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Channels Students Prefer in Submitting Reference Inquiries: A Survey of Undergraduate Students in University of Nigeria, Nsukka.

Introduction

The emergence of modern information and communication technologies (ICTs) has revolutionised functions and services of libraries all over the world. Technological developments have affected not only the format and sources of the information libraries use to provide reference services, but also where we provide references services. Libraries and their resources have partially moved to the virtual world of the internet. As a result, library patrons can access our resources from outside of the physical library. In an effort to reach patrons accessing the library via their computers, many libraries and library consortia are extending their reference services to include virtual references (Reference and User Services Association, 2004). Technology now allows users to submit their queries to the library at any time at any place in the world. According to Chow and Croxton (2012, p. 246)

In the rapidly moving world of the information age, information seeking behaviour is increasingly multi-faceted, on demand, real time and diverse. Despite the emergence of the internet and the availability of a wide variety of robust search engines that can seek information with increasing speed and accuracy, people are turning to their school, public, and academic libraries more frequently and in larger number than ever before.

Libraries currently answer reference questions in a variety of modes: in-person, telephone, e-mail, instant message, in virtual worlds such as second life, and via virtual reference software. Virtual reference is responsive to patrons' need for convenient access to reference service. Virtual reference to reference services initiated electronically, often in real-time, where patrons employ computers or other internet technology to communicate with reference staff, with being physically present (Reference & User Services Association, 2004). Communication channels used frequently in virtual reference include chat, video conferencing, and voice over IP, co-browsing, e-mail and instant

messaging. It is a goal of all references services to be of high quality. Integration of virtual references into the mainstream of references services implies that all services (in-person, telephone, and virtual) will be supported at a level to ensure quality services (RUSA, 2004).

Libraries are urgently attempting to reinvent themselves and fully embrace the challenge of meeting the needs of their users in a climate of rapid change where information seekers have many different types of information and communication technology. As academic libraries become fully immersed in the twenty-first century, they are beginning to realize that to best meet users needs, they must first look at user preferences. With the proliferation of online resources and distance education opportunities, many libraries are attempting to meet their users' demands by expanding their reference services beyond the face-to-face or telephone reference interaction (Chow & Croxton, 2012).

According to Agosto, et.al (2010) "over the past few years, reference and information services have increasingly moved away from library reference desks and from libraries' print collection out into the virtual world." (p.1) Rather than viewing face-to-face reference, chat reference, IM reference, e-mail reference, telephone reference, etc. as unique services, the trend seems to be to view them all as subsets of "reference and information services" in general (Agosto at al. 2010).

According to the Reference & Users Services Association (2004, p.6) "Virtual reference service responsibilities should be shared among staff to ensure continuity of service." And that "staff should be required to demonstrate skills in the effective use of online communication, as well as demonstrate awareness of the common potential problem areas when conducting reference interviews online, as compared to the face-to-face reference interview" (p. 4). We have seen the emergence of a generation of young students who have grown up 'native' in a technologically intense world. Library users have ever-increasing amounts of digital content at their finger-tips, and many studies show they prefer this format over print (Tenopir, 2005).

Reference libraries have considered and studied these wide-ranging transformations - the demographics, technological pressures, and the changing educational climate, and have experimented with and adopted new approaches to service. One of the most significant developments in reference services these past several years has been the emergence of real-time virtual reference (VR).

The present study is a case study that aims to investigate help-seeking preferences of students. Specifically, we were interested in exploring how users of University of Nigeria, Nsukka (UNN) prefer to get help anywhere they are located either on campus or off-campus. To do so, we set ourselves the following research questions.

RQ1. To what extent are students of UNN aware of the different reference inquiry channels?

RQ2. To what extent do students in UNN consult the Reference Librarian using any of the channels?

RQ3. What is the most preferred channel through which students of UNN make reference inquiries.

RQ4. What is the level of students' satisfaction with the reference answers received?

Literature review

A majority of today's library users are characterized as technology savvy, visually oriented, very demanding and expect nomadic, anytime and anywhere communication (Becker, 2009). For this reason, there are changes in the help-seeking preferences of students. Library users prefer to access the library via the internet and seek the help of a librarian in a digital environment. Thus, they opt to make the use of the digital reference services over the traditional reference service being rendered. However, use preference of the library users may be influenced by their level of awareness on the availability and the knowledge of the features and processes involved on the existing digital reference Services (Grandfield & Robertson, 2008).

Several studies have been conducted in developed countries on students' use of different channels such as traditional reference desk or face-to-face, phone/SMS, Facebook, IM/chat and e-mail in making reference inquiries. Presently, only few studies from developing countries like Nigeria have been conducted on users' preferences in reference services. The present study aims to fill the gap. The literature review is organized under the following headings:

traditional reference desk or face-to-face, phone/SMS, IM/chat, e-mail and Web 2.0 tools reference services.

Traditional reference desk or Face – to – Face reference services

Studies have proven that face-to-face reference or traditional reference desk continues to be the most used reference service and at the same time, the first choice getting help from the library (Grandfield & Robertson, 2008; Luo, 2008; Ruppel and Vecchione, 2012; Baro, Efe & Oyeniran, 2014). For example, Ruppel and Vecchione (2012) reported that many of the comments (36 percent) relate to the personalized service that traditional reference is able to offer, in contrast to SMS and chat reference services. According to the authors, respondents value the direct nature of traditional reference service (33 percent of the comments). Particularly the fact that the librarians can lead patrons directly to the physical resources they need in the library building.

Chu and Du (2013) studied social networking tools for academic libraries and found that instant messaging was reportedly used for handling enquiry related services and internal staff communication. IM has shown to enhance users' social presence and to facilitate a sense of communication which was not provided by e-mails and conventional web 1.0 websites (Boulos and Wheelert, 2007). Chu and Du (2013) concluded that overall, participants perceived social networking tools to be very helpful in terms of information sharing, knowledge sharing, enhancing reference services and promoting library services.

The study by Johnson (2004) asked respondents for “their first option” if seeking assistance from library staff in a hypothetical scenario, and relationships were drawn between preferences noted and status of respondent. It was found that undergraduates were most likely to choose face-to-face reference services and faculty were more likely to prefer e-mail. Few people had used the chat service and few people were even aware of it. Similarly, the study by Malik and Mahmood (2013) in Pakistan revealed that the culture of providing reference services through traditional face-to-face method was still prevailing in most of the libraries, while modern means of communication like e-mail and IM were being adopted but at a slow pace. The authors recommended that the electronic means of communication like e-mail, chatting and IM should be incorporated for delivering better reference services.

Phone or SMS reference services

Text messaging reference services present efficient, personalized methods for connecting with undergraduate students. Text messaging, also known as short-message-service (SMS), is described as “near-synchronous” because the sender and the receiver have time to thoughtfully compose and edit a message before sending it (Guo and Turner, 2005). SMS reference is a personal medium because it is similar to spoken communication and is efficient due to the fact that it can be employed anywhere cell service is available. The use of SMS text messaging has enhanced library services via hand phones. In so many libraries, the SMS text messaging has been incorporated into enquiry and reference services. For example, cellular phone usage including SMS usage is very high in places like Nigeria. Trends such as these suggest that SMS is an ideal way to reach-out to a greater pool of potential users of reference enquiry services. Adding the advantage of portability of the cellular phone and ease in using SMS, it becomes clear that SMS provides an alternative and potentially ideal mode of posting reference enquires for users on the move, or who may not have the luxury of visiting the library due to their schedules.

In regard to this, the National Library of Singapore (NLS) launched the SMS reference service on 11 April 2006 as an additional convenient channel for users to post questions (Thanuskodi, 2012). Academic research is made easier for students when reference services are offered at the point-of-need, whether it is via the traditional reference desk, chat reference, or text messaging reference (SMS). According to a Pew Internet & Life Project in US, 97 percent of Americans adults aged 18-24 exchange an average of 109.5 messages during a normal day (Smith, 2011, p. 2). Libraries that have implemented SMS reference are able to reach students on their mobile phones and other portable devices at the point-of-need, which will extend their relevancy to students. Patrons ask a question with their cell phones by sending a text message to a specific number. According to Ruppel and Vecchione, (2012, p.425) “use of SMS reference service has grown since Boise State University libraries implemented it.” The researchers reported that, SMS usage increased after the librarians promoted the service through campus posters, in-house flyers and instruction librarians promoted the SMS services in their information literacy workshops. Guo and Turner (2005) studied college students’ perceptions of messaging systems. They determined that while face-to-face was the most preferred communication medium, chat and SMS communication would become more popular as students increase their usage and familiarity with them. Albertsons’ Library at Boise State University (BSU) expanded their reference services by implementing

SMS reference in July 2010 (Rupple and Vecchione, 2012). During the 2009-2012 academic years, BSU librarians answered 946 chat reference questions, but a year later, during 2010-2011, the total number increased to 1,683. During the same year, librarians answered 563 SMS questions using SpringShare's LibAnswers software (Rupple and Vecchione, 2012).

Luo (2011) reported that San Jose State University survey participants used SMS because they needed information immediately (55.6 percent), wanted to see how the service worked (38.9 percent), did not have internet access (33.3 percent) and needed help from a librarian (16.7 percent). The participant cited the SMS features they appreciate such as speed, convenience, but said it is a challenge to ask a more complex question via SMS. According to Luo, "they also can consider texting to be a more comfortable way to get help from a librarian" (Luo, 2011, p.491). Tomaszewski (2011) reported that students prefer SMS reference because "the convenient and unobtrusive nature of SMS makes it all the more popular choice with students who own a cell phone" (p. 284).

One of the key differences between responding to questions asked via e-mail and instant messaging and questions posed using text messages is the length of the message. While email and instant messaging questions and answers can be of any length, text messages are limited to 160 characters. With the increased usage of mobile phones, it is time for libraries to explore the option of using text messaging, chatting to provide access to reference services.

IM/Chat reference services

Chat reference refers to the services where the "core of the communication between the librarians and user is an exchange of text message in real time" (Francoeur, 2001, p. 189). Many academic libraries in U.S. provide the opportunity to "chat" online with a reference librarian that is more resource – intensive than e-mail reference (Lochore, 2004). Libraries prefer using free software such as Yahoo! Messenger, Google Talk, Instant Messenger, Meebo and many more.

Librarians in Nigeria are still behind in terms of the development of digital reference services compared to their counter-parts abroad. Several factors should be taken into consideration when implementing chat reference service. These include cost of chat software, staff management, facilities and viability of the service (Lou, 2008; Baro, Idiodi and Godfrey, 2013; Radford & Kern, 2006). It is important to note that not all the chat reference services are

successful. Few libraries have discontinued chat reference because of low volume, software problems and staffing model (Radford & Kern, 2006). Ruppel and Vecchione (2012) reported in their study that almost all of the respondents (59) stated they would use the chat reference service again in the future. When asked how much they like using the chat reference service, 90 percent said they liked or loved it.

Foley (2002) in a survey asked library users their reasons for preferring chat reference over visiting, telephoning or e-mailing the reference staff. The participants mentioned the following reasons: convenience; hassle in making telephone call; off campus access; and liked the instantaneous nature of online communication. Ramos and Abrigo (2011) evaluated reference services in selected Philippine academic libraries and asked respondents whether they have sought help from the librarian or any library personnel through the digital reference services. While a majority of the respondents are familiar with the existence of digital reference services, only 65 out of 189 respondents (34%) have asked help from the librarian using the Ask-a-Librarian, e-mail reference, and Facebook. Ramos and Abrigo (2011) concluded in their study that a significant increase in the number of reference transaction was observed after integrating web 2.0 tools to its information services. They added that, IM and Facebook were found to be most useful reference 2.0 tools in finding relevant information. Studies have reported a less developed culture of delivering reference services through e-mail and other electronic means of communication due to the lack of IT skills and professional knowledge on the parts of librarians in developing countries (Baro, Efe, and Oyeniran, 2014; Baro, Idiodi and Godfrey, 2013).

The study by Ruppel and Fagan (2002) found that students see the benefits of chats reference as being convenient, anonymity, speed, quality of help, and no waiting in line. Grandfield and Robertsons (2008) employed a survey and a focus group method in order to compare virtual reference and reference desk users' preferences and behaviour. The authors reported that:

- The reference desk is the most preferred method of getting help in the library despite some respondents admitting the reference desk intimidated them, and that it was sometimes frustrating to wait in line;
- Virtual references fill a need for users who prefer to work off-campus, especially for graduate students. It seem as a significant service from students, not just a supplement;

- Exposure to virtual references “changes the perception of the landscape of reference services,” which can motivate students to seek research help using new mediums.

Librarians and patrons both appreciate the fact that instant messaging is faster than traditional chat services and librarians also like the fact that the software can be downloaded for free (Houghton and Schmidt, 2005). IM helps the patrons easily and quickly get in touch with the librarian for assistance. On the other hand, the librarian provides feedback to the patrons via the IM tool (Houghton and Schmidt, 2005). Instant messaging is vastly being used for online reference services in libraries. Ask a librarian service is provided by instant messengers all over the world. A study of top 100 university libraries in India shows that IM feature have extensive quick online reference services using technology (Harinarayana and Raju, 2010). Instant messaging is very popular both with librarians and patrons (Tripathi and Kumar, 2010). Reference questions are answered immediately without the need to go to a reference desk (Stephens, 2006).

The study by Kibbee, Ward, and Ma (2002) at the University of Illinois revealed that nearly 90 percent of the respondents reported the completeness of the answer to their question as very good or excellent. Nearly 85 percent found chat service easy to use and would use it again. Reference librarians have recognized that communicating with users through various methods, including chat, is an extension of their services that make the user experience more convenient. The study by Stoffel and Tucker (2004) revealed that the majority of respondents were experienced with chat or instant messaging. Half of the respondents indicated to have used the Milner chat reference service more than once. Nearly eight in ten respondents (78.6 percent) indicated to have used a web-based chat reference service prior to their ready for reference chat session. The researchers observed that both e-mail and chat reference services of Milner are highly valued by their patrons.

According to Sloan (2006) chat reference has been around since the mid-1990s. It is very common now for libraries of all types to offer chat reference, but the type of software utilized, staffing patterns, and hours of operation vary widely. Kayongo and Jacob (2011) discovered four libraries that provide chat

assistance outside regular reference hours using their own staff. Libraries offering chat outside their own reference desk hours are University of Pennsylvania, University of Georgia, Pennsylvania State University, and University of Texas at Austin. These libraries according to Kayongo and Jacob (2011) offer chat reference anywhere from one and a half hour (University of Georgia) to six hours (University of Texas at Austin) after conclusion of their in-person reference services.

In the study by Ramos and Abrigo (2011), respondents who have utilized the digital reference services were asked to rank the five DRS according to their preference for getting help from the librarian. The study revealed that when respondents want to know basic information about the library, they prefer to ask the librarian through the Ask-a-Librarian (IM) which yields the highest mean rank of 3.49. When requesting for documents delivery, respondents referred e-mail which yield the highest mean rank of 3.74. When asking help on how to use online subscription, web OPAC, etc. they preferred instant messaging, with mean rank of 3.72. When looking for specific and highly specialized resources, the respondents preferred instant messaging with mean rank of 3.57. Finally, when requesting for library orientation, they preferred e-mail reference with mean rank of 3.35 (Ramos and Abrigo, 2011).

E-mail reference services

The study by Chow and Croxton (2012) examined the information seeking preferences of 936 university faculty, staff and students in South-Eastern United States and found that participants preferred face-to-face reference interactions over a suite of virtual reference options. E-mail was the second most commonly used, followed by telephone, and online chat with little interest in text messaging or Skype video. Nilson (2004) conducted a study that looked at perceptions of the service received at the virtual reference desk and the physical reference desk. The research involved library science students posing as users and then filling out a detailed questionnaire after each visit to a physical and virtual reference desk. The author discovered that if students were not familiar with chat technology (such as MSN messenger or yahoo Messenger), they tend to prefer e-mail reference over virtual reference. The reason noted for this was that a lack of familiarity may lead to a sense of intimidation or resistance. Nearly everyone became enthusiastic about chat reference service, and preferred it to e-mail, once they had used it.

The study by Stoffel and Tucker (2004) compared e-mail and chat to determine user perceptions of their services as a means to improve reference services. While they did not ask questions regarding preference, they did ask users if they used other services to meet their information needs. Fewer than one in ten used another service in the case of e-mail users, chat users responses to this question were not noted in the article. Stoffel and Tucker concluded that there was high satisfaction for their virtual services and that e-mail users were slightly more satisfied than chat users. The study revealed that approximately one-third of respondents (34.5 percent) used the e-mail reference services to seek help with topic searches.

Web 2.0 tools reference services

Some of the Web 2.0 tools are especially suited to reference services. Technologically-minded patrons can receive answers to their reference questions by using Twitter, Facebook, IM, etc. The participants in Agosto, et al (2010)'s study saw a shift toward library 2.0 in reference and information services. That is, not only is the question answering research components of reference services increasingly collaborative, users are playing an increasing role in information production. Just as library 2.0 means library services provided via the internet that encourages feedback and participation from users, reference 2.0 means that users are acting as information providers as well as information seekers (Agosto et al. 2010). A comparative study of the use of Web 2.0 tools by librarians in Nigeria and South Africa revealed that 66.7% of the librarians in South Africa use Web 2.0 tools such as IM for online reference services (Baro, Ebiagbe and Godfrey, 2013). Another study by Baro, Idiodi and Godfrey, (2013) also revealed that more than half of the librarians surveyed in Nigeria (66.5%) indicated using Web 2.0 tools for online reference services.

Since many users are now fairly proficient at finding information, they are moving toward providing information for others, by creating blogs, adding to library collaborative blogs and wikis, reviewing materials to be posted on library websites, answering questions, and so on, as a part of what one town hall meeting participants in Agosto, et al. (2010)'s study called "the people's network" (p.2).

In summary, despite the wide variety of options, the literature suggests that when given a choice, in-person, face-to-face interaction with a librarian is the first choice for the majority of library users seeking assistance.

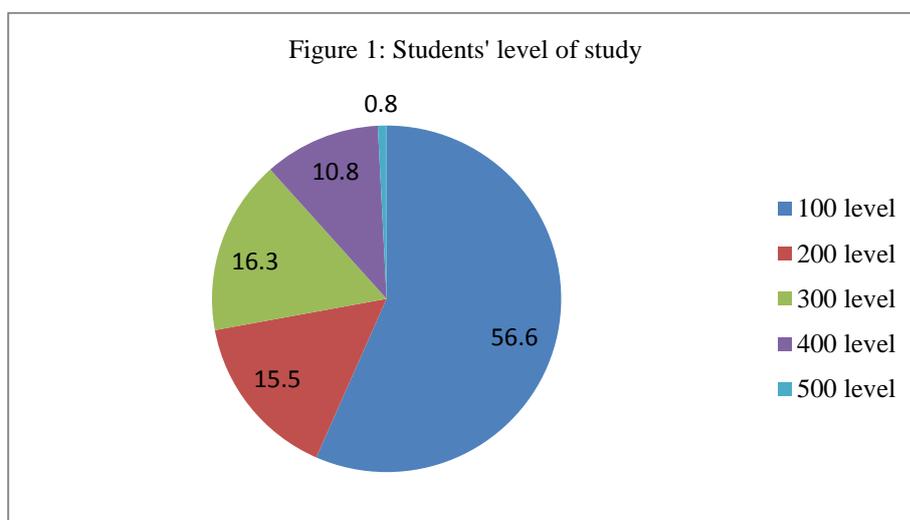
Methodology

The study examined the extent students of UNN use the library Facebook page, e-mail, Phone/SMS, instant messaging, and person-to-person when seeking for help from reference librarians. The population of this study consist of all eligible undergraduate students using the library. Questionnaire was used for data collection. The study collected data from respondents who represent different departments in the university using the library. The questionnaire is made up of 8 items, questions 1-3 asked respondents biodata, while 4-8 asked questions covering the various research questions raised to guide the study.

The researcher personally visited the university library over a period of one week where copies of the questionnaire were distributed to the respondents in the library using convenient sampling technique. Out of the 300 questionnaires administered to the respondents in the main university library, 258 completed questionnaires were returned and were used for the analysis. Data collected was analyzed using frequency counts and percentages and the results presented in tables and charts.

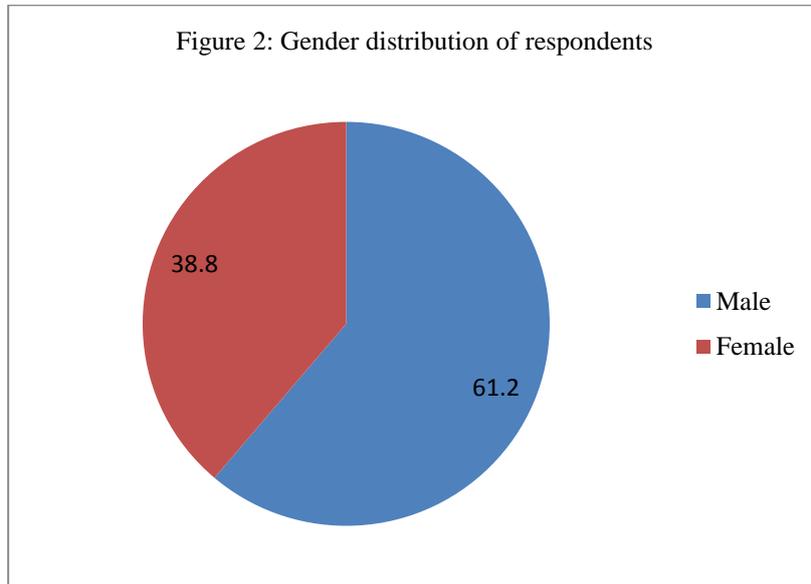
Analysis of Results

Students' level of study



Out of the 258 respondents, the majority (146: 56.6%) of the respondents are 100 level students, followed by 200 level students with 40 (15.5%) respondents. The breakdown by gender is as follows: 158 (61.2%) were indicated as males, while 100 (38.8%) indicated as females (see Figures 1 and 2).

Gender of respondents



Department of respondents

Discussion of findings

Awareness of the different reference inquiry channels

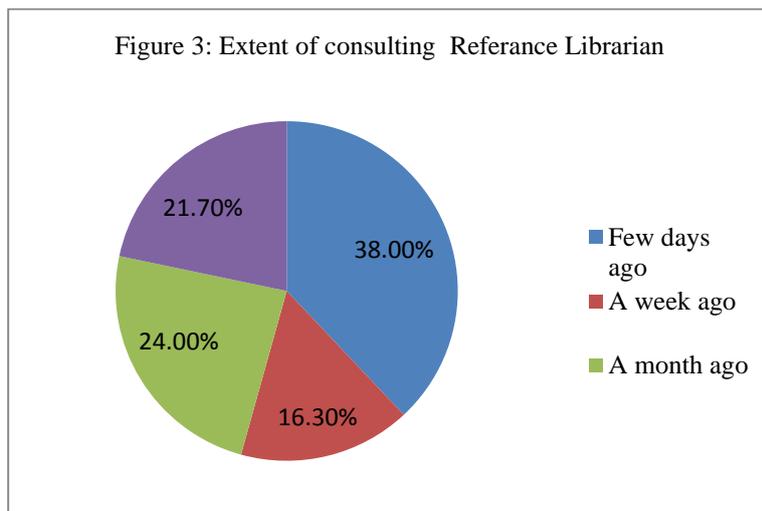
Respondents were asked to indicate their level of awareness with the following reference inquiry channels available in the UNN library: library Facebook page, e-mail, phone/SMS, instant messaging, person-to-person (The reference desk). The study revealed that almost all (222:86.0%) of the respondents indicated that they are aware of the person-to-person reference channel, followed by the phone/SMS to make reference inquiries, and the library Facebook page (Table 1). This shows that the UNN students are more aware of the person-to-person reference channel, and the phone/SMS reference channels. The results indicate that most of the UNN students are not aware of reference channels such as the library Facebook page, instant messaging and e-mail. More effort is needed to publicise the different channels used in the university library.

Table 1: Level of awareness of the following reference inquiry channels

Channels	I know	I don't know	Only heard
Library Facebook Page	90 (34.8%)	124 (48.1%)	44 (17.1%)
E-mail	42 (16.3%)	30 (11.6%)	186 (72.1%)
Phone/SMS	138 (53.5%)	86 (33.3%)	34 (13.2%)
Instant Messaging	22 (8.5%)	192 (74.4%)	44 (17.1%)
Person-to-person (The reference desk)	222 (86.0%)	18 (7.0%)	18 (7.0%)

Extent of consulting reference librarian

Respondents were asked how long they have consulted a reference librarian for information or inquiry through any of the channels. The study revealed that 98 (38.0%) of the respondents have consulted reference librarian few days ago, followed by those who indicated consulting reference librarian a month ago (62:24.0%) (Figure 2). Although, the majority of the students consult reference librarian few days ago, the level of consultation is still low. Many students prefer to use the materials or fine solution to their information needs without consulting reference librarians. The reason might be that either they are shy or takes it as a waste of time. For example, studies have shown that students no longer consult the OPAC or library catalogue before using the library materials, they go straight to the library collections on the shelves (Ampka, 2000; Eyitayo, 2009; Adedibu, 2008).



Most preferred channels through which students make reference inquiries

Respondents were asked to rate the channel through which they make reference inquiries with a scale from 1-5, where 1 indicated least and 5 most. As expected the majority (149: 57.8%) of the respondents indicated using the person-to-person reference channel most, followed by 122 (47.3%) of the respondents indicating using the phone/SMS, and the library Facebook page (89: 34.5%) channel when making reference inquiries. Other channels such as: instant messaging, and e-mail were indicated to be least used by the students (Table 2). Despite the wide variety of options available to users, when given a choice, person-to-person (the reference desk), the face-to-face interaction with a librarian is the first choice for the majority of library users seeking help.

The finding of the high use of the traditional reference desk agrees with the existing literature (Johnson, 2004; Ruppel and Vecchione, 2012; Chow and Croxton, 2012; Granfield and Robertson, 2008). For example, in a study of 276 students and faculty at two public universities in the South Atlantic region, Johnson found face-to-face and e-mail to be the most popular reference mediums. From the present findings, it can be assumed that library users most probably prefer face-to-face reference transactions due to the fact that the librarians can lead users directly to the physical resources they need in the library building.

The finding on the use of the Library Facebook page is due to the fact that recent statistics have shown wide use of Facebook by Nigerians. According to the statistics of December 2015, in Nigeria, 67 million of the population are Internet users, out of which 6.6 million are Facebook users (Internet World Stats, 2015). In other words, librarians and students are among the 6.6 million Facebook users in Nigeria. A recent study by Baro, et al. (2013) revealed that the most frequently used Web 2.0 tool is Facebook. It was used by 46.6 per cent of the librarians in Nigeria. The authors added that 66.5 per cent of the librarians in university libraries in Nigeria use Web 2.0 tools like the Facebook mostly for online reference services. Farmer (2007) rightly suggested that technology has expanded the basic philosophy of reference service and improved John Cotton Dana's quote "the right information to the right person at the right time" by incorporating the "right format". For example, e-mail, chatting and instant messaging (IM), Facebook, Whatapp, and Twitter are now becoming viable means of delivering reference service to remote users, thereby, reducing physical constraints of time and space.

The present study revealed that instant messaging, and e-mail were indicated to be least used by the students. This finding agrees with pervious findings that chat use in academic libraries is low. For example, Horowitz, Flanagan, and Helman (2005) found that the use of their chat reference service was small compared to other reference services and that "the resources required for

training and management... were disproportionately high for the rate of use of the service” (p.255). Similarly, Radford and Kern (2006) examined nine chat reference services that were discontinued and reported that “low volume was the most frequently cited reason for service discontinuation”(p.527). Baro, Efe and Oyeniran (2014) also reported little or no use of e-mail and IM as channels through which students make reference inquiries in Nigeria. Similarly, Rehman and Mahmood (2010) reported a less developed culture of delivering reference services through e-mail and other electronic means of communication due to the lack of IT skills and professional knowledge on the part of librarians. Librarians need to promote the use of the different reference inquiries channels through the library web site, information literacy instruction, orientation sessions, etc.

Table 2: The most preferred channels through which students make reference inquiries

Channels	1	2	3	4	5
Library Facebook page	61 (23.6%)	41 (15.9%)	22 (8.5%)	45 (17.4%)	89 (34.5%)
E-mail	95 (36.8%)	39 (15.1%)	34 (13.2%)	25 (9.7%)	65 (25.2%)
Phone/SMS	32 (12.4%)	9 (3.5%)	13 (5.0%)	82 (31.8%)	122 (47.3%)
Instant messaging	131 (50.8%)	52 (20.2%)	41 (15.9%)	13 (5.0%)	21 (8.1%)
Person-to-person (The reference desk)	5 (1.9%)	10 (3.9%)	35 (13.4%)	59 (22.9%)	149 (57.8%)

1 indicates least – 5 most

Level of satisfaction with the reference answers given

Respondents were asked to indicate their level of satisfaction with answers received from reference librarians through the chosen channel. More than half (53.90%) of the respondents indicated that they are not satisfied with answers given. In the “If not satisfied give reasons option”, some respondents gave reasons such as:

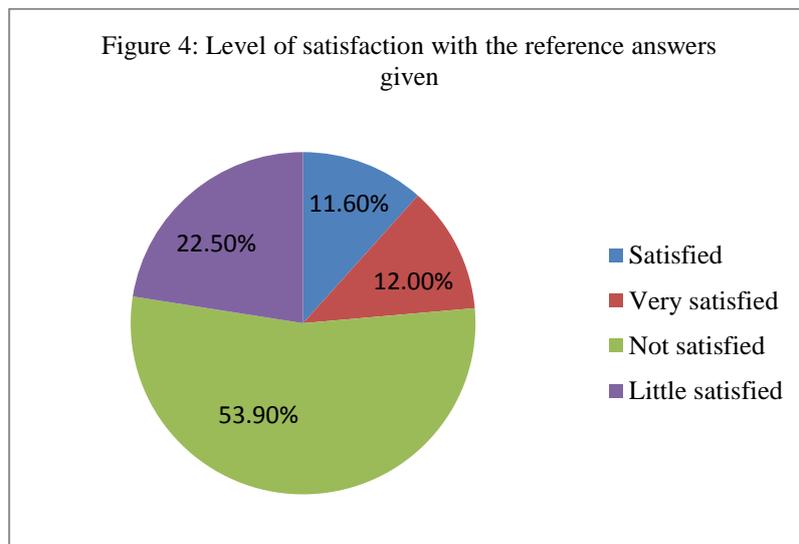
I did not know that these channels exist in the library

I think creating awareness of the existence of the library Facebook page, e-mail, Instant messaging and the rest of them should be made.

Sometimes librarians are reluctant to send feedbacks or negligence on the part of the librarian

Most of the inquiries I make, I do not get a satisfactory answer.

Due to poor power supply.



User satisfaction, another outcome measure, is one of the most frequently used measures in reference effectiveness literature (Saxton & Richardson, 2002). User satisfaction relates to the degree to which users are satisfied with the service obtained. In this present study, the users of the UNN library expressed dissatisfaction with the services offered through the various channels. The reason given is that, most of them are not aware of the various reference inquiry channels used in the library, and others reported that librarians are reluctant to provide timely feedback. Reference librarians have recognized that communicating with users through various methods, including Facebook, is an extension of their services that makes the user experience more convenient. The findings of the present study on the level of user satisfaction calls for librarians in Nigeria to be proactive in creating awareness on the various channels. They should post attractive posts on the Library Facebook page to attract students. This will make them like the Library Facebook page and other online channels and make reference inquiries using them.

Connaway, Dickey, and Radford (2011) asserted, “The user once built workflows around the library systems and services, but now, increasingly, the library must build its services around user workflows.” Providing innovative library services requires staff evaluation and user assessment. A point listed in the “Facets of quality for digital reference services” states:

Digital reference services should regularly evaluate their processes and services. Ongoing review and assessment help ensure quality, efficiency, and reliability of transactions as well as overall user satisfaction (Virtual Reference Desk Project, 2000).

Conclusion

The research has shown that the majority of the respondents at UNN are more aware of the person-to-person reference channel and the phone/SMS reference channels. It was found that the students use the person-to-person reference, the phone/SMS, and the library Facebook page most when seeking for reference help. From the survey results it is apparent that library patrons need awareness campaigns on the various channels of reference services offered at UNN.

It is clear from the findings that library patrons still value face-to-face traditional reference desk service to virtual reference service channels such as e-mail, chat, Facebook, Twitter, IM, and Skype that are gaining wide acceptance by librarians and library patrons. Using online services like Facebook will enable librarians answer questions related to research assignments even outside normal library hours. Users have become accustomed to the often instant gratification that the Internet and advances in technology have provided.

Arising from the findings, university libraries in developing countries like Nigeria must make policy statements regarding virtual reference services to guide the design and delivery of virtual reference services and ensure service continuity. Library staff should first examine who their users are and their respective preferences and then develop library services to support them.

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