

# The challenge of ebooks: Consumption

## Briefing for project stakeholders

A summary of research on digital behaviour

From visitor and residents project:-

Digital Visitors and Residents. Progress Report JISC, University of Oxford, OCLC, University of North Carolina  
June 2012

<http://www.jisc.ac.uk/media/documents/projects/visitorsandresidentsinterim%20report.pdf>

### Residents and Visitors—mode of behaviour

**Residents:** significant online presence and usage; high level of collaborative activity online; contributions to the online environment in the form of uploading materials, photos, videos; high dependence on a mobile device (smart phone, laptop, etc.); more than 10 hours a week spent online;

**Visitors:** functional use of technology, often linked to formal need (such as use of software for specific coursework, or organising meetings through email contact); less visible/more passive online presence, more likely to favour face-to-face interactions (even as they use the internet to organize/schedule those interactions); fewer than 6 hours spent online a week;

**Emerging educational stage.** (the last year of secondary/high school and first year of university)

### covert' online study habits.

For example, Wikipedia is widely used but almost always with a sense of guilt or an eagerness to convey awareness of its 'unreliability'; there is an assumption by students that teachers and lecturers value the authenticity of paper-based books rather than information found online through a browser, such as Google (the data also indicate that this assumption is unfounded)

### Evaluation of information

a number of interviewees spoke about the way they evaluated information and sites from the internet. A typical way of doing this was to judge by sites by their popularity (as shown by their placement in the Google results list),

### Visitors

- See web as untidy garden tool shed
- Defined goal or task
- Select most appropriate tool for task
- Need to see concrete benefit from use of a platform
- Relatively anonymous
- Try to avoid the creation of digital identity
- Caution: identity theft, privacy
- Sense that online social networking is banal and potentially a time waster
- Will use technology to maintain relationships
- Web offers set of tools to deliver or manipulate content (including conversations)
- Tendency to respect (and seek out) authoritative sources
- Thinking often takes place offline
- Users, not members, of the web
- See no value in belonging' online

## Residents

- See web as place (park, building) where clusters of friends and colleagues meet
- Live out a proportion of their life online
- Distinction between online and offline increasingly blurred
- Sense of belonging to a community
- Have a profile in social networking platforms
- Comfortable expressing their identity online
- Web is a place to express opinions, to form and extend relationships, maintain and develop a digital identity
- Aspect of their persona remains once logged off
- See web as networks or clusters of individuals who generate content/opinion
- No clear distinction between concepts of persona and content

Some subjects **behave in very Visitor ways when they are doing academic/professional work, but then switch** to a much more Resident mode in the context of their personal lives.

Some have migrated huge chunks of their social and academic lives onto the web, and engage with the web via mobile technology in a very Resident mode, but still use **technology in a Visitor mode, as when they only do certain kinds of work (for instance, writing long papers)** on a desktop computer.

The data from the Emerging educational stage seem to suggest that individuals were **engaging with systems and materials not provided by their institutions to do institutional work** (e.g., consulting Wikipedia to write an essay). Such user-owned literacies, when mapped as below, take a prominent role in the academic work of many of our research subjects.

Given the effect that the internet is having on collapsing the relationship between certain modes of activity and specific physical spaces, it is important not to tie notions of the intuitional and the personal to ideas of school/university/library' and home' as buildings.

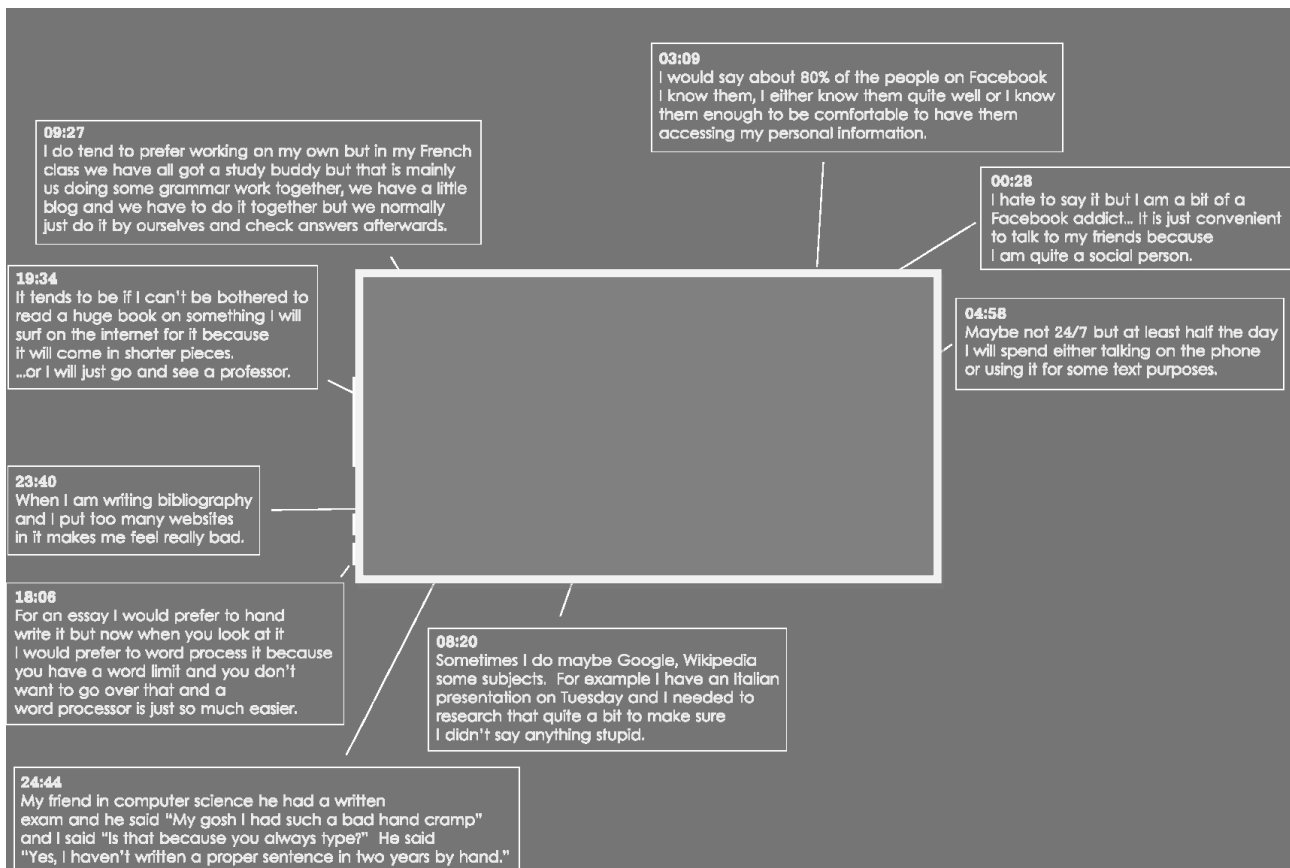
For instance, the **difference between the personal and the institutional diminishes as individuals become increasingly embedded in academic contexts.**

## Mapping behaviours

*Emerging Stage Engagement* Emerging educational stage. ( the last year of secondary/high school and first year of university)

### **UKU3 (UK 1st year undergraduate)**

This participant has a clear demarcation between Resident modes of engagement in her personal life and Visitor modes of engagement for study.



## Emerging Findings

findings are predominantly drawn from data from the Emerging educational stage (late stage secondary/high school – first year undergraduate).

### Convenience

**Convenience is a major factor.** convenience was the primary factor in choosing or getting information. Convenience was determined by the specific context or situation, so the solution students identified as —convenient did not always look the same.

**Convenience and validity are not always mutually exclusive** in our sample. Some of our students choose the most convenient option out of a set of —legitimate sources (those they have been directed to by their tutors or by library staff). It also is the case that **students were generally positive about syllabus-based websites that had been recommended to them by tutors** or were being used directly as part of the curriculum.

Suspect that convenience is a large part of why our data indicate that **Google and Wikipedia are the most popular search engine and information source respectively.**

Almost without exception, our participants use Google as a starting point to seek out information when they do not already know much about a topic. Many go no further, and it was **not uncommon for interviewees simply to accept the first Google site listed.**

a number of interviewees, when asked about what would be an ideal way to seek information, expressed a **deep desire for an easier and more reliable way to ascertain quickly what is right' and wrong':** in other words, to validate efficiently and effectively.

There was a desire amongst participants for Google search and similar services to be more accurate and always to return a correct answer at the required academic level and length.

In essence, many students were hoping that technology would evolve to become capable of **returning the perfect answer and that they would not have to critically evaluate**. This notion is very much in tension with academic notions of what it means to learn and how this differs from simply providing a correct answer.

*'Like at first it was just Google and just research papers. And then, I don't have all the time, I just want a direct answer, I don't want to read about everyone's problems and symptoms. (USU2)'*

**The web itself and all the information available on it may be branded as suspect unless created and managed by a trusted source.**

trusted sources were generally specifically-designed discipline and exam sites, together with reputable and well-known sites such as that of the BBC, and specialist sites such as those of a university

*'The problem with Wikipedia is it's too easy. You can go to Wikipedia, you can get an answer, you don't actually learn anything, you just get an answer. Whereas if you have to do the rest of the research and, especially, when the reason you have to have three sources, even though the three sources may have the same sets of information, they may have different analysis of it, and they may have somewhat conflicting information, or information that appears to be conflicting until you do more research, and that's how you come to the understanding' (USU6 – describing his tutors views on the convenience of Wikipedia)*

The student thinks that the reason his lecturer doesn't like Wikipedia is that the convenience of Wikipedia reduces students' ability to conduct other important academic searching and evaluation activities.

**For many students in the Emerging educational stage the academic level of Wikipedia seems appropriate.** It is frequently used for school and assessment purposes and provides interviewees not only with useful factual information, but also with an initial introduction to a topic, together with further references.

And do you think that Wikipedia always gives you the best way forward?

*'Probably not the best, but I think it's the simplest and easiest way to get going. So if I needed to produce a much more detailed and developed essay I would probably explore further on the internet'. (UKS1)*

Our data suggest something akin to a learning black market (or grey market) as **students make regular use of Wikipedia but are often uncomfortable about revealing this to their teachers.**