Zur Diskussion

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Detecting and facing information demand for new target groups such as startup founders – A case study at the WHU library

Abstract: Future oriented libraries can make use of the current startup trend. An orientation towards new and unorthodox target groups can lead to an enhanced extension of demand and can emphasize the status of libraries. The library of the WHU – Otto Beisheim School of Management is considering to involve a new target group, startup founders amongst their alumni. This was carried out through a survey, in cooperation with the University of Applied Science (Institute of Information Science) in the form of a bachelor thesis. Here a structured pre-analysis tries to determine the demand of this specific target group (founders) and develops a concept to serve the demand of this target group specifically. The example of the case study illustrates a method for target groups specific information demand and also checks the consequences for libraries and their services who venture out of their regular clientele.

Keywords: Academic Libraries, information demand, new target groups, research service, startup founders, case study

Informationsbedarf neuer Kundengruppen am Beispiel von Start-up-Gründern – eine Fallstudie an der WHU Bibliothek (Otto Beisheim School of Management)

Zusammenfassung: Zukunftsorientierte Bibliotheken können den aktuellen Startup-Trend für sich nutzen. So kann eine Ausrichtung auf neue und unorthodoxe Zielgruppen zu einem gesteigerten Bedarf führen und somit den Status und die Nutzung von Bibliotheken stärken. Die Bibliothek der WHU – Otto Beisheim School of Management zieht in Erwägung eine neue Zielgruppe und zwar Startup-Gründer unter ihren Alumni zu bedienen. Hierzu wurde eine Befragung in Kooperation mit der Technischen Hochschule Köln am Institut für Informationswissenschaft durchgeführt und in Form einer Bachelorarbeit ausgewertet und dient als Grundlage des Artikels. Hier wird mit Hilfe einer strukturierten Vorabanalyse, der Informationsbedarf dieser spezifischen Zielgruppe (Gründer) bestimmt und ein Konzept entwickelt, um den Bedarf der Zielgruppe zu bedienen. Das Beispiel dieser

Fallstudie stellt eine Methode für zielgruppenspezifischen Informationsbedarf dar und zeigt die Konsequenzen für Bibliotheken und ihre Dienstleistungsangebote auf, welche sich außerhalb des regulären Kundenstammes befinden.

Schlagwörter: Wissenschaftliche Bibliotheken, Informationsbedarf, neue Zielgruppen, Research Service, Rechercheservice, Startup Gründer, Fallstudie

1 Introduction

In the past years digitalization and subjects like big data has changed handling of information research tremendously. More and more library users are now using the broad offerings of web search engines and other internet tools like Google scholar and Statista for their information demand. This has reduced the usage and dependency on academic libraries because the customers can use other ways to fulfill their individual information demand. A result of this change is that libraries have to look for different options to align towards this situation. Since they are now not the exclusive information provider in this area anymore, they have to make sure, that their services stay relevant in the information research process.[1] One possibility to face these challenges is to extend the offer by looking for and serving new target groups. A possible new target group for future-oriented, academic libraries are startup-founders.

2 Startup as a trend

A startup is a young, non-established enterprise or company with an innovative business model and or innovative business idea and generally a low starting budget.[2] Startups are searching for scalable, sustainable and profitable business models with high potential for growth[3] and where one or more entrepreneurs move from the idea stage to securing financing, laying down the basis structure of the business, and initiating operations or trading.[4] Today, founding a startup seems to be a trend and is currently as hip as playing in a rock band in the early 1990.[5]

This is proven by the present startup boom in Germany, which is still growing. Currently, the foundation of startups is spreading amongst the country and is developing solid bases in larger cities like the capital, Berlin. Furthermore, this development is now being acknowledged by the state, the federal states and private companies, which have started to support and promote these new

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[1] Sadeh (2007) 307.

[2] Achleitner (n.y.).

[3] Blank et. al. (2014) XII und XXI.

[4] BusinessDictionary.com (2018).

[5] Cronin (2017).

enterprises.[6] Next to the urban centers such as Berlin, Munich, Rhine-Main-Area and Hamburg where the startup scene is growing fast, also Universities (WHU, EBS, HHL) are becoming part of this scene as well due to their integrated business incubators.[7] Also, North Rhine-Westphalia is tracking a strong growth of startup foundations.[8]

Furthermore, the startup scene is becoming more and more important in overall sectors and industries.[9] The number of co-working spaces in large cities shows a strong growth as much as the willingness of local authorities to support startup founders in further other aspects. In addition to that, there is a wide range of consulting support for founders at universities, newly built incubators, and startup centers. For example, the TH Köln-University of Applied Sciences has created a new platform for entrepreneurship with the German InsurLab. It has to be emphasized that the WHU – Otto Beisheim School of Management has a leading role in maintaining entrepreneurship ideas and startup establishments as well as setting up programs to support the idea of entrepreneurship at a student level.

3   New target groups for libraries

In the past, libraries often focused their services based on what they thought their users would need without exactly knowing what their users really wanted. It was more a guess than a precise matching of customer information demand. A future-oriented library should engage closely with its customers to understand their specific information demand and therefore consequently improve the library's services and collection. The library's success is highly influenced by how much their services are continuously evaluated, shaped and adapted relating to their user's needs.[10]

In this context, libraries need to align themselves towards new target groups to keep up with innovation and change. In addition to that, they have to adapt and be able to relate to the transformation of their users and their searching behavior. The role of libraries as an origin of information and knowledge has to be secured in today's society where access to different sources of information has become tremendously diverse. Libraries have to sustain their position by offering the corresponding sources and services and to make explicit that they can offer information with decent depth.[11] Change in technology is having a huge impact on academic libraries and even more, they can no longer be considered book depositories. It is vital to acknowledge this fact and to act accordingly

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[6] Westfälische Nachrichten (2017).

[7] Hahn (2014) 8f.

[8] Westfälische Nachrichten (2017).

[9] Handelsblatt (2016).

[10] Esson et al. (2012) 470.

[11] Chan and Wong (2013) 47.

to the new ways, customers access, collect, and use data and information.[12] So what are new possible target groups for academic libraries? Next to regular students, newly qualified graduates, academics and researchers, new target audiences could be groups along this value chain. In case of the WHU, you could easily think of potential startup founders as this target group is about to leave the university or just has left university. In addition to that, this target group already has a link to the university as alumni. Furthermore, libraries should widen their target groups to segments, which hold a high potential for the future. Therefore, academic libraries should address to those customers, who are closely connected to their main target groups. These target groups could be groups, who are connected to the university or the main study and research fields of the university. Another relevant consideration should be the possibility of developing target groups, who are willing to pay for highly required information, which has a positive effect on the financial situation of the library.[13] In the long run, it is important to involve your target audiences in different options of a bottom-up-approach, like focus groups and webinars. Together, that they can explain and work next to learning on their own to ensure a close connection to the library. In addition, the library should make sure that especially their students, can build up a loyal and a better understanding of available databases and information services, which can accompany them in their future work place.

To increase the number of customers in an academic library, different ways of enhancement are possible: On the one hand, the library could implement a customer strategy to understand their customers, build relationships and create value with them. A better understanding of the library's users can optimize their value and map the library's vision.[14] On the other hand, this can also be supported, by user surveys and information behavior studies which are common survey instruments used by libraries to engage with and learn about their customers.[15] Here, it is important that the library is able to come up with changes after evaluating the feedback of the users. One important goal of such a survey should be to capture new information about the relationship of the customers towards their library and the use of the library's information portfolio. Of course, this information should have an impact on further actions and improvements towards the customers' needs and wishes towards collection and services. Further, such surveys and the handling of the results, reported with accuracy can be a vital basis for further decision making.[16]

Another important issue is that different customer groups have different needs and value different library services. A possible approach is to prioritize the user's interactions, in order to provide the

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[12] Leligdon et al. (2015) 252.

[13] Fourie and Fourie (2014) 165ff.

[14] Leligdon et al. (2015) 247f, 252.

[15] Fourie and Fourie (2014) 166.

[16] Esson et al. (2012) 477.

greatest possible value and impact on the user segments that best fit into the library's framework. Next to this group of users, potential users are to be found within the population, especially new target groups who have not used libraries to a high degree. However, it is surely more feasible to interact with target groups with higher information demand and who are also willing to pay a fee for valuable information.[17]

Since universities are a place of higher education and research institution, most academic libraries perform the function of a research library. The main characteristic of such a research library is to support research in any context. Indeed, especially these libraries have to also face the challenge that users no longer come to the library and thus, the library has to approach its users where they are. One way to approach this situation can be through communicating and interacting with users online and therefore creating a new value for the library itself and to gain an increasing demand for library services.[18]

4   Case Study

4.1   Introduction, background

The library at the WHU – Otto Beisheim School of Management is a perfect example, that aims to serve new target groups. It was quite obvious to choose founders of startups and at the same time alumni of the WHU university as a new target group because this group is already linked to the WHU through "In Praxi" the WHU Alumni Association. 90% of all WHU graduates are a member of "In Praxi".[19] Another reason to turn to this target group is that this group is definitely a target group with ambition and need for information. To pinpoint the exact need for information the target group's information demand was analysed as part of a bachelor thesis in cooperation with the Institute of Information Science at the University of Applied Sciences Cologne.[20]

4.2   Introduction of WHU and presentation of the problem

The WHU – Otto Beisheim School of Management is one of Germany's best and well-known business schools focusing on business education. It was founded in 1984 to improve the business education of young businessmen and businesswomen. This business school, which is privately financed operates with an international outlook. Furthermore, it concentrates on management education. There are two campuses, one in Vallendar for undergraduate and graduate students and one in Düsseldorf with the focus on MBA and executive education. Moreover, the WHU has an international community with more than 200 partner schools worldwide, more than 160 associated companies worldwide and

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[17] Leligdon et al. (2015) 252f.

[18] Maceviciute (2014) 282f. and 291ff.

[19] http://www.whu.edu/alumni.

[20] Grefkes (2017).

about 4.000 alumni. In addition, the WHU – Otto Beisheim School of Management is three-times accredited by AACSB, EQUIS, and FIBAA System Accreditation.[21]

Because of WHU's high focus on management and entrepreneurship, a lot of students as well as alumni explore the possibility of founding their own company. As a result, the startup and founding spirit is part of the WHU's every day campus life. This leads to an ambitious and very specific information demand. Therefore, the library of the WHU – Otto Beisheim School of Management is interested in supporting these students and alumni in the founding stage of their startups. Besides supporting their students with various information services, the WHU library considers to address startup founders amongst their alumni as a new target group. Here the library can use its research skills to offer information on markets, enterprises and other relevant startup topics including addressing the very individual research needs of this new target groups.[22]

4.3   Methods and approach, Structured pre-analysis

In the bachelor thesis the information demand of startup founders amongst WHU alumni was analyzed through an online survey. The questionnaire was executed with a survey tool called Unipark and spread through the mailing list of the WHU alumni organization. The questionnaire was published in a German as well as in an English version since the working language at WHU is English. The survey asked the target group about their founding experience, retrieved information about their startup companies and their information demand as well as their research experience. Further, the alumni and founders were asked about information or consulting services they would appreciate. At the end of the survey usual questions regarding demographic data was requested. The results of the analysis were compared and balanced to the current situation. With these results a concept for a specific research support for this new target group was developed. This research support ought to help the startup founders with their founding and company related research as well as encounter their individual information demand. Since, the target group of the survey covered the startup founders amongst WHU alumni, the analysis was structured specifically towards their assumed information demand and topics to gain their interest. Furthermore, the questionnaire and basis of the analysis was supported by direct communication with the library management of the WHU and different professors and university staff to ensure a realistic and complete compilation of the situation as much as of the student's needs. The survey was conducted with support and continuous talks with different people. On the one hand with the help of the director of the WHU library and its staff as well as with the first supervisor of the bachelor thesis. On the other hand, several interviews were conducted with the head of the Alumni organization "In Praxi" at WHU to ensure that the

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[21] https://www.whu.edu/die-whu/geschichte-der-whu.

[22] Hill (n.y.).

needs of the alumni and startup founders could be represented as suitable as possible. In addition, meetings with three different professors at WHU took place, who had close contact to startup founders as well as a good understanding of startup founder's information demand. The aim of having multiple interviews with all startup founders related contacts at the business school was to represent the information demand of startup founders as well as possible and hereof to design the questionnaire as fitting as possible.

4.4   Results of the survey

In case of the WHU library and their target group of startup founders amongst WHU alumni the results of the survey showed that there is a high information demand especially in the beginning and during the founding stage of their companies. The founders are mostly interested in information about competitive products, the competitive situation as a whole, and potential competitors. Moreover, market analysis, target markets, target audiences, customer requirements and the financing of an establishment are the most chosen topics in the pre-founding stage. In the founding stage topics like legal structure, taxes and patents or trade mark rights take on a higher interest and the post-founding stage is characterized by the information demand towards future developments in the market and the own company. Most of the participants of the survey, state that they had difficulties during their information research process. Desired services and consulting assistance required access to fact and full text databases like Markus and Dafne (Bureau van Dijk) for company and detailed financial information or Statista for statistical data. Furthermore, databases with focus on founding information like ProQuest Entrepreneurship Database or Entrepreneurial Studies Source by EBSCO can serve founding related and specific data and information on entrepreneurship. In addition, the interviewees asked for a personal point of contact and research guidelines as research support. Here the startup founders can be aided to important sources and get helpful hints during their search.

4.5   Concept

Through a thorough analysis of the target group requirements (WHU alumni startups) a proposal for a concept of five stages for the research service of the WHU library was generated, a major goal of the bachelor thesis. The concept consists of five levels (see graph 1): It starts with general measures as far as to capacity building activities regarding the information research process and finally leading to an individual research service explicitly focusing on the demand of the new target group, in case of the WHU library the founders of startup companies. This hands-on approach of the concept proposal ought to enable the library to impart its information literacy more efficiently and to address the target groups' information need more intrinsic and purposefully.

The research service concept as case study for WHU alumni startups consists of the following stages:

Stage 1: Overview of information resources

Stage 2: Research guidelines

Stage 3: Access to databases

Stage 4: Personal point of contact

Stage 5: Research service

Graph 1: Research service concept

Stage 1 includes an overview of all information sources, relevant for the target group. These lists involve information sources including a description of their content within the library's portfolio. Furthermore, the library should develop topic-based compilations for the main interest of the target group. In the case of the WHU – Otto Beisheim School of Management these overviews include the library's resources and their content as well as free sources outside the library relevant to the new target group of the WHU library (startup founders). These lists summarize sources, which include founding and company related information. A possible category or cluster in this case are startup and founding news. A list with this topic could include sources like Berlin Valley, Deutsche Startups, Gründerszene or StartingUp. These sources are different types of news platforms and magazines for startups in Germany with startup relevant news: Berlin Valley is a startup magazine, Deutsche Startups is a news portal, Gründerszene is an online magazine and StartingUp is a founder magazine as well. In addition, other topic-based compilations for example relating to founding experiences and founding questions could be generated.

In stage 2 the library should use its own information literacy by offering research guidelines. This is the easiest way to support the customers during their specific research process. One way to obtain those are written guidelines, which should be posted on the library's website to be downloaded from there and which include general hints and tips for successful research. Moreover, short instructions for specific databases could be designed to simplify the search for the library's users. Another way to transfer information literacy and research guidance could be to come up with short videos where for example an exemplary search in a database is shown. In addition to that, the library could offer user training to do proper research and to teach the use of programs and databases present in libraries. At the library of WHU research guidelines, which could be downloaded from the library's website or a specialized solution like e.g. LibGuides as well as short written instructions are an additional possibility. Further, short videos could be another option to explain for example an efficient search

strategy in an easy-to-handle way and a short amount of time. In fact, this offer could also benefit all other undergraduate and graduate students in their research process.

Stage 3 includes a broader access to databases for customers and or to target group specific databases. In the case of the WHU and its library this would mean an extension of licenses for specific databases for the startup founders amongst the alumni of WHU and or the purchase of a database with the focus on founding and entrepreneurship. The access to these databases and corresponding license possibilities have to be verified in detail.

In stage 4 each target group receives its own personal point of contact. Thereby the customers obtain an individual information research support which is topic related, to support the new target group with source recommendations and topic related knowledge. Communication could take place via electronic exchange communication channels like Skype or video conferences next to the already in existence ordinary telephone calls and email. Other possibilities could be a form on the library's website to arrange an appointment or weekly scheduled consultation hours for this specific target group. At the library of WHU this would resolve in a personal point of contact for startup founders. This personal point of contact provides an individual support for the startup founders regarding their information needs and research enquiries. The installation of a specific startup consultation hour could be a good way to ensure a solid point of contact between the WHU library and its new target group, the startup founders.

Stage 5 contains the most customized configuration level of the concept, which aims to support customers in their needs for reliable information research: the research service. Here the research service carries out the active search, the compilation and aggregation of information regarding a previously defined topic for the library's user. This service could be of great help as it compensates a lot to the shortage of time and staff of the target group. Precondition for this are necessary regulations such as a written agreement about the research topic and included subjects, the confidentiality agreement relating to the content and a clear and precise research question as well as a determined deadline. Establishing an individual contact and debriefing at the beginning of the research process is vital to make sure, that both sides receive the same understanding of the research question and to clarify uncertainties or questions from the library staff early on in the process. Further, it is important to keep both sides up-to-date with changes and a certain level of availability for further enquiries. In the case of the WHU this research service for startup founders would meet their named shortage of time for detailed research. Here, the research service would completely undertake the whole search for the startup founders including the compilation of information. Restrictive factors like the license situation has to be clarified as well as the interpretation and use of the data, which stays in the responsibility of the founder itself. Additionally,

it is necessary to train and improve the skills of the employees in the library for this specific configuration level. Furthermore, the need for more staff in the library, as well as a way to compensate the rise of costs concerning this stage has to be reviewed.

4.6   Recommendations for WHU and future steps

As a result of these findings and the developed concept, following consequences can be derived for the WHU library. The concept as such is of great interest for the business school and its students who are highly interested in setting up a business. Therefore, the possibilities of the execution have to be evaluated and opportunities and challenges have to be balanced against risks and threats. However, since the research service concept is beyond scope and mission of the WHU library the implementation of such a research service has to be discussed in detail with the business administration.

Next to the mission of the library, the legal dimension in providing information to non-academics has to be verified. On the one hand, provision of information is part of the tasks of an information professional but on the other hand, the WHU library would gather information for startup founders, who no longer belong to the academia of the university, this would include legal relevant disclosures.

Another important aspect is the examination of the licenses and their legal limits. Since the WHU library is an academic library, its licenses are of academic nature as well. These might not be suitable for the usage of non-members of the University. Therefore, the licenses may have to be extended to implement all of the research service concept stage. Such an extension of the license proposition is definitely going to increase the costs for the different databases and accesses, which has to be carefully reviewed and considered.

The new copyright law from March 1st, 2018 underlines the non-profit utilization in providing information as a library which also needs careful attention.

Even though there are a lot of legal and organizational hurdles involved which need to be examined, there are also multiple positive effects for such a research service, which cannot be denied. First, information literacy and information desk skills of the library staff is going to be enlarged even further. Second, the engagement with the library and information sources is going to increase due to the customized requests. Here information literacy of the whole library team in general is going to benefit. Third, such a research service and broader service offering of the WHU library is going to benefit the business school, and subsequently the library. The services of the library are going to expand due to the research service concept. This will broaden the library's portfolio offer to enlisted students and other business school researchers as well. In conclusion, establishing this concept will lead to a better information basis and quality of information sources used and cited in research

papers and publications for the entire business school. The usage of this research service concept for registered students, who are startup founders at the same time, should be no problem, even though it might be difficult to differ between their information needs relating to university studies and research and their information needs regarding their new business.

5   Conclusion and consequences for libraries generally

A recommendation for libraries in general is to adjust themselves towards the current situation and take subjects such as big data and digitization seriously. The apparent information overflow has changed the way of common information research and sometimes has led to simplified information searches. Subsequently, complete new information providers have come up the scene. One way to encounter this intensified competition is to look for new target groups and to serve them properly and try to exceed expectations. In addition, it is important to know and understand the demand of your customers as well as to adjust your services towards these information needs. A good option to meet the requests and demands of your customers is to conduct a survey and use the results to customize your offerings.

The presented concept can be applied in different situations where an academic library sees the need to adjust itself stronger towards future challenges and to serve its customers more individually.

The aim of every library should be to help and support their customers during the information research phase. This becomes clearly obvious through the suggested name for the designed research service at the WHU library which could be called "Research Service WHU – **W**e **H**elp **U**".[23]

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