

**E-textbook use, information seeking and its  
impact: results from JISC National e-book observatory**

Professor David Nicholas

CIBER

University College London

<http://www.ucl.ac.uk/infostudies/research/ciber/>



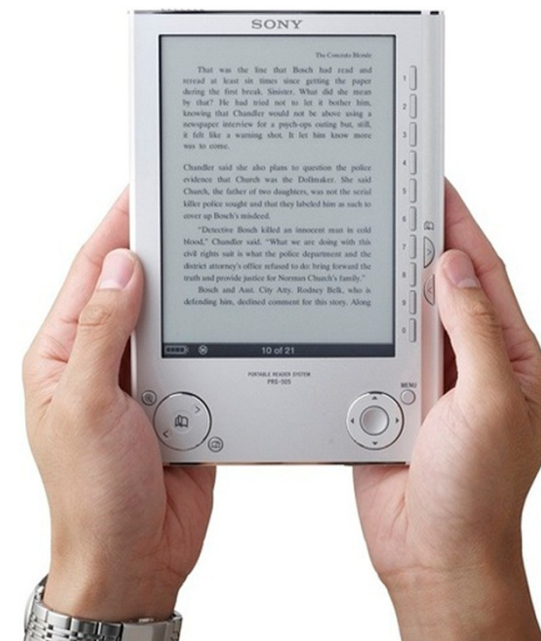
## Methods

- 127 universities recruited to scholarly e-book experiment which lasted 15 months
- Given free access (courtesy of JISC) to 26 course text books via the MyiLibrary platform
- Asked their staff and students to fill in questionnaire about general e-book and JISC title use at start and end of the 15 months – over 50,000 responses – a record
- Monitored logs of JISC titles and another 10,000 MyiLibrary e-books used by participating universities (thousands of academics covered)
- Focus groups held to follow-up on log and questionnaire data



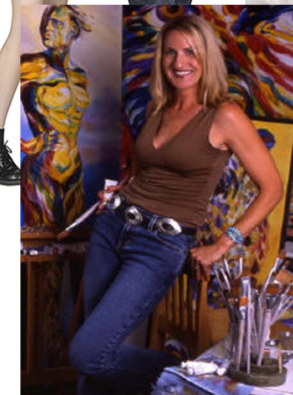
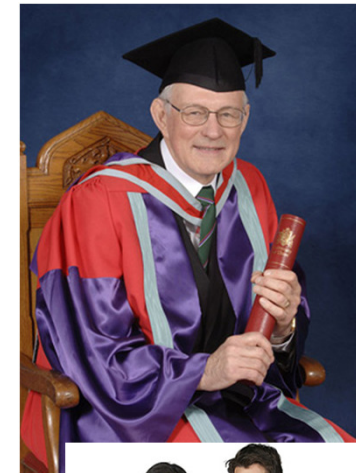
# Popularity

- 15 months, 7 million page views and 1/2 million sessions. Considerable jump-start
- Each title received on average 20,000 views; typical session saw 8-9 pages viewed and sessions lasted 17 minutes.
- In comparison with e-journals represents more intensive online use which explained by:
  - a) different audience; b) novelty; c) nature of the book; d) more restricted viewing & printing arrangements imposed by publishers, which result in more online information seeking & viewing.
- Library e-book use grew by 10+% in 12 months between questionnaires.



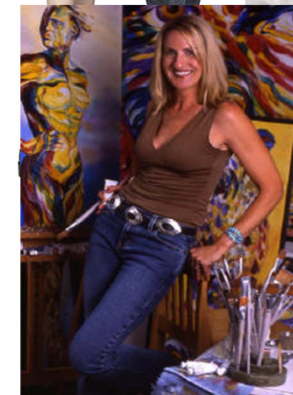
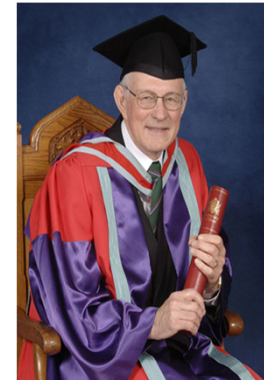
## Diversity rules (subject)

- Examined in detail: Business Management, Media Studies, and Engineering. Clear winner Business. 5 Business titles (20% of the JISC e-books) accounted for around half of usage.
- Partly because of relative (large) size of business in terms of population. However, Business users not only viewed more pages also spent longer viewing titles and had much busier & intensive sessions.
- Most popular JISC title was a business title, attracting over 80,000 views.



## Diversity rules (gender, age & institution)

- Men more likely to: a) use e-books for reasons unrelated to work/study; b) read 5+ titles a month; c) to purchase e-book.
- Women much more likely to get e-books from university library;
- Use significantly lower for those aged over 35.
- Older they were more likely to have purchased an e-book and read whole e-book.
- Size of university good indicator of level of e-book use.
- Top ten universities accounted for over quarter of JISC title use.
- Top user of JISC e-books was Sheffield Hallam; Cambridge biggest user of all MyiLibrary titles, recording nearly a 1/4 million views.



## When and where used

- E-books enable students & staff to fit work & study flexibly into busy lifestyles.
- Third of e-book viewing took place off campus and a quarter after 6pm and before 8am. Delivered academic productivity gains.
- Levels of scholarly e-book use vary enormously throughout year, often by 50+% month-on-month, tied to the peaks and troughs of the teaching year.



## How used

1. **In small chunks.** Use of e-books satisfies needs for brief information and rapid fact extraction: not used for extended reading.
2. **Quickly.** 5% of users spent more than 5 minutes viewing a page and 85% spent less than a minute.
3. **Horizontal.** Less continuous reading as users adapt to great choices offered to them in zooming through the contents of dozens of books in seconds.
4. **To navigate.** Much time devoted to navigation and finding content - taking full advantage of new digital motorways driven through books and the knowledge discovery opportunities.

*All the above consistent with what users tell us they like about e-books — searchability and rapid, instant access.*





## How used

5. **Delayed reading?** Little evidence of e-book content being downloaded for later consumption, although cutting and pasting was commonplace.
6. **Online reading.** 60% of viewing directly from the screen rather than from paper or a mixture of both screen and hard copy. Proportion is strikingly similar for students and teaching staff and is, surprisingly, independent of age
7. **Forced?** Whether a genuine preference or a form of behaviour that is shaped by the various restrictions (such as DRM, and limitations on how much content may be printed) that currently apply to e-books difficult to say, probably both lies somewhere in between.



## E-books: unblocking the blockage?

- Student use of library books tied to course assignments, projects and exams, which creates periods of exceptional short-term peaks of demand on print collection. Creates bottleneck in educational process, resulting in inconvenience and anxiety.
- Digital course text platforms that support concurrent use the obvious solution
- Clear benefit of e-books is convenience: consulted 24/7 from any location. Half of students now visit their university's digital library mostly or exclusively from home.
- Stronger *prima facie* case for library and publisher investment in electronic course texts could hardly be made.



## Unblocking the blockage

- **Satisfaction.** Levels of student satisfaction with the library provision of printed course textbooks rose over the relatively short period of the observatory study.
- Finding given further weight by university teachers, who reported that the level of student complaints about library provision of printed textbooks diminished sharply over the year.
- Concurrent access to course text e-books makes a substantial contribution to the student experience by offering a 'safety valve' for libraries, enabling them to offer equity of access even during the sharpest peaks of demand.



## Most avid readers of e-books? (super users)

- Typical e-book `super user` :
  - **older** than typical student, typically 22-35
  - more likely to be **male**
  - much more likely to be daily visitors to physical library
  - taught **postgraduate**, on vocationally-oriented programmes.
  - most likely to be **Business Studies** student
  - has strong preference for sourcing e-book readings from **university library**
  - conducts **longer session times** and much more likely to spend 20+ minutes each time
- Super users cannot be explained by geek factor: no more or no less dependent on internet resources than other students
- Nor super use a function of online course delivery through VLES



## Finding e-book content

- Most popular route, Google, but did not have access to Observatory.
- That aside, quality catalogue data appears to play a key role in e-book discovery.
- Users confused rather than helped by wide range of access methods provided: library web pages, OPACs, federated search, etc.
- Role of VLEs, like Blackboard, initiative waiting to happen as little evidence of students accessing e-books via this route. Maybe publishers' efforts (e.g. WileyPLUS) more successful?
- Once users find e-book rely on mix of looking at cover (place dwell longest), browsing tables of contents & simple searching.
- Advanced searching not used



## Impact on hard copy sales

- Does e-access cannibalize print sales or will extra digital visibility afforded by projects like Observatory promote interest in print version?
- So did sales of Observatory titles hold up against basket of textbooks in same subject area published in same year? Rather well and generally `outperformed the market' by just over 50%.
- Find no convincing case for e-access cannibalizing print sales, in fact, found that downloads and sales were statistically independent of one another.



## Conclusions

- On the basis of more than two years studying e-books in the scholarly environment (including time spent on the Superbook study) CIBER have no doubt whatsoever that e-books will prove to be a massive success and to suggest otherwise is to fly in the face of a massive evidence base.
- While there is little doubt about that there is dispute about who will benefit most from the digital shakeout. Our guess is it will be in this order — scholars, publishers and librarians.

## Readings

1. Jamali H, Nicholas D, Rowlands I. Scholarly e-books: the views of 16,000 academics: Results from the JISC National E-Book Observatory. *Aslib Proceedings* 61(1) January 2009, pp33-47
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