AN INVESTIGATION INTO THE PERCEPTIONS OF ACADEMIC LIBRARIANS AND STUDENTS TOWARDS NEXT-GENERATION OPACS AND THEIR FEATURES

A study submitted in partial fulfilment of the requirements for the degree of Master of Arts in Librarianship at THE UNIVERSITY OF SHEFFIELD by HOLLIE OSBORNE

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An Investigation into the Perceptions of Academic Librarians and Students Towards Next-Generation OPACs and their Features

Abstract

Background: Next-generation catalogues are being implemented by university libraries to address concerns that students favour Internet search tools over the institutional resources. These catalogues have been developed to meet user needs by having a range of searching and browsing features, as well as Web 2.0 applications. They also incorporate links to full-text articles and relevancy ranking. There are contradictory opinions in the literature towards the usefulness of next-generation catalogue features for different groups of library users. It is also unclear as to how intuitive the next-generation interfaces are to users with different levels of searching ability.

Aims: This study aims to investigate the perceptions of academic library users towards next-generation catalogues and their features.

Methods: Semi-structured interviews were conducted with 7 librarians, 6 MA Librarianship students, and 5 post-graduate students from The University Of Sheffield. The interviewees were shown specific features of the University Library's newly implemented StarPlus catalogue. Their responses towards the catalogue were audio-recorded, transcribed and analysed.

Results: The interviewees agreed that the StarPlus next-generation catalogue is quicker and more convenient to use than the Library’s traditional catalogue. In particular, library users appreciate being able to select their own preferred searching method. However, parts of the interface and some of the features are not intuitive to the students or the librarians.

Conclusions: Librarians and students have similar opinions towards next-generation catalogue features. Generally, users favour the searching and browsing features over the Web 2.0 features. It is also concluded that the catalogues are not entirely intuitive. Therefore, it is suggested that libraries promote their next-generation catalogues to librarians and students through training. It is also recommended that further user studies are conducted.
An Investigation into the Perceptions of Academic Librarians and Students Towards Next-Generation OPACs and their Features

Contents

Abstract .................................................................................................................................................. 2

Acknowledgements ......................................................................................................................... 8

Chapter One: Introduction .............................................................................................................. 9

  Background to the study ................................................................................................................ 9

  Justification of the study ............................................................................................................. 10

  Research aims and objectives ..................................................................................................... 11

  Structure of the dissertation ......................................................................................................... 11

Chapter Two: Literature Review .................................................................................................... 13

  Introduction .................................................................................................................................. 13

  Development of the library OPAC ............................................................................................... 13

  Changing library user needs and expectations ............................................................................ 14

  Next-generation OPACs ................................................................................................................ 15

  Ex Libris’ Primo and The University Of Sheffield Library’s StarPlus catalogue ....................... 16

  User studies .................................................................................................................................. 17

  Simple and advanced searching features including integrated content .................................... 18

  Faceted browsing ......................................................................................................................... 19

  Spellchecker ................................................................................................................................. 21

  Tagging ....................................................................................................................................... 21

  Ratings and reviews ..................................................................................................................... 22

  Links to additional content ......................................................................................................... 23
<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Chapter Five: Discussion</th>
<th>Page</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Introduction</td>
<td>49</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Interviewees’ background knowledge and experience of using library catalogues and Internet search tools</td>
<td>49</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Simple and advanced searching features including integrated content</td>
<td>50</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Faceted browsing</td>
<td>51</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Spellchecker</td>
<td>52</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Tagging</td>
<td>52</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Ratings and reviews</td>
<td>53</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Links to additional content</td>
<td>54</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>E-shelf</td>
<td>54</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Visual appearance and accessibility of the features</td>
<td>55</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>An overall impression towards next-generation catalogues</td>
<td>56</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Summary</td>
<td>57</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Chapter Six: Conclusion</th>
<th>Page</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Summary of the research</td>
<td>58</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
An Investigation into the Perceptions of Academic Librarians and Students Towards Next-Generation OPACs and their Features

Limitations of the study and recommendations for further research ........ 60

Recommendations for libraries ................................................................. 61

Bibliography ................................................................................................. 62

List Of Appendices ....................................................................................... 65

Appendix A: Semi-structured interview guide ........................................... 66

Appendix B: Semi-structured interview guide (short version) ................. 72

Appendix C: Participant information sheet ................................................. 77

Appendix D: Participant consent form ...................................................... 80
An Investigation into the Perceptions of Academic Librarians and Students Towards Next-Generation OPACs and their Features

List Of Tables And Figures

Table 1: University Of Sheffield Librarians 30
Table 2: MA Librarianship Students 30
Table 3: Post-Graduate Students (Short Interviews) 31
Figure 1: Example of StarPlus’ keyword search box. 37
Figure 2: Example of StarPlus’ advanced search option. 37
Figure 3: Example of StarPlus’ faceted browser. 39
Figure 4: Example of StarPlus’ spellchecker feature. 40
Figure 5: Example of StarPlus’ tagging feature. 41
Figure 6: Example of StarPlus’ ratings and reviews feature. 42
Figure 7: Example of StarPlus’ links to additional content. 43
Figure 8: Example of StarPlus’ e-shelf feature. 44
Figure 9: Example of StarPlus’ search results page. 45
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Chapter One: Introduction

Background to the study

The University Of Sheffield (TUOS) Library has recently implemented a next-generation catalogue interface entitled StarPlus, which has been developed using Ex Libris' Primo software. As it is still undergoing development, the Library is currently offering users a “beta” version of StarPlus alongside their traditional Star catalogue (TUOSL, 2012; Sadeh 2008). Consequently, they are yet to receive any significant feedback from students, which could enable them to make improvements to StarPlus. Therefore, this research study has demonstrated StarPlus’ features to library users in semi-structured interviews. Overall, it is intended that the conclusions drawn from this study will provide TUOS Library with ideas for both improving and promoting StarPlus to their students and librarians. However, the generalised recommendations will be applicable to all academic libraries that are considering implementing a next-generation OPAC (Online Public Access Catalogue).

Throughout this study, the term “next-generation” is used to describe the library catalogues that have been developed to meet user needs and move beyond the earlier OPACs, which were primarily designed for experienced librarians (Emanuel, 2009; Merčun & Žumer, 2008; Sadeh, 2007; Large & Beheshti, 1997). Next-generation catalogues are also referred to in the literature as “discovery layer interfaces” (Yang & Wagner, 2010:691). They typically enable searching of external content, such as academic databases, as well as local collections from a single interface. Additionally, they imitate Internet search tools by incorporating: relevancy ranking; links to full-text articles; aesthetic interfaces; Web 2.0 applications; and multiple searching and browsing features (Allison, 2010; Fagan, 2010; Yang & Wagner, 2010; Emanuel, 2009; Sadeh, 2008).
An Investigation into the Perceptions of Academic Librarians and Students Towards Next-Generation OPACs and their Features

**Justification of the study**

It has been stated in the literature that the current generation of library customers favour using Internet search tools, such as Google, over library catalogues. This may be because users perceive these services to be more user-friendly, quicker and easily accessible (Lewis, 2008; Sadeh, 2008; Sadeh, 2007). Consequently, most searches are being conducted away from the library over the Internet, which has encouraged librarians to develop their online services (Allison, 2010; Craven et al, 2010; Emanuel, 2009). Furthermore, libraries are starting to implement next-generation catalogues in an attempt to guide users away from Google and towards academically relevant information (Emanuel, 2009; Lewis, 2008; Sadeh, 2007).

If libraries are to remain relevant, further research will need to be conducted into the information seeking preferences and expectations of library users. This should involve determining what features make Internet services such as Google successful and incorporating these into next-generation catalogues (Craven et al, 2010; Lewis, 2008; Sadeh, 2007). However, the literature regarding next-generation OPAC features is limited, with some features being investigated more than others. Furthermore, the available studies provide inconsistent information regarding the usefulness of particular features and the preferences of different user groups. It is also unclear as to how intuitive the catalogues are compared with Internet search tools (Allison, 2010; Yang & Wagner, 2010; Emanuel, 2009; Tam, et al, 2009; Tam, 2008). Therefore, this study aims to address gaps within the existing body of literature on next-generation OPACs.
An Investigation into the Perceptions of Academic Librarians and Students Towards Next-Generation OPACs and their Features

Research aims and objectives

This dissertation aims to investigate the perceptions of different groups of academic library users towards next-generation catalogue interfaces and their features.

Objectives:

- To conduct semi-structured interviews with three groups of library users from The University Of Sheffield: librarians; Master of Arts Librarianship students; and post-graduate students.

- To determine whether or not the next-generation catalogue interfaces are useful and intuitive to users who have different levels of searching ability, knowledge and experience of using information retrieval tools.

- To compare the perceptions of librarians and students, regarding the usefulness of next-generation features.

- To provide The University Of Sheffield Library with suggestions for improving and promoting their newly implemented next-generation catalogue, StarPlus.

Structure of the dissertation

Chapter Two presents a review of the literature, which comprises: the development of the early library OPACs; the changing information seeking behaviour and expectations of library users; the development and definition of next-generation OPACs; and a description of Ex Libris’ Primo catalogue interface, which has been implemented by TUOS Library. The chapter also summarises the previous user studies of next-generation OPACs, which are organised under sub-headings that correspond to the features investigated by this study. These features include: simple and advanced searching options including integrated content; faceted browsing; spellchecker; tagging; ratings and reviews; links to additional content; e-shelf; and visual presentation. These sub-headings are also employed in Chapters Four and
An Investigation into the Perceptions of Academic Librarians and Students Towards Next-Generation OPACs and their Features

Therefore, the reader can select to read about the specific features that they are interested in and navigate easily between the different chapters.

Chapter Three outlines the methodology that is employed by this study and discusses: the research approach; the data collection method used; and the process of conducting semi-structured interviews. It also acknowledges the limitations of the adopted methodological approach, as well as the ethical aspects of the study. The findings of the semi-structured interviews are presented in Chapter Four, while Chapter Five discusses how the results of this study compare with the previous literature. Finally, Chapter Six summarises the study and presents the conclusions and observations, which have been formulated from the research to address the project’s initial aims and objectives. It also provides recommendations for further research and advice for libraries who are considering implementing a next-generation catalogue.
Chapter Two: Literature Review

Introduction

This literature review establishes a context for the research project to determine its relevance. It begins by summarising the changing information seeking behaviour and expectations of library users, and emphasises the importance of developing library OPACs (Online Public Access Catalogues) to address these issues. Following this, a definition of next-generation OPACs is provided to identify their features, which differ from traditional library OPACs. The Primo next-generation interface by Ex Libris, which has been implemented by The University Of Sheffield (TUOS) Library, is also described. Finally, a select number of next-generation OPAC user studies are synthesised and organised according to the features that this study will investigate.

Development of the library OPAC

The first generation of OPACs were introduced during the 1970s to replace card indexes. They required users to conduct “known-item” searches with terms that exactly matched the bibliographic information contained within the item records. Consequently, these systems did not support subject searching, a technique which users were generally more inclined towards using (Large & Beheshti, 1997:111). Also, the majority of users did not understand how to use the catalogues effectively because they had been designed to support the needs of experienced librarians (Merčun & Žumer, 2008; Large & Beheshti, 1997). A second generation of OPACs were updated to include keyword searching within specific fields, such as the title, as well as Boolean matching. However, users continued to find searching difficult, possibly because of their limited skills and a lack of comprehension regarding Boolean retrieval (Antelman et al, 2006; Large & Beheshti, 1997). A third generation of OPACs with enhanced searching methods were envisioned during the 1980s, although these systems were largely unrealised, with commercial vendors continuing to offer “second-generation functionality” long after (Antelman et al, 2006:129; Large & Beheshti, 1997).
Furthermore, the introduction of the World Wide Web in the 1990s provided library users with an alternative method of finding information that did not require any prior knowledge of information retrieval (Merčun & Žumer, 2008).

**Changing library user needs and expectations**

In recent years, there has been a growing concern that libraries are becoming irrelevant as they struggle to meet diversifying user needs and expectations (Allison, 2010; Yang & Wagner, 2010; Emanuel, 2009). For example, more students are seeking information over the Internet and thus have reduced support from library staff (Allison, 2010). According to Olson (2007), even the current generation of PhD scholars have been conditioned to using the web. This argument is supported by statistics from the University of Nebraska-Lincoln Libraries, which show that in 2007 to 2008, 81 percent of searches were conducted away from the Library. Therefore, it is likely that the library OPAC and website will be a researcher’s primary point of contact with their library and will shape their overall impression of it (Allison, 2010). Consequently, the development of online services has become increasingly important to libraries and they have started to develop websites and electronic resources (Allison, 2010; Craven et al, 2010; Emanuel, 2009). Despite these advances, the OPAC has remained largely unchanged since the 1980s and has therefore lagged behind modern Internet search tools (Yang & Wagner, 2010; Emanuel, 2009; Antelman et al, 2006).

According to Lewis, there is much evidence to suggest that users favour Internet search engines like Google over the library catalogue and other institutional resources (Lewis, 2008). This may be because these services are more user-friendly, quicker and easily accessible (Lewis, 2008; Sadeh, 2008; Sadeh, 2007). For example, Internet search engines provide relevance-ranked results and aesthetic interfaces (Lewis, 2008). Also, commercial sites like Amazon have raised user expectations regarding the amount and types of information required about a resource, such as customer reviews and ratings (Emanuel, 2009). Furthermore, web search engines provide access to a variety of information resource types including: articles, online books, websites and multimedia. In contrast, the traditional
library system requires the user to search through multiple databases and repositories to locate different materials (Sadeh, 2008). Therefore, to remain relevant, library OPACs should imitate Internet services and enable users to locate information quickly and easily in an integrated environment (Allison, 2010; Yang & Wagner, 2010; Lewis, 2008; Sadeh, 2007). However, unlike Internet search engines, which may retrieve vast and largely irrelevant results, library catalogues should bring together carefully selected resources that adhere to the University’s mission and the user community’s research interests (Allison, 2010; Sadeh, 2007). Guiding library users away from Google and towards OPACs will ensure that researchers retrieve academically relevant information (Lewis, 2008; Sadeh, 2007).

**Next-generation OPACs**

In 2006, North Carolina State University in collaboration with a commercial company developed a new catalogue interface, which was customised to meet user needs (Emanuel, 2009; Sadeh, 2007). Commercial library suppliers and libraries have since produced similar systems, which have been referred to as “next-generation” catalogues and “discovery layer interfaces” (Yang & Wagner, 2010:691; Emanuel, 2009:118; Sadeh, 2008). Most of these systems are built on decoupled architecture. This means that they are developed separately to, and overlaid on top of, the library’s existing management systems and disparate collections, from which data can be harvested to create a unified searching index (Sadeh, 2008). As a result, next-generation interfaces enable the user to search multiple resources from a single interface. They also incorporate relevancy ranking (Fagan, 2010; Yang & Wagner, 2010; Emanuel, 2009). The functionalities characteristic of next-generation OPACs are comprehensively described in a 2010 research article by Yang and Wagner. Similarly, Allison outlines the requirements for developing a user-centred information portal (2010).

Next-generation catalogues differ to traditional OPACs in the sense that they enable “serendipitous discovery” of information as opposed to a targeted search and are therefore more user-friendly (Allison, 2010:382; Emanuel, 2009). Simple keyword searching is encouraged above other types of
searching, such as Boolean matching, and the user is not required to select limiters prior to their search (Yang & Wagner, 2010; Emanuel, 2009). Therefore, next-generation catalogues may be particularly useful to those users who are unaware of the availability of resources prior to their search or have limited search skills (Emanuel, 2009). The searching experience may be further enhanced with the inclusion of spell-checking, recommendation features and links to full-text resources (Allison, 2010; Yang & Wagner, 2010).

Another contrast with traditional OPACs is the next-generation catalogue’s interface, which imitates Internet sites like Amazon by using book cover images, tag clouds and icons to emphasise key information. Furthermore, they typically accommodate Web 2.0 features, such as tagging, reviews and RSS feeds, which are interactive and enable user contribution (Allison, 2010; Yang & Wagner, 2010; Emanuel, 2009; Sadeh, 2008). Yang & Wagner claim that such peer-generated information is now expected by library users (2010). Similarly, Sadeh (2008) believes that the success of Web 2.0 services on the Internet, such as the reviews on Amazon, provides evidence that users appreciate being able to contribute their knowledge and learn from their peers.

**Ex Libris’ Primo and The University Of Sheffield Library’s StarPlus catalogue**

This research assesses users’ perceptions towards specific features of next-generation catalogues, which are derived from TUOS Library’s StarPlus catalogue. Currently, the Library is offering users a “beta” version of StarPlus alongside their second generation Star Library catalogue (TUOSL, 2012). StarPlus is a customisation of Primo, a proprietary next-generation discovery interface that was released in May 2007 by Ex Libris (Yang & Wagner, 2010; Sadeh, 2008; Sadeh, 2007). The Primo software is built on decoupled architecture, thus it can integrate multiple library collections, regardless of the metadata standards used or the resources’ format or location (TUOSL, 2012; Sadeh, 2008; Sadeh, 2007). It also incorporates meta-searching to facilitate integrated resource discovery beyond Primo’s local indexes. This enables
An Investigation into the Perceptions of Academic Librarians and Students Towards Next-Generation OPACs and their Features

users to explore a wide range of scholarly information resources from a single interface, which can be modified by institutions to correspond with their visual identity (Sadeh, 2008; Sadeh, 2007).

The Primo system provides multiple methods of accessing resources (Sadeh, 2008). For example, it can suggest alternative queries to the user via a spellchecker feature (Sadeh, 2008:12; Lewis 2008; Sadeh, 2007). Additional searching and browsing features include: a keyword search box; an advanced search option; relevance ranking; options to display the results according to additional criteria such as date; faceted browsing; alternative search suggestions; and links to full-text resources (Sadeh, 2008; Sadeh, 2007). The combination of these features enables the user to either search for specific items or browse. Primo also incorporates Web 2.0 features, including: tagging; ratings and reviews; and an e-shelf. These features enable the user to interact with, contribute and share information (Sadeh, 2008; Lewis 2008; Sadeh, 2007).

According to Sadeh (2008), Primo does not require users to have any prior training because it is “intuitive” and similar to web search engines that library users are familiar with (Sadeh, 2008:12). Furthermore, the results of two initial usability studies conducted by The University of Minnesota in 2006 and 2007 in collaboration with Ex Libris have shown that participants found the Primo interface to be “easy to use” and “easy to learn” (Rosen, 2006, cited in Sadeh, 2008:22). The majority of the participants, which included academic staff and students, found Primo easier to use than other, similar search tools that they were familiar with (Rosen, 2006, 2007 cited in Sadeh, 2008).

User studies

According to Emanuel (2009), next-generation catalogues are becoming prevalent in libraries and librarians are beginning to consider user preferences to determine future developments. She also claims that library users want these catalogues to be improved further (Emanuel, 2009). Lewis argues that in order to make library catalogues relevant to users, libraries need to determine what features make services such as Google and Amazon successful and incorporate these into next-generation OPACs (Lewis, 2008).
Similarly, Sadeh declares that libraries must develop a greater understanding of why users favour Internet services over the library catalogue (2007). Therefore, it is important that libraries involve their users during the initial stages of interface design and development as a means of determining their requirements and preferences for the features (Craven et al, 2010).

The literature regarding user studies of next-generation OPAC features is limited and predominantly originates from North American academic institutions. Also, the studies have generally involved participants completing practical tasks to assess the usability of a specific interface product that a library has intended to purchase, implement or develop (Fagan, 2010). While these studies have typically assessed the entirety of a given interface, some features are written about more extensively than others. Nevertheless, most of these qualitative studies can provide a generalised overview of user perceptions towards next-generation OPAC features. A select number of projects from the literature are synthesised below and are organised according to the features that this study will investigate:

**Simple and advanced searching features including integrated content**

Most next-generation catalogue interfaces provide as the default a simple keyword search box similar to those found on popular Internet search tools, and a link to an advanced search option (Yang & Wagner, 2010; Emanuel, 2009). This is because users can generally comprehend “keyword” searching more than they understand, for example, ISBN or call number searching (Emanuel, 2009:119). Indeed, it was revealed by a user study that was conducted at TUOS in 2008, that international students favour keyword searching because they are accustomed to using Google (Tam et al, 2009). Furthermore, the results of a recent Copac usability study suggest that the majority of users now expect to find a simple search box on the home page of their OPAC (Craven et al, 2010).

However, according to Yang and Wagner (2010), librarians have expressed negative opinions towards the keyword search box, with some refusing to
include it in their interfaces. They believe that it causes confusion to users and that a basic or advanced search option is more suited towards constructing precise search queries (Yang & Wagner, 2010). This may be because, unlike library users, librarians habitually construct complex search strategies prior to actually searching (Emanuel, 2009). Indeed, when Western Michigan University decided to implement VuFind, their librarians requested that a “known-item” title search be integrated into the catalogue as they favour this method of searching (Ho et al, 2009:85).

There are few references within the literature regarding user perceptions towards integrated resources within OPACs. However, some academic libraries have stated that being able to provide integrated content within a library catalogue is beneficial because it promotes the smaller and lesser known local electronic collections, which would not be retrieved by a commercial search engine (Allison, 2010; Lewis, 2008).

**Faceted browsing**

Faceted browsing provides the user with an overview of their search results via a list of categories or facets, from which they can select sub-facets to refine and browse their results. These facets are derived from the items’ metadata record and generally encompass categories such as author, subject and format. In other words, the facets allow metadata to become visible to the user (Emanuel, 2011; Fagan, 2010; Ho et al, 2009). As a result, the user can be guaranteed that at least some results will be returned by selecting the sub-facets (Olson, 2007).

According to Fagan (2010), faceted browsing is a common feature in next-generation library catalogues. It has also been investigated by a number of usability studies, which suggest that faceted browsing is a popular feature that users find quick to learn and easy to use (Denton & Coysh, 2011; Emanuel, 2011; Allison, 2010; Tam et al, 2009; Olson, 2007). For example, in a usability study conducted by Ex Libris and The University of Minnesota on Primo, all 16 participants expressed that the faceted browser is a useful feature for narrowing down their search results. They also saw the faceted browser as a distinguishing feature of the interface (Rosen, 2006, 2007 cited.
Similar to a 2010 usability study of VuFind by York University Libraries in Toronto, found that participants emphasised the facets when they expressed a preference for VuFind over the Library’s traditional catalogue (Denton & Coysh, 2011). Furthermore, Emanuel (2009), who has conducted user studies with a range of academic library users at the University of Illinois at Urbana-Champaign, has observed that faceted navigation is the feature that is most appreciated by users, particularly those who have limited searching skills. The literature also suggests that faceted browsing is appreciated by library users who have advanced searching capabilities. For example, in 2006, the University of Chicago Library conducted a user study of AquaBrowser, which assessed the impact of faceted navigation on scholarly research. Overall, it was determined that faceted browsing may increase the range of material that a PhD student is able to locate (Olson, 2007).

Some of the studies highlight specific comments made by users towards the categories and sub-categories employed for the faceted browsers, with opinions varying among the participants and the studies. In particular, it has been written that the terminology used for the facets can be ambiguous, with some categories within the same faceted browser being too similar (Denton & Coysh, 2011; Emanuel, 2011; Emanuel, 2009; Olson, 2007). Users also find it confusing when sub-facets are duplicated. For example, in the Olson study (2007) the term “music” appeared under both the “format” and “topics” facets, while in the Emanuel study (2011) participants noticed that the same author’s name appeared under multiple facets (Olson, 2007:556). It is also mentioned in the literature that participants prefer facets to be presented in an explicit order with an accurate item count and a manageable number of results organised under each sub-facet (Denton & Coysh, 2011; Emanuel, 2011; Olson, 2007). Overall, the usability of a faceted browser is largely affected by implementation-specific details, with issues arising from inaccurate or inconsistent cataloguing (Denton & Coysh, 2011; Allison, 2010; Fagan, 2010).
Spellchecker

The Primo interface provides a spellchecker feature, which offers suggestions to replace misspelled query terms (Lewis, 2008:3). There are few references within the literature regarding the perceived usefulness of spellcheckers. However, the feature was investigated as part of a 2008 study conducted at TUOS to determine which features of next-generation OPACs are favoured by international students. The majority of the interviewees liked the feature although they did not think that it is essential. In particular, they expressed that the feature is useful for international students whose first language is not English and for correcting typing errors. Nonetheless, some of the interviewees were concerned that the spellchecker may suggest incorrect terms or fail to recognise subject-specific terminology (Tam et al, 2009).

Tagging

Primo allows users to attach keywords to item records, which may enhance personal retrieval and improve the browsing experience for other users in the library community, particularly when they are seeking items on specific topics according to popularity or currency (Anfinnsen et al, 2011; Sadeh, 2008). Indeed, Anfinnsen et al (2011) argue that the inclusion of tagging into OPACs may help libraries to overcome the limitations of rigid classification systems, by allowing users to supplement and enhance the existing metadata records with terms that are more apparent to them. Such a system may be especially beneficial to those users who have difficulties generating search terms, because they can browse the tags added by other users, which are usually presented in the form of a list or a cloud (Anfinnsen et al, 2011).

Limited research has been conducted regarding the integration of tagging into academic library catalogues (Anfinnsen et al, 2011). However, the results from a select number of studies show that user opinion is diverse regarding the usefulness of this feature. For example, in a next-generation OPAC study conducted by Emanuel (2009), a range of participants gave varied opinions towards the usefulness of tagging. While the majority stated that tagging is useful, half of them were unaware of it prior to the study and
they did not feel compelled to contribute tags. Indeed, anecdotal evidence gathered from a number of academic institutions has suggested that students are not interested in tagging (Ho et al, 2009). Furthermore, participants in a recent Copac development study expressed that they would be concerned about how such a feature is administrated (Craven et al, 2010). Similarly, in a user study conducted at Brunel University to investigate the benefits of implementing a tagging system into their existing library catalogue, some of the participants expressed concerns about the relevancy of the tags added by other users (Anfinnsen et al, 2011).

Ultimately, the Brunel University study determined that a tagging system would be highly appreciated by their users because it is believed to encourage browsing and support the retrieval of relevant information resources (Anfinnsen et al, 2011). Similarly, the University of Nebraska-Lincoln Libraries have decided to integrate tagging into their Encore catalogue because they claim that the feature is easy to manage and has become popular with users. In particular, the University’s librarians have added tags to improve the information contained in the item records. The academic staff have also used the tagging feature to organise and bring together information resources for their students. Moreover, the Library has noticed that more undergraduate students began to contribute tags as they became aware of the feature (Allison, 2010).

**Ratings and reviews**

As with tagging, the literature shows that library users also have varied opinions regarding the usefulness of user contributed ratings and reviews. Users in favour of the feature express that it can be helpful when deciding whether a resource is relevant to them, particularly if there are numerous books available on the same topic (Emanuel, 2011; Tam et al, 2009). They also think that the comments written by users may be more truthful than those found from other sources (Tam et al, 2009).

However, the studies also reveal that some users are concerned about the objectiveness, quality and relevance of the information (Emanuel, 2011; Emanuel, 2009; Tam et al, 2009). In a 2008 study conducted with
international students at TUOS, almost half of the participants felt that user contributed ratings and reviews are too subjective for a library catalogue and that they are more appropriate for commercial websites, which people use to buy rather than borrow books. They also expressed doubt regarding the usefulness of the comments as students will be using the same books for different purposes (Tam et al, 2009). Similarly, in a 2009 VuFind user study conducted by Emanuel (2011), the participants wanted to know the origin of the reviews and whether they were being moderated by the library. Another issue, which was highlighted by a recent usability study of Copac, is the volume of ratings and reviews available on library catalogues compared with commercial sites. Participants expressed that a link to Amazon would be more reliable and less subjective because their website has a larger audience (Craven et al, 2010). Participants in the Tam et al study (2009) also commented that they would not contribute reviews because they take too much time to write and that they would prefer the reviews to be written by a librarian or an academic (Tam et al, 2009).

**Links to additional content**

A main characteristic of the next-generation catalogue is its ability to utilise information from external sources, such as Amazon, which enables the inclusion of, or links to, enriched content such as tables of contents and reviews (Emanuel, 2009). Indeed, the Primo catalogue interface can provide links to external websites such as Amazon and WorldCat (Lewis, 2008). Although this feature has not been written about comprehensively in the literature, libraries have found that the integration of additional content into OPACs has helped customers to make decisions about the items that they borrow (Emanuel, 2009). Furthermore, it has been indicated by Craven et al (2010) that users expect to find additional content within catalogues.

**E-shelf**

The e-shelf feature in Primo allows the user to create and save a personal list of items that they have found in the catalogue. It also allows the user to: write notes about the resources; e-mail and print the details; save search queries; and push the information into reference management tools such as
Refworks (Lewis, 2008). Instances of user studies investigating similar features are sparse in the literature. However, a feature that is similar to Primo’s e-shelf is briefly mentioned in several studies by Emanuel, which tested the VuFind and WorldCatLocal catalogues, as well as a development study of Copac (Emanuel 2011; Craven et al, 2010; Emanuel, 2009). These studies found that the majority of users like the feature, although they expressed a desire to be able to create multiple lists and to organise the information into folders. Another VuFind user study, which was conducted at York University Libraries in Toronto, tested a “favourites system” to see whether users would notice and understand how to use the feature (Denton & Coysh, 2011:308). It was found that most of the participants noticed the link and understood how to add items to their favourites list. However, there was some confusion regarding the terminology used for the link and several participants thought that they were adding a bookmark in Internet Explorer (Denton & Coysh, 2011).

**Visual appearance and accessibility**

Next-generation catalogue interfaces are designed to be simple and easy to read, encompassing graphics, icons and cover images, which are sourced from other websites (Yang & Wagner, 2010; Emanuel, 2009). There are few references within the literature regarding user perceptions of the visual appearance and accessibility of next-generation interfaces. However, in the Tam et al study (2009), the majority of the participants thought that the inclusion of book cover images into the Library OPAC is not useful. They expressed that the images would not affect how they use the catalogue or decide which resources to borrow. Some of them were also concerned that the images would occupy too much space on the results page. Nevertheless, most of the participants thought that the images make the catalogue “look attractive” and “easier to read” (Tam et al, 2009:20). Conversely, a Copac development study found that the inclusion of book cover images would help users to find particular items. However, its participants were reluctant to use some of the features that were not self-explanatory or visible. Therefore, this study suggested that the Copac interface integrate pop up windows to provide additional information about
An Investigation into the Perceptions of Academic Librarians and Students Towards Next-Generation OPACs and their Features

the features (Craven et al, 2010). In contrast, a 2009 usability study, which involved predominantly undergraduate students, found that the VuFind next-generation interface was “intuitive” and “user-friendly” (Denton & Coysh, 2011:317). Another user study of VuFind also found that the participants appreciated the “clean” and “uncluttered” interface (Emanuel, 2011:50).

An overall impression towards next-generation catalogues

Overall, the existing studies indicate that users prefer next-generation catalogues to traditional OPACs because they are more user-friendly (Denton & Coysh, 2011; Emanuel, 2011; Emanuel, 2009). It is also apparent that users have a stronger preference towards the searching and browsing features than the Web 2.0 features, such as tagging and reviews, which have received a mixed reception (Emanuel, 2009; Tam et al, 2009). However, some of the literature also implies that academic staff and librarians may favour traditional library catalogues or at least have different preferences towards the next-generation features. This may be because they have advanced searching skills that do not fully utilise the browsing features (Allison, 2010; Yang & Wagner, 2010; Emanuel, 2009; Tam, 2008). Therefore, additional research is required to investigate the perceptions of different user groups towards particular features. It would also be beneficial to build on the existing literature as there are some inconsistencies between the results of different studies, particularly regarding the Web 2.0 features (Tam, 2008). Furthermore, it has been suggested that not all users understand how the next-generation features work and that these OPACs are more suited towards those who already have a basic understanding of library catalogues (Allison, 2010; Emanuel, 2009).

Summary

From a review of the literature, it is apparent that the searching behaviour and expectations of library users is being conditioned by popular Internet search engines and services, which are perceived by users to be more user-friendly and accessible than the traditional library OPACS (Yang & Wagner, 2010; Emanuel, 2009; Tam, et al, 2009; Lewis, 2008; Sadeh, 2007). Consequently, researchers may be retrieving irrelevant and poor quality
An Investigation into the Perceptions of Academic Librarians and Students Towards Next-Generation OPACs and their Features

information (Allison, 2010; Lewis, 2008; Sadeh, 2007). Therefore, it is essential that libraries improve their OPACs to ensure that they remain relevant to their users. Next-generation interfaces, which can be customised to meet user needs, may provide a solution to this challenge (Emanuel, 2009; Sadeh, 2007). However, to ensure that they keep pace with Internet search tools, libraries must conduct studies that determine user preferences for particular features (Emanuel, 2009; Lewis, 2008; Sadeh, 2007). Indeed, from the review of previous user studies, it is evident that further research in this area is required. For example, there are some inconsistencies between the results of studies regarding the usefulness of particular features and the preferences of different user groups (Allison, 2010; Yang & Wagner, 2010; Emanuel, 2009; Tam, et al, 2009; Tam, 2008).
Chapter Three: Methodology

Introduction

This chapter summarises the methodology that is employed by the study. It begins by outlining the research approach taken and the data collection method used. Following this, it explains how the study’s 18 participants were selected and recruited from three separate library user sub-groups: librarians, MA Librarianship students, and post-graduate students from The University Of Sheffield (TUOS). The process of conducting the semi-structured interviews is also described. Finally, the chapter acknowledges the limitations of the methodology and outlines the ethical aspects which have been adhered to by this study.

The research approach

This project takes an inductive approach as it investigates a case study and a topic, for which limited research has previously been conducted. While the study draws on the limited existing research and aims to address gaps within the literature, it does not intend to test a specific theory. Rather, conclusions are drawn from an interpretive analysis of data, which has been collected specifically for this study. The inductive approach typically involves adopting qualitative research methods (Bryman, 2008). Such methods are employed towards exploring social topics through collecting subjective evidence. Qualitative research methods are most suitable for this project as it aims to understand the searching behaviour, views and opinions of different groups of academic library users (Hennink et al, 2011; Bryman, 2008). Ultimately, this will help to determine the degree to which next-generation catalogues and their features are useful and intuitive from the perspective of the people who use them most, University students and librarians (Hennink et al, 2011). Indeed, it is anticipated that this research will contribute towards improving the usability of library catalogues for the benefit of these user groups. Compared with quantitative methods, qualitative research will also provide a greater depth of detail for a relatively under researched topic (Hennink et al, 2011).
Data collection method

According to Bryman (2008), interviewing is one of the most extensively used methods for collecting qualitative data. More specifically, this study has involved conducting semi-structured one-to-one interviews, which are also referred to in the literature as qualitative and in-depth interviews (Hennink et al, 2011; Bryman, 2008). Semi-structured interviewing involves an interviewer asking questions about the research topic to an interviewee, who is motivated to respond in a conversational manner (Hennink et al, 2011; Bryman, 2008). This data collection method was determined to be appropriate because it allows a degree of flexibility, whereby the interviewer is not required to follow an interview guide directly. For example, the researcher can ask additional, probing questions that are prompted by the participants’ responses. This may encourage the interviewees to talk about the research issues and topics that they perceive to be the most important or interesting (Bryman, 2008). As a result, the interviewer may uncover new research issues or questions that are not apparent in the literature. Furthermore, the interviewees’ should be able to provide varied and detailed information (Hennink et al, 2011; Bryman, 2008). Overall, semi-structured interviewing is most suitable for a study of this nature, which seeks to determine the perceptions and preferences of library users.

The semi-structured interviews that were conducted as part of this study loosely followed an interview guide (Appendix A), which included a list of questions and topical probes that were partly derived from the literature (Hennink et al, 2011). The structure of the interview guide was adapted from an example guide obtained from Hennink et al (2011:114) and included: an introduction section to remind the interviewer of what information the interviewees’ needed to know at the beginning of the interview; questions to obtain contextual information such as gender and programme of study; opening questions, which were broad and general to help the interviewer establish a rapport with the interviewees; key questions, which were designed to obtain in-depth information about the main areas of the research; and closing questions, which were broad and general to help end the interviews (Hennink et al, 2011; Bryman, 2008). Furthermore, the questions
were designed to be simple and open-ended so as to encourage the interviewees to provide in-depth responses. Also, prior to conducting the interviews, the guide was pilot tested with a user from outside of the study sample, which helped to verify the length of the interviews and the appropriateness of the questions, in terms of whether or not they would be understood by the interviewees (Hennink et al, 2011).

**Study sample**

The interviewees for this study were recruited from three distinct sub-groups from TUOS: librarians, MA Librarianship students, and post-graduate students from various disciplines. The intention behind this was to investigate whether or not there is any connection between a library user’s background context and their preferences and perceptions towards next-generation catalogues. For example, it can be assumed from the literature that practicing librarians will have more advanced searching skills and experience of using library catalogues than students (Merčun & Žumer, 2008; Large & Beheshti, 1997). Conversely, the students may have a greater knowledge of Internet search tools and Web 2.0 applications (Yang & Wagner, 2010; Sadeh, 2008). It can also be surmised that the MA Librarianship students will have a current knowledge of library catalogues from studying for their course and therefore they may be more perceptive towards usability and design issues. The different sub-groups will also be acquiring information for different purposes. Therefore, research is required that investigates the different needs and expectations of a range of users for a library catalogue. This study aims to address those areas of the literature which suggest that librarians have different preferences to students for the next-generation features, in particular the keyword search box (Allison, 2010; Yang & Wagner, 2010; Emanuel, 2009; Tam, 2008).

The study’s participants, whose details are summarised in the tables below, included: seven librarians, six MA Librarianship students, and five post-graduate students who were from a range of disciplines. To recruit the librarians, an invitation email explaining the purpose of the project was distributed to all TUOS Library staff via a general email list. It was expected
that the response rate to this email would be low, considering that the interviews were taking place during the day when most full-time staff would be at work. Therefore, a further nine emails were sent out to the researcher’s personal colleagues, which helped to recruit five of the seven librarians interviewed for the study. Conversely, the Librarianship students were made aware of the study through an advertisement which was placed on their MA course’s Facebook page.

It proved more difficult to recruit interviewees from the post-graduate user sub-group. Initially, communication was made with an academic member of staff, who was able to place the researcher in contact with post-graduate engineering students via email. However, this approach received no response and thus an alternative recruitment method was employed, which involved approaching post-graduate students directly in TUOS’s St. George’s Library.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>ID</th>
<th>Gender</th>
<th>Sector</th>
<th>Full-time/Part-time</th>
<th>Used Star/StarPlus for own academic study?</th>
<th>Audio recorded?</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>L1</td>
<td>M</td>
<td>Customer Services</td>
<td>Full-time</td>
<td>YES</td>
<td>YES</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>L2</td>
<td>F</td>
<td>Customer Services</td>
<td>Part-time</td>
<td>YES</td>
<td>YES</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>L3</td>
<td>F</td>
<td>Customer Services</td>
<td>Full-time</td>
<td>YES</td>
<td>NO</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>L4</td>
<td>F</td>
<td>Customer Services</td>
<td>Full-time</td>
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<td>YES</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>L5</td>
<td>F</td>
<td>Customer Services/ Cataloguing</td>
<td>Part-time</td>
<td>YES</td>
<td>YES</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>L6</td>
<td>M</td>
<td>Customer Services</td>
<td>Part-time</td>
<td>NO</td>
<td>NO</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>L7</td>
<td>M</td>
<td>Customer Services</td>
<td>Full-time</td>
<td>YES</td>
<td>YES</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>ID</th>
<th>Gender</th>
<th>Home/International</th>
<th>Full-time/Part-time</th>
<th>Audio recorded?</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>LS1</td>
<td>F</td>
<td>Home</td>
<td>Part-time</td>
<td>YES</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>LS2</td>
<td>F</td>
<td>Home</td>
<td>Part-time</td>
<td>YES</td>
</tr>
<tr>
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<td>F</td>
<td>Home</td>
<td>Part-time</td>
<td>YES</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>LS4</td>
<td>F</td>
<td>Home</td>
<td>Part-time</td>
<td>YES</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>LS5</td>
<td>F</td>
<td>Home</td>
<td>Full-time</td>
<td>YES</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>LS6</td>
<td>F</td>
<td>Home</td>
<td>Part-time</td>
<td>YES</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
### Table 3: Post-Graduate Students (Short Interviews)

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>ID</th>
<th>Gender</th>
<th>Programme of study</th>
<th>Home/International</th>
<th>Nationality</th>
<th>Full-time/Part-time</th>
<th>Audio recorded?</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>S1</td>
<td>M</td>
<td>PhD Accounting</td>
<td>International</td>
<td>Saudi Arabian</td>
<td>Full-time</td>
<td>YES</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>S2</td>
<td>F</td>
<td>MA Public Health</td>
<td>International</td>
<td>Saudi Arabian</td>
<td>Full-time</td>
<td>NO</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>S3</td>
<td>M</td>
<td>MSc Mechanical Engineering</td>
<td>International</td>
<td>Malaysian</td>
<td>Full-time</td>
<td>NO</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>S4</td>
<td>M</td>
<td>MSc Materials Science and Engineering</td>
<td>International</td>
<td>Nigerian</td>
<td>Full-time</td>
<td>NO</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>S5</td>
<td>F</td>
<td>MA Translation Studies</td>
<td>International</td>
<td>Taiwanese</td>
<td>Full-time</td>
<td>NO</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

**Conducting the interviews**

The semi-structured interviews, which were conducted with the librarians and Librarianship students, were identical and on average required around 30 to 45 minutes each to complete. They took place in a private room located in TUOS’s Information Commons during July 2012. This location was ideal as it provided a quiet space with access to a desktop computer. During the interviews, the participants were shown the StarPlus catalogue on the computer and were asked to give their opinions regarding the features demonstrated. This was determined to be a useful approach, as it has been suggested in the literature that some people are unaware of how the next-generation features work (Allison, 2010). The interviewees’ were also given the freedom to explore the interface themselves and many of them felt compelled to do so as they were relatively unfamiliar with StarPlus prior to the interviews. Additionally, they were asked a number of questions, which were designed to obtain an insight into the users’ personal experience and knowledge of using information retrieval tools, as well as their overall opinion of the StarPlus catalogue.
An Investigation into the Perceptions of Academic Librarians and Students Towards Next-Generation OPACs and their Features

The post-graduate student interviews followed a shortened version of the interview guide (Appendix B) that was employed with the librarians and Librarianship students. While this interview guide encompassed many of the same questions and probes, it excluded some of the features including the integrated content tab and the links to additional content. Therefore, the interviews took around 20 minutes each to complete. It was necessary to adopt this alternate approach because the post-graduate students were recruited directly at St. George’s Library while they were studying, thus it would have been unethical to ask them to provide more of their time. Nevertheless, StarPlus’ features were still demonstrated to them using the computers in the Library.

The majority of the interviews were audio-recorded and transcribed. It has been argued by Bryman (2008) that qualitative researchers typically record their interviews so that the interviewees’ responses can be analysed accurately and in detail. Using audio equipment also enables the interviewer to be more responsive to the interviewees as they are not distracted by writing notes (Bryman, 2008). However, a small number of the interviewees’ in this study, in particular the post-graduate students, expressed that they would feel uncomfortable being audio recorded. As this was expected, these interviews were manually recorded using a semi-structured interview guide sheet designed for this purpose.

Limitations

This study could have further benefitted from interviewing undergraduate students who, it can be assumed, will have different opinions and expectations of library catalogues to the post-graduate students. It may be that this user group has an even greater knowledge and experience of using Web 2.0 applications and less confidence with using library catalogues. It would also have been insightful to compare the interview responses of undergraduate students from various discipline backgrounds. However, the limited timeframe of this study rendered it impossible to recruit undergraduate students who were away from TUOS for the summer.
It can also be assumed that a greater amount of detail would have been obtained from the responses of the post-graduate students, had it been possible to interview them for a longer period of time. For example, they received shorter demonstrations of StarPlus’ features than the librarians and Librarianship students, thus their perceptions of the catalogue were based on limited information and experience. Furthermore, the study could have been extended by interviewing librarians from different sectors of the Library in addition to customer services, such as the staff who work in Metadata. Nevertheless, it is likely that the customer services staff will have a greater understanding of their customers’ information seeking needs and expectations as they work with them on a regular basis.

**Ethical aspects**

This study has been conducted in accordance with TUOS’s Ethics Policy Governing Research Involving Human Participants, Personal Data and Human Tissue. Therefore, prior to being interviewed the interviewees were given an information sheet (Appendix C), which explained what participating in the research would involve. It was made clear in the information sheet and before the interviews that the interviewees would not be personally identified in any part of the research process and that they could withdraw from the study at any point. Additionally, it was explained that their responses would only be audio recorded if they agreed to this and that they could refuse to answer any of the questions. The participants were also given a consent form to sign (Appendix D), which has given the researcher permission to use their anonymised interview responses in this study. As a means of ensuring that no individuals can be identified from the research, each participant was assigned a unique identification code, which has been used to distinguish between the different responses. Furthermore, any identifiers recorded in the interviews were removed from the written transcripts (Hennink, et al, 2011). The audio recordings of the interviews were destroyed following transcription.

The researcher has also completed and received approval for a University Research Ethics Application Form as the project has been categorised as low risk. It should be noted that the methodological approach of the study
An Investigation into the Perceptions of Academic Librarians and Students Towards Next-Generation OPACs and their Features

has evolved since the form was completed. In particular, the study initially proposed to conduct all of the interviews with post-graduate students, who were going to be approached directly in one of the University’s computer rooms. Nevertheless, the basic information can still be considered correct from an ethics standpoint.

Summary

This study takes an inductive approach, thus it aims to address gaps within the literature and develop new conclusions from an interpretive analysis of qualitative data (Bryman, 2008). Therefore, semi-structured interviews were conducted with three library user sub-groups from TUOS, which involved the interviewer demonstrating particular features of the StarPlus catalogue on a computer. The interviews were recorded and transcribed prior to analysis. As recruiting the post-graduate students proved to be problematic, their interviews were shorter and less extensive than the interviews conducted with the librarians and MA Librarianship students. It has also been acknowledged that the adopted methodology has limitations. In particular, the study could have benefitted from interviewing undergraduate students.
Chapter Four: Findings of the Interviews

Introduction

This chapter presents the findings from the semi-structured interviews, which were conducted with three interviewee sub-groups from The University Of Sheffield (TUOS): librarians; MA Librarianship students; and post-graduate students. The responses given by each interviewee sub-group are compared and contrasted to emphasise the key trends evident in the data. These are organised under ten sub-headings, which are derived from the semi-structured interview guides. Firstly, the interviewees’ background knowledge and experience of using library catalogues and Internet search tools is presented. Following this, the interviewees’ perceptions towards StarPlus’ next-generation features are given under the following sub-headings: simple and advanced searching features including integrated content; faceted browsing; spellchecker; tagging; ratings and reviews; links to additional content; e-shelf; and visual appearance and accessibility of the features. The chapter finishes by summarising the interviewees’ overall impression of the StarPlus catalogue.

Interviewees’ background knowledge and experience of using library catalogues and Internet search tools

All of the librarians and Librarianship students interviewed have experience of using TUOS Library’s second generation Star catalogue, with five out of seven librarians stating that they are “very familiar” with it. The librarians use Star on a regular basis for work-related tasks, particularly when answering customer enquiries. Conversely, the Librarianship students use Star less frequently to search for specific resources. When asked about their use of StarPlus, the Library’s next-generation catalogue, most of the librarians implied that they are less familiar with it than Star and therefore less inclined to use it:

“Yeah I’m not so familiar with it but I have used it [StarPlus]...I suppose it’s the habit really, I’m still in the habit of using straightforward Star.” (L1)
When asked about their frequency of use, five out of seven librarians stated that they use Star more frequently than they use StarPlus. One of the librarians responded that it requires less effort to use Star because they are more familiar with it. Another said that using StarPlus places them “outside of their comfort zone” while two other librarians stated that it is a “force of habit” that they continue to use Star. Similarly, all but one of the Librarianship students use Star more often than they use StarPlus. Regardless, most of the librarians and Librarianship students expressed frustration towards Star regarding its limited browsing capabilities and the unmanageable number of results that it returns. Nearly all of them found it difficult to locate information resources using Star unless they had entered specific item details. As a result, all of the librarians interviewed used Internet search tools to find bibliographic information for resources requested by customers. This ensured them that they had the correct item details, which could then be entered into Star. The search tools they used include Google or Amazon for books and Google Scholar or the academic databases for journal articles. Additionally, half of the Librarianship students interviewed favoured using Internet search tools, particularly Google Scholar and subject-specific databases because they enable the user to narrow the results and define their search parameters more easily, as well as providing quick access to full-text journal articles.

In contrast to the librarians and Librarianship students, the post-graduate students are less familiar with Star, with only three out of the five interviewees having used it frequently for their research. They are even less familiar with StarPlus as none of them used it regularly and, prior to their interviews, one of the students had not used it while another had never heard of it. The majority of the post-graduate students favoured using Internet search tools because they had a preference for e-journal articles and felt that there is a greater variety of information available through Google and Google Scholar. Like the librarians, they had developed a habit of using Google and Star in combination.
simple and advanced searching features including integrated content

The StarPlus catalogue has a keyword search box that allows users to choose whether they want to search within the University collections or the remote electronic databases. When asked about StarPlus’ keyword search box, the majority of librarians responded that it is useful and will bring up the most relevant information first. One librarian also stated:

“I think it’s pretty useful [because] it’s clear and it’s kind of what people expect [because] people are used to Google and Amazon and eBay and they all work on a similar basis…” (L7)

Only two librarians were unsure about the usefulness of this feature because they thought that users would be confused about the type of information that can be entered into the search box, such as ISBN numbers, Boolean operators and item barcodes. With regards to the integrated electronic databases, which can be searched by clicking on an “Articles and more” tab,
most of the librarians and Librarianship students thought it would be easier, quicker and “less intimidating” than having to search through multiple electronic databases. However, it was commented that having to click on an additional tab to search the databases is confusing, particularly as no on-screen information is provided to explain how the integrated content tab works. Therefore, they thought that the two tabs should be fully integrated.

The interviewees were also asked about how useful they think it is to have an advanced search option in addition to the single search box, which allows the user to define their resource requirements more specifically. Four librarians said that the advanced search feature is useful. They said that having a combination of both the simple and advanced search option caters for users with different searching needs. However, two librarians stated that the feature is unnecessary in a next-generation catalogue that facilitates faceted browsing, while another expressed that the drop-down menus in the advanced search option are too time consuming to use. Similarly, a Librarianship student commented that the advanced search feature has too many options to click through and that it would be more convenient if it were located on the catalogue’s homepage.

When asked about StarPlus’ search options, the Librarianship students and post-graduate students gave varied opinions as to the usefulness of the features, with most preferring one feature over the other. From the responses given it can be ascertained that the students have their own established methods for finding information. For example, some were concerned that the simple search box would bring up too many results and therefore favoured the advanced search features. Conversely, other students preferred the simple search box because it is more effective when searching for information on a general topic.

**Faceted browsing**

Most of the interviewees strongly agreed that StarPlus’ faceted browser feature is useful, as it enables the user to refine a vast number of search results when browsing the catalogue using broad query terms. One of the post-graduate students also commented that the feature is useful for
An Investigation into the Perceptions of Academic Librarians and Students Towards Next-Generation OPACs and their Features

providing a quick overview of the results. Nevertheless, the librarians and Librarianship students were somewhat critical towards particular aspects of StarPlus’ faceted browser. For example, quite a few of them commented that there are too many options, which causes some of the facets to be hidden unless the user scrolls down the screen or clicks on the drop-down arrows. Therefore, they recommend that the number of different facets be reduced. While most were reluctant to suggest which facets should be removed because of their lack of experience in using the feature, one of the Librarianship students felt that the “Collection” and “Subject” facets are too similar. Another felt that there is some duplication between the “Collection” and “Resource type” facets. This suggests that the terminology used for some of the facets may be ambiguous.

![Figure 3: Example of StarPlus’ faceted browser.](image)

**Spellchecker**

There was consensus among all of the interviewees that the spellchecker feature is useful. When asked why this was, most of them explained that it is common for users to make typing errors when entering query terms as they are often in a hurry. This can cause frustration, particularly when using Star
as it often returns no results for incorrectly spelt query terms. Also, as Star does not have a spellchecking feature, users do not know if it is their spelling that is at fault when no results are retrieved. In particular, the interviewees thought that the feature would be useful for dyslexic students and international students whose first language is not English, as well as for students who are studying scientific disciplines that employ technical terminology.

However, two of the librarians and three of the Librarianship students expressed concerns about the spellchecker feature. While they acknowledged the feature’s potential, they were concerned that it might be misleading when entering “obscure” terms that the spellchecker does not recognise. This may cause the spellchecker to offer irrelevant suggestions and lead some users to think that they have entered a query wrong when they have in fact spelt it correctly. One Librarianship student was also concerned about the accuracy of the spelling suggestions. These concerns stemmed from the interviewees’ experience of using spellcheckers in StarPlus and in other catalogues and Internet search tools. However, they appreciated being able to select or ignore the alternative suggestions presented by the spellchecker.

Figure 4: Example of StarPlus’ spellchecker feature.

**Tagging**

The interviewees’ responses regarding the usefulness of being able to add and search user contributed tags in StarPlus differed among the sub-groups. For example, the majority of the librarians and post-graduate students said that the feature is useful, while most of the Librarianship students were unsure about its usefulness. Overall, the librarians thought that the feature would help students to locate subject-specific resources that their peers have read and found useful. Indeed, one of the post-graduate students
An Investigation into the Perceptions of Academic Librarians and Students Towards Next-Generation OPACs and their Features

commented that the tagging feature would assist them when selecting from a large number of resources. Another explained that the feature would be useful to them when they cannot think of appropriate keywords to enter into the search box.

Conversely, the Librarianship students expressed concerns about the accuracy of the tags added by other users. They felt that there is such a large variety of requirements for information resources among students that the feature cannot fulfil the needs of everybody. In other words, a single resource may be used for multiple purposes and read from different perspectives. Therefore, the feature will be more useful if it is tailored towards personal or course-specific use as a means of organising and drawing attention to resources. Several of the interviewees also expressed confusion as to how the feature actually works, not knowing whether the tags they added would be included in the catalogue’s general searching index.

When asked whether they would contribute tags themselves, one Librarianship student explained that adding tags is too time-consuming. Also, while the librarians predicted that the feature will become more useful as users become aware of it, the Librarianship students doubted that enough tags would ever be contributed to make the tagging feature effective. Nevertheless, three out of the five post-graduate students interviewed expressed an interest in contributing tags.

Figure 5: Example of StarPlus’ tagging feature.
Ratings and reviews

All of the librarians and post-graduate students interviewed agreed that the ratings and reviews feature in StarPlus is useful. In particular, they mentioned that it would help students to “exchange knowledge” and select resources from their course reading lists that have been reviewed by previous students. Furthermore, the librarians suggested that the resource could be used by University lecturers or the Library to promote specific reading materials to students. When asked whether they think the feature will be reliable, most of the librarians responded that the reviews should be taken with “a pinch of salt”. They also expected the students to understand that the ratings and reviews are based on opinion. In comparison, the post-graduate students did not express any concerns regarding the trustworthiness of the reviews and would consider adding reviews themselves, particularly for the resources that they have found to be “extremely good or extremely bad”.

The responses given by the Librarianship students towards the reviews and ratings feature were more varied and critical. While two of them agreed that it is a useful feature because it “adds a lot more information” to the resource, two were unsure and another two said that the feature is not useful. Their reasons for not liking the feature were similar to their responses given towards the tagging feature. They are concerned that the resources will be reviewed from alternative perspectives by people on different courses, which would not be useful to them. Therefore, they suggested that the feature be...
modified to cater for individual modules, which would make it more relevant to users. They also thought that leaving and reading reviews would be too time consuming and that not enough users would leave comments for it to be useful. Furthermore, one Librarianship student explained that the ratings feature may create too much demand on a limited number of resources thus causing disappointment to those students who find the highly rated books unavailable.

**Links to additional content**

![Links](image)

*Figure 7: Example of StarPlus’ links to additional content.*

Only the librarians and Librarianship students were asked about the links to additional content in StarPlus, which enable the user to access Amazon and tables of contents, as well as the Star, Copac, and WorldCat catalogues. All of the librarians and most of the Librarianship students interviewed agreed that it is useful to have links to additional content within the Library catalogue. In particular, they thought that the feature would be useful for finding books from alternative locations when the Library’s copies are out on loan. It was also mentioned that the Amazon website is useful for accessing additional forms of information about resources, such as: tables of contents, sleeve notes, abstracts, ratings and reviews. One librarian commented that the feature:

“…makes searching a lot smoother for people. It’s more of a question of being able to use the material rather than having to look for it.” (*L2*)

However, some of the Librarianship students were unsure about the usefulness of the feature because they thought that most students would not be familiar with the Copac and WorldCat catalogues. Furthermore, one of the Librarianship students mentioned that the links would be more useful if
they appear when a user is searching for a book that the Library does not hold as opposed to it only being available within the item records.

**E-shelf**

There was consensus among all of the interviewee subgroups that the e-shelf is useful. However, different reasons were given as to why the interviewees liked the feature. For example, one librarian said that it would be useful for when students need to remember what books they have taken out, particularly when referencing their assignments. Some of the interviewees said that the feature would be useful for when students are writing their dissertations as it will help them to “keep track” of their research by creating reading lists or saving complicated search queries. Additionally, another librarian said that the feature could be useful for students who are conducting group assignments because they can e-mail their research to each other. Overall, it was agreed that the feature is convenient and a time-saver:

“…It’s a good idea [because] I often find stuff that I want to come back to and then…I have to write it down or try and remember what it is…”  
*(LS3)*
A few suggestions for improving the feature were also made. For example, one of the librarians said that it would be better if the items saved in the list could be selected simultaneously. Similarly, one of the Librarianship students stated that the layout of StarPlus’ e-shelf could be improved so that the user does not have to scroll so far down the page.

**Visual appearance and accessibility**

Towards the end of the interview the interviewees were shown a results page and asked for their opinions regarding the catalogue’s visual appearance. It was found that all of the post-graduate students and the majority of the Librarianship students liked StarPlus’ visual appearance. In contrast, nearly half of the librarians believed that the interface could be improved. Those interviewees who liked StarPlus’ visual appearance gave similar comments. They thought that it is: “clean”, “simple”, “easy to understand” and consistent with the layouts employed in other next-generation library catalogues. Similarly, the post-graduate students mentioned how the catalogue imitates popular Internet search tools and databases. Most of the interviewees also
liked the inclusion of book cover images into the catalogue because it is helpful when looking for books on the library shelves or when trying to recognise a book that they have used before.

Those interviewees who disliked StarPlus’ visual appearance said that there is too much unused space towards the top of the screen, causing the user to scroll down the page. As a result, the links that are located at the top of the screen become hidden. These links include the e-shelf feature, the user login and the help page. To overcome this issue, it was suggested that these links be statically positioned so that they remain visible on the page as the user scrolls down. Additionally, some of the links could be made more explicit, including the advanced search option. One of the Librarianship students commented that the e-shelf feature would need to be emphasised to students as its existence in the catalogue is not immediately obvious. Additional comments about the limited visibility of some of the features were made throughout the interviews. For example, another Librarianship student expressed that the additional content links and the integrated content tab are inconspicuous while the faceted browser does not “stand out” because the individual facets are not explicit.

**Interviewees’ overall impression of the StarPlus catalogue and its next-generation features**

There was consensus among all of the librarians and the Librarianship students that StarPlus is an improvement on the older Star catalogue. Similarly, all of the post-graduate students interviewed said that they intend to use StarPlus now that they are aware its features. Overall, the interviewees thought that it is easier to find relevant resources using StarPlus because the next-generation features render it more “flexible” and “sophisticated” than Star. For example, StarPlus’ keyword search box and the faceted browser allow the user to enter broad query terms and browse vast numbers of results, while the advanced search option can be used for locating specific items. Furthermore, users can search for a wide range of resources from a single and “easy to understand” interface. This is a convenient and quicker alternative to searching multiple subject databases.
They also appreciate being able to link directly to full-text e-journal articles. Below are just a few of the comments made by interviewees about StarPlus:

“It’s a good way of getting quick access to reliable information.” (L4)

“It seems much more interactive and welcoming.” (LS2)

“I think it’s a lot better, I think it’s a huge improvement on Star.” (LS6)

Despite many of the interviewees claiming that StarPlus’ interface is “easy to understand”, they also thought that students would require training to be able to take full advantage of the different features. In particular, features such as the e-shelf, the faceted browser and the integrated content tab would need to be explained or demonstrated to students. This could be during the Library’s induction sessions. Additionally, it was suggested that having more on-screen information within StarPlus could help students to use the features because they do not always notice the “help” link. As a solution to this, one of the Librarianship students recommended adding tooltips to the interface so that when a user places the cursor over a link or feature they are instantly provided with related information.

**Summary**

This chapter has summarised the key responses derived from semi-structured interviews, which were conducted with three interviewee subgroups from TUOS: librarians, MA Librarianship students and post-graduate students. It was found that the majority of interviewees had little or no experience of using StarPlus prior to the interviews, although most of them had used the older Star catalogue and a range of Internet search tools. However, once the interviewees had been shown the next-generation features of StarPlus, they all agreed that it is an improvement over the older catalogue because it offers multiple methods of finding resources through a single interface. As a result, StarPlus is quicker and more convenient to use. Nevertheless, students will need to be trained in how to use the different features as some of them are neither immediately obvious nor intuitive.
An Investigation into the Perceptions of Academic Librarians and Students Towards Next-Generation OPACs and their Features

Generally, the searching and browsing features appear to be more popular than the Web 2.0 features such as tagging and ratings and reviews.
Chapter Five: Discussion

Introduction

This chapter discusses the findings of the interviews to determine how the new research compares with current literature. Furthermore, the chapter synthesises the findings into an overarching argument, and is organised using the same ten sub-headings that are employed in the literature review and findings of the interviews chapters.

Interviewees’ background knowledge and experience of using library catalogues and Internet search tools

The literature highlights that users favour Internet search tools over library catalogues and other institutional resources because they find them more user-friendly, quicker and easily accessible (Lewis, 2008; Sadeh, 2008; Sadeh, 2007). This perception was confirmed by the majority of the interviewees in this study, in particular the post-graduate students, who explained that it is easier to obtain relevant results and a greater variety of information using Internet search tools. However, it is also apparent from the interviews that librarians and post-graduate students frequently use the Internet and the Library’s Star catalogue in combination, implying that neither search tool is adequate for their needs. For example, the interviewees generally use the Internet to find electronic resources or bibliographic information, which they then input into the Star catalogue to locate the items in the Library. Not only does this reinforce the opinion that library users find the earlier OPACs difficult to use, it also shows that those who have had extensive training and experience in information retrieval struggle to use these catalogues effectively (Merćun & Žumer, 2008; Antelman et al, 2006; Large & Beheshti, 1997). Therefore, it can be argued that the usability issues apparent in earlier OPACs stem from the system design as opposed to the users’ searching abilities. Nevertheless, the interviewees, in particular the librarians, were initially reluctant to use the StarPlus catalogue as an alternative to Star as they were unfamiliar with it. It is therefore...
recommended that the Library actively promote the new catalogue through training to make users feel more comfortable with it.

**Simple and advanced searching features including integrated content**

From the interviews it was discovered that the majority of librarians felt positively about the keyword search box in StarPlus. In contrast, the literature suggests that librarians dislike the feature and instead favour the basic or advanced search options, which enable the user to construct more precise search queries (Yang & Wagner, 2010; Emanuel, 2009; Ho et al, 2009). Furthermore, Yang & Wagner (2010) claim that librarians believe that the simple search box is too confusing for users. Indeed, two of the librarians interviewed thought that users would be unsure about the type of information that can be entered into the search box. However, most of the librarians understood that their users expect the catalogue to include features that emulate Google, and they thought that the keyword search box would be easier for them to use than the advanced search options.

In contrast, the literature indicates that students are accustomed to conducting keyword searches and therefore they favour and expect this option to be available in their library’s OPAC (Craven et al, 2010; Emanuel, 2009; Tam et al, 2009). However, when asked about the usefulness of StarPlus’ search options, the Librarianship students and post-graduate students gave varied opinions, with some preferring the simple search box and others favouring the advanced search options. From this response, it can be seen that the perceptions of library users towards searching features is more diverse than is realised by the literature. Therefore, it is suggested that libraries provide multiple search options in their OPACs, which allow the user to select their own preferred searching method. However, the usability of StarPlus’ searching features could be improved by, for example, providing more information about the type of queries that can be entered into the simple search box.
There are few references within the literature regarding the perceived usefulness of integrating remote information resources within library OPACs. However, it has been argued that integrating local content helps libraries to promote electronic collections that would not be retrieved by an Internet search engine (Allison, 2010; Lewis, 2008). Overall, the interviewees in this study appreciated being able to search multiple resources from a single search interface because it is quicker and easier than using a combination of different search tools. Nevertheless, the interviewees also explained that they would prefer StarPlus’ library collections tab to be combined with the integrated content tab. However, it has been argued by Lewis (2008) that combining Primo’s local and remote collections within the same tab may result in significant delays when retrieving the results (Lewis, 2008). Nevertheless, this study provides evidence that users expect more from next-generation OPACs in terms of integrated content than is currently being offered by Primo.

Faceted browsing

The literature provides strong evidence that faceted browsing is a popular feature, which users find quick to learn and easy to use (Denton & Coysh, 2011; Emanuel, 2011; Allison, 2010; Tam et al, 2009; Olson, 2007). Moreover, it has been suggested that users perceive the faceted browser as being the distinguishing feature of next-generation OPACs (Denton & Coysh, 2011; Emanuel, 2009; Rosen, 2006, 2007 cited in Sadeh, 2008). These assumptions have been confirmed by this study, as most of the interviewees strongly agreed that StarPlus’ faceted browser is useful, particularly for when narrowing down a large number of search results. Also, as the interviewees were from three distinct user sub-groups, it can be advanced that the feature is useful for people who have different levels of searching ability and experience, not just those who have limited searching skills, as has been suggested by some of the literature (Emanuel, 2009).

However, several of the librarians and Librarianship students implied that StarPlus’ faceted browser is not as user-friendly as the literature indicates. For example, they stated that there are too many facets, some of which are
difficult to notice. Furthermore, it can be inferred from the Librarianship students’ responses that the terminology used for some of the facets is too ambiguous, in particular, the “Collection” facet. Similar issues regarding indistinct terminology have been highlighted by previous studies, which suggest that users become confused when the facets are too similar or when the sub-facets are duplicated (Denton & Coysh, 2011; Emanuel, 2011; Emanuel, 2009; Olson, 2007). Therefore, to improve the usability of their faceted browsers, libraries should conduct further studies to determine what terminology their users understand. However, such improvements may involve adjusting the existing metadata, which is not always technically or economically viable (Denton & Coysh, 2011; Allison, 2010; Fagan, 2010).

**Spellchecker**
The spellchecker feature has not been thoroughly investigated by the literature. However, a 2008 study conducted at The University Of Sheffield found that the majority of its interviewees appreciated the feature, although they did not consider it to be essential (Tam et al, 2009). In consensus, all of the interviewees in this study commented that StarPlus’ spellchecker feature is useful, particularly for international students whose first language is not English. However, some of the librarians and Librarianship students expressed concerns regarding the accuracy and relevancy of the spelling suggestions. These perceptions were derived from their own experience of using spellcheckers in StarPlus and in other catalogues and Internet search tools. Similar issues were also raised by the participants in the 2008 study (Tam et al, 2009). This suggests that while library users and librarians appreciate the concept of spellcheckers, they do not trust them to work effectively. Therefore, it can be argued that further usability testing in this area is required.

**Tagging**
The previous research is inconclusive regarding the perceived usefulness of tagging, with library users giving varied opinions (Anfinnsen et al 2011; Allison, 2010; Craven et al, 2010; Emanuel, 2009; Ho et al, 2009). Similarly, the responses gathered by this study differ greatly, for example, the
An Investigation into the Perceptions of Academic Librarians and Students Towards Next-Generation OPACs and their Features

Librarianship students were critical towards tagging whereas the librarians and post-graduate students believed that the feature is useful as an alternative method for locating subject-specific resources. It is unclear as to why there was such a distinct divide in opinion among the sub-groups. However, the Librarianship students gave specific suggestions for improving StarPlus’ tagging feature, which implies that they had greater knowledge of it. For example, they recommended that the feature be customised to cater for personal or course-specific use to render it more relevant to users. Similarly, academic staff at the University of Nebraska-Lincoln Libraries have used tagging to draw the attention of their students towards specific resources (Allison, 2010).

Overall, the evidence derived from this study and previous studies indicates that tagging may have potential within academic catalogues, although some users are not as attracted by Web 2.0 features as the literature suggests (Anfinnsen et al, 2011; Allison, 2010; Yang & Wagner, 2010; Sadeh, 2008). Therefore, libraries and software vendors need to conduct user studies to ensure that tagging is relevant to their customers and used to its full potential, otherwise the feature may be ignored. Indeed, the Librarianship students expressed the view that the feature would not be useful at all if students do not add tags.

**Ratings and reviews**

As with tagging, user perceptions towards the ratings and reviews are also diverse. This is evident from the previous research and from the interviews conducted for this study. For instance, the Librarianship students were somewhat critical towards the feature whereas librarians and post-graduate students thought that it is useful. Comments derived from the literature and interviews suggest that the feature is helpful for when students need to make a resource selection from, for example, a course reading list (Emanuel, 2011; Tam et al, 2009). However, some of the Librarianship students doubted the usefulness of the feature because the reviews may be written by students who are on different courses to them. Similar concerns have also been expressed by the previous studies. In contrast with the literature, the...
An Investigation into the Perceptions of Academic Librarians and Students Towards Next-Generation OPACs and their Features

Interviewees in this study did not seem too concerned about the objectivity of the reviews because, as the librarians explained, they were aware that the information is based on personal opinion (Emanuel, 2011; Tam et al, 2009). Nevertheless, the Librarianship students thought that writing and reading reviews would be too time-consuming and that not enough users would leave comments for it to be useful. Once again this indicates that, while the ratings and reviews have potential, some users are not as interested in Web 2.0 features as the literature suggests (Yang & Wagner, 2010; Sadeh, 2008). Therefore, libraries will need to conduct further user studies to determine how they can promote and make these features more relevant to their users by, for example, tailoring the reviews towards specific modules.

**Links to additional content**

The usefulness of including links to additional content within OPACs has not been thoroughly investigated by the literature. However, it has been implied that the feature helps users to make decisions about the resources that they use (Emanuel, 2009). The librarians and Librarianship students who were interviewed about the feature confirmed this perception. For example, they explained that a link to Amazon is useful because it provides them with access to additional information about books, such as the tables of contents and reviews. In particular, the interviewees said that the links would be useful for when they need to find books from alternative locations to the Library. However, some of the Librarianship students raised concerns about the links to WorldCat and Copac because they think that students would not be familiar with using these catalogues. Therefore, it can be recommended that StarPlus provides additional information about these links on the interface via a tool tip or a pop-up window.

**E-shelf**

There are few references within the literature regarding features that resemble StarPlus’ e-shelf. However, the available research and the interviewees’ responses from this study strongly suggest that library users appreciate any type of feature that helps them to manage and organise their research (Denton & Coysh, 2011; Emanuel 2011; Craven et al, 2010;
An Investigation into the Perceptions of Academic Librarians and Students Towards Next-Generation OPACs and their Features

Emanuel, 2009). Nevertheless, while the interviewees liked the feature they also had ideas for how it can be improved. For example, some comments were made about the layout of the e-shelf page and the manner in which items in the list can be selected. Similarly, participants in previous user studies had very specific ideas for improving the feature, such as the ability to organise the information into folders (Emanuel, 2011; Craven et al, 2010). This suggests that library users have diverse expectations for the functionality of such a feature. Consequently, libraries need to determine what their users' expectations are if they are to improve and attract users to their OPACs.

Visual appearance and accessibility of the features

The previous research suggests that library users find next-generation catalogue interfaces to be “clean”, “intuitive” and “user-friendly” (Denton & Coysh, 2011:317; Emanuel, 2011:50). In consensus, the majority of the interviewees from this study commented that StarPlus' interface is “simple” and “easy to understand”. However, some of the librarians believed that StarPlus' links and features need to be emphasised, such as the user log-in and the advanced search option. Similarly, the Librarianship students made comments throughout the interviews about the limited visibility of some of the features including the e-shelf and the integrated content tab. Therefore, it can be argued that the Primo interface is not as “intuitive” as previously suggested by the literature or the interviewees' initial perceptions, which may have been inaccurate due to their inexperience of using StarPlus (Denton & Coysh, 2011; Emanuel, 2011; Sadeh, 2008). Consequently, it is important that libraries determine how visible the links and features are within their OPACs. A recent Copac development study found that their participants were reluctant to use the features that were not immediately obvious to them (Craven et al, 2010).

With regards to the inclusion of book cover images within OPACs, the responses from the interviewees in this study were inconsistent with those from a 2008 study by Tam et al (2009), which investigated the perceptions of international students towards features of next-generation OPACs. For
example, the 2008 study determined that its participants did not think the images would be useful to them (Tam et al, 2009). In contrast, most of the interviewees from this study commented that the cover images would help them find books on the library shelves or identify items in the catalogue that they have previously used. Similarly, a Copac development study determined that its participants used book cover images to help them locate particular items (Craven et al, 2010). Therefore, it is recommended that libraries incorporate book cover images into their OPACs.

An overall impression towards next-generation catalogues

There is consensus between the previous research and this study that users favour the next-generation catalogues to traditional library OPACs (Denton & Coysh, 2011; Emanuel, 2011; Emanuel, 2009). In particular, users thought that the catalogues are more user-friendly due to the next-generation features, which offer multiple methods of finding a range of resources from a single interface. This study also confirms that users have a stronger preference for the searching and browsing options than Web 2.0 features, even though some of the literature claims that users expect and are accustomed to using social networking tools (Yang & Wagner, 2010; Emanuel, 2009; Tam et al, 2009; Sadeh, 2008). Nevertheless, the integration of tagging and reviews into library catalogues has potential, so long as the features are promoted and made relevant to users.

The literature provides varied opinions regarding how easy the next-generation catalogues are to use. Ultimately, they are designed to be an improvement over traditional OPACs, which were aimed at experienced librarians who possessed extensive searching skills (Merčun & Žumer, 2008; Antelman et al, 2006; Large & Beheshti, 1997). Therefore, it has been suggested that the next-generation OPACs are “intuitive” and that users who are accustomed to finding information on the Internet should not require any training to be able to use them (Denton & Coysh, 2011:317; Emanuel, 2011:50; Sadeh, 2008:12). However, it has also been claimed that not all users understand how the features work and that the catalogues are more suited towards those users who already have a basic understanding of library
OPACs (Allison, 2010; Emanuel, 2009). Indeed, this study has determined that students and librarians require more training on the StarPlus catalogue if they are to use it effectively. Furthermore, it is recommended that more on-screen information is provided to help people learn how to use the features, which may be achieved through tooltips or pop-up windows (Craven et al, 2010). This is not to say that the next-generation OPACs are not useful, only that library users require guidance and training if they are to make full use of them, particularly as it cannot be assumed that all users are familiar with Web 2.0 concepts.

**Summary**

The evidence suggests that neither traditional library catalogues nor the Internet can fully meet the information needs of users. The StarPlus next-generation catalogue offers an alternative tool that enables users to search or browse through a vast range of information resources from a single interface. However, the interviewees were hesitant to use StarPlus because they had developed searching preferences and habits that they were reluctant to change. Indeed, it has been discovered that users’ preferences towards searching and browsing features are more diverse than the literature indicates, with the interviewees’ having their own favoured searching methods. It has also been found that the librarians in this study appreciated the keyword search box, which implies that they are more aware of their customers’ information seeking needs and are less critical of the next-generation features than the literature suggests (Yang & Wagner, 2010; Ho et al, 2009). Overall, this chapter has determined that next-generation catalogue interfaces offer an improvement over the traditional OPACs, although libraries will need to provide training, and promote their catalogues, as the features are not always immediately obvious or intuitive to users.
Chapter Six: Conclusion

Summary of the research

This study set out to explore the perceptions of academic library users towards next-generation OPACs and their features. It intended to determine whether these interfaces are useful and intuitive, regardless of the users’ searching ability and experience. Additionally, the study aimed to investigate whether there is a difference between librarians’ and students’ perceptions towards the usefulness of specific features. It began by presenting a literature review, which determined that the traditional library OPAC is failing to meet current user needs and expectations (Yang & Wagner, 2010; Emanuel, 2009; Lewis, 2008; Antelman et al, 2006; Large & Beheshti, 1997). Consequently, the importance of developing next-generation OPACs through conducting studies with library users was emphasised (Craven et al, 2010; Emanuel, 2009; Lewis, 2008; Sadeh, 2008). Finally, the previous user studies were summarised according to the next-generation features that this study has investigated. It was found that additional research in this area is required because the results of these studies are inconsistent regarding the usefulness of some features and the preferences of different user groups (Allison, 2010; Yang & Wagner, 2010; Emanuel, 2009; Tam, et al, 2009; Tam, 2008).

Chapter three outlined the methodology that was employed for the study as well as the ethical considerations. Semi-structured interviews were conducted with three library user sub-groups from The University Of Sheffield (TUOS): librarians, MA Librarianship students, and post-graduate students. This was to determine whether or not different user groups have similar preferences and expectations of library catalogue features. During the interviews, the interviewees were shown particular features of the StarPlus catalogue and asked open-ended questions, which encouraged them to provide conversational and detailed responses (Hennink et al, 2011; Bryman, 2008). The interviews were audio-recorded and transcribed prior to analysis.
Chapter Four presented the findings of the interviews, while Chapter Five considered how the results of this study compared with the previous literature. From this a number of overarching arguments were formulated. Firstly, the next-generation interfaces offer an improvement over the traditional library OPACs because they facilitate searching across a wide range of resources via a single interface, which is more convenient for users. The interfaces are also more flexible, allowing users to select their own preferred searching or browsing method. Indeed, this study has ascertained that the searching preferences of users is more complex than the literature indicates (Craven et al, 2010; Yang & Wagner, 2010; Emanuel, 2009; Ho et al, 2009; Tam et al, 2009). In other words, it cannot be assumed that a specific sub-group of library users search in a similar way. For example, some of the students who were interviewed as part of this study preferred to use the keyword search box while others favoured the advanced search option. Nevertheless, most of the interviewees used a combination of different search tools, indicating that neither the Internet nor the traditional library catalogue could fully meet their information retrieval needs.

This study has also found that librarians and students have similar opinions regarding the usefulness of next-generation OPAC features. In particular, the interviewees agreed that the keyword search box is useful despite the literature suggesting that librarians are more favourable towards advanced search options (Yang & Wagner, 2010; Emanuel, 2009; Ho et al, 2009). This indicates that librarians are more aware of their users’ expectations for the Library’s catalogue and are less critical of the next-generation features than the literature implies. The Librarianship students were the most critical of all the user groups towards the features, although this may be due to their background, which has made them more perceptive towards catalogue usability and design issues.

In consensus with previous studies, the interviewees appeared to prefer the searching and browsing options over the Web 2.0 features (Emanuel, 2009; Tam et al, 2009). This is in contrast to the literature which indicates that users favour and expect Web 2.0 features to be included in the library
catalogue (Yang & Wagner, 2010; Sadeh, 2008). Also, it cannot be assumed that all users understand how to use social networking features. Nevertheless, the Web 2.0 features are potentially useful provided that they are made more relevant to user needs. For instance, the interviewees strongly agreed that StarPlus’ e-shelf feature was useful, which suggests that users favour personalised features that are convenient and time saving.

Overall, this study has determined that while the next-generation catalogue interfaces and features are useful, they are not as “intuitive” as some of the literature suggests, regardless of the users’ searching skills (Denton & Coysh, 2011:317; Emanuel, 2011:50; Sadeh, 2008:12). The librarians and Librarianship students commented that some of StarPlus’ links and features were neither immediately obvious nor self-explanatory. Furthermore, it is evident that some of the librarians were reluctant to change their information seeking habits because they perceived that using the next-generation catalogues would demand too much of their time and effort.

Limitations of the study and recommendations for further research

This study was limited by the range of users interviewed. For instance, the number of discipline groups surveyed was restricted, and the study could have been further extended by including librarians from different sectors of the Library. Furthermore, given time constraints the post-graduate students were not given the opportunity to see all of StarPlus. Also, the study could have benefitted from including undergraduate students, whose experiences of using library catalogues, the Internet and Web 2.0 tools could have provided the basis for a wider scope of conclusions.

To address these limitations, it is recommended that further research is conducted to investigate the perceptions of undergraduate students towards next-generation catalogues and their features. Such research could seek to determine whether students from different discipline backgrounds maintain similar opinions. It can also be argued that the Web 2.0 tools require further investigation to ascertain how they can be made more relevant to users.
An Investigation into the Perceptions of Academic Librarians and Students Towards Next-Generation OPACs and their Features

working within an academic context, who appear to be more concerned with saving time than adding content. Additionally, further usability studies should consider how the OPAC features can be made more visible on the interface and easier to understand, possibly by providing on-screen information. The results from any further research can be compared with the findings of this study.

**Recommendations for libraries**

This study would advise libraries to actively promote their next-generation catalogues to students as well as librarians. The results of this study show that the students were largely unaware of the StarPlus catalogue, while the librarians were reluctant to use it. Promotion may be achieved by providing training, either online or during library induction sessions. This would also help to make library users more aware of the catalogue’s features. Furthermore, libraries are encouraged to conduct user studies prior to and following the implementation of their next-generation OPACs, so to determine methods of maintaining the catalogue’s relevance to users (Craven et al, 2010).

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Bibliography


An Investigation into the Perceptions of Academic Librarians and Students Towards Next-Generation OPACs and their Features


An Investigation into the Perceptions of Academic Librarians and Students Towards Next-Generation OPACs and their Features

List Of Appendices

Appendix A: Semi-structured interview guide
Appendix B: Semi-structured interview guide (short version)
Appendix C: Participant information sheet
Appendix D: Participant consent form
Appendix A: Semi-structured interview guide

Introduction

I am conducting this research for my master’s course in Librarianship at The University Of Sheffield. It will investigate the perceptions of University students and librarians towards specific features of library catalogues. During the interview you will be shown some features of library catalogues using The University Of Sheffield Library’s StarPlus catalogue. Following this you will be asked some questions about your personal experience of using library catalogues and your opinions towards the features demonstrated. If you consent, the interview will be audio-recorded and written notes will also be taken. The information that you provide during the interview will only be used for the purposes of this project and any audio recordings made will be destroyed once they have been transcribed. You will not be personally identified in any part of the research process. You have consented to the interview using the consent form. Is there anything that you would like to ask me before we begin?

Background information

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<td>Gender: M/F</td>
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<tr>
<td>Job title:______________________________________________________________</td>
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<tr>
<td>OR Section (i.e. customer services etc):_________________________________</td>
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<tr>
<td>Library site:________________________________________________________</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Status: Full time/Part time</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Nationality:________________________________________________________</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Have you ever used Star/StarPlus as part of your own academic study?</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Yes/No</td>
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</tbody>
</table>
An Investigation into the Perceptions of Academic Librarians and Students Towards Next-Generation OPACs and their Features

Opening questions

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>1. How familiar are you with using the Library’s Star (old) catalogue?</th>
<th></th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Probes: frequency of use; purpose of use e.g. browsing, searching for specific titles etc.</td>
<td></td>
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</table>

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>2. How easy do you find searching for information resources using the Star (old) Library catalogue?</th>
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</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Probes: relevancy of results; number of results; tools for query formulation; information displayed for the results.</td>
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</table>

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>3. How familiar are you with the Library’s StarPlus catalogue?</th>
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</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Probes: frequency of use; purpose of use; knowledge of how to use it; knowledge of differences between Star and StarPlus; confidence in using it.</td>
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</table>

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>4. On average, how often do you use Star/StarPlus?</th>
<th></th>
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</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Star</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Everyday</td>
<td>[ ]</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>StarPlus</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Everyday</td>
<td>[ ]</td>
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<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>5. Have you used other Library catalogues?</th>
<th></th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Probes: at other universities; public library catalogues; COPAC; frequency of use.</td>
<td></td>
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</tbody>
</table>
6. **What search tools, besides library catalogues, do you use to find or browse for academic books/information?**
   Probes: Google; Google Scholar; Amazon; Academic databases; frequency of use.

7. **What do you prefer using the most: Internet search tools or library catalogues? Why?**
   Probes: ease of use; relevancy of results; number of results; browsing capabilities; academic quality of materials; specific features e.g. ratings/reviews, web 2.0 etc.

### Questions about the searching and browsing features

8. **How useful do you think the simple search box feature is?**
   Probes: keyword searching; query formulation; integrated content; preference for advanced search feature?

9. **How useful do you think it is to have an advanced search option in addition to the simple search box?**
   Probes: advanced query formulation.
### 10. How useful do you think the faceted browser feature is?
Probes: terminology used; categories (e.g. formats); date ranges; number of items under each facet; prior awareness/ experience of using facets for browsing search results; “suggested new searches”

### 11. How useful do you think the spellchecker/ did you mean… feature is?
Probes: prior awareness/ experience of using spellcheckers.

### 12. How useful do you think the “Articles and more tab” is?
Probes: would use?; Primo central; Find databases; Quick sets; easier than searching individual databases?; everything is in one place/interface (integrated content).

### 13. Which catalogue do you think is the most useful for finding information resources: Star or StarPlus?
Probes: relevancy of results; number of results; browsing using the faceted browser; query formulation; links to full-text online resources; terminology used; use different catalogues for different tasks?
Questions about the web 2.0 and Amazon features

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Question</th>
<th>Probes</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td><strong>14. How useful do you think the Tagging features are?</strong></td>
<td>incentive for contributing tags (i.e. helping others to find information); making resource selection; browsing information resources; quality of the information; awareness of the contributor (status of); preference for tag cloud or tag list; ability to summarise a resource using one word; prior awareness/experience of tagging; ease of use/enhanced user experience; administration.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>15. How useful do you think the rating/review features are?</strong></td>
<td>would use in Amazon/commercial sites?; incentive for contributing ratings/reviews; resource selection; reliability/objectivity of the information; volume of reviews (reliable source); better to link to Amazon reviews?.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>16. How useful do you think it is to have links to additional content from the item records?</strong></td>
<td>tables of contents via Amazon; link to Copac; link to WorldCat; alternative copies; resource selection; visibility.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>17. How useful do you think the e-shelf feature is?</strong></td>
<td>management of results; list favourite resources; push items to reference management tools; email/print search results; save queries.</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
An Investigation into the Perceptions of Academic Librarians and Students Towards Next-Generation OPACs and their Features

Closing questions

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>18. What do you think of the visual aspects of the StarPlus catalogue? Probes: book cover images (help to recognise the resource?); format icons; layout of results; location of search box/facets etc; visibility of the features.</th>
</tr>
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<tr>
<th>19. What is your overall opinion of the StarPlus catalogue and the features demonstrated? Probes: Usability (would use again?); easier to use than the Star catalogue; would add/remove any features? Like/dislike.</th>
</tr>
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<tr>
<th>20. Thank you for taking part in this research. Before we finish, is there anything that you would like to ask me?</th>
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Appendix B: Semi-structured interview guide (short version)

Introduction

I am conducting this research for my master’s course in Librarianship at The University Of Sheffield. It will investigate the perceptions of University students and librarians towards specific features of library catalogues. During the interview you will be shown some features of library catalogues using The University Of Sheffield Library’s StarPlus catalogue. You will also be asked some questions about your personal experience of using library catalogues and your opinions towards the features demonstrated. If you consent, the interview will be audio-recorded and written notes will also be taken. The information that you provide during the interview will only be used for the purposes of this project and any audio recordings made will be destroyed once they have been transcribed. You will not be personally identified in any part of the research process. You have consented to the interview using the consent form. Is there anything that you would like to ask me before we begin?

Background information

<table>
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<tr>
<th>No. of interview:</th>
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<tr>
<td>Students</td>
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<td>Gender: M/F</td>
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<td>Programme of study:……………………………………………………………………………</td>
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<tr>
<td>Type of student: Home/International Full time/Part time</td>
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<tr>
<td>Nationality……………………………………………………………………………</td>
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Opening questions

1. How familiar are you with using the Library’s Star (old) catalogue?
   Probes: frequency of use; purpose of use e.g. browsing, searching for specific titles etc.
### 2. How easy do you find searching for information resources using the Star (old) Library catalogue?
Probes: relevancy of results; number of results; tools for query formulation; information displayed for the results.

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### 3. How familiar are you with the Library’s StarPlus catalogue?
Probes: frequency of use; purpose of use; knowledge of how to use it; knowledge of differences between Star and StarPlus; confidence in using it; if usage is infrequent, why?

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### 4. What search tools, besides library catalogues, do you use to find or browse for academic books/information?
Probes: Google; Google Scholar; Amazon; Academic databases; frequency of use.

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</table>
### Questions about the searching and browsing features

<table>
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<tr>
<th><strong>5. How useful do you think the simple search box feature is?</strong></th>
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<tr>
<td>Probes: keyword searching; query formulation; integrated content; preference for advanced search feature?</td>
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<table>
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<tr>
<th><strong>6. How useful do you think the faceted browser feature is?</strong></th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Probes: terminology used; categories (e.g. formats); date ranges; number of items under each facet; prior awareness/ experience of using facets for browsing search results; “suggested new searches”</td>
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<tr>
<th><strong>7. How useful do you think the spellchecker/ did you mean… feature is?</strong></th>
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<tr>
<td>Probes: prior awareness/ experience of using spellcheckers.</td>
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</table>
### Questions about the web 2.0 and Amazon features

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<tr>
<th><strong>8. How useful do you think the Tagging features are?</strong></th>
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<tbody>
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<td><strong>Probes:</strong> incentive for contributing tags (i.e. helping others to find information); making resource selection; browsing information resources; quality of the information; awareness of the contributor (status of); preference for tag cloud or tag list; ability to summarise a resource using one word; prior awareness/experience of tagging; ease of use/enhanced user experience; administration.</td>
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<td><strong>Probes:</strong> management of results; list favourite resources; push items to reference management tools; email/print search results; save queries.</td>
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</table>
## Closing questions

| 11. What do you think of the visual aspects of the StarPlus catalogue?  
Probes: book cover images (help to recognise the resource?); format icons; layout of results; location of search box/facets etc; visibility of the features. |
|---|
| 12. What is your overall opinion of the StarPlus catalogue and the features demonstrated?  
Probes: Usability (would use again?); easier to use than the Star catalogue; would add/remove any features? Like/dislike; what could be improved/changed? |
| 13. Thank you for taking part in this research. Before we finish, is there anything that you would like to ask me? |
Appendix C: Participant information sheet

Research project title: An Investigation into the Perceptions of University Students and Librarians Towards Features of Next-Generation Library Catalogues

You are being invited to take part in a research project. Before you decide it is important for you to understand why the research is being done and what it will involve. Please take time to read the following information carefully and discuss it with others if you wish. Please ask me if there is anything that is not clear or if you would like more information. Take time to decide whether or not you wish to take part. Thank you for reading this.

The purpose of the project:
I am conducting this research project for my MA dissertation in Librarianship. The aim of my dissertation is to investigate the perceptions of University students and librarians towards specific features of library catalogues. It will also provide The University Of Sheffield Library with feedback on their new online library catalogue, StarPlus.

Why have I been chosen?
The project requires that I conduct short semi-structured interviews with around 12 students and six librarians from The University Of Sheffield.

Do I have to take part?
It is up to you to decide whether or not to take part. If you do decide to take part you will be given a printed copy of this information sheet to keep and be asked to sign a consent form. You can withdraw from the research at any time and you do not have to give a reason. However, I will be unable to withdraw anonymised data once it has been used in writing up the dissertation.

What will taking part involve?
You will be asked to take part in a one-off, informal interview, which will last no more than 20 minutes. At the beginning of the interview you will be asked some open-ended questions about your personal experience of using library catalogues. Following this, specific features of the StarPlus catalogue will be demonstrated and/or explained to you.

Name of researcher: Hollie Osborne

Date: 03/07/2012
An Investigation into the Perceptions of Academic Librarians and Students Towards Next-Generation OPACs and their Features

You will then be asked a number of open-ended questions about the features demonstrated.

Will I be recorded, and how will the recorded media be used? Your responses to the interview questions will be audio recorded unless you object to this beforehand. The audio recordings of your responses made during this research will be used only for the purposes of this project and will be destroyed following transcription. No other use will be made of them, and no one outside the project will be allowed access to the original recordings.

What are the possible benefits of taking part? It is hoped that this research will make a contribution towards improving the University’s Library catalogue for future students. It may also make you aware of specific features of the catalogue.

What are the possible disadvantages and risks of taking part? The research will require you to give up around 20 minutes of your time.

What if I need to complain about how the research has been conducted? If you feel that you need to complain about how the research has been conducted please contact Dr Andrew Cox, who is my dissertation supervisor. Contact details are included at the end of this information sheet.

Will my taking part in this project be kept confidential? All of the information that I collect from you during the interview will be kept strictly confidential. You will not be personally identified in my dissertation or in any future publications. In my dissertation, participants will be identified using a pre-designated number (e.g. participant 1).

What type of information will be sought from me and why is the collection of this information relevant for achieving the research project’s objectives? During the interview you will be asked open ended questions about specific features of the StarPlus Library catalogue. These features will be demonstrated and/or explained to you during the interview. You will also be asked for some background information, such as

Name of researcher: Hollie Osborne Date: 03/07/2012
An Investigation into the Perceptions of Academic Librarians and Students Towards Next-Generation OPACs and their Features

Your subject discipline (for students) or section (for librarians). The purpose of this is to ascertain which features students find the most and least useful and if this opinion varies among students and librarians.

What will happen to the results of the research project?
The conclusions drawn from this research will be published in my MA Librarianship dissertation, which will be completed in September 2012.

Who is organising the research?
The research is being conducted in collaboration with The University Of Sheffield Library and is being supervised by The University Of Sheffield’s Information School.

Who has ethically reviewed the project?
This project has been ethically approved via the Information School’s ethics review procedure.

Contacts for further information
If you would like to contact me regarding this research, at any point during the research process, please use the following e-mail address:

e-mail: h.osborne@sheffield.ac.uk

Alternatively, you can contact Dr Andrew Cox, who is my dissertation supervisor and a lecturer in the Information School at The University Of Sheffield:

e-mail: a.m.cox@sheffield.ac.uk
Address: Information School
The University Of Sheffield
Regent Court
211 Portobello
Sheffield
S1 4DP
UK

Thank you for taking the time to read this participant information sheet
Name of researcher: Hollie Osborne
Date: 09/07/2012
Appendix D: Participant consent form

Title of Research Project: An Investigation into the Perceptions of University Students and Librarians Towards Features of Next-Generation Library Catalogues

Name of Researcher: Hollie Osborne

Participant Identification Number for this project: Please initial box

1. I confirm that I have read and understand the information sheet dated 03/07/2012 explaining the above research project and I have had the opportunity to ask questions about the project.

2. I understand that my participation is voluntary and that I am free to withdraw at any time without giving any reason and without there being any negative consequences. In addition, should I not wish to answer any particular questions or have my responses audio recorded, I am free to decline.

3. I understand that my responses will be kept strictly confidential.

4. I agree for the data collected from me to be used in future research.

5. I agree to take part in the above research project.

Name of Participant (or legal representative) Date Signature

Name of person taking consent (if different from lead researcher) Date Signature

To be signed and dated in presence of the participant

Lead Researcher Date Signature

To be signed and dated in presence of the participant

Copies:

Once this has been signed by all parties the participant should receive a copy of the signed and dated participant consent form, the information sheet and any other written information provided to the participants. A copy of the signed and dated consent form should be placed in the project's main record (e.g. a site file), which must be kept in a secure location.

Date: 05/07/2012