

Trends and Preferences in Virtual Reference

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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

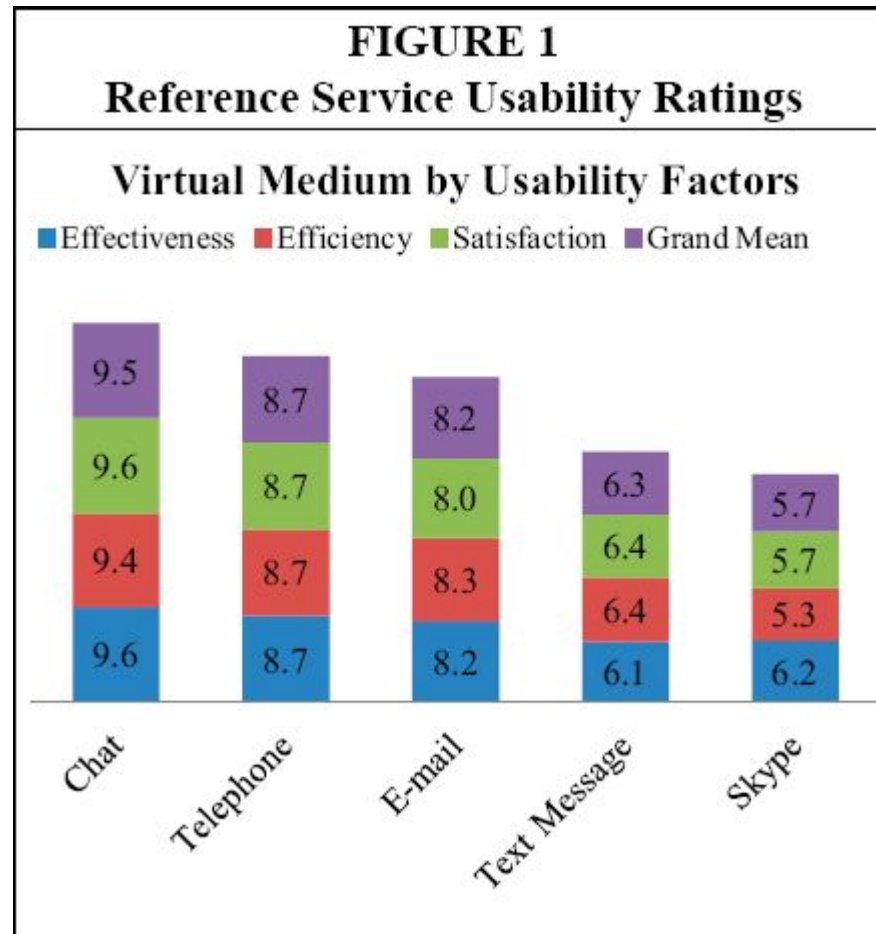
Virtual reference is reference service initiated electronically, often in real-time, where patrons employ computers or other Internet technology to communicate with reference staff, without being physically present.

(RUSA, 2010)

Chat

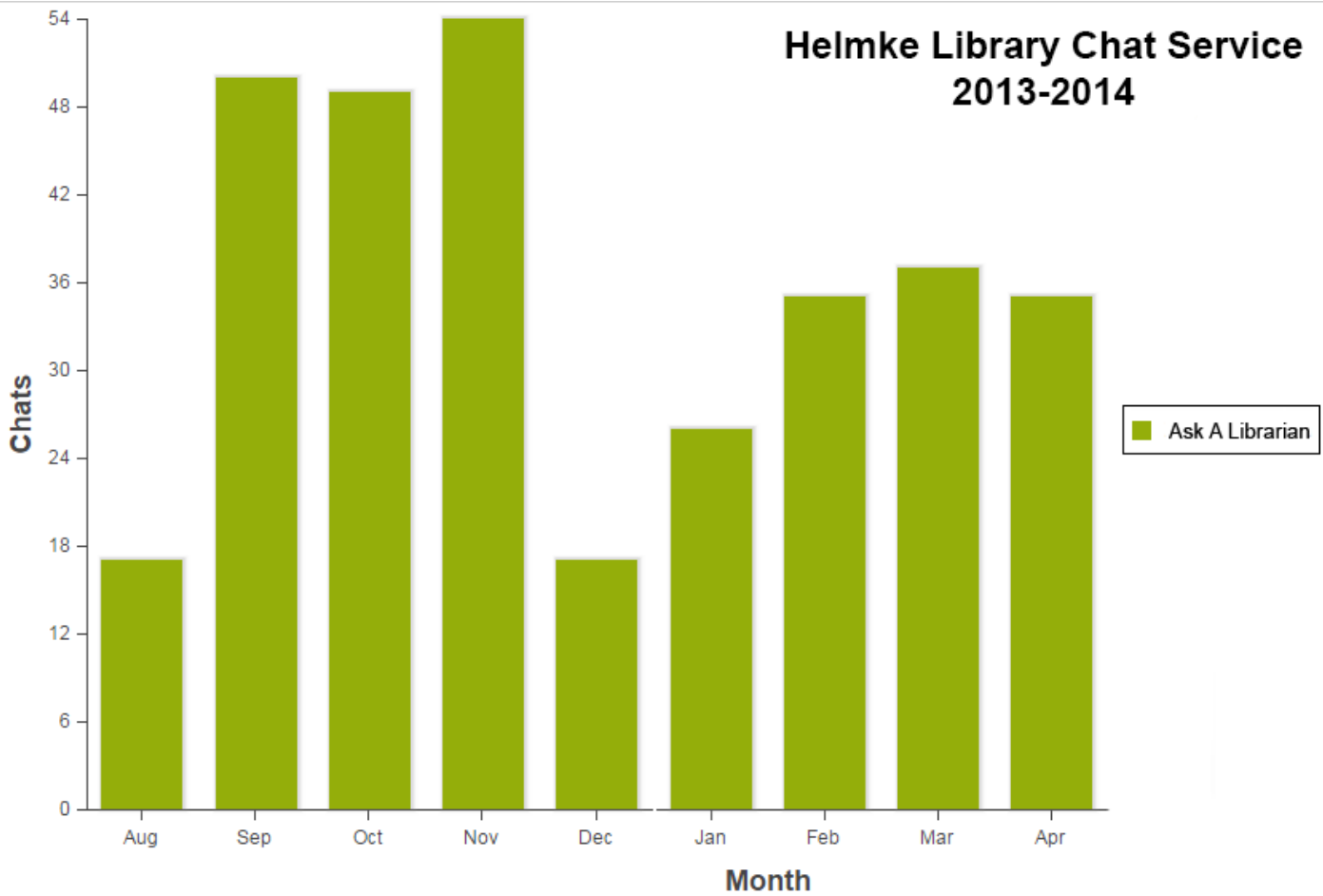
- Mu et al. (2011)
 - High user satisfaction, but low use (87.53% would recommend chat service)
 - 73% of non-users did not know the service was available
- Chow and Croxton (2012)
 - User preferences influenced by demographics and type of question
- Chow and Croxton (2014)
 - Ranked highest in usability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

Chat Ranks High in Usability

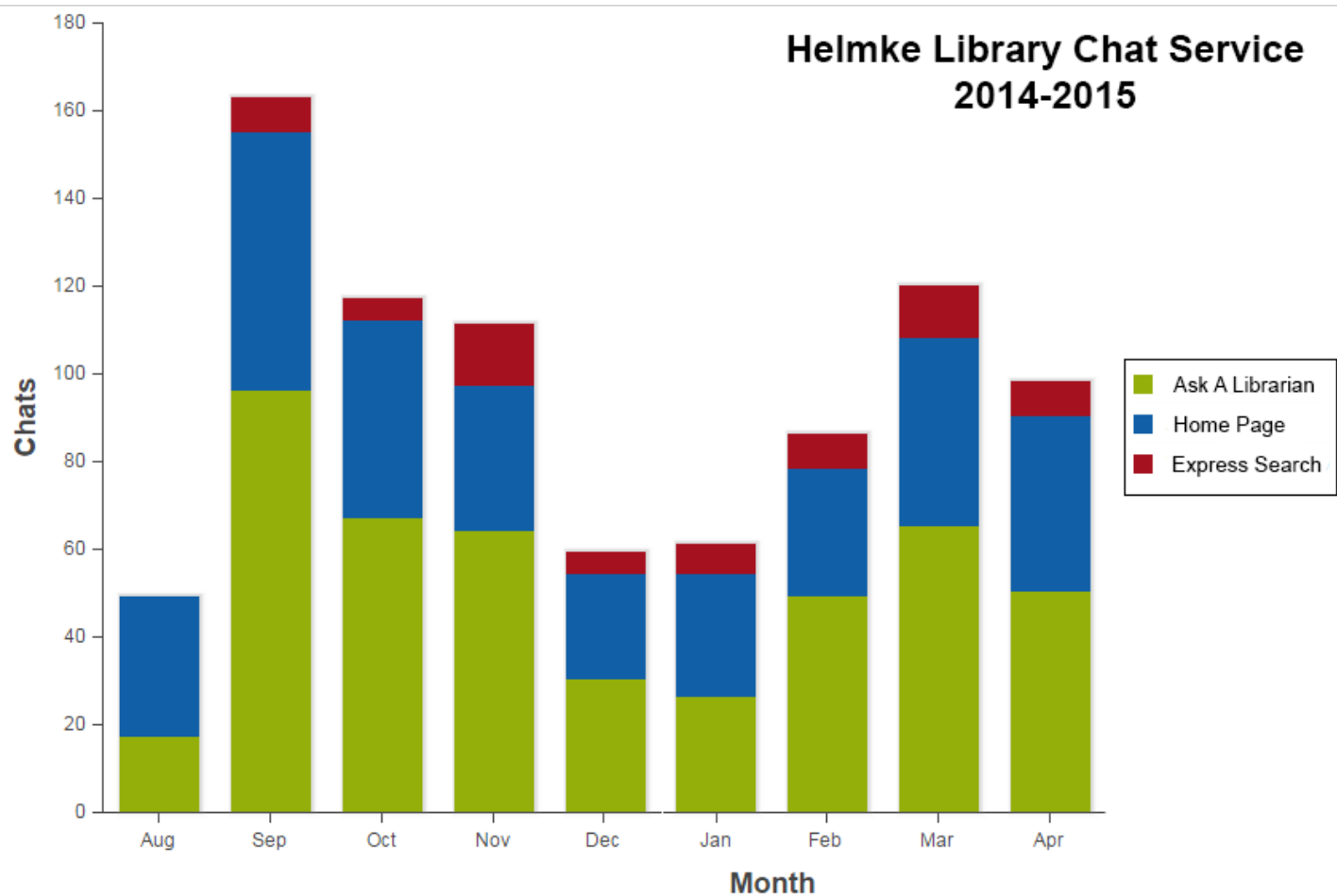


Chow & Croxton, 2014

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.

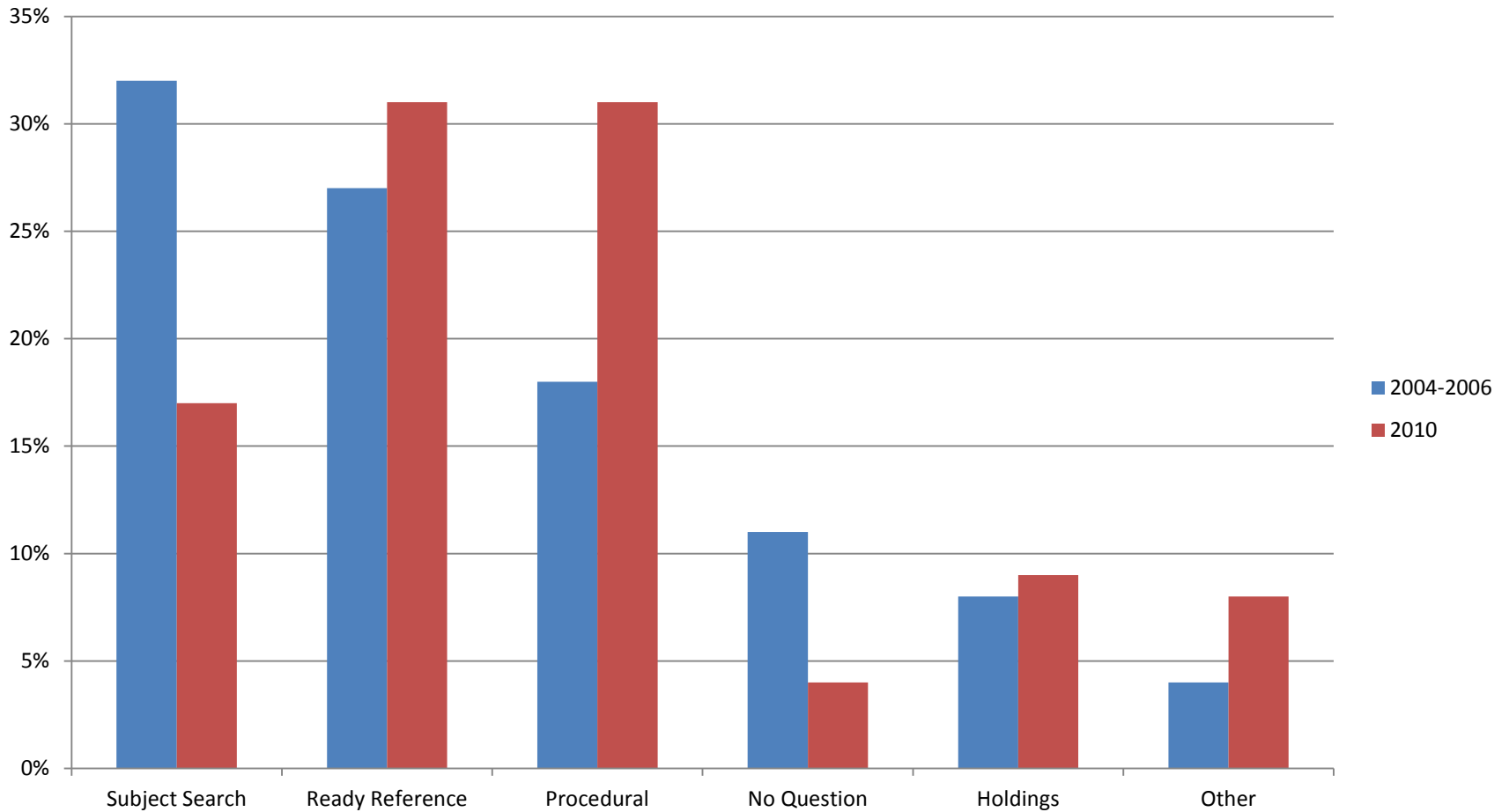
Comparison of Virtual Reference Services

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

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