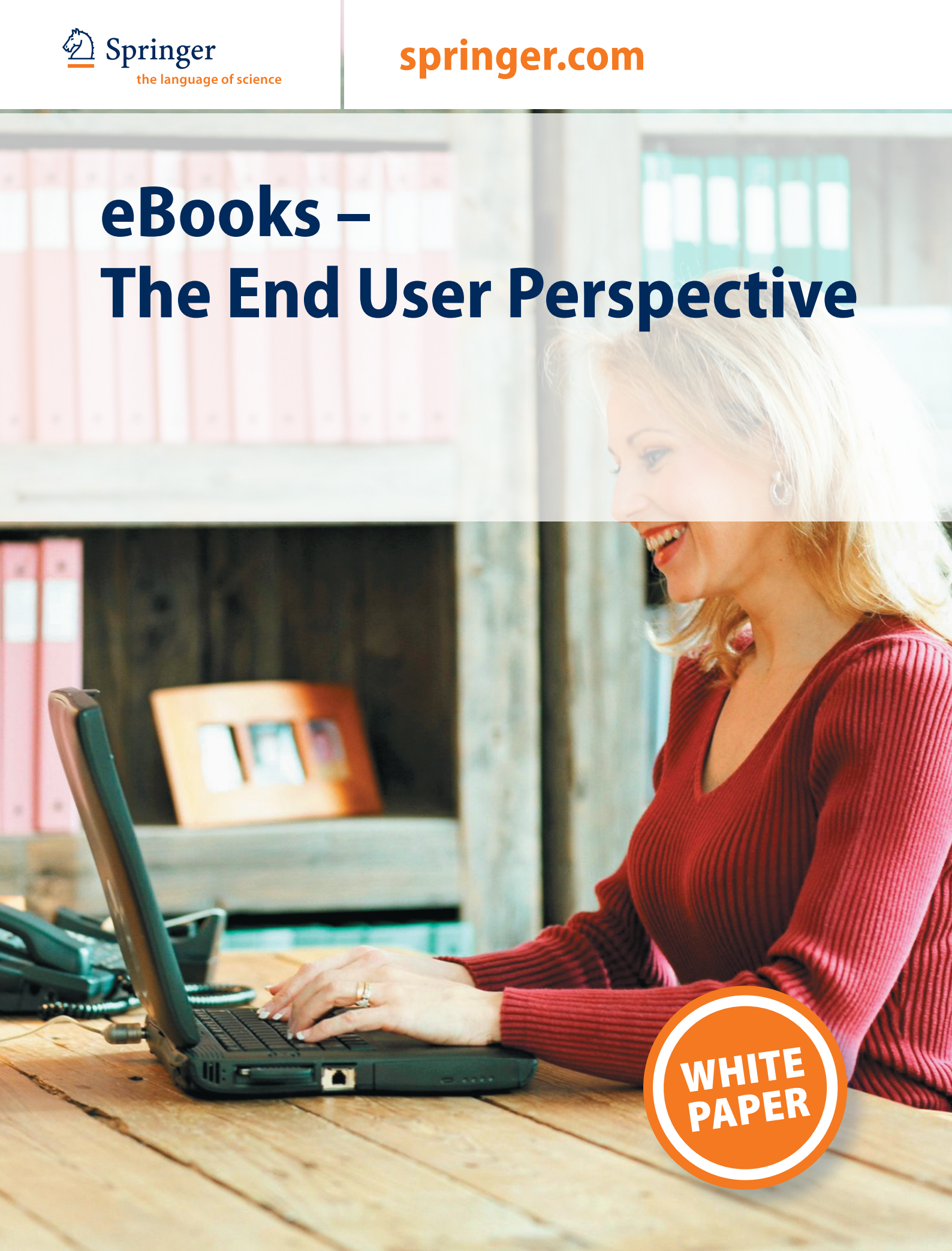


eBooks – The End User Perspective



**WHITE
PAPER**

Executive Summary

eBooks form a growing part of the collections at research and academic libraries. Although still in the early stages of adoption, eBooks have demonstrated advantages in the areas of accessibility, functionality, and cost-effectiveness. End users are just beginning to incorporate eBooks into their information experience and research habits. Libraries are eager to learn more about the rate of eBook adoption among their end users and the ways in which users are interacting with eBooks. In 2007, Springer surveyed librarians at six institutions to understand their views on eBook adoption and benefits. In 2008, Springer followed up that study with a survey of end users at five institutions to gauge their usage of and attitudes toward eBooks.

The survey uncovered some encouraging results regarding eBook adoption. Most users were aware of eBooks and had accessed them at least once. Respondents also overwhelmingly said that eBooks are useful and that they would like to incorporate eBooks into their information experience more frequently. These positive findings are supported by additional Springer usage research and studies from independent organizations that have found a surprising level of uptake for eBooks given their relative newness.

In terms of user behavior, the 2008 Springer survey found that users mostly access eBooks for research and study purposes and that the types of eBooks most frequently used are reference works and textbooks. A separate Springer study of usage metrics within its own eBooks program found that content age appears to have less of an impact on the usage of eBooks than on the usage of online journals. eBook usage is also less concentrated than online journal usage, with a greater array of titles driving downloads. eBook users appear to find value in a wide variety of titles and content. Finally, the 2008 Springer user survey found that users most frequently locate eBooks through general search engines like Google as well as through online library catalogs.

Users regard convenience, accessibility, and enhanced functionality as the primary benefits of eBooks. Print books are perceived to have an advantage in ease and enjoyability of reading, and users do not expect them to disappear in the near future. However, users anticipate that in five years time, they will prefer the electronic versions of some books and expect that their transition to eBooks will be fastest for research-related activities and for reference works.

Overall, the survey results indicate that eBooks are best suited for research purposes or in a search environment where the user needs to locate specific information. Users are not reading eBooks cover-to-cover in the traditional sense but instead approach them as a resource for finding answers to research questions. eBooks have the potential to stimulate new forms of book content usage and will require libraries to think differently about how to accommodate the needs of users as their eBook collections grow. Viewing eBooks through the lens of traditional print book usage might cause libraries to miss important opportunities for enhancing the user research experience.

An End User Perspective on eBooks

After years of development efforts and high expectations, eBooks have begun to cement their place as a central part of the information experience. Research and academic libraries are gradually building their eBook collections into a valuable resource for their users. A 2007 Springer survey of librarians at six institutions¹ found that many libraries recognize eBooks as an ideal opportunity to expand collections while enhancing users' research experiences. And in a recent Publishers Communication Group study, 43 percent of the librarians surveyed said that their budget for eBooks would likely increase in 2008. While most librarians acknowledge that eBook programs are in their early stages, they also clearly recognize the significant impact that eBooks will have on the future of research and information retrieval.

No picture of eBooks' current status and future potential can be considered complete without including the end user perspective. User experiences with the Internet have created an expectation of instantaneous access to information, both whenever and wherever needed. Given these high expectations for digital information resources, libraries, publishers, and other organizations have sought to better understand how end users perceive and interact with eBooks.

¹ Institutions participating in the 2007 survey included the following: University of Illinois at Urbana-Champaign, United States; University of Florida, United States; University Library of Turku, Finland; Centre for Mathematics and Computer Science Amsterdam, The Netherlands; University of Muenster, Germany; and Victoria University, Australia.

In order to gain insight into the end user perspective on eBooks, Springer conducted a 2008 survey of users at four of the institutions that took part in the 2007 study, plus one additional institution. The following institutions participated in the 2008 study:

- ▶ Centrum voor Wiskunde en Informatica (CWI), Centre for Mathematics and Computer Science, Amsterdam, The Netherlands
- ▶ University of Illinois at Urbana-Champaign, United States
- ▶ University of Muenster, Germany
- ▶ University of Turku, Finland
- ▶ JRD Tata Memorial Library Bangalore, India (new participant in 2008)

The purpose of the study was to understand users' adoption of eBooks, their eBook usage behavior, and their perceptions of eBook advantages and disadvantages. This paper summarizes the findings of the user survey and describes the implications for libraries.

End User Awareness and Usage of eBooks

Despite the relative newness of eBooks as a resource, most of the users surveyed were aware of their existence and had used them at least once, whether through their libraries or through another source. The study found that between 52 percent and 84 percent of respondents at each institution were aware of the availability of eBooks through their libraries. Moreover, between 58 percent and 80 percent of respondents at each institution had used eBooks at least once, whether through their library or other sources. For example, at University of Turku, 84 percent of users said they were aware that they had access to a large number of eBooks through their library, and 73 percent said they had used eBooks at least once.

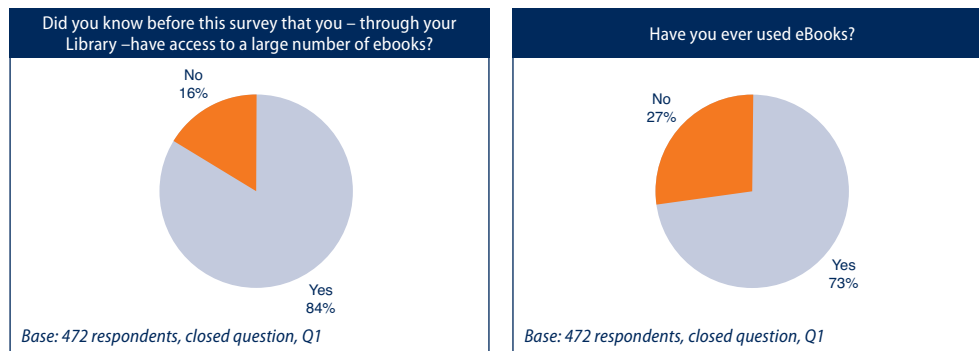


Fig. 1: At University of Turku, 84 percent of respondents said that they were aware of the availability of eBooks through their library, and 73 percent said they had used eBooks.

Springer's findings on the prevalence of eBook usage are consistent with a recent Joint Information Systems Committee (JISC) study in the UK, which found that 60 percent of users surveyed had used eBooks. The JISC study also found that while 46 percent of users obtained their last eBook they used through their library, nearly the same number (43 percent) obtained their last eBook via the Internet. Clearly, even if users do not realize their library contains eBook offerings, they are encountering eBooks in their online research through sources like Google Book Search. Libraries have the opportunity to position themselves as a central, convenient source of extensive eBook content for users who would otherwise turn to the Internet for their eBook searches.

A 2007 study of usage metrics within Springer's own eBooks program confirms the promising trend in user adoption of eBooks. The study found that for institutions that were early adopters of eBooks, users accessed eBooks with 50 to 100 percent of the frequency with which they accessed online journals. And in the first year of Springer's eBooks program, eBook usage accounted for roughly a fourth of total usage on the SpringerLink website with approximately 25 million chapter downloads. Given the relatively recent introduction of eBooks, these usage statistics demonstrate significant promise.

In the 2008 user survey, respondents described the primary obstacle to eBook usage as a lack of awareness of eBook resources available through their libraries. Fortunately, libraries have the power to remove this obstacle by improving the ease of finding eBooks and educating library users about the availability of eBooks as part of library collections.

Trends in eBook User Behavior

Frequency of eBook usage varied by institution, with most users indicating they access eBooks on a weekly or monthly basis. Users also said that they primarily use eBooks for research or study purposes, rather than for leisure or teaching purposes. For example, at the University of Illinois at Urbana-Champaign, 78 percent of users said they use eBooks for research while 56 percent reported using eBooks for study, but only 10 percent mentioned teaching or leisure. Given most users' existing experience with seeking information on the Internet, research is a natural entry point for eBook usage.

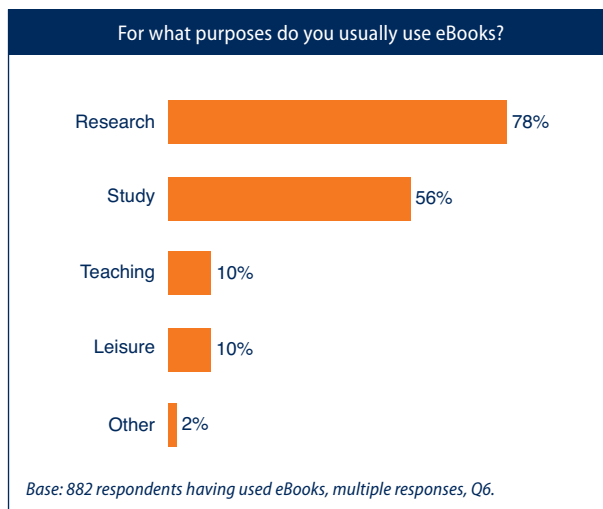


Figure 2: At the University of Illinois at Urbana-Champaign, most users said they use eBooks primarily for research and study, with teaching and leisure trailing far behind.

When users were asked what types of eBooks they had used so far, the most frequently given answers varied by institution:

- ▶ Reference works at the University of Illinois at Urbana-Champaign
- ▶ Reference works and textbooks at Muenster
- ▶ Conference proceedings at CWI Amsterdam
- ▶ Reference works and textbooks at Turku
- ▶ Textbooks at Bangalore

These results are somewhat consistent with the 2007 Springer study of usage metrics within its own eBooks program, which found that reference books, textbooks, and research monographs had the highest average download rate.

The 2007 Springer usage study also found that unlike journal content, the age of eBook content does not appear to have a significant impact on usage. eBooks published in 2005 were used as frequently as eBooks published in 2006 and 2007. Moreover, the Springer usage study found that eBook usage is less concentrated than electronic journal usage. The study points to a “long tail” of eBook usage, wherein many book titles that sell only a few copies in print are now findable and frequently used online.

In terms of locating eBook content, the 2008 Springer user survey found that users begin their search for eBooks at different places depending on the institution. At the University of Muenster and CWI Amsterdam, users said they find eBooks mostly through general search engines like Google. But at University of Turku and the University of Illinois, online library catalogs served as the starting point for most users' eBook searches. The graph below illustrates the detailed response of University of Muenster users. Fifty-two percent of users said they often or very often start their eBook search with a general search engine, while 49 percent often use the library's online catalog. Vendor-provided sites, the library web site, and regional library catalogs trailed somewhat as starting points for searches.

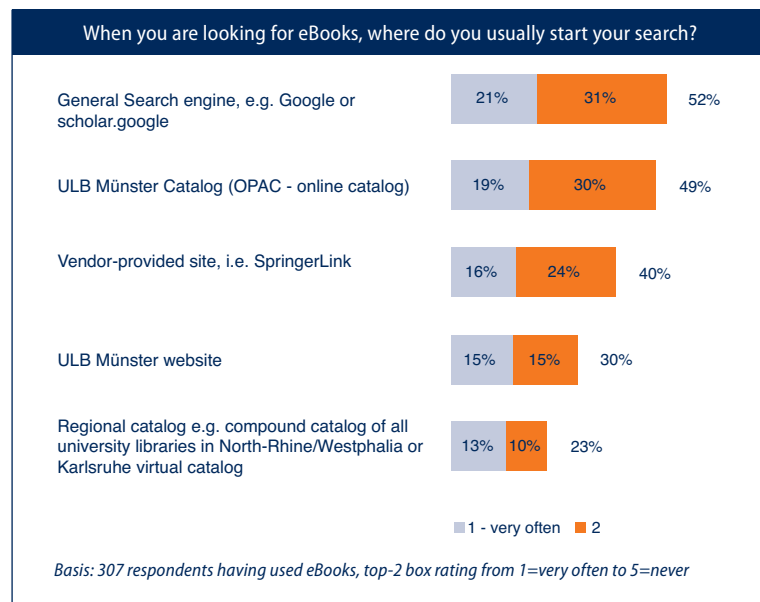


Figure 3: Users at University of Muenster primarily begin their eBook searches with a general search engine like Google or the library's online catalog.

These results are supported by the findings of SpringerLink usage investigations, wherein eBook usage was monitored before and after the implementation of Springer eBook MARC records in library catalogs. At Turku University, the average number of eBook chapter downloads per month more than doubled after eBook MARC records were loaded into the library catalog.

A recent study conducted by the Centre for Information Behaviour and the Evaluation of Research (CIBER) offers conclusions that complement the findings of the 2008 Springer user survey. CIBER studied patterns of user behavior in virtual libraries, finding that users often engage in non-traditional reading activities like "horizontal information seeking" and "power browsing." Instead of spending a long time reading a particular eBook or online journal article, users skim quickly and bounce from source to source. The CIBER study found that users spent an average of only four minutes on a particular eBook site, leading CIBER to conclude that in a virtual environment, users are not reading in the traditional sense. Ultimately, CIBER said that its research "suggests that eBooks will be the next publishing success story, although demand here could be even more spectacular, simply as a result of the enormous size of the student population, hungry for highly digested content."

CIBER's conclusions mesh well with Springer's studies, which found that users primarily access eBooks for research, use a relatively wide variety of eBook titles, focus on reference works and textbooks, and often locate eBooks through general search engines. The pattern of behavior described in these results is consistent with CIBER's findings that users skim quickly through a variety of digital resources looking for specific pieces of information, rather than engage in extended reading sessions.

End User Evaluation of eBook Advantages and Disadvantages

Encouragingly, users overwhelmingly indicated that eBooks are useful to them and that they would like to use more eBooks. Almost all respondents found eBooks useful, with between 85 percent and 96 percent of respondents at each institution rating them as either very or somewhat useful. Moreover, between 79 percent and 92 percent of users at each institution said that they would like to use more eBooks.

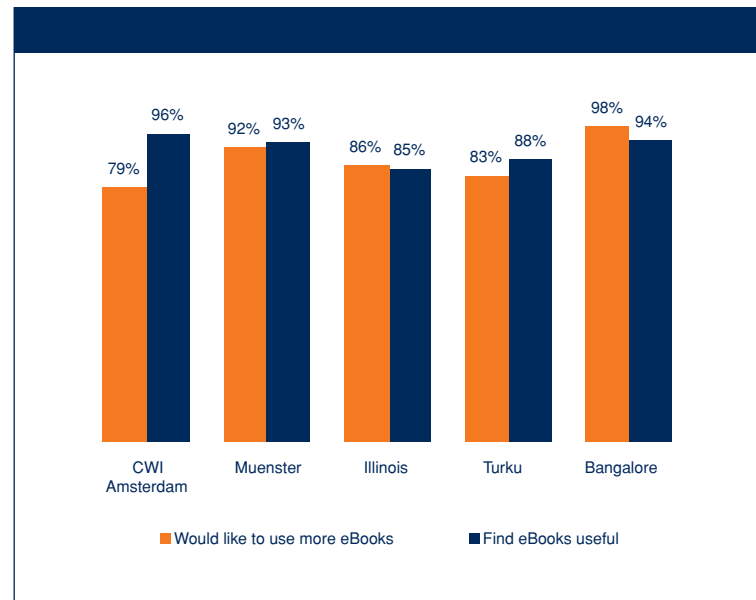


Figure 4: The vast majority of users surveyed find eBooks useful and would like to use more of them.

Users cited the difficulty of reading books from a screen and a preference for traditional print books as the primary reasons for not using eBooks more often. Given users' comfort level and long history with print books, the challenge of making eBooks easier to read is a difficult one. The strides that companies like Amazon.com and Sony are making with their eBook readers might point the way toward resolving this issue in the long term.

The Springer user survey also sought to understand user perspectives on the advantages and disadvantages of eBooks. The primary advantages of eBooks for end users revolve around convenience and information access. Users said that they value the ability to access eBooks anytime and anywhere and appreciate that access is fast and easy. Full-text searching was also named as a top eBook advantage.

► *Mostly the advantage of using eBooks would be their convenience. Instead of going through the hassle of tracking down a specific work of inquiry and checking it out, eBooks provide an easily accessible way of accessing said work at my own convenience and leisure. Also, if at any time I need to make a copy, as long as I have access to a computer and printer, I doubt eBooks could make it any easier.* ► User at University of Illinois at Urbana-Champaign

► *With eBooks, you can find much faster relevant content by searching for keywords. You can use them anytime and everywhere, in contrast to library-provided books, which are often not available when you need them.* ► User at University of Muenster

► *I can carry and read [an eBook] everywhere! I can put it on my small laptop or PDA and finish my literature research while traveling on the train.* ► User at CWI Amsterdam

Echoing their response to the earlier question of why they do not use eBooks more frequently, users described the primary disadvantage of eBooks as the difficulty of reading content from a screen. When viewed from the standpoint of traditional print reading behavior, these recurring mentions of eBook readability problems might indicate ongoing challenges for eBook adoption. However, users appear to find value in using eBooks for specific research or information retrieval purposes. In these cases, users do not need to consume lengthy sections of content from a computer screen and eBook readability becomes less of an issue.

► *eBooks are great for research. Cover to cover: print rules.* ► User at University of Turku

► *A large number of eBooks can be carried in a laptop, where transferring the print books is a real pain. Also if the computer screen is suitable, it doesn't give much difference with the print book. Of course, print books have different glamour, it's not quite right to compare them.*

► User at JRD Tata Memorial Library, Bangalore

Users were also asked to specifically compare the advantages of eBooks and print books. As compared to print books, users said that eBooks have advantages in the areas of storage space required, 24/7 accessibility, up-to-dateness, and ease of making copies. On the other hand, print books have the advantage in terms of ease and enjoyability of reading.

► *In general, I find eBooks more useful in instances where I 'use' (look up specific data) rather than 'read' (from cover to cover).* ► User at University of Illinois at Urbana-Champaign

► *The main advantages of eBooks are their availability and searchability. They are perfectly suitable for quick references of detailed, scientifically based information.* ► User at University of Muenster

What implications do these advantages and disadvantages have for user behavior? Overall, the users surveyed said that they prefer print books for cover-to-cover reading, but see eBooks as useful for specific research needs or as complementary to print books. In other words, eBooks are best suited for research purposes or in a search environment where the user needs to locate specific information. This finding indicates that eBooks have the potential to stimulate new forms of book content usage. Looking at eBooks through the lens of traditional print book usage might offer a skewed viewpoint of eBooks' value to users and could cause libraries to miss important opportunities for enhancing the user research experience.

The Future of eBook Usage

While users acknowledge that adoption of eBooks will continue to increase, they do not envision print books disappearing within the near future. Users expect that the transition to eBooks will happen fastest for research-related activities, rather than study, teaching, or leisure purposes. They also expect that reference works will most quickly make the transition to eBooks, followed by research monographs and textbooks. These answers further support the conclusion that eBooks are best suited to specific research and information retrieval purposes. Users recognize the potential of eBooks to support their research activities and believe that digitized reference works will help them quickly locate the specific information they seek.

► *Access to more eBooks is always welcomed in the research world, even when print books are still preferred for heavy reading. Instant access to information is increasingly important and advantageous.* ► User at University of Illinois at Urbana-Champaign

► *I don't need to wait for eBooks to be returned to the library. It's faster to find specific information by using [the] search option instead of flip-flopping pages.* ► User at University of Turku

Most respondents predicted that in five years time they will prefer to read print versions of some books, and electronic versions of others. For example, at the University of Muenster, 53 percent of respondents said they would read both print and eBooks, 35 percent said they would read more print, and seven percent said they would read more eBooks. In the short term, eBooks will continue to be best suited to specific research and information retrieval needs.

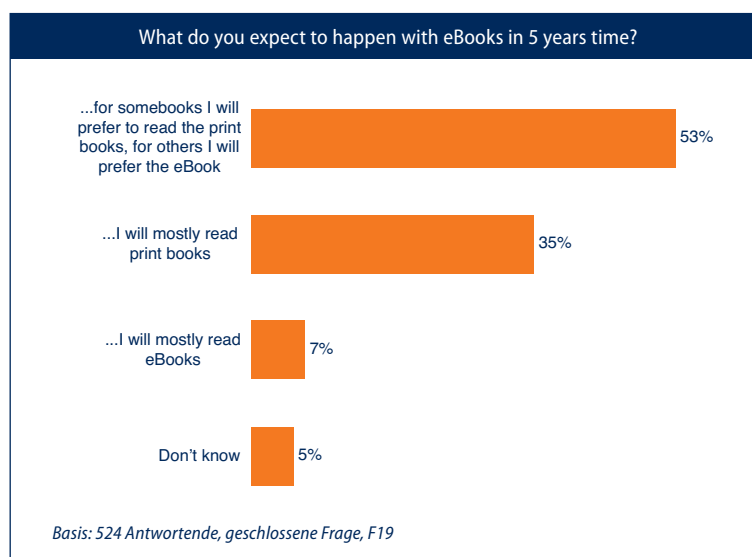


Figure 5: Most users at the University of Muenster expect that in five years, they will prefer print for some books and eBooks for others.

The CIBER study takes an even longer viewpoint, looking ahead to the state of virtual libraries in 2017. CIBER describes the “inexorable rise of the eBook,” predicting that print sales will fall sharply as electronic publishing matures and consumer demand grows. CIBER believes that by 2017, eBooks will be the default format for textbooks, scholarly books, and reference works.

Conclusion

The emergence of eBooks as a central part of the information experience requires libraries to think differently about how to meet the needs of their users. While eBooks will not replace print books in the near future, users are rapidly adopting them as complementary to print books. Users value the convenience and ease of access that eBooks provide and are engaging in new forms of book content usage to take advantage of their libraries’ growing eBook collections. Libraries can expand eBook usage to an even larger population of users by raising awareness of eBook availability and ensuring that eBook content is easy to find and use.

About Springer

Springer is the second-largest publisher of journals in the science, technology, and medicine (STM) sector and the largest publisher of STM books. It publishes on behalf of more than 300 academic associations and professional societies. Springer is part of Springer Science+Business Media, one of the world’s leading suppliers of scientific and specialist literature. The group publishes over 1,700 journals and more than 5,500 new books a year, as well as the largest STM eBook Collection worldwide. Springer has operations in over 20 countries in Europe, the USA, and Asia, and some 5,000 employees.

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