

Understanding complex phenomena through an educational lens: the case of fluid reading

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Abstract:

In today's information environment, libraries and information centers are challenged to keep pace with their users changing needs and rising expectations. To meet these challenges, librarians must understand complex social, cultural and technological phenomena. One of the most pressing issues facing libraries today is ability to adapt to the evolving nature of reading practices and the emergence of new reading tools and platforms. While a great deal of research has been conducted on various aspects of the use of e-books in different contexts (Ramaiah, 2012), it is still difficult to predict when and how e-books will be widely adopted.

This work describes a collaborative model of inquiry between libraries and schools of library and information science that engages graduate students in the study of changing reading habits influenced by the emergence of digital media, defined here as *fluid reading*. Specifically, the model provides the methodological framework for a longitudinal research project aimed at increasing our understanding of the factors affecting e-book use. This project enables graduate students of library and information science to develop their empirical reasoning skills by applying research methods to real-world questions. The project provides invaluable learning experiences to students who, under the instructors' supervision, are involved in all the steps required to conduct user studies, from design to data analysis and evaluation, and are exposed to a variety of quantitative and qualitative methods. The results of the research feed directly to the library community and inform its decisions regarding the development of e-books collections and the implementation of e-book services. The work discusses the design and implementation of the collaborative model and its effectiveness in understanding fluid reading in the academic context. It also reports initial findings of the project that investigates faculty and students' reading practices and attitudes towards e-books in several academic library systems in New York City (Lopatovska, Pattuelli, Lange & Ludas, 2013).

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References

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