and to justify the benefit the institution secured as a result of introducing EIRs. The advent of EIRs has introduced a number of changes within the LIS arena. One of the changes exhibited as a result of the introduction of EIRs is the fact that LIS professionals lost the ownership of the majority of these resources. Rather, most of them, especially commercial ones are resident on the publishers server remotely. As opposed to the traditional promotion approach which was made within the four walls of the LIS, the promotion of these resources required different approaches (Kennedy 2011; Garoufallou et al 2013). Based on their nature and type, there have been a number of marketing strategies for EIRs (Ashcroft 2004, Kennedy 2011). Several authors came to the agreement that there must be different approaches to promote EIRs. For instance Kennedy (2011) identified four categories of marketing of EIRs. These are using physical media (such as brochures, flyers, etc.); electronic communication (email, using website of the library, social media, etc.), training (one-

o-one or group) and marketing using human interaction (collection policy, collaboration, word of mouth, etc.) (Kennedy 2011). Although implementation of diversified approaches to marketing documented by several authors (such as Ashcroft 2000; Ashcroft, 2004; Kennedy, 2011; Garoufallou et al 2013, etc.) Garoufallou et al (2013) have given much more emphasis for the application of relationship and word of mouth marketing. These authors have also noted that for LIS professionals to be engaged in successful marketing application of such new technologies as web 2.0 must be considered (Garoufallou et al 2013; Alire 2007).

Irrespective of the marketing strategy any LIS environment should follow, for better and efficient marketing of EIRs there must be a strategy that stipulates goals, targets, budgets and assessments (Kennedy 2011; Garoufallou et al 2013, etc.). Almost all authorities clearly acknowledged that these components would lay strong foundation for any marketing strategy to be put in place in LIS environment (Garoufallou et al 2013, Kennedy 2011; Adeyoyin 2005; Kanaujia 2004; etc.)

### **Challenges in marketing electronic information resources**

Marketing and promotion of EIRs have found to be problematic from different perspective one of which is lack of basic understanding of LIS professionals of the concept of marketing (Garoufallou et al 2013). The challenges also come from the advent of ICT in LIS environment (Kanaujia 2004; Sharma and Bhardwaj 2009; Garoufallou et al 2013) and others which resulted from information explosion. In order for any LIS to enable its user access EIRs especially from different publishers' website, there must be adequate infrastructure institutionally (Lwehabura 2008). In this regard, LIS environments can be one of the access points for users as well as offices (Aynalem and Wondimeneh 2008). Adeyoyin (2005) identified that top management support is a challenge as the recognition for marketing as management function of LIS is minimal. Therefore, making sure that there is adequate top management support, infrastructure including better bandwidth and adequate number of computers both of which are beyond the remit of the leaders of LIS environments (Adeyoyin 2005) is important. On top of these, with regard to the interface for contents that are channeled by the publishers are different from publisher to publisher, users usually are faced with wasting their time in mastering the interfaces



(Aynalem and Wondimeneh 2008). It has also been noted that with the ever dwindling budget of LIS environments, making budget available for marketing of library and information resources in general and EIRs in particular is problematic. Such a problem is exacerbated by the low level awareness of leaders of the parent institutions towards marketing of EIRs (Adeyoyin 2005). The remedial contribution of capacity building efforts being made available by LIS schools has been attested to have paramount of importance (Garoufallou et al 2013) by catering training for LIS professionals by way of continuous professional development. Nevertheless, evidences prove that there is little or no treatment for marketing of EIRs in particular and LIS environment in general in LIS curricula in Ethiopia (Wondimeneh et al 2013; Wondimeneh 2007). Therefore, marketing in LIS environment needs continuous professional development consistent with the growing EIRs as well as user population.

### **Research on marketing of EIRs in Ethiopia**

Marketing in library and information services environment has been identified as a challenge and Wondimeneh (2007) has also identified as an issue to be incorporated in LIS curricula. In his study, as part of curriculum review, stakeholders identified marketing as one component that is missing in the skills set in professional librarians (Wondimeneh, 2007). One of the first researches conducted on the arena of digital libraries or electronic information resources is the one conducted by Aynalem and Wondimeneh (2008). The research was an attempt to fill knowledge gap identified in relation to PERI resources utilization, users, barriers to use the resources and the impact observed and was conducted with the aim of exploring the usage, relevance, impact and barriers to use. Major findings of the research were level of awareness varies among surveyed institutions; promotion of PERI resources was not handled adequately; infrastructure and low level of skills form some of the users has been identified to hinder the utilization of PERI resources. Based on the major findings such recommendation as marketing and promotion of PERI resources; end user training, upgrading the infrastructure, etc. were recommended. Following the research conducted by Wondimeneh and Aynalem (2008) and Fanaye (2010) follow suit and has tried to investigate EIRs with specific users' category in Addis Ababa University Faculty of Social Science. One of the recommendations of this research is the need for making aggressive marketing of EIRs for the targeted group (Fanaye 2010). Even

though, these researches have made attempts to investigate the mentioned issues and stressed the importance of marketing of EIRs, both failed to incorporate PHEIs libraries in the target group.

In addition, on the current research undertaken to identify the changing needs in the light of harmonizing LIS curricula (Wondimeneh et al 2013), marketing of EIRs was underlined as a limitation in LIS environment from different stakeholders, as a result it was recommended that, LIS curricula must give due attention and incorporate marketing of EIRs as part of their curriculum review efforts (Wondimeneh et al 2013). Therefore, the current research is an attempt to look at the issues of marketing of EIRs from the PHEIs side.

### **Summary of findings**

This section is organized to reflect responses towards the research questions. However, before going into presenting the responses for the research questions, attempts have been made to summarize responses towards questions raised on the availability of EIRs and graduate programs.

### **Availability of EIRs**

Both AUC and SMUC institutional libraries are well versed with incorporating EIRs as part of their graduate program collections. E-books (online as well as offline accessible), online contents accessible via PERI, Online Public Accessible Catalog (OPAC), and conference proceedings are EIRs made accessible for students enrolled in graduate programs as well as teaching professors. On top of these, SMUC has e-journals that are made accessible through AJOL and digital contents of different institutional research output such as tracer studies.

### **Availability of graduate programs**

SMUC has relatively rich experience in the provision of graduate program education both regular and distance mode compared to AUC. The regular programs are in the areas of Masters of Business Administration - Human Resource Management (HRM) and Accounting and Finance concentration, MA in Rural Development, MA in Agricultural Economics, and MA in Agribusiness. The distance program in collaboration with Indra Ghandi Open University (IGNU) encompasses such disciplines as Masters of Business Administration, Masters in Public Administration, Masters in Sociology, Masters in Social Work, Masters of commerce, Masters in Economics, and Masters in Rural Development (<http://www.smuc.edu.et>). Whereas AUC has launched MBA and is planning to introduce concentration areas on Accounting and Finance, Human Resource Development, Development studies, and project management, etc.

### **Mapping of PERI resources against graduate programs of surveyed institutions**

The efforts that have been made to map PERI resources against the surveyed institutions of graduate programs revealed that surveyed institutions have exerted efforts to get registered to the publishers' databases that are in par with the program contents. In this regard, AUC has registered for 15 online databases that are aligned with the graduate program as well as research needs of the university college. Similarly, SMUC has registered for 30 databases that are in congruent with the graduate programs as well as research needs of its community including teaching professors.

**What marketing approaches are used by the libraries to promote the existence of EIRs in the institutions surveyed?**

Summary of respective marketing approaches used by the surveyed institutions is presented in the following table

| Marketing approaches                               | Surveyed Institutions |      |
|--|-----------------------|------|
|  | AUC                   | SMUC |
| <b>1. Marketing using human interaction</b>        |                       |      |
| 1.1.academic staff as collection developers        | X                     | X    |
| 1.2.collaboration                                  | X                     | X    |
| 1.3.collection policy                              |                       |      |
| 1.4.faculty/professionals as marketing tools       | X                     | X    |
| 1.5.phone call/office visit                        | X                     |      |
| 1.6.students as marketing tools                    | X                     | X    |
| 1.7.word of mouth                                  | X                     | X    |
| <b>2. Marketing using electronic communication</b> |                       |      |
| 2.1.e-mail   | X                     | X    |
| 2.2.feedback forum; home/office;                   |                       |      |
| 2.3.online social network;                         |                       |      |
| 2.4.screen saver;                                  | X                     |      |
| 2.5.usage statistics;                              | X                     |      |
| 2.6.web page alert; web page, customized           |                       | X    |
| <b>3. Marketing using physical medium</b>          |                       |      |
| 3.1.banners/posters;                               |                       |      |
| 3.2.bookmarks;                                     |                       |      |
| 3.3.calendar; flyers/brochures; giveaways;         |                       | X    |
| 3.4.incentives;                                    |                       |      |
| 3.5.newsletter; newspaper alert;                   | X                     |      |
| 3.6.pins; postcards/letters/direct mail            |                       |      |
| <b>4. Marketing using training</b>                 |                       |      |
| 4.1.FAQ  |                       |      |
| 4.2.native language education                      |                       |      |
| 4.3.patron training (individual, group)            | X                     | X    |
| 4.4.slide show/demonstrations                      | X                     |      |
| 4.5.staff training (individual, group)             |                       | X    |
| 4.6.use guide.                                     | X                     |      |

**Are there enabling infrastructures that assist the marketing of EIRs?**

For effective and efficient marketing of EIRs, enabling infrastructure must be existent. In this line, SMUC has been found to have enabling infrastructure to be utilized for the marketing of EIRs. However, there is absence of enabling infrastructure for the purpose marketing EIRs in AUC.

**How do institutional libraries rate the level of support from the top management in their effort to market EIRs?**

Activities that one can handle in the marketing of EIRs needs champions at institutional level thus top management support must be secured. In this regard, surveyed institutions have made it clear that level of support from the top management is minimal.

**As part of marketing strategies, do institutions link up EIRS with courses in their graduate programs?**

In line with the questions posed whether marketing of EIRs have been linked in the graduate programs, only Alpha University College has started integrating EIRs as part of research methodology courses. Nevertheless, SMUC has not started integrating EIRs in the graduate program.

**Are there adequate human resources capacities to handle the marketing of EIRs?**

Marketing of EIRs requires adequate number of expertise conversant with the marketing concept as well as range of EIRs available. Considering the mushrooming of graduate programs, even though the existing human resource available for the provision as well as promotion of EIRs does seem adequate, there might be challenge in handling the marketing aspect of EIRs in the near future with the ever increasing diversified programs as well as growing student population.

## **Conclusion and Recommendations**

The research was initiated to assess the existing marketing strategies to market EIRs in PHEIs and there are positive initiatives towards marketing of EIRs, marketing of EIRs is being practiced with varying degrees. Nevertheless, the existing marketing practice ensures that professional librarians are in a better position to create awareness of EIRs but uptake will remain a challenge as the magnitude of marketing of EIRs is not adequate with the available infrastructure, low level commitment from the top management side and inadequate human resource that solely engaged in marketing activities. In addition, the existing practice with regard to marketing of EIRs does not lend itself for the actual comprehensive marketing practices which incorporate goals, targets, and budget and evaluation aspects. The very fact that linking up EIRs as part of graduate curricula is not popular despite the available practice at AUC; the full integration of EIRs will have also potential challenges to embrace e-resources and services to deliver excellent graduate program as well as instituting superb research culture. Finally, the research is it is limited in exploring issues of marketing from the library administration side and does not consider the users side.

Based on the summary of findings and experiences from related studies (Garoufallou et al, 2013) the following recommendations have been forwarded:

### ***Availability of EIRs***

- The positive aspect of the research is that it identifies considerable awareness and efforts in incorporating digital resources and services in the collections of the surveyed institutions. In addition, SMUC is pioneered in making available contents freely through its institutional websites. On top of these, both institutions have been found not to compile Open Access (OA) contents available worldwide in their institutional websites. Therefore, future efforts of the management of libraries of the surveyed institutions must be focused to compile OA contents and make proper promotion to direct graduate programs and professors to such valuable contents.

- Mapping of PERI resources vis-à-vis graduate programs is a continuous process as PERI is a growing digital content where additional resources and services are made available. Therefore, there must be an effective culture developed by institutional libraries to map graduate programs in the light of identifying quality and relevant content for the research as well as the graduate program needs periodically.

**What marketing approaches are used by the libraries to promote the existence of EIRs in the institutions surveyed?**

- Among the options for marketing using human interaction, incorporating marketing as part of collection policy is missing. Therefore, efforts must be made by PHEIs libraries to integrate marketing of EIRs as part of collection development policy.
- In marketing approach using electronic communication, institutional libraries must strengthen their effort and incorporate utilization of web 2.0 and also its latest versions. Especially, utilization of usage statistics has paramount of importance in evaluating the marketing endeavors of institutions vis-à-vis EIRs librarians must gauge their marketing strategies based on usage statistics.
- Marketing using physical media is weak spot with regard to approaches used to the marketing of EIRs. Therefore, in the light of increasing the awareness and uptake of EIRs, such a gap must be properly addressed and utilization of brochures, flyers, bookmarks and others by the management of the surveyed libraries.
- Training has been one of the approaches used to the marketing of EIRs in the surveyed institutions. Nevertheless, Frequently Asked Questions (FAQ) and training using native language have not been evident in the surveyed institutions. On top of these, it must be noted that training is not a one-time business rather it must be conducted on a continuous bases by the librarians in the surveyed institutions.

**Are there enabling infrastructures that assist the marketing of EIRs?**

- Marketing of EIRs requires adequate infrastructure and AUC leadership must strive to put in place the required infrastructure for the provision of EIRs and services. However, PHEIs must also note the fact that infrastructure must be upgraded periodically to provide competent services in a sustainable manner based on existing and envisaged programs as well as research strategies of the surveyed institutions.

**How do institutional libraries rate the level of support from the top management in their effort to market EIRs?**

- The fact that minimal level of support from the top management to the marketing of EIRs hampered the existing as well as future efforts. Therefore, top management of the surveyed institutions must be the prime champions in the institutional efforts to market EIRs to maintain quality graduate program and research.

**As part of marketing strategies, do institutions link up EIRS with courses in their graduate programs?**

- Integrating EIRs to the graduate programs is one of the efficient ways of marketing. Therefore, existing effort in AUC must be strengthened and professional librarians at SMUC and other PHEIs must follow suit.

**Are there adequate human resource capacities to handle the marketing of EIRs?**

- Expertise in marketing EIRs is highly important and institutions must strive to avail the necessary human resource conversant with the concept of general marketing as well as EIRs to handle marketing of EIRs in a sustainable manner.
- Capacity building schemes endeavors must be designed by Consortium of PHEIs and Consortium of Academic and Research Libraries (CEARL).



- These institutions must advocate capacity building of LIS professionals to effectively engaged them in marketing of EIRs. Therefore, they must enforce LIS schools to introduce marketing of LIS environment in general and EIRs in particular in their curricula.

### **Future research**

As the current research is focused on the marketing of EIRs from the library administration side, future research must consider users as the prime targets of the research in order to make the research exhaustive. Such kind of comprehensive research will definitely contribute immensely in the awareness as well as uptake of EIRs.

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