

Trends and Preferences in Virtual Reference

Laura Bosley

August 12, 2015

Objectives:

- Different ways of providing virtual reference
- Different types of question that patrons ask
- User preferences are influenced by demographics and type of question
- Different options for different user behaviors
- Where reference is headed

Virtual Reference

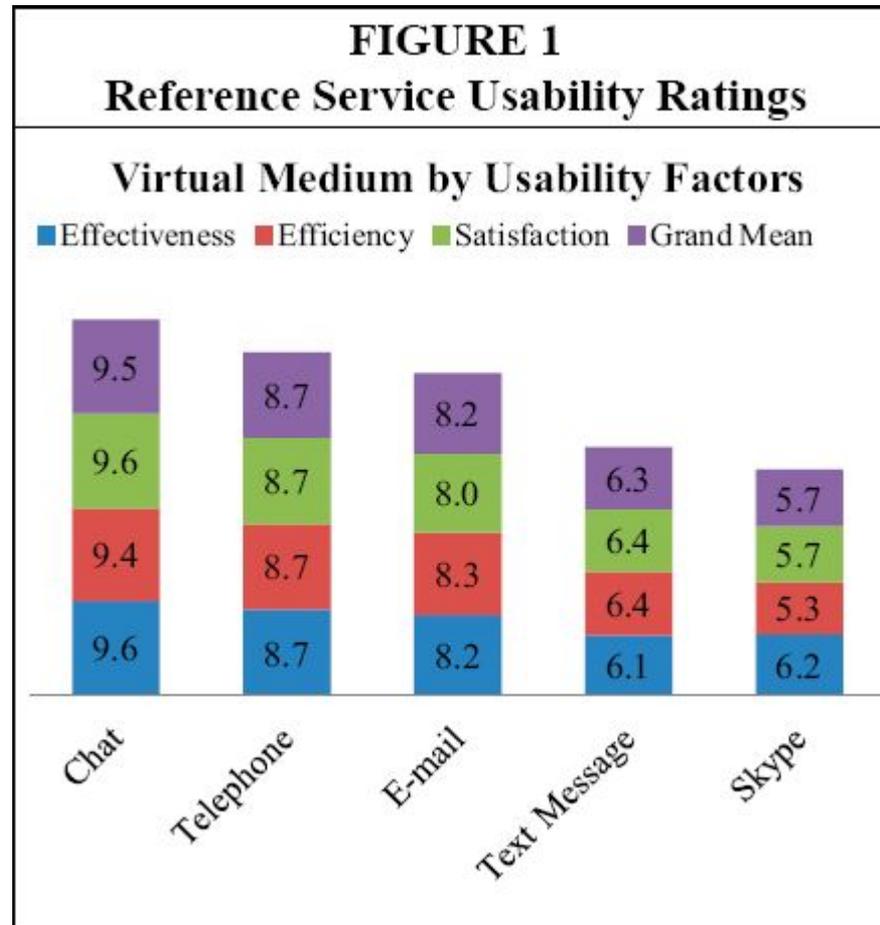
Virtual reference is reference service initiated electronically, often in real-time, where patrons employ computers or other Internet technology to communicate with reference staff, without being physically present.

(RUSA, 2010)

Chat

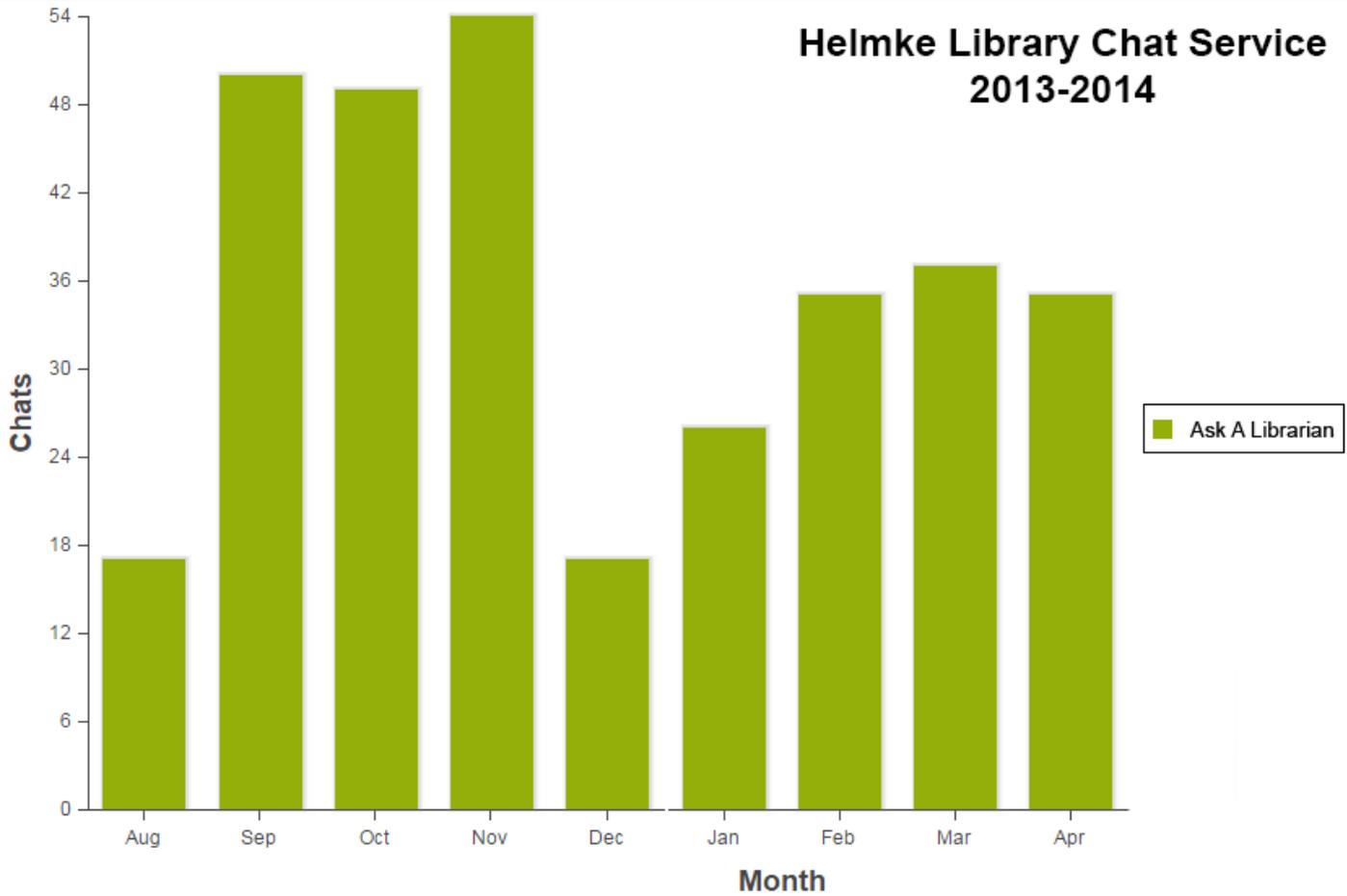
- Mu et al. (2011)
 - High user satisfaction, but low use (87.53% would recommend chat service)
 - 73% of non-users did not know the service was available
- Chow and Croxton (2012)
 - User preferences influenced by demographics and type of question
- Chow and Croxton (2014)
 - Ranked highest in usability when compared to email, telephone, text, and Skype

Chat Ranks High in Usability

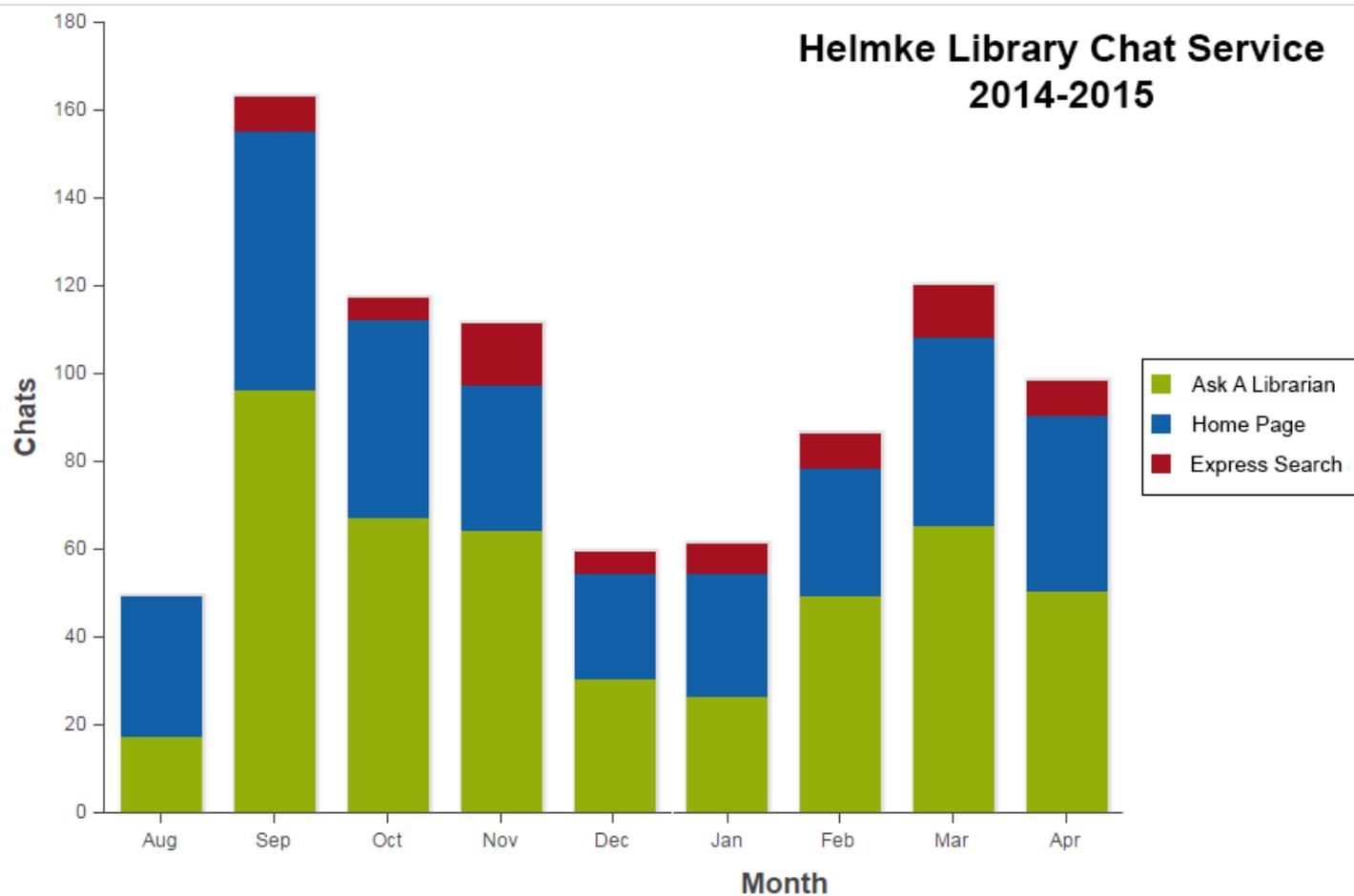


Chow & Croxton, 2014

Data from Indiana University Library



What happens when users know about the service...



Email

- Chow and Croxton (2012)
 - Email was preferred for reference questions among faculty and graduate students
- Connaway et al. (2009)
 - Net Gen users find VRS, particularly email, less intimidating than face to face reference.
 - Older adults prefer email because of fear of not typing fast enough



Text

- Chow and Croxton (2014)
 - Text messaging reference services chosen for speed, quickness of first response, ease of use, and ability to multitask while asking questions.
 - “text messaging reference is a unique virtual reference service well suited for short answer questions” (p. 312).
 - The authors found a lower preference for this service, but there is still a need.

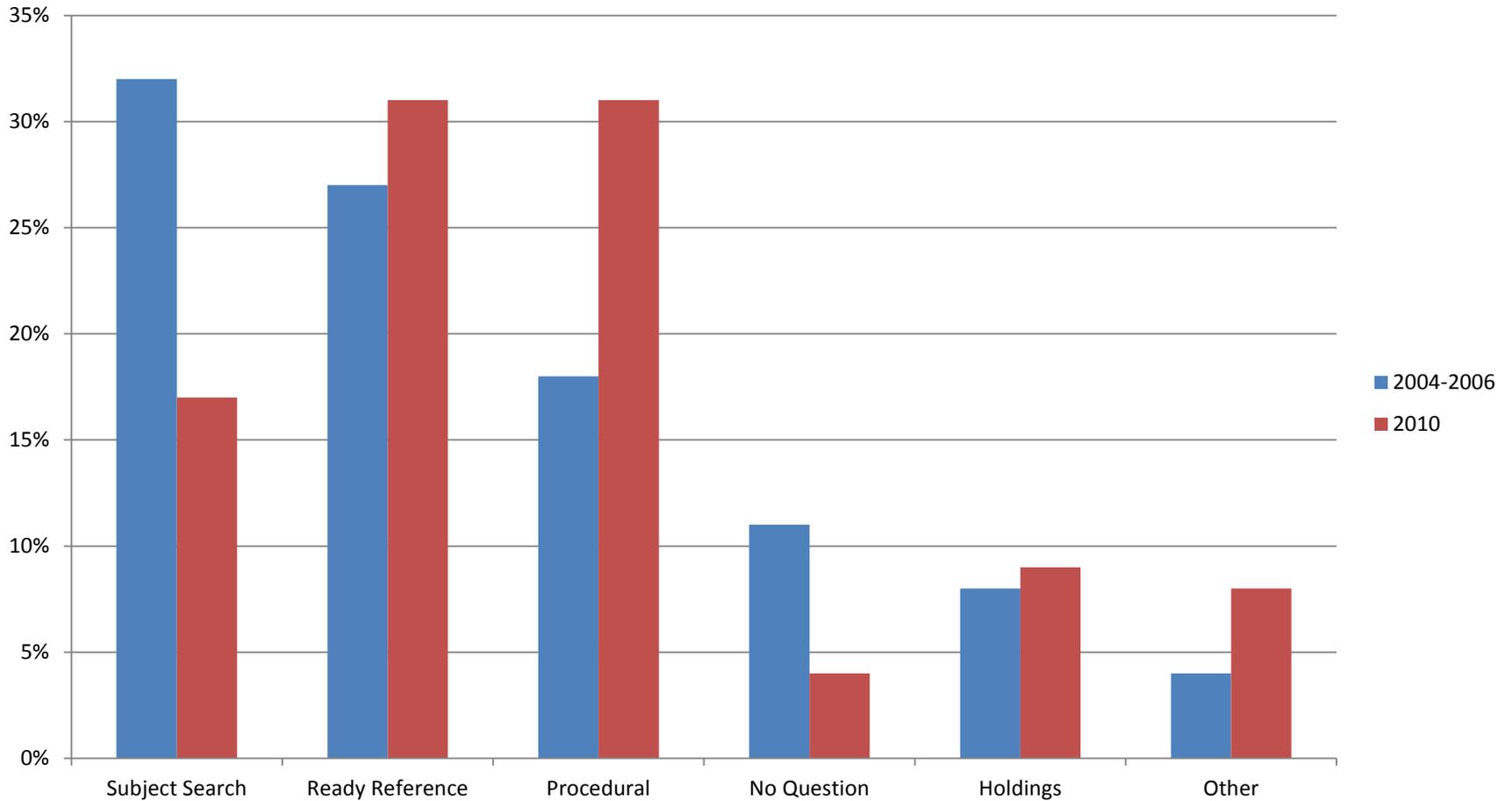
Comparison of Virtual Reference Services

VR Service	Who uses?	Why?
Chat	<p>Undergraduate students</p> <p>Faculty and graduate students</p> <p>Net Generation Users (12-28)</p> <p>Adults (29+)</p>	<p>Research questions and checking facts (Chow & Croxton, 2012) See “chat” as applicable to most situations</p> <p>Checking facts and ready reference questions (Chow & Croxton, 2012)</p> <p>Rated as least intimidating method for seeking reference assistance. Convenience (Connaway et al., 2009)</p> <p>Convenience, providing quick answers and ability to access information late at night or on weekends (Connaway et al., 2009)</p>
Email	<p>Undergraduate students</p> <p>Faculty and graduate students</p> <p>Net Generation Users</p> <p>Adults (29+)</p>	<p>Research questions (Chow & Croxton, 2012)</p> <p>Prefer email to chat for reference questions (Chow & Croxton, 2012)</p> <p>Rated as less intimidating than face to face (Connaway et al., 2009)</p> <p>Prefer to chat because unsure of typing skills (Connaway et al., 2009)</p>
Text	Faculty, Staff, and students	Short answer questions (Chow & Croxton, 2014)

Types of Virtual Reference Questions

- **Subject Search** (Where can I find information about autism?)
- **Ready Reference** (How do I cite a website in APA format?)
- **Procedural** (How do I make a purchase request?)
- **No Question** (system test, practice session, not discernible “..Jnc,u”)
- **Holdings** (Do you have a book in stock?)
- **Research**(Research studies on a particular topic)
- **Inappropriate** (Personal questions)
- **Directional** (Branch location, website URL)
- **Reader’s Advisory** (Book or author recommendations)

Query Type is Changing



(Radford & Connaway, 2013)

The Future of Reference: Need for options

- How do we adjust our services to be the first in mind when people have questions?
- Why do you think it is important to provide virtual reference options?
- Where is reference headed?

References

- Chow, A. S., & Croxton, R. A. (2012). Information-seeking behavior and reference medium preferences. *Reference & User Services Quarterly*, 51(3), 246-262.
- Chow, A. S., & Croxton, R. A. (2014). A usability evaluation of academic virtual reference services. *College & Research Libraries*, 75(3), 309-361.
- Connaway, L. S., Radford, M. L., & Williams, J. D. (2009). Engaging net gen students in virtual reference: Reinventing services to meet their information behaviors and communication preferences. *Unpublished paper*.
- Connaway, L. S., Radford, M. L., & Dickey, T. J. "On the Trail of the Elusive Non-User: What Research in Virtual Reference Environments Reveals," *Bulletin of the American Society for Information Science and Technology* 34 (2) (2008): 25–28.
- Mu, X., Dimitroff, A., Jordan, J., & Burclaff, N. (2011). A survey and empirical study of virtual reference service in academic libraries. *The journal of academic librarianship*, 37(2), 120-129.
- Radford, M. L., & Connaway, L. S. (2013). Not dead yet! A longitudinal study of query type and ready reference accuracy in live chat and IM reference. *Library & Information Science Research*, 35(1), 2-13.
- RUSA (2010). Guidelines for Implementing and Maintaining Virtual Reference Services. Retrieved from <http://www.ala.org/rusa/sites/ala.org.rusa/files/content/resources/guidelines/virtual-reference-se.pdf>