



Cost of Print and Digital Books: A Comparative Study



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ABSTRACT

The present paper dwells upon the difference between the prices of print versions of academic titles and their digital counterparts across different subjects. It underlines that the print versions of academic titles are cheaper than their digital counterparts. It also spotlights that the commercial publishers are more capable of catering to the information needs of the students and researchers than the University presses by publishing more number of books. Just 57.5% of the required academic titles are available in digital format; hence, libraries cannot switch over to e-only collection development as all of what is needed is not available in digital format.

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There is a change in the information seeking behavior of students, researchers and faculty members in institutions of higher learning. They preferably want everything in digital format. As a result of this, libraries are expected to cater to their expectations and needs by acquiring digital books. University libraries, worldwide have actively started subscribing to e-books.

The global e-book market is the fastest growing submarket in the worldwide book publishing industry. The share of global e-book market was approximately 12.6% of the global book publishing market in 2014 and is expected to increase to 27.8% by 2019. It is forecasted to grow at a CAGR of 17.4% over the period 2014–2019 (ReportsnReports, 2014). E-books experienced 3.8% revenue growth to an estimated \$3.37 billion dollars. There were 510 million e-books sold in 2014, which is nearly at par with the 568 million hardback books sold in 2014.

The Global e-Book Report (Wisichenbart, 2015) also shows the encouraging trends in the production of e-books in the markets of U.S.A., U.K., Germany, Australia, France, Belgium, Spain, Italy, Netherlands, Brazil, China, India, and Russia. It has highlighted that the readers read more when they have digital readers at their disposal. In the United States, the e-book industry is worth about \$5.7 billion which is likely to grow to \$8.7 billion by 2018 (The Statistics Portal, 2014).

The Global E-book Report (2015) claimed that the share of digital books is less than 1% of the \$2 billion value of the book market of India; however the report perceived encouraging growth in the sale of digital books due to a boom in the sale of tablets in recent times and the supportive policy of the Government of India for education through ICT. 26% of books published in India are in Hindi; 24% are in English. The

major publishers in India—Penguin Books India, Hachette India, and Westland have digitized their English language backlists (Vyas, 2014). India's e-book industry shows great potential. In the coming years, digital books would constitute about 25% of the total book sales in India. It has the largest youth population from 10 to 24-year-old; 808 million are below the age of 35. The young generation is also known as the net generation due to their exposure to the web and the internet. There are 243,198,222 internet users with a 19.19% penetration rate. The e-book market, in India is expanding very fast. The e-book selling companies are making concerted efforts to reach out to readers in small cities by selling e-books through e-book reader apps installed on smartphones hence publishers can market their books to individual readers in small towns and remote areas. In rural India, 70% of the population accesses the internet through mobile phones (Vyas, 2014). Hence, the publishers of digital books can market their books directly to rural youths having smartphones.

Libraries have always functioned and served their users on a shoestring or a tight budget. When e-books converged on the landscape, it was thought that, libraries would be able to widen the range or gamut of resources, which they offer to their users, at the same cost. There was also a feeling that e-books would prove a panacea for all the constituents involved in scholarly communication. But very soon came the revelation that the e-books' world offers various ways to vendors and publishers to maximize their profits by providing content at different access and business models that are not very library friendly. The libraries are edged by the terms and conditions of use set forth by the vendors and publishers.

The Jawaharlal Nehru University (JNU) was established in New Delhi under the JNU Act 1966. The publicly-funded university houses ten schools of studies and four special centres which offer a wide spectrum of programmes in the areas of sciences, social sciences and humanities

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at graduate, post graduate and doctoral levels. The schools and centres are firmly committed to pursuing and maintaining the high and rigorous standards of academic and research excellence. The constituency of the university comprises 600 + faculty members, 8,000 + students and 1,350 non-teaching staff.

In this context, the present study reports the e-book subscription at the central library of Jawaharlal Nehru University, New Delhi. The Central Library subscribes to more than 100,000 + e-books from various publishers across different disciplines. The book procurement policy of the Library is given on <http://jnu.ac.in/Library/BookProcurementPolicy.htm>.

During 2012–2014, the Central Library, made a strategic decision to opt for the purchase of electronic access to print materials wherever it was possible to do the same. The ever increasing use of progressive technology to access and retrieve information is part of libraries' mission and, in turn, contributes to the education and research mission of the university. The digital collection enables optimal access of resources and materials which facilitate the increasingly collaborative and multidisciplinary nature of teaching and research. The provision of a digitally rich environment reinforces the library's mission for excellent user services.

METHOD OF STUDY

The faculty members of the different schools recommended 1248 titles altogether in early 2014 for procurement by the Central Library of JNU. These titles requested by them were examined to determine the availability of their digital counterparts. The list of 1248 titles was given to various aggregators and publishers like EBSCO, Proquest, Balani, Cambridge, Oxford, Taylor and Francis who were asked to submit their quotations for print as well as digital versions of the books. The Library received proposals from them who agreed to provide 717 titles in digital as well as in print versions. The researchers took into consideration the least prices offered by the aggregators and publishers on 717 books. So the authors analyzed and interpreted data of 717 book titles available in digital and print versions. The analysis is based on multiple user pricing and one-time purchase model. The data, which included title, ISBN, publisher, year of publication, the price of digital and print versions, nature of publication i.e. commercial press or university press of 717 books was entered and maintained in Excel. The data is analyzed with MS-Excel 2010 and SPSS – 13.0 packages.

For this article, a university press is a publishing house associated with a university and bears its name in its imprint. For instance, Cambridge University Press, Oxford University Press, and so on and so forth; while publishers, societies who/which are not associated with any university have been categorized as commercial publishers; for example, Taylor and Francis; Sage, etc.

So the authors decided to find out with empirical evidence if the use of the e-book was indeed budget friendly, and could support libraries in their mission to serve the users in a cost efficient manner.

Besides, as per the understanding of the authors, no study has been done in the Indian context so far comparing prices of print and digital versions of academic titles. It is hoped that this study will trigger many more studies in the Indian library milieu. It, in turn, will help in ascertaining if e-books are library budget friendly or otherwise.

RESEARCH QUESTIONS AND HYPOTHESES

The following research questions were posed in this study:

1. Is there any difference in the prices of digital and print versions of the same academic titles?
2. Is there any difference in the pricing policy of commercial presses and university presses for their digital and print versions of academic titles?

The following hypotheses were derived from the abovementioned research questions:

Null hypotheses.

H₀₁: There is no difference in prices of print and digital versions of books.

H₀₂: There is no association in prices of digital and print versions of the same title.

H₀₃: Prices of the print version of books do not differ with prices of their digital counterparts for the books published by university presses.

H₀₄: Prices of the print version of books do not differ with prices of their digital counterparts for the books published by commercial publishers.

H₀₅: There is no association in prices of print and digital versions of books, when the books are published by university presses.

H₀₆: There is no association in prices of print and digital versions of books, when the books are published by commercial publishers.

REVIEW OF LITERATURE

There are many evaluations and anecdotal evidence which have highlighted that the use of print collections is on the decline. So the subscription to e-books is the logical inference which emerges out of the prevailing situation (Pickett, Tabacaru, & Harrell, 2014).

Walters (2013) has examined the problems which libraries encounter while selecting and finalizing subscriptions to e-books. The business models, terms and conditions of use differ from publisher to publisher. There are bottlenecks like changing the nature of physical media, different proprietary formats and lack of archiving policies which prevent long term access to e-books.

Hodges, Preston, and Hamilton (2010) have identified significant challenges which should be overcome to enhance the procurement and use of e-books by libraries and readers respectively. There are many issues which need to be handled, embargo between the print and the electronic counterparts, different access models, restrictions on use and scholarly sharing before the use of e-books becomes common in the university libraries.

The studies have observed that all the academic titles required for higher education and learning are not available as online books (Pomerantz, 2010; Walters, 2013). Jindal and Pant (2013) have shown that only 17% of print books have their digital counterparts which fulfill only 9–15% of the requirements of science undergraduates and postgraduates.

Bounie, Eang, Sirbu, and Waelbroeck (2013) have studied the impact of the sale of e-books on the sale of their print counterparts, whether the sale of e-books adversely affects or promotes the sale of their print equivalents. They have compared the bestselling titles on Amazon in print and Kindle formats during 2007–2010. They have categorized the e-books as “superstars”, which sell in big numbers in digital as well as print formats; “digital outsiders”, which are not best-selling in print but are very popularly sold as Kindle versions and “print preferred books” which are top sellers in print but not as e-books. Their study highlights that the e-book market encourages and promotes the sale of old print books too. Other studies too have emphasized that old print release gains popularity and sales in the electronic markets (Bounie et al., 2013). Hu and Smith (2013) have studied the impact of digital distribution of e-books on the sale of their print counterparts. They have observed that the delayed release of e-books results in a small increase in the print sales but a large decrease in the sale of total e-books. But the delay in the Kindle availability of books leads to a significant increase in the print sales for the same titles.

It is believed that e-books should be cheaper than their print counterparts, but there are a number of variables which determine

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