E-Journal Usage and Scholarly Practice

An ethnographic perspective on the role and impact of e-journal usage among users of biomedical literature
A two-year Stanford University Libraries project funded by the Andrew W. Mellon Foundation
Objectives

• To describe the emerging role and fit of e-journals
• To understand the range and types of dimensions that shape e-journal usage
• To understand the impact of e-journals on scholarly practice
Findings I

The role and fit of e-journals in scholarly practice

• Scientific e-journals are accountable to the worlds of print and the Internet
• E-journals belong to a cluster of technological innovations that shape the way scholars adopt these journals
• The most significant current source of value from e-journals is in the scholars’ ability to search them.

• Online searching emphasizes the article as container (or structure) of content
Findings II

Scholarly usage of e-journals: idiosynchratic and contextually based practices

• No single pattern of usage predominates for e-journals
• Scholars craft multiple routines for using e-journals to support a range of information practices
• Key drivers shaping usage
  – Scholarly goal
  – Infrastructure
  – Time and place
  – Professional characteristics
• Convenience drives usage
  – and it is a relative term among scholars
• The idea of a tradeoff between paper and electronic formats is misleading
  – both are important tools for thinking and working
Scholars

- monitor and review content regularly to keep current
- conduct direct research for retrieval
- study and read intensively to extract knowledge
- circulate and exchange content to build peer networks
Scholars…

• Organize content to create context and relevance
• Document original content to establish ownership of ideas
• E-journals provide a bridge between publicizing and publishing scholarly work.
• E-journal features get blurred with the features of the broader search-and-retrieval environment.
Findings III

Impacts of e-journals on scientific scholarly practice:
a new relationship to information, knowledge, and peers
E-Journals

• Increase peripheral vision
• Facilitate participation in a greater flow of information and scholarly communications
• Provide new ways for presenting scientific results that contribute to new thinking processes
• Make data more visible and increase evaluation and scrutiny
E-Journals

• Create new knowledge boundaries and domains of equivalencies
• Create new kinds of work in scholarly practice
Findings IV

Insights on e-journal adoption and implications for the future
• E-journals are part of a cluster of innovations and technologies that can be leveraged to create value for scholars
• Scholars work in an integrated media environment, with synergies between paper and electronic journals
• Scholars obtain more value from e-journals when the journals support a wide range of information practices
• E-journals offer different types of value for searching, reading, and publishing
• The zone between informal publicizing and formal publication is a rich and critical area for scholarly communications
• E-journals challenge the notion of journal brand
E-journals improve the efficiency of scientific scholarship

E-journals facilitate new forms of scholarly practice through new relationships to information, knowledge, and peers