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E-books and the Use of E-book Readers in Academic Libraries: Results of an Online Survey

Judith Brook
Mercer University, Atlanta, brook_jd@mercer.edu

Anne A. Salter
Oglethorpe University, asalter@oglethorpe.edu

PEER REVIEWED

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By Judith Brook and Anne A. Salter

Introduction

This article is a snapshot in time of the state of the e-book and e-readers prior to Fall, 2010 and the implementation of the iPad, other tablets, and widely available e-books. The "snapshot" is a nugget of history and, the authors feel, valuable in and of itself. The literature review is devoid of the changes that have occurred since the introduction of the e-book and especially since the introduction of more accessible platforms for e-books and e-book readers. In other words, scholars and researchers looking for the state of the state of e-book technology in segments would appreciate this snapshot effect. It is cohesive for a period of time and it is especially expressive of the attitudes and uses of the technology before the snowballing effect of and the rapid adoption of more e-books with the entry of Wiley and EBSCO into the vendor pool.

Additionally, the authors regret not defining more of the terms used in their survey at the outset. Even clearly communicating their definition of librarian might have limited some confusion. It quickly became evident that e-book and e-reader were also terms that were not regarded equally by all the respondents. Perhaps such ambiguity is significant and worthy of additional study.

Literature Review

There exists an excess of surveys on e-books in academic libraries. In 2010, surveys on e-book readers were less prevalent. A review of the literature reveals that e-books are used more than print versions when users are given a choice and good reading equipment (Pearson, 2012; Littmann & Connaway 2004; Summerfield, Mandel & Kantor, 2001). They enhance collection use through 24/7 accessibility (Connaway, 2003). Although at the time of this initial survey, some preference still existed for print, this has since changed (Pearson, 2012 & Walton, 2007). Drawbacks to use were due to misconceptions of how e-books could be utilized (McGinnis & Meloy, 2007), to challenges related to on-screen presentations (Dearnley & McKnight, 2001), and the inability to gather reliable use statistics (Cox 2008). Students were the primary users, especially in the area of reference (Anuradha & Usha, 2006) with increase in usage directly related to e-book MARC records in online catalogs (Dillon, 2001). Initially libraries and librarians were uncertain that the market for e-books would be viable and sustainable (Snowhill, 2001).

E-book readers were less well utilized. The challenges of most concern were "portability, accessibility, and navigability" (Dearnley & McKnight, 2001). One author even declared 2010 to be the "only year of the e-reader," saying that the readers did not have enough uses to make them viable when notebooks or laptops were more able to multitask. The same author predicted that the flexibility of new tablets and slates would quickly render e-readers obsolete (Eaton, 2010). Walt Crawford also complained about the little difference in e-books and e-readers and said that e-books would not become widely read until they could do things that a print book could not (Crawford,

2006). One issue of accessibility was challenged in 2009. When the National Federation of the Blind and the American Council of the Blind sued Arizona State University over the university's intent to introduce the Kindle into the classroom, the Department of Justice got involved claiming that until Amazon and other e-reader manufacturers could ensure that emerging technologies offer individuals with disabilities the same opportunities as other students, such devices could not be used in the classroom (Katz, 2010). The scope of use and the influence of e-book readers are certain to change with the invention of the iPad and other tablets. These devices were being introduced as this survey was being conducted.

Survey Design and Analysis

The survey (see appendix I) was designed to ascertain the use of e-books, e-book readers and the policies governing their use, including use of statistics as a collection development tool among academic libraries. The target audience included scholars on the history of the book, academic librarians, library staff, library students, and general academics. Questions were designed to gather quantitative data. Qualitative data was encouraged by employing and soliciting written comments to some of the multiple choice answers.

The survey consisted of three preliminary questions (professional status, institution type, etc); twelve e-book questions (purchasing habits, statistics, policies, access, availability, and usage); and eight e-book reader questions (equipment, statistics, procedures, availability, and usage).The survey was administered by email to listservs that emphasized the target audience.

The Society for the History of Authorship, Reading and Publishing, or SHARP-L is made up of academics from around the world who are interested in the study of book history, print culture, and new media. The organization was

founded in 1991 with the list existing since 1992. LIBREF-L or Library Reference is a discussion of library reference issues operated by Kent State University. The Atlanta Macon Private Academic Libraries, AMPALS-L, is made up of local private library directors. The list is administered by the President's office of the Atlanta Regional Consortium for Higher Education, of which all are members.

The rest of the lists surveyed are all owned and administered by the American Library Association and its divisions. LIBADMIN-L consists of people interested in the administration of libraries. RUSA-L is a list made up of people primarily interested in reference and user services. ULS-L or the University Libraries List is comprised of the largest public and private academic libraries. COLLIB-L is the College Libraries Section. It is comprised of librarians working in smaller academic institutions, again, both public and private. And the last list, CJC-L, is a discussion group dedicated to issues relating to community college and two year college libraries.

In total, the survey was sent to over 10,600 recipients.

SHARP - L	1100 members
LIBREF- L	1628 members
AMPALS – L	11 members
LIBADMIN - L	906 members
COLLIB - L	2590 members
ULS - L	1342 members
CJC - L	1387 members
RUSA - L	1650 members

The emails were launched from the period March through May, 2010. 435 respondents filled out the preliminary section. 208 responded to the e-books and e-readers section and 51 responded to the final section on policies and procedures. The following analysis was compiled from the responses and is presented here in each of the three parts of the survey.

Survey: Introduction

The majority of respondents classified themselves as library faculty (57%). Library staff (who may or may not have earned college diplomas) was the second highest group of responders (30.5%). It appeared that the lack of definition in the survey of the terms faculty and staff may have been misleading. Table 1 provides the percentage of respondents to the question of classification by status. More than half of those taking the survey classified themselves as faculty. Since "faculty" was not defined, this response is a mixture of library faculty and academic faculty working in libraries.

Table 1: Respondents by type

Respondents by Type	Percentage of responses
Faculty	57.7%
Staff	30.5%
Students	2.8%
Other	12.1

Survey: Part One

E-books in academic libraries, according to those responding to this survey, have been in use since at least the year 2000; electronic books were mainly used for assignments (65%); the majority of responding libraries had between 10,000 and 35,000 e-books in their collections. Respondents were satisfied with e-books (73%); 62% of the libraries purchased e-books annually; 86% plan to expand e-book offerings; the majority use NetLibrary (now EBSCOHost E-books); 67% of librarians indicated they kept statistical data on the use of e-books; those keeping statistics indicated that use of e-books was increasing. 97% of users classified themselves as students; only 36% of those responding marketed e-books and just marginally over 50% linked to e-books from their library home pages. Table 2 provides a quick look at the survey response to types of use of e-books. Table 3 provides an assessment of several questions concerning acquisitions of e-books. 36 vendors were listed. The table provides the top 3 from those 36.

Table 2: In what capacity do you use them?

Percentage of responses	Type of use
45.8%	Leisure
38.9%	Textbooks
36.9%	Other
26.6%	Reserves
9.9%	Do not use

Table 3: Cumulative Reponses to use of e-books

Question	YES	No	N/A
Do you purchase these annually?	62.6%	29.6%	7.8%
Do you plan to expand your e-book offerings?	86.3%	13.7%	0
What vendor do you use? (top 3 listed)	NetLibrary e-Brary Gale	89 33 23	

Survey: Part Two

208 people filled out this part of the survey. E-book readers were provided by 87.5% of responders' institutions (i.e. 182 institutions); 69.9% (i.e. 18) of the respondents without institutional ownership of e-book readers were reported to be considering purchasing them;

21% of responders (i.e. 44 people) owned a personal reader; 46% of those who had e-book readers classified themselves as non-faculty. Table 4 provides a summary of the questions and responses to use of e-readers.

Table 4: Summary of answers to questions on the use of e-readers

Question	YES	No
Does your library provide e-book readers?	87.5%	12.5%
If not, are you considering adding them?	69.9%	30.1%
Do you personally own an e-Reader?	21.1%	78.9%
Percentage of users who own a reader by type answering yes or no to "do you own one."	Faculty 21%	Faculty 78.3 %
	Students 25%	Students 75.5%
	Staff 21.5%	Staff 78.5%

Survey: Part Three

This section was restricted to library staff and faculty and sought information on policies governing e-books and e-book readers. [Authors] also were seeking information about any statistics gathered on e-book activity read on e-readers. The authors were amazed when 89% of the respondents reported having no policies; 18% of the respondents allowed e-book readers to be checked out; only 12.8% of those responding required paper work to be

filled out prior to check out. No library required a deposit to take out an e-reader; check out periods varied with the majority of answers in "weeks" rather than "days" for the check-out period. In light of libraries' propensity for collecting usage statistics on practically everything, the authors found it particularly puzzling that only 18% of respondents reported keeping statistics on the use of e-books on e-readers; those few keeping statistics indicated

that use was increasing and plans were being made to buy more e-book readers. Table 5 provides a composite of the answers to section 3.

Table 5 Composite of responses to section 3

Question	Yes	No
Do you have policies governing the use of e-book readers?	10.7%	89.3%
Do you allow patrons to check out e-book readers?	18.5%	81.5%
Do you require a deposit before allowing check out of e-readers?	0	100%
Do you require patrons to fill out paper work to check out an e-reader?	87.2%	12.86%

Analysis

The object of questions 4, 7, 9, 10, and 13 in part one was to determine user satisfaction with e-books and associations between usage and users. 73% of respondents reported satisfaction with e-books with the majority of satisfied users identifying themselves as students (97%). As indicated by the answers to question 13, use was increasing. The majority of respondents to these questions indicated satisfaction with e-books, plans to continue purchasing e-books, and growing use of e-books among the student population. A limited number of respondents indicated preference for print. Similar positive responses to questions 1, 3, 4,and 6 in part two concerning e-book readers indicated increasing numbers of users planning to purchase e-book readers in the future for themselves personally and also for their libraries.

A major surprise came with the answers to questions 7 and 8 in part three regarding statistical data for e-readers. Answers indicated that few respondents calculated or recorded statistics on the use of e-book readers. Perhaps this was due to lack of continuity in data delivered by vendors and "lack of reliability of these vendors' statistics "(Cox, 2008).

Until recently, there was little adherence to statistical collection standards for e-books. Project COUNTER (Counting Online Usage of NeTworked Electronic Resources) has been used for e-journals internationally for some years. Work on a COUNTER-compliant code for e-books has developed at a much slower pace and accepted commonly for use even more slowly. The COUNTER Code of Practice for *Books and Reference Works: Release 1* came out in March 2006 (Shepherd, 2009), yet according to Cox (Cox, 2008) at the end of the first 18 months after the e-book code was published only nine publishers had managed to achieve compliance. By January 2012, however, 38 vendors had reached compliance (http://www.projectcounter.org/R1/R1Audit_Jan2012.pdf). As this number of compliant vendors grows, the dependability of the statistics will increase.

Statistics and quantitative data are significant but must be contextualized by qualitative data. For this survey, comments were solicited, resulting in many of the questions eliciting a number of stimulating responses. These remarks can be organized into the following categories: use of e-books and accessibility of digital resources. In general the remarks about e-books were negative and centered on the inability to navigate them and read them online. The following comments serve to illustrate significant remarks concerning e-books:

> "My library has lots of e-books …but in general e-books are useless because they are so hard both to search and to read…"

"People who think e-books are the future should devote their energies to devising a truly universal protocol for finding, reading, and searching them."

These comments are valid observations worthy of vendor attention. In addition to the book comments, astute observations concerning accessibility indicated a broad concern for the entire electronic environment. The following comments are significant in and of themselves, defining moments for the electronic age concerning topics that are relevant and issues that remain unresolved:

"…spent an hour trying to find and read an article last week that would have taken me two minutes if the journal was on the shelf."

"[predictions] that …within ten years there would be no more need for a library, everything would be online."

"…response to listserv question of whether anyone ever read a book online received not one positive response."

"…online subscription systems are expensive…who can and should pay for this service"

"…digital age has shifted the haves and have-nots in academic research. "

"..having the world at your keyboard really isn't true. We don't. There are limitations to access of academic databases. "

As the digital age continues to expand, the issues and concerns raised by those who left comments in this survey will provide a framework for change and focus. Vendors, publishers, librarians, and academics will find these issues pressing and, like Sisyphus's rock, an endless source of struggle.

Conclusion

The survey results plainly indicated that the uses of e-books were on the rise. A small number of responders commented that they preferred print, but the majority of answers formulated a clear rationale that increase in use is leading to increase in purchase as well as plans to expand collections in the future. The statistics gathered in this survey indicated users were less interested in e-book readers. This survey was launched prior to the introduction of Apple's iPad and other tablets and illustrated the attitudes and concerns associated with the challenges at the time of the survey to operate the available e-book readers. As mentioned earlier, the majority of those who had personal readers, or planned to purchase one, identified themselves as non-faculty. This scenario is certain to change with the advancements in e-book reader technology and, as faculty ranks grow, with technology savvy users. In recognition of the development of new tablets and sharper e-book readers, the Pew Research Center's Internet & American Life Project reports that the number of Americans owning a digital reading device jumped from 18% in December 2011 to 29% in January 2012 (Pew Research Center, January 23, 2012).

Lessons learned during this survey were many. As mentioned earlier, a clearer definition of terms used in the survey might have been helpful to the responders. A more explicit definition of library faculty would have made the answers to part three more concise.

Calculating and recording more qualitative information would have been interesting especially with the proximity of the survey to the launch of the iPad. An ensuing survey and its comparison to previous data on e-book readers will be illuminating.

Gathering and calculating relevant and accurate statistical data on the use of e-books will progress if vendors receive pressure from library professionals. It appears that e-books

and e-book readers have become and will continue to develop as integral parts of the library collection environment. Recent changes to NetLibrary (now EBSCOHost E-books) and the entrance of JSTOR, Project Muse, and other large scientific publishers into the e-book market will also contribute toward improvement of the product as accessibility to these databases of e-books becomes a necessity.

Judith Brook is director and associate dean at the Monroe F. Swilley, Jr. Library at Mercer University, brook_jd@mercer.edu, and Anne A. Salter is University Librarian of the Philip Weltner Library, Oglethorpe University, asalter@oglethorpe.edu.

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Appendix I

Survey Questions

Introduction

1.   Please select the status that applies to you:
         Faculty
         Student
         Staff
         Other
2.   What is the name of your institution?
3.   What is your department?

Part One – Electronic Books (E-books)

1.   How long have you been using e-books?
2.   In what capacity do you use them? Select all that apply.
         Other
         Not at all
         Reserves
         Leisure
         Textbooks
3.   How many e-books does your library subscribe to?
4.   How satisfied are you with e-books?
5.   Do you purchase additional e-books annually?
6.   If yes to #5, from what vendor do you usually purchase e-books?
7.   Do you plan to expand your e-book offerings?
8.   Do you keep statistics on the use of e-books?
9.   Who uses the e-books most frequently? Select all that apply.
10.   What do your statistics indicate regarding use of e-books?
11.   Do you have access to your e-books from your homepage?
12.   Do you separately market e-books to your audience?

Part Two – E-Book Readers

1.   Does your library provide e-book readers?
2.   If you answered yes to the above question, what brand do you use?
3.   If you are not using e-book readers, are considering adding them?
4.   Do you personally own an e-book reader?
5.   If you own an e-book reader, what brand? If you do not own one, are you considering buying one?
6.   If you do not own one, are you considering buying one?

Part Three – This section is for Library Staff/Faculty to answer

1.   Do you have policies in your library governing the use of e-book readers?
2.   Do you allow patrons to check out the e-book reader?

3. What is the check out period for your e-book readers?
4. Do you require a deposit from the user before allowing check out of the e-book reader?
5. Do you require patrons who check out the e-book reader to fill out any type of paper work?
6. Briefly describe your check out procedure for e-book readers.
7. Do you keep statistics on the use of e-book readers?
8. If you keep statistic on e-book readers, please briefly indicate what they reflect.

Appendix II

Survey Questions with Responses

Introduction

1. Please select the status that applies to you.

	Response %	Response Count
Faculty	54.7	235
Student	2.8	12
Staff	30.5	131
Other	12.1	52

2. What is the name of your institution? 369 answered, 66 skipped
3. What is your department? 377 answered; 58 skipped

Part One – Electronic Books (E-books)

1. How long have you been using e-books? 207 answered; 228 skipped
2. In what capacity do you use them? Select all that apply.

	Response %	Response Count
Other	36.9	75
Not at all	9.9	20
Reserves	26.6	54
Leisure	45.8	93
Textbooks	38.9	79

3. How many e-books does your library subscribe to?

	Response %	Response Count
No idea	28.4%	63
Not applicable to me	4.1%	9
Other (specify size)	67.6%	150
Under 5,000	21.3%	
More than 5,000 but < 50,000	31.3%	
More than 50,000 but < 200,000	11.3%	
More than 200,000	3.3%	

4. How satisfied are you with e-books?

	Response %	Response Count
unsatisfied	18.4%	34
satisfied	73.5%	136
never use	8.1%	15

5. Do you purchase additional e-books annually?

	Response %	Response Count
Yes	62.6%	129
No	29.6%	61
N/A	7.8%	16

6. If yes to #5, from what vendor do you usually purchase e-books? 169 answered; 266 skipped.

NetLibrary (now EBSCOhost E-books)	51%
eBrary	20%
Gale	14%

7. Do you plan to expand your e-book offerings?

	Response %	Response Count
Yes	86.4%	158
No	13.7%	25

8. Do you keep statistics on the use of e-books?

	Response %	Response Count
Yes	67.8%	139
No	32.2%	66

9. Who uses the e-books most frequently? Select all that apply.

	Response%	Response Count
Students	97.4%	148
Faculty	29.6%	45
Staff	13.8%	21
Other		59

10. What do your statistics indicate regarding use of e-books?

	Response %	Response Count
Use is increasing	67.7%	128
Use is decreasing over last year	5.3%	10
Statistics are not kept	27%	51

11. Do you have access to your e-books from your homepage?

	Response %	Response Count
Yes	51.9%	109
No	27.1%	57
Other	21%	44

12. Do you separately market e-books to your audience?

	Response %	Response Count
Yes	36.9%	76
No	63.1%	130

Part Two – E-Book Readers

1. Does your library provide e-book readers?

	Response %	Response Count
Yes	12.5%	26
No	87.5%	182

2. If you answered yes to the above question, what brand do you use? Sony, Kindle most named.

3. If you are not using e-book readers, are considering adding them?

	Response %	Response Count
Yes	30%	55
No	69.9%	128

4. Do you personally own an e-book reader?

	Response %	Response Count
Yes	21.1%	45
No	78.9%	168

5. If you own an e-book reader, what brand? Kindle, Sony, iPhone.

6. If you do not own one, are you considering buying one?

	Response %	Response Count
Yes	27.9%	48
No	72.1%	124

Part Three – This section is for Library Staff/Faculty to answer

1. Do you have policies in your library governing the use of e-book readers?

	Response %	Response Count
Yes	10.7%	16
No	89.3%	133

2. Do you allow patrons to check out the e-book reader?

	Response %	Response Count
Yes	18.5%	20
No	81.5%	88

3. What is the check out period for your e-book readers? 48 answers with the majority in weeks not days for the allowed check out period.

4. Do you require a deposit from the user before allowing check out of the e-book reader?

	Response %	Response Count
Yes	0.0%	0
No	100.0%	85

5. Do you require patrons who check out the e-book reader to fill out any type of paper work?

	Response %	Response Count
Yes	12.8%	10
No	87.2%	68

6. Briefly describe your check out procedure for e-book readers. 44 answered. Majority require paper work.

7. Do you keep statistics on the use of e-book readers?

	Response %	Response Count
Yes	18.1%	15
No	81.9%	68

8. If you keep statistic on e-book readers, please briefly indicate what they reflect. 29 answered; answers ranged from use is decreasing to use is increasing, waiting list for use, plan to add more, not much use. The answers were collectively inconclusive but more positive in response than negative.