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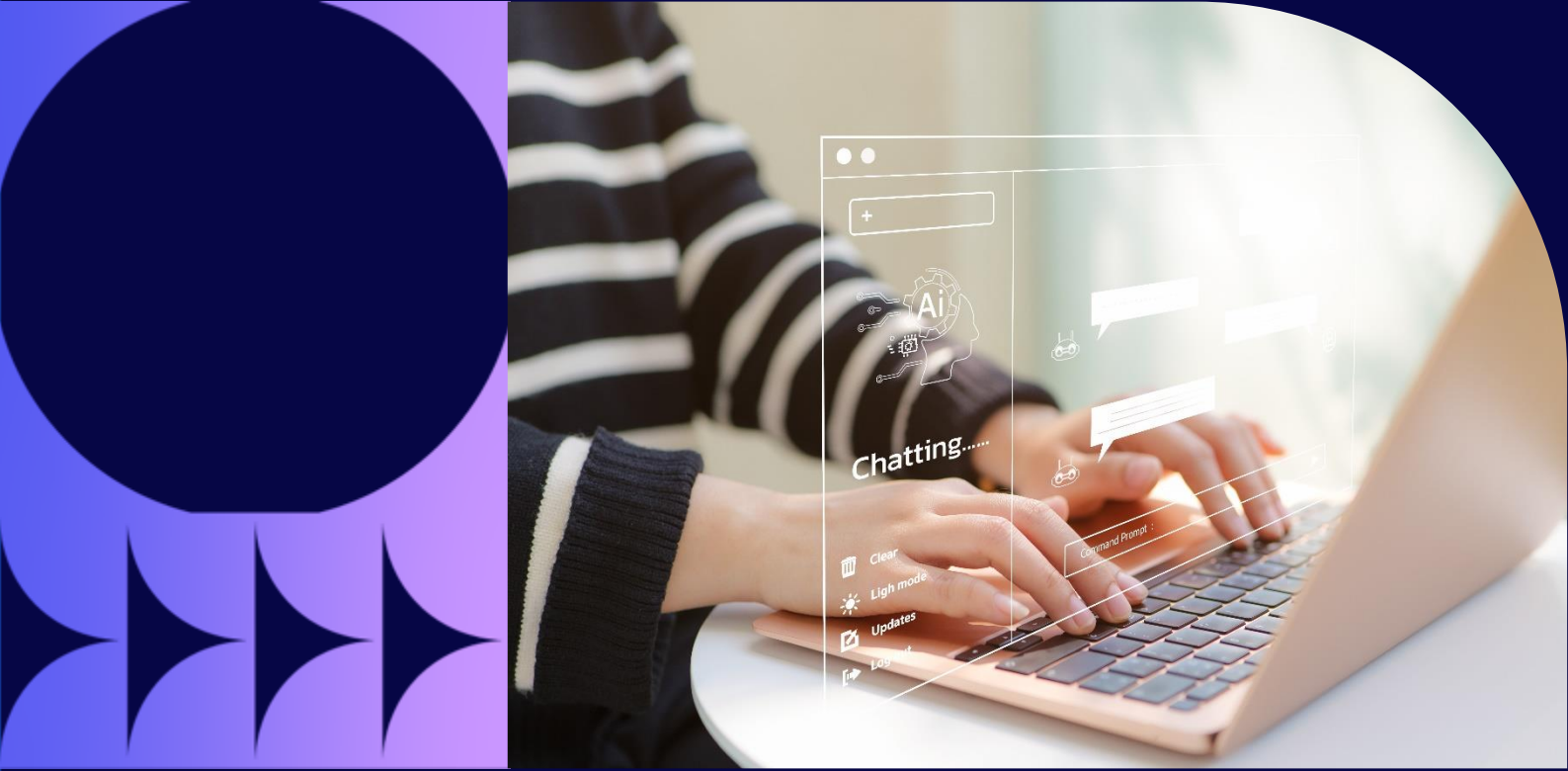
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Primo Research Assistant

User Testing and Feedback

Charlene King / Digital Services and Metadata
Library / March 2025

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Primo Research Assistant

In September 2024, Clarivate launched the Primo Research Assistant, an AI based discovery tool that uses Library resources. The Primo Research Assistant press release claims that “searching with the Primo Research Assistant surfaces an overview based on information from library sources. Those sources are included below the summary, making it easy for users to click and continue their research and learning journey, explore more results, refine their original query, or pursue a suggested related research question.” (1)

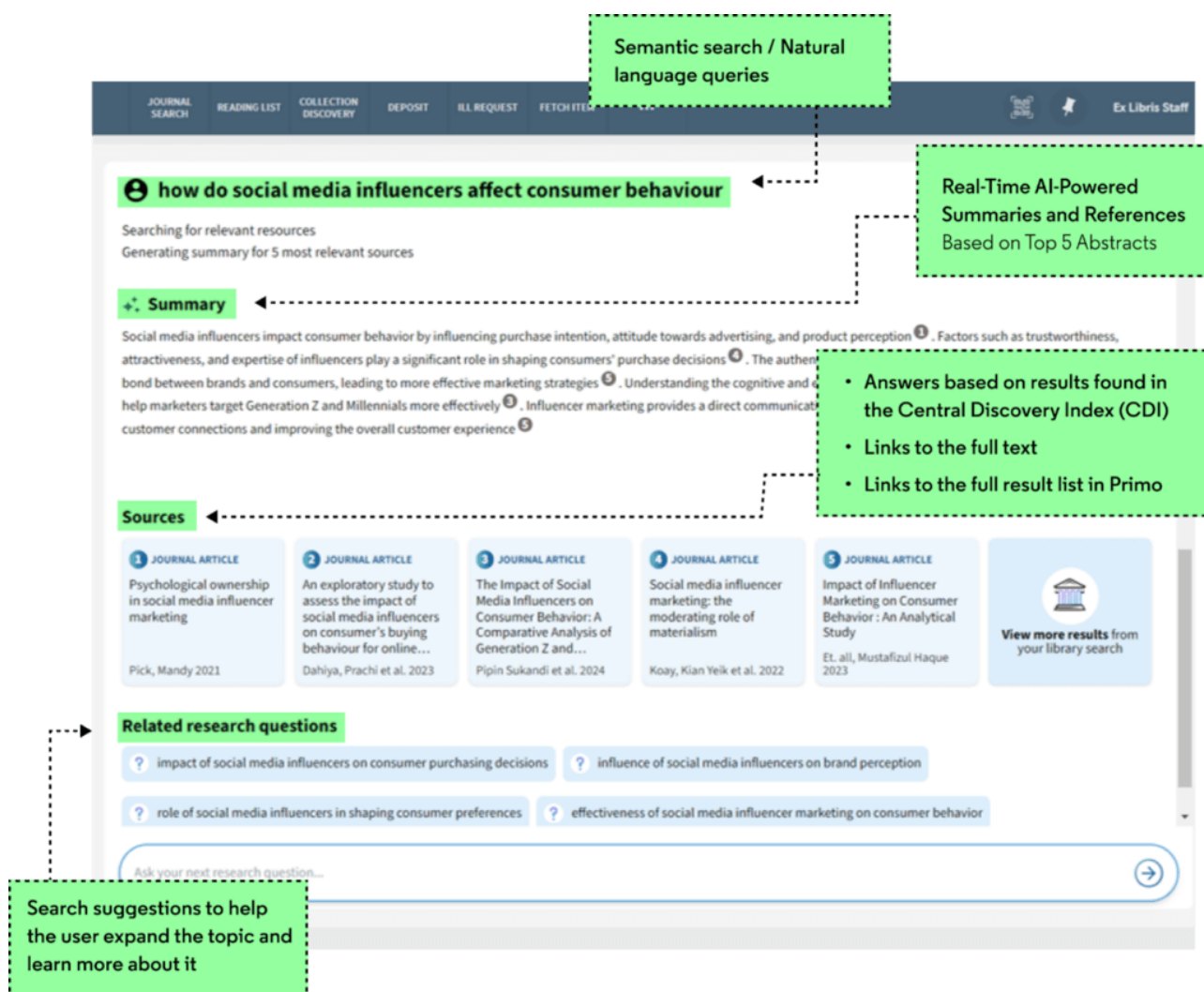


Figure 1: Screenshot of the Primo Research Assistant layout

In Library Search, resources we subscribe to or have purchased are indexed by the Central Discovery Index or CDI. The Primo Research Assistant draws on this index to answer user questions using natural language and provide a list of 5 resources for further consultation.

By using Library resources, rather than the open web, is it likely that the perception is that the answers provided by the AI should be of a higher academic quality, however before enabling this for students we wanted to test the accuracy and validity of the Primo Research Assistant.

Research Aims

Experimenting with the technology within the Digital Services and Metadata team, it was clear that to conduct a proper test of Primo Research Assistant, we needed to ask it a variety of questions from different subject disciplines and at differing levels of complexity, but to evaluate the response, specialist knowledge was required. We therefore invited staff and faculty from across the University to interact with the Primo Research Assistant and complete a short survey.

The survey ran from the beginning of November 2024 and closed at the end of January 2025. During this timeframe we collected 28 detailed responses. The Primo Research Assistant was activated in our Acceptance version of Library Search, so that it was easy for users to access, but not visible to our main users.

The main objectives of the survey were:

1. What was the quality of the summary answer and accuracy in relation to the question asked.
2. How relevant was the response to the question asked.
3. Were the “related research questions” helpful.

Additionally, we were very keen to know how many resources out of the five recommended that the Open University Library had full-text access to. Within the CDI there are several book reviews indexed and we noticed in our first-phase testing that these reviews can be misleadingly presented as resources we have full access to. Directing users, especially students, to resources that are unavailable to them would present a significant barrier to deployment of the feature in Library Search.

Using MS Forms, this is the survey that was circulated:

Primo VE Research Assistant Survey

Thank you for your interest in testing the new Research Assistant for Primo VE. Before you begin, please watch this six-minute video that explains what the Research Assistant is, and how it works: Primo Research Assistant.

Now that you have watched the video, we would like you to ask the Research Assistant some questions. These questions should relate to areas that you know a lot about, so that you can assess the accuracy and quality of the answers provided. We will need you to write down the questions that you asked and give us some feedback on the answers you were given.

Please ask three to five questions and select the suggested sources and 'Related research questions' for each question.

What did you ask the Research Assistant? (* Required)

<<Free text field>>

How accurate was the response? (* Required)

- Highly accurate
- Somewhat accurate
- Don't know
- Somewhat inaccurate
- Highly inaccurate

Why did you choose this rating?

<<Free text field>>

How would you rate the quality of the response? (* Required)

- High quality
- Somewhat high quality
- Average
- Low quality
- Very low quality
- Don't know

Why did you choose this rating?

<<Free text field>>

How relevant was the response to your question? (* Required)

- Very relevant
- Somewhat relevant
- Don't know
- Somewhat irrelevant
- Entirely irrelevant

Why did you choose this rating?

<<Free text field>>

Of the five sources that were suggested to you, how many did the OU Library have access to? (* Required)

- 0
- 1
- 2
- 3
- 4
- 5

How helpful were the 'Related research questions'?

- Very helpful
- Somewhat helpful
- Don't know
- Somewhat unhelpful
- Very unhelpful

Why did you choose this rating?

<<Free text field>>

If you have any, what would be your main concerns if the Research Assistant were to be enabled for student use?

<<Free text field>>

Do you have any other comments or observations?

<<Free text field>>

Survey Results

How accurate was the response?

Of the respondents that completed the survey, these were their responses:

- Highly Accurate: 6
- Somewhat Accurate: 10
- Somewhat Inaccurate: 4
- Highly Inaccurate: 1
- Don't Know: 2

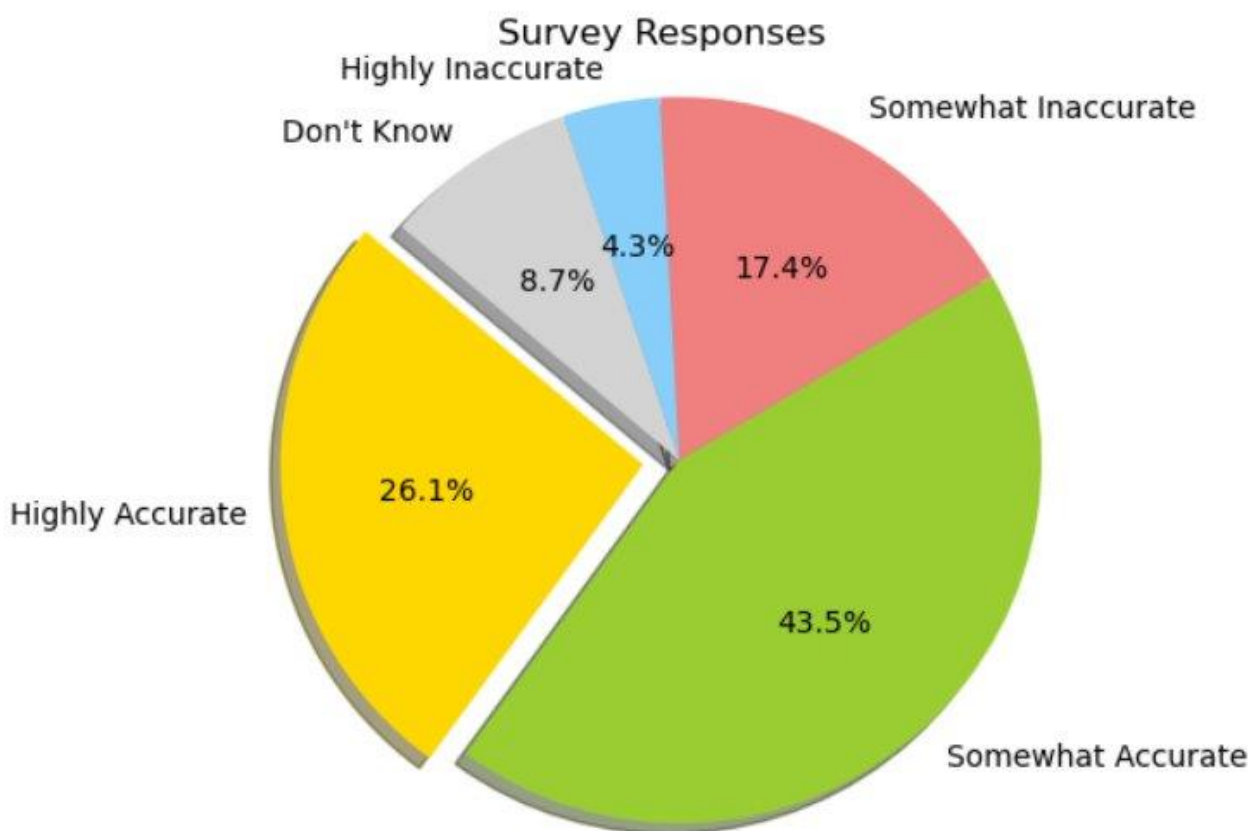


Figure 2: How accurate were the responses

This was a positive result, with just under 70% of respondents ranking the Primo Research Assistant as either somewhat or highly accurate.

How would you rate the quality of the response?

The quality of response also scored quite highly amongst respondents, with only three of the respondents scoring the quality as low or very low:

- High Quality: 8
- Somewhat High Quality: 4
- Average: 6
- Low Quality: 2
- Very Low Quality: 1

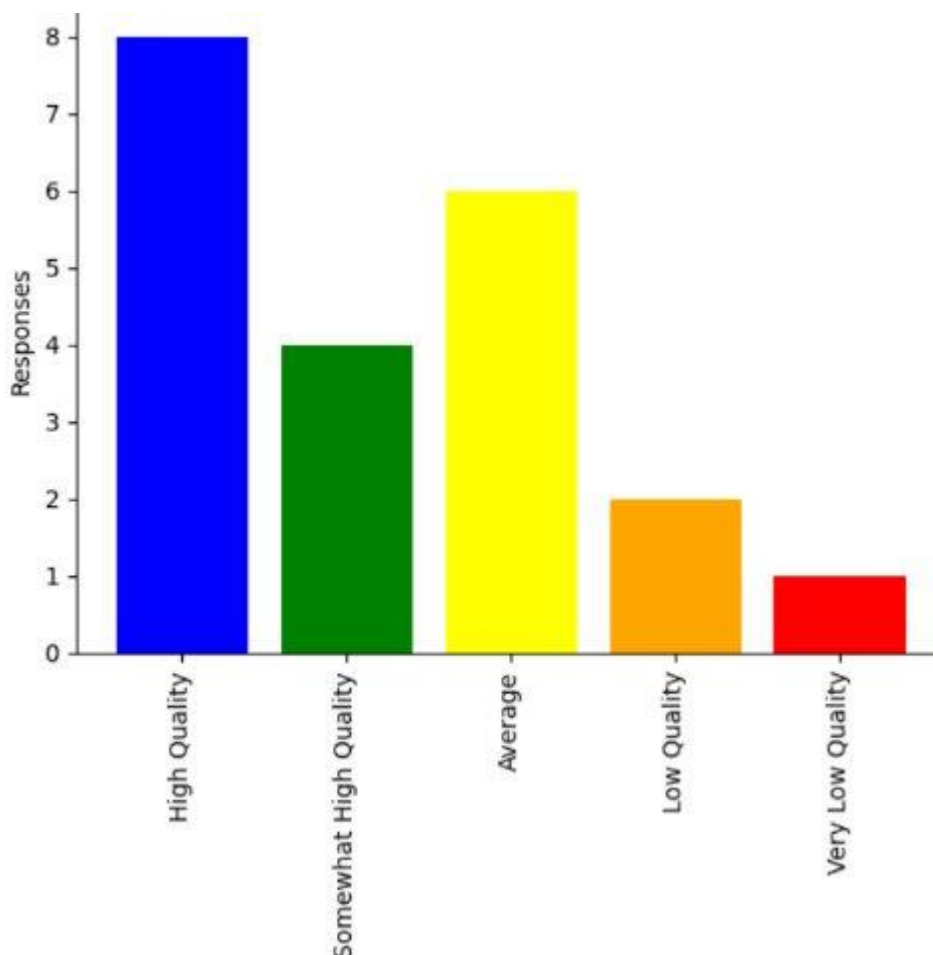


Figure 3: How would you rate the quality of the response?

How relevant was the response to your question?

Respondents were also positive on the relevance of the response, with only 1 user marking their response as very irrelevant:

- Very relevant: 8
- Somewhat Relevant: 8
- Somewhat Irrelevant: 3
- Very irrelevant: 1
- Don't know: 2

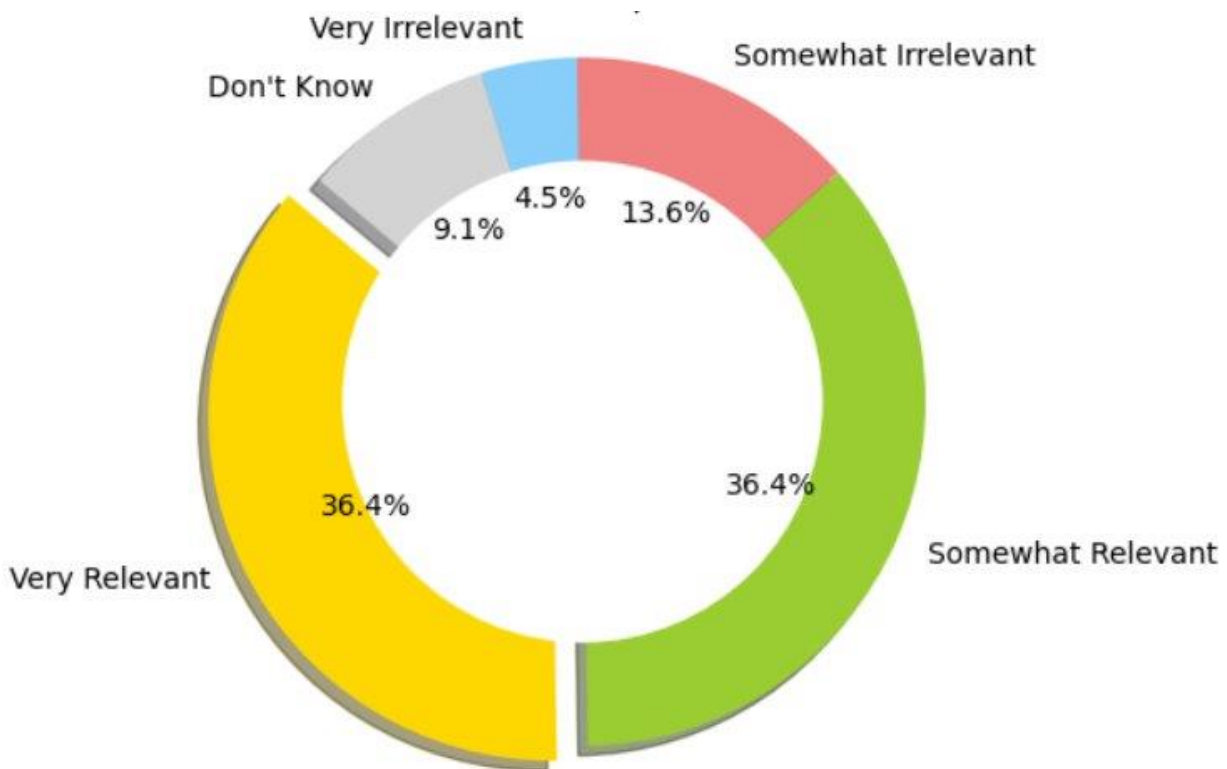


Figure 4: How relevant was the response to your question?

How helpful were the related research questions?

Related research questions was a feature that scored well with respondents, with a majority ranking these as either very helpful or somewhat helpful:

- Very helpful: 8
- Somewhat helpful: 6
- Somewhat unhelpful: 2
- Very unhelpful: 1
- Don't know: 2

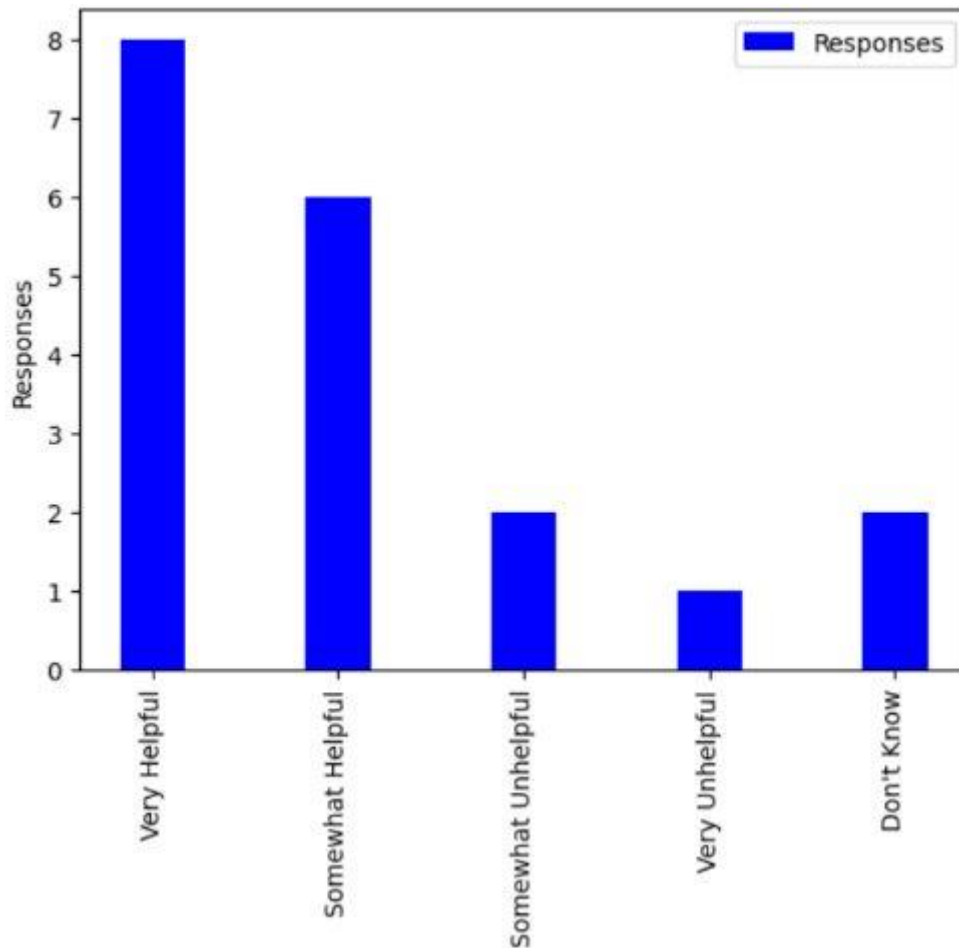


Figure 5: How helpful were the related research questions?

How many recommended resources were available as full-text?

Of the 28 respondents, only 4 were able to report that all sources were available. It is clear that further development is needed by Clarivate to improve this score, as this could impact user experience and satisfaction with the service. However, the largest group could access at least 2 – 4 of the recommended resources, which is higher than anticipated during the first phase of testing within the team.

These were the responses:

- All sources available: 4
- 2 -4 sources available: 6
- 0 – 1 sources available: 3
- Don't know: 2

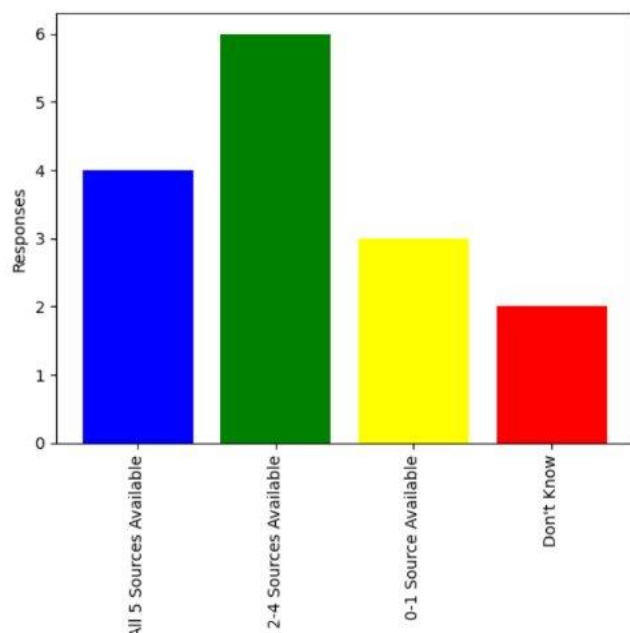


Figure 6: Of the five sources that were suggested to you, how many did the OU Library have access to?

Conclusions from the survey

The concerns we had as a team about the Primo Research Assistant were around the accuracy and relevance of the response, and full-text access to the resources suggested. Whilst lack of full-text access to some resources is a concern, the Primo Research Assistant was received largely positively by respondents, which has increased confidence in making this available to all users.

“Yes we could do this, but should we?” – Comments from Respondents

In addition to the quantitative data generated by respondents, the survey also elicited a wide variety of qualitative responses about the Primo Research Assistant and the use of AI tools in academic libraries. Whilst the tool itself performed well, there are clear concerns around the ethical and effective use of AI tools like this embedded in Library Search. Here are a selection of these comments grouped into overarching themes:

Concerns around AI and student behaviour

- “It summarises a few sources presenting them as fact. A good review of the literature considers conflicting evidence and only extracts conclusions that can be confirmed from more than one source or a very robust study. Students should read critically, so the tool should encourage that and be careful to present the results as what they are: summaries of a few sources that are related to the search query, not all there is to know about that topic or even knowledge that is agreed upon in the field of research.”
- “It may unwittingly limit a student's creative thinking by not producing as many sources for underresearched areas, implying a correct or incorrect answer. Academic surfacing of sources by minority or niche authors is already an issue, and I suspect AI runs the risk of doing this too. Quality of

sources could also be an issue if AI does not have the tools to assess the quality of the research.”

- “[The Primo Research Assistant] would encourage laziness! This tool does a good job finding resources, presenting a reasonable summary, etc. Will students' ability to find, assess and analyse research suffer if we offer them this much help? I think of what we do on the helpdesk. Do we advise library staff to do this level of the legwork? We definitely do not. So, applying that line of thinking makes it more of a pedagogical question. Yes, we could do this but should we?”

Concerns around user experience of Library Search

- “Superficially a useful tool, but when you dig in deeper, it gets less useful and more frustrating, with links not necessarily working, findings too broad or superficial. And arguably much better sources for searching available elsewhere, such as google, wiki or conventional library searching.”
- “Potentially a useful starting-off point. Sense I would find at least one very relevant and useful source from each question I ask. But language of text in Overview Summary is stiff and obviously AI, so off-putting. Not sure I convinced it is any better than entering my own search terms in a library search. And rare that it recommends anything available at the OU, so frustrating if you're looking for something to read now.”

- “As a tool to identify future reading, potentially useful. As a first-stop library search tool, not good as so few suggestions are available to read now. And Summary text is poor. And search results not consistently good.”
- The suggested resources are going to be 'of the moment'. Of the 5 suggested, 2 were open access, 3 were from subscriptions. Changing content may mean what is suggested as available may change. The other concern is even with this testing we can't fully assess the quality of all answers, we need to give a clear disclaimer that this isn't being monitored by librarians/academic staff for accuracy of answers.
- I also think it might be hard for students to know what to do if they use the option to take them back to Library search. Here they will see the complex Boolean query made from their question. So with this tool we will be in effect getting students to use both natural language and Boolean/keyword, I do wonder how they will cope.
- Disappointment in not being able to access content; Relevance of answer; Students becoming overly reliant on it; Thinking they won't need to learn how to key word search - which they most probably will need to learn
- I am guessing if it suggested resources we do not have in our collection then it may drive traffic towards the helpdesk asking for access to content we do not have.

Concerns around plagiarism

- Is there a danger that this could in some ways enable plagiarism, although I guess if someone wants to do that there a plenty of tools out there to enable that already.

- As the results are presented as well-written text with references, it might be tempting to copy the results into an assignment.
- My main concern would be students copying the answer directly into their work or becoming overly reliant on the Research Assistant rather than doing their own original research and learning the necessary skills to find and evaluate resources. Additionally, I would question how nuanced a response could be given when providing information on a subject which is little understood or on which the scholarship is highly contested.

Positive feedback from respondents

- “I was pleasantly surprised by the results and do think it does a good job of pointing you towards relevant sources which, in my case, we had in full text online. This leads to a very positive and satisfying experience and I think would help students cut through the feeling of overwhelm when being confronted with a list of thousands of results. I liked the way the information was presented, as well, and thought the topic prompts were helpful in exploring more information.”
- “I thought on balance it was very good. The links to the actual sources make this a tool I would be happy (and keen) to direct students towards. I would wish to provide guidance to students on the value of following up the sources used for deeper understanding.”
- “Most of the issues around AI are effectively just increased risk of things humans already do – i.e get things wrong, not assess quality of sources, etc. However, as AI often makes 'matter of fact' statements, it may make this more deeply entrenched and allow the spread of research

misinformation. Properly managed, this could be an effective tool for increasing speed of research.”

Conclusion

It is clear from the feedback gathered during this research that whilst the Primo Research Assistant itself as a tool has been quite positively received, there are some serious and valid concerns about the impact of users, particularly students, using these kinds of tools in their research. It is clear that alongside the Primo Research Assistant, and indeed any AI-supported technology, we have an obligation to educate students on good academic practices and critical thinking.

Acknowledgements

I would like to thank all the participants who took part in the survey and contributed such valuable feedback.

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- (1). **Ex Libris Group.** (2023) 'Ex Libris Primo Research Assistant is now available for Primo institutions'. Available at: <https://exlibrisgroup.com/announcement/ex-libris-primo-research-assistant-is-now-available-for-primo-institutions/>
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