

A Survey of eBook Usage and Perceptions at the University of Liverpool

University of Liverpool eBook Study: part 2



Introduction

Over the last several years, eBooks and eJournals have rapidly gained acceptance among University Libraries and their users. This sharp growth has occurred for a variety of reasons. eBooks have allowed libraries to continue to acquire new content despite tighter budgets and limited physical space. In addition, publishers have made eBooks more attractive through 'big deal' type offers that provide large collections of content at attractive prices.

The rapid acquisition of eBooks has changed the character of Library catalogs, providing patrons with access to much more information than has been previously available and altering the manner in which patrons interact with materials. The growth of eBooks has been well documented, but changing usage models and patrons' views on eBooks and how those views may differ from print and other resources has not been well understood. As part of its 2010 eBook acquisition agreement with Springer, the University of Liverpool agreed to undertake a comprehensive study of eBook usage and perceptions among its students and faculty. This project was divided into three parts: an analysis of usage reports, an in depth survey of users habits and opinions, and a series of focus groups covering eBooks and related topics.

The results of the first portion of the project, an analysis of usage reports, were published in *The Big Deal Approach to Acquiring E-Books: A Usage-Based Study*.¹ The findings from that article are briefly summarized later in this text.

This article will focus on the second portion of the project, a review and analysis of the results collected by the University of Liverpool in their survey of users' habits and opinions in using eBooks. Library patrons from the student and faculty population were surveyed as to their awareness and usage of eBooks as well as their opinions about the utility of eBooks. Other topics were also covered in the survey, notably how digital books compare with print counterpart and users' awareness of copyright issues related to eBooks.

eBook Market Growth

The number of eBooks published each year has grown steadily since 2005, but in the last two years the rate of growth has greatly accelerated. In 2009 alone, wholesale eBook sales were almost 200% greater than they were in 2008. Springer's own data also shows a dramatic growth in eBooks; Springer eBook usage was up 70% in 2008 and an additional 36% to 56 million chapters in 2009. By the end of 2009, Springer eBook usage was more than double what it had been at the beginning of 2008.² To put these figure in some context, eBook usage in 2009 was equal to the total eJournal usage for 2006. This represents dramatic growth and illustrates a growth curve similar to the explosion of growth that eJournals enjoyed earlier in the decade. eBook collections provide libraries with a means to quickly establish a critical mass of e-book content. eBook Collections allow libraries to acquire a wide selection of valued resources in a highly efficient acquisition model that does not require staff time to be spent on selecting and acquiring single titles. At the right price, the risk of acquiring less relevant content is offset by the convenience and time saved in the acquisition process. In an era of increasing interdisciplinary research, eBook collections enable libraries to meet the needs of a wide range of users and help the library to move rapidly to an eContent dominated catalogue that provides users with remote 24/7 access and much easier discovery.

¹ Serials: The Journal for the Serials Community, Volume 23, Number 2/July 2010, pages 126–134

² www.IDPF.org Annual Industry Statistics

eBook Purchases at the University of Liverpool

After an early unsuccessful experiment with a handful of eBooks in 2005, the University of Liverpool's first successful foray into eBooks came in the summer of 2006 with a subscription to the ebrary Academic Complete collection. The University began purchasing Springer eBooks during the summer of 2008 with the complete collection for copyright years 2005 to 2008. The complete 2009 collection was purchased the following year. Because these collections were purchased at the end of fiscal year, there was some duplication of titles purchased individually throughout the year that were later acquired as part of the Collection. In an effort to eliminate duplications, the library began purchasing collections at the beginning of the fiscal year, emulating the purchasing practice for eJournals. In addition, Liverpool became one of the first libraries in Europe to participate in Springer's MyCopy program, a service that allows users to order selected Springer eBooks as personal Print-on-Demand soft cover books at a discounted price.

Springer eBooks

Springer eBooks are grouped into 12 annual subject collections and have been offered alongside print offerings since 2005. All Springer eContent is available on the SpringerLink platform which delivers access to eBook chapters alongside eJournal articles on a single interface. Each chapter or article is provided as a single file that may be viewed, downloaded or printed in its entirety. The eBook collections include primarily monographs, contributed volumes and conference proceedings but also some textbooks and major reference works.

eBook Usage Statistics Study

In the companion article to this piece, *The Big Deal Approach to Acquiring E-Books: A Usage-Based Study* this author outlined the results from an analysis of COUNTER reports at the University of Liverpool. That article concluded that acquisition of Springer Collections in a 'big deal' purchase model was in fact a good deal for the University. All disciplines were accessed regularly and the number of unused titles declined each year. A somewhat surprising result was that older titles continued to generate significant usage, frequently on par with more contemporary titles, even as newer collections were added.

The study also noted that the acquisition of a database of book material seemed an ideal model for purchasing research oriented content. Robust discovery tools that enable users to search book and journal content on the same platform allow users to easily locate relevant information whether published in a book or journal. eBooks complemented the Libraries eJournal resources and frequently produced an inflationary effect on eJournal usage. The conclusion was that Libraries may need to reconsider budget allocations for eContent, which tend to be overwhelmingly allocated to eJournal purchases.

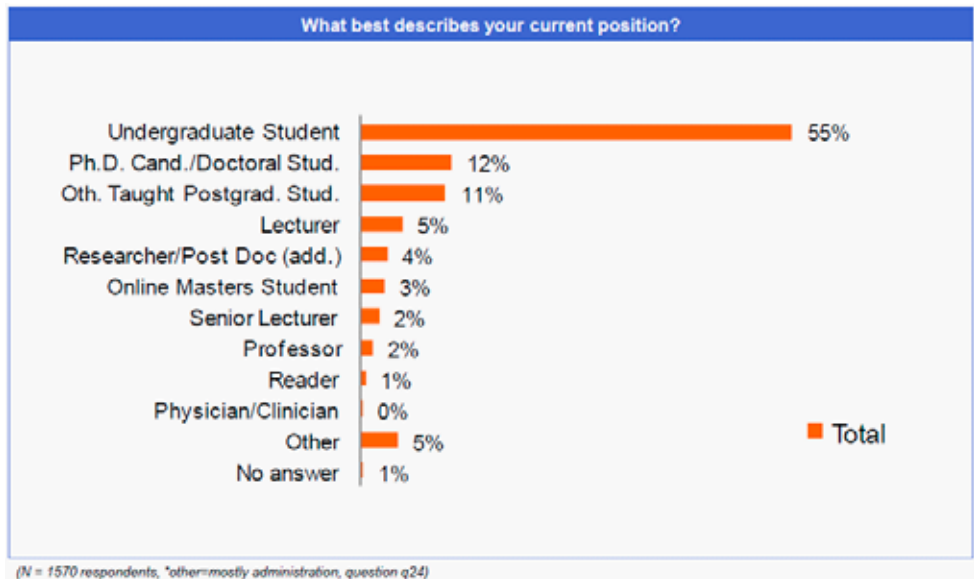
eBooks Survey Results

With this context in mind, let us turn our attention to the eBook Survey conducted by the University of Liverpool. In the spring of 2010, the library staff approached approximately 21,000 students and 2,000 members of the academic and research staff to participate in the survey. Potential respondents were invited by email to complete the online survey. The library staff also employed Facebook and Twitter to support recruitment efforts. A total 1,571 respondents completed the questionnaire, 1,267 of which were students and the remaining 224 were members of the academic and research staff. In raw numbers, respondents were overwhelmingly students, but the percentage of respondents across each population was higher for faculty. Approximately 6% of students and 11% of faculty completed the questionnaire. The survey questions focused on the respondents' awareness of eBooks, usage habits, opinions on the utility of eBooks, a comparison to print books, and selected other topics such as copyright issues.

Survey Respondents

As noted above, survey respondents were overwhelmingly members of the student population. 81% of respondents were students, of which 55% were undergraduate students and the remaining 26% were pursuing a variety of post-graduate degrees. 14% of respondents were faculty members, divided relatively evenly between Professors and Lecturers.

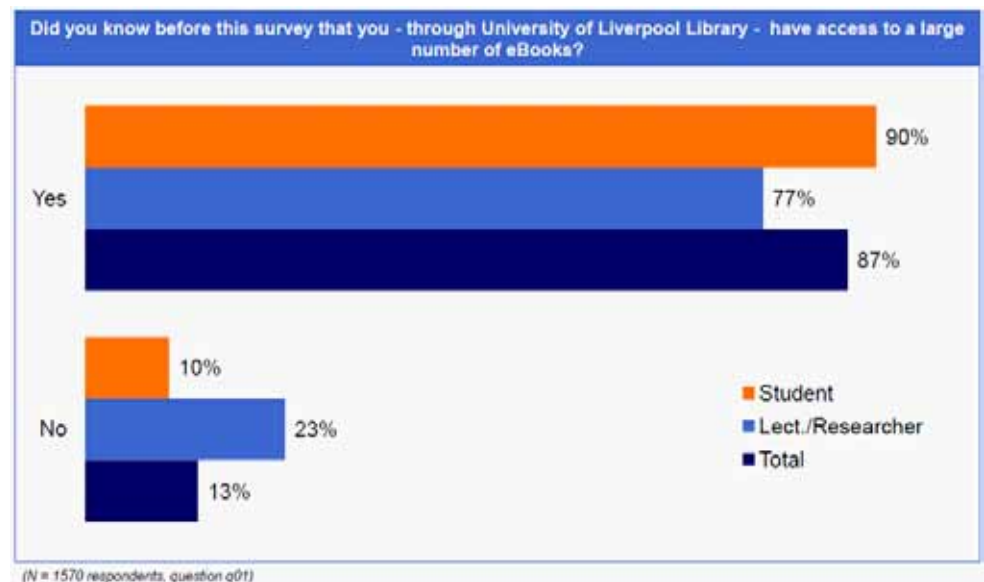
Figure 1



Awareness and Usage of eBooks

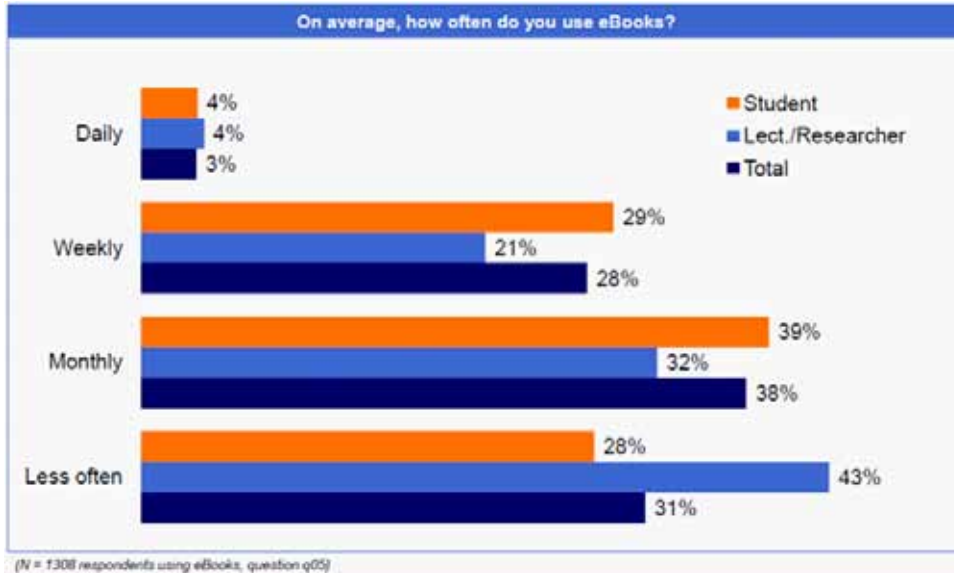
The initial questions in the survey dealt with the student and faculty populations' awareness of eBooks on the University of Liverpool campus and the results were encouraging. 87% of all respondents were aware that the University Library provided access to a large collection of eBooks. As detailed in the chart (Figure 2) below, students had a slightly higher rate (90%) of awareness than lecturers (77%) though the aggregate of the two groups was still very high.

Figure 2



Respondents were also asked whether they had ever used eBooks, at the University of Liverpool or elsewhere (Figure 3). As in the previous question, students had a slightly higher response (85%) rate than lecturers (77%) but the results were still quite high (83%) across both groups. These high response rates both in the awareness of eBooks on the University campus as well as a personal familiarity with eBooks are a significant marker for the rest of this survey. The fact that both groups have a similar level of awareness and familiarity with eBooks adds weight to topics covered later in this survey, allowing us to make some basic comparisons of the usage habits and attitudes towards eBooks between the two constituent groups.

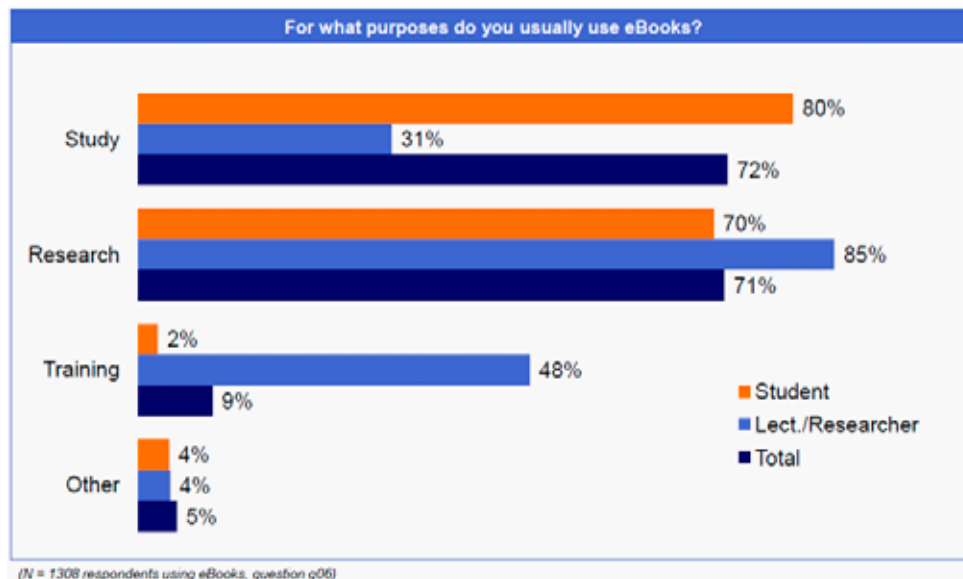
Figure 3



These high levels of awareness for the eBook collections can be explained by at least two important factors. MARC records are available for each eBook alongside the records for all print books, allowing users to find and quickly access eContent as they search the library catalogue. In fact, the library catalogue is the primary method for users to discover the library's eContent collection. In addition, the library also announces new eBook bundles and specific titles on the Library's eBook home page, in library blogs and in information literacy sessions.

At the University of Liverpool, eBooks are used primarily for study and for research (Figure 4). Undergraduate students use eBooks almost equally for study (80%) and for research (71%). Not surprisingly, faculty members have somewhat different usage habits, accessing eBooks less frequently for study purposes (31%) but much more often for research (85%). In addition, nearly 50% of faculty members access eBooks for training purposes, primarily the preparation of course and teaching materials.

Figure 4



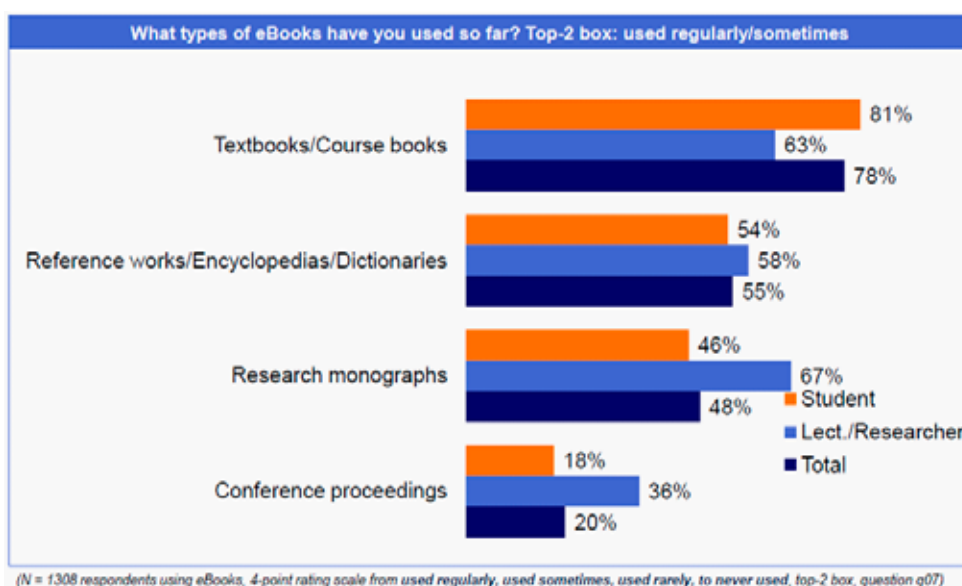
Next, respondents were asked which types of eBooks they had used (*Figure 5*) regularly or at least sometimes – not just one time uses. As noted above, the usage models differed by constituency.

Mapping to their primary uses – study and research – undergraduate students (81%) stated that they used textbooks and course books with the highest frequency. These students also answered that they frequently referred to reference works (54%) and research monographs (46%), albeit with somewhat less regularity than textbooks.

Among postgraduates, researchers and faculty, research monographs were used most often (67%) but not by a wide margin. Because of the mixed nature of usages (research, training, study) among this group, textbooks and reference works were used nearly as often as pure research monographs.

In examining these results, it is readily apparent that eBooks are used for purposes similar to their print counterparts. This fact is not surprising, given that much of the same content can be found in both the electronic and the print catalogue. The results also revealed that student and faculty populations have slightly different usage patterns which reflect their roles within the University. Though, as we will see, the specific ways that eBooks are used will vary from their print books as eBooks offer much greater access to the information contained within a given volume and across volumes, allowing users to dip in an out of eBooks much more quickly and efficiently than is possible with printed books.

Figure 5



It is interesting to compare these perceptions of usage with the actual usage results. Personal preferences, such as whether one enjoys reading text from a screen are entirely subjective and a survey of this type is probably the best method for understanding these personal penchants. But actual content usage can be measured very accurately, and as the usage data will show, variances in the way that the students define texts seems to have artificially inflated perceptions of their own textbook usage. What a publisher defines as a 'research monograph' or a 'conference proceeding' may in some cases be defined as a course book by a student. This is an important point because it demonstrates that the prevailing assumption that students mostly use textbooks is not entirely accurate. Other types of publications, such as Monographs and Conference Proceedings have significant value as research tools for students, as well as faculty.

In this instance, we decided to compare the survey results against the actual chapter download figures. The chapter download results represent downloads across all constituencies, so the results are a blend of both student and faculty usage (*Figure 6*). Even considering that fact, it is important to note that actual chapter downloads of textbooks account for only 11% of total downloads – a much lower figure than found in the above survey results. Research materials such as Monographs and Proceedings comprised exactly half of all chapter downloads, more closely matching the survey results. The implication here is that assumptions and perceptions of usage can be very inaccurate. Libraries should leverage all available information and tools at their disposal to discern usage patterns in order to make informed decisions on future purchases.

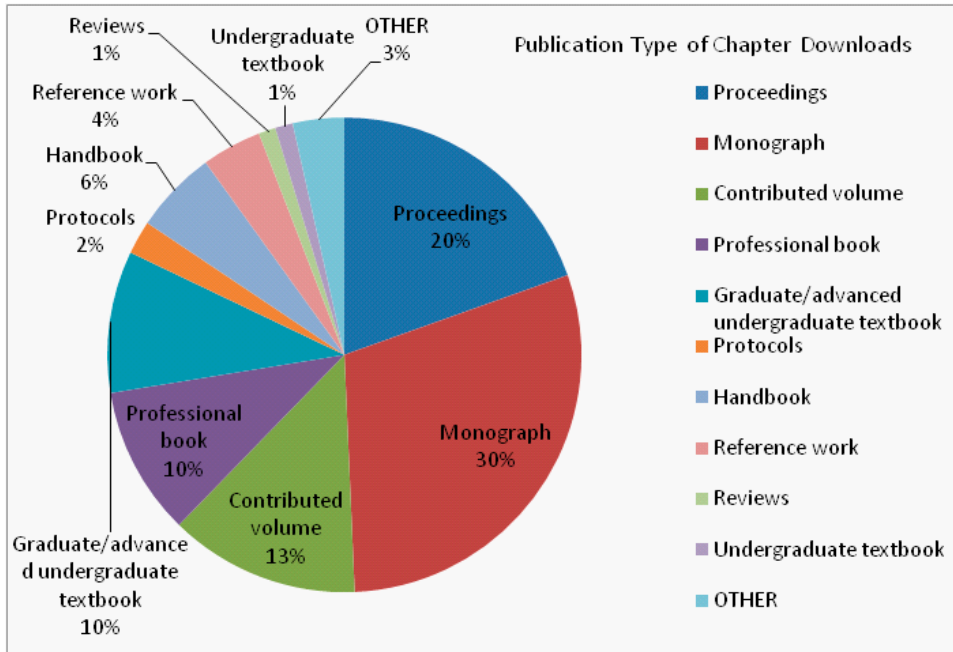


Figure 6

As demonstrated in the chart below (Figure 7), in most instances both students (73%) and faculty (67%) performed keyword searches on selected topics to locate an eBook. Students did also search for specific titles when presented with a reading list, while faculty often sought books that had particular relevance or reputation in their given field. Both constituencies browsed titles within a certain discipline, but the preferred method for locating material was keyword search, the most direct and efficient method for finding information on a given topic. These findings supports a key conclusion from the companion to this article -- that the acquisition of a 'database of chapter's' is a highly effective means of acquiring content for a research institution. In addition, the heavy reliance on keyword search supports the notion that well indexed eContent is critical to discovery. To maximize usage, eBook chapters should be as well indexed and prevalent on bibliographic databases as their eJournal counterparts.

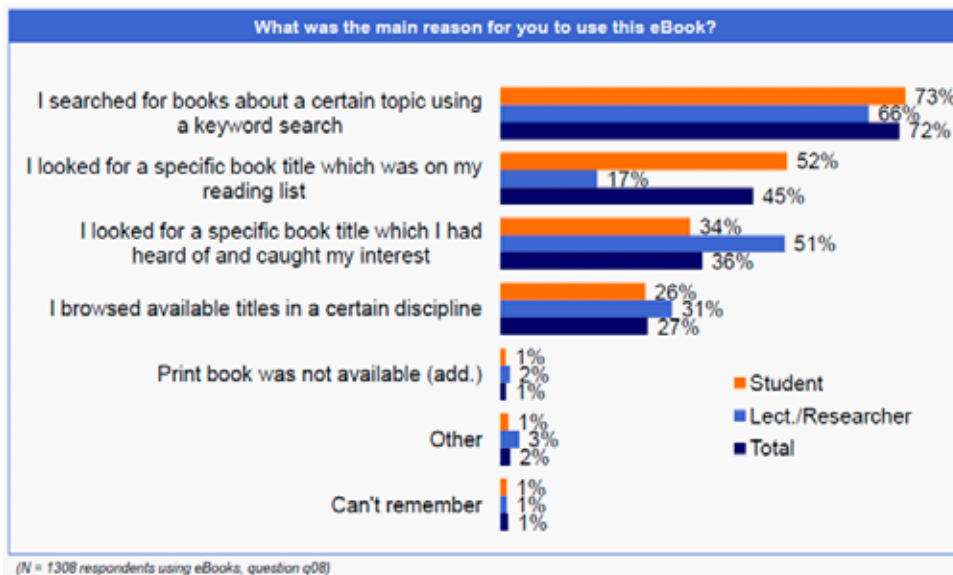
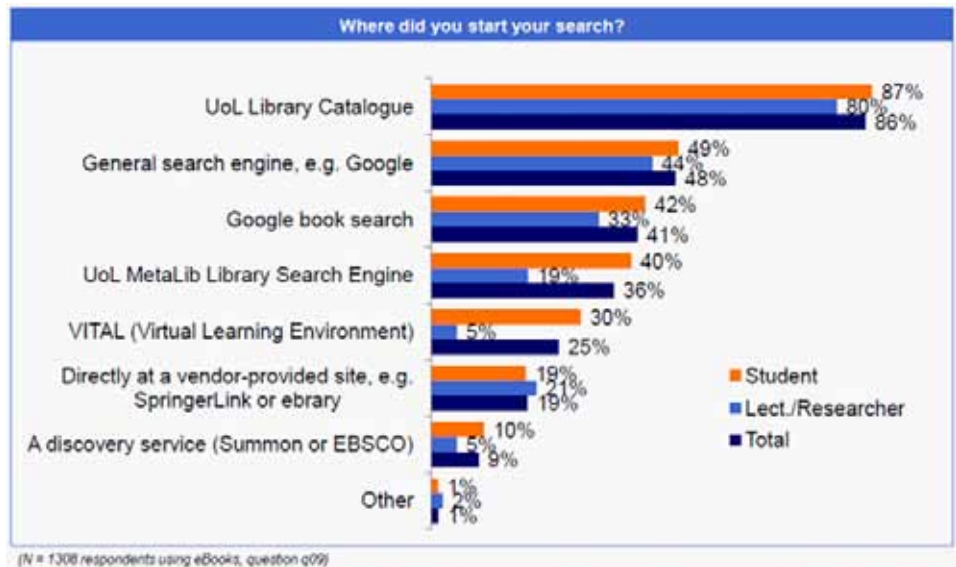


Figure 7

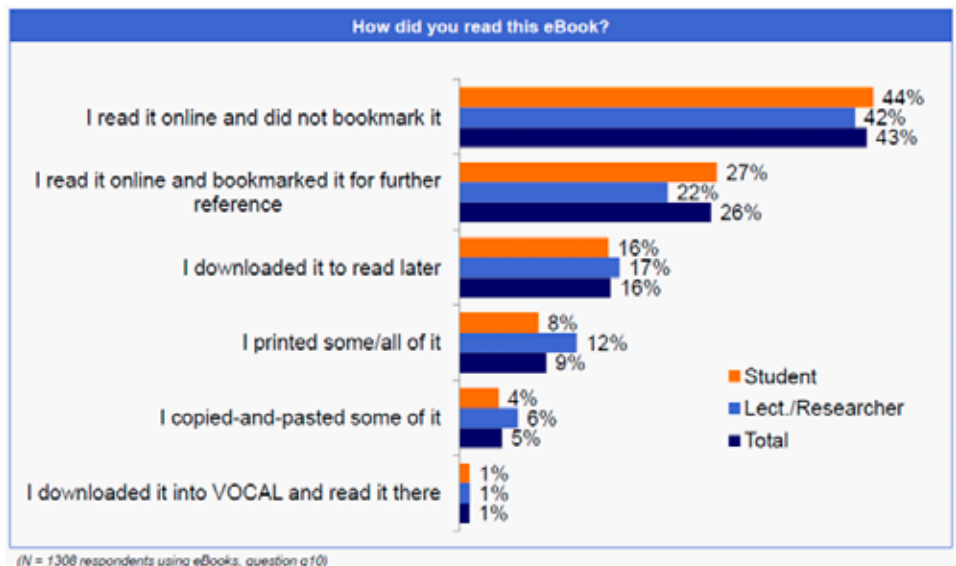
Figure 8



Library patrons used a variety of Search tools to locate materials (Figure 8). The University of Liverpool Library catalogue was the primary tool, being used first among students and faculty 86% of the time. But other tools were also used with some frequency. Search Engines and Google Book Search were used quite often as were more Library specific tools such as MetaLib, Summon and EBSCO Discovery Service (EDS). At the time of the service, Metalib was the library’s federated search tool, with Summon and EDS both available as beta products. The library subsequently chose EDS as a replacement for Metalib. It is notable that nearly a third of students said they sometimes used Blackboard VLE (branded ‘VITAL’ at Liverpool) to start their search. Teaching staff therefore have a duty to be aware of eBooks relevant to their courses and to help guide students to them through the VLE. Vendor provided tools, such as SpringerLink and ebrary, were also used in some instances. These figures are comparable to referral statistics that Springer has measured on the SpringerLink platform across all users. SpringerLink patrons use Library catalogs to locate content 47% of the time and external Search Engines (Google) 27% of the time. The lesson here is that users are searching for information using a range of tools. Publishers and libraries should consider this and make their eContent available to a wide array of internal and external search tools and bibliographic databases.

Respondents were next asked how they interacted with an eBook once a particular title was located (Figure 9). eBooks are preferred for carrying out research and for brief interactions where specific information is being sought. Responses to these questions were remarkably similar between students and faculty members. While different constituencies may use different types of eBooks depending on their role within the University, once located, their actual usage of the material is remarkably similar. Users rarely download or print an entire book. Instead, they will read the material online, occasionally bookmarking materials for

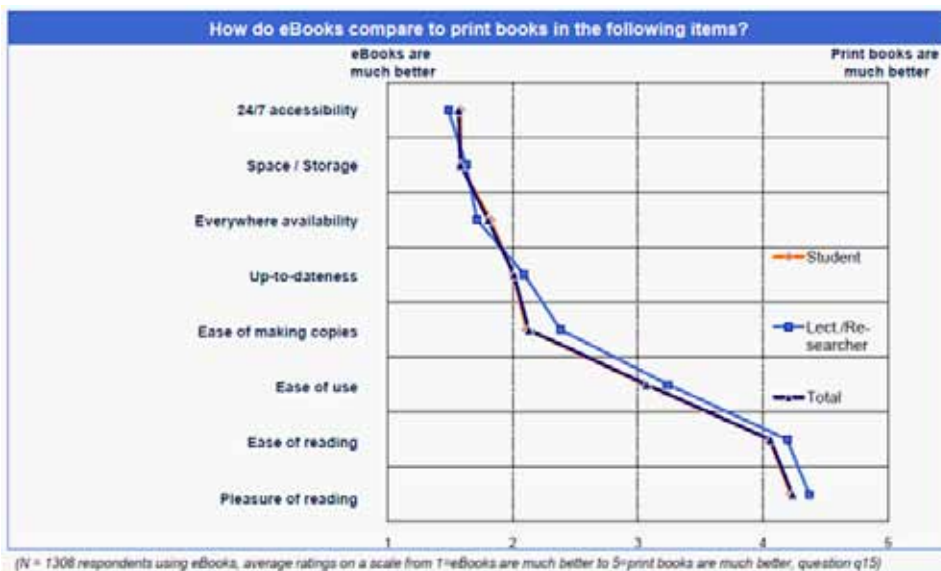
Figure 9



future reference. This is consistent with subsequent responses where users indicate that eBooks are preferred for searches and brief interaction with material, but print books are preferred for extended reading. These conclusions are bolstered further by the responses to questions regarding the way that users prefer to use various types of materials. When asked if print books were favored for reading a book cover to cover, respondents were very clear in their preference for print books. Similarly, when asked if a greater selection of eBooks would be welcomed for research purposes, respondents were very clear in their support for this idea. Answers to other questions were less decidedly supportive of eBooks or print books, likely reflecting users' ambiguity towards using eBooks outside of purely research or study purposes. Again, eBooks are seen as a very useful tool for retrieving information but not particularly pleasurable or aesthetically pleasing when the requirement is to read long passages or the entire book.

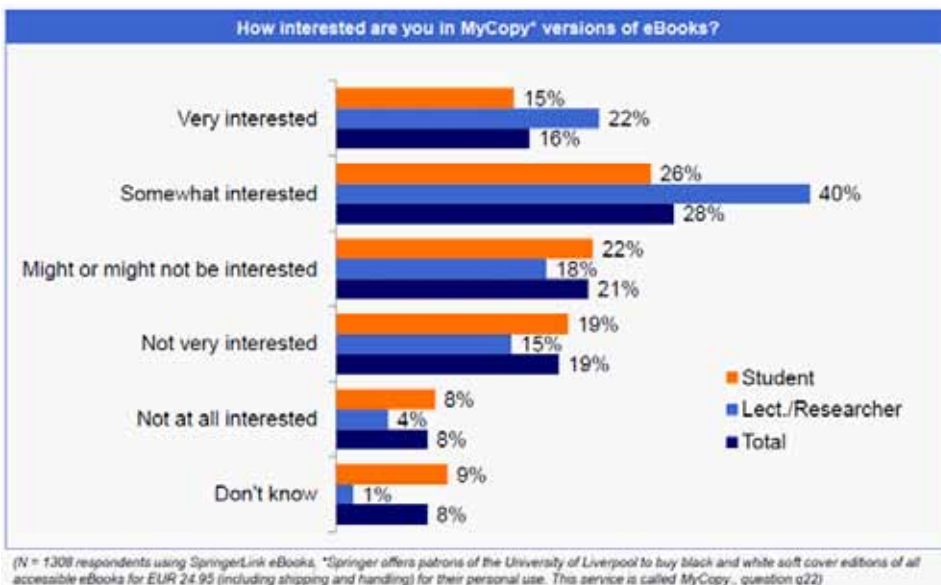
As the next chart (Figure 10) illustrates, users find eBooks useful for specific purposes and prefer print books for others. Responses were virtually identical across constituencies, further supporting the argument that users generally have the same experience when using eBooks, despite the fact that they may be accessing them for different reasons. eBooks are overwhelming preferred in the areas that one would expect: accessibility, availability, currency, and the ability to transfer the information from the text. But where aesthetics are concerned, as in ease and pleasure of reading, print books were clearly favored.

Figure 10



Next, users' were questioned about their interest in Springer's MyCopy service (Figure 11). MyCopy allows library patrons to order online for \$24.95/ €24.95, their own personal soft cover print copy of many of the Springer eBooks included in their library's eBook package.

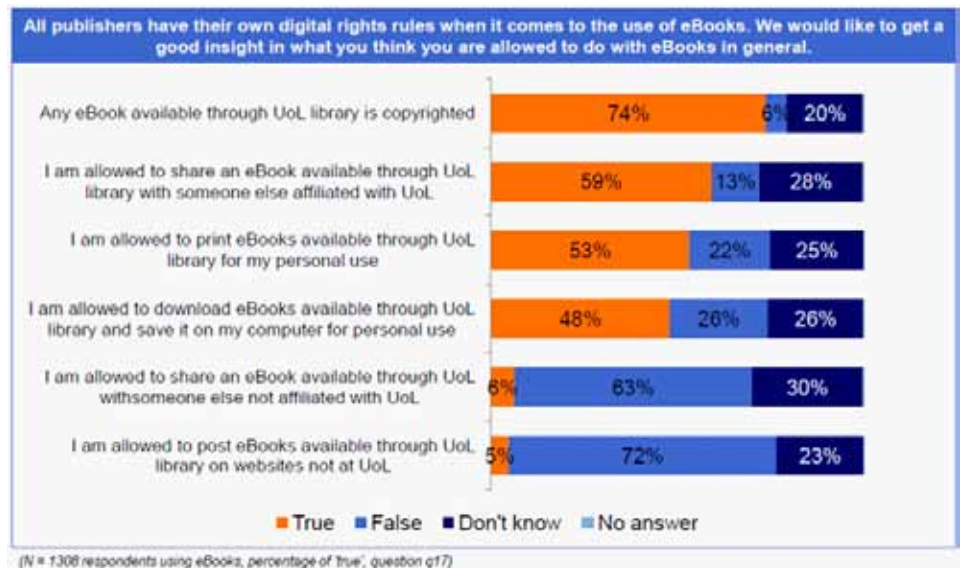
Figure 11



66% of faculty members stated that they were either somewhat or very interested in purchasing soft copies of eBooks for their own personal use. Students were a bit less enthusiastic for the service with only 41% responding that they were somewhat or very interested in the service. But it is interesting to note that very few of those surveyed responded (8%) that they had no interest at all in the service.

As with most digital content, copyright issues are a concern and users are not always clear on the limits of what they are and are not able to do within the copyright rules for a given piece of eContent. Respondents were questioned about copyright issues and asked to provide their opinions as to whether certain actions were allowed. The responses underscore the confusion that persists in regard to copyright rules on eContent. In each of the scenarios shown below (Figure 12), at least 20% of respondents simply did not know if a given action was permitted. In half of the questions, opinions were divided almost down the middle, with only a slight majority coming down clearly on one side of the question. These responses illustrate the level of education that still needs to occur in order to inform users of the permissible limits for using eBooks. It also illustrates that some standardization needs to occur in the market before users can be expected to have a clear understanding of what is acceptable under eBook copyright rules. Differences in platform capabilities and DRM implementations have contributed to this confusion. For example, certain platforms limit downloading chapters or entire books and there are often different rules printing content depending on the platform and content type. So in many cases respondents' answers may have been influenced by which eBook platform(s) they had in mind at the time, and indeed it might be that many of the "don't know" answers were an attempt to express "it depends on the platform".

Figure 12



Springer eBooks do not include any Digital Rights Management (DRM), which provides greater flexibility and usability for Library patrons. In addition to accessing content directly while in the library, patrons may easily access the library's catalogue from any location and on almost any platform including PC's and a broad array of mobile devices. Additionally, no DRM means that a single eBook can be delivered into multiple devices depending on the user's preference at a given moment.

Conclusions

From these survey results, we can draw a fair number of conclusions about the awareness and usage of eBooks at the University of Liverpool. More than 80% of respondents knew that they had access to eBooks through the library and had actually used them showing that eBooks have quickly become an essential part of the information mix. The vast majority of users found eBooks to be useful, with convenience and the ability to quickly access information the major reasons for preferring eBooks. For these reasons, eBooks are greatly favored for performing research, while print books are clearly preferred when reading a book from cover to cover. This behavior could have a big impact on the provision of book resources with those in scientific areas preferring eBooks and those in arts and humanities continuing to desire the print. Overall, there seems to be consensus that eBooks will complement, but not completely replace printed books for the foreseeable future.

In comparing the survey results to the usage results, we can also conclude that perceptions about eBook usage, particularly among students may not be accurate. The general consensus and Students' perceptions suggest that they overwhelmingly used textbooks, but the actual usage results tell a different story for Springer eBooks with Monographs, Conference Proceedings and other types of texts accessed with more frequency than textbooks. This could be down to the influence of the types of books that a specific publisher publishes but it also highlights the fact that what a student describes as a textbook may not in fact be the same as a publisher or library definition. Also, it is fair to note that while students gave the highest priority to textbooks, the lecturer and researcher community defined monographs as the most important type of eBook. Therefore for institutions involved in both teaching and research it is important to have a mix of eBook types available which is why a collection that includes different types of eBooks in a specific subject area may be a better solution than individual titles of one type or another.

Library patrons also used a variety of Search tools to locate materials. The library catalogue was overwhelmingly the tool used most often which not only shows the importance of having good data in the OPAC but also asks the question of whether it is good enough to be used as a search tool and whether it should be further developed. Search Engines such as Google and Google Book Search also play their part in helping users locate eBook content but it is a much smaller part than for eJournals which needs some further investigation. Also it is assumed that the picture will change in the future as abstract and indexing resources become more compatible with eBook content then the expectation is that these will also begin to play a bigger role. In addition, nearly a third of students began their search using Blackboard VLE which underscores the rise in the use of technologies of this sort and also reinforces the need for publishers to allow their eBooks to be used in conjunction with these tools.

Libraries, publishers and platform developers have work to do in the area of copyright. Knowledge of copyright rules regarding eBooks is limited; nearly a quarter of respondents could not answer copyright related questions. This knowledge gap is compounded by the wide array of access differences between different publishers and aggregators and more needs to be done to make the use of eBooks an experience more akin to the use of eJournals.

Two thirds of faculty members and nearly half of students expressed interest in Springer's MyCopy service. This is a relatively new model for publishing, and one that may take some time to gain acceptance although it does have the possibility to bridge the gap between searching and browsing book content online and a desire to read detailed research in print format. For libraries seeking to reduce print acquisitions in favor of eBooks, it may be an interesting model to pursue. Libraries can purchase 'big deal' eBook collections to maximize available content with minimal cost and space requirements and supplement these collections with print on demand for patrons who require or prefer printed copies

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