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Vroom's expectancy theory and the public library customer motivation model

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Abstract

Purpose – The purpose of this paper is to understand the components of Vroom's expectancy theory; to create or develop a public library customer motivation model using Vroom's expectancy theory; to suggest appropriate public library services marketing mindset which public libraries can employ to enhance customers' perceived expectancy and instrumentality of public library services to motivate customers to use public library services more frequently based on the proposed public library customer motivation model; and to suggest appropriate public library services marketing strategies to motivate customers to use public library services more frequently based on the proposed public library customer motivation model.

Design/methodology/approach – Research paper based on expectancy theory.

Findings – Customer-centered mindset is the most important factor to motivate public library customers. Furthermore, the suggested marketing strategies can be also achieved through a customer-centered marketing mindset. In conclusion, public libraries should continuously focus on the recognition of customers' needs and deliver long-term value to customers.

Originality/value – There were few studies that focused on library users' motivations for using library products and services. In addition, there was a lack of developed theory in library and information science field.

Keywords Expectancy theory, Motivation (psychology), Public libraries, Library users, Reference services

Paper type Research paper

Introduction

One of the most frequent and substantial pressures on management in all types of organizations is to identify customer needs thereby motivating customers to use their products (tangible goods and intangible services). In today's networked environment, public libraries are just one of many information providers. In other words, if public libraries cannot motivate customers to use their products and satisfy their needs, they may lose advantage over other information providers. Therefore, it is important for public libraries to satisfy and motivate customers for the libraries' survival and prosperity.

The advent of the concept of motivation is not new in the industrial and vocational psychology field. Scholars used the motivation concept to analyze and explain behavior since the beginning of the 20th century. In this context, Victor Vroom (1964) introduced "expectancy theory" to organize and integrate existing knowledge in the field of vocational psychology and motivation. Furthermore, through subsequent researchers, his theory revealed implications for the explanation of the motivational factors of individuals to various situations or settings as well as for the explanation of the motivation factors of the worker to his work. Furthermore, as Robbins (1983, p. 152) stated, "though expectancy theory has its critics, it has generally developed results that indicate it is currently the clearest and most accurate explanation of individual motivation".



Problem statement

Workman (1999) defined marketing as “the process of understanding what your customers want, and then designing and delivering products and services that fit those needs” (as cited in Woodward, 2005, p. 130). In other words, marketing can be viewed as a variety of activities designed to motivate target customers to exchange values voluntarily. These activities include organizational efforts to encourage customers to use their products frequently. Furthermore, from the customers’ perspective, the concept of “motivation” premises on voluntary involvement in the value exchanges with the organizations. Therefore, the following question should be the primary question of marketing activities of an organization: how can we motivate customers to use our products?

Vroom’s expectancy theory premises the importance of motivation. He examines motivation from the perspective of why people choose a particular action or behavior. From this perspective, Vroom’s expectancy theory offers critical value for marketing research. It provides answers in part to the question of “how can we motivate customers to use our products?”.

Based on these understandings, the followings will be the purposes of this paper:

- (1) To understand the components of Vroom’s expectancy theory.
- (2) To create or develop a public library customer motivation model using Vroom’s expectancy theory.
- (3) To suggest appropriate public library services marketing mindset which public libraries can enhance customers’ perceived expectancy and instrumentality of public library services to motivate customers to use public library services more frequently based on the proposed public library customer motivation model.
- (4) To suggest appropriate public library services marketing strategies to motivate customers to use public library services more frequently based on the proposed public library customer motivation model.

This paper is a conceptual paper. Therefore, testing and verification of the proposed public library customer motivation model is offered for future research.

Victor Vroom’s expectancy theory*The components of expectancy theory*

Valence. Vroom defined valence as “affective orientations toward particular outcomes” (p. 15). According to Vroom (1964, p. 15), “an outcome is positively valent when the person prefers attaining it to not attaining it” and “an outcome has a valence of zero when the person is indifferent to attaining or not attaining it, and it is negatively valent when he prefers not attaining it to attaining it”. There can be a discrepancy between the anticipated satisfaction from an outcome (valence) and the actual satisfaction from an outcome (value).

Expectancy. According to Vroom (1964), expectancy can be defined as a momentary belief followed by a particular outcome. The range of expectancy can be from zero to one. Zero expectancy is a person’s subjective probability that his act will not be followed by an outcome. On the other hand, an expectancy of one is a person’s subjective certainty that his act will be followed by an outcome. Expectancy is a person’s estimation of the probability that effort will lead to successful performance. This estimation or belief is likewise based on the confidence a person has in his/her

own capacities to bring skills to bear and influence outcomes (e.g. self-concept, self-efficacy, locus of control). For example, if a person thinks as follows: “if I will study hard tonight, I will get a better grade on tomorrow’s math test” his/her expectancy will be high.

Instrumentality. This is the person’s perception of the probability that performance will lead to a specific outcome. It is related to the individual’s beliefs or expectations that “if he or she behaves in a certain way, he or she will get certain things” (Nadler and Lawler, 1977, p. 218). The following case can be one example of high instrumentality: “if I get a better grade on tomorrow’s math test, I will get an ‘A in math”.

Instrumentality ranges from –1 to +1. The value –1 instrumentality indicates that the second outcome (grade “A” in math) is certain without the first outcome (a better grade on tomorrow’s math test). Furthermore, +1 instrumentality indicates that the first outcome (a better grade on tomorrow’s math test) is a necessary and sufficient condition of the second outcome (grade “A” in math).

Vroom’s expectancy theory can be depicted as follows (see Figures 1 and 2).

Public library customer motivation model

As Vroom (1964) pointed out that individuals will be motivated if they meet three criteria. First, they must value the behavioral outcome valence. Second, they must believe that the desired behavior is instrumental in achieving the valent outcome. In other words, the individuals must expect that if they behave in a certain way, they will receive certain things. Finally, they must expect that they are capable of performing the behavior that is instrumental to achieving the outcome.

Based upon Vroom’s expectancy theory, it is possible to construct a general model of how customers are motivated to use library products in public library settings (see Figure 3).

First of all, the expectancy represents the customers’ perception of how hard it will be to access library products and the probability of the customers’ successful achievement of access to library products. Second, the customers believe that they can find the library products that they are looking for through their access to products. Third, the library products have different valence for the customers to satisfy their information needs.

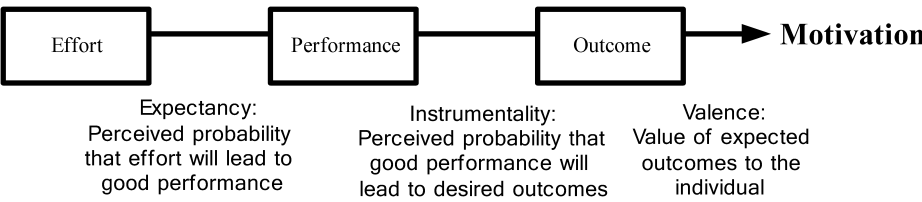


Figure 1.
Vroom’s expectancy
theory

Note: Adapted from <http://faculty.css.edu/dswenson/web/OB/VIetheory.html>

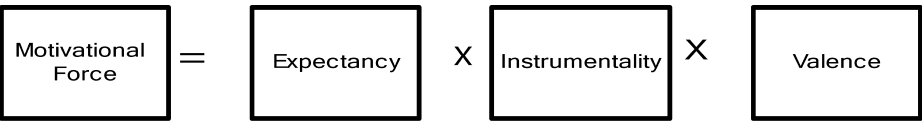


Figure 2.
Vroom’s expectancy
theory

In conclusion, if the customers confidently perceive that they can access library products through virtual or physical visit of the library, if the products (book, e-book, online journal article, chat reference services, etc.) that they have found are the products that they were looking for, and if they think the library products have valence to satisfy their information needs, they will be motivated to use the library products frequently. However, if they perceive that there will be difficulties with access to products because they have not had any experience with library catalogs, or online searching, chat reference services, their motivational force to use library products will be very low.

In the same context, if they cannot find the library product that they are looking for in spite of their perceived high probability of access to the library product, their motivational force to frequently use the product will be diminished. In addition, if their valence to the library product is low, their motivational force to frequently use the library product will be low in spite of their perceived probability of access to the library product as well as their finding the library product that they are looking for.

According to the proposed public library customer motivation model, public library marketing efforts which intend to motivate customers to use library products frequently should be focused on the enhancement of customers' perceived expectancy, instrumentality, and valence of library materials or services. How can public libraries enhance customers' perceived expectancy, instrumentality, and valence of library products? Among these issues, the focus of this paper will be the enhancement of customers' perceived expectancy and instrumentality. Furthermore, for the public library, many offerings are intangible services and intangible services have unique characteristics which are different from tangible goods. Based on these understandings, this paper will focus on the enhancement of customers' perceived expectancy and instrumentality of public library services using chat reference service example.

How can public libraries enhance customers' perceived expectancy and instrumentality of public library services?

Customer-centered public library services marketing. As for tangible goods, for example, in the past collection developments of public libraries, public libraries argued that the library should limit itself to provision items of high quality and the usefulness of library collection as a whole. This perspective can be described as a "give-them-what-they-should-have" theory. As Baker argued, this mindset of the public library can be expressed as quality book selection principle, regardless of customers' needs and wants. However, from the customers' perspective, quality selection has caused most

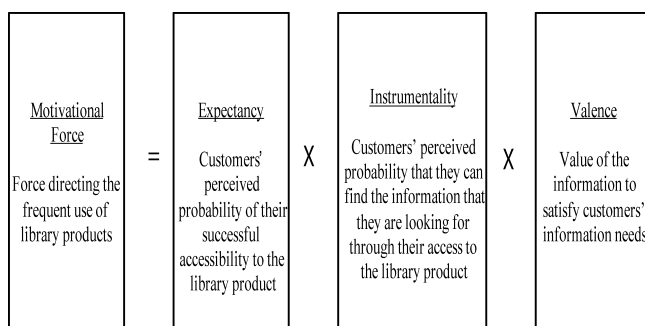


Figure 3.
Public library customer
motivation model

public library collections to be far greater than the needs of the average customers. As a result, as many researchers pointed out, most public library collections are used by white, middle-class, well-educated, female customers. Furthermore, it is premised on the assumption that librarians recognize quality.

With intangible services, it is assumed that well-equipped library services will be beneficial to all the customers. However, as Andreasen and Kotler (2002, p. 324) mentioned, "a major source of dissatisfaction on the part of many service customers is not inferior service but exaggerated expectations". For example, chat reference service is not the final answer to reliable and rapid reference service. Chat reference service is slower than face-to-face interaction and has a different pace than telephone interaction. In addition, chat reference librarians cannot achieve in-depth contact with their customers, as they can with traditional face-to-face reference service. Therefore, libraries should understand the gap between the expectation customers and potential customers have and actual chat reference services libraries deliver.

How can public libraries overcome these flaws and enhance customers' perceived expectancy and instrumentality of the public library services?

As mentioned in the proposed public library customer motivation model (Figure 2), expectancy is the customers' perception of how hard it will be to access library services and the probability of their successful accessibility to that service. In addition, instrumentality is the perceived probability by the customers that they can find the information that they are looking for through their access to the library service. Using the chat reference service example, if the customers confidently perceive that they can access the virtual reference desk without difficulties, their perceived expectancy will be high. Furthermore, if the information that chat reference librarians provide is the information that they were looking for, their perceived instrumentality of library services will be high. If the libraries want to enhance customers' perceived expectancy and instrumentality of library services to motivate customers to use library services more frequently, these goals cannot be achieved through the traditional marketing mindset which is the belief that well-equipped library services will be beneficial to all the customers. For example, in spite of well-equipped chat reference service, if customers perceive there will be difficulties in access to the virtual reference desk due to their technical skills and if the chat reference librarians cannot provide the information that they are looking for, customers cannot be motivated to use the services. From this point of view, a customer-centered marketing mindset which is the belief that an organization's success will depend on whether they can satisfy their customers' needs through the design, communication, and delivery of appropriate offerings may in part be the answer.

From a customer-centered services marketing mindset, it is the belief that public libraries' success depends on whether they can satisfy public library customers' needs through the design and delivery of appropriate public library services. All services, including library information services, exist for their customers, and their continued existence depends on customers' willingness to engage in transactions with the services. In other words, successful service marketing rests on the ability of the service to deliver a solution to the customers' concern, or to deliver various benefits that the customers want.

It is known that service quality is a crucial factor and the foundation in service marketing of organizations whose aim is to satisfy target customers' needs through appropriate design and delivery of services. Therefore, from a customer-centered

service marketing point of view, organizations should improve service quality to enhance customers' perceived expectancy and instrumentality of the services.

Customer-centered Public library services marketing strategies. As mentioned above, service quality is a critical factor and the foundation in service marketing of organizations whose aim is to satisfy target customers' needs through appropriate design and delivery of services. Generally speaking, it is known that customers evaluate service quality based on five specific dimensions that can be applied to a variety of service contexts. These dimensions are "reliability", "responsiveness", "assurance", "empathy", and "tangibles".

- (1) Reliability is the ability of the organization to provide the promised service accurately. According to several empirical studies, reliability is the foremost criterion customers consider in the evaluation of service quality.
- (2) Tangibles are physical elements of the services such as facilities, equipment, and personnel.
- (3) Responsiveness is the willingness to help customers and to provide prompt service.
- (4) Assurance is the employees' knowledge and courtesy and their ability to inspire trust and confidence.
- (5) Empathy is the degree to which the organization treats customers as individuals. It is true that reliability is the most critical dimension in service quality. However, reliability is not the sole determinant of customers' service quality evaluations. All five dimensions are closely related to the service quality perceived by customers. With the five dimensions of service, we can improve our service quality.

With this in mind, we must ask ourselves, what services marketing strategies are appropriate to motivate customers to use our organizations' services? As mentioned above, this paper will attempt to answer these questions using chat reference services as an example.

With reliability, chat reference librarians should know basic technical issues related with the chat environment and be able to provide the exact information customers are looking for. Libraries should design chat reference systems which everyone can use without any special skills. In addition, customers should be able to access the chat reference desk at any time during business hours without any technical difficulties. This does not mean that the libraries should take responsibility for any technical problems caused by customers.

As for responsiveness, chat reference librarians should express their willingness to listen to customers' questions and their information needs. If librarians cannot respond to customers' questions during chat sessions because of a lack of knowledge or time limitation, librarians will be able to respond through e-mail after chat sessions. In this case, the response should take place promptly after the chat session. In any case, librarians should make customers feel they are willing to help and hear them. Complementary services can be instituted during peak times to provide alternatives (e-mail or web-based reference service) to waiting customers. As Taylor (1994, p. 56) mentioned, "waiting for service is a negative experience" and "speed of service is increasingly becoming a very important service attribute". Furthermore, shared services can be developed and libraries can provide collaborative chat reference services with other libraries. Through collaborative chat reference service, libraries can

share expertise and access to collections held by other libraries. On the other hand, if the library cannot provide the service around the clock, it will be important to include links to other digital reference services (e-mail service or telephone service) during the hours the service is not in operation so that customers are not frustrated with a lack of available assistance (Katz, 2003). Lastly, if customers are forced to wait for a while, messages can appear informing the customers that librarians recognize their presence, and will show up as soon as possible.

With assurance, if the librarian says clearly, "I cannot give you your wanted information," or, "your question is very difficult, so I cannot answer it", this may create a very negative impression of chat reference services. In this situation, customers will feel as if they have had a negative experience. The solution to this problem is "internal marketing". There are many strategies for internal marketing, however, the key point is the training of individual chat reference librarians. Therefore, the training of chat reference librarians is a very important factor in service quality. Chat reference service librarians, including staff, will need to be trained on the software and be able to comfortably answer questions in chat mode. The organization should recognize that every encounter with a customer is "a moment of truth". As Andreasen and Kotler (2002, p. 320) explain, "a moment of truth is any occasion in which a customer comes into contact with some aspect of the organization and has a chance to form an impression". Furthermore, libraries should use credible or recent chat reference software while their technical troubleshooting technician should have in depth knowledge to respond to various technical requests from customers.

As for empathy, the chat reference environment has its own manner of interaction. The librarian should understand this point. The librarians cannot see the customers and cannot read their physical language. In traditional reference services, librarians can offer face-to-face, locally based human assistance. In-person, genuine real-time reference service has emotional elements that are impossible to achieve through online interaction. Librarians should also understand this unique characteristic of the chat environment. Therefore, librarians' should express that they understand customers' needs and they are willing to help them as best they can. Furthermore, librarians can provide more specialized service based upon studying customers' queries. Likewise, librarians can design frequently asked questions (FAQ) so that some customers will be able to find the information they are looking for without access to the chat reference desk.

With tangibles, chat reference librarians can routinize or even automate many parts of the service without diminishing the customers' perceptions of the service. For example, after customers log in to a chat reference service desk, librarians can copy and paste some basic statements, greetings, and closing words. Also, after interaction, librarians can automatically send the transcripts to customers through e-mail. Automated services can provide consistent services to customers. Furthermore, contact information for chat reference services such as hours, availability of remote assistance, and so on, should be placed in prominent locations to make them obvious. In addition, a chat reference icon on the library website should be easily recognizable.

Conclusion

Generally speaking, motivation can be regarded as the selective and preferential aspect of specific behavior. It is motivation that is responsible for the explanation of force toward a particular behavior or action. Vroom's expectancy theory also places emphasis on the importance of motivation in the explanation of why people choose a

particular action or behavior. From this point of view, Vroom's expectancy theory can have critical values for marketing research which tries to answer the question, how can organizations motivate customers to use their products? Based on Vroom's expectancy theory, the primary purposes of this paper were to propose public library customer motivation model, explain how public libraries can motivate their customers to use public library services more frequently based on the proposed model, and suggest public library services marketing strategies to motivate their customers. As mentioned above, customer-centered mindset is the most important factor to motivate public library customers. Furthermore, the suggested marketing strategies can be also achieved through a customer-centered marketing mindset.

In conclusion, public libraries should continuously focus on the recognition of customers' needs and deliver long-term value to customers.

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