

# Students, Vendor Platforms, and E-textbooks: Using E-books as E-textbooks

Sara Samuel, Paul Grochowski, Natsuko Nicholls, Leena Lalwani, David Carter

Art, Architecture & Engineering Library, University of Michigan - Ann Arbor

Special thanks to: Susan Hollar, Kathleen Folger & Suzanne Chapman

## Abstract

Considering the cost of textbooks, our library has been working to make copies of textbooks available for all engineering courses. We purchase electronic copies of textbooks when they are available for institutional access. In fall of 2011 we provided 41 e-textbooks for 36 courses, or approximately 8% of all engineering courses. In fall of 2012, we provided 73 e-textbooks for 62 courses, or approximately 15% of all engineering courses. We provide access to e-books on various platforms, including MyiLibrary, ebrary, EBL, Knovel, ScienceDirect, SpringerLink, Wiley, and Safari.

To learn about students' experiences in using the e-textbooks, in fall 2011 we sent a survey to 2014 students in 35 classes. We received 299 usable responses for a 15% response rate. Findings from the survey guided changes to some of our procedures for providing and announcing e-textbooks in 2012. In fall 2012 we distributed a second survey to 2033 students in 42 classes. We received 449 usable responses for a 22% response rate.

Our Qualtrics survey asked students to rate usability in regard to ease of use, ease of access, reading, printing, sharing, taking notes, searching, and others, and asked them to rate overall satisfaction.

This poster displays our findings for the two years of the survey by focusing on student responses to the usability questions and student responses to open questions. We also present data for individual e-book vendors in an attempt to draw some comparisons in usability between the different vendors.

## Vendors

### 2011

ebrary (2 books surveyed)  
IEEE Xplore (1 book surveyed)  
Knovel (4 books surveyed)  
MyiLibrary (15 books surveyed)  
NetLibrary (1 book surveyed)  
Safari Tech Books Online (3 books surveyed)  
ScienceDirect (1 book surveyed)  
SpringerLink (5 books surveyed)  
Wiley Online Library (3 books surveyed)

### 2012

Cambridge Books Online (1 book surveyed)  
ebrary (2 books surveyed)  
EBL (2 books surveyed)  
EBSCO eBook Collection (1 book surveyed)  
ENGnetBASE (1 book surveyed)  
Knovel (7 books surveyed)  
MyiLibrary (6 books surveyed)  
Safari Tech Books Online (1 book surveyed)  
ScienceDirect (3 books surveyed)  
SpringerLink (4 books surveyed)  
Wiley Online Library (2 books surveyed)

*"I personally prefer to have a hard copy of a textbook versus an electronic copy. I like to make notes and highlight in the book, two things you cannot do with library copies of electronic books/textbooks."* (2012)

*"Not as convenient [sic] to 'flip' through pages on the computer, especially when referencing charts or tables."* (2012)

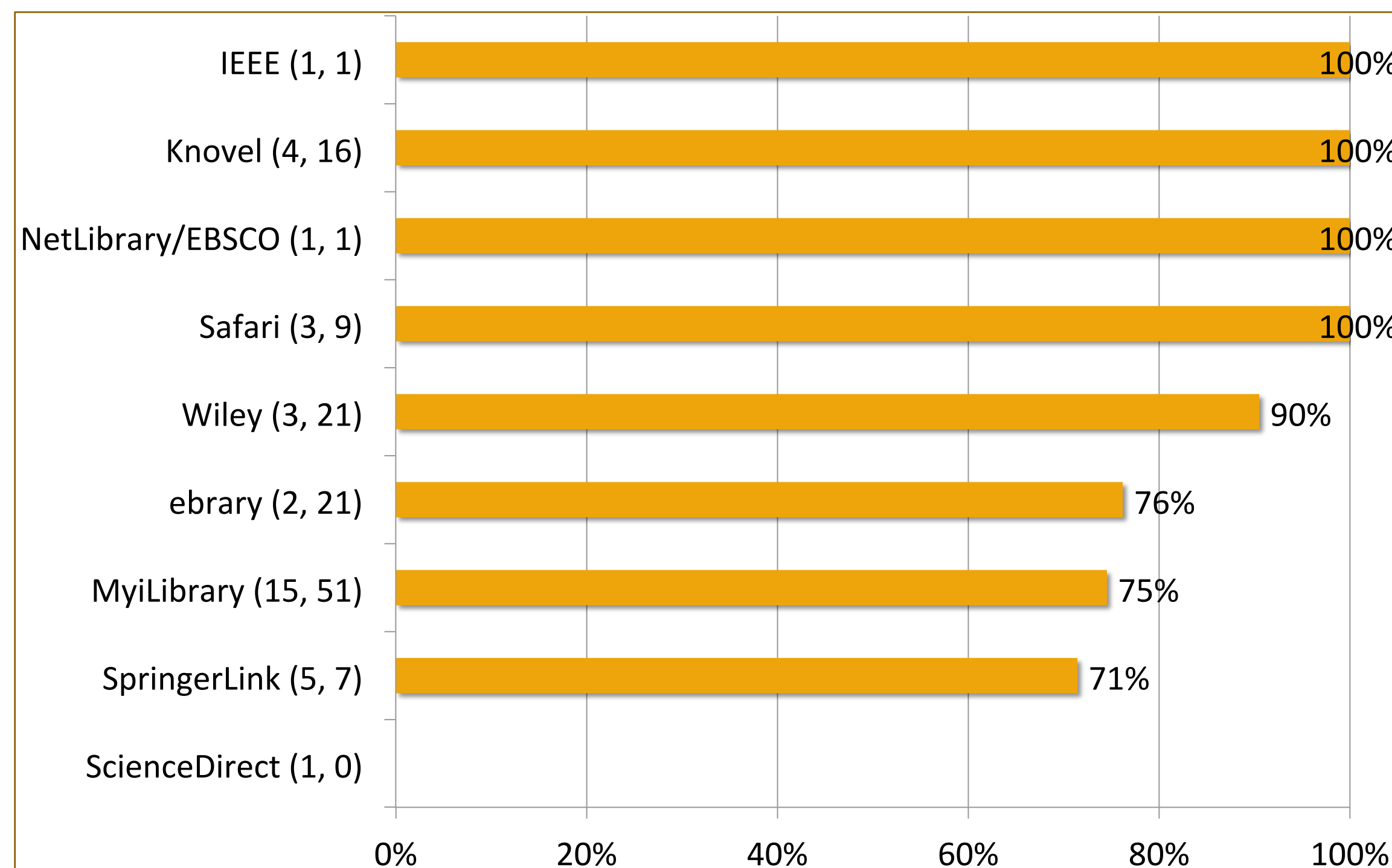
*"It is very convenient and it is also a great economical option for me. Textbooks, even used books, are very expensive. I do not want to purchase textbooks that are for courses that are not directly relevant to my future career."* (2012)

## Ease of Use

Percentage of respondents who agree or strongly agree that e-textbooks are easy to use.

Numbers in parentheses are numbers of books surveyed and numbers of respondents, respectively

### 2011

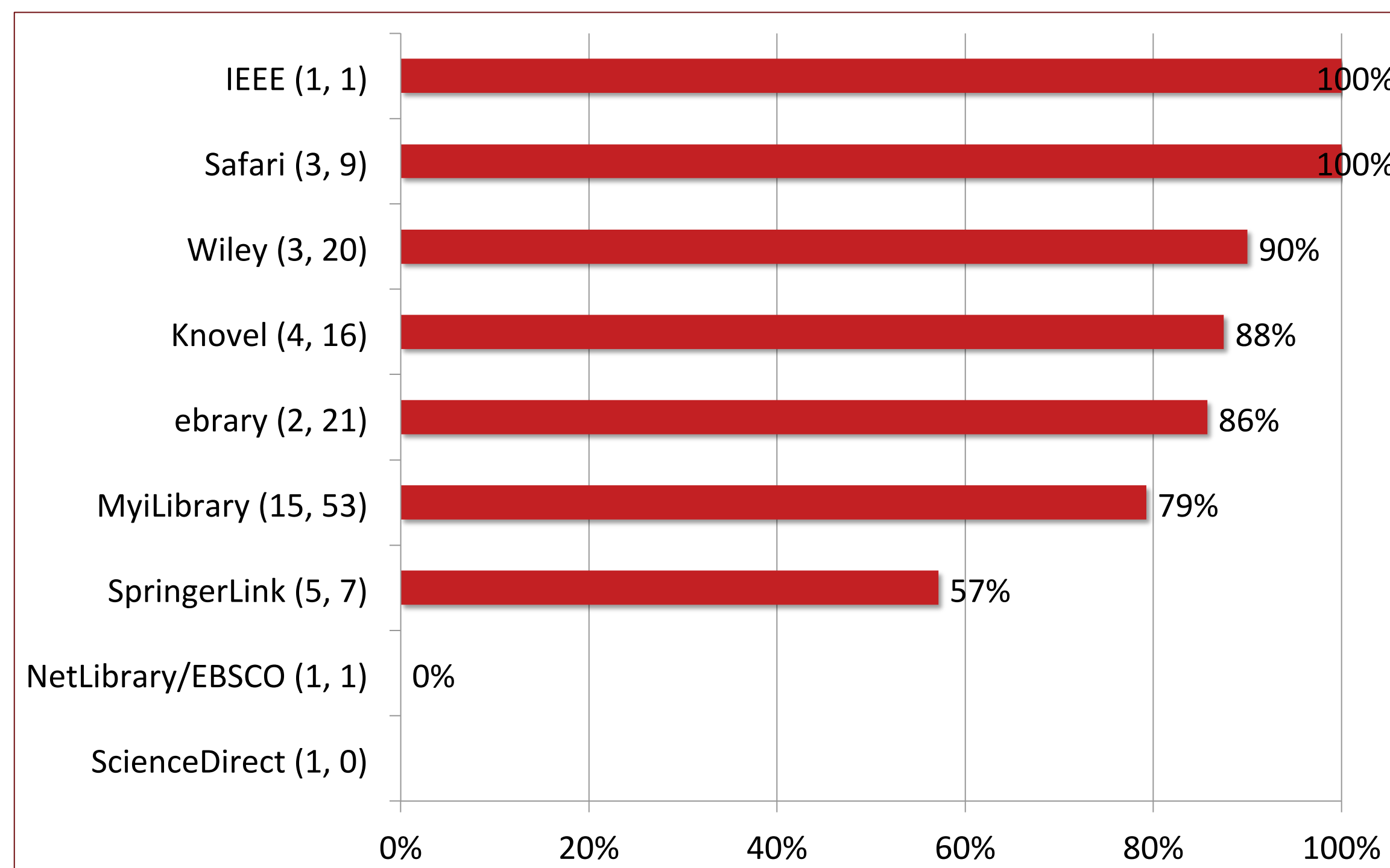


## Ease of Access

Percentage of respondents who agree or strongly agree that e-textbooks are easy to access.

Numbers in parentheses are numbers of books surveyed and numbers of respondents, respectively

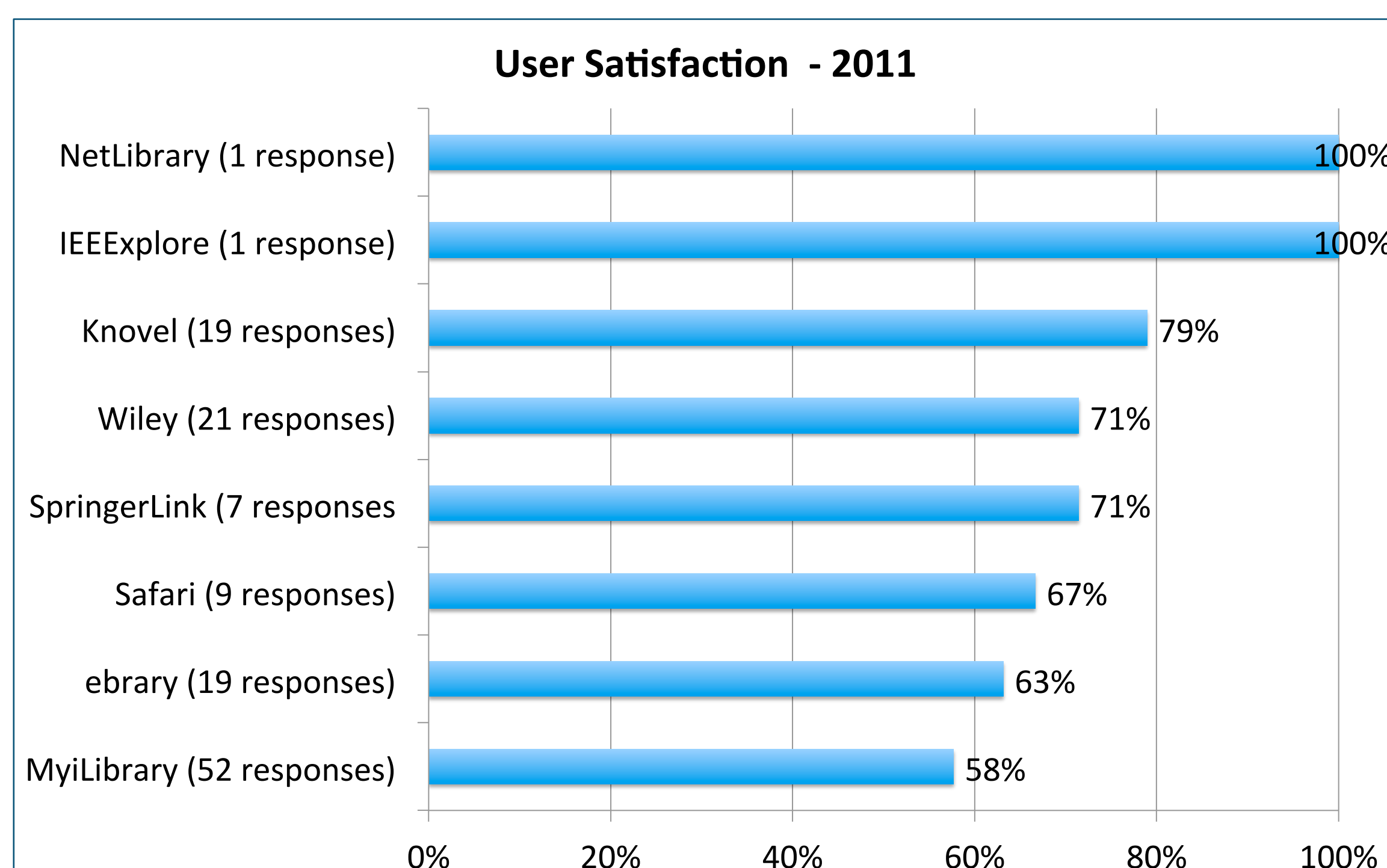
### 2011



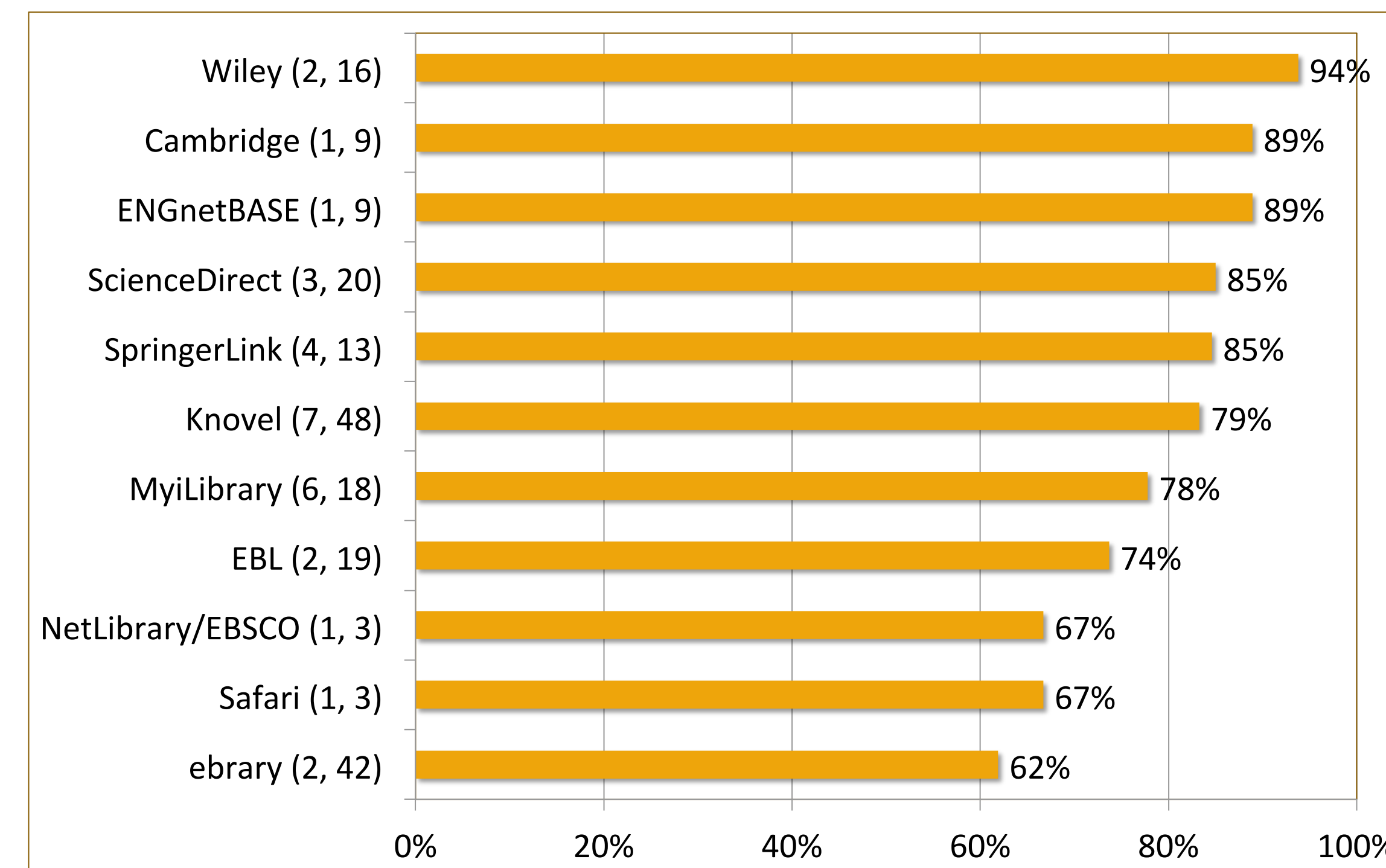
## Overall Satisfaction

Percentage of respondents who were either Satisfied or Very Satisfied with their e-textbook.

Number in parentheses is number of respondents.

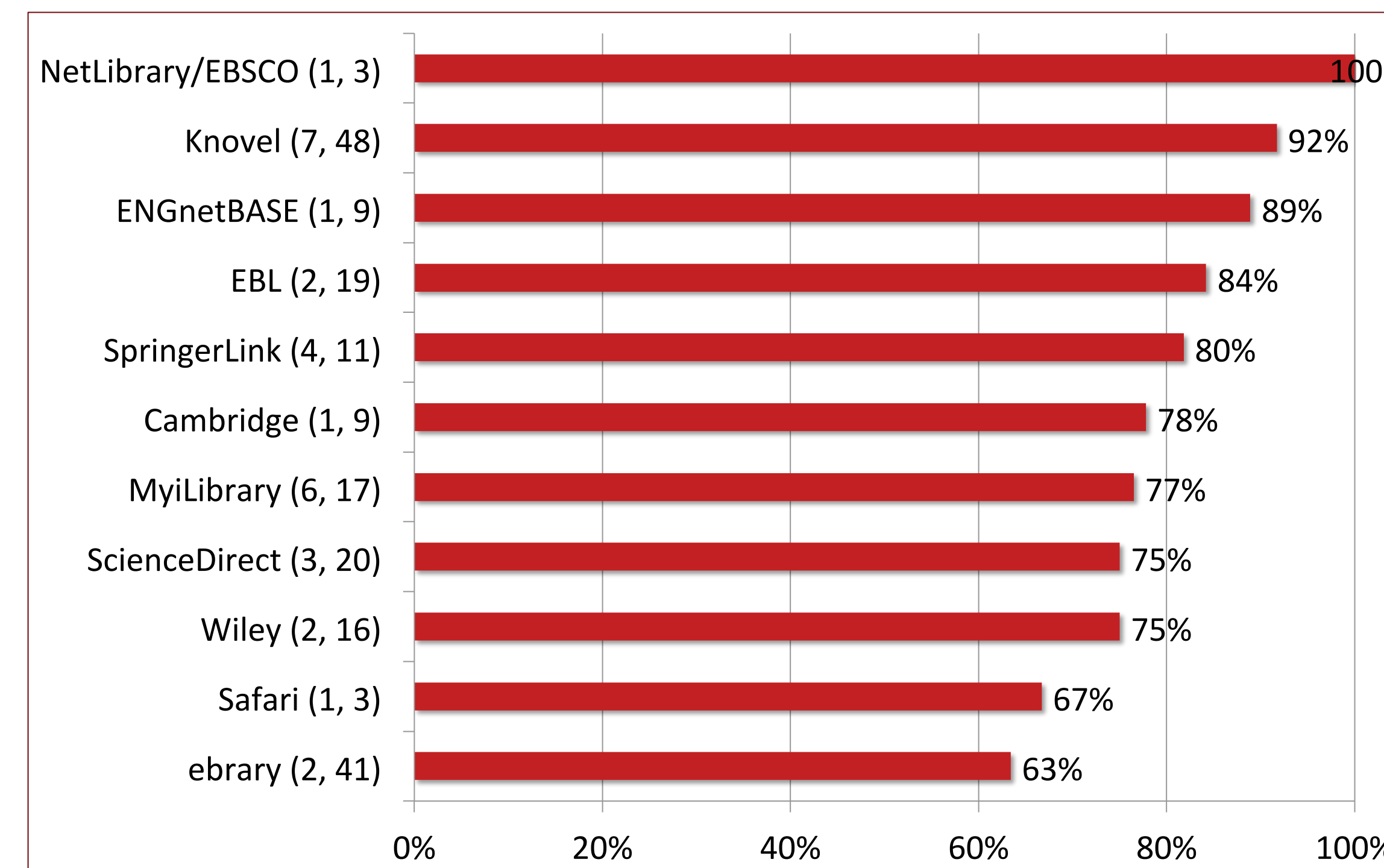


### 2012

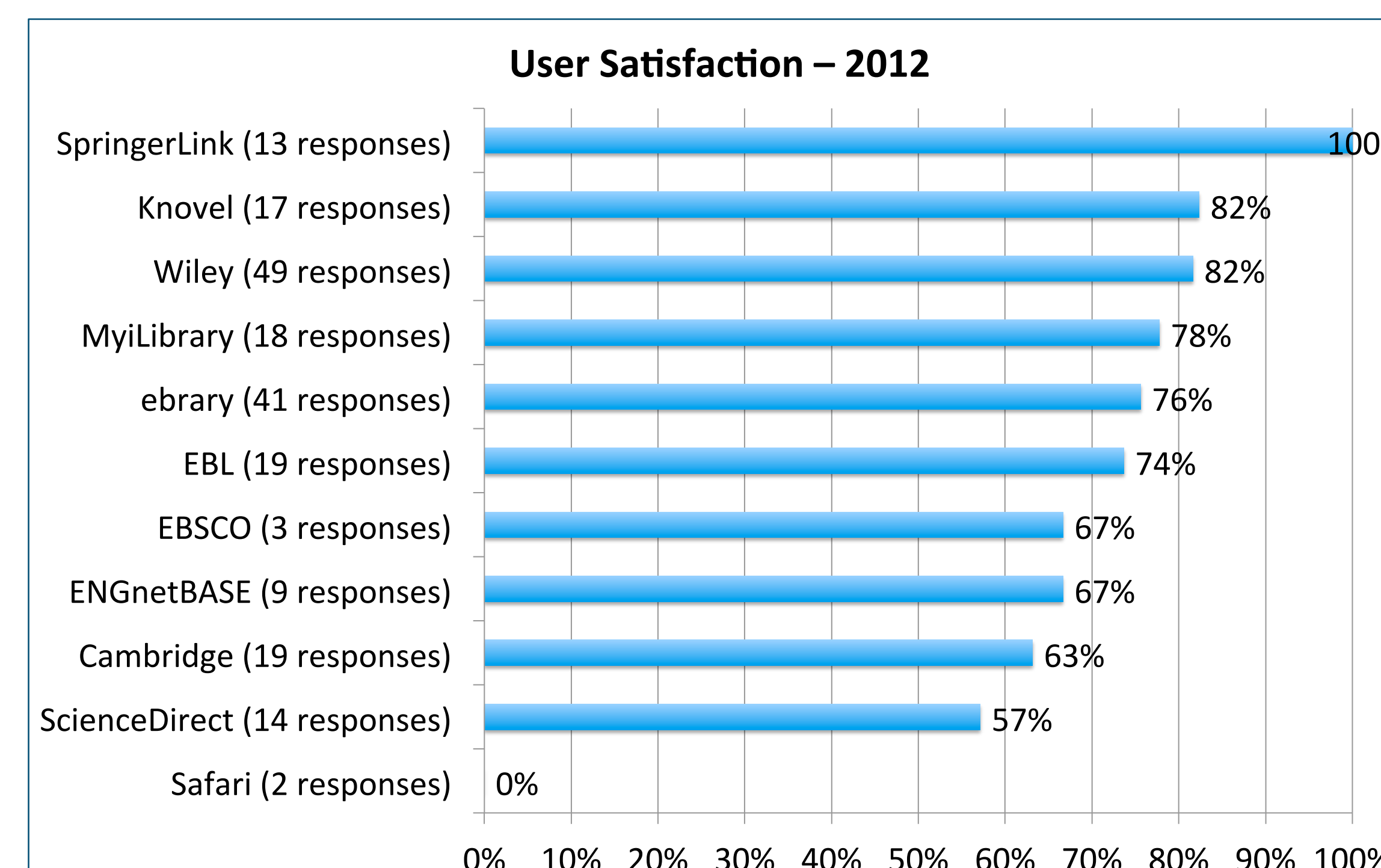


*"Although [the e-textbook] is somewhat dissatisfactory, it was free and I have no complaints. You get what you 'pay' for."* (2012)

### 2012



*"Make sure electronic textbooks are reliable. As a student, I need to be able to trust that my textbook will be available whenever I need it."* (2011)



## Qualitative Data

Fill-in-the-blank answers gave us additional insights on:

- Suggestions for improvement
- Satisfaction with the e-textbooks
- Students' future use of e-textbooks

Quotations in italics are taken from these qualitative data.

| Suggestions for Improvement          | 2011 | 2012 |
|--------------------------------------|------|------|
| Awareness/Publicity                  | 31%  | 18%  |
| Need for a better platform           | 25%  | 25%  |
| Need for use with other devices      | 12%  | 8%   |
| Statement about preference for print | 6%   | 3%   |

## Conclusion

We decided that we do not have data to support any conclusions of student preferences for one vendor over another. In too many cases, we surveyed either too few books or had too few respondents, and in all cases we must acknowledge that different users are responding about different books. With so many uncontrolled variables, we are therefore not prepared to draw any conclusions from these data.

Still, we find that these data give us at least a glimpse into student perception of vendors. Aggregator platforms, MyiLibrary and ebrary, consistently perform worse than publisher platforms. Of the other platforms with significant numbers of respondents, Knovel and Wiley consistently perform strongly among our users.

A high percentage of students who reported that they had used the e-textbooks also reported that they were satisfied with them. This demonstrates that our efforts at providing and promoting e-textbooks are a good investment.

## Future work

We will explore further methods for increasing awareness of e-textbooks, such as social media.

Talk with faculty to learn their impressions of e-textbooks available through library subscriptions.

*"I'm taking 16 grad credits and each class has its own 600-1500 page book. I'd be in the hospital if some of them weren't digital!"* (2012)

*"They are accessible from any computer, which means I can study/do readings even if I am unable to carry around the book."* (2012)

*"They are a great supplement to hard copies."* (2012)

*"The cost saving is a HUGE factor, I'm just concerned about ...being able to have an offline copy, so I can read it places where I don't have internet access."* (2012)