

## How Can We Serve You Better: Customers' Perceptions of Services and Facilities Offered in a Community Library

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### Abstract

The purpose of this study is to understand residents' perceptions of the Big Rapids Community Library (BRCL). The study uses a quantitative online survey to investigate the perceptions of local residents who use this community library. The survey focuses on questions directly related to the services and facilities offered to BRCL customers. The results of the survey indicate that residents' income levels affect their visits to the library. In addition, female residents view access to a community library as more important than their male counterparts do. This project has important policy implications for BRCL and other community libraries because data on customers' perceptions and satisfaction are increasingly being used to motivate service reforms, budget allocations, and management accountability. In addition, this intention by BRCL can be treated as a "best practice" model for other community libraries trying to build better relationships with their customers.

### Introduction

Customer satisfaction is important to the success of for-profit and nonprofit organizations. According to Matzler and Hinterhuber (1998), many organizations around the world use satisfaction ratings as an indicator of the performance of their products and services and of the company's future. The idea of marketing implies that "achieving organizational goals depends on determining the needs and wants of target markets and delivering the desired satisfactions more effectively than competitors" (Kotler et al., 2003, p. 18). Therefore, organizations need to focus on their customers and aim at achieving long-term customer satisfaction. This requires continuously providing superior value, establishing a sustainable competitive advantage, and using an integrated organizational effort to achieve objectives (Ho, 2012).

Researchers such as Abd-El-Salam, Shawky, and El-Nahas (2013) have taken a similar view to that of Kotler et al. and Ho. They argued that in the service industry, customer satisfaction has emerged as "one of the most powerful tools for sustaining a competitive advantage for business success and survival nowadays, through excellent service quality" (p. 180). Furthermore, good service leads to satisfied and loyal customers (Grewal & Levy, 2016). Therefore, the ability to provide excellent service is no longer optional for today's organizations. As Little and Little (2009) pointed out, customers are more demanding in this severely competitive market, and they are the judges of quality. This is reflected in large numbers of empirical studies of the impact of service quality on customer loyalty and satisfaction.

The present study examines customers' perceptions of a community library in a rural area and tries to understand their needs and wants. From the library administrators' perspective, an increase in the number of customers using the library's services has come to be an important library-performance indicator (Bakti & Sumaedi, 2013). Furthermore, library managers and administrators believe that an increase in customer numbers provides strong support for their requesting additional budget and staff members to better serve their customers

(Bakti & Sumaedi, 2013; McKnight, 2008).

## Literature Review

### *Importance of Customer Satisfaction and Loyalty in Service Organizations*

Customer satisfaction and loyalty have been widely discussed in the services marketing literature. From a service-provider manager's perspective, customer satisfaction and loyalty are among the most enduring assets of a company (Kandampully, Zhang, & Bilgihan, 2015). Abd-El-Salam et al. (2013) provided a similar account. They argued that in the contemporary market environment, "customer loyalty and retention is the most vital goal for a service organization's success" (p. 182). Customer excellence is achieved when a firm develops value-based strategies for retaining customers and provides outstanding customer service (Grewal & Levy, 2016).

Paying attention to customers' needs and wants will narrow perceptual gaps between customers and the organization and yield better business performance through greater customer satisfaction and loyalty (Ho, 2012). Loyal customers are more willing to pay extra, express greater buying intentions, and re-use the services same provider's services for longer periods (Kandampully et al., 2015). In other words, loyal customers are the most profitable in the long term (Grewal & Levy, 2016). In addition, loyal and committed customers can be the best source of referrals for many service organizations. As Fallon (2014) suggested, committed and word-of-mouth referrals are the best sources of revenue for 80 percent of service organizations today.

Prentice (2013) noted that "although service quality is an important determinant of customer satisfaction and retention, an organization's service resources are limited, and customers are not served equally; nor are all customers equally profitable to the firm" (p.51). Customer loyalty requires the service organization to consistently meet or exceed expectations (Mothersbaugh & Hawkins, 2016), so service organizations should regularly evaluate their service quality and identify new values and services that can be used to better meet or exceed these expectations in return for satisfaction and loyalty.

### *Evaluating Service Quality in Service Organizations*

Quality is subjective and difficult to define precisely. Service quality is commonly acknowledged as an antecedent of customer satisfaction and loyalty, though (Prentice, 2012). According to Zeithaml, Parasuraman, and Berry (1990), it can be defined as customers' perceptions of how well a service meets or exceeds their expectations. This definition is now used frequently by researchers in services marketing. The delivery of high-quality services is also one of the most important and difficult tasks a service organization faces (Pride & Ferrell, 2016). To deliver good service, Pride and Ferrell (2016) argued that providers need to understand their customers' expectations and design services to meet or exceed them.

One of the most common instruments for measuring service quality and customer expectation, SERVQUAL, was developed in 1988 by Parasuraman, Zeithaml, and Berry (1988). SERVQUAL can be used as a research instrument to capture customer expectations and perceptions of a service along five dimensions—reliability, responsiveness, assurance, empathy, and tangibility—that are believed to represent service quality (Parasuraman et al., 1988). It is now used frequently by service-quality researchers, including those in the library

sector. For example, Nimsomboon and Nagata (2003) conducted research using SERVQUAL to examine the overall service quality of Thammasat University Library System from users' perspectives and to identify the dimensions that determined customers' evaluation of service quality. Podbrežnik (2014) modified the SERVQUAL instrument to assess service-quality expectations and perceptions from the perspective of users of a public library in Slovenia. The SERVQUAL model has also recently been used to assess the quality of services in academic libraries in several developing countries: Bangladesh, Iran, Nigeria, and Pakistan (Asogwa et al., 2014). All these studies revealed that service quality has a direct impact on customer satisfaction, which in turn influences customer loyalty.

Although many service-quality researchers continue adapting SERVQUAL for their projects, the model has also been scrutinized and criticized in recent years. According to Hsu, Cummings, and Wang (2014), "there is little evidence that customers gauge service quality in terms of the service gap between expectations and perceptions" (p. 138). Other performance-based instruments, such as SERVPERF (Cronin & Taylor, 1992) and LibQUAL+ (Thompson, 2007) are also popular among researchers, apparently for their relatively simple structure in comparison with SERVQUAL (Hsu et al., 2014).

No approach works best in all circumstances. No matter which instrument researchers adopt, they must understand that the definition of quality is a subjective matter (Sahu, 2006). Besides, customers always dictate what they want, when, and how. Customers can also change the direction, form, and character of any service depending on their needs (Sahu, 2006). For this study, therefore, the author has argued that the research instrument (structured open/closed ended questions) should be tailor-made to accommodate the overall objective: understanding customers' perceptions of the services and facilities offered by a local library and identifying services that should be offered in the near future.

### *Service Quality, Customer Satisfaction, and Customer Loyalty*

The relationship between service quality, customer satisfaction, and customer loyalty has been discussed in many publications for several decades. In empirical research using the SERVPERF model (a modified version of SERVQUAL), Cronin and Taylor (1992) found that excellent services can always lead to total customer satisfaction, which determines rebuy intentions. This is similar to the claim by Grewal and Levy (2016) that "a service provider that does a good job one year is likely to keep customers satisfied the next year too" (p. 425).

A similar empirical study was conducted by Yu, Chang, and Huang (2006) in the leisure industry in Taiwan to examine the relationship between the three constructs mentioned above. Once again, the SERVPERF model was used. The findings indicated that high satisfaction with service quality has a strong relationship with customer loyalty (Yu et al., 2006). In other words, the highest level of customer satisfaction can be reached only when high levels of services are consistently available to the customer.

Although the possibility exists of satisfied customers who do not make repeat purchases (Izogo & Ogba, 2015), more happy customers will be loyal than otherwise. Maintaining a high level of service quality is a major goal of marketers in the service industry today. Marketers should understand that any basic approach to customer satisfaction that is unable to fulfil the customers' expectations is likely to fail (Ho, 2012). In the long run, any service organization with the resources and ability to provide superior services to customers, will see an increase in market share, customer satisfaction, and stronger customer loyalty.

### *Customer Satisfaction and Loyalty in Public Libraries*

Customer satisfaction with library services has a positive correlation with the overall image of the library itself and most importantly, with its financial state (Bakti & Sumaedi, 2013). Hence, the interest in satisfying customer needs and wants has tremendously increased over the last two decades in different kind of public libraries throughout the world.

A regional study was directed by Joy and Idowu (2014) to investigate the utilization and user satisfaction of public library services in south-west Nigeria. Questionnaire was the major instrument used for data collection and a total of 400 library users chosen across four states in south-west, Nigeria were used for the study. From their research findings, lack of adequate facilities, outdated information resources, and internet/ICT services in Nigeria public libraries were revealed by the users as major factors affecting user satisfaction of public library services. They recommended that funding should be increased by the Nigerian government so that adequate information resources and ICT facilities can be acquired in public libraries of the country (Joy & Idowu, 2014).

In 2012, Othman and Mazli (2012) conducted a research to investigate whether daylight and in-room temperature in the public library of Shah Alam, Malaysia influences the library users' overall satisfaction. They claimed that since the main factors that affect library users is a good lighting as well as indoor temperature, their study helps to give an indication of the library users' preferences, hence, "provide future designers to design better and efficient seating layout at the reading area of the library ... this will encourage people to go to the library and stay longer at the library" (Othman & Mazli, 2015 p. 245). As indicated in their research findings, the library users prefer the seat near day-lighted area, but the time spend in the library is not really affected by daylighting. Besides for visual comfort, daylighting is not the only contributor to overall comfort and user's satisfaction.

Tyler and Hastings (2011) initiated an online survey for a university in the northwest region of Florida to determine if online students are satisfied with the resources and services being provided by their university's online library. Based on their analysis, several demographic factors were found to influence student satisfaction with the library's online resources which include age, gender, achieved educational level, student status, and computer experience.

Bakti and Sumaedi (2013) examined the relationship between library customer loyalty and other latent constructs, namely service quality and customer satisfaction in a university library service in Indonesia. They argued that in order to achieve library customer royalty, "library management has to assure the library customer satisfaction. Thus, since many factors can influence library customer satisfaction, library management should improve not only library service quality, but also other aspects that influence library customer satisfaction, such as perceived price, situational factor, and personal factor" (Bakti & Sumaedi, 2013 p. 397).

Hakala and Nygrén (2010) implemented a customer satisfaction survey for Turku School of Economics Library (one of the six libraries of University of Turku) in Finland with the aim to improve quality and customer appreciation for their business library. Based on their research findings (n=486) via online survey, they claimed that "in order for the library to better serve their own clientele, as well as their parent organizations, they need to listen to the voices of their customers, the library users" (p. 204) and one way of "listening" is to conduct a similar survey once every two years (Hakala & Nygrén, 2010).

## Objective and Hypothesis of the Study

In recent years, academicians and practitioners have given more attention to customer perceptions of library services and customer satisfaction with a library, on the assumption that high satisfaction can lead to greater loyalty, more positive word-of-mouth (WOM), and improved customer retention (see Bakti & Sumaedi, 2013). However, most of this research was conducted in large and medium-sized public and college libraries (see Bakti & Sumaedi, 2013; McKnight, 2008). No similar research has been done on community libraries in rural areas. The aim of this study is to fill this gap by examining the perceptions of rural community library customers to determine how far this library—the Big Rapids Community Library—has succeeded in delivering such service to its customers.

The objectives of this study are as follows:

- To measure residents' awareness of the library and its services.
- To measure residents' satisfaction with the library's services.
- To identify services the library needs to offer.

According to the administrators of BRCL, they continuously having conversations with their customers at the library in order to better understand customers' needs and wants. Based on what they have learned about the customers over the past decade, they have suggested several hypotheses which can be used for this research project. After detailed discussions with the BRCL administrators, this study proposes five hypotheses related to the research objectives:

1. If respondents have visited the library, they will feel it is important to have access to it.
2. There is a relationship between township of residence and most recent library visit.
3. There is a difference by income in whether residents have visited the library.
4. Female respondents perceive access to a local community library as important.
5. There is an association between resident's age and the important of having access to a local community library.

## Big Rapids Community Library: A Case Study

BRCL is a public library at 426 South Michigan Avenue, operated by the government of the City of Big Rapids, Michigan. Big Rapids is a rural city of about 10,700 in the vacation-recreation region of west-central Michigan (Institutional Research & Testing, n.d.) and is the county seat of Mecosta County. BRCL serves residents of Big Rapids and the six surrounding townships. It was renovated and reopened in 2014 and its customers use its resources and programs year-round (Big Rapids Community Library, n.d.).

The mission of BRCL is "To provide quality information and assure equal access to all materials using appropriate technologies" (Big Rapids Community Library, n.d.). The library's director reports that since its creation, BRCL has been a leader in providing innovative services in Big Rapids and the surrounding areas. In today's competitive market, however, every service organizations must understand the concept of service quality from the viewpoint of the customer, not the provider (Grewal & Levy, 2016; Jha, 2008). It is essential for BRCL to identify its customers' perceptions of the services and facilities it offers, and to learn what other services those customers would like to receive from the library in the near future.

**Methodology**

Descriptive statistics were deemed appropriate for this study, as it was believed to be better suited to obtaining a clear understanding of customers’ overall perceptions of the services offered by BRCL.

*Population and Sample*

As indicated by the Director of BRCL, the population for this study should comprise of all the residents of Big Rapids and the six surrounding townships (see Table 1) since these residents are having access to the library’s services and facilities and are eligible for a free borrower’s card from BRCL. The author is aware of adopting self-selection sampling can lead to self-selection bias or causing the sample not being representative of the population being studied that might exaggerating some particular finding from the study (Hair, Celsi, Ortinau & Bush, 2017). Self-selection sampling was still used in this study in order to encourage any residents who have a particularly strong feelings or opinions about the research or simply wanting to help out BRCL in this study.

Table 1: Residents of Big Rapids and Surrounding Townships

<b>Township</b>	<b>Number of Residents</b>
City of Big Rapids	10,532
Big Rapids Township	3,249
Barton Township	820
Colfax Township	574
Green (Paris) Township	1,228
Grant Township	680
Norwich Township	607
Total population	17,685

Source: *United States Census Bureau (n.d.).*

Yamane’s (1967) approach to identify the right sample size for the survey was used for this research since his proposal is commonly accepted by many social science researchers for over four decades (see Babin & Zikmund, 2016; Hair et al., 2017; Sarmah, Hazarika & Choudhury, 2013; Silver et al., 2016; Singh & Masuku, 2014). Yamane (1967) argued that although a larger sample group can yield more accurate study results, the excessive responses can also be pricey. Hence, predetermined margin of error and level of confidence should be used to determine a representative sample size. In brief, the 95 percent confidence level is suggested for most research (Silver et al., 2016). For this study, a sample of 376 residents was considered appropriate for the population being studied (population size 17,685, confidence level 95%, margin of error 5%) as indicated in the Survey System’s Sample Size Calculator (Creative Research Systems, n.d.).

*Data Collection*

Data were collected from the participants through a structured questionnaire survey. The survey was given from March 29 to April 19, 2017, both self-administered (online via Survey Monkey) and person-administered (via mall intercept). With the help of the City of Big Rapids government, an invitation letter to complete the survey online was attached to water bills and distributed to households within the city and townships. Target respondents were also intercepted in several public areas, such as the library, the Big Rapids town hall, and local

banks and restaurants, where interviewers read the questions from an Android tablet and entered the responses directly into Survey Monkey.

### *Questionnaire Design and Research Instrument*

The questionnaire was designed by the author formulated on the basis of thorough review of literature and after detailed discussions with the administrators of BRCL. The final questionnaire consisted of 16 items for assessing residents' perceptions of their community library. Respondents' responses to various survey questions formed the basis for all of the variables used in the analysis. The questionnaire has been separated into five sections: *Demographics, Awareness of BRCL, Satisfaction level of services and facilities of BRCL, Relationships and experience with the library, and Future services to be offered in the library.*

In brief, Five-point Likert Scale was used in several survey questions (i.e. 1 = Not at all & 5 = Very important as well as 1 = Very Dissatisfied & 5 = Very Satisfied) mainly within the sections of *Relationships* with the library and *Satisfaction* of the services provided by BRCL. This question aimed to measure residents' viewpoints of having access to a local community library. Nominal scale was used in many of the questions in the survey especially within the *Demographics* section in order to seek information related to demographics of the participants. Three open ended questions were then implemented in three different sections of the survey as directed by the administrators of BRCL to gather qualitative feedback from participants. All other questions were either interval or ratio (see Table 13 under 'Appendix' for survey questions).

### **Findings and Discussion of the Results**

The collected data were analyzed using IBM's SPSS statistics software, version 23. Several statistical tools (e.g., Pearson's correlation and chi-square test) were used to interpret the data. There were 617 surveys completed (slightly more than the projected appropriate sample size) in the four-week data collection period.

### *Demographic Information*

As Table 2 shows, the study sample included a good mix of ages, but more than 60% of the respondents were female. More than 50% of respondents indicated they were married, and approximately 45% that they were single. More than 34% of respondents reported a yearly income of \$50,000 or more, and about 42% reported less than \$50,000.

Table 2: Respondent Profile

Sample size	617
<b>Gender</b>	
Male	38.58%
Female	60.35%
Prefer not to answer	1.06%
<b>Age</b>	
18–24	24.51%
25–39	23.98%
40–54	20.78%
55+	30.73%
<b>Marital status</b>	
Single	45.31%
Married	50.09%
Prefer not to answer	4.60%
<b>Annual household income</b>	
\$0–\$9,999	13.68%
\$10,000–\$29,999	12.26%
\$30,000–49,999	16.52%
\$50,000–\$69,999	12.79%
\$70,000+	21.31%
Prefer not to answer	23.45%

*Awareness of the Library*

Of the 617 respondents who completed the survey, more than 69% indicated that they had visited the library. Among those, nearly 61% reported using the library within the last six months. However, slightly over 25% of respondents said they hadn't visited BRCL for more than five years. One question asked if the respondent knew where BRCL is located. The majority (91.15%) answered "Yes." These results imply that most of the residents of the Big Rapids area are aware of the community library and have visited it and used its services and facilities in the past six months.

*Respondents' Satisfaction Levels with Services and Facilities*

The first question in this section asked respondents which of the twelve major services and facilities at BRCL they used. Among the 419 who answered, books services scored the highest (close to 85%), followed by free Wi-Fi and movies (both nearly 35%). All these results are in Figure 1.

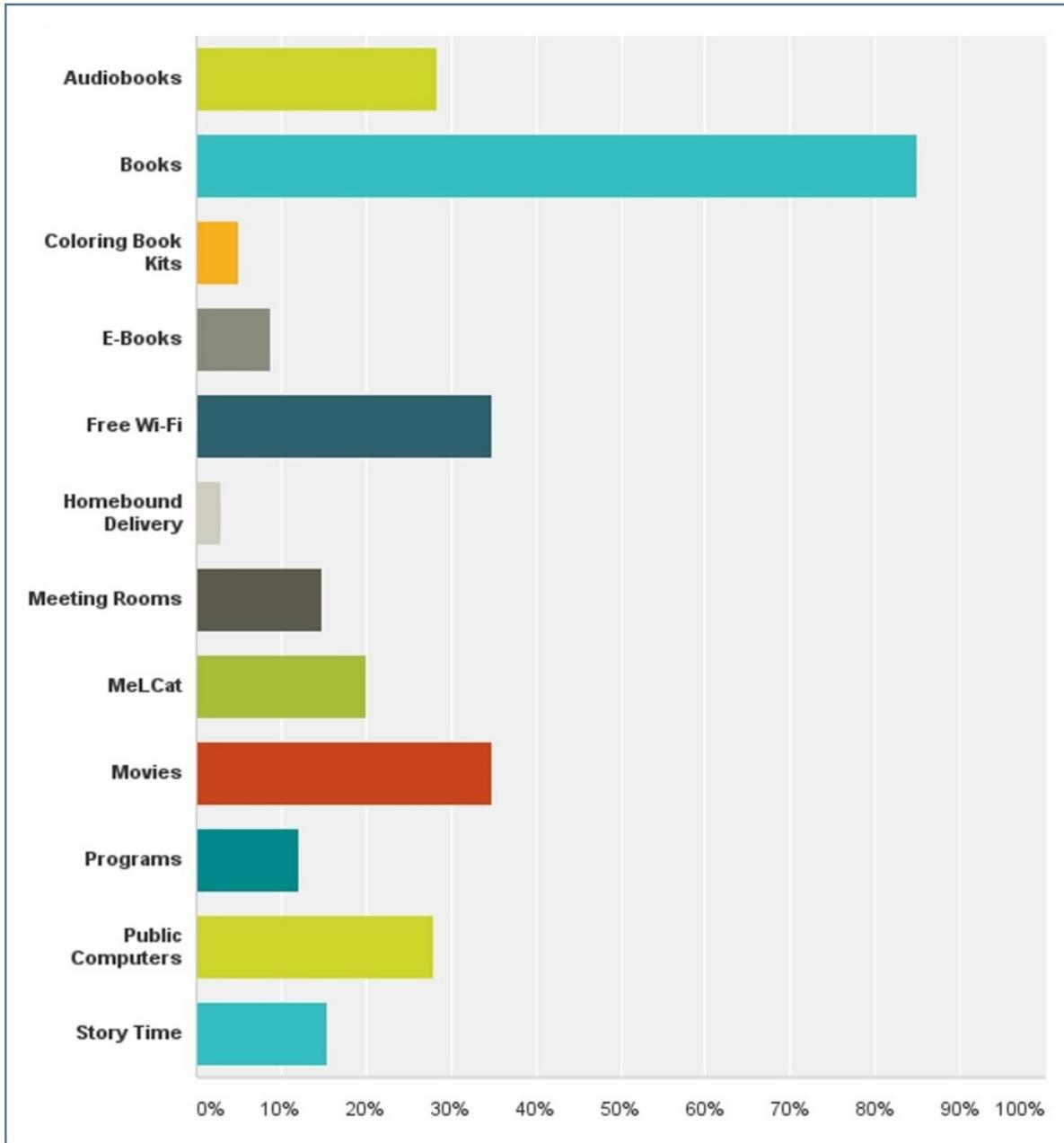


Figure 1: Services and Facilities Utilized

When the respondents were asked, “What is your level of satisfaction regarding these services?” it appeared that all 419 were very satisfied with all the services currently offered, with a mean score of at least 3.55 for each of the major services (see Table 3).

Table 3: Satisfaction Level with Services and Facilities Provided

	Very Dissatisfied	Dissatisfied	Neutral	Satisfied	Very Satisfied	Mean
Audiobooks	0.00%	2.26%	26.55%	25.42%	45.76%	4.15
Board Games	1.20%	0.00%	56.63%	18.07%	24.10%	3.64
Books	2.50%	0.28%	9.72%	37.78%	49.72%	4.32
Coloring Book Kits	1.18%	2.35%	57.65%	17.65%	21.18%	3.55
E-Books	2.80%	2.80%	35.51%	30.84%	28.04%	3.79
Free Wi-Fi	1.14%	0.00%	17.14%	38.86%	42.86%	4.22
Homebound Delivery	1.20%	1.20%	56.63%	18.07%	22.89%	3.60
Meeting Rooms	1.65%	0.83%	36.36%	21.49%	39.67%	3.97
MeLCat	0.76%	3.82%	20.61%	26.72%	48.09%	4.18
Movies	1.15%	1.15%	22.99%	33.33%	41.38%	4.13
Programs	1.71%	0.00%	41.03%	25.64%	31.62%	3.85
Public Computers	1.20%	0.00%	26.51%	33.13%	39.16%	4.09
Story Time	0.81%	0.00%	35.77%	21.14%	42.28%	4.04

\*  $n = 419$ , five-point Likert scale with 1 = Very Dissatisfied and 5 = Very Satisfied.

One open-ended question was used in this section to find out how respondents felt about the services the library currently offers. Unfortunately, most of the respondents chose not to answer this question. Those who gave feedback mainly recognized the services currently available at BRCL. However, they did seem to especially appreciate BRCL staff members' customer service skills and contributions to the local community. Some direct quotations are given below:

- We are blessed to have this facility which we use almost every week when we are in town.
- My library card is the best card in my purse. Excellent!
- It's great for families! Keep up the great work. We need our community library!
- Staff are always friendly, helpful, and willing to assist with or even purchase requested selections.
- It is an amazing space with an astonishing selection. The staff is extremely responsive. The story time for preschoolers is very interactive! I love it. I am very surprised and extremely pleased.

Other feedback on the question included the following:

- Good, average. I feel like they should advertise more or have more events to bring people in.
- Needs to be expanded into a regional library so more services can be offered.
- It's underfunded and limited. If one was an avid reader of philosophy, there is only Christian "literature" available.
- I enjoy them, but they need more services for high school age students (books are ok, space is small and uninviting).
- They need services for those who are blind and/or deaf.

*Relationships and Experience with the Library*

This section started by requesting the respondents to rate the four main categories (*Available Technology, Check-out Process, Facilities, and Helpfulness of Staff*) of experiences at BRCL (1 = poor and 10 = excellent). The results indicated that the respondents had had positive experiences at the library. The averages for all four categories exceeded 8 out of 10 on the scale. For the question “How important is it that you have access to a library in your community?” the vast majority answered either “Very Important” (approximately 50%) or “Important” (close to 29%; see Figure 2).

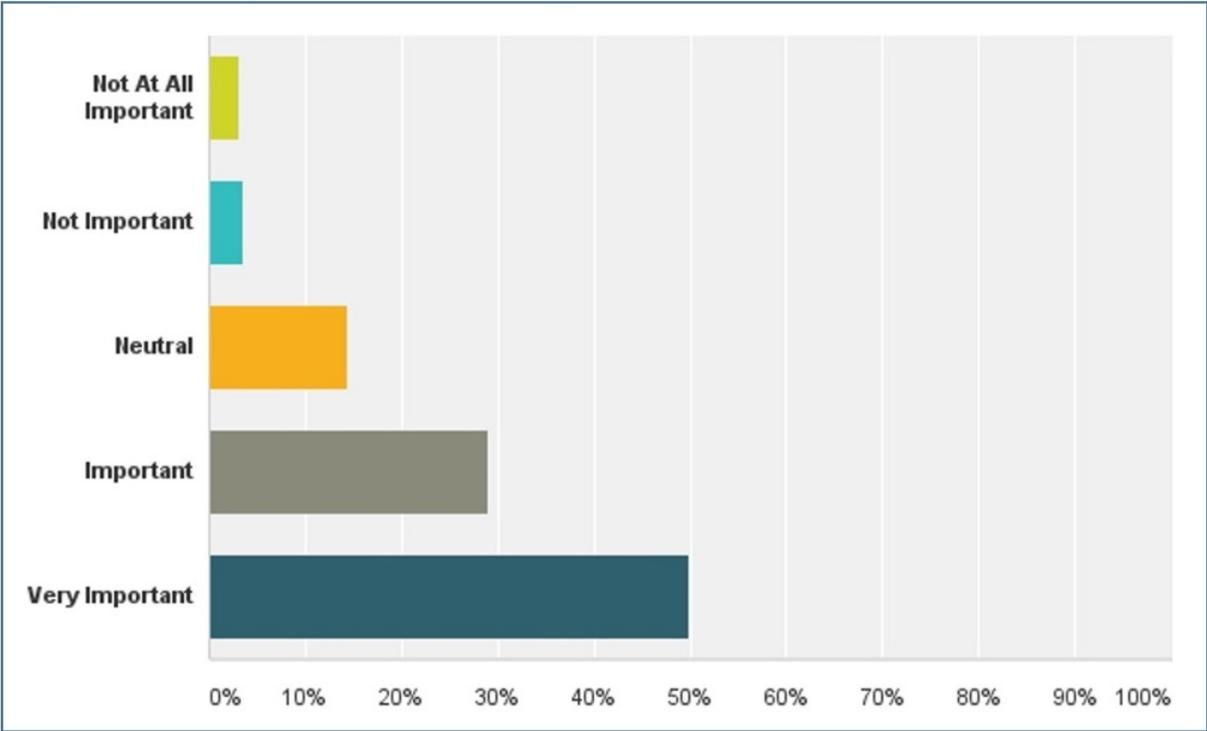


Figure 2: Importance of Library Access

The open-ended question in this section asked respondents whether they had ever had a bad or good experience with the staff of BRCL and how long had it been since the experience. Once again, few respondents chose to answer. The constructive feedback included the following:

- Had good experiences interacting with staff, staff seemed knowledgeable in helping to locate checkout materials.
- No bad experiences ever. All my contacts have been good, and I average coming here several times per month and have used the library since 1974— more frequently since my children have grown and moved and I have retired.
- My son has special needs. His class used the library every week for many years, it was a very good exposure. He still loves visiting the library.
- The majority of the staff are very helpful. Occasionally the staff seem too busy to help patrons.
- I couldn’t find a quiet reading area. All the comfortable reading chairs are near noisy computer area or service desks.

### Future Services and Facilities to be Offered by the Library

More than 450 people answered the question “Which of the following services/offerings would you like to see provided in the future at the Big Rapids Community Library?” More than 45% of those wanted more parking spaces on site. Respondents also wanted “Smart Technology Workshops” (nearly 40%) and “Computer Classes” (close to 35%) to be introduced at BRCL. Details of the respondents’ preferences are shown in Figure 3.

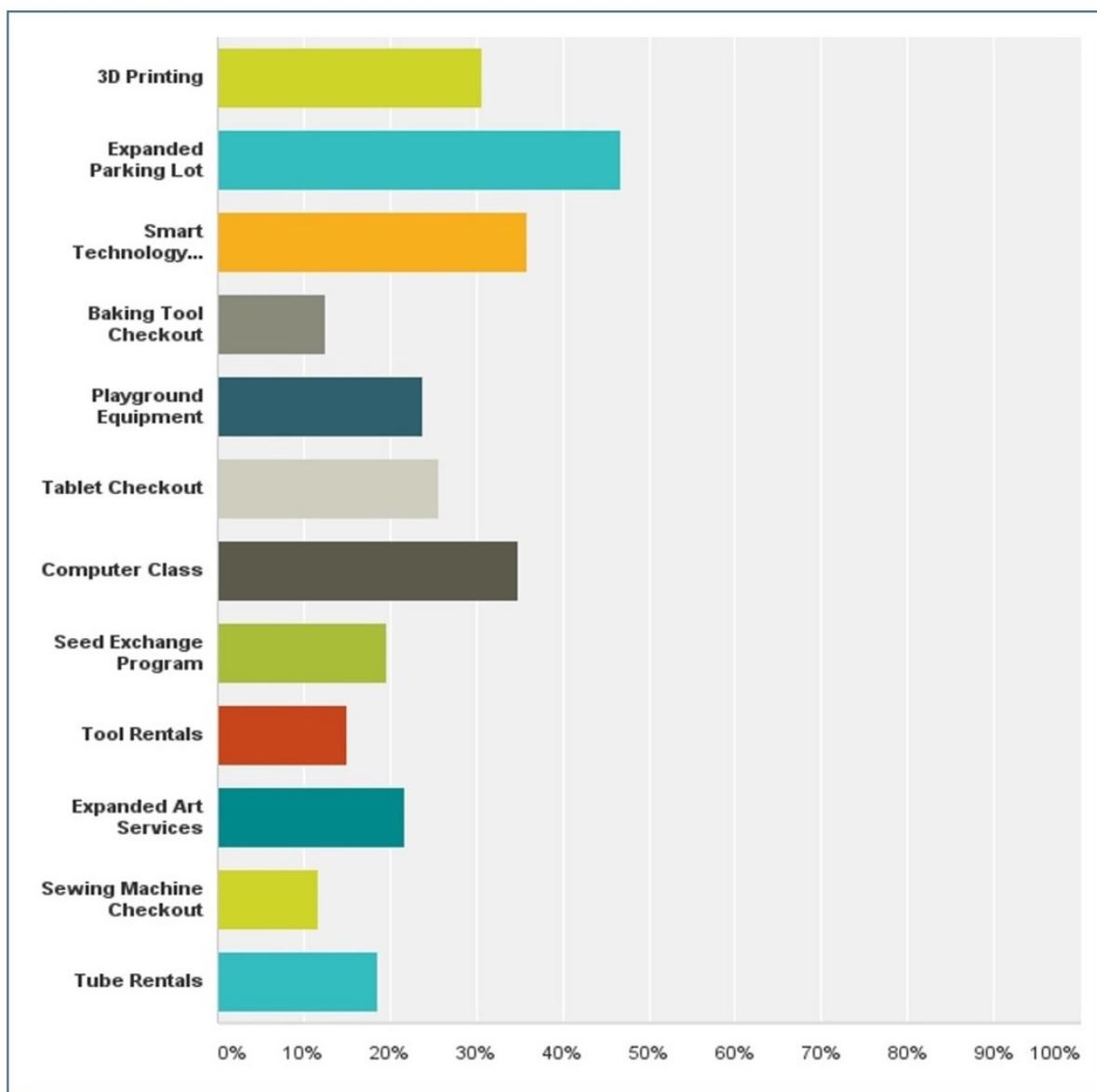


Figure 3: Future Services to Be Offered

The open-ended question in this section asked, “Are there any services not listed that you feel would benefit you?” Unfortunately, respondent numbers for this question were low. Some of the qualitative feedbacks that could be useful to BRCL is below:

- A better children’s section in the library, with services for children (other than story times). I have grandchildren who would live in the East Grand Rapids Library’s children section. So I know it can be done. They no longer want to visit the Big Rapids library.
- I live in Big Rapids but have joined the Wheatland Library in Mecosta, as they have someone there to give tech support. I have used his services a number of times.
- Maybe a sewing class or ACT/SAT prep classes for high schoolers.
- A patron book exchange for books the library does not offer and will not likely get.
- Partnerships with other libraries. I assume we already have this—publicize more.
- Resume-building workshop.

*Hypothesis Testing*

To understand customers’ overall perceptions of BRCL, the author tested five hypotheses proposed by the director and other administrators of the library.

- H1: If respondents have visited the library, they will feel it is important to have access to it.
- H0: There is no association between the important of having access to a local library and whether respondent have visited the library.

A cross-tabulation (crosstab) table was used to better describe the variables in H1. As Table 4 shows, most of the respondents who had visited BRCL claimed that having access to a library in their community is either “important” or “very important”. Also, the probability of the chi-square test statistic (chi-square = 46.870) was  $p = 0.000$ , less than the alpha level of significance of 0.05 (see Table 5) and the effect size was considered moderate association (see Table 6, Cramer’s  $V = .291$ ). Therefore, the null hypothesis (H0) can be rejected and hypothesis H1 is supported by this analysis where those respondents who had visited BRCL tended to claim that having access to a local community library is important for them.

Table 4: Crosstabulation. “Have you ever visited the Big Rapids Community Library?” \* “How important is it that you have access to a library in your community?”

			How important is it that you have access to a library in your community?					Total
			Not at all Important	Not Important	Neutral	Important	Very Important	
Have you ever visited the Big Rapids Community Library?	Yes	Count	9	7	42	119	226	403
		% within “Have you ever visited the Big Rapids Community Library?”	2.2%	1.7%	10.4%	29.5%	56.1%	100.0%

	% within "How important is it that you have access to a library in your community?"	52.9%	35.0%	52.5%	73.9%	82.2%	72.9%
	% of Total	1.6%	1.3%	7.6%	21.5%	40.9%	72.9%
No	Count	8	13	38	42	49	150
	% within "Have you ever visited the Big Rapids Community Library?"	5.3%	8.7%	25.3%	28.0%	32.7%	100.0 %
	% within "How important is it that you have access to a library in your community?"	47.1%	65.0%	47.5%	26.1%	17.8%	27.1%
	% of Total	1.4%	2.4%	6.9%	7.6%	8.9%	27.1%

Total	Count	17	20	80	161	275	553
	% within	3.1%	3.6%	14.5%	29.1%	49.7%	100.0%
	“Have you ever visited the Big Rapids Community Library?”						%
	% within	100.0%	100.0%	100.0%	100.0%	100.0%	100.0%
	“How important is it that you have access to a library in your community?”			%			%
	% of Total	3.1%	3.6%	14.5%	29.1%	49.7%	100.0%
							%

Table 5: Chi-square Test

	Value	df	Asymp. Sig. (2-sided)
Pearson Chi-Square	46.870 <sup>a</sup>	4	.000
Likelihood Ratio	43.783	4	.000
Linear-by-Linear Association	40.128	1	.000
N of Valid Cases	553		

a. 1 cells (10.0%) have an expected count of less than 5. The minimum expected count is 4.61.

Table 6: Symmetric Measures

		Value	Approximate Significance
Nominal by Nominal	Phi	.291	.000
	Cramer's V	.291	.000
N of Valid Cases		553	

- H2: There is a relationship between township of residence and most recent library visit.
- H0: There is no association between township of residence and most recent library visit.

A Pearson Chi-Square test was also used to assess the relationship between the two variables in H2. As Table 7 shows, the probability of the chi-square test statistic (chi-square = 59.887) was  $p = 0.036$ , less than the alpha level of significance of 0.05. In addition, the effect size was considered weak association (see Table 8, Cramer's  $V = .158$ ). Hypothesis H2 is thus supported by this analysis. This makes sense if the library is closer to some residents than others. However, BRCL should be aware that its location may be affecting its impact on some of the smaller townships it serves.

Table 7: Chi-square Test

	Value	df	Asymp. Sig. (2-sided)
Pearson Chi-Square	59.887 <sup>a</sup>	42	.036
Likelihood Ratio	66.710	42	.009
Linear-by-Linear Association	4.730	1	.030
N of Valid Cases	399		

a. 31 cells (55.4%) have an expected count of less than 5. The minimum expected count is 0.33.

Table 8: Symmetric Measures

		Value	Approximate Significance
Nominal by Nominal	Phi	.387	.036
	Cramer's V	.158	.036
N of Valid Cases		399	

- H3: There is a difference by income in whether residents have visited the library.
- H0: There is no association between household income and whether residents have visited the library.

As Table 9 shows, the majority of respondents with annual incomes of \$50,000 or more claimed to have visited BRCL previously. In addition, the probability of the chi-square test statistic (chi-square = 46.671) was  $p = 0.000$ , less than the alpha level of significance of 0.05 (see Table 10) and the effect size was considered moderate association (see Table 11, Cramer's  $V = .288$ ). Therefore, H3 is supported by this analysis.

Table 9: Crosstabulation. "Have you ever visited the Big Rapids Community Library?" \* "What is your household income per annum?"

		What is your household income per annum?						Total
		\$0– 9,999	\$10K – 29,999	\$30K – 49,999	\$50K – 69,999	\$70K+	Prefer not to Answer	
Have you ever visited the Big Rapids Community Library?	Yes	31	44	69	56	95	104	398
	No	46	25	24	16	25	28	164
Total		47	69	93	72	120	132	563

Table 10: Chi-square Tests

	Value	df	Asymp. Sig. (2-sided)
Pearson Chi-Square	46.806 <sup>a</sup>	5	.000
Likelihood Ratio	43.439	5	.000
Linear-by-Linear Association	33.364	1	.009
N of Valid Cases	563		

a. 0 cells (0.0%) have expected counts of less than 5. The minimum expected count is 20.10.

Table 11: Symmetric Measures

		Value	Approximate Significance
Nominal by Nominal	Phi	.288	.000
	Cramer's V	.288	.000
N of Valid Cases		563	

- H4: Female respondents perceive access to a local community library as important.
- H0: There is no association between gender and the important of having access to a local library.

As Table 12 shows, 49.6% of female respondents claimed that it is either “Important” or “Very Important” to have access to a library within their community. By contrast, only 28.4% of male respondents said the same. The probability of the chi-square test statistic (chi-square = 24.328) was  $p = 0.002$ , less than the alpha level of significance of 0.05 (see Table 13) and the effect size was considered weak association (see Table 14, Cramer's V = .150). Therefore, hypothesis H4 is supported by this analysis.

Table 12: Crosstabulation. “How important is it that you have access to a library in your community?” \* “What is your gender?”

			What is your gender?			Total
			Male	Female	Prefer Not to Answer	
How important is it that you have access to a library in your community?	Not At All Important	Count	6	11	0	17
		% within “How important is it that you have access to a library in your community?”	35.3%	64.7%	0.0%	100.0%
		% within “What is your gender?”	2.9%	3.4%	0.0%	3.1%
		% of Total	1.1%	2.0%	0.0%	3.1%

Not Important	Count	11	8	1	20
	% within "How important is it that you have access to a library in your community?"	55.0%	40.0%	5.0%	100.0%
	% within "What is your gender?"	5.3%	2.4%	16.7%	3.7%
	% of Total	2.0%	1.5%	0.2%	3.7%
Neutral	Count	38	40	0	78
	% within "How important is it that you have access to a library in your community?"	48.7%	51.3%	0.0%	100.0%
	% within "What is your gender?"	18.2%	12.2%	0.0%	14.4%
	% of Total	7.0%	7.4%	0.0%	14.4%
Important	Count	71	84	4	159
	% within "How important is it that you have access to a library in your community?"	44.7%	52.8%	2.5%	100.0%
	% within "What is your gender?"	34.0%	25.6%	66.7%	29.3%
	% of Total	13.1%	15.5%	0.7%	29.3%
Very Important	Count	83	185	1	269
	% within How important is it that you have access to a library in your community?	30.9%	68.8%	0.4%	100.0%
	% within What is your gender?	39.7%	56.4%	16.7%	49.5%
	% of Total	15.3%	34.1%	0.2%	49.5%
Total	Count	209	328	6	543
	% within How important is it that you have access to a library in your community?	38.5%	60.4%	1.1%	100.0%
	% within What is your gender?	100.0%	100.0%	100.0%	100.0%
	% of Total	38.5%	60.4%	1.1%	100.0%

Table 13: Chi-square Tests

	Value	df	Asymp. Sig. (2-sided)
Pearson Chi-Square	24.328 <sup>a</sup>	8	0.002
Likelihood Ratio	23.849	8	0.002
Linear-by-Linear Association	6.834	1	0.009
N of Valid Cases	543		

a. 5 cells (33.3%) have expected counts of less than 5. The minimum expected count is 0.19.

Table 14: Symmetric Measures

		Value	Approximate Significance
Nominal by Nominal	Phi	.212	.002
	Cramer's V	.150	.002
N of Valid Cases		543	

- H5: There is an association between resident's age and the important of having access to a local community library.
- H0: There is no relationship between age and the important of having access to a local library.

A Pearson's correlation was run to determine the relationship between the two variables in H5. This test (see Table 15) showed a weak, positive correlation between the variables ( $r = 0.203$ ,  $n = 540$ ,  $p < 0.001$ ). In addition, a crosstab table was used to better describe the variables in H5. As Table 16 shows, 86.6% of the respondents who are 55 and above claimed that having access to a community library is either important or very important for them (follow by 82.6% from the age group of 40-54 and 80.6% from the age group of 25-39 respectively). On the contrary, only 63.5 % of respondents (age between 18-24) said the same. Therefore, hypothesis H5 is supported by this analysis.

Table 15: Pearson Correlation Test. "What is your age?" \* "How important is it that you have access to a library in your community?"

		What is your age?	How important is it that you have access to a library in your community?
What is your age?	Pearson Correlation	1	.203**
	Sig. (2-tailed)		.000
	N	564	540
How important is it that you have access to a library in your community?	Pearson Correlation	.203**	1
	Sig. (2-tailed)	.000	
	N	540	554

\*\* Correlation is significant at the 0.01 level (2-tailed).

Table 16: Crosstabulation. “What is your age?” \* “How important is it that you have access to a library in your community?”

		How important is it that you have access to a library in your community?						Total
		Not at all Important	Not Important	Neutral	Important	Very Important		
What is your age?	18-24	Count	7	7	33	38	44	129
		% of Total	1.3%	1.3%	6.1%	7.0%	8.1%	23.9%
	25-39	Count	5	5	15	38	66	129
		% of Total	0.9%	0.9%	2.8%	7.0%	12.2%	23.9%
	40-54	Count	1	4	15	40	55	115
		% of Total	0.2%	0.7%	2.8%	7.4%	10.2%	21.3%
	55+	Count	4	4	14	44	101	167
		% of Total	0.7%	0.7%	2.6%	8.1%	18.7%	30.9%
Total		Count	17	20	77	160	266	540
		% of Total	3.1%	3.7%	14.3%	29.6%	49.3%	100.0%

## Discussion of Findings

Just like any other service providers, the administrators of a public library should always ensure its customers’ satisfaction and, hopefully, turn satisfied customers into loyal customers (Asogwa et al., 2014; Bakti & Sumaedi, 2013; Nimsomboon & Nagata, 2003; Podbrežnik, 2014). The current study examines customers’ perceptions of services and facilities provided by BRCL, a rural community library in Michigan, USA. While a vast amount of residents are aware of the community library as indicated in the research findings, there are still a large portion of residents who are not aware of the library and its services. Hence, raising public awareness is one important and ongoing task for the administrators of BRCL in order to drive more customers to their library.

The findings from the first hypothesis reveal that those respondents who had visited BRCL tended to claim that having access to a local community library is important for them. However, even though this is very encouraging, it is not really a surprising finding. According to Lombardi (2019), libraries are more than just the place where books live. In fact, many classes are offered at the local libraries, along with seminars and book clubs. In other words, it can be a great place for socializing and learning new things that today’s community libraries can offer (Vinjamuri, 2013). Since there are so many beneficial and enjoyable things to do at the community library, one must first paying a visit to the library and get involve in order to claim that having access to a local library is important.

The second hypothesis findings establish a significant relationship between township of residence and most recent library visit. These findings, too, are not surprising results where most of the respondents who live in the City of Big Rapids claimed that they have visited BRCL at least once in the past six months. This result conforming to Grewal and Levy (2016)

argument where customers often chose to shop near where they live. Thus, any physical retailers and outlets that are closer to their target customers tend to be able to attract local customers. This also applies to a non-profit service provider such as BRCL. In order to increase BRCL's foot traffic, the administrators of BRCL should also look for approaches to encourage their customers who remain outside of Big Rapids (for e.g. residents of the six surrounding townships who are also eligible for a free borrower's card from BRCL) to visit and use the services onsite. By doing this, it will lead to improve customer satisfaction in long term.

The third hypothesis asserts that there is a difference by income in whether residents have visited the library. As indicated in the cross-tab table (see Table 9), majority of respondents with annual incomes of \$50,000 or more claimed to have visited BRCL previously. In addition, the research findings also indicated that female respondents (see H4, Table 12) as well as older residents (refer to H5, Table 16) are more concerned of having access to a local community library.

To make the full use of the library, the administrators of BRCL should pay attention on the demographics information of their serving customers. For example, when considering marketing and promoting BRCL, they should focus more on the lower income families, male and younger age residents of Big Rapids; encouraging them to consider using the services and facilities offered by BRCL (such as public computer with internet access, meeting rooms, resume assistance, movies and etc.). Since the increase of customers will also increase the usage of the services and facilities in long term, this outcome is in conformity with the study conducted by Bakti and Sumaedi (2013) and McKnight (2008) where increase in customer numbers provides strong support for the library in requesting additional budget and headcounts to better serve their customers in long-term.

### **Limitations, Future Directions, and Conclusion**

This study should be viewed in the light of several limitations. These limitations, however, do point out promising directions for future research. First, the survey was conducted over a relatively short period (four weeks), so the sample size may be restricted. If there had been more time for data collection, more respondents might have completed the survey. Second, the quantitative method used in this study might be a limitation as well. Surveys are good tools for building a general understanding of certain topics, but they cannot go into further detail because every respondent completes the same set of questions. Diving deeper into the reasoning behind people's responses would require qualitative approaches such as focus groups or in-depth interviews. Third, the current study focused only on the customers of the library. To obtain a holistic view and assessment of the services provided, staff members of BRCL (permanent employees and volunteers) could be included in future studies.

In addition, the administrators of BRCL should conduct this survey annually or biannually to familiarize their customers with all the services offered by the library. This will keep the customers more informed about any new services BRCL offers. As this was just a first stage, the author limited the investigation to a single rural community library. It would be interesting to build on this by undertaking parallel studies at other rural community libraries, both inside and outside the U.S., to compare the results and identify differences in approach.

The services marketing and library literatures describe many empirical studies into customers' perceptions of the services offered by libraries. However, most of these studies focus on large public or college libraries. To address this gap, the author investigates customers' perceptions of a rural community library. Other community libraries inside and

outside the U.S. can learn several things from our findings. This research project has important policy implications for BRCL and other community libraries because data on customers' perceptions and satisfaction are increasingly being used to motivate service reforms, budget allocations, and management accountability. In addition, this undertaking by BRCL can be treated as a "best practice" model for other community libraries trying to build better relationships with their customers.

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## Appendix: Questionnaire

Big Rapids Community Library Survey					
<u>Demographics</u>					
1. Please check the city/township in which you currently reside.					
<input type="checkbox"/> The City of Big Rapids	<input type="checkbox"/> Barton Township	<input type="checkbox"/> Big Rapids Township	<input type="checkbox"/> Colfax Township		
<input type="checkbox"/> Grant Township	<input type="checkbox"/> Green Township	<input type="checkbox"/> Norwich Township	<input type="checkbox"/> Other		
2. What is your gender?					
<input type="checkbox"/> Male	<input type="checkbox"/> Female	<input type="checkbox"/> Prefer Not To Answer			
3. What is your age?					
<input type="checkbox"/> 18-24	<input type="checkbox"/> 25-39	<input type="checkbox"/> 40-54	<input type="checkbox"/> 50+		
4. What is your marital status?					
<input type="checkbox"/> Single	<input type="checkbox"/> Married	<input type="checkbox"/> Prefer Not To Answer			
5. What is your household income per annum?					
<input type="checkbox"/> \$0-\$9,999	<input type="checkbox"/> \$10,000-\$29,999	<input type="checkbox"/> \$30,000-\$49,999			
<input type="checkbox"/> \$50,000-\$69,999	<input type="checkbox"/> \$70,000+	<input type="checkbox"/> Prefer Not To Answer			
<u>Awareness</u>					
6. Have you ever visited the Big Rapids Community Library?					
<input type="checkbox"/> Yes		<input type="checkbox"/> No (If no, go to question 8)			
7. If yes, how long since visiting the Big Rapids Community Library?					
<input type="checkbox"/> 1 Week	<input type="checkbox"/> 1 Month	<input type="checkbox"/> 6 Months	<input type="checkbox"/> 1 Year		
<input type="checkbox"/> 5+ Years	<input type="checkbox"/> Before the Renovation	<input type="checkbox"/> I Only Use the Library During the Summer			
8. Do you know where the Big Rapids Community Library is located?					
<input type="checkbox"/> Yes		<input type="checkbox"/> No			
<u>Satisfaction of Current Services/Facilities</u>					
9. Select any of the following services that you utilized at the Big Rapids Community Library.					
<input type="checkbox"/> Audiobooks	<input type="checkbox"/> Books	<input type="checkbox"/> Coloring Book Kits	<input type="checkbox"/> E-Books		
<input type="checkbox"/> Free Wi-Fi	<input type="checkbox"/> Homebound Delivery	<input type="checkbox"/> Meeting Rooms	<input type="checkbox"/> MeLCat		
<input type="checkbox"/> Movies	<input type="checkbox"/> Programs	<input type="checkbox"/> Public Computers	<input type="checkbox"/> Story Time		
10. Considering the services you have used, what is your level of satisfaction regarding these services.					
	Very Dissatisfied	Dissatisfied	Neutral	Satisfied	Very Satisfied
Audiobooks	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
Board Games	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
Books	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
Coloring Book Kits	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
E-Books	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
Free Wi-Fi	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
Homebound Delivery	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
Meeting Rooms	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
MeLCat	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
Movies	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
Programs	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
Public Computers	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
Story Time	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>

11. How do you feel about the current services that the Big Rapids Community Library has to offer?

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Relationships

12. Rate the following based on your experiences at the library (1 is poor - 10 is excellent).

- Available Technology \_\_\_\_\_
- Check-Out Process \_\_\_\_\_
- Facilities \_\_\_\_\_
- Helpfulness of the Staff \_\_\_\_\_

13. How important is it that you have access to a library in your community?

- Not At All Important     Not Important     Neutral     Important     Very Important

14. Have you ever had a bad/good experience with the staff at Big Rapids Community Library? How long has it been since the experience? Explain.

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Future Facilities/Services

15. Which of the following services/offering would you like to see provided in the future at the Big Rapids Community Library?

- 3D Printing                       Baking Tool Checkout                       Computer Class
- Expanded Art Services             Expanded Parking Lot                       Playground Equipment
- Seed Exchange Program             Sewing Machine Checkout                 Smart Technology Workshops
- Tablet Checkout                       Tool Rentals                                       Tube Rentals

16. Are there any services not listed that you feel would benefit you?

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