

Exploring faculty experiences with e-books: a focus group

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Abstract

Purpose

The purpose of this paper is to describe how, in the spring of 2007, Arizona State University Libraries held a focus group of selected faculty to discover their perceptions and use of electronic books (e-books) in their research and teaching.

Design/methodology/approach

The services of the Institute of Social Sciences Research were employed to recruit and moderate the focus group. Major themes explored were: use of e-books as textbooks; use of e-books for personal research; comparison between e-books and print; disciplinary differences in perceptions of e-books; and motivators for future use.

Findings

Overall, the focus group revealed that faculty had generally unsatisfactory experiences in using e-books in their research and teaching owing to the unreliability of access, lack of manipulability, and the steep learning curve of the various interfaces. However, most faculty agreed that e-books would be a very viable and useful alternative if these issues were resolved.

Research limitations/implications

The focus group consisted of only six faculty members and hence is not representative of faculty as a whole. A larger survey of a more diverse faculty population would greatly serve to clarify and expand upon the findings.

Practical implications

The implications for academic libraries include providing better outreach and training to faculty about the e-book platforms offered, provide better course support, and advocate to e-book vendors to consider faculty's teaching and research needs in their product development.

Originality/value

This is believed to be the first published study of faculty opinions and use of e-books utilizing focus group methodology and offers detailed information that would be useful for academic libraries and e-book vendors for evidence-based decisions.

Keywords

Electronic books

Academic staff

Focus groups

Academic libraries

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