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RESEARCH ARTICLE

How libraries can enhance customer service by implementing a customer value mindset

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Libraries have a rich tradition of solid customer service. Good service today, however, is often not good enough. Libraries can improve the customer experience by understanding what it means to truly deliver outstanding value. Implementing customer-centric marketing and the latest technology can increase the perceived value of library usage before, during, and after service delivery. The evolving library experience framework explains how library administrators can prepare for current challenges and future changes to enhance customer service. A customer value-based services perspective will help libraries strengthen overall user experiences to keep a larger "share of customer" from formidable information rivals such as search engines, online databases, news sources, video sharing sites, internet service providers, and content creators.

KEYWORDS

customer value, knowledge organizations, libraries, marketing strategies, service experience

If you do build a great experience, customers tell each other about that

Jeff Bezos-founder/CEO, Amazon

1 | INTRODUCTION

Libraries are part of the information sector and are considered knowledge organizations. To succeed in the changing marketplace, they must master five key activities: (a) manage information and insights; (b) adapt to new desires of customers; (c) employ skilled and highly educated staff; (d) leverage technology, new media, and social networking: and (e) outthink their direct and indirect competitors.

Creative climate and market orientation are key factors leading to better performance in organizations (Im & Workman, 2004; Jaworski & Kohli, 1993; Narver & Slater, 1990). An important aspect of marketingoriented practices in libraries today is the development of internal marketing to communicate mission and organizational values to employees (internal customers); this buy-in process is a vital part of the new customer-focused paradigm. Although research shows that librarians are gaining a more positive attitude towards the development of a marketing culture and the utilization of marketing activities, it varies by setting (public librarians are more promarketing than academic librarians), position (more enthusiasm by administrators than reference and technical services librarians), years of experience (more favorable), and exposure to marketing training (Parker, Kaufman-Scarborough, & Parker, 2007).

This paper argues that libraries must adapt to change via implementing a customer value strategy. As a consumer-focused service provider, libraries must go beyond customer service to deliver enhanced customer experiences and create superior customer value whether it is face-to-face, online, or via a hybrid model. The keywords are disruption and differentiation. Perhaps you remember Blockbuster Video, Borders bookstore, and Tower Records? These market leaders failed to adapt to the internet and changing marketplace and were supplanted by Netflix, Amazon, and Apple, respectively. Are brickand-mortar library systems doomed to suffer a similar fate? Will they be replaced by digital information alternatives?

All libraries (public, private, educational, and corporate) must justify their value to society, communities, and their patrons. The general assumption is that more use of materials (print, digital, other) is of greater value than less use. An opportunity exists for libraries to assess the economic value of internet-based services and resources that assist in education, technological literacy, job-seeking, and social service applications (Jaeger, Bertot, Kodoma, & DeCoster, 2011). A recent three-day retreat of 60 academic library executives and managers brainstormed key trends impacting modern libraries. Consensus was reached that four key areas are priorities to better serve student users. These are (a) putting students at the center through training, signage, and facility redesign, (b) making learning

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visible through displays or artwork and electronic equipment, (c) modeling a learning community by developing partnerships with stakeholders, reengineering work spaces, and assessing user needs, and (d) responding to the academic mission of sponsoring universities (Cain 2015)

Consider these two South Florida examples. Miami residents love their libraries, but only 44% of the public are willing to pay more in taxes to fund them. Ninety-five percent of users and 72% of nonusers said libraries add to their quality of life. Only 17% of respondents feel that libraries are "outmoded, obsolete, and no longer necessary". A task force appointed by the mayor suggested ideas to consider as part of a long-term survival plan. These included promoting libraries as event or collaborative work spaces, offering printing and passport services, opening library coffee shops, and selling books (Mazzei, 2014). The Alvin Sherman Library at Nova Southeastern University (Fort Lauderdale) is a joint-use facility serving the residents of Broward County as well as NSU students, faculty and staff, and is open 100 h per week while classes are in session. The five-story facility is fully wireless, has cozy reading niches, 22 study rooms, 1,000 user seats, and a cafe. The "Ask a Librarian" reference service is available in person, by phone, and e-mail or chat to all patrons (Nova Southeastern University Alvin Sherman Library, 2015).

According to Breeding (2014), libraries can prosper via a twopronged approach: (a) having an energetic, creative, and passionate staff, and (b) embracing new technologies. As to the latter point, the author says that libraries have been slow to adapt web services to mobile users or devices. Interesting, emerging technologies include 3D printing, near field communication, and linked databases. Other technology initiatives gaining traction in libraries nationwide include digital collections, social media apps, cloud-based storage, photo streams, computer recording or voice recognition, community of users, and segmentation by personas (Kroski, 2013).

In a United Kingdom study of staff respondents, four themes emerged that impacted the library service experience: service reputation and status, service delivery and standards, staff morale, and the customer experience (Brody-Preston & Lobo, 2011). A recent Australian conference on "Managing and Improving Library Value" focused on the movement to stay "in touch". This included examples of transformations such as libraries transitioning from books to electronic collections, going from teaching support to supporting online learning, and from gathering industry data to business plan research (Missingham, 2012). The American Library Association recognizes libraries for cutting edge in-house innovation (i.e., solutions not purchased "off-the-shelf"). Recent North American winners include

- 1. Edmonton, Alberta, Canada's Public Library-their "Join Me" initiative allowed nearly 4,000 users to access over 10 million items from about 350 libraries for free
- 2. North Carolina State University Libraries—the My #HuntLibrary project used a photo contest or application or archive app to engage with more than 18,000 visitors
- 3. Pennsylvania State University Library—the One Button Studio is an easy-to-use video production tool utilized by students and professors to create compelling educational content

4. Somerset County, New Jersey Library System—developed a digital signboard system to share new and revised communications with viewers saving thousands of dollars annually in the process (American Library Association, 2014).

Other innovative global marketing strategies for creating superior value for library users are shown in Figure 1.

2 | THE CUSTOMER VALUE PARADIGM-AN OVERVIEW OF THE LITERATURE

Customer value can be summarized by one important guestion that all organizations must ask themselves: "What do customers really want and how do we meet their demands"? Or in other words. "What do customers really value?" These might seem like very simple questions, especially if they are supplied with answers such as, "Customers want value!" or "Customers want quality products and services!" Although these may be correct responses, customers want more than just value; they want businesses to overwhelm and surprise them by going above and beyond the ordinary to meet their needs and wants.

2.1 The customer value mandate

In today's highly competitive market environment where companies have equal or great opportunities to access the same resources including talents, technology, and information, the question, "Why superior customer value?" seems rhetorical. If not superior customer value, then what else do companies have to offer consumers? Organizations must seek more than ever before to distinguish themselves and the ability to do so using technology, and widely and generally available means and resources are no longer a viable strategy for differentiation or distinction. Therefore, they must turn to customer value, which makes all the difference between companies offering similar products and services. Superior customer value serves as the most unique strategic option for differentiation in an environment where most organizations are market followers rather than market leaders. Service providers that deliver above and beyond customers' expectations (by overwhelming and surprising customers) stay way ahead of their competitors and have the best market performance.

In an economy built predominantly on a growing service sector, projected to account for almost 96% of U.S. job growth between 2008 and 2018 (Weinstein, 2012), it becomes obvious that designing and delivering superior customer value is more than a strategy; it is a necessity. And those companies that have not yet recognized this, regardless of their line of business or industry, will certainly fail. The recession, which began in or around 2007, led to massive business failure in many industry sectors and industries, and no doubt brought to light the importance of customer value to those businesses surviving. Many organizations gained valuable experiences by observing how consumer-purchasing decisions altered by economic and financial factors shape business performance and success, but most of all recognized that creating, designing, and delivering customer value is an effective strategy that can lead to significant retention despite these environmental pressures. Organizations offering subpar

Application A:

The British Library (BL), which is the national library of the UK with a collection of over 150 million items, has adopted a more market-oriented approach in order to clarify and communicate its value proposition to its identified targets (Wannaby & Finney, 2005). In order to achieve this, the BL identified five different market sectors (researchers, education or schools, business users, the general public, and UK library network – public and higher education libraries) and appointed a "Head of Marketing" for each of these sectors, and these heads of marketing report to the BL's "Director of Strategic Marketing and Communications". A specific strategy was developed for each sector after target research and the "brand consultancy Interbrand was commissioned for researching internal and external stakeholders' perceptions of BL. From this analysis, the BL has been able to operationalize Kotler's and Lansing and Michaels' three-stage value creation and value delivery approach: choosing the value, providing the value, and communicating the value (Warnaby & Finney, 2005; Kotler, 2003; Lansing and Michaels, 1988).

Application B:

The Boise (Idaho) public library has developed a strategic plan focused on customer value. According to their customer value statement, "library customers value current and accurate information, new materials in relevant formats, engaging programming and a friendly welcoming environment – all delivered quickly at a responsible cost." (Boise Public Library: Strategic Plan Fiscal Year 2012 – 2014, 2011).

Application C:

While libraries are places of possibility or portals to travel (outer space, time, identity, etc.), indirect competitors include broadcast media, film, new media, eBooks, and iPods. The Dunbar Public Library (Vancouver, B.C., Canada) competed via its bricks and mortar presence, somethings a Kindle could not match. It invited children/families to bring a stuffed animal toy to have an overnight experience with lots of photo memories. In essence, this library makes a virtue of its anti-rituality (McCracken, 2012).

Application D:

The Singapore National Library quadrupled its visitorship, tripled its collection, and doubled its membership and physical space from 1995 to 2000 by embracing a customer value strategy. Librarians were hired by having customer orientation values, being team players, and the ability to be proactive service providers. As part of the customer-centric philosophy, a "voice of the customer" metric (the complaints versus compliments ratio) was introduced. A more advanced self-service program was also implemented to positively transform the user experience (Hallowell, et al., 2006).

FIGURE 1 Creating value for customers—innovative practices from European, North American, and Asian libraries (Research support for applications B, C, and D provided by Alexander Schuster)

or fair value will likely fail as smart consumers will choose competitors offering superior value.

Customer value has become an imperative for business leaders and managers as companies lose other core and distinctive competencies in the rapidly changing and highly competitive global economy. Customer value creation is no longer an activity or process relegated to marketing and sales departments and specialists; it is an organizational-wide philosophy like total quality management that requires each member of the organization to play an active role in adding value to the customer experience. The organization must essentially take a marketing orientation approach backed by a value-driven management philosophy and attitude (Pohlman & Gardiner, 2000) in focusing strategically on the customer from the planning stage of business right to the delivery and postpurchase and postconsumption activities of customers.

There is no business that survives without creating excellent value for customers because that is what businesses exist to do; they are driven and shaped by customer demands, needs and wants, and the degree to which they are able to meet these needs and wants through value creation. The idea is that customer value is not something that can be created within a day; it must be ingrained in the organizational culture similar to Amazon, Fedex, Southwest Airlines, and Zappos. This is a strategic creation resulting from a powerful combination of service, quality, image, and pricing for products and services that consumers are willing to pay to meet their existing and emerging needs and wants. Similar to Ritz-Carlton and Nordstroms, each member of the organizational team must understand their critical role and become a

value-adding knowledge worker with a passion for customer service and satisfaction. Research has found that creative climate, market orientation, learning orientation, entrepreneurship, and organizational flexibility are all highly correlated with organizational performance in the nonprofit sector (Barrett, Balloun, & Weinstein, 2005; Yström, Aspenberg, & Kumlin, 2015). Libraries and other knowledge providers (universities, consulting firms, publishers, etc.) can embrace these business concepts or practices to attain a competitive advantage in a crowded information services market space.

2.2 | Competing on value via the service quality image price approach

Customer value refers to the ability of companies to create and add value to the goods and services, especially to the services they offer to customers, or the service aspects of their business (Johnson & Weinstein, 2004). Essentially, customer value entails extraordinary delivery on four SQIP value components, which are known as the "essence of customer value" (Weinstein, 2012, p. 6).

- 1. Service: the intangible value offered to customers.
- 2. Quality: customers' perception of how well an organization's products and services meet expectations.
- 3. Image: customer's perception of the organization or business they interact with.
- 4. Price: the amount that customers are willing to pay for goods or services.

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Each of these components contributes to customers' perception of value or definition of value and affects their levels of dissatisfaction or satisfaction with a product, service, or business. Thus, in order to design and deliver superior customer value, each of these components F2 must be treated with equal attention and importance. As Figure 2 shows, service, quality, image, and price are what constitute customer value in terms of conferred benefits; meeting customers' needs, wants, and expectations; customer satisfaction and loyalty; and ultimately, organizational performance and survival. Essentially, everything that a company does ultimately impacts customer value, and this translates into the bottom line.

Weinstein (2012) explains that customer value is best defined from customers' perspectives as trade-offs between benefits received from offers versus the sacrifices including money, stress, and time to obtain products and services or these offers. Thus, in order to become market leaders rather than followers, organizations need to meet or preferably exceed consumer expectations on all four elements of the SOIP model: in turn, this yields a superior value proposition.

Delivering high-quality service is closely related to profits, cost savings, and market share (Ham, Johnson, Weinstein, & Johnson, 2003). Service quality is an essential strategy for organizational success in today's economy (Parasuraman, Zeithaml, & Berry, 1985a, 1985b; Reicheld & Sasser, 1990; Zeithaml, Parasuraman, & Berry, 1990; McFarlane, Britt, Weinstein, & Johnson, 2007; McFarlane & Britt, 2007). Weinstein (2012) explains that the service factor must reign supreme in value-creating organizations because more than two-thirds of customer defections are due to service deficiencies. Yet, this is highly controllable within organizations via proper customer service training.

Product quality and innovation have become especially important to producers and consumers in the 21st century where competition and the need for change have forced both parties to search for new means and ways to create value and to satisfy needs and wants using limited resources. This entails using available and emerging technology and new methods and ideas to satisfy an increasingly sophisticated and smarter customer-base and survive in both the marketplace and market space characterizing the global economy.

Consumers are very class conscious in our materialistic society where influential others shape our attitudes toward various brands and our purchasing choices and decisions (Solomon, 2004). Therefore, organizational image matters, as well as the type of image-impact that consumption of a particular good or service will have on customers. Value is created when a product or service represents high-quality in the eyes of consumers and their peers and onlookers. Customers



FIGURE 2 The service quality image price approach to customer value

perceive value based on how they feel about a company and its products and how other consumers feel about the same.

In the context of library services, price is generally thought of as a minor factor. It must be considered, nonetheless, as costs may be expressed in travel expenses (gas, tolls, parking), time expended to visit, and other "hassle" factors (convenience, getting dressed, etc.). Therefore, the value equation must demonstrate that the benefits of using library's services exceed its various costs (price).

Strategic implications for library and nonprofit organization marketers

Libraries can shape the future as to accessing, providing, and disseminating information and knowledge in a globally competitive service-led economy. Libraries have always been integral to the communities they serve (Department for Culture, Media, & Sports-UK.gov, 2016a). As public sector and not-for-profit organizations, libraries are extensively distributed across the globe. The emergence, however, of powerful competitors including search engines; technology-information and data storage or retrieval companies; and social media sites loaded with content, information portals, and webpages, have steered millions of former and potential users away from libraries. Some libraries in the United States, especially those in rural and underfunded cities, have had to shut down or have become almost desolate except for the occasional few visitors because they have not kept up with the pace of change on both a marketing and technology basis. Legislative and competitive pressures have forced public sector organizations such as libraries to reconsider marketing and customer relationship management (Chapman & Cowdell, 1998), and libraries are now making patron (client-customer) relationship a priority in driving their performance and success (Jobber, 2004).

A market segmentation framework can assist libraries to better understand their service area, target markets, and underserved segments. The Topeka and Shawnee County Public Library (Kansas) found that six market segments accounted for 53% of their potential market for checkout materials. Via a market research perspective, they were able to correct several misguided decisions impacting their customers based on faulty assumptions (CIVIC Technologies, 2009).

Libraries are institutions that focus on creating unique products such as knowledge, information, and ideas. These intangibles are highly valued by organizations and customers (Kotler & Keller, 2016). The bricks-and-mortar personal experience cannot be replicated by a Google search, Yahoo Answers, or watching a YouTube video. It is incumbent for library managers to build an interesting and enjoyable venue to attract users for their information needs.

To create superior value and excel in the marketplace, libraries and nonprofit organizations must consistently offer top-notch service, excellent quality, a great image, and function efficiently. Although the focus of this article is on libraries, other NPOs and public sector Q5 108 organizations such as art galleries, museums, parks, educational institutions, and theatres can benefit from understanding the customer value mandate and relationship marketing practices to increase user satisfaction and build loyalty.

Hutton (2001) has argued that marketing may be incompatible with the fundamental purpose of public organizations. However, the

controversy over whether or not nonprofit organizations like libraries should engage in marketing is quickly settled as they are seriously impacted by competing digital information providers. Libraries in the United Kingdom, USA, and across the globe have had to close their doors because of escalating costs, poor management, decreased customer or community usage, perceived inferior value, and simply because they have not been providing the level of service that leads to customer retention. This can clearly change with the utilization of effective customer value marketing strategies designed to involve patrons as co-creators of value.

2.4 | Building a customer value mindset

Library administrators and information service directors must realize that their core business, like all others, has changed dramatically in the past few years. As part of the emerging disruptive business climate, Murray (2015) explains that all companies are now technology companies; competition can come from anywhere, much of it from outside of one's industry, and the greatest challenge organizations face is not from new technology but rather creating the right business culture (having the very best people).

Astute library or information leaders can prepare for these new challenges by being proactive in their marketing orientation. Jarvis (2009) says organizations can emulate Google and find ways to add value for users. This means of being useful, fast, simple, engaging, innovative, universal, profitable, beautiful, trustworthy, and personable. If it works for them, why not adapt such a strategy for your organization?

From a service perspective, innovative thinking is exemplified through understanding and responding to the evolution of the library experience. This customer service transformation is explained in F3 Figure 3. As of now, relatively few libraries have mastered a customer value-based philosophy as advocated in this article.

Lessons learned—A five-point roadmap for marketing success for library executives

- 1. Understand and practice the marketing concept of perceived value
 - Realize that consumers not organizations set the value agenda (what matters to them is what matters)
 - Customers evaluate service experiences relative to competing offerings—they may be highly satisfied, somewhat satisfied, or not satisfied (be sure it is the first one)
 - Individual transactions or service experiences impact future visits or usage and ongoing relationships with organizations

- 2. Superior customer value means to do more than what is expected
 - Satisfy customer requirements at the lowest cost (understand benefit or cost trade-offs)
 - Know your relative worth or importance based on customer needs and wants
 - Design a strong value proposition combining the best of service, quality, image, and price
- 3. Relationship marketing is valuing your customers
 - Strive to create service experiences to exceed customer expectations (at least occasionally)—be like Apple and amaze, astound, delight, and wow 'em
 - Because customer value is a strategic driver (a marketing controllable), use value delivery mastery as a differentiating strategy to attract and retain consumers
 - Consistent and outstanding delivery (people as well as technology) leads to continued market success and lifetime patrons
- 4. Build a value-creating organization
 - Excel in purpose (customer focus) and process (service operations)
 - Solve customer problems
 - Make all business decisions based on what is best for the user
 - Be a value-creating and service-focused organization
 - Stress long-term customer relationships
- 5. Evaluate and improve the marketing strategy
 - Benchmark best practices from within and outside of your industry
 - Continuously learn and adapt to fine-tune the customer value strategy
 - Set appropriate customer service metrics, collect or analyze data, and act upon the marketing intelligence

3 | RESEARCH AGENDA

3.1 | Limitations

This conceptual work identified and recommended ways in which libraries can enhance customer service by implementing and

Service Issue	Then	Now
Customer Role	Recipient of Value	Co-Creator of Value
Customer View	Awareness	Commitment
Customer Need	General Solution	Personal Experience
Product	Collections/Resources	Knowledge Services
Service Emphasis	Organization Information	Service Provider Insights
Service Encounter	Customer Service	Customer Value

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maintaining a customer value mindset. Although our research explored best practices and trends, it was based primarily on North American and European libraries; an increased global perspective should consider Asian and Latin American libraries, knowledge-disseminating enterprises, and nonprofit organizations. Specifically, progressive library administrators can benefit from empirical evidence gained from key components of customer value-e.g., market orientation, service, quality, image, satisfaction, loyalty, and customer retention-to become value-creating organizations and the preferred choice for personal and/or business information by users. To fully embrace, customer value thinking requires the adoption of a market-oriented business culture. In addition, the organization should emphasize the idea of co-creating value with customers. These areas—customer value measures, business culture, and co-creation of value—are important research priorities to be addressed in future studies.

3.2 | Areas for future research

There are numerous opportunities for research and practice in the customer service arena for libraries, nonprofit, and service-oriented organizations. Major considerations include adapting to changing demographics and diversity, sophisticated and demanding users, and indirect competition from knowledge providers such as search engines and online research databases that result in declining face-to-face contact with patrons. Libraries face unprecedented challenges as far as their roles are concerned, and research needs to examine the transformation into a digital economy where individuals essentially walk around with their own "Google" libraries via mobile phones, tablets, or laptop technology. Hence, it is critical to understand how to embrace these market realities and target the right patrons with the right information and programs that goes beyond a click or two

In today's multicultural consumer environment, libraries can test and implement cross-cultural projects and programs such as hiring diverse employees, offering promotional materials and websites in multiple languages, multilingual resources (books, journals, videos, etc.), and external outreach in ethnic communities. The delivery of outstanding customer value requires a multifaceted strategy in changing markets whether the organization is pursuing specialized niche markets such as Asian-Americans, British-Indians, military veterans, or senior citizens.

As libraries attune to the customer value mandate of the new economy, it is important that they establish a strong presence in both the marketplace (physical world) and market space (digital world). Careful segmentation analysis can assist in this endeavor to understand customer usage patterns by preferred modalities and service requirements. Focus groups can be employed to investigate the motivations of library patrons or potential patrons—whether they are heavy or light users or nonusers.

In addition, libraries need to revisit how they deliver value, engage with users, and offer a superior customer experience. As a starting point, is a compelling value proposition offered? Customer service models such as SERVQUAL or SERVPERF can be revealing in evaluating customer expectations and perceptions about service encounters. And customer relationship management systems can be built to gather critical data on user behavior (usage frequency, which branches and services are used), attitudes (satisfaction levels and service quality assessments), demographic profiles, and strategic marketing insights.

4 | CONCLUDING REMARKS

Libraries around the world are employing innovative customer activities and programs. Many have increased volunteer participation rates, partnered with related community service organizations, designed new delivery models, and integrated the latest technologies to improve service quality (Department for Culture, Media, & Sports-UK.gov, 2016b). As services represent the core offerings of libraries, customer experience management must be paramount (Miao & Bassham, 2007). Over the last quarter of a century, smart library executives have adopted formal marketing planning-they realize that being marketing-savvy is now an imperative for success (be relevant to stakeholders or fail). This article extends the body of knowledge by reviewing numerous examples of global strategies used by highperforming libraries, offering practical tools on implementing customer value (SQIP and the evolving library experience framework), and providing a five-step process for library administrators to become more market-oriented and benefit from customer value thinking.

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^{*} Q10 http://firstmonday.org/ojs/index.php/fm/article/view/3765/3074

^{**} Q12 https://americanlibrariesmagazine.org/2013/02/27/10-great-technology-initiatives-for-your-library/

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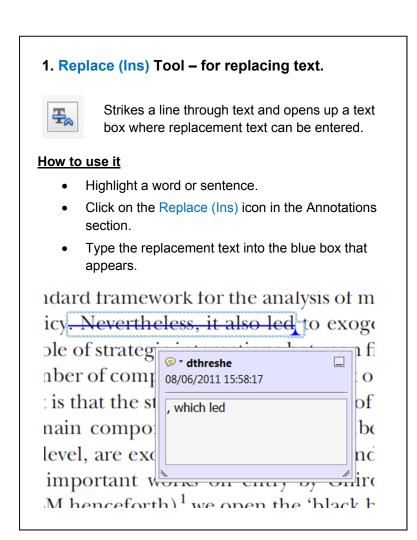
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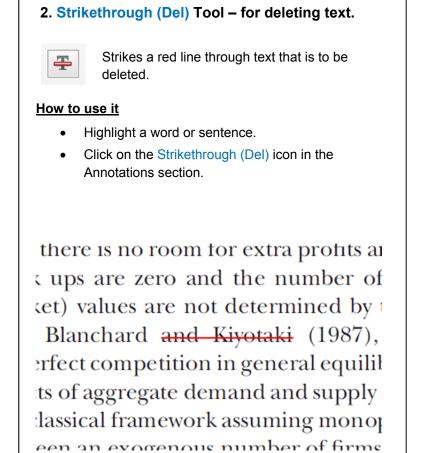
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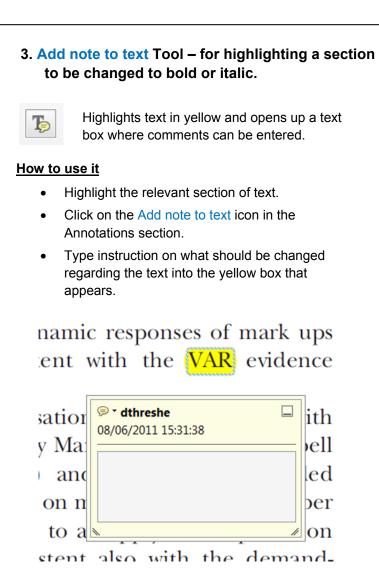


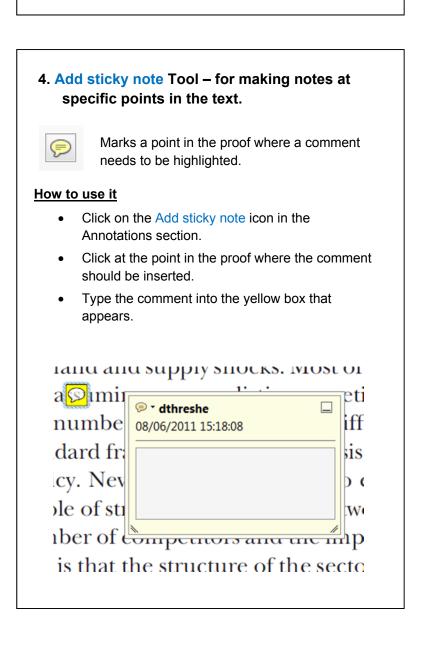
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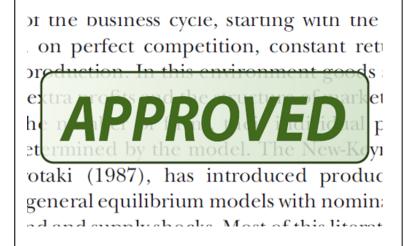
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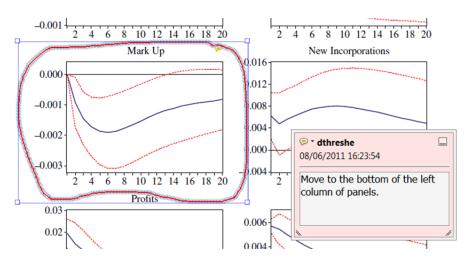


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