No cause to be critical:
Decreasing user dissatisfaction in Ask a Librarian chat reference

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About Ask a Librarian

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Ask a Librarian is a collaborative, bilingual chat reference service offered by the Ontario Council of University Libraries (OCUL) consortium

- 15 participating universities, including the TRY+ institutions

- Administered by Scholars Portal, the service arm of OCUL

Evidence-based decision-making

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In 2018, our research team began a project evaluating the Ask a Librarian service

Transcript analysis project focused on factors that may influence user dissatisfaction

- Service model
- Service policies
- Operator behaviors (RUSA guidelines)

Does our chat data validate our service model, policies, and training? What changes need to be made?

What's been done already

Previous Transcript Analysis Research

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- Service perspective: efficiency of the operations of the service

  - User type, question content, completeness and correctness of librarian's response, librarians' adherence to behavioral standards

  - E.g. Bishop (2012): rate of correct responses to location-based questions over chat

- User perspective: effectiveness of the output of the service

  - User satisfaction, willingness to return

  - E.g. Kwon & Gregory (2007): do users feel more satisfied when librarians adopt the behaviors in the RUSA Guidelines during the chat reference interview?

- Consortial layer: perspectives of the participating libraries

Methodology

Why *dis*satisfaction?

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- Gap in the literature

  - E.g. Nilsen (2006): Library Visit Study (Western) identified three problem behaviors - bypassing the reference interview, unmonitored referrals, and failure to ask follow-up questions

- Dissatisfied exit survey responses are rare

- Trusting user's perception of the service received, not imposing a judgement from an "insider" view

Due Diligence

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- Research Ethics approval

- OCUL Virtual Reference Steering Committee's Data Working Group research data request approval

- All data anonymized for anything that would identify the user, operator, and institution

Sampling

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- 1,395 / 9,424 interactions between June 1 and December 1 2016 had completed exit surveys

  - 256 with satisfied responses (random)

  - 217 with neutral or dissatisfied responses (purposive)

Exit survey

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The service provided by the librarian was

- Excellent
- Good
- **Satisfactory**
- **Poor**
- **Very poor**

The librarian provided me with

- Just the right amount of assistance
- **Too little assistance**
- **Too much assistance**

This chat service is

- My preferred way of getting library help
- A good way of getting library help
- **A satisfactory way of getting library help**
- **A poor way of getting library help**
- **A last resort for getting library help**

Would you use this service again?

- Yes
- **No**

Variables

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Opening behaviours

- Clarification
- Confirmation
- Attempt to resolve

Closing behaviours

- Satisfaction check
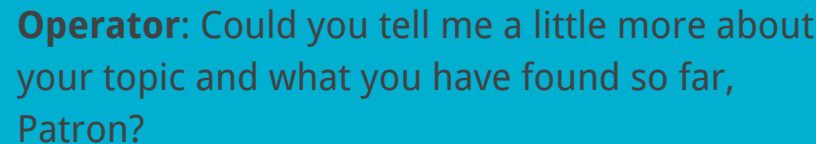- Invitation to return
- Chat ended mutually

Anytime behaviours

- Institution match reveal
- Tone
- Transfer
- Referral
- Interest and Empathy
- Informality
- "No"

Clarification

— — —

RUSA 3.1.8

The operator asked an open- or closed-ended question about the user's information need.

Operator: Could you tell me a little more about your topic and what you have found so far, Patron?

Confirmation

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RUSA 3.1.5

The operator confirmed that their understanding of the user's information need was correct, usually by paraphrase or closed-ended question.

Operator: Okay, you are asking about citing online archival material, specifically whether you should be indicating that your sources are online ones. Is that correct?

Attempt to resolve

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The operator provided a bare minimum of support to the user. The operator's effort should have matched the complexity of the question. Common examples of non-attempts include:

- Providing a link with no context as an answer
- Trying something obvious then giving up
- Not looking for local instructions

Operator: Sorry, I can't access that information online. Are you able to visit the info desk at Branch? That would be the best way to find out

Satisfaction check

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RUSA 5.1.1

The operator checked to see if they answered the user's question or if they were satisfied with some element of the service.

Operator: Is that what you're looking for?

Invitation to return

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RUSA 5.1.2

The operator invited the user to return either with a "canned message" or in the operator's own words.

Operator: Thank you for using Ask a Librarian chat. Remember to come back if you have more questions.

Chat ended mutually

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Both the operator and the user acknowledged and agreed that the chat was ending.

Operator: Is there anything else I can do for you today?

User: no thank you. Have a good day :)
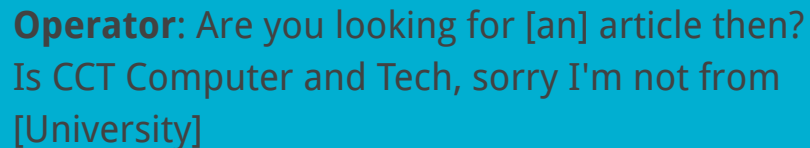
Operator: You as well!

<User closed chat>

Institution match reveal

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The operator revealed to the user that they are not from the user's institution or campus if within the same institution. The operator must have explicitly stated this, coder inferences are not sufficient.

Operator: Are you looking for [an] article then? Is CCT Computer and Tech, sorry I'm not from [University]

Tone

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The operator maintained a professional and courteous tone. They were never rude, abrupt, inappropriate, or unprofessional.

Operator: how you doig User?

User: just great. you?

Operator: LIVING THE DREAM!

Operator: :0

Transfer

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The user is transferred from at least one operator to another during the course of the chat. No warning messages are required to qualify

Operator1: Great thanks! I'll take a look, but just to let you know my shift is ending in a few minutes. I'd be happy to transfer you to another librarian, though, who can help you further

User: That's awesome thank you!

Operator1: Ok, I'll transfer you over to Operator2. Please give me a few moments...

User: Okay thanks :)

System: Please wait while I transfer the chat to 'Operator2'.

System: You are now chatting with 'Operator2'

Referral

— — —

The operator shared contact information or advised the user to contact another staff member or a different service point to complete the question.

Operator: Also, if still no luck by tomorrow. We do have a librarian who may know about spss. Unfortunately she isn't working tonight. But you can find her contact info here. Librarian

Interest and empathy

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RUSA 2.0

The operator made it clear that they cared about the user and/or the user's question. Behaviors like "small talk" (e.g., how are you, talking about the weather, etc.), exhibiting kindness (e.g., sympathizing with problems, acknowledging difficulties), showing support (encouraging user), and offering the user congratulations are examples of interest and empathy.

Operator: That looks like an interesting question! Which course or department is this for? I want to get you the best resources. :)

Informality

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The operator tended to use more informal language during the chat including:

- Sentence fragments
- Emojis
- Contractions
- Abbreviations
- Lack of punctuation
- Lack of capitalization
- "Prosodic features" like ellipsis for passage of time
- Reactions (e.g., "lol")
- Multiple punctuation for emphasis

Operator: Aaaaand it won't because we only have the digital content for this journal from 1965-1984

Patron: :'(

Operator: Yup that sucks. But that's how you can get around the technical problem that's happening right now. Proquest still wouldn't have been able to find this article. If you really really need it, you can request it via interlibrary loan

"No"

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At some point in the chat, the user found out they could not do something they wanted due to technical, policy, library collection, or any other reason. The operator did not actually have to say the word "no".

Operator: The bad news is we don't have this article online -- even though we do have more recent online volumes of the journal. The good news though is you can get the article in print at the [Branch].

Variables

— — —

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Statistical analyses

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1. Chi squares
2. Binary logistic regression

Variables left after chi square tests

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Opening behaviours

- Clarification
- ~~Confirmation~~
- Attempt to resolve

Closing behaviours

- Satisfaction check
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Anytime behaviours

- Institution match reveal
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Variables left after logistic regression

Opening behaviours

- Clarification
- ~~Confirmation~~
- ~~Attempt to resolve~~

Closing behaviours

- ~~Satisfaction check~~
- ~~Invitation to return~~
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Anytime behaviours

- ~~Institution match reveal~~
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- ~~Informality~~
- ~~"No"~~

Strategies for your own practice

Watch your tone

Patron: I'm not a student, but can I access library e-resources?

Operator: You have to be a student or an alumni. Databases are expensive and tuition pays for it.

Patron: I'm not a student, but can I access library e-resources?

Operator: Unfortunately e-resources are limited to students and alumni, but you may be able to access some of them if you come to the library and use the library computers.

Avoid being "all business"

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Operator: APA does not require that you include the database reference any more as these tend to change.

Patron: ahhh citation is already confusing before they start changing the rules on me :(

Operator: Please see this link from OWL at Purdue on APA citations.

Operator: APA doesn't require the database reference anymore since they tend to change.

Patron: ahhh citation is already confusing before they start changing the rules on me :(

Operator: I know, it throws me for a loop when they change the rules too! I always check OWL at Purdue for the latest information.

Make your reference interview questions count

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Patron: looking for article on the digital divide
Operator: Have you started searching?
Patron: yes
Operator: Where have you searched?
Patron: [discovery layer]
Operator: What digital divide are you looking at?
Patron: global
Operator: Are you looking at countries that do and don't have access?
Patron: yes
Operator: Are you looking at specific countries?
Patron: not really
Operator: Can you narrow it down?
Patron: east vs west

Patron: looking for article on the digital divide
Operator: That's an interesting topic but a very big one! Can you tell me a bit more about what exactly you're looking for?
Patron: i need an article on the global digital divide between east and west
Operator: Like who does and doesn't have digital access?
Patron: yes
Operator: Okay, cool. Where have you looked so far?
Patron: [discovery layer]
Operator: Great, thanks!

Stay with the user

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Operator: I don't know, I'm not at [University]. You should call their circulation desk to ask.

Operator: I'm not sure, but give me a second and I'll call the circulation desk to ask.

Operator: I'm at the end of my shift so I need to transfer you to another librarian.

Operator: I'm getting close to the end of my shift so I only have a few more minutes. Do you want me to transfer you to another librarian, or do you think we can solve this in the next five?

Transfers and referrals are sometimes necessary, but users much prefer a consistent/continuous reference transaction, so stay with them when possible!

Don't rush the user

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Patron: I was told i can access this journal through the website but i cant find it
Operator: I did a title search and the online journal came right up. Are you searching thru the catalogue?
Patron: ive never done this before so im not sure where to research it
Operator: ok go to the catalogue and just do a library resources search. Let me know what you find.
Operator: ok have you done you search yet
Patron: yes i couldnt find the author im looking for
Operator: ok so you found the link?
Operator: you would then search for the author?
Patron: is it possible to send a link
Patron: i cant seem to find the right article?

Patron: I was told i can access this journal through the website but i cant find it
Operator: Okay, let's try putting the journal title in the catalogue search [link]
Operator: Make sure the "searching in" is set to "journal title"
Operator: Let me know when you're done this step!
Patron: i see the link to the journal but i couldnt find the author im looking for
Operator: Let's see where we are. Did you click on the link to access the journal online?
Patron: yes
Operator: Great! What's the rest of your citation? I can guide you through the whole process.

Logan, J., Barrett, K., & Pagotto, S. (in press). Dissatisfaction in chat reference users: A transcript analysis study. *College & Research Libraries*.

Thank you! Questions?

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