

A number of paragraphs were omitted from the published version of our study to pare it down to meet length requirements, even though it was a double article as published.

Here are those sections with a bit of context to locate where they were in the paper. The highlighted text was removed from the published paper.

After the Introduction:

The data forces us to conclude, reluctantly, that not only does print still offer libraries a far better “bang-per-book” than digital, but that for most popular titles, digital collections are becoming increasingly difficult to sustain. Some smaller and independent publishers are, however, now more likely to be present in the market and offer some hope for long-term and cost-effective holdings.

Study Scope

Some Research Hypotheses and Limitations 612 words About the Study

Our 2018 original paper used a 557-title selection, with many titles from the first “Focused” Monash study. This current study uses fewer titles. The earlier study included numerous British, Australian and New Zealand titles that might be less available in Canada or the United States for copyright reasons and many older titles. As we shall see, the current study focuses more narrowly on current and USA or Canadian titles. We expect coverage of digital titles to be higher than in our original study’s percentage.

Our initial study found, unsurprisingly, that both the upfront cost-per-title and cost-per-use for digital greatly exceed that of print. We hypothesize that with the disappearance since 2018 of the perpetual license option for ebooks and the reduction of perpetual digital audio options from the Big 5 publishers will mean the discrepancy between print and digital cost-per-use over time will have grown even larger in this study.

Children’s and teen titles are not selected, unless they were perchance on one of the lists we drew from. We hope a detailed study of that market using a similar methodology and looking at the leading vendors in youth titles might be undertaken, but we remain steadfast in our belief that

very early reading should occur with adults taking the lead with their children using print books and not digital.

From the “Selection of Vendors” Section:

That pay-per-use model is difficult to compare with the other vendors; we have not studied it, especially since several of our member libraries are finding it increasingly cost-prohibitive. Instead, we looked at their more traditional licensing options, not yet widely used in Canada.

By focusing on national (and international) award lists and large media outlet bestseller lists, we miss some focus on some smaller titles of regional interest—titles that might perhaps be less likely to be in digital but might offer some digital bargains. Moved to below: The current study is meant to be suggestive and not a complete picture of the library digital ecosystem. That said, its focus on best sellers and notable fiction and non-fiction provides a fairly accurate idea of what librarians face when selecting and maintaining digital content in 2024 and 2025.

A further limitation is that some numbers in this study are based on reasonable hypotheticals. We do not, for instance, compare print to digital costs based on the actual number of circulations for one copy of a print book and one license of the same digital book across several libraries. Doing such a study with enough titles to seem significant would give more precise numbers. We hope someone might undertake such a study one day, but it is likely very much beyond the scope of what working acquisitions librarians might be able to do.

This section followed the Licensing Terms section and was taken out completely:

Licensing Models and Print Use 635 words

Before moving to a comparison of print and digital costs, we acknowledge that the two are the proverbial apples and oranges, even if the content of the books remains the same. For libraries, the difference in format is not as important as the difference in access terms. With print of course, we circulate under “first sale” copyright and buy at reasonable terms, as we have for literally hundreds of years. With digital, we are locked in by licenses, cannot freely share one

user at a time, and, as we shall soon see, often pay exorbitantly. As the recent Internet Archive case shows, big publishers will fight libraries in court to keep licensing privileges. We are forced to wonder if print copyright were to be implemented today if libraries would not be bound by the same unfavorable terms that often govern digital, unbalancing the U.S. Constitution's mandate for copyright to "promote the Progress of Science and useful Arts."

Digital licenses are provided on three basic terms: "perpetual" (or so the contract says) with one copy checked out at a time, metered by time (often one or two years) and metered by number of circulations. Comparing these terms to print book use is tricky. As we noted in our initial study, factoring cost per use for print books is difficult. An unfortunate coffee spill could ruin a book on the first check out. Most libraries, however, would ask for and likely receive replacement costs in such an instance. If retired from use in good condition, moreover, many print books would go to Friends of the Library organizations and eventually bring some funding return to the library. Digital, once lapsed, is gone.

As far as we know, no study has ever established an average figure for the number of years or number of circulations print books are circulated before being weeded for condition or lack of use. It would be an interesting number to know. Individual systems could probably do a query in their ILS. One of our working group members has a policy of weeding all titles (and possibly replacing popular ones) at 100 circulations. A quality hardback can last that many circulations. Even factoring a quick turnaround circulation of two weeks, the book is unlikely to go out 26 times in one year and so should last more than four years. Six years might be common. Another of our members has done a suggestive exploration and found that their print books in fact last an average of six years or even more.^[i] We shall thus use six years as a standard figure for print format.

It could be objected that many books might get weeded for lack of interest or condition before then or perhaps never get checked out at all. While ebooks do not wear out by condition,

however, an ebook title too might get little or no use due to lack of interest. It is for that very reason that librarians would prefer metered titles to be metered by circulation, if they must be metered at all, not by time. We know our possible use if we have a digital book for a certain number of circulations, but time-bound circulation is a gamble. The books in this study are modern classics or popular at the time of study. They might not all get 100 circulations in an average library in print, but many of them might in the first three or four years. We recognize that not all these books will be so heavily used. We think it fair—even conservative--to say that they will average 52 circulations in their lifetime and last six years. Why this number matters will now become especially clear as we look at cost.

[i] Parker, Carmi. (2023). "eBook cost crisis methodology." *ReadersFirst*.
<https://www.readersfirst.org/cost-crisis-methodology>.

Nearly all of The Conclusions section was removed. This what it originally said:

Conclusion and Ideas for Further Study—1500 words

Six years later, our follow-up study identifies some positive trends. The availability of award-winning and best-selling digital titles is if anything even greater than before in ebooks. Enormous gaps in what is available in digital before 1980 no doubt still exist, but the majority of books that public libraries wish to collect on an ongoing basis for adults should be on hand. It would be valuable to do a study of teen and children's books. Digital audiobooks are less likely than ebooks to be available through our vendors, especially if they are older. That they are more readily available to individual consumers suggests we should encourage vendors to make more available to libraries. This, however, may require more licensing through a company such as Audible; while Vendor 3 has started this process, progress may be difficult. More licenses options exist than six years ago, and many of them can help libraries make better use of their limited funds. Vendor 3 developing ownership models with independent publishers at very

reasonable prices will help, even if the Big 5 remain unlikely to buy in. A study including owned titles and those from Amazon or Audible would be informative.

While our current study is informative and, we argue, representative of the current market, a still larger study of perhaps 100,000 titles across even more vendors, including the academic market, across both countries could explore even more deeply. A study across several libraries looking at exact usage of a unified list of titles in print and digital over some six years would fill in where we have only suppositions. The will and resources to do these studies are likely to remain illusive.

Unfortunately, the current study validates even more strongly the original Australian study's conclusion that availability does not correspond to library digital access. Less and less perpetual access combined with higher and higher prices will make even more titles seem like marginal acquisitions. Collections may be even more likely to focus on the most popular works, even though they are many times more expensive than print for libraries to provide access. Audiobook access itself may become difficult if streaming becomes a dominant mode. If no license is created and consumers are limited to steaming rather than downloads, libraries may be shut out almost completely. Growing a deep and sustainable collection for libraries has only become more difficult for libraries, with more and more titles having to be relicensed and thus more and more titles ultimately dropped due to lack of resources. With library funding even more likely to decline in many areas in the next four years due to political trends and costs likely to grow due to irresponsible economic policies, digital collections are likely to be even more difficult to sustain at current levels. Imagine a future in which libraries are likely to have fewer and fewer digital books, prevented from meeting increasing digital demand. Even wholesale transfer of funds from print to digital budgets may be unable to sustain the current level of holdings.

Legislation at the state level has attempted to get libraries with more favorable terms.^[1] The one state that succeeded in passing a law, Maryland, did not prevail in a legal challenge brought by

the publishers. [Note-the article was written before the recent success in Connecticut and legislation was introduced in New Jersey.] Librarians have learned much from that loss and redrafted legislation to be stronger.[ii] Publisher lobbying efforts have so far stymied the legislation, sometimes through devious means, but many legislators and much of the public view it favorably. Comparing the cost of digital to print, it turns out, is very convincing.

Effective action at the federal level, at least in the USA, seems unlikely for now. Corporations are having their sway. Blocking the merging of two of the largest publishers under the recent administration is unlikely under the corporate friendly present, as is action in favor of libraries that has built a platform on curtailing libraries and the freedom to read. If nothing else, release of the pointed questions about licensing asked of publishers and ebook vendors by Senator Wyden and U.S. Representative Eschoo in 2021 would be welcome.[iii] Those questions and their answers have been buried. Librarians must note that the influence of billions of dollars, not only from publishers but from many industries that wish to create an economy based not on ownership but rather licensing is working against our interests.

With this rather depressing prospect before us, what then must we do?

First, we must continue action at the provincial and state level. Some may say it isn't working, so we should try something else. Those voices must answer this question: What other option is open? If even one state passes legislation--which, as rewritten, would be likely to withstand every publisher legal challenge under state procurement and consumer protection laws—it would undermine the efforts to limit library access through unfair (not print equivalent) license terms there, giving other libraries a wedge to with which to work.

Second, using this wedge, or even working before a bill might pass, we too must use the power of our purse. This action need not be organized. It could be just like in 2019, when many libraries

on their own opted not to get ebooks from Macmillan, which had recently instituted license terms that libraries had at last said went too far. Macmillan subsequently abandoned those terms, explaining that the Pandemic was no time for controversy. We doubt that their loss of library revenue did not play a role. Libraries help to create a market for books, even in the digital market, as anecdotal and now empirical evidence shows.^[iv] Even the publishers seem to agree. Why else spend so much supporting library conferences and marketing the new titles to us? Suppose libraries were independently and without an organized central effort suddenly to begin not licensing metered access titles that are so very print or consumer price inequivalent? Many library directors might balk. We can understand why. The pressure to provide high demand titles, so long counted upon by publishers who feed at the trough of public money as if it would ever be unquestioned, is a powerful incentive. If we are not providing high demand ebook titles, how do we prove our relevance in a time of increasing digital demand. To those, we ask these questions: how will your digital content ever be sustainable under the current and ever-worsening conditions? How will you prove your relevance when your collections no longer allow you to reflect anything but corporate interests dictate? The publishers are good friends now, fighting the horrific book banning efforts happening in the USA, even if they were rather dilatory in their response. Do you trust them to support libraries when their corporate interests are opposed to ours, and to privilege fair terms because they are good for readers. . . and taxpayers?

The present study makes one thing clear. Medium-sized and independent publishers are often giving us much more fair terms than the Big 5. How is it that they survive on small library profit margins when the Big 5 are so very unfair to us in digital when compared to print? These are the entities that truly care about literature, promoting readers and authors. Their offerings may not begin as best-sellers, but they publish a disproportionate number of award winners. We should use our power to be taste-makers, promoting their often high-quality but lesser-known works and deserving authors, available on terms that compared to Big 5 offerings are sustainable and even favorable. To those publishers engaged with libraries, we offer thanks. To those who are not, we invite you to see what libraries can offer. Librarians, you have nothing to lose but a bunch of overpriced and increasingly unsustainable licenses with megacorporation-controlled businesses that thus far have shown no interest in recognizing our needs, and ever so much to gain.

We of the ReadersFirst Working Group in the USA and Canada are pleased and proud to have collaborated on data collection and evaluation. We pledge to work together for mutual support of libraries and increased access to digital content, especially during one administration's mistaken efforts to break our countries' friendship. Together we are as strong distinct countries dedicated to the best for our millions of readers.

[i] Haight, Iantha, and Annalee Hickman Pierson. (2024). "State Strategies for Fair E-Book Licensing: Lessons from the Library E-Book War." *Law Library Journal*.
https://www.aallnet.org/wp-content/uploads/2024/08/LLJ_116n3.pdf.

[ii] See The Ebook Study Group <https://www.ebookstudygroup.org/> and Library Futures <https://www.libraryfutures.net/>.

[iii] Albanese, Andrew. (2021). "Wyden, Eshoo Question Big Five Publishers Over Their Library E-book Practices." *Publishers Weekly*.
<https://www.publishersweekly.com/pw/by-topic/industry-news/libraries/article/87458-wyden-eshoo-question-big-five-publishers-over-their-library-e-book-practices.html>

[iv] Crosby, Paul, Tessa Barrington, Airlie Lawson, and Rebecca Giblin. (2024). "Untapped Potential: Results from the Australian Literary Heritage Project." *Australian Literary Heritage Project*.
https://law.unimelb.edu.au/data/assets/pdf_file/0007/5096446/Untapped-Research-Report_v4.pdf.