

eBook/eAudiobook User Behavior Survey

Created by: T. Meredith, Jefferson County Library (Port Hadlock, WA)

Contact Info: tmeredith@jclibrary.info

Notes on Survey Development and Distribution

Why create a user behavior survey?

- Recent publishing industry statements—specifically, [the open letter written by John Sargent, CEO of Macmillan, at the end of October 2019](#)—referenced “changing habits” of readers. Sargent stated that “...it is becoming ever easier to borrow rather than buy. This is causing book-buying customers to change habits, and they are fueling the tremendous growth in e-book lending.” This behavior change has been used to argue that the library’s e-material lending model is having a negative financial impact for the “publishing ecosystem.” However – no supporting data was shared with this claim, and no open data could be found to confirm or deny the claim. Therefore, a brief user behavior survey was created to gather data about the current selection, borrowing, and subsequent purchasing habits of present-day eBook and eAudiobook readers, with the intent to share this data openly for review by anyone interested in the topic.

Why such a quick, rushed data gathering phase?

- Although the library and publishing communities were quick to read and digest the media surrounding the Macmillan embargo in early November 2019, the general public was mostly unaware. I felt it was critical to try to gather user behavior data prior to significant media coverage or local library PR efforts in order to reduce the potential influence of media biases on the survey responses.

What questions did we want to answer?

- Based on Sargent’s claim(s) in his open letter to librarians AND the ensuing conversations in the library community, I felt there were two specific claims/questions for which we needed data before we could adequately refute or confirm.
 - CLAIM: Library users who check out materials do not purchase those same materials; therefore, library circulation negatively impacts publisher (author) income.
 - *This is the rationale for increased library purchase price, limited item circs before re-purchasing, etc.*
 - CLAIM: When library users want to read material that is currently unavailable and has extended hold (wait list) times, they will choose to purchase the title instead of waiting for a library (free) copy to become available.
 - *This is the rationale for embargoing library sales – if libraries are allowed to purchase one, a significant holds list will accrue, and patrons will choose to purchase the title rather than wait more than two months to read it for free.*

Who created the questions?

- The survey questions were developed/selected by Tamara Meredith, Director of the Jefferson County Library. Suggestions and edits were incorporated from feedback received from Daniel Heaton, Systems and Technical Services Manager at the Jefferson County Library; Kim Tingelstad, Acquisitions Librarian at the Jefferson County Library; and Larra Clark, Deputy Director, Policy, of the Public Library Association.

When did survey run?

- 11/27/19 through 12/31/2019

How was it promoted/shared?

- The survey was shared via social media and email.

Why no demographic questions?

- Based on the broad claims made by Sargent, I felt that survey data needed to speak to “eBook/eAudiobook user behavior” in broad terms. The survey was designed to collect data on individual behavior and choice-making, not the frequency or quantitative impact of those choices. As public libraries, we do not track materials use by patron demographics—therefore, it seemed irrelevant (and inappropriate) to collect data specific to library users based on age, gender, etc. “Home library” was relevant for us, however, so that we could compare local use trends to broader state and national trends.

Will you share more information on why/how the survey was developed and which questions were included?

- Yes, future publications/presentations will contain details for rationale behind inclusion for each question.

Where can I see aggregate results?

<https://tinyurl.com/ebookeaudiosurveyresults2019>