How Readers Discover Content in Scholarly Journals

The results from a large scale reader survey (and a few other observations)

Simon Inger, May 2013
Survey on Reader Navigation

- Mission: Gain a measure of the relative importance of all of these channels to inform publishers and information buyers
- Survey of Readers following on from 2005 and 2008 studies
- Much larger, with over 19,000 respondents globally
- Over a year in planning, execution and analysis
- Thanks to all our supporters, studied multiple subject areas
Supporters

- BMJ Group
- CABI
- Cambridge University Press
- IOP Publishing
- Nature Publishing Group
- Palgrave Macmillan
- Publishing Technology
- RSC Publishing
- SAGE

(response rates between 1.7% and 6.4%)
Limitations

- It’s a survey
- Survey was only in English
- Survey used invitations from our supporters – not necessarily completely representative sample
- Due to data privacy/data protection rules, all those invited to the survey via email will be quite highly engaged with the publisher (“opted in”)
What was studied?

- Preference of discovery resources
- Search engine preference
- Device preference
- App use
- Publisher web site features

- all broken down by region, income, job role, subject area, sector
Starting Points for Searching for Articles - trend from 2005 to 2012

- A specialist bibliographic database
- Library web pages
- A specialist site for your subject
- A community web site such as EBSCO, ProQuest
- Web pages managed by a key research group in your...
- A departmental listing
- A publisher’s web site
- By searching through an archive of journal alerts
- The journal’s homepage
- A journals gateway
- An academic search engine e.g. Google Scholar
- A Scholarly Society web page

2005, n=413, ±0.20 at 95% confidence
2008, n=762, ±0.15 at 95% confidence
2012, n=788, ±0.15 at 95% confidence
To what extent do you want to support or even nurture some of these alternative discovery channels?
Relative Importance of Library Web Pages in Search by Subject Area

317 ≤ n ≤ 2790 depending on subject area, maximum error ±0.25 at 95% confidence
Is the increased reliance on library web pages for search in Humanities, Education Research and Social Sciences because these areas are less well funded and so cannot support A&Is?

What can publishers in these areas do to support and enhance content discovery?
Relative Importance of Full-Text Aggregators in Search by Subject Area

- Agriculture
- Chemistry
- Computer Science
- Earth Science
- Education Research
- Engineering, Materials & Technology
- Environmental Science
- Humanities
- Life Sciences
- Mathematics
- Medicine
- Physics & Astronomy
- Psychology
- Social & Political Science
- Other

317 ≤ n ≤ 2790 depending on subject area, maximum error ±0.25 at 95% confidence
Does this mean that physicists don’t make as much use of aggregations as those in other subject areas because:

a) ArXiv is a viable alternative?

b) There isn’t a critical mass of physics content in aggregations?

c) Physicists want to search other content types at the same time?
Relative Use of Google over Google Scholar by subject in higher income areas

- Social Sciences, n=1142, ±0.1 at 95% confidence
- Psychology, n=470, ±0.1 at 95% confidence
- Physics, n=649, ±0.1 at 95% confidence
- Medicine, n=879, ±0.1 at 95% confidence
- Mathematics, n=155, ±0.2 at 95% confidence
- Life Sciences, n=637, ±0.1 at 95% confidence
- Humanities, n=1264, ±0.1 at 95% confidence
- Environmental Science, n=219, ±0.2 at 95% confidence
- Engineering, n=607, ±0.1 at 95% confidence
- Education Research, n=251, ±0.2 at 95% confidence
- Earth Science, n=147, ±0.2 at 95% confidence
- Computer Science, n=118, ±0.2 at 95% confidence
- Chemistry, n=401, ±0.1 at 95% confidence
- Agriculture, n=165, ±0.2 at 95% confidence
- Other, n=695, ±0.1 at 95% confidence
Is this further evidence that physicists want to search other content types at the same time?

Is that also a valid reason for the difference in behaviour between social science and humanities?
Most recent article accessed. Comparing use by subject.

- Link in an Email
- Link on a Social networking site
- Bookmarked journal
- Journal alert
- Saved search alert
- Searching for articles on a subject
- Article citation from any another source
- I can't remember

Legend:
- Chemistry, n=860, ±2% at 95% confidence
- Medicine, n=1929, ±1% at 95% confidence
- Life Sciences, n=1425, ±2% at 95% confidence
Chemists seem to use ToC alerts just as much as search. What can other subject areas learn from this?
How often do you use each of the following device types to access online articles? Comparing preference for Europe vs Africa

- Desktop computer
- Laptop computer
- Tablet computer
- Phone

- Students in Europe, n=425, ±0.2 at 95% confidence
- Information Managers in Europe, n=102, ±0.3 at 95% confidence
- Respondents in Africa, n=442, ±0.2 at 95% confidence
Other studies have also shown a preference for use of the mobile version of web sites over the full site for regions with lower quality internet connections. Should publishers de-clutter their web sites so readers can more quickly get to the thing they really want?
Discovery - reference

Discovery

Delivery

Grove Music

Oxford Music Online

www.oxfordmusiconline.com

The New Palgrave Dictionary of Economics Online

MLA

MLA Handbook for Writers of Research Papers

Home | Handbook | Research Projects
How can the business models and delivery technology of eBooks change so that eBook discovery can be broadened and better integrated with the discovery of other content types?
See the full study at www.renewtraining.com

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