



## ARTICLE

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# Enhancing Student Engagement: Introducing Social Exchange Theory in Outreach Practices for Academic Libraries

## ABSTRACT

This paper delves into the potential of social exchange theory (SET) within the context of academic libraries, using the University of Malta Library (UML) as a case study. The study explores the application of SET to enhance library outreach practices. By harnessing the power of SET, which offers profound insights into human interactions and the reciprocal nature of social relationships, this research aims to develop a comprehensive approach to navigating library outreach assessment to spark a new wave of academic library research.

SET, which focuses on the reciprocal exchange of benefits and obligations between various members of a community, provides a framework for evaluating and improving library services. Key initiatives, including training workshops, librarian chat services, stress-relief campaigns, and artistic and cultural engagement projects, were analyzed based on SET's core elements: rewards and resources, mechanisms of exchange, social structures and social capital, and reciprocity and obligations.

The findings highlight the concept that activities like personalized one-on-one sessions and workshops provide significant benefits, such as skill development, while fostering trust and user commitment between library users. Programs like stress-relief campaigns and charity events strengthen community ties and enhance the library's role as a cultural hub. Initiatives such as chat-with-a-librarian demonstrate that reciprocal engagement builds long-term relationships and increases patron satisfaction. By assessing outreach through the lens of SET principles, this study emphasizes the importance of aligning activities with academic community needs. Applying SET strategies ensures outreach efforts foster meaningful connections, mutual benefit, and social capital, ultimately improving community engagement and the overall impact of library services.

## KEYWORDS

social exchange theory (SET), library outreach, community engagement, reciprocal relationships, academic libraries

In academic library settings, strategic outreach initiatives have become essential in meeting users' expectations and ensuring effective delivery of services. Modern academic libraries have transformed from mere knowledge repositories to dynamic centers for student engagement and community interaction. In the context of academic libraries, outreach serves as a critical

component that integrates marketing, communication, and customer care, thereby establishing the library as a central hub in the academic community. This multifaceted approach is essential for effectively engaging a diverse range of users, including students, faculty, and administrative staff, all of whom collectively become the library patron and thus its ultimate customer. Academic libraries are increasingly recognizing the importance of outreach as a strategic initiative that not only enhances visibility but also fosters a sense of community among patrons. Although outreach in general has been part of library services for years, dedicated positions for outreach librarians are now more prevalent, indicating a shift toward library management prioritizing such efforts (Carter & Seaman, 2011; Dennis, 2012).

Moreover, the effectiveness of outreach initiatives is seen in various programs designed to meet specific needs of diverse user groups. For example, some libraries have tailored outreach strategies to support STEM-related constituents, as evidenced by Biddle and Gowen's study (2023), which emphasizes the need for libraries to adapt outreach efforts to align with unique demands of these communities. This adaptability is crucial, as academic libraries must remain responsive to the evolving landscape of higher education and its patrons' diverse needs (Purpur et al., 2016; Bastone, 2020). Furthermore, integration of technology and social networking tools has enabled library administrators to enhance outreach capabilities, allowing for more dynamic engagement with users (Chu & Du, 2013).

The proactive approach to outreach not only informs patrons about available resources but also encourages participation in library activities and programs. This is supported by findings of German and Lemire (2018), who discuss the importance of assessing outreach efforts to understand their impact and value within the academic ecosystem. Additionally, the role of outreach in promoting information literacy is significant, as libraries often collaborate with faculty to integrate library instruction into the curriculum, thereby enhancing students' academic success (Johnson et al., 2013; LeMire & Graves, 2019). Such collaborations underscore the library's role as an essential partner in the educational process, further solidifying its position in the academic community.

The multifaceted outreach strategies academic libraries employ are vital for maintaining relevance and responsiveness to the needs of a diverse user base. The University of Malta Library (UML) exemplifies this transformation through comprehensive outreach programs designed to enhance student engagement as well as students' academic success and overall well-being.

Social exchange theory (SET) is an interdisciplinary framework that examines the dynamics of social interactions, focusing on costs and benefits associated with such exchanges. SET has been used to analyze interpersonal and organizational relationships. Its versatility makes it a powerful tool for understanding library user engagement, the value of services provided, and the importance of fostering strong relationships between the library and its patrons in the context of library outreach, instilling confidence in its potential.

In the context of academic library outreach practices, SET provides a valuable lens through which the library image becomes less like an institution and more like a friend as patrons develop an understanding that library staff are reliable and trustworthy sources of assistance. By analyzing the reciprocal nature of such interactions, library administrators can better tailor outreach strategies to

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meet the needs of users while simultaneously enhancing overall engagement and satisfaction.

The primary objective of this research is to explore how SET can be applied to enhance library outreach practices. The study aims to discover what key factors influence user engagement and satisfaction through the lens of SET, and explore how SET principles can foster more substantial, reciprocal relationships between the library as an institution and its patrons.

## **Literature Review**

### **Theoretical Foundation—Social Exchange Theory: A Balance of Engagement, Reciprocity, and Relationships**

Social exchange theory (SET) traces its origins back to the late 1920s and spans disciplines such as anthropology, social psychology, and sociology (Mauss, 1925; Sahlins, 1972; Gouldner, 1960; Homans, 1958; Kelley, 1959; Blau, 2017). Classic anthropology studies, in which exchanges were viewed not only in terms of economic value but also for their symbolic relevance, serve as the foundational ideas that persist in contemporary SET scholarship. SET examines the dynamics of social interactions, emphasizing costs associated with social engagement or interaction versus perceived benefits for the individual (Blau, 2017; Homans, 1974). In relation to interpersonal communication, Gatignon and Robertson (1986) utilized SET by considering the trade-off between costs and benefits to understand how individuals engage in communication. Within this framework, a series of interactions give rise to mutual obligations in social exchange (Thomas & Gupta, 2021). These interactions are interconnected and contingent on other individuals' actions (Cropanzano & Mitchell, 2005). SET, as applied to workplace interactions, posits that obligations are interdependent and contingent on others' actions (DeLamater & Ward, 2006; Cook et al., 2013; Blau, 2017). Significant contributors to SET's development include Thibaut and Kelley, whose work emphasized the dynamics of interdependence and reciprocal interactions in dyads; Homans, who applied principles of reinforcement theory to group behavior; and Blau, who distinguished between economic and social exchanges to explore complex social structures (Cropanzano & Mitchell, 2005). The theory highlights the potential for these transactions to foster high-quality relationships contingent on specific circumstances.

Utilizing a reductionist approach, Homans explained social relationships through reinforcement mechanisms, by which behavior is either reinforced with reward or inhibited through punishment (Cropanzano & Mitchell, 2005). Expanding on the theory, Blau employed a technical-economic lens, emphasizing anticipation of gains as the motivating factor for behavior rooted in utilitarian principles (DeLamater & Ward, 2006; Blau, 2017). Thibaut (2017) applied theoretical concepts to human decision-making, employing matrices to predict outcomes based on proportions of costs and rewards in interpersonal relations.

Despite divergent perspectives among researchers, a collective assertion emerged that indicates behavior in social groups constitutes a form of exchange, serving as the cornerstone for social exchange research (Blau, 2017; Homans, 1974). The advent of SET resolved debates concerning application of economic approaches in anthropological research and contributed to a quasi-economic analysis of social systems (Smith & Malinowski, 2018). SET introduced the concept of interdependence, challenging prior anthropological views and providing a utilitarian understanding of social relations contingent on other actors (Blumer, 1986; Heath, 1976).

SET identifies four fundamental components shaping individuals' social behavior:

**Rewards and resources.** First, the framework expounds on the role of reinforcement tools in motivating social interaction, by which rewards signify positive outcomes and resources denote attributes enabling rewards (Cropanzano & Mitchell, 2005). Resources encompass elements such as love, status, money, information, services, and goods (Foa & Foa, 1980). The associated rewards are categorized along particularism and concreteness, influencing the subjective value of exchanged resources. Resources yield socio-emotional and economic benefits, addressing self-esteem, social needs, and financial requirements (Shore et al., 2006).

**Mechanisms of exchange.** The second facet delves into the intricate exchange processes, proposing that resources undergo transactions guided by subjective evaluations of costs and rewards. These transactions involve nuanced analysis influenced by history of past rewards and perceived value attached to resources being exchanged (Blau, 2017). In essence, individuals engage in thoughtful and evaluative weighing of potential benefits against perceived drawbacks, drawing on their prior experiences of rewards and current assessment of the value associated with resources in question. This complex interplay of subjective judgments and historical influences contributes to shaping decisions regarding resource exchange within the framework of SET.

**Social structures and social capital.** The third element underscores the impact of social structures and social capital, providing insight into how entities integrated into organizational frameworks can play pivotal roles in promoting or hindering social relationships and outcomes. Social capital encompasses power distribution considerations within these structures (Coleman, 1994; Nahapiet & Ghoshal, 1998). Elaborating further, the organizational configuration and interconnections among social entities within these structures contribute significantly to shaping the dynamics of social interactions, influencing distribution and exercise of power among individuals involved.

**Reciprocity and obligations.** Finally, reciprocity, identified as the fourth mechanism, establishes reciprocal obligations between involved parties, drawing from the foundations of evolutionary psychology, cultural norms, and individual moral orientation (DeLamater & Ward, 2006; Cropanzano & Mitchell, 2005). This principle is a normative guide for behavior and functions as a regulatory mechanism that nurtures mutually beneficial and interdependent relationships (Blau, 2017; Molm, 1997). The dynamics of social exchange unfold within a two-step behavioral model, triggered by either positive or negative treatment, exerting influence on reciprocal actions and cultivating enduring cooperation and commitment among participants (Cropanzano et al., 2017).

SET serves as a foundational lens for understanding human responses in the context of library outreach. In exploring user perceptions of value exchange, this theory allows for an in-depth investigation into what motivates individuals to engage with library resources and services. Applied to library outreach, SET helps librarians explore how users perceive the value they receive in exchange for their engagement with library resources and services. What motivates users to engage with library outreach efforts, and how do they evaluate the benefits and costs of this engagement?

At UML, outreach activities are designed with SET elements from the planning stage to maximize their efficacy. By understanding the reciprocal nature of social exchanges, the academic library can craft strategies emphasizing mutual benefits of engagement for users and the library. For instance, users might perceive value in accessing high-quality resources, receiving personalized assistance, or participating in enriching workshops and seminars. In return,

the library benefits from increased user engagement, enhanced community relations, and improved service utilization.

Library outreach is instrumental in creating connections, increasing effective use of resources among patrons, and cultivating a positive institutional image (Carter & Seaman, 2011). Outreach serves as a bridge between institutions and individuals within user groups, facilitating effective communication.

### **Understanding Costs and Benefits in Social Exchange**

SET posits that social exchanges are driven by a cost-benefit analysis, through which individuals and institutions evaluate the potential rewards of an interaction against its perceived costs. For the academic library, understanding these dynamics is essential to optimizing its outreach activities and ensuring they effectively engage its community.

For students, primary costs of participating in library outreach activities include time and effort. Attending workshops, participating in events like stress-relief campaigns, or engaging in one-on-one sessions requires a time commitment that could be otherwise spent on academic work or personal activities. Additionally, there is an element of social risk. Students may feel apprehensive about participating in activities like chat-with-a-librarian or ask-a-librarian, fearing judgment or discomfort when seeking help (Homans, 1974; Blau, 2017).

The library's costs are largely related to resource allocation, including staff time, financial investments, and physical or digital spaces. Organizing events such as charity campaigns or cultural exhibitions requires significant planning and coordination. There are also opportunity costs, by which resources devoted to these activities might have been utilized for other initiatives with potentially broader impacts (Cox, 2005).

Perceived benefits often outweigh the costs, making the social exchange favorable. For students, benefits include access to valuable academic resources, personalized support, and stress-relief activities that enhance academic success and overall well-being. Activities like training workshops and stress-relief campaigns provide significant rewards by fostering a sense of community, reducing stress, and offering skill development opportunities (Cropanzano & Mitchell, 2005; Adeogun, 2022).

The library's benefits include increased student engagement, which can lead to higher utilization of services and resources. Successful outreach activities also strengthen the library's role in the academic community, enhancing its reputation as a supportive and proactive institution (Gupta & Savard, 2018). Moreover, building social capital through initiatives such as art collectives and collaboration with external organizations helps foster trust and long-term relationships with students and other stakeholders (Nahapiet & Ghoshal, 1998).

### **Elements of Social Exchange Theory in Library Outreach**

In academic library outreach, incorporating SET introduces four essential elements—rewards and resources, mechanisms of exchange, social structures and social capital, and reciprocity and obligations—that redefine dynamics between libraries and their communities. These elements of SET can be used to examine library outreach activities, and establish reciprocal and enduring relationships with patrons. Effective outreach is a testament to positive exchanges between the library and its community. Librarians and outreach

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professionals are pivotal in initiating reciprocity, offering valuable information, resources, and support tailored to the community's interests and needs. This proactive approach involves hosting informative workshops, curating engaging content, and providing specialized services directly addressing the community's unique challenges.

Central to this exchange is an emphasis on transparency. Mutual benefits derived from library outreach initiatives must clearly articulate advantages community members stand to gain—be it access to educational resources, participation in skill development programs, or involvement in cultural enrichment activities. Shared benefits in fostering such exchanges are multifaceted. By actively engaging with the community through outreach initiatives, the library strengthens its role as a hub for learning, creativity, and social connection. Increased participation in programs enhances the library's visibility and reputation, positioning it as an indispensable community resource. This can lead to stronger advocacy, improved funding opportunities, and the ability to expand services. Additionally, through reciprocal relationships, the library gains valuable insights from user feedback, enabling it to tailor offerings to more effectively meet community needs. This iterative process not only enriches the library's service portfolio but also fosters a loyal user base that actively supports and promotes the library's mission. By highlighting these mutual benefits, the library positions itself not merely as a repository of information but also as a valuable contributor to the community's overall well-being.

Trust-building stands as a foundational pillar in the success of library outreach endeavors. Librarians foster trust through transparency, consistency, and genuine concern for community welfare. Open communication—about the library's goals, offerings, and positive impact it aspires to achieve—creates a sense of reliability. Over time, this fosters commitment from the community to actively engage with the library, creating a relationship built on trust and shared objectives.

Perceived costs and rewards are pivotal in shaping the nature of academic library outreach. Librarians address this by understanding and minimizing perceived costs, such as time or effort, through streamlined processes and enhanced accessibility. Simultaneously, they maximize rewards by showcasing value-added services, resources, and opportunities available to the community. This delicate balance creates a positive exchange environment, incentivizing sustained and meaningful community involvement with the library.

The foundational elements of SET define the narrative of library outreach. Beyond being conduits of information, libraries are dynamic hubs actively engaged in reciprocal relationships with their communities. Using SET as a framework, the library enhances outreach effectiveness to ensure a sustainable and impactful presence in the community.

## **Methodology**

### **Research Design and Approach**

The research adopts a mixed methods case study approach, focusing on UML's outreach activities from 2015 through 2023. This approach was chosen to explore how social exchange theory (SET) can be applied to real-world outreach practices in an academic library setting. The research uses a case study design to capture complexity of social interactions, exchange processes, social capital, and reciprocity within the library's outreach initiatives.

The descriptive and analytical study seeks to describe the library's outreach activities and critically analyze their alignment with SET principles. The research is grounded in a reflective analysis of existing library practices,

focusing on understanding intentionality behind these activities, and identifying gaps and areas for improvement.

Objectives of this research are to answer these questions:

- What key factors influence user engagement and satisfaction through the lens of SET?
- How can the principles of SET foster more substantial, more reciprocal relationships between the library and its patrons?

### **Data Collection Methods**

Data for this study were collected using qualitative methods, including document analysis, surveys, feedback forms, and semi-structured interviews. These approaches aimed to provide a comprehensive understanding of UML's outreach activities and their perceived effectiveness.

**Analytical Framework.** The analytical framework for this study was grounded in SET, which serves dually as a theoretical foundation and a practical guide for evaluating the library's outreach practices. The analysis was structured around the four core SET elements: rewards and resources (understanding tangible and intangible benefits from the library's outreach activities), mechanisms of exchange (examining processes through which interactions and exchanges occur between the library and its community), social structures and social capital (analyzing how outreach activities foster relationships, trust, and networks in the academic community), and reciprocity and obligations (evaluating the mutual benefits and sense of duty generated through outreach initiatives).

**Document Analysis.** The document analysis included a review of 20 key documents, such as these:

- Annual reports (2015–2023)
- Outreach plans and strategies
- Internal evaluations of outreach activities
- Promotional materials
- Workshop schedules
- Social media posts
- Event descriptions

The documents were analyzed to identify primary outreach activities, their objectives, and their alignment with SET principles.

**Surveys and Feedback Forms.** A total of 577 responses were collected through feedback forms distributed during the survey period (2022–2023). The forms were provided to students participating in library outreach activities and others visiting UML. Respondents represented diverse demographics, the majority being students, alongside smaller numbers of administrative staff and faculty members. Participants' academic studies spanned various subject areas, including arts and humanities, social sciences, sciences, technology, medicine, and business. The sample included a mix of undergraduate and postgraduate students, with significant representation from first-year undergraduates and master's level students. The majority of respondents were 18 to 25 years of age, reflecting the predominantly young student population. Their responses provided valuable insights into patrons' perceptions of and experiences with UML's outreach initiatives.

**Semi-Structured Interviews.** To complement the feedback forms, researchers conducted semi-structured interviews with 17 library staff members to gain

in-depth understanding of planning, execution, and impact of outreach activities. The interviews included three library managers and the library director, who offered strategic insights into how outreach initiatives align with institutional priorities. Additionally, three full-time outreach librarians, including the head of section, provided detailed perspectives on operational and creative aspects of outreach, emphasizing integration of SET principles such as rewards and resources, mechanisms of exchange, social structures and social capital, and reciprocity and obligations. To ensure a broad representation from various departments, 10 other librarians who support outreach activities were also interviewed. The diverse sample, representing nearly one-third of UML's approximately 60 staff members, enabled a comprehensive evaluation of how outreach activities foster reciprocal relationships and social capital.

**Data Analysis.** All qualitative data were analyzed using thematic coding, guided by SET's four core elements. Analysis involved the following steps:

1. Transcription of interviews and open-ended survey responses
2. Initial coding based on SET concepts such as rewards, exchange mechanisms, social capital, and reciprocity
3. Grouping related codes into broader themes and aligning them with the theoretical framework
4. Comparing findings across data sources (documents, feedback forms, and interviews) to ensure consistency and depth

The thematic coding process provided critical insights into how UML's outreach activities align with SET principles to enhance engagement and reciprocal exchanges in the academic community. Supporting materials, including survey instruments, interview guides, and coding matrices, are featured in Appendixes A, B, and C.

## **Analytical Framework: Applying Social Exchange Theory to Outreach Activities**

The analytical framework for this study is grounded in SET, which provides a theoretical foundation and practical guide for evaluating library outreach practices. The analysis was organized around SET's four core elements: rewards and resources, mechanisms of exchange, social structures and social capital, and reciprocity and obligations. Feedback from students was collected, and interviews with library staff were conducted within the context of the four SET elements. Outreach activities were categorized according to the four elements, and the impact of each outreach activity was further analyzed, with focus on perceived costs and benefits for students and UML. This involved detailed examination of feedback and interview data, to assess how effectively the activities fostered reciprocal relationships, built social capital, and engaged students. Finally, SET framework was employed to identify gaps and areas for improvement in UML's outreach practices, particularly in balancing costs and rewards or strengthening social interactions. These insights were used to develop recommendations for future outreach efforts.

## **Limitations and Scope**

Though this study offers valuable insights into applying SET to library outreach practices, several limitations should be acknowledged. First, as a case study centered on UML, the findings may not be directly generalizable to other academic libraries with different institutional contexts, resources, and student populations. However, insights gained can contribute to broader discussions on applying SET in library outreach. Second, data collection methods, which

relied on document analysis and participant feedback, may introduce bias, mainly if participants provided socially desirable responses. Although interviews provided in-depth insights, they were limited to 17 individuals, potentially restricting diversity of perspectives captured in the university community. Third, retrospective alignment of some outreach activities with SET may influence interpretation of their effectiveness. The distinction between intentional design and retrospective application was carefully considered, and this remains a potential limitation of the study.

Additionally, the study's temporal scope, covering outreach activities from 2015 to 2023, may present challenges, as changes in library resources, staff, and student needs during this period could have influenced outcomes of activities. Although efforts were made to account for such changes, they may still affect consistency of findings across different time periods. Finally, SET provides a robust framework for analyzing social interactions and exchanges, but it may only partially capture other vital factors influencing library outreach, such as cultural or institutional dynamics. The study focuses on SET but acknowledges the potential for integrating other theoretical perspectives in future research.

## **Discussion of Results**

### **Results from Feedback Forms**

Feedback forms collected during the survey period provided detailed insights into participant experiences with UML's outreach activities. Responses from 577 participants were analyzed using the framework of social exchange theory (SET), focusing on rewards and resources, mechanisms of exchange, social structures and social capital, and reciprocity and obligations.

**Demographics.** Of the 577 respondents, 422 (73.1%) were students, 91 (15.8%) were administrative staff, and 64 (11.1%) were faculty members. Among students, undergraduates accounted for 332 (57.5%) of respondents, with a significant portion (211, or 36.5%) being first-year undergraduates. Postgraduate students made up 90 (15.6%) of the student cohort. The majority of participants, 439 (76.1%), were ages 18 to 25, followed by 86 (14.9%) in the 26 to 34 age group, and the remaining 52 (9%) were 35 years or older. Participants represented various academic disciplines, including arts and humanities (167, or 28.9%), sciences (145, or 25.1%), social sciences (117, or 20.3%), medicine (86, or 14.9%), and business and technology (62, or 10.7%).

**Rewards and Resources.** A total of 490 respondents (84.9%) agreed that outreach activities provided meaningful benefits, such as skill development (375, or 65%), access to resources (115, or 19.9%), and networking opportunities (86, or 14.9%). Among outreach activities, training workshops in particular were noted for their emphasis on developing research skills and using library databases. Respondents highlighted the need for additional resources, with 156 participants (27%) requesting recorded sessions or more advanced-level workshops tailored to specific disciplines.

**Mechanisms of Exchange.** Four hundred sixty-two respondents (80.1%) rated participation processes as clear and accessible, though 115 participants (19.9%) mentioned barriers such as scheduling conflicts (86, or 14.9%) and difficulties navigating event registration (29, or 5%). UML programs like Borrow a Librarian and Chat with a Librarian were praised for their ease of access, but some respondents suggested inclusion of asynchronous options, like online consultations, to increase accessibility.

**Social Structures and Social Capital.** Outreach activities helped foster a sense of community and build connections, with 404 respondents (70%) reporting that the activities made them feel part of a supportive network. UML programs like Chat with a Librarian and Feel-Good Campaign initiatives

received the highest praise for fostering connections between students and librarians, as noted by 298 respondents (51.6%). However, 97 participants (16.8%) felt cultural initiatives like ART Connect, an art collaboration effort at UML, had limited appeal. Suggestions for improvement included expanding the range of activities to include interdisciplinary collaborations or digital creative projects, with 112 respondents (19.4%) expressing interest in such formats.

**Reciprocity and Obligations.** A majority of respondents (433, or 75.1%) felt their participation or feedback was valued and acknowledged. Programs like Feel-Good Campaign initiatives and Chat with a Librarian were highlighted as strong examples of reciprocal relationships in which students received personalized support while librarians gained valuable insights into user needs in order to improve services and better support patrons. However, 144 respondents (24.9%) indicated UML could better demonstrate appreciation for their insightful contributions. Suggestions included sharing visible outcomes of feedback (56 participants, or 9.7%) and involving users in planning future initiatives (88 participants, or 15.2%).

**Barriers to Participation.** Key barriers to participation in activities were identified, with 231 respondents (40%) citing scheduling conflicts as a primary issue followed by perceived social risks (87, or 15.1%) and lack of awareness about activities (58, or 10.1%). UML programs like Borrow a Librarian and training workshops, which include library tours and information literacy, were effective but often limited by these challenges. Participants suggested improving promotion strategies, emphasizing confidentiality in services, and increasing availability through online options, which were recommended by 142 respondents (24.6%).

## Results from Interviews with Library Staff

Semi-structured interviews conducted with 17 library staff members provided nuanced insights into planning, execution, and perceived effectiveness of UML's outreach activities. The sample included three library managers, the library director, three full-time outreach librarians (including the head of section), and 10 librarians (from various departments) who actively support outreach. Responses were analyzed using SET principles focusing on rewards and resources, mechanisms of exchange, social structures and social capital, and reciprocity and obligations. These insights revealed strong demand for genuine engagement from library patrons, suggesting integration of marketing, communication, and customer care into outreach practices is essential for impactful initiatives.

Interviews revealed that applying SET principles to outreach transforms marketing and communication channels into dynamic engagement tools that transcend traditional boundaries. By aligning with the four basic elements of SET, the library can create meaningful outreach initiatives that resonate across diverse target audiences. Staff emphasized that whether targeting students, academics, or administrative staff, outreach can be impactful if it prioritizes genuine engagement and mutual benefit, reinforcing the library's centrality in the academic community.

**Rewards and Resources.** Library staff emphasized that effective outreach must offer tangible benefits tailored to diverse needs of students, academics, and administrative staff. Programs such as stress-relief campaigns were seen as successful in providing emotional and mental well-being resources, whereas training workshops delivered practical academic skills. However, staff noted that many patrons prefer targeted, discipline-specific workshops that align with their academic goals, with 11 respondents (65%) suggesting a more curated

approach to resource delivery. Additionally, staff identified a growing demand for digital tools, such as resource repositories and on-demand tutorials, that align with patrons' expectations for flexibility and convenience.

**Mechanisms of Exchange.** Staff highlighted the importance of creating seamless mechanisms for participation that integrate outreach into patrons' academic routines. Although UML initiatives like Chat with a Librarian were lauded for their simplicity and effectiveness, six staff members (35%) expressed concerns about underutilized traditional marketing and communication channels, such as email notifications and event posters, which often fail to engage patrons. Staff emphasized that by embedding SET principles into communication practices, such as using personalized invitations or leveraging peer networks, these mechanisms can become more effective. Additionally, staff stressed the importance of ongoing dialogue with patrons rather than relying on one-way promotional efforts.

**Social Structures and Social Capital.** Staff noted that meaningful engagement with patrons requires fostering a sense of community that extends beyond transactional interactions. Initiatives like ART Connect were highlighted as exemplary for building interdisciplinary networks and cultivating social capital. However, several staff members observed that academic staff participation remains limited, with seven respondents (41%) calling for more targeted efforts to involve faculty in outreach. Collaborative projects, such as joint faculty-student workshops or cocurated exhibitions, were proposed as ways to expand the library's role as a community hub. Additionally, staff suggested that using SET principles to reframe academic libraries as bridges between disciplines could further strengthen their role in fostering collaboration across the university.

**Reciprocity and Obligations.** Reciprocity was seen as a cornerstone of effective outreach, with 13 staff members (76%) emphasizing the importance of two-way exchanges between library staff and patrons. UML programs like Borrow a Librarian exemplified this, as students and staff received tailored support and provided valuable feedback that informed refinement of services. However, several staff members noted that patrons often do not see how their input directly influences library decisions. To address this, staff recommended showcasing visible outcomes of feedback, such as service adjustments or new programs, through communication channels that highlight the library's responsiveness. This would strengthen mutual obligation between the library and its patrons, fostering deeper trust and engagement.

**Barriers and Opportunities.** Staff identified several barriers to meaningful engagement, including limited awareness of outreach activities and lingering perceptions of libraries as purely transactional spaces. Nine respondents (53%) noted that traditional marketing methods are insufficient for reaching certain user groups, particularly academic staff and postgraduate students. They argued that embedding SET principles into outreach ensures marketing and communication efforts are not merely promotional but also transformative in providing intrinsic methods of engagement. For example, integrating personalized customer care approaches, such as follow-ups after workshops or offering bespoke services for faculty, could help bridge gaps.

Opportunities for innovation were also highlighted, particularly in expanding interdisciplinary and digital outreach. Staff suggested digital storytelling initiatives and collaborations with academic departments could increase participation and build new social structures. Additionally, six respondents (35%) advocated for enhanced cross-departmental partnerships within the university to ensure outreach activities address a wider range of academic and administrative needs.

## Outreach Activity Analysis

**Chat with a Librarian.** The Chat with a Librarian initiative at UML provides students the opportunity to interact with library staff in a casual, one-on-one setting. This informal program allows students to ask questions, seek guidance on research, and discuss academic needs directly with an available librarian during select time periods. The event is designed to break down barriers often associated with formal library services, offering a more approachable and personalized way for students to connect with library resources.

In terms of *rewards and resources*, students benefit from personalized academic support, gaining access to tailored information and advice on effectively utilizing library resources. The assistance empowers students with tools to succeed in research and studies. *Mechanisms of exchange* are evident in the reciprocal nature of interactions. Students engage with librarians to obtain valuable support, while librarians try to understand how to improve library services and resource allocation.

The *social structures and social capital* element is evident in how the Chat with a Librarian program builds a sense of community and connection between the library and students. By fostering personal relationships, the library becomes a comfortable space for students to access resources, creating stronger ties between the library and academic community. Finally, *reciprocity and obligations* are central to this activity. Students receive personalized assistance in exchange for providing feedback or more regularly engaging with the library. The two-way exchange strengthens the bond between the institution and its patrons, encouraging continued use and engagement with library services.

**Feel-Good Campaign: De-stress with a Librarian.** The De-stress with a Librarian event is part of the Feel-Good Campaign, designed to offer stress-relief activities during peak academic periods, such as exam time. The event includes a range of activities, including the Library Wishing Well, where students write down their wishes for the semester, get free origami bookmarks, and play casual games to encourage relaxation (in collaboration with the university's chess club and the Institute of Digital Games). The activities aim to reduce student stress and offer a break from intense academic pressure.

From a *rewards and resources* perspective, students benefit from the mental relaxation and stress relief the activities provide. The rewards go beyond tangible resources like books or articles and contribute to students' overall well-being. *Mechanisms of exchange* in this event involve students engaging in enjoyable activities in exchange for their participation in a positive, low-stakes environment. There are minimal costs to students—primarily time spent attending—but perceived benefits, such as reduced stress and increased relaxation, outweigh costs, reflecting the central tenet of SET: that social exchanges are driven by perceived benefits outweighing costs.

In terms of *social structures and social capital*, the De-stress with a Librarian event strengthens the library's role as a supportive environment for students, fostering a sense of community and belonging. Its informal nature promotes peer interaction, helping students feel more connected to one another and to the library. *Reciprocity and obligations* come into play as students benefit from the stress-relief activities, which may increase their loyalty to the library. In return, the library receives valuable feedback on effectiveness of its outreach initiatives, to help guide future event planning.

“...embedding SET principles into outreach ensures marketing and communication efforts are not merely promotional but also transformative in providing intrinsic methods of engagement.”

**Training Workshops and Academic Database Workshops.** Training workshops and academic database workshops at UML offer students personalized academic support by teaching them how to effectively use library resources, including databases, research tools, and citation management systems. These workshops provide hands-on learning opportunities, by which students can receive one-on-one or small group instruction from library staff. Although not necessarily seen as outreach efforts in the traditional sense, organizing such workshops is a form of outreach for students who do not necessarily know of the services UML provides.

*Rewards and resources* of these workshops are clear: Students gain essential skills to more effectively navigate academic research. Resources—ranging from database search techniques to citation management—empower students to perform better in academic work. *Mechanisms of exchange* are present in the way students exchange time and attention for practical, applicable skills to aid their studies. Despite some initial barriers, such as time commitment and scheduling, students report significant satisfaction with the skills and knowledge they acquire, indicating rewards outweigh costs.

From the *social structures and social capital* perspective, workshops create a space for students to interact with library staff—building stronger relationships and encouraging future use of library services. The interactions also foster a sense of community in the academic environment, as students share learning experiences and challenges. Finally, *reciprocity and obligations* are evident as students gain valuable skills and knowledge in exchange for their participation. In return, the library collects feedback that allows them to refine future workshops and ensure services meet students' evolving needs.

**Artistic and Cultural Engagement (ART Connect, Library Box Poetry, and Exhibitions).** Artistic and cultural engagement initiatives, such as the ART Connect project, are designed to create a dynamic and inclusive library environment by showcasing student artwork and hosting exhibitions. Events aim to engage students in creative expression and bring cultural vibrancy to the university setting. The library acts as a platform for students to present creative work, and the initiative includes collaborative art projects and exhibitions that allow students from various disciplines to engage with one another and display artworks on UML premises. This highlights UML as a central hub of student life, transforming it into an ever-changing canvas.

*Rewards and resources* in these initiatives are twofold: Students receive the opportunity to showcase their creative work, which can enhance their personal and professional development, and the library gains exposure to diverse artistic expressions that enrich campus culture. *Mechanisms of exchange* involve students contributing artwork to the library's exhibitions in exchange for recognition and the opportunity to be part of a creative community. This interaction fosters positive social exchanges and contributes to the university's cultural richness.

In terms of *social structures and social capital*, artistic and cultural engagement initiatives help build a sense of community by bringing together students from various academic backgrounds to share in the creative process. It enhances social capital by fostering relationships, trust, and collaboration among students, faculty, and staff. The *reciprocity and obligations* element is evident in the mutual benefits students and the library receive: Students gain a platform to showcase their work, and the library enhances its role as a cultural hub on campus. Expanding the scope of art and culture initiatives could engage a broader audience and further enhance the library's social capital.

**Borrow a Librarian: One-on-One Sessions.** The Borrow a Librarian initiative at UML, inspired by the Human Library Project, offers students one-on-one research support. Students can request to meet with a librarian to discuss

specific academic challenges, research questions, or other library-related queries, or to simply borrow someone to talk to and vent about university life. This initiative was designed as a rebranding exercise to promote more one-on-one meetings between librarians and patrons.

In terms of *rewards and resources*, students benefit from expert guidance and tailored support to help resolve research challenges and optimize use of library resources. *Mechanisms of exchange* involve students engaging with librarians for personal academic support, while librarians learn the types of research challenges students face, to better support future users.

*Social structures and social capital* aspects of this Borrow a Librarian activity are evident in the relationships built between students and librarians, as well as strengthening of the library's role as a trusted academic partner. By facilitating one-on-one exchanges, the library builds trust and rapport with students, encouraging future interactions and continued engagement. *Reciprocity and obligations* come into play as students engage with the service and, in return, provide valuable feedback that helps librarians refine support offerings. Positive feedback from academics further supports the idea of extending this initiative, highlighting its shared value to students and the library institution.

## **Role of Assessment in Outreach Activities**

Assessing outreach activities in academic libraries is essential for understanding their impact and identifying areas for improvement. This evaluation process is greatly enhanced when framed through the lens of SET, which focuses on reciprocal exchange of benefits and obligations between parties. By applying SET's four core elements—rewards and resources, mechanisms of exchange, social structures and social capital, and reciprocity and obligations—library professionals gain valuable insights into effectiveness of initiatives, how those resonate with patrons, and alignment with community needs.

The *rewards and resources* element allows libraries to assess tangible and intangible benefits patrons receive, such as improved access to resources, skill development, or personal support. Collecting data on user satisfaction through surveys or focus groups helps determine whether outreach activities meet patron expectations and offer significant value. As Carter and Seaman (2011) suggest, aligning services with user needs ensures perceived rewards are meaningful and relevant.

The *mechanisms of exchange* element evaluates how outreach activities facilitate participation and engagement. Library personnel must examine accessibility and clarity of communication and promotional strategies, as these factors significantly impact success of outreach efforts, emphasizing the importance of designing mechanisms that reduce barriers and encourage active participation. Identifying and addressing challenges, such as unclear event formats or scheduling conflicts, ensure outreach is inclusive and accessible.

The third element, *social structures and social capital*, focuses on relationships and networks formed through outreach activities. Academic libraries are uniquely positioned to foster connections among students, faculty, and staff, contributing to a stronger academic community. Libraries can use tools like network analysis to assess quality and strength of connections built through outreach, ensuring initiatives effectively contribute to social capital within the institution.

Finally, *reciprocity and obligations* explore mutual expectations and benefits that arise from outreach initiatives. Library staff should evaluate whether activities foster a sense of reciprocity, encouraging patrons to engage with and contribute to library programs. Cultivating a culture of reciprocity enhances

user engagement and strengthens community ties. Soliciting participant feedback on their willingness to contribute to future initiatives or recommend library services provides a measure of success of this exchange.

Incorporating feedback collected through surveys, interviews, and focus groups ensures future outreach initiatives are better tailored to needs of the academic community. Ongoing dialogue fosters a sense of ownership among patrons, creating a collaborative environment where patrons feel invested in the library's success. By aligning outreach activities with SET principles, libraries create impactful, reciprocal, and meaningful engagements that benefit the library and its community.

## **Social Exchange Theory in Practice and Areas for Improvement**

### **Identifying Gaps and Areas for Improvement**

Although library outreach activities demonstrate strong alignment with the principles of SET, several gaps present opportunities for improvement across SET's four core elements: rewards and resources, mechanisms of exchange, social structures and social capital, and reciprocity and obligations.

A key area identified for improvement is the flexibility and accessibility of outreach activities. For example, training workshops at UML were generally well-received, but some students reported scheduling conflicts that limited their ability to participate. This highlights a mismatch between students' needs and

“One way to enhance reciprocity and obligations is by creating more opportunities for students to provide feedback on outreach activities and then demonstrating tangible outcomes based on their input. Closing the feedback loop—by responding to student suggestions and making visible changes—fosters a greater sense of community ownership over the library's services.”

availability of resources. To address this issue, the library offered more flexible scheduling options, including shorter sessions and online alternatives directly aligned with SET's principle of minimizing perceived costs. The goal is to reduce barriers to engagement, making it easier for students to participate. Further exploration of asynchronous learning opportunities, such as recorded sessions or modular workshops, might better accommodate diverse student schedules and preferences, ensuring rewards like skill development and research support are accessible to a wider range of students.

Another opportunity lies in strengthening reciprocity, a core SET element by which mutual benefits are expected from social exchanges.

UML initiatives like Chat with a Librarian and Feel-

Good Campaign programs exemplify reciprocity, as students and the library both gain value from the exchanges. However, the structure of such exchanges could be more effective. One way to enhance reciprocity and obligations is by creating more opportunities for students to provide feedback on outreach activities and then demonstrating tangible outcomes based on their input. Closing the feedback loop—by responding to student suggestions and making visible changes—fosters a greater sense of community ownership over the library's services (Thomas & Gupta, 2021; Cropanzano & Mitchell, 2005). This approach aligns with SET's focus on mutual benefit and strengthens social capital by encouraging greater student involvement in shaping library services.

Perception of social risk is an additional challenge that may hinder student participation in outreach activities, particularly in initiatives like Chat with a Librarian. Some students may hesitate to engage, due to fears of judgment or discomfort in seeking help (Homans, 1961). To reduce perceived risks, the library can provide a more inclusive and supportive environment by training staff to be empathetic and approachable, promoting confidentiality of

interactions, and normalizing help-seeking behavior. Targeted communication campaigns that reduce stigma associated with seeking academic support could further mitigate concerns, thereby encouraging greater engagement. This approach aligns with SET's emphasis on exchange processes, ensuring students feel comfortable engaging with library services without fear of judgment (Blau, 2017; Cook et al., 2013).

Finally, cultural projects such as ART Connect and several art exhibitions at UML have been successful in engaging students with specific artistic interests but with limited reach. Expanding initiatives to include a wider range of creative activities, such as digital storytelling or interdisciplinary collaborations, could attract a more diverse audience. By incorporating a broader spectrum of creative outlets, the library could provide additional rewards that cater to interests of a wider student population. This would not only enhance social capital but also strengthen social structures within the university community. Partnerships with other departments or external community organizations could further increase impact of these projects, creating more opportunities for cross-disciplinary interactions and fostering stronger community bonds (Scicluna, 2015; Ashcroft & Hoey, 2001; Ippoliti, 2022). Expanding the scope of these initiatives would enhance their ability to build social capital and expand the library's role as a cultural hub in the university setting.

These opportunities for improvement demonstrate how SET principles can inform ongoing development of outreach activities, ensuring they are more flexible, inclusive, and reciprocal, and adjacently build stronger social connections and address students' evolving needs.

### **Moving beyond Familiar Activities: Social Exchange Theory-Informed Innovations**

To further strengthen its outreach strategy, UML staff should consider looking beyond traditional activities to explore innovative approaches informed by SET. Applying SET more rigorously to outreach practices offers new opportunities for innovation. Instead of focusing solely on conventional activities, like social media engagement and workshops, the library could explore novel forms of engagement that leverage digital tools and platforms. For example, developing gamified learning modules or interactive content could increase engagement by making the exchange processes more dynamic and rewarding (Dholakiya, 2023).

It is important to highlight achievements, but equally vital to acknowledge challenges and areas for improvement. For example, the library could better articulate certain activities' costs and trade-offs in allocating resources to outreach versus other services (Cox, 2005; Diaz, 2019). By adopting a more reflective stance, the library demonstrates a commitment to continuous improvement and evidence-based practice, positioning itself as a learning organization responsive to its community needs (Adeogun, 2022).

### **Future Directions for Research and Practice**

Moving forward, several avenues for future research and practice could further refine and expand the application of SET in academic library outreach:

- Longitudinal studies could assess the long-term impact of SET-based outreach activities on user engagement and satisfaction. This would provide deeper insights into sustainability and effectiveness of various outreach strategies over time.
- Comparative studies across multiple academic libraries could help identify best practices and explore how different contexts influence the

application of SET. Such research could contribute to developing a more comprehensive framework for applying SET in various library settings.

- Exploratory studies on the efficacy of the four elements in social media outreach campaigns could help determine whether SET provides a viable framework for assessing academic libraries' social media engagement. Such studies could evaluate how well social media fosters meaningful connections, mutual benefit, and community-building. These insights could inform the development of more strategic, engaging, and impactful social media outreach efforts for academic libraries.

Though this study focuses on UML as a specific case, its findings and recommendations offer insights that can be adapted to other academic library settings. SET principles, such as fostering reciprocal relationships, enhancing social capital, and balancing costs and rewards, are broadly applicable across various types of libraries regardless of size, location, or resources. For instance, academic libraries in more prominent research universities could use SET to design targeted outreach programs that cater to diverse student populations. In contrast, smaller college libraries might apply the principles to strengthen community engagement or improve service utilization among limited user groups. Additionally, use of SET could be tailored to address unique challenges libraries face. For example, urban libraries may emphasize social capital and networking opportunities to support student success in highly competitive environments, and rural libraries might focus on more personalized interactions to build trust and engagement in close-knit communities. This study's approach provides a flexible framework for academic libraries to refine outreach strategies according to specific needs and goals by demonstrating how SET can be adapted to various contexts.

This study underscores the significant potential of SET to inform and enhance outreach strategies in academic libraries. By focusing on the reciprocal nature of social exchanges and emphasizing the importance of mutual benefits, libraries can foster more robust, more meaningful relationships with patrons, ultimately supporting their mission to promote learning, research, and community engagement.

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## Appendix A: Library Outreach Feedback Form

Dear Participant,

Thank you for taking the time to provide feedback on the library's outreach activities. Your responses will help us understand your experiences, improve future programs, and ensure our initiatives align with your needs.

All data collected is confidential and will only be used in accordance with the University of Malta privacy policy. If you have any questions about this survey, please contact us on [library@um.edu.mt](mailto:library@um.edu.mt).

### Section 1: Demographic Data

This information will provide statistical data about the respondents of the survey.

1. Age:

- 18–24
- 25–34
- 35–44
- 45–54
- 55 or above

2. Gender:

- Male
- Female
- Nonbinary
- Prefer not to say

3. Educational Background:

- Undergraduate student
- Graduate student
- Working professional
- Currently not enrolled with the university
- University staff
- Academic staff

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4. Main Area of Study:
  - \_\_\_\_\_
5. Are you a:
  - Student
  - o Specify year of study: \_\_\_\_\_
  - Staff member
  - Faculty member
6. Have you participated in any of the following library outreach activities? (Select all that apply):
  - Training workshops/academic database workshops
  - Chat with a Librarian
  - Cultural projects (e.g., ART Connect, Library Box Poetry, exhibitions)
  - Feel-Good Campaign
  - Borrow a Librarian
  - Other (please specify): \_\_\_\_\_

**Section 2: Perceptions of Outreach Activities**

7. How would you rate the overall effectiveness of the library's outreach activities?
  - Excellent
  - Good
  - Fair
  - Poor
8. How well do you think these activities address your needs?
  - Very well
  - Somewhat well
  - Not well
9. What motivated you to participate in these activities? (Select all that apply):
  - Access to resources
  - Skill development
  - Cultural enrichment
  - Networking opportunities
  - Other (please specify): \_\_\_\_\_

**Section 3: Elements of Social Exchange Theory (SET)**

Rewards and Resources

10. Did the outreach activities provide you with meaningful benefits (e.g., skills, knowledge, networking opportunities)?
  - Yes
  - Somewhat
  - No
11. What additional rewards or resources would make these activities more valuable to you?

Mechanisms of Exchange

12. Were the processes for participating in these activities clear and easy to navigate (e.g., registration, accessibility, communication)?

- Yes
- Somewhat
- No

13. How could these processes be improved to enhance your experience?

#### Social Structures and Social Capital

14. Did the activities help you build relationships or connect with others in meaningful ways?

- Yes
- Somewhat
- No

15. Do you feel the library fosters a sense of community through its outreach initiatives?

- Yes
- Somewhat
- No

16. How could the library improve its role in building a supportive community?

#### Reciprocity and Obligations

17. Do you feel that your participation or feedback in these activities was valued and acknowledged?

- Yes
- Somewhat
- No

18. What changes could the library make to better demonstrate appreciation for your contributions?

19. Do you feel a sense of mutual obligation (e.g., the library providing resources in exchange for your engagement)?

- Yes
- Somewhat
- No

20. Please describe any examples of successful reciprocity you experienced through these initiatives.

#### Section 4: Barriers to Participation

21. Have you faced any barriers that made it difficult to participate in library outreach activities?

- Scheduling conflicts
- Lack of interest
- Perceived social risks (e.g., fear of judgment)
- Other (please specify): \_\_\_\_\_

22. What could the library do to make these activities more accessible or appealing?

Section 5: Additional Feedback

23. Do you have any additional comments or suggestions for improving the library's outreach activities?

Thank you for your feedback!

**Appendix B: Semi-Structured Interview Guide for Library Staff  
Purpose**

This interview guide was designed to capture library staff experiences and perceptions of outreach activities through the lens of Social Exchange Theory (SET). Questions focused on rewards and resources, mechanisms of exchange, social structures and social capital, and reciprocity and obligations to explore the planning and execution of these initiatives and how SET principles were integrated.

**Demographic Information**

1. What is your role/job title at the University of Malta Library?
2. How many years of experience do you have working at the University of Malta Library?
3. Age?

**Interview Questions**

Rewards and Resources

4. What do you see as the key benefits or rewards that outreach activities provide to participants?
5. How do you ensure that the resources offered through outreach initiatives align with the needs of the university community?
6. Can you share examples of tangible or intangible resources that have been particularly effective in your outreach programs?

Mechanisms of Exchange

7. How do you facilitate interactions or exchanges between the library and its patrons during outreach activities?
8. What strategies do you use to encourage active participation and engagement from students and staff?
9. Have you observed any patterns in how patrons respond to outreach activities based on the way they are delivered?

Social Structures and Social Capital

10. In what ways do outreach activities foster relationships and build a sense of community within the university?

11. How do you identify and engage with key groups or stakeholders who could benefit from or contribute to outreach initiatives?
12. Have outreach activities helped to establish trust or strengthen networks among participants? Can you provide specific examples?

#### Reciprocity and Obligations

13. How do you design outreach activities to ensure they provide mutual benefits for both the library and its patrons?
14. Have you noticed participants taking actions, such as providing feedback or recommending services, that reflect a sense of obligation or reciprocity?
15. What measures do you use to evaluate whether outreach activities are fostering a reciprocal relationship between the library and the university community?

#### Closing Questions

16. What challenges have you faced when incorporating SET principles into the planning and execution of outreach activities?
17. Are there any lessons or insights you've gained from past initiatives that could guide future outreach efforts?

## **Appendix C: Coding Matrices and Analysis Steps**

### **Purpose**

This appendix outlines the analysis of qualitative data derived from semi-structured interviews with library staff and participant feedback forms. The data was thematically coded based on social exchange theory (SET) to assess how outreach activities such as training workshops, Chat with a Librarian, cultural projects, Feel-Good Campaign, and Borrow a Librarian aligned with the core SET elements: rewards and resources, mechanisms of exchange, social structures and social capital, and reciprocity and obligations.

**Coding Matrix for Library Staff Interviews**

<b>SET Element</b>	<b>Code</b>	<b>Example Quote/ Observation</b>	<b>Theme</b>
<b>Rewards and Resources</b>	Skills development	"Training workshops empower students to use academic databases effectively."	Providing academic support
	Custom assistance	"Chat with a Librarian lets us address specific research questions."	Personalized resource delivery
	Promoting well-being	"Feel-Good Campaigns remind users that the library is here for their mental health too."	Supporting holistic well-being
<b>Mechanisms of Exchange</b>	Interactive engagement	"Borrow a Librarian sessions allow staff to build tailored research solutions."	Facilitating one-on-one interactions
	Creative communication	"Cultural projects like ART Connect are ways we communicate in an engaging manner."	Encouraging diverse participation
<b>Social Structures and Social Capital</b>	Community engagement	"Exhibitions bring together students, faculty, and artists, fostering collaboration."	Strengthening social networks
	Relationship building	"The workshops build ongoing trust between students and the Library."	Building long-term connections
<b>Reciprocity and Obligations</b>	Mutual collaboration	"Participants actively help us refine Borrow a Librarian based on their experiences."	Reciprocal service improvement
	Cultural contributions	"Users who donate poetry for Library Box projects contribute to our creative mission."	Fostering shared ownership

## Coding Matrix for Participant Feedback Forms

SET Element	Code	Example Response	Theme
<b>Rewards and Resources</b>	Valuable training	"The academic database workshop helped me improve my research skills."	Enhancing academic competence
	Accessible support	"Chat with a Librarian was quick and provided exactly what I needed."	Personalized support
	Well-being recognition	"Feel-Good Campaigns were such a nice break during stressful times."	Promoting mental health
<b>Mechanisms of Exchange</b>	Tailored interaction	"Borrow a Librarian made me feel the library truly cared about my research."	Encouraging individual engagement
	Creative collaboration	"ART Connect gave me a platform to share my artwork with others."	Supporting cultural expression
<b>Social Structures and Social Capital</b>	Community interaction	"Exhibitions helped me connect with students outside my program."	Strengthening cross-disciplinary ties
<b>Reciprocity and Obligations</b>	Feedback for improvement	"I suggested improvements for future workshops, and they were implemented."	Building reciprocal relationships
	Shared creativity	"Submitting my poem for Library Box made me feel part of something bigger."	Participating in collective projects