

Measuring the economic value of the electronic scientific information services in Portuguese academic libraries

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Luiza Baptista Melo

CIDEHUS, Universidade de Évora, Portugal

Cesaltina Pacheco Pires

CEFAGE, Universidade de Évora, Portugal

Abstract

This article has three main objectives: i) to describe the use patterns of electronic and traditional resources in Portuguese academic libraries; ii) to estimate the value of the Portuguese electronic scientific information consortium b-on by using two alternative valuation methodologies; iii) to relate the use patterns with the valuation of b-on. We estimate the value of the Portuguese electronic scientific information consortium b-on by using two alternative evaluation methodologies: a) the value of the time saved by using this electronic resource; and b) the contingent valuation method to estimate how much the user is willing to pay for the service. Our results show wide differences in use patterns, with professors, researchers and PhD students having a more intense use of digital library services than undergraduate and masters students. Moreover, the benefit-cost ratios computed using the two valuation techniques indicate that the value of the electronic scientific information consortium b-on is well above its costs. Finally, the study shows that the valuation of b-on is higher for the user groups with higher percentage use of digital services.

Keywords

academic libraries, contingent valuation, electronic resources, impact evaluation, performance assessment, Portugal

Introduction

Lancaster (1993) argued that is ‘exceptionally difficult, if not completely impossible, to express the benefits of library service in monetary terms’. Nevertheless, Hider (2008) states that the last decade ‘has identified some recent “waves” of libraries evaluation where the aim has been to quantify the benefits derived by the end user’. This article is a contribution to this growing branch of research that explores ways to give a monetary value to the libraries and the services they provide.

The main purpose of this article is to investigate the following issues: 1) to describe and contrast the use patterns of electronic and traditional resources in public Portuguese academic libraries by five different types of users (professors, PhD students/researchers, masters students, undergraduate students and others, such as, library staff and anyone else who works at the university); 2) to estimate the value of the Portuguese electronic scientific

information consortium b-on¹ by using two alternative valuation methodologies; and 3) to relate the use patterns with the valuation of b-on.

Nowadays there is an increasing demand for transparency regarding costs and quality in the institutions. Poll and te Boekhorst (2007) suggest various important indicators to evaluate the cost-effectiveness in libraries, such as: cost per user, cost per visit, cost per use, ratio of acquisitions costs to staff costs, cost per document processed and cost per download. In this article, we follow another approach. We assume that scientific information is a good, thus it is possible to value this good in monetary terms. In order to estimate the monetary value for the end-users of the

Corresponding author:

Luiza Baptista Melo, Universidade de Évora, Portugal
Email: lbmelo@fc.up.pt