



Article

Evidence Based Marketing for Academic Librarians

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Abstract

Objective - In developing marketing strategies for the Business & Economics Library (BEL) at the University of Illinois at Urbana-Champaign (UIUC), a survey was designed to answer the following questions:

- Should BEL develop marketing strategies differently for East Asian business students?
- What services do graduate business students want to receive from BEL?
- With whom should BEL partner to increase visibility at the College of Business?

Marketing research techniques were used to gather evidence upon which BEL could construct appropriate marketing strategies.

Methods - A questionnaire was used with graduate business students enrolled at UIUC. The survey consisted of four categories of questions: 1) demographics, 2) assessment of current library services, 3) desired library services, and 4) research behavior. The data were analyzed using descriptive statistics and hypothesis testing to answer the three research questions.

Results - East Asian business students showed similar assessment of current services as non-East Asian international business students. Survey results also showed that graduate business students had low awareness of current library services. The Business Career Services Office was identified as a co-branding partner for BEL to increase its visibility.

Conclusion - A marketing research approach was used to help BEL make important strategic decisions before launching marketing campaigns to increase visibility to graduate business students at UIUC. As a result of the survey, a deeper understanding of graduate business students' expectations and assessment of library services was gained. Students' perceptions became a foundation that helped shape marketing

strategies for BEL to increase its visibility at the College of Business. Creating marketing strategies without concrete data and analysis is a risky endeavor that librarians, not just corporate marketers, should avoid.

Introduction

Corporations develop marketing strategies for their products or services based on careful analysis of research findings, and marketing research has become a distinct discipline due to its importance within the field of marketing. According to Armstrong and Kotler, marketing research is the “systematic design, collection, analysis, and reporting of data relevant to a specific marketing situation facing an organization” (113). Aaker et al. explain that marketing research “helps to improve management decision making by providing relevant, accurate, and timely (RAT) information” (1). Put differently, marketing research is a discipline based on the need to identify and discover evidence upon which corporations can decide what products to develop or to withdraw from the market, which consumer groups they will target for their advertising campaigns, and which strategic partners to select. Marketing research does not stop at simply studying consumer behavior or preferences, but continues to help create concrete marketing action plans.

The techniques of marketing research are highly applicable to libraries that are seeking to develop and communicate their services to users. By applying techniques of marketing research, librarians may learn essential information seeking behavior of diverse groups of users in such areas of preference, satisfaction, and expectations. Furthermore, librarians can answer such questions as what new services should be offered, what existing services should be evaluated for their effectiveness, and with whom librarians can collaborate to increase their visibility and relevance to students and faculty members.

This paper presents a case study that discusses how the author applied

marketing research to study a specific group of students and develop appropriate marketing strategies based on the results.

Institutional background

The Business & Economics Library (BEL) is one of 40 departmental libraries at the University of Illinois at Urbana–Champaign (UIUC). It mainly serves faculty and students at the College of Business that typically enrolls about 3,500 undergraduate and graduate students each academic year. Interestingly, the majority of graduate business students are identified as international students; consistently between 55 and 65 percent since 1992, according to information provided by UIUC. Furthermore, business information resources have increasingly become available electronically, and most business information resources at BEL, such as statistics databases, scholarly journals, and financial analysis databases, are now electronically accessible regardless of time and location. Nevertheless, there has not previously been an in-depth user study to determine how diverse business student groups at UIUC react to both traditional and new services offered by BEL.

As BEL was introducing new services, the author sought to understand how business students perceived BEL and its current services. In doing so, it was hoped that marketing needs and opportunities could be determined, and marketing strategies developed, accordingly. As mentioned earlier, the majority of the graduate business students at UIUC are international students bringing with them drastically different previous library experiences and expectations. Many corporations carefully design their marketing campaigns to meet the needs of specific populations, since consumer behaviors vary widely depending upon

their demographics. Ethnic marketing, for example, closely assesses the needs of various ethnic populations in the United States and creates appropriate marketing strategies with regards to packaging, promotions, and retailing. With this in mind, the author recognized the likely need to devise different marketing plans for diverse international business student populations. Instead of grouping all the international business students into one population as a homogeneous group, the author sought to determine whether or not international business students needed to be segmented further based on their nationalities, assuming that international business students brought distinctively different previous library experiences from their home countries which may have shaped their perceptions of the library in general.

Interestingly, over 70 percent of the international business students at UIUC are from four East Asian countries – China, Japan, Korea, and Taiwan. If East Asian business students showed significantly different reactions to library services from other international business students, then BEL might need to consider devising marketing plans especially for them, which would require further research. To determine this, the first step was to study

their perceptions of current library services and determine if their perceptions were widely different from those of other international business students.

A conventional marketing research methodology was followed. A research method was developed, data was collected and analyzed, and the findings were communicated. For this study, the targeted student group was limited to graduate business students who were enrolled in master’s degree programs such as the M.B.A. and Master of Science in Finance, and doctoral programs in various business fields.

Research Design

Constructing an appropriate methodology ultimately determines the validity of any research effort. The author designed a survey questionnaire that consisted of 25 questions asking about graduate business students’ current library use and research behavior. Prior to conducting the survey, the author obtained approval from the Institutional Review Board at UIUC to comply with the University’s policy on the ethical and legal conduct of human subjects research. Figure 1 illustrates the research process that the author followed.

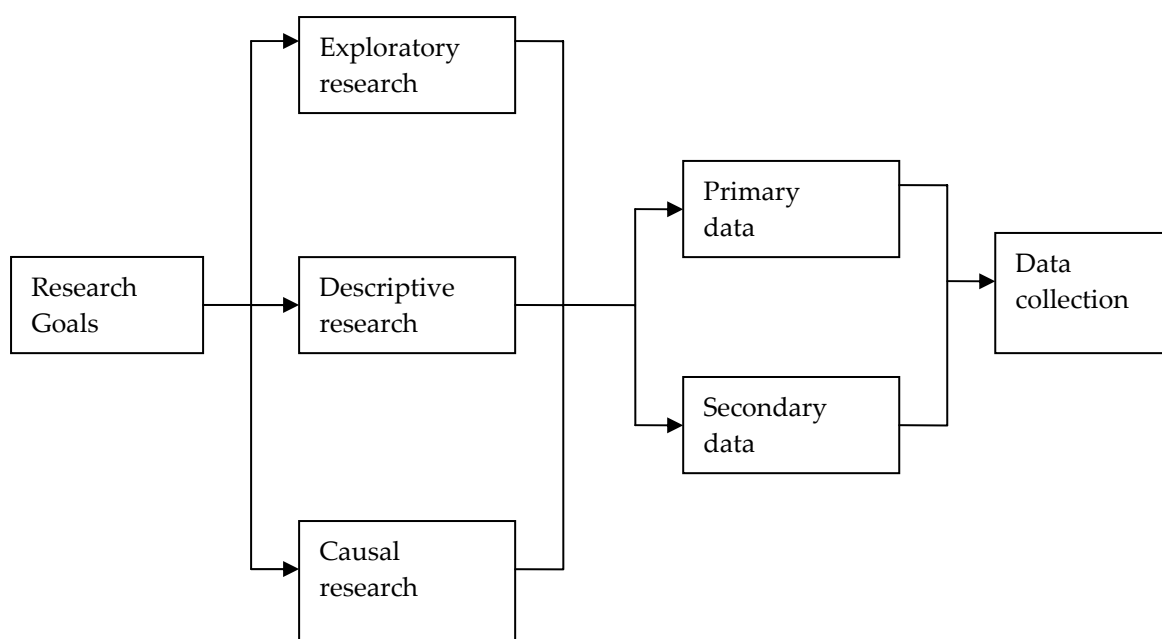


Figure 1. Research Design Process

Research goals

Due to the rapid adoption of the Internet as a research tool and changes in pedagogical requirements for graduate business programs, it was critical to assess graduate business students' perceptions and expectations of library services. The results of this research would then become the foundation on which BEL could formulate its branding, advertising, and service development strategies. Three questions formed the basis of the research:

- Should BEL develop marketing strategies differently for East Asian business students?
- What services do graduate business students want to receive from BEL?
- With whom should BEL partner to increase visibility at the College of Business?

At the time of this research, many departmental libraries at UIUC were introducing new services such as virtual reference, term paper consultation sessions, electronic databases tutorials, and wireless Internet access. However BEL, as a departmental library, did not have data that would indicate how graduate business students in particular reacted to such services, and how those services truly helped increase BEL's visibility and relevance. There was a concern that BEL might not be offering services that graduate business students actually needed the most. Only in-depth research would reveal what services they were hoping to receive, what services should be continued, and those that should be considered for termination.

Research objectives

According to Armstrong and Kotler, marketing researchers make a decision as to which of three research objectives – exploratory, descriptive, and causal – is most likely to accomplish their research goals (114). The three research types serve distinctively different objectives. Exploratory research is helpful in

establishing hypotheses for further research, and therefore, it is generally used as a preliminary research tool for descriptive and causal research. Descriptive research, on the other hand, helps researchers determine consumer behavior and market potential for products. Causal research is suitable when researchers seek to understand cause-and-effect relationships. As the goals clearly demonstrate, the objective of this research was to conduct descriptive research in order to study customer behavior (in this case, the behavior of graduate business students).

Data collection

As Figure 1 illustrates, there are two types of data: primary and secondary. While some secondary information found in a literature review was helpful in understanding business students' information seeking behavior in general terms, the availability of secondary information specifically on graduate business students was very limited. Furthermore, since the results would be the basis of marketing efforts targeting graduate business students at UIUC, collecting primary data specific to them was essential to make this research relevant.

Primary data collection

It was decided to conduct a written survey via a questionnaire. The author had previously used an Internet-based survey for other research projects, and while it was easy to use, the response rate did not meet the author's expectation. Based on this previous experience, a different approach was taken with this survey. A research assistant contacted graduate business students individually, in the hope that this approach would result in a high response rate. Students were approached at various locations on campus, and asked to participate if they met the requirements (i.e. current full-time graduate business students at UIUC). A total of 259 responses were gathered. At the time of the survey, 845 graduate students were enrolled in the College of

Business, which indicates a 30 percent response rate. Of the total respondents, 143 students (55 percent) were international students. The response rate may be considered low, but the actual number of the respondents was high enough to draw conclusions with a fairly high level of confidence. BEL had never achieved a response rate higher than 30 percent for other research projects previously.

Survey questions

Since the research was designed to study graduate business students' perceptions and behaviors, the author used a Likert-scale for most questions, a tool widely used for behavioral research. For example, the respondents were given a statement "How important is the availability of personal space at the library?" and the scale ranged from 1 (least important) to 5 (very important). Similarly, the respondents were asked to select the degree of agreement from 1 (strongly disagree) to 5 (strongly agree) with a statement such as "Library workshops introduced me to resources at the library of which I had not known previously."

The survey asked respondents to select specific answers for some questions. It included questions on their favorite Internet sites for research, the student program offices (e.g. admissions office, career services office) with which they had most frequent contact, and library offerings that they hoped to receive.

Questions were grouped into separate categories: 1) demographics, 2) assessment of current library services, 3) desired library services, and 4) research behavior.

Each respondent was asked to indicate his or her field of study, student status, and the number of years spent in the United States as a student if the respondent was an international student. The respondents were then asked to indicate the importance of current library services such as virtual reference, personal study area, and the availability of electronic resources. Each respondent also had an opportunity

to list up to five services he or she wished to receive from BEL. Lastly, the survey asked several questions to study graduate business students' research behavior.

Those questions included:

- Which Internet site do you visit most frequently on a daily basis?
- When conducting research for school projects or personal needs, which Internet site do you primarily use?
- With whom do you have most frequent contact? (e.g. curriculum advisor, career counselor, student organizations)

Data Analysis and Reporting

Once all the results were gathered, the data was interpreted and analyzed. Again, having clear research goals helped guide the data analysis stage. As mentioned earlier, there were three questions to be answered from data generated by the survey. The following sections illustrate how the data for each question was analyzed and interpreted.

Question 1: Do East Asian business students differ from other international business students in terms of their assessment of library services?

It was necessary to compare several student groups when analyzing the data. While all survey respondents were graduate business students, they could be further segmented based on various factors. Segmenting the graduate business students is important in developing marketing strategies because different segments may require different types of marketing efforts. For instance, international business students may possess drastically different information seeking behaviors from those exhibited by domestic business students. Furthermore, even among international business students, information seeking behavior may be different based on their nationalities.

In the survey, respondents were asked to identify their citizenship. A total of 25 countries were reported, and students from the four East Asian countries constituted 66.2 percent of the total respondents. The rest of the respondents were from Southeast Asia (19.4 percent), Europe (7.2 percent), South America (4.3 percent), and other (2.9 percent).

Hypothesis testing was used to determine if East Asian business students had different library expectations from other international business students.

Hypothesis testing is generally used with empirical data to draw conclusions on the difference among two or more samples.

For example, the survey asked the question "How important is the availability of personal study space at the library?", and this research sought to find out if the level of importance of personal study space was different by the place of citizenship. The means for this question for East Asian and other international business students were 4.46 and 4.59, respectively. Can we safely conclude that East Asian business students were placing less emphasis on the availability of personal study area at BEL than did the rest of the international business students, or should the conclusion be that, in actuality, there was no significant

difference between the two student groups?

To approach this question, the data was examined using a statistical test for the difference among student groups. A major difficulty in comparing the different student groups was that the data revealed that responses to the questions with the Likert-scales were heavily skewed toward the numbers four (somewhat important or somewhat agree) and five (very important or strongly agree). While the t-test is well-known and widely used for comparing different populations, it could not be applied since a critical requirement of the t-test is that the result must be a normal distribution with a bell-shaped curve, but the data collected for this research did not show a normal distribution. For this reason, the chi-square test was used to compare different student groups, since it is appropriate to test samples that are not normally distributed but highly skewed.

Five services were tested in order to better understand how international business students viewed traditional services and new services (i.e. physical space and electronic services). Overall, the chi-square test showed that East Asian business students did not differ significantly from the rest of the international business

<i>Importance of Library Services: E. Asian vs. Non-E. Asian</i>		
1. Space for Personal Study		
Critical Value	Chi-square Test Stat	p-value
5.991	1.718	0.424
2. Public Computers		
Critical Value	Chi-square Test Stat	p-value
7.815	6.173	0.103
3. Electronic Resources		
Critical Value	Chi-square Test Stat	p-value
5.991	3.440	0.179
4. Virtual Reference Service		
Critical Value	Chi-square Test Stat	p-value
9.488	2.004	0.735
5. Space for Group Meetings		
Critical Value	Chi-square Test Stat	p-value
7.815	0.156	0.984

Table 1. Importance of Library Services: East Asian vs. Non-East Asian International Students

students in terms of their perceptions and expectations of library services, and therefore, no separate marketing strategies for East Asian business students were suggested. Table 1 provides the results of the chi-square test and shows that no significant differences were found between the two student groups. The chi-square statistics for all questions were below the critical values, and p-values also demonstrated that there existed no significant differences. When the chi-square statistics produce values larger than the critical values, the results suggest that the two samples being tested exhibit different behaviors. As shown in Table 1, the chi-square test statistics for all five library services fell below the critical values, and thus it can be concluded that there existed no significant differences between the two student groups with regards to their perceptions of the five library services listed in the survey. The p-values also suggest the degree of the probability of wrongly concluding that there are significant differences. Table 1 reveals that the p-values for all the services exceeded .05 which is the level of statistical significance. The conclusion can be made that the two student groups did not differ significantly in terms of their perceptions of the five services. The survey results showed that space for personal study was the most important service for both East Asian and non-East Asian students, followed by the availability of public computers, electronic resources, space for group meetings, and virtual reference services, in that order of importance.

Question 2: What services do graduate business students want to receive from BEL?

Open-ended questions were used to ask respondents to list new services that they hoped BEL might offer. Respondents could list up to five services. In analyzing the data, the author ranked the services based on the number of times they were listed by respondents.

Surprisingly, the two library services that graduate business students asked for the

most from BEL were wireless access to the Internet (42 percent) and access to electronic resources from remote locations (37 percent). These two services were already being offered at the time of the research, but graduate business students did not seem to be aware of them. Signage had been posted in the building stating that BEL was equipped with wireless connectivity, but it was never marketed aggressively. This result indicated that

BEL needed to market its services more proactively to graduate business students so that they could take advantage of the services currently being offered. It was suggested that BEL needed to emphasize the offerings of wireless access to the Internet and access to electronic resources from remote locations more aggressively through marketing campaigns and orientations for newly admitted students. Moreover, all M.B.A. students are now required to have individual laptops, and thus communicating such services is essential.

Question 3: Who could be a strategic partner for BEL to increase its visibility?

To increase the visibility of BEL to the College of Business, potential partners were sought to create a co-branding strategy. Armstrong and Kotler define co-branding as "the practice of using the established brand names of two different companies on the same product," which creates "broader consumer appeal and greater brand equity" (245). Co-branding is effective when two organizations do not compete against each other, and each has expertise that is widely recognized. This co-branding strategy can easily be replicated by academic libraries in identifying appropriate partners. Libraries can expand their outreach through co-branding with other campus units in ways that are similar to companies expanding their markets by collaborating with other companies already established in the existing markets. At BEL, potential collaborators were sought for co-branding opportunities so that BEL could increase its visibility to graduate business students.

- Most popular research topic (n=253)
 1. Career (73 percent)
 2. Current news (53 percent)
- Most frequently used student services (n=243)
 1. Career counseling (82 percent)
 2. Faculty advice or curriculum advice (74 percent)
- Most popular campus program (n=242)
 1. Job fairs (52 percent)
 2. Academic seminars (32 percent)

Table 2. Finding a Co-Branding Partner

The survey asked a number of questions designed to find viable candidates to become BEL's strategic partners. Table 2 shows the results of these questions. As is clearly seen, the primary concern for graduate business students is career management, and the Business Career Services Office (BCSO) at the College of Business seemed to be the best strategic partner available for BEL. Unlike other graduate programs, graduate business programs are categorized as professional as opposed to academic, since the main goal of business schools is to train students to become business managers who can solve complex problems in a fast-paced global business environment. Graduate business students also have expectations that degrees such as the M.B.A. will enhance their chances of obtaining job offers with high salaries from reputable companies. Consequently, the average salary for graduates, and job placement rate, play a central role in assessing the strength of various graduate business schools when business publications, such as *Business Week*, *Wall Street Journal*, and *Financial Times*, rank graduate business programs.

Based on these findings, BSCO was confidently identified as a co-branding partner for BEL. BCSO has great visibility among graduate business students since

they frequently contact BCSO for assistance. The results of the survey suggested that business students were highly attentive to campus activities dealing with career management issues, such as effective interview skills, effective resume writing, and building professional networks. BCSO would be an excellent marketer of BEL's services, as business students closely monitor announcements released from BCSO. In turn, BEL could provide substantial expertise as business students could benefit significantly from in-depth company and industry research available when they prepared their resumes and cover letters. By having joint seminars and workshops, BEL would leverage BCSO's high visibility, and BCSO, in return, would help business students improve their job search processes. At career-related seminars hosted by BCSO, BEL would demonstrate various business databases, showing company and industry information that students would be interested in, and how to access resources remotely so students can find relevant information easily and quickly without location or time constraints.

Conclusion

Linking research to practice is a critical element in evidence based librarianship. Marketing research has been used by marketing professionals to study user needs when developing new products and

to assess consumer reactions to existing products. The author used a marketing research approach to help BEL determine important strategies as it was about to launch new marketing campaigns to increase its visibility to graduate business students at UIUC. As a result of the survey, a deeper understanding of graduate business students' expectations and assessment of library services was gained. The research findings suggest that BEL did not have to design marketing strategies specifically targeting East Asian at UIUC. In addition, promotion of services such as wireless Internet connectivity and remote access to electronic databases at BEL were strengthened. The survey results also helped BEL identify BCSO as its strategic partner and a strong relationship with BCSO has begun to develop through seminars and workshops on career research. Graduate students' perceptions, as indicated by the results of the survey, became a foundation that helped shape marketing strategies for BEL's efforts to increase its visibility in the College of Business.

Works cited

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- Armstrong, Gary and Philip Kotler. Marketing: An Introduction. 7th ed. Upper Saddle River, N.J.: Pearson/Prentice Hall, 2005.

Appendix: Survey instrument

Part 1

1) Gender

1. Male
2. Female

2) Country of citizenship: _____

3) Program of study

- Undergraduate
- Master (Major: _____)
- Ph.D. (Major: _____)
- Other (please specify): _____

4) Length of stay in the US (applicable only to international business students)

For how many months have you been studying in the United States?

____ Year ____ Months

Part 2

For the questions 5 – 9, please indicate how important each of the following library services is to you at UIUC.

	Very Important	Moderately Important	Neutral	Of Little Importance	Not Important
5) Personal study area (i.e. study space)	5	4	3	2	1
6) To use computers	5	4	3	2	1
7) To use library resources for research and assignments	5	4	3	2	1
8) Asking questions via Internet chat	5	4	3	2	1
9) Group meetings	5	4	3	2	1

Part 3

10) When you look for information on the Internet, what types of information do you seek most frequently? (Write more than one, if necessary)

11) Among many student services at the College of Business, with which student services do you have most frequent contact?

1. Faculty/Curriculum counseling

2. Career services and counseling
3. Diversity services
4. Student associations (please specify: _____)
5. Other: (please specify: _____)

12) In which campus events are you most interested?

1. Job fairs
2. Academic seminars
3. Presentations from invited guest speakers
4. Field trips to companies
5. Athletics/Sports
6. Multicultural events
7. Other (please specify: _____)

Part 4

13) What Internet sites do you visit most frequently on a daily basis? (Write more than one, if necessary)

14) What Internet access do you currently have at your residence?

1. Dial-up (56K or less)
2. Cable modem
3. DSL
4. High-speed access provided by dormitory or apartment
5. Other (please specify): _____

15) Do you access electronic library resources from home via the Internet?

1. Always
2. Frequently
3. Occasionally
4. Rarely
5. Never

16) When using electronic resources, do you access them from library computers or home computers?

1. Computers at the library
2. Computer at home
3. Other (please specify): _____

17) Have you asked librarians for help at the library (please circle one)? **Yes/No**

17-1. If you responded "Yes" to question 27, what kind of questions did you ask? Check all that apply.

1. Help locate and retrieve books or articles
2. Help with research strategies
3. Other (please specify): _____

17-2. If you responded "No" to question 27, why did you not seek any assistance?

1. Did not need to do research requiring using books, journals, or databases
2. Already knew how to use the library without any help
3. Did not expect that librarians would understand my area of study
4. Other (please specify): _____

18) What types of services do you wish to receive from the Business & Economics Library?
(Write more than one, if necessary)

19) The library that I use the most frequently on campus is (e.g. ACES, Grainger, Business & Economics, Undergraduate): _____

20) The library that I use second most frequently on campus is (e.g. ACES, Grainger, Business & Economics, Undergraduate): _____

21) When conducting research for your projects, which Internet sites do you primarily use?

1. Search engines (e.g. Google, Yahoo!)
2. Library home page
3. Other: (please specify: _____)

For the following questions (22-25), please indicate the level of your agreement with the statement, using the following scale. This time, please answer based on your experience currently with the library at UIUC.

	Strongly Agree	Somewhat Agree	Neutral	Somewhat Disagree	Strongly Disagree
22) The Internet is more useful than library resources for my research or assignments at UIUC.	5	4	3	2	1
23) Professors or instructors at UIUC encourage students to use library resources for research and assignments.	5	4	3	2	1
24) Library workshops introduced me to resources at the library of which I had not known previously.	5	4	3	2	1
25) My course assignments at UIUC usually require some research utilizing library materials.	5	4	3	2	1