

# **The use of Marketing Research methods for the evaluation of Information Literacy services**

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## **ABSTRACT**

In recent years, services provided from any organization are being evaluated in terms of their necessity for the aims of the organization and libraries can be no exception. Many library researchers have used marketing methods, such as quantitative and qualitative research.

The Central Library of the National Technical University of Athens conducted a quantitative research in order to evaluate the services provided within the concept of Information Literacy.

However, both qualitative and quantitative methods are necessary. In the case of the Central Library of the National Technical University of Athens, the need for evolution in the existing Information Literacy services requires the use of a qualitative research method, using focus groups, in order to identify unexplored user needs and library shortcomings through the suggestions of the members of the institution.

**Keywords:** Quantitative research, Qualitative research, Information Literacy, Evaluation, Marketing research methods.

## **1. Introduction**

Marketing, as a managerial process, appears more often in profit organizations. In business, for example, the role of the marketing is to promote specific services and products as well as to attract more customers. In non-profit organizations such as libraries the role of the marketing is just to attract more 'customers' that in the particular situation are 'users', without making any profit. The Chartered Institute of Marketing stresses that *"marketing is the management process responsible for identifying, anticipating and satisfying customer requirements profitably"* (Chartered Institute of Marketing, 2005). Moreover as Coote and Batchelor claim marketing is a mixture of planning, analysis, on going action as well as a management process (Coote and Batchelor, 1997). All the organizations focus on their customers, try to identify their needs and satisfy their requirements. Gambles and Schuster add that marketing role is to predict the current and future needs of the organization so as to improve the existing services and create new services and facilities (Gambles and Schuster, 2003).

There is a debate about the utility of marketing in libraries. From one part, it is believed that marketing and promotion of services is only useful in profit organizations, so libraries that are non-profit organizations do not need it. Marshall claims that many directors of academic libraries are still uncomfortable with the public relations of their job (Marshall, 2001). On the other hand, it is believed that the appropriate marketing could not only improve library services but also could attract more people to use these facilities. Drucker asserts that the marketing in a non-profit organization is very important, and that nobody trusts something that is completely free, even if it is a beneficial service (Drucker, 1998).

In recent years, services provided from any organization are being evaluated in terms of their necessity for the aims of the organization and libraries can be no exception (Wilson, 1985). The focus of the library should be on its users and the quality of services that they receive (Matthews, 2005). Academic libraries in order to achieve this goal should follow marketing research strategies and techniques. *"In a world that is forever changing, the only certainty is change. Therefore, strategies for building the 21<sup>st</sup> century libraries and librarians must focus on the ability of librarian and libraries to not just adapt to change, but to prepare for it, facilitate it, and shape it"*. Rot Tennant (Matthews, 2005, p. 43). Moreover, Dodsworth claims that *"a marketing plan should be an integral part of libraries*

*strategic plan*” (Dodsworth, 1998, p. 320).

Many library researchers have used marketing research methods, such as quantitative and qualitative research, in order to focus attention on expectations and quality, capturing the user’s perspective on services used (Cook and Thomson, 2001). Quantitative research is a method where the data are in form of numbers and can be counted or measured. In this case the researcher organizes the data in order to produce numerical information (Preece, 1994). The main problem of the quantitative analysis is that the quality of the results depends on the quality of the original data. If the data are not accurate, the results will also be improper. On the other hand, qualitative research, that is the opposite of quantitative, involves in-depth investigation. Moreover, it is a way of recording people’s attitudes, feelings and behaviours in greater depth. It pays more attention to individual cases and looks further than precise numerical evidence. One of the most important disadvantage of qualitative analysis is that usually analyzes few people and so it is difficult to generalize and make systematic comparison (Blaxter et al, 2001).

However, both qualitative and quantitative methods are necessary because qualitative data typically involves words and quantitative data involves numbers. There are various ways to combine these different research methods. User data gathered via various means can reveal information on services needing improvement, which can help in anticipating future user needs, becoming a measure to judge the library’s effectiveness (Wood, 2007).

## **2. Quantitative approach**

The Central Library of National Technical University of Athens (NTUA) has been providing for several years certain services within the concept of Information Literacy. These services include seminars addressed to the first year students, aiming to establish an understanding on how to search in the library’s Online Public Access Catalogue (OPAC), e-journals, databases and also in the e-books, encyclopedias and dictionaries. Due to the fact that these seminars address the first year students, thus are an introduction to the library’s services, the focus is mostly on the basic search through the library’s OPAC.

The Information Literacy services of the Central Library of NTUA also includes tutorials for specialized databases, as well as print and electronic guides with information on loan regulations, renewal procedures and information on hold requests. Finally, there is the help-desk service which gives the opportunity to the users to state their questions

concerning all services offered by the library.

However, in order to be better, it is necessary to focus on an existing service and try to improve it (Matthews, 2005). Aiming to such an improvement the Central Library of the National Technical University of Athens conducted a quantitative research in order to evaluate the services provided within the concept of Information Literacy. A questionnaire of eleven closed ended questions was uploaded in the library's website. The number of the questions was limited because the nature of this research required relatively high numbers of respondents. Questions were structured in a closed ended format in order to assist data entry and statistical analysis (U.S. Department of Health and Human Services (HHS), 2010). The research sample consisted of 272 of the library's users, from which 41% was undergraduate students, 4.8% postgraduates, 26.2% PhD students, 18.5% teaching staff and 9.6% employees of the National Technical University of Athens (Kokkinos, Papadatou, Sisamaki, 2008).

The choice of quantitative research depended on the research aim (Hara, 2005), objectives (DJS Research Ltd, 2009) and the researcher's belief that the quantitative approach was most suitable for the topic under consideration. This was the appropriate way to state the research problem in very specific terms making possible to evaluate predetermined services provided. It was considered to be very reliable due to mass surveys (Matveev, 2002), allowing for a broader study and enhancing the generalization of the results for the larger population of interest (U.S. Department of Health and Human Services (HHS), 2010). Finally, it is a method that enabled comparisons across categories, which was essential in this situation.

The findings of this research project indicated the need for further training on the search techniques for the electronic resources of the library. Therefore there was an development of the educational seminars addressing students who needed more analytical information on such search techniques. Similar seminars are planned to take place in the near future addressing postgraduate and PhD students as well as the teaching staff (Kokkinos, Papadatou, Sisamaki, 2008).

The research also revealed the need for subject indexing of the databases as well as the need for a search option using key-words. These services will be provided to the library's users through a meta-search tool called Metalib, which will establish an easy and quick way to search among all the library's resources, making scientific research more efficient. Finally, as an attempt to update the library's users and staff regarding its e-resources,

presentations from the publishers of these resources will be scheduled.

### **3. Qualitative approach**

Quantitative researchers in some cases have met difficulties in expressing their data when using only the quantitative way. Therefore, they have attempted to incorporate a qualitative approach into the research (Hara, 1995). Both qualitative and quantitative methods are necessary. Both methods are used to combine a general picture of the study by complementing each other (Shuttleworth, 2008).

In the case of the Central Library of the National Technical University of Athens, the need for evolvement in the existing Information Literacy services requires the use of qualitative research methods, since the quantitative research approach had difficulties in expressing the problem further (Hara, 2005). When the topic of the research is not predetermined and well established, then qualitative research is the appropriate choice, because it provides an initial understanding for further decision making and enables to generate hypotheses or research questions for further investigation (Barbour, 1999).

Library's goal at this point is beyond the improvement of existing services. The goal is the achievement of innovation. Innovation requires identifying new user needs, and new ways of providing services (Matthews, 2005). As a result, the Central Library of the National Technical University of Athens aims to conduct a qualitative research, using focus groups, in order to identify unexplored user needs and library shortcomings through the suggestions of the members of the institution. Focus groups will be used to help shape the future needs of the library as part of a strategic planning process (Moore, 2001), and hopefully will lead to operational excellence (Matthews, 2005).

### **4. Conclusions**

In this paper arguments have been used to prove that a quantitative research method is most appropriate when the aim and the objectives of a research are well stated. Therefore, in the early stages of the evaluation process of Information Literacy services in the Central Library of NTUA a survey was appropriate.

According to Matthews (2005), the information that results from a survey must be discussed with various groups of users in focus groups. This will be the next step in the

case of the Central Library of NTUA. Listening hard and asking users to share their opinion will help view the library services from the perspective of the user. This will ensure that the library understands the perceptions of its users and the services the library provides, rather than drawing conclusions using the library's assumptions. Employing both macro-view satisfaction surveys as well as micro-view discussions with groups of users will provide a more complete picture (Matthews, 2005), resulting to a more targeted planning for future services.

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