

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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Focus groups have been a dominant form of qualitative data collection in market research for more than 30 years. So, how can you get the most from them? In a room in the Students Union, a group of students discuss their experiences as students at the University. They are talking about what they like and dislike at the University and how this compares to their expectations before arriving. They are brainstorming words which come to mind when thinking about the University and are working in pairs to come up with a "strap line" which typifies their experiences. To explore a concept with stimulus aids. To explore and identify issues of satisfaction for customers, staff or suppliers. To explore perceptions of brand and service elements associated with the brand. – 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. Most of these books were by experienced focus group moderators and provided considerable detail about the recruitment of focus group participants, the actual conduct of groups, and the interpretation of data generated by focus groups. We have referenced a number of these books in our own monograph, and we feel that the reader will find them useful supplements to the material we offer. Despite the recent appearance of other books on the topic, we feel that our own work offers a unique perspective on focus groups. Exploring gender speak: Personal effectiveness in gender communication. New York: McGraw-Hill. [Page 171].