

User Satisfaction Surveys in Two Italian University Libraries: Model, Results and Good Practices

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Abstract: We introduce a user satisfaction survey carried out in the Milano-Bicocca University Library and in the Siena University Library in 2012, which is significant with regard to several aspects: we applied a conceptual model transferable to different library contexts (public, academic, and school libraries); we used quantitative and qualitative research methods; we tested a survey tool useful for any academic library; we compared the survey findings of the two university libraries, doing an external benchmarking; we also did an internal benchmarking in the case of Milano-Bicocca, comparing these results with those found in previous surveys; we communicated and shared quantitative and qualitative survey results, and eventually found possible improvements, thus achieving good practices.

Keywords: Quality Evaluation, User Satisfaction, Quantitative Methods, Qualitative Methods, Surveys, Continuing Improvement, Academic Libraries, Library Services, Case Study, Good Practices

1. Introduction

Over the past two decades theories and practices of library user satisfaction have undergone considerable development.

The theories, which started from the concept of Total Quality Management, have focused on Service Quality and on User Perceptions: Baker and Lancaster (1991), Cook, Thompson and Thompson (2002), Lancaster (1993), OCLC (2011), Parasuraman, Zeithaml and Berry (1994), Pickard (2007), Poll and Boekhorst (2007), Zeithaml, Parasuraman and Berry (1990).

Also the surveys have changed over time; from the gathering of statistical data to the administration of questionnaires and finally to the use of interviews and focus groups, which explore users' opinions, perceptions and experiences: Adeniran (2011), Association of Research Libraries (2004), Becher and Flug (2005), Brophy (2008), Brown-Sica, Sobel and Rogers (2010), Chowdhury and

Landoni (2006), Citti et al. (2012), Esson et al. (2012), Fagerheim and Weingart (2005), Fitzpatrick, Moore and Lang (2008), Gibbs et al. (2012), Gronhold and Martensen (2003), Hiller (2002), Jaber Hossain (2013), Lincoln (2002), Norlin (2000), Powell (1999), Rogani (2007), Rojeski (2012), Westbrook (1990), Wilson (2000).

In Italy, several authors have contributed to the advancement of knowledge on the subject from theoretical and practical points of view, especially in recent years: Apis and Della Fornace (2007), Di Domenico (2001, 2007, 2009), Faggiolani (2012), Faggiolani and Moroni (2012), Galluzzi (2007), Moroni (2011), Moroni and Vezzosi (2011), Ventura (2004). Most customer satisfaction surveys at Italian university libraries used the questionnaire technique, and only in few cases qualitative research methods were employed: Moroni (2012), Santocchini (2010).

In 2012 the author of the present paper, keeping in mind more than one hundred surveys in library contexts, created a conceptual model from which it is possible to derive different tools for user satisfaction surveys.

Thanks to the collaboration between two university libraries, members of GIM (Interuniversity Group for the Monitoring of Academic Libraries), we could test this model: indeed, the survey tool collected a lot of information on users' opinions and behavior, using open and closed questions, that is, qualitative and quantitative methods.

In what follows we will introduce the conceptual model and the survey tool used both at the Milano-Bicocca University Library and at the Siena University Library, then we will describe the main survey findings and the good practices performed by both universities.

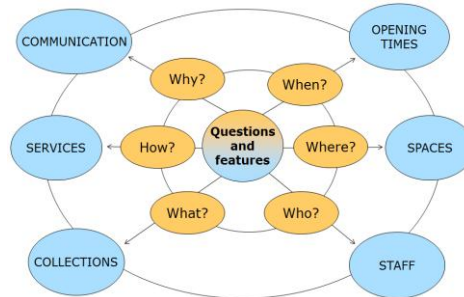
These two libraries are very different in history, geographic location, organization, number of users and staff, and that is why using the same survey was interesting. Moreover, we can compare some data of the Milano-Bicocca University Library with those collected in previous surveys, thus doing an internal as well as external benchmarking.

2. Conceptual model and survey tool

The theoretical model proposed for the user satisfaction survey identifies six library features, connected to several questions (see Figure 1):

- *Opening times*: When is the library open?
- *Spaces*: Where are library services provided?
- *Staff*: Who provides library services?
- *Collections*: What does the library offer?
- *Services*: How can library print and online resources be used?
- *Communication*: Why and how are library services and resources useful?

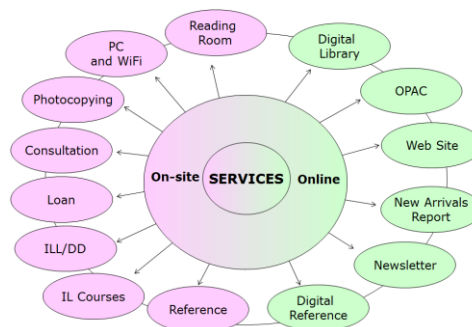
Figure1. Library features



Library services in their turn may be subdivided as follows (see Figure 2):

- *services available on-site*: reading room, computers, wi-fi system, photocopying, consultation, loan, interlibrary services (ILL/DD), Information Literacy courses, quick reference, specialized reference, etc.;
- *services available online*: digital library, online catalogue (OPAC), website, new arrivals report, newsletter, digital reference, etc.

Figure 2 – Library services



As for the users’ perceived quality, for some services such as the reading room, opening times and spaces are crucial; for other services such as reference and loan, staff and collections are essential; for all services, communication is important. Therefore, library features cross several library services (see Figure 3).

By examining each service deeply, several elements are found to influence their perceived quality: for example for the evaluation of the reading room, seat number, comfort and furniture will be important; for the assessment of loan services, quantity and quality of collections, number of books that can be borrowed, loan duration, online services to renew and reserve books, staff efficiency and efficacy will be significant.

Figure 3 – Relationship between library services and features

SERVICES	TIMES	SPACES	STAFF	COLLECTIONS	COMMUNICATION
Reading Room	X	X			X
PC and WiFi	X	X			X
Photocopying	X	X			X
Consultation	X	X		X	X
Loan	X		X	X	X
ILL/DD	X		X	X	X
IL courses	X	X	X		X
Reference	X		X		X
Digital Reference			X		X
Newsletter					X
New Arrivals Report					X
Website					X
OPAC				X	X
Digital Library				X	X

When carrying out a customer satisfaction survey, the following variables may be analyzed (see Figure 4):

- *importance and satisfaction* for all features, including services;
- *knowledge and use* only for services.

Figure 4 – Library features and variables for analysis

FEATURES	SATISFACTION	IMPORTANCE	KNOWLEDGE	USE
OPENING TIMES	X	X		
SPACES	X	X		
STAFF	X	X		
COLLECTION	X	X		
SERVICES	X	X	X	X
COMMUNICATION	X	X		

Finally, when a survey tool is created, such as a questionnaire text or interview draft, different types of questions can be used, depending on research objectives: on the one hand, closed questions allow you to measure various behaviors and opinions; on the other hand, open questions permit you to understand the reasons behind them in greater detail: Pickard (2007).

In the case of the Milano-Bicocca and Siena universities, open and closed questions of the online questionnaire allowed us to find out:

- who attends libraries, who does not and why;
- to what extent library services are used, how important and satisfying they are to users;
- why some libraries or some services are not used or are little used;
- to what extent library features are important and satisfying;
- what the users' opinions on library services and features are;
- what the overall perception of the library is and why;
- what the users' suggestions to improve libraries are.

In particular, in the case of Milano-Bicocca University the quantity and diversity of the sample allowed us to examine many behaviors according to user

type (student, teacher, employee, etc.) and to subject (economics, law, medicine, psychology, etc.): Moroni (2013).

The questionnaire was administered in both universities between May and June 2012, using the open source application Lime Survey; during that time we emailed two recalls, which were useful to collect a lot of responses—5,231 in Milano-Bicocca and 1,785 in Siena. In both cases the survey involved all potential users, so the effectiveness of the samples was retrospectively evaluated: Moroni (2013), Università di Siena (2012).

3. Main survey results and good practices

What are the main results of the survey?

First of all, it was interesting to find out how many people attend university libraries, other libraries, and how many people do not attend libraries (see Figures 5 and 6), on the basis of who took part in the survey—15% of population in Milano-Bicocca and 9% in Siena.

Figure 5 – Milano-Bicocca University: people attending libraries

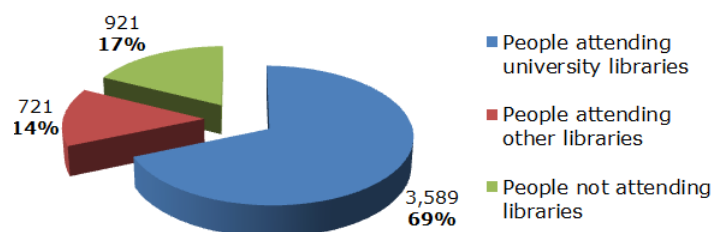
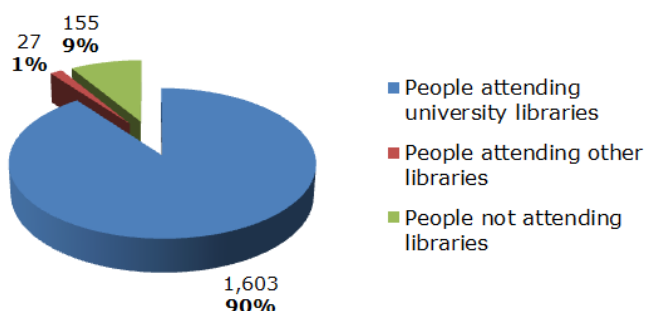


Figure 6 – Siena University: people attending libraries



In both universities those who do not attend libraries, mostly teachers and employees, claim that they either do not need to or they study/work in other places. Those who attend other libraries, mostly students of the Milano-Bicocca University, consider public libraries near their home more convenient to reach.

Those who attend university libraries explain they do it mainly to read/study, to consult or take/bring books, journals, etc.

In Siena, a university town, there are more people who use only on-site services than in Milan, a city full of commuters: 33% against 19%. However, in both towns among those who do not attend libraries or who attend other libraries, there are many users of university library online services: 18% out of 31% in Milano-Bicocca and 9% out of 10% in Siena.

The most used library services are the same in both universities, even if in a different order: the first is the reading room in Siena, and consultation in Milano-Bicocca; loan, photocopying and OPAC, together with those mentioned, are among the five most commonly used services, especially by students. Some library services, such as ILL/DD (Interlibrary Loan/Document Delivery), reference, digital library, are used little or are not used at all, because many potential users, mostly students, either do not need or are not aware of them; these findings are really useful to understand that libraries should advertise some services more often and better.

In both universities the library services which are considered most important tend to coincide with those used the most, whereas the least used services are also considered the least important, and are often unknown. The least satisfactory services are PC/WiFi, photocopying and the website in both cases, but the most satisfactory are different—in Siena they are quick reference and consultation, in Milan they are ILL/DD and Information Literacy courses.

If we analyze library features, the most important ones are spaces, collections and opening times in both universities, whereas the least important is communication (see Figure 7). Among the most satisfactory features there are staff and spaces in both cases, but the least satisfactory ones are different—communication in Siena, opening times and online services in Milan (see Figure 8).

The overall satisfaction, evaluated on a four-point scale (from 1= not at all satisfied to 4 = very much satisfied), is quite high anyway: 3.29 in Milan and 3.16 in Siena. In both contexts users' opinions and suggestions were very useful to understand how to improve some library features and services. In addition, comparing results on satisfaction and importance was useful to identify priority actions, where the gap is greater.

Figure 7 – Both universities: importance of library features

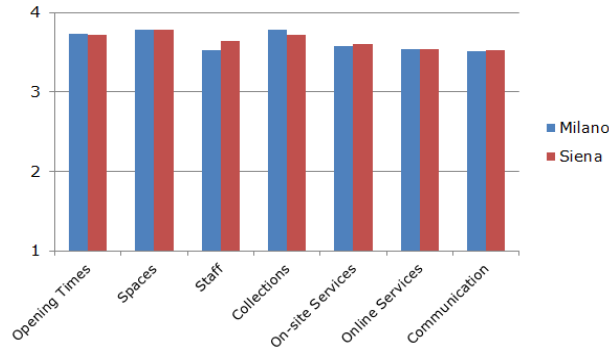
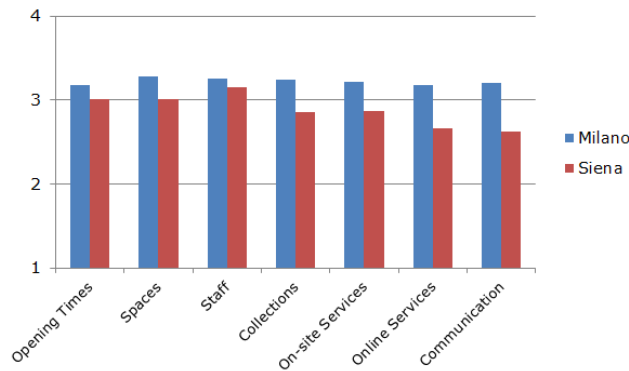


Figure 8 – Both universities: satisfaction with library features

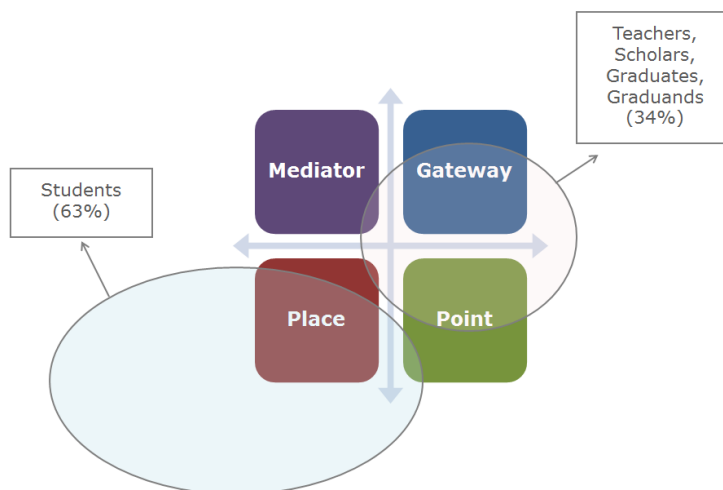


The in-depth analysis of qualitative and quantitative data, collected at the Milano-Bicocca University, led us to identify four library profiles, depending on the use; for each there are different levels of satisfaction, features considered more important than others, mostly used services, and prevalent user types (see Table 1). Thus, users can be divided into two broad categories: on the one hand, there are the students, except graduands (63% of the sample), who use the library primarily as a “Place to study” and as a “Point to use on-site services”; on the other hand, there are graduands, graduates, scholars and teachers (34%), who use the library mainly as a “Gateway to online services” and as a “Mediator for bibliographic search” (see Figure 9). The employees (3%), if enrolled at university, are like students, otherwise they use the library little and especially for professional development.

As for qualitative data, the analysis with the software T-Lab confirmed the effectiveness of paper-based analysis, and highlighted different perceptions among three branches of the Milano-Bicocca University Library: Oliva (2013).

Tab. 1 – Milano-Bicocca University: library profiles

<i>Library Profiles</i>	<i>The Most Important Features</i>	<i>The Most Used Services</i>	<i>User Type</i>	<i>Satisfaction Level</i>
Place to study	Opening Times, Spaces	Reading Room, PC and WiFi	Students	Average high
Point to use on-site services	On-site Services, Collections	Consultation, Loan, Photocopying, OPAC, Quick Reference	Students	High
Gateway to online services	Online Services, Communication	Digital Library, OPAC, Website	Teachers, Scholars, Graduates, Graduands	High
Mediator for bibliographic search	Staff, On-site Services	Reference, IL Courses, ILL/DD	Teachers, Scholars, Graduates, Graduands	Very high

Figure 9 – Milano-Bicocca University: users' big categories

In addition to the external benchmarking, in the case of Milano-Bicocca we were able to do an internal benchmarking, comparing the results of this survey with those previously collected by the Good Practice Project, which involves about twenty Italian universities. The overall satisfaction with the University Library improved slightly from 2009 to 2012—from 3.24 to 3.29 on a four-point scale. The datum that changed the most during that time was the satisfaction with ILL/DD, which increased considerably—from 3.11 to 3.41 (see Table 2).

The progress of this service is due to the improvement action taken during and after a project of Action-Research: Moroni (2011). Indeed, between 2010 and 2012, the Library Service Charter was updated, determining quality standards; the management of ILL/DD was centralized, improving its efficiency; and Information Literacy courses were increased, promoting ILL/DD and online services.

However, we should specify that the user satisfaction survey in 2009 can be only partially compared with that of 2012, as it was carried out in different ways and it involved a much smaller sample—776 people, including students and teachers.

From the comparison of the satisfaction level for several services (see Figure 9), we can note that the perceived quality for loan and website decreased slightly. As for the loan, maybe the increase in the number of users (from 10,500 to 12,000 between 2008 and 2011), against the inability to buy many copies of textbooks, had an impact on the perceived quality; and as for the website, created in 2006, maybe the growth of expectations among the younger generations, used to more friendly and interactive portals, affected the assessment.

Tab. 2 – Milano-Bicocca University: satisfaction level 2009-2012

Services	2009	2012	Gap
ILL/DD	3.11	3.41	+0.30
Quick Reference	3.12	3.24	+0.12
Electronic Resources	3.29	3.29	0.00
OPAC	3.30	3.30	0.00
Website	3.28	3.20	-0.08
Loan	3.38	3.24	-0.14

What good practices were adopted in both universities, before, during and after the user satisfaction survey?

First of all, special emphasis was put on communication: in Siena University some posters were hung to promote the survey and to support the attendance; in Milano-Bicocca University some newsletters were emailed, before and after the survey; in both cases the results were published on the website as soon as possible, and the users were thanked for their contribution: Università di Milano-Bicocca (2012), Università di Siena (2012).

Afterwards, the library staff of both universities carried out meetings to think about survey findings and to decide improvement actions. Thus we have achieved various improvements, bearing in mind users' suggestions. In the case of Milano-Bicocca we wrote a paper that recaps critical situations which emerged during the survey, describes actions implemented or planned, and explains why some issues cannot be solved in the short term: Moroni (2013).

Moreover, Siena University organized a course, taught by the author, to train a group of librarians and young people doing Voluntary Service. The course was useful to learn qualitative research techniques, to identify topics to be investigated in greater detail, and to create survey tools. Later, many users were

interviewed in order to find out how to improve online services and library advertising. The results of these last surveys are going to be processed.

The cooperation and exchanges between the two universities were very intense, both face to face and online. Before the above mentioned course, held in November 2012, another course had been organized, in March 2012; the latter course had focused on user satisfaction theories and practices, and involved about twenty librarians: <<http://www.aib.it/struttura/sezioni/toscana/2012/19574-customer-satisfaction-in-biblioteca/>>. During and after the survey many Skype Conferences were held between the author and the Siena Customer Satisfaction Staff: <<http://www.sba.unisi.it/index.php/servizi/progetti/customer-satisfaction/175>>.

We uploaded all documents about the case of Milano-Bicocca onto the portal E-LIS (E-Prints in Library and Information Science) and we are writing this paper in order to provide useful elements either to reflect upon or to carry out similar surveys for librarians, scholars and stakeholders: Moroni (2013).

4. Conclusions

The test of the conceptual model, created to evaluate and compare the perceived quality in different libraries, was successful:

- the survey was useful to examine all services and features, like collections, staff, opening times, spaces and communication;
- the use of open and closed questions in the same survey tool allowed us to gather qualitative and quantitative data, useful to understand and measure users' behavior and opinions;
- the comparison of the results between the two university libraries showed similar and different aspects.

During the cooperation between the Milano-Bicocca University Library and the Siena University Library, eight good practices were adopted, which are useful to keep in mind when carrying out a customer satisfaction survey:

- 1) learning continually through training, studies and updates on theory and practice;
- 2) being aware of all possible topics to examine, and creating a survey tool based on the survey objectives;
- 3) taking care of internal and external communication, staff and user involvement;
- 4) explaining survey results and following actions;
- 5) improving libraries thanks to survey findings;
- 6) improving the knowledge of users' opinions and behavior using qualitative techniques (interviews, focus groups, observation, etc.);
- 7) doing both internal and external benchmarking to compare data, think and learn with colleagues who work in different organizations;
- 8) sharing experiences within the scientific community.

To sum up, learning, sharing and continuous improvement prove fundamental.

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