
USAGE OF THE 1MALAYSIA BOOK VOUCHER: BOOK PURCHASING DECISIONS AMONG UNDERGRADUATES OF THE UNIVERSITY OF MALAYA

Hezreen Abdul Rashid
University of Malaya
hezreen@gmail.com

ABSTRACT

This is a study on the University of Malaya's undergraduates' decisions on book purchasing using the 1Malaysia book voucher. For this study, a qualitative research was done in the form of four focus group discussions among the undergraduates. The discussions were on four aspects: how useful was the book voucher to students, what motivated them to purchase the books based on Philip Kotler's and Alison Baverstock's marketing mix factors (product, price, place, promotion, people and period of time), what were the problems that hindered them from utilising the book vouchers for their academic studies and what suggestions can be made to increase usefulness of the voucher for their studies. Before the introduction of the book voucher, students relied on library books, photocopied books, notes from their lecturers, second hand books and online notes. With the 1Malaysia book voucher, do the students now purchase their academic books? The focus group sessions were audio recorded and transcribed. The data were divided into themes, coded and analysed using Microsoft Excel. The findings showed that the book vouchers were useful and that they were mostly used for their studies. Also, product and place were the most dominant factors they looked for before they made their purchases with their vouchers. There were complaints about the timing of the distribution of the voucher, which was nearly the middle of the second semester instead of the beginning of an academic session. The most popular suggestion in improving the usage of the voucher is to either remove the expiry date or lengthen it. The purpose of this study is to provide better feedback so that the vouchers will certainly be of great benefit in the dissemination of knowledge in tertiary education.

Keywords: *Book voucher, book purchasing, marketing mix*

INTRODUCTION

This study is about the usefulness of the 1Malaysia book voucher to university students particularly the undergraduates from The University of Malaya. The 1Malaysia book voucher is now in its third year running yet, no formal studies have been conducted to oversee if the objectives of the book vouchers are met or whether they clearly benefit the students. Although the government has channelled millions of ringgit for students' academic expenditure in the form of book vouchers, there is a need to analyse how these vouchers are utilised.

A survey conducted in Kolej Datin Seri Endon (KDSE), University Teknologi Malaysia, Johor revealed that most students only read more than four books a year. Most of these books were academic books in preparation for exams, report writing, tutorials and presentations. In the same study, the reason for the low reading habits is the cost of books and half of the respondents said that most of the reading materials are expensive (Mohini et al., 2011).

Since high cost of books was one of the main factors that affected readership behaviour, the Malaysian government decided to come to aid to tackle the problem. In October 2011, the Malaysian Prime Minister Datuk Seri Najib Tun Razak announced in parliament that Malaysian students in public and private local institutions of higher learning, matriculation as well as Form 6 students nationwide were eligible for RM200 book vouchers also known as the 1Malaysia Book Voucher.

When the vouchers were first introduced at RM200 per voucher, students were said to have purchased items other than for academic purposes. At the same time, MABOPA also urged the government to impose stringent rules and regulations so that the book vouchers will not be misused. The government obliged (MABOPA, 2012).

On the 28th September 2012, the book voucher allocation was increased to RM 325 million as of which students were privileged to own RM250 vouchers. This time, the requirements were that to use the book voucher, 80% of purchases are solely for books and 20% are for stationery.



Figure 1.1: 1Malaysia Book Vouchers Given to Malaysian Students

STATEMENT OF THE PROBLEM

There have been many studies on poor reading habits among Malaysian undergraduates as reported by Nor Shahriza (2006). Malaysian students only read for academic purposes and not for pleasure. Therefore they do not find reading an enjoyment and buying books to them is a waste of money. At the same time, other studies have indicated that because of the high cost of academic books, students resort to photocopying academic textbooks as this seems to be more affordable. By photocopying books, students could save almost 50% of local books and almost 75% on imported book (Hamedi, 2011).

Therefore, the statement of the problem highlights whether the 1Malaysia book vouchers help ease the burden of high cost of academic books and are they useful for their academic studies since this is one of the objectives of the voucher.

At the same time, MABOPA reported in the media such as *Sinar Harian* as well as *Free Malaysia Today*, both published on 28th February 2013, that students used the vouchers to purchase items other than for their academic studies. There have also been reports that the vouchers were bought for cash by irresponsible parties. A list of parties who allowed these vouchers to be used to purchase products other than for their academic studies were published in the memorandum to the Prime Minister on the MABOPA's 44th Annual General Meeting Report (MABOPA, 2012).

Based on the reports above, what are the problems that students have faced with the voucher? Are students truly benefitting from these vouchers? Did these vouchers satisfy their needs and wants as university students? Most importantly, what are the students' viewpoints and suggestions since they are the direct consumers of the book vouchers?

At the same time, MABOPA also requested for these vouchers be distributed annually. Thus, this shows that there were positive usages of these vouchers. And if the vouchers are to be continually distributed, what are the improvements that need to be made so that the problems mentioned above can be reduced?

The three statements of problems above brought forth the research questions and research objectives which were derived from a triangulation method. According to O'Donoghue and Punch (2003), triangulation is a "method of cross-checking data from multiple sources to search for regularities in the research data." According to the authors, there are various types of triangulation that can be achieved through mixed methods, multiple sources, multiple researchers, theories and data types. In this study, it is from different data types that have led to the triangulation method. First data type are from tertiary data sources such as media reports about the misuse of the 1Malaysia book voucher published by *Sinar Harian* and *Free Malaysia Today*, as well as a memorandum to the Malaysian Prime Minister as published in MABOPA's 44th Annual General Meeting Report (MABOPA, 2012). The second data type are from primary data sources collected from a focus group discussion conducted as a pilot test on the 29th October 2013 with five respondents who were University of Malaya undergraduates from the Department of Media Studies. Based on these collective data, the research questions and objectives were derived.

OBJECTIVES OF THE STUDY

Although this study can be used to analyse many issues as mentioned in the statement of problem, this work is only used to fulfil the following objectives:

- To examine how the 1Malaysia book vouchers were useful for the undergraduates in their academic studies.
- To determine the major considerations that influenced the undergraduates to purchase books with the voucher.
- To evaluate the problems that hindered the undergraduates from utilising the vouchers for their academic studies.
- To identify suggestions that can be made to increase usefulness of the book vouchers especially in terms of book purchasing.

RESEARCH QUESTIONS

This study is to address the following research questions:

- How were the 1Malaysia book vouchers useful for the undergraduates in their academic studies?
- What were the major considerations that influenced the undergraduates to purchase books with the voucher?
- What were the problems that hindered the undergraduates from utilising the vouchers for their academic studies?
- What suggestions can be made to increase usefulness of the book vouchers especially in terms of book purchasing?

THEORETICAL FRAMEWORK

According to Teh (2004), quoted by Gourville and Soman (2002), a consumer may not consider to purchase an item if it is not going to be used at all after purchase. So a purchase will only be made if it interests them, if it benefits them and if it is within their disposable income.

Therefore, it is important to outline what is being offered to consumers not only based on the product, but also based on the trade-offs for the consumer, the efforts made by the market to attract the consumer and how convenient it is for the consumer to shop. Because of the short duration of time, this study will only focus on the market's influences on the consumers also known as the marketing stimuli as it affects the consumers' decision making. The marketing stimuli or marketing mix answers the what, when, where, why, how and how much the consumer buys (Abu Bakar et al., 2007).

The marketing mix factors in this study are based on Philip Kotler's 4Ps which comprise of the product, price, place and promotion (Kotler & Armstrong, 2004). At the same time, this study will also incorporate Alison Baverstock's three additional Ps which are people, period of time and profit (Baverstock, 1993). However, profit is not taken into account since this study is only from the consumers' views and not the publishers'.

Why is only the marketing mix factor used as the main theory? This is so because these are the main factors that compel the students to purchase their products using the voucher. What influences the decision-making of consumers is significant.

In terms of the marketing mix, since 80% of the voucher is allocated for purchasing books, the product in this study refers to textbooks or reading materials that students use

in their tertiary education at the institutions of higher learning as cited by Azizah (1988). Similarly, Teh (2004) reported that books still remain as the main media tool of facilitating classroom teaching process in tertiary education.

Price of the product is another important marketing factor since students believe that if reading materials were cheaper, it can improve the reading habit among students and as many as 53% of students agreed that they are willing to pay a high price for a book that interests them (Mohini et al., 2011).

At the same time, the publishing industry is a competitive world. Promotions, discounts and freebies advertised by book retailers in bookstores and book fairs are another magnet that can attract students to clear their stocks from the shelves. Book lovers who believe in quantity would rather frequent places that offer cheaper price for the same product that is priced higher elsewhere. Promotions that are successful are persuasive to the consumers and they are aware of the minimal loss they encounter when making a purchase. Perhaps it is the lure of getting extra vouchers or freebies when purchasing books that excites them as promoted by MPH Bookstore, Popular, Borders and other leading bookstores.

Since universities have become the perfect breeding ground for book fairs, the place to shop is another marketing factor that consumers look into for their convenience. As cited by Teh (2004) and originally reported by Barnes and Lorimer (1996), the location and presence of bookstore is one of the major determinants of book purchasing especially by students. With busy schedules and datelines, students look into where is the best place to shop and they frequent shopping malls to break away from hectic routines (Reid & Brown, 1996; Zafar, Ghingold & Zainurin, 2006).

At the same time, how useful are products if the people who have the purchasing power are not given importance in the marketing mix factors? The people segment consists of the consumer market and these are usually university students who are interested in the products they purchase. What are their needs and what compel them to purchase the books? It is important to see what motivate them to purchase the books with the voucher (Baverstock, 1993).

Apart from the above, purchasing seasons are also studied. When do students prefer to purchase their books? Obviously, the vouchers have to be used before the expiry date. But since academic books are specialty products, they are bought as and when they are required. In this case, the purchasing season for academic books are when the academic session begins and during the registration courses in the university (Baverstock, 1993).

All the marketing mix factors are interrelated. One cannot place a price without the product and vice versa. Similarly, a product cannot be promoted if the price, place, period of time and people it is marketed or distributed to, is unknown. It is for these reasons that one of the research objectives is on the major considerations that clearly attract students to make their purchases and these are tied in with the marketing mix factors above. The profit factor is not considered for the analysis of this research since what is most appropriate for this study is from the point of view of the consumers and not the retailers.

ALTERNATIVES TO BOOK PURCHASING

Photocopying books and reading materials has become a norm for university students and even libraries in campuses are equipped with photocopying machines. A study conducted

in Universiti Putra Malaysia (UPM), Universiti Sains Malaysia (USM), University Teknologi Malaysia (UTM) and National University of Malaysia (UKM), showed that out of 422 materials that were photocopied, 49.28% were from local publications such as Longman Malaysia, UKM Press and Federal Publications whereas 50.7% were from imported titles such as McGraw-Hill, Macmillan, Prentice-Hall (Hamedi, 2011). The respondents in the same study admitted that they preferred photocopying the books for their studies since they could save 50% of local books and almost 75% on imported books. Moreover, they only needed a required number of pages or chapters from the books and not the entire publication, therefore photocopying was the better alternative. However, if students were to only rely on photocopied material, they will not get the latest academic data and findings and most of their material will be out-dated. Unfortunately, we are living in a fast pace world and getting knowledge in haste (photocopying) seems to be approved even by universities. The fact that photocopying is illegal is ignored, hence is disturbing since books are governed by copyrights law.

A part from photocopying, students are happy to get their academic resources from the library. According to Dilevko and Gottlieb (2002) cited by Festus (2012), about 88.9% of students in their research, frequent their university libraries in search of scholarly books, printed texts and other publications.

CONSUMER BEHAVIOUR OF UNIVERSITY STUDENTS

Consumer behaviour also known as buying behaviour involves the process of final consumers when selecting, buying, using, disposing off a product or a service to fulfil their needs and wants (Abu Bakar et al., 2007).

In this study, consumer behaviour is a study on how University Malaya undergraduates react to purchasing academic books with the 1Malaysia Book Voucher. And a survey done by Book Marketing Limited (BML) on behalf of the Council of Academic and Professional Publishers (CAPP) in Europe in 2003 indicated that in higher learning institutions such as colleges and universities, printed books are still the most notable source of information for students (Teh, 2004). However, a survey conducted by the Total Research for Council of Academics and Professional Publisher in 2002 indicated that first year students purchased 20% more academic books compared to fourth year students (Hahessy, Carr & Forrester, 2002; Teh, 2004).

FOCUS GROUP DISCUSSION

This methodology is a qualitative study that uses the focus group discussions as the main method of obtaining data from the respondents, who are undergraduates from the University of Malaya. This methodology is used bearing in mind the research objectives that are being studied which are within the time frame and resources that are available (Morley, 2007). Although participants in a focus group discussion do not represent the entire population, this methodology is useful as it is important to analyse what they think about the study, how they provide the relevant data and why they perceive an issue as such. When these knowledge are combined together, the total amount of rich data increases (Ahmad, Nor Azan, Noraidah, 2011).

Four separate focus group discussions were held of which five to seven respondents were invited for every session.

For this study, convenience sampling was used, whereby respondents who sat with their peers in libraries were invited to participate in the focus group discussions. A general email was sent through Siswamail which is the University of Malaya's internal mailing list for students. Respondents were selected and grouped as follows:

- Arts- Arts and Social Sciences, Education, Language Faculties, Business and Accounting, Economics and Law Faculties.
- Science- IT, Medicine and Dentistry, Engineering, Science and Built Environment Faculties.

Throughout the focus group discussions, the assistant moderator took down notes while the whole sessions were audio recorded. The moderator was able to observe the respondents as they spoke, took notes of their expressions, body language and their emotions.

At the end of every session, the data were collected and recordings had been transcribed and summed up as reports.

REPORTING AND ANALYSING FOCUS GROUP RESULTS

After the focus group discussions come the analysing of results. Data analysis in qualitative research is about grouping them in sections, examining the evidence and tying it with the initial objectives of the study (Yin, 1984; Krueger and Casey, 2000). Analysis for qualitative study is a continuing process that is systematic, well documented, recorded, clear and verifiable. The data reaped from the focus group discussion has to be sufficient for a trail that will lead to a conclusive study (Krueger and Casey, 2000). Therefore, the first step to analysing the focus group data comes from the sessions itself when the transitional questions result in more in-depth data.

The second step to analysing students' usage of the 1Malaysia book voucher in their academic studies and their book purchasing decisions, is based on the audio-recorded-abridged transcript. This study will take on a condensed version of the audio recordings that eliminate irrelevant conversations and pauses.

The third and most crucial step is analysing the data manually. Although in qualitative data, computer programs such as NVIVO or NUD*IST are available for researchers to decipher the data once the information are keyed in. However, since this study is less complex and since David Morley (2007) argued that with qualitative data, the researcher herself would be able to analyse the data better than a software. It is highly relevant to be able to see the whole raw data before working on it and most importantly, the unsaid facts are more important than the verbal data. A computer is unable to handle these intuitive matters that only a human does best (Morley, 2007).

Thus, using the manual approach, the reports from every focus group is divided using the Microsoft Excel based on the different themes, categories and also based on whether the respondents answered the questions and if they comment on anything important on the topic. Certain patterns need to be noted to see what segments of the answers need to be highlighted during analysis that is relevant for this study. Factors that are looked into include frequency, specificity, emotion and extensiveness (Krueger and Casey, 2000).

Extensiveness is how many people commented about something, for example the bad timing of receiving the vouchers and that was cited as the biggest problem. Reports are then written and include interpretations, conclusions and recommendations which will all be discussed in the subsequent chapters.

USEFULNESS OF THE VOUCHER IN ACADEMIC STUDIES

Most of the participants who took part in the four focus groups mentioned that the book vouchers were useful and that they were mostly used for their studies especially when they were recommended by their lecturers. Only a handful of the participants mentioned that the book vouchers relieved them the burden of purchasing expensive textbooks:

Yes, I think it is useful. Because, some of the reference books or text books, the price is quite high. So the voucher helps to reduce the financial burden for us (A1.1).

Oh yes, I also bought a reference book by McGrawhill on Genetics priced at RM50 (S1.1).

Even when there were no need to purchase new academic books, students used their vouchers to purchase other supplementary publications that interest them and that were relevant to their studies:

Yes, the voucher was certainly useful. I remember buying a science magazine and another *National Geographic* magazine. It helped because these were all extra references for me (S1.2).

Students especially from the science groups were happy to purchase original textbooks compared to photocopied books, despite the price difference in both products. In this aspect, the book vouchers came in handy for them to purchase quality text books that gave them the satisfaction and motivation to study. Therefore, Hamedi (2011), who reported that students prefer photocopied books to original books, do not apply when the book vouchers come into the scenario. Students are motivated to use original textbooks and although photocopied books are cheaper, they place a better value on original books:

For me, I prefer to purchase original books rather than photocopies. Because of the satisfaction of having a new and clean book. If it's a photocopy, there would have been scribbles on them that cannot be removed. That is why I dislike photocopies (S1.2).

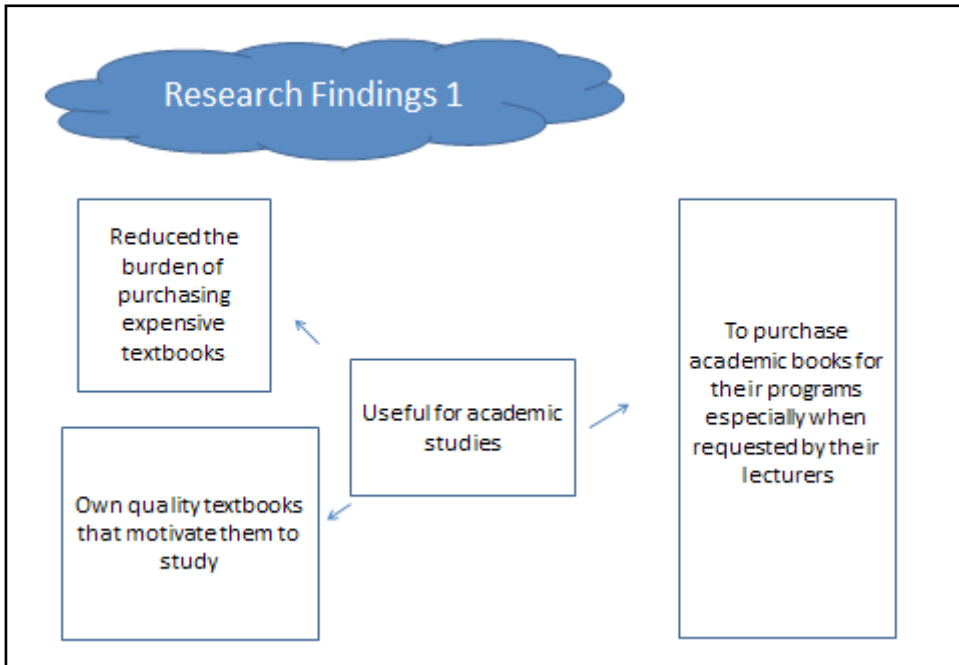


Figure 5.1: Usefulness of the 1Malaysia Book Voucher to Undergraduates of the University of Malaya

MAJOR CONSIDERATIONS THAT INFLUENCED BOOK PURCHASING

Based on the factors that influenced respondents to purchase their books, most of them agreed that product and place were the major considerations they looked for before they made their purchases with their vouchers. Their main goal was to make the best of their vouchers by getting quality products that they could benefit for a long term. Interestingly, participants mentioned that they had to think about the usefulness of a product before purchasing them. This indicates that they value their book vouchers.

If I want to buy books with the voucher, I would buy something that I can use on long term (A1.6).

For those who did not purchase academic books, there were purchasing patterns of the general books that they bought with the voucher. For example, most of the general books were bought based on their favourite authors:

I bought a novel written by Nicholas Sparks, Jodi Picoult and cook books (S1.2).

This proves that Alison Baverstock's marketing mix 'product' play an important role in book purchasing. This has shown that students bought products that are consistent with their needs, academic syllabus or for their personal interests.

As for the next major consideration; place was most sought for since students needed to look for the right bookstore that had their academic books that they needed and most importantly, allowed the usage of the book voucher. This too tied in with Baverstock's and Kotler's marketing mix factors when purchasing books:

I recommend a bookstore from Subang; Big Bookshop. They offer a lot of reference books, they specialise in academic books. But then again, you have to really search for the bookstores that offer this voucher. Some bookstores do not offer the vouchers to buy certain items (A1.4).

Only a handful cited price as a major consideration they looked for before purchasing their items with the book voucher. Many were willing to forego the price factor since they were given the freedom to spend within the budget. However, since the allocation given is only RM250, some tend to budget within the amount to avoid forking out their own money for the expenditures:

I used them to purchase books, but usually books that are not so expensive, example books priced RM50 and below and are compulsory for us to buy (A2.4).

A few participants mentioned that price was not the criteria they looked for since the budget had already been allocated. What's most important is to use it up wisely for their benefits:

For me, if I want to buy (using the voucher), no need to think about the price so much. Most importantly is to use up the amount on the voucher. Example, if I want to purchase two, three things, not enough right? So must take, take, take until finish up RM50 for stationery (A2.1).

As for promotion, although the students were attracted to 'get more voucher, purchase here,' factor, their focus were more on purchasing items not pertaining to academic studies. That is why other marketing mix factors (place and price) did better in this study. Only a handful agreed that promotion helped them to purchase more books, especially when there were discounts:

For me it's the promotion because at the time I wanted to buy at the bookstore, they were having sales. So I bought a lot of things (S1.4).

Look at the promotion. For some places, if you use the voucher up to RM200, you will get an extra voucher for RM10. This is also a form of attraction (S1.6).

Lecturers too played a role (although as a minor consideration) in influencing the students to purchase their academic books. Thus, this comes under Baverstock's Marketing Mix Factor which is people. This is significant as they influence the importance of obtaining certain types of books for their studies.

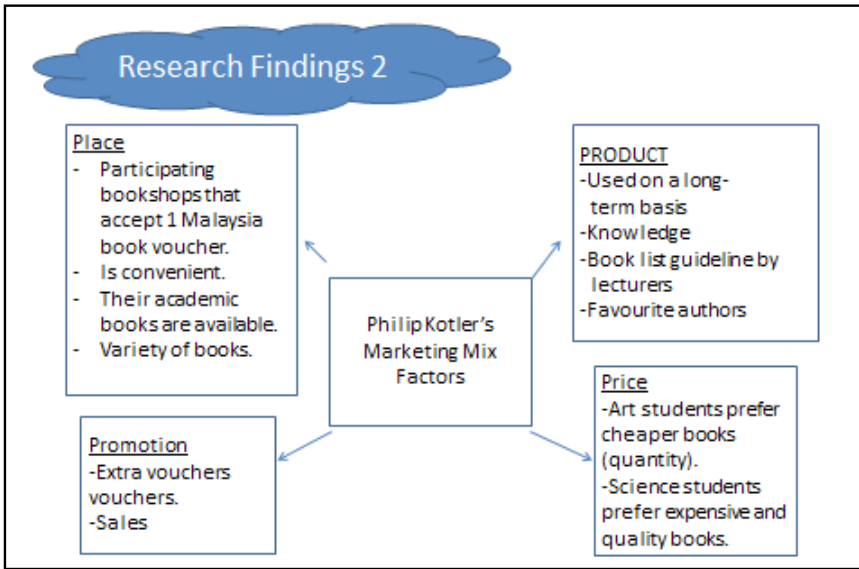


Figure 5.2: Major Considerations (Philip Kotler's Marketing Mix) that Influenced the Undergraduates to Purchase Books with the Voucher

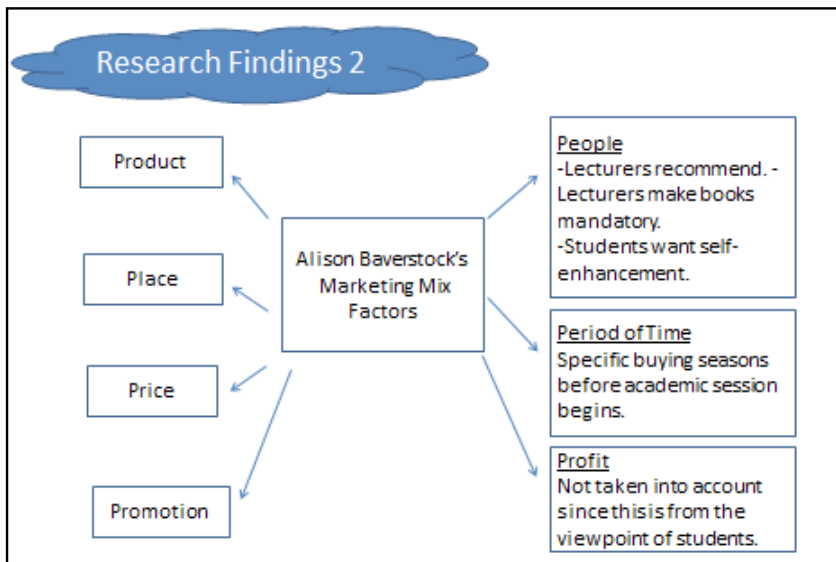


Figure 5.3: Major Considerations (Alison Baverstock's Marketing Mix) that Influenced the Undergraduates to Purchase Books with the Voucher

ISSUES WITH THE 1MALAYSIA BOOK VOUCHER

The issues the students had with the voucher include: late timing of the distribution of the voucher, unable to purchase other academic items with the voucher, unsatisfactory ratio on the voucher, insufficient amount on the voucher, short expiry date on the voucher,

unavailability of latest academic books, illegal trade-in vouchers for cash and substitutions for hard copy academic books

Based on the analysis, the problems lined out by the students can be divided into primary problems that led to secondary problems. Primary problems are the main issues with the vouchers that are often derived by the rules and regulations that have been set for usage. Primary problems cannot be changed by the students. Therefore, these issues affect its usage for academic purposes. Whereas secondary problems are within the control of the students and if they change these elements, the vouchers can be used for the benefit of academic studies.

For example, the primary problems derived from this study include the timing of the distribution of the voucher, its expiry period, unavailable stock of academic books, voucher not useful for purchase of other academic products, the ratio of the voucher and its amount.

Secondary problems include misusing the voucher for other purchases, substitutions of original textbooks by getting photocopied books as well as trading-in vouchers for cash.

Although many of the participants thought that the voucher was useful, there were complaints about it, especially in terms of the timing of the distribution of the voucher. Majority of the participants of the focus group agreed that the vouchers were given at a wrong time; nearly the middle of the second semester instead of the beginning of an academic session. Therefore, this led to secondary problems of students relying on substitutions before obtaining the voucher such as photocopy of textbooks. Ultimately, this tied in with Alison Baverstock's emphasis on the period-of-time marketing mix factor. Since book sales have its own season, so do academic books especially in the tertiary level.

The timing is so not suitable for students because we have to start our studies in September last year. But we only received our vouchers in the second semester. At that time, we had to use our own money (to photocopy) (S2.3).

Ah yes. At the time we received our voucher, most of our books we photocopied before receiving the voucher. Therefore, the time we received the voucher was not right. By right, before people enter the new semester, we should receive the vouchers (S2.1).

And, because the books had been bought earlier before the voucher, the remainder of the voucher was used up to purchase unnecessary things for the sake of finishing it off:

When we have the voucher we buy electronic things and sometimes not useful things just to finish up the voucher. (A1.7).

At the same time, students had to use their own money to purchase other academic tools because the voucher is given only once a year in the middle of an academic session and not at the beginning of the session.

The ecology students need to purchase their own dissecting set and they are all RM50 and above. Like for my friend, she had to use her own money to buy them because those who came in the 1st semester, they did not get their book vouchers.

These vouchers were only given in the 2nd semester. So they had to use their own money to purchase their dissecting sets. (S1.1).

The other problem that the participants faced was the unsatisfactory ratio set on the book voucher; 80% books, 20% stationery. Many thought that the 20% for stationery was too much as a bigger percentage should be for the purchase of books. Then again, Baverstock's product as an important purchasing factor is crucial, especially when students are given a budget for it. At the same time, this ratio problem resulted in secondary problems of purchasing useless items just to finish off the voucher:

Even though we got the voucher, we ended up buying useless things. Like the pen for instance. We already have pens but we have to purchase 2 or 3 to finish up the voucher. Buying extra is such a waste (S1.4).

Naturally, some said that the amount on the voucher was not enough to purchase textbooks that cost more than RM100:

Books are costly, could only buy 2 academic books. But I had to add RM100 from my pocket to purchase reference books. Science reference books are expensive especially biology (S1.3).

Only a handful admitted that the expiry date was too short, given that the voucher was distributed so late. That led to secondary problems of purchasing non-academic items:

I have to admit, that mostly I bought useless things because of the limited time (S1.5).

The book voucher has an expiry date right? So it feels that the time frame to buy is limited (A2.3).

There were also narratives, that students from other faculties were not allowed to purchase other academic tools with these book vouchers and they were not accepted by the specialty shops. The results? They ended up trading-in their vouchers for cash illegally, so that they could purchase their tools.

My neighbour was from built environment faculty. So I asked her if the voucher was useful? She said, not useful at all. Because they cannot use it to buy their tools. They have to buy at specific shops where they buy all their painting tools. Because this is a book voucher, those shops do not accept it. So wasted for themlah. So in the end, they sell their vouchers to somebody else and they use the money to buy their tools (S2.5).

Another dilemma that students faced with the vouchers, were the fact that they had other substitutions to purchasing textbooks. They had other options such as photocopying, borrowing from the library, downloading online and so on. Thus, the vouchers were not fully used to purchase academic books:

When I used it for the 1st semester, 100% rely on lecturer’s notes. So, the voucher was not very useful for purchasing academic books. My lecturer said that this voucher is normal only. Because, most books are there in the library. So, why should we buy more books? (A2.5).

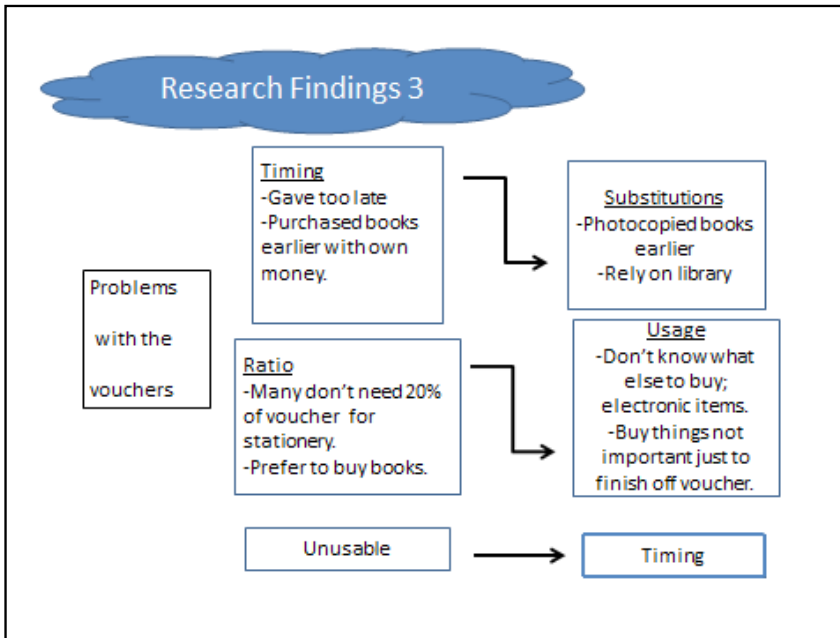


Figure 5.4: Problems that hindered the undergraduates from utilising the vouchers for their academic studies

SUGGESTIONS TO INCREASE USEFULNESS OF THE 1MALAYSIA BOOK VOUCHER

To increase the usefulness of the 1Malaysia book voucher, the participants of the focus group discussion suggested the following changes on the voucher: the expiry date, the ratio, the distribution timing, the amount on the voucher or to go paperless and give other forms of money aid.

The most popular suggestion in improving the usage of the voucher is to either lengthen the expiry date or remove it altogether. This will give students more time to purchase their academic books even up to the following semester when new books are required for their studies. The participants agreed that with the expiry date, students end up rushing to purchase whatever is available to finish it up:

Maybe they should change the due date to 1 year until the next voucher comes (A2.3).

Lengthen the time. There should be no expiry date just like the Jusco voucher (A1.5).

Apart from that, ratio change was another suggestion that would make it easier for students to purchase academic books with the voucher:

The quota on the voucher should be 50%, 50%, or no conditions. It will be easier because we need to buy more stationery, more books or use to bind our assignments and projects (A2.5).

A few suggested that the timing should be more appropriate when giving out the voucher as there are seasons when students need to purchase new books:

I think if these book vouchers were given in the early sessions, it would be beneficial. Because our academic calendar is based on sessions not by the year (A2.4).

And there were a handful who suggested that the amount of the voucher be increased so that it is more valuable to purchase more academic books:

Why not increase to RM300? Because books are expensive (A1.4).

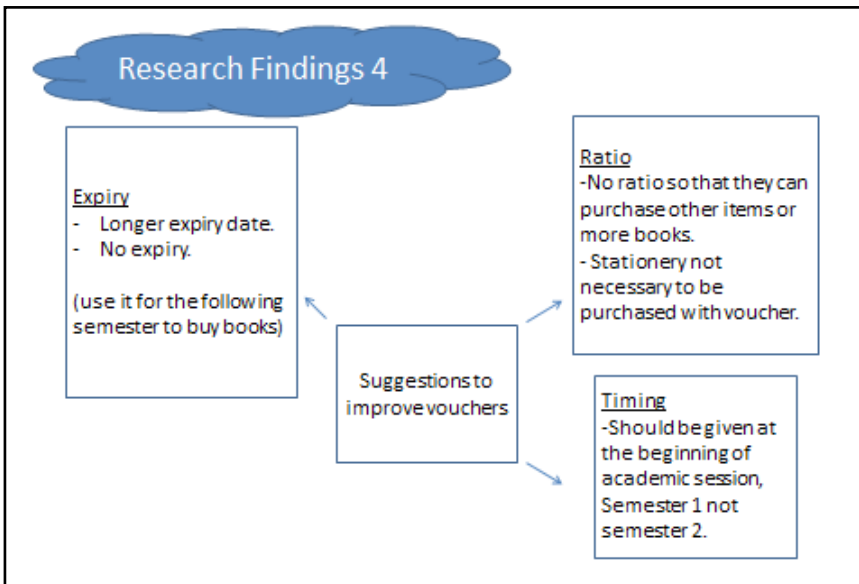


Figure 5.5: Suggestions to Increase Usefulness of the Vouchers for Book Purchasing

CONCLUSION

The findings from the qualitative study does tally with the problem statements which questions whether the book vouchers truly benefit students academically especially in terms of spending on expensive text books. Also, the problem statements focused on the issues that students faced with the vouchers and the improvements that need to be made as solutions to the problems.

Likewise, the research questions too have been answered based on the data from the focus group discussions. Yes, the vouchers benefitted the students and they could own quality textbooks especially when requested by their lecturers. Students were unhappy with the late

distribution of the vouchers that had short expiry dates and that led them to purchase non-academic items. The solution is to either remove the expiry date or the ratio so that students have ample time to purchase their academic items.

In conclusion, the 1Malaysia book voucher was well received and used wisely for academic purposes. Product and place of purchase were what students looked for when utilising the voucher. Since academic books are best purchased at the beginning of every semester, period of time was another important factor for the students. Thus, when the voucher was distributed late, it became a common problem among the respondents in the focus groups. Suggestions include changing the expiry date or the ratio on the voucher so that students can utilise them for a longer time for their academic studies.

REFERENCES

- Abu Bakar Abdul Hamid, Ahmad Sharifuddin Shamsuddin, Fauziah Sh Ahmad, Mohaiminah Hj. Khayon, Noor Hazarina Hashim, Rohaizat Baharun (2007). *Principles of marketing. A global perspective*. Shah Alam: McGrawHill.
- Ahmad Al Thunibat, Nor Azan Mat Zin. (2011). *Identifying user requirements of mobile government services in Malaysia using focus group method*. *Journal of e-government studies and best practices*. Available at: <http://www.ibimapublishing.com/journal/JEGSBP/jegsbp.html>. Retrieved on 1 December, 2013.
- Azizah Hamzah. (1988). *Scholarly publishing in Malaysia*. Master's Thesis. University of Stirling
- Barnes, Roger and Lorimer, Rowland. (1996). *New SFU study provides insights into book-buying behaviour*. Available at: <http://www.sfu.ca/archive-sfnews/sfnews/1996/July4/books.html>. Retrieved 1 December, 2013.
- Baverstock, Alison. (1993). *Are books different?: Marketing in the book trade*. London: Kogan Page.
- Dilevko J. and Gottlieb, L. (2002). Print sources in an electronic age: A vital part of research process for undergraduate students. *The Journal of Academic Librarianship*. 28 (6), pp.381-392.
- Festus, Odelola Olusegun. (2012). *The use of prints and electronics academic resources among University Malaya undergraduates*. Master's Dissertation. University of Malaya.
- Gourville, John, Soman, Dilip. (2002). Pricing and the psychology of consumption. *Harvard Business Review*. Sep2002, 80 (90), p90-96. Available at <http://ezproxy.um.edu.my:2760/ehost/detail?vid=4&sid=8aa11980-acc5-4c4b-815c3cf4a8a6de48%40sessionmgr198&hid=102&bdata=JnNpdGU9ZWWhvc3QtG12ZQ%3d%3d>. Retrieved 4 December, 2013.
- Hahessy, J., Carr, F. & Forrester, N. (2002). Higher education impact assessment survey, *Council of Academics and Professional Publishers*.
- Hamedi M. Adnan. (2011). Xerox makes everybody a publisher: Problems of book photocopying and ways to control it in Malaysia. *Springer Science + Business Media, LLC* 2011, 27, p (268-276). Available at <http://ezproxy.um.edu.my:2433/article/10.1007/s12109-011-9233-4>. Retrieved 4 December, 2013.
- Kotler, Philip and Armstrong, Gary. (2004). *Principles of marketing* (10thed). New Jersey: Pearson Prentice Hall.

- Krueger, Richard A. and Casey, Mary Anne. (2000). *Focus groups: A practical guide for applied research* (3rded). California: Sage Publications, Inc.
- Majlis Industri Buku mengadu BB1M disalahgunakan. 2013, February,13. Free Malaysia Today. Retrieved from <http://www.freemalaysiatoday.com/category/nation/2013/02/28/majlis-industri-buku-mengadu-bb1m-disalahgunakan/>. Retrieved 10 December, 2013.
- Majlis Industri Buku gesa henti salah guna BB1M. 2013, February,13. Sinar Harian. Retrieved from <http://www.sinarharian.com.my/nasional/majlis-industri-buku-gesa-henti-salah-guna-bb1m-1.135458>. Retrieved 1 October, 2013.
- Malaysian Book Publishers Association. 2012. 44th Annual General Meeting Report. Available at www.mabopa.com.my/upload/attc/MABOPA-report.pdf. Retrieved 1 October, 2013.
- Mohini, Roshanida, Lee, Haslenda, Hasmeriya, Noor, Siti Nazrah, Siti Marsilawati, Nur (2010). Reading behaviours of students in Kolej Datin Seri Endon (KDSE): *The International Journal of Educational Management*. 26 (40), pp. 381-390, available at: www.emeraldinsight.com/0951-354X.htm. Retrieved 10 December, 2013.
- Morley, David. (2007). *Media, modernity and technology. The geography of the new*. New York: Routledge.
- Nor Shahriza Abdul Karim, (2006). Reading habits and attitude in the digital age: Analysis of gender and academic programme differences. Faculty of ICT, International Islamic University Malaysia. Available at <http://www.emeraldinsight.com/journals.htm?articleid=1610815&show=abstract> Retrieved 10 December, 2013.
- O'Donoghue, T., Punch K. (2003). *Qualitative educational research in action: Doing and reflecting*. New York: RoutledgeFalmer.
- Reid, R. and Brown, S. (1996). I hate shopping! An introspective perspective. *International Journal of Retail and Distribution Management*, 24(4), pp 4-16.
- Teh, Teik Lee. (2004). Factors influencing students' book buying behaviour in Malaysia higher learning institutions. Masters Dissertation. University Sains Malaysia.
- Yin, R.K. (1984). *Case study research*. Beverly Hills, CA: Sage.
- Zafar U. Ahmed, Ghingold, Morry, Zainurin Dahari. (2006). Malaysian shopping mall behaviour: An exploratory study. *Asia Pacific Journal of Marketing and Logistics*, 19(4), pp. 331-348. Available at: www.emeraldinsight.com/1355-5855.htm. Retrieved 10 December, 2013.

