E-book ILL in Academic Libraries: A Three-Year Trend Report

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A R T I C L E   I N F O

A B S T R A C T

In spite of the widespread trend of e-book adoption by U.S. academic libraries, interlibrary loan (ILL) of e-books is significantly lagging behind because of license agreement restrictions, unstandardized platforms, library policies, and technological barriers. More recently, the long-cherished tradition of ILL has been further challenged, because an increasing number of academic libraries are adopting user-based e-book purchasing models that have the potential to bypass ILL. This paper compares the findings of two longitudinal surveys on e-book ILL practices in U.S. academic libraries, based on random sampling. The results from inferential statistical analyses reveal that, while inter-library lending of entire e-books is seldom practiced and shows no growth, e-book chapter ILL is becoming more prevalent in U.S. academic libraries. Librarians have grown more knowledgeable about licensing and technological issues, but their perceptions of these barriers are mixed. The study also shows that larger institutions are more likely to perform e-book ILL services, and their librarians tend to be more positive about the future of e-book ILL.

Introduction

In spite of the widespread trend of e-book adoption by U.S. academic libraries, interlibrary loan (ILL) of e-books is significantly lagging behind, because of license agreement restrictions, different purchasing models, unstandardized platforms, and technological barriers. Recently, the long-cherished library tradition of resource sharing has been further challenged, because an increasing number of academic libraries are adopting user-based e-book purchasing models that bypass ILL, such as Demand Driven Acquisition (DDA), Patron Driven Acquisition (PDA), Purchase-On-Demand (POD), Pay-Per-View (PPV), and short-term loan (Sewell & Link, 2016; Tyler, Falci, Melvin, Epp, & Kreps, 2013). These models are often considered to be alternatives or even replacements for ILL. Moreover, although some libraries and library consortia are developing e-book lending methods (Machovec, 2015; Woods & Ireland, 2008), some library scholars appear to be increasingly pessimistic about the future of e-book ILL.

Is ILL becoming extinct for e-books? This paper presents the findings of a longitudinal study intended to shed light on the current trends of e-book ILL. In 2013 and again in 2016, similar survey instruments were administered to 200 U.S. academic libraries, to identify their general practices related to e-book ILL. These surveys included specific questions about whether/how e-book ILL was practiced, obstacles encountered in practicing e-book ILL, their usage of the alternative lending/purchasing models, and librarians' perceptions of e-book ILL and library resource sharing. Based on the results of the two surveys,

this paper addresses the following research questions:

RQ1. Was e-book ILL more widely practiced by U.S. academic libraries in 2016 than in 2013?

RQ2. Were there changes in librarians' perceived obstacles to e-book ILL in 2016 compared to 2013?

RQ3. What types of institutions were more likely to practice e-book ILL in 2016?

RQ4. What were librarians' attitudes towards and perceptions of e-book lending and the future of resource sharing in academic libraries? Did their institutions' ILL policy affect librarians' perceptions of the future of e-book ILL?

This study not only captures the current state of e-book ILL in U.S. academic libraries, but also reveals the trend in the evolution of e-book ILL in this fast-changing environment, through statistical analyses and comparisons. More importantly, responses about librarians' perceptions are potential indicators of the future of ILL. Librarians are key agents of change whose innovation and collaboration may define the future of ILL.

Literature review

The incompatibility between e-books and the traditional ILL model has been discussed for > 15 years. While "the number of eBooks sold is nearly on-par with the number of hardbacks sold" (Bluestone, 2015),

the trajectory of e-book ILL services going forward is murky. E-books present unique and complicated challenges for sharing through traditional ILL services. Will ILL services survive amid the trend of growing e-book collections, especially in academic libraries? There are two opposing views among library scholars, which are summarized below.

Pessimistic view

Seventeen years ago, Jackson (2000) pointed out that e-book ILL was often the "deal breaker" in license negotiations (p. 19). Lynch (2001) claimed that the license issue deadlocked e-book usage through ILL, and the culture of inter-library book lending was at stake. Those opinions were echoed by Garrod (2004), who argued that the single factor affecting e-book ILL was "publishers' fear regarding unlicensed access to copyright materials" (p. 228).

A decade later, many scholars still expressed similar points of view. Most observers maintained that the major obstacle in e-book ILL, both for whole e-books and for chapters, was the licensing restriction on ILL. Many e-book vendors and publishers chose to ignore institutions' practice of sharing books via ILL services, and instead prohibited such sharing of e-books in their license agreements (Litsey & Ketner, 2013; Walters, 2013). Some content providers, such as Project Muse, simply did not permit e-books to be used for the purpose of fulfilling ILL requests. When e-book ILL was allowed, usually only chapters could be shared (Machovec, 2015); sharing entire e-book versions of copyright-protected materials was "still a struggle and nearly impossible" (Radnor & Shrauger, 2012, p. 156).

Given these restrictions, libraries "struggled with the dilemma of where e-books fit in the traditional ILL model" (Woods & Ireland, 2008, p. 107). Scholars were worried about the risk of losing their beneficial ILL rights, as libraries seem headed towards an e-only future (Berube, 2005; Bivens-Tatum, 2014). Meanwhile, e-book ILL was not an isolated issue handled only by ILL librarians and staff, but instead was "driven by larger shifts in how libraries approach collection development" (Bailey-Hainer, Beaubien, Posner, & Simpson, 2014, p.8).

Additional concerns arose from various user-based acquisition models, including Demand Driven Acquisition (DDA), Patron Driven Acquisition (PDA), Purchase-On-Demand (POD), Pay-Per-View (PPV), and Short-Term Loan (STL), that were becoming "one of the most discussed ideas in the world of library collections" (Lugg, 2011, p. 7). PDA, for example, has become a popular, lower-cost solution for obtaining unavailable or unlendable books (Lener & Brown, 2014). DDA of an e-book has the advantage of fulfilling users' needs immediately, with a lower average cost per use (Carrico & Leonard, 2011; Fischer, Wright, Clatanoff, Barton, & Shreeves, 2012; Kelly, 2010; Walters, 2012). STL has allowed libraries and consortia to reduce costs, especially when compared to traditional ILL costs (Harloe, Hults, & Traub, 2015).

These models could not only change the process of acquisition, but also challenge the traditional ILL services. Although in most institutions, these alternative models have not been fully integrated with collection development, content delivery, and technical services (Lener & Brown, 2014), many believe that these models will persist and become an important part of their acquisitions and collection-building efforts (Harloe et al., 2015; Sewell & Link, 2016; Tyler et al., 2013). Bivens-Tatum (2014) argued, "E-books, and the digital rights that make what should be a great advancement into a tedious exercise, have the potential to destroy ILL for books".

New proactive opportunities

In contrast to the pessimistic view of the future of e-book ILL, other scholars asserted that ILL librarians could make proactive efforts to reduce the license restrictions and other associated obstacles for e-book ILL, because local license agreements for electronic contents include possible opportunities for negotiation, (Algenio & Thompson-Young, 2005; Galligan, 2012; Radnor & Shrauger, 2012; Weston, 2015).

Some scholars argued that while many licenses limited or prohibited e-book ILL, it was librarians' irresponsible attitudes and unawareness that caused the situation to go from bad to worse. As Radnor and Shrauger (2012) pointed out, because of the extra workflow, special handling, and additional staff time required for processing, many ILL practitioners simply responded to e-book ILL requests by claiming "ebooks are not available through ILL" or they "deflect all ILL requests for ebooks automatically" (p. 156). In addition, many librarians were not aware of the e-book license permissions provided by certain databases (Zhu & Shen, 2014). For example, a review of existing license agreements from major e-book vendors revealed that some vendors do allow ILL of entire e-books, such as Springer and Taylor & Francis Group (Litsey, 2013).

Radnor and Shrauger (2012) discovered that e-book licenses sometimes remain silent about loaning an entire e-book, and therefore, they argued that knowledgeable librarians should try to broaden the licensing terms and even secure rights to lend entire electronic works. Gee (2007) also argued strongly for libraries to "demand license concessions before purchasing or subscribing to content" (p. 28). He even suggested lobbying Congress to demand better licensing rights from publishers (Gee, 2007). At the least, libraries should be willing to walk away if the terms are not ILL-friendly, because "[that] e-book sales to academic libraries continue to increase without ILL-friendly conditions, doesn't bode well for the future" (Bivens-Tatum, 2014).

Librarians became increasingly aware of the risk of losing ILL, and started various initiatives and programs in an attempt to save e-book ILL rights. In particular, scholars stressed the importance of collaboration in advocating for various forms of resource sharing and in designing universal e-book lending platforms (Bailey-Hainer et al., 2014; Ball, 2009; Litsey & Ketner, 2013). For instance, library consortia, such as the Greater Western Library Alliance (GWLA), have been playing active roles in licensing negotiation and promoting collaboration on e-book ILL (Litsey & Ketner, 2015). Oberlin Group, a consortium of liberal arts colleges, proposed an "ecosystem of sharing" based on trust and good faith between libraries and publishers (Oberlin Group, 2014). In addition, Occam's Reader, a platform of sharing e-books from certain publishers, has been used by a number of libraries across the country (Lambert, 2016).

Weston (2015), based on observations and the literature, argued that ILL could play an evolutionary role in cooperative collection development, and concluded,

> The future of ILL is ours to decide. As a service, it has not diminished even in the face of often dire predictions about the consequences of online journals and e-book content; it has instead thrived and grown.
>
> (p. 54).

Although there exists a large amount of thought pieces, reports on specific project(s), and papers on the practices of individual libraries/consortia, evidence of whether or how libraries are practicing e-book ILL has only been presented by a few studies (e.g., Frederiksen et al., 2011; Zhu & Shen, 2014; Zhu, Shen, & McCusker, 2017). This paper also fills a gap in the literature by presenting changes and trends occurring over a three-year period in the actual ILL practices among academic libraries.

Research design

The survey method was employed to collect data in both the 2013 and 2016 investigations. The two surveys used the same sampling strategy and comparable survey instruments. Each time, we sampled 200 academic libraries, using a random sampling strategy, from the population of academic libraries that had at least 50 "non-returnable interlibrary loans received" per year and at least 50 "non-returnable interlibrary loans provided" per year, based on the latest Academic Library Survey (ALS) Data File (National Center for Education Statistics,