



Institute for  
Public Policy  
and Governance

# Online library spaces research

experiences and perspectives from users and libraries



# Introduction to the University of Technology Sydney

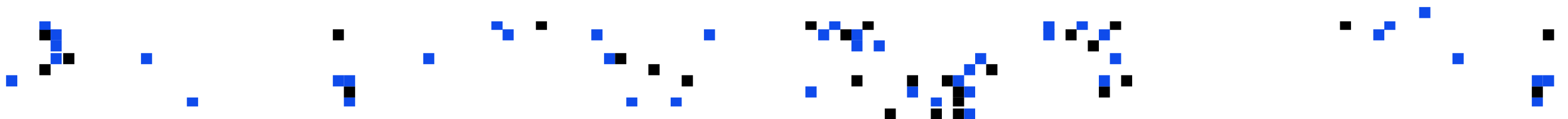
- Ranked as Australia's top young university.
- A distinct model of learning, strong research performance and a leading reputation for engagement with industry and the professions.
- Over 7000 staff which is 3100 full-time equivalent
- 40,600 students including 11,000 postgraduate coursework students and over 1,600 research students.
- Part of the Australian Technology Network of universities: committed to raising innovation and enterprise across industry and government.
- Invested over \$1.2 billion to create the campus of the future, reinventing traditional learning and delivering world-class teaching and research spaces.
- The vision for the **Future Library** is that it will be a transformational space that inspires and elevates, encouraging creativity, curiosity and the pursuit of new knowledge.



# Introduction to UTS:IPPG

The Institute for Public Policy and Governance at the University of Technology Sydney (UTS:IPPG) is a leading group of researchers and practitioners in the areas of ***public administration and policy, social research, evaluation, stakeholder engagement, and leadership.***

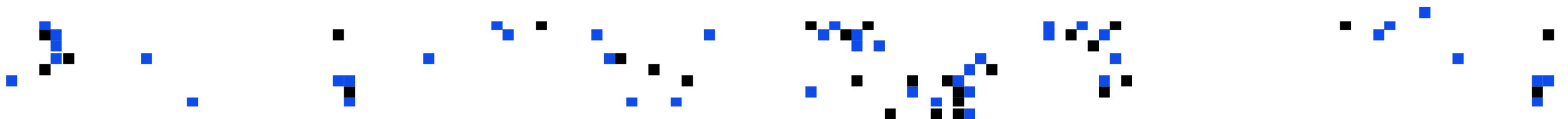
The UTS: Centre for Local Government (UTS:CLG) is part of the UTS:IPPG, and continues to be a leader in local government research, teaching and advisory.



# This study

**Research focus :** How online library spaces are experienced and valued in a digital age

- Users' perceptions of the value of, and engagement with online library spaces and digital services
- Perspectives of library professionals on the challenges, opportunities, and future of library digital services



# Stages of the Research

Desktop research on the perspectives of the performance and perception of online libraries



Survey of users across libraries in Australia, New Zealand, Singapore and the U.K. for their perspectives of online libraries



In depth interviews with librarians and library managers across the countries

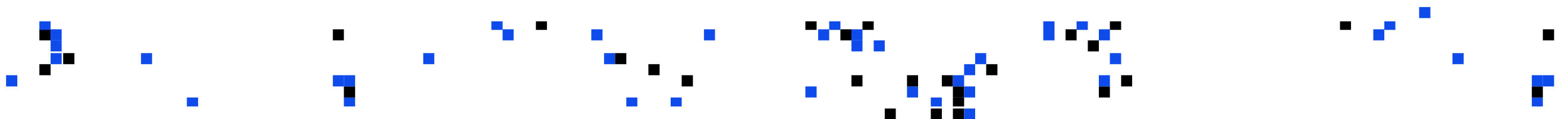


Focus group with library professionals from the countries surveyed

# Framing the study

# From the desktop research

1. Libraries remain at the centre of many communities
2. Online library service delivery requires high performing infrastructure
3. Libraries as hybrid spaces, that is linking their physical and online components
4. New technologies such as AI and VR should be adopted by libraries





# 1. Libraries remain at the centre of many communities

- Libraries provide an non-commodified space for diverse user groups
- This is especially important for diverse communities





## 2. Online library service delivery requires high performing infrastructure

- Uneven and uncertain delivery of infrastructure such as the NBN leads to planning difficulties
- Poor provision reinforces the digital divide concentrating regional advantages
- Communities without access to high speed internet will not be able to deliver high quality digital experiences



### 3. Libraries as hybrid spaces, that is linking their physical and online components

- Growth of online spaces supports the physical library
- Access to both in tandem produces the hybrid library
- The information landscape influences the physical user experience
- Requires greater expertise and new skills to complement that of a traditional librarian



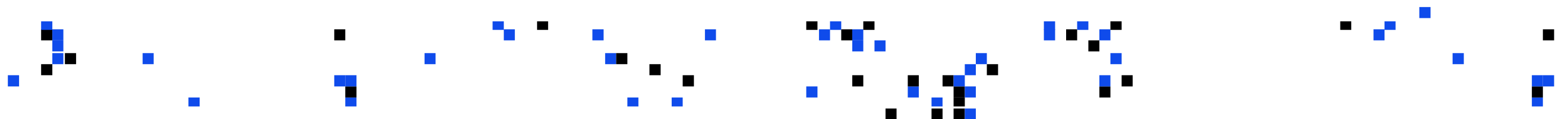
## 4. New technologies such as AI and VR should be adopted by libraries

- Libraries should adapt towards digital futures by integrating new technologies
- Can also stimulate greater engagement with users to create content
- Offers potential for collaboration with industry partners



# Latest research – user experience of online libraries

- Greater investment in the online user experience
- Importance of the physical-online interface
- Differentiation between physical and online use cases
- Value of partnerships and collaboration for the future of libraries





# The Library User perspective: Survey

## What we asked

Survey asked for perspectives on:

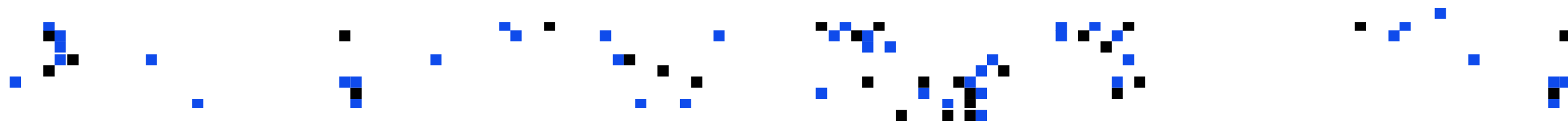
- How library users utilised online spaces and digital services
- How online library spaces were viewed in relation to physical library spaces
- Perceptions on the value of online library spaces and digital services
- The experience of engaging with online library spaces and digital services

## Who we asked

- Library users from Australia, New Zealand, Singapore and United Kingdom invited to participate
- Facilitated through Civica library customer staff
- Nearly 600 respondents completed the survey

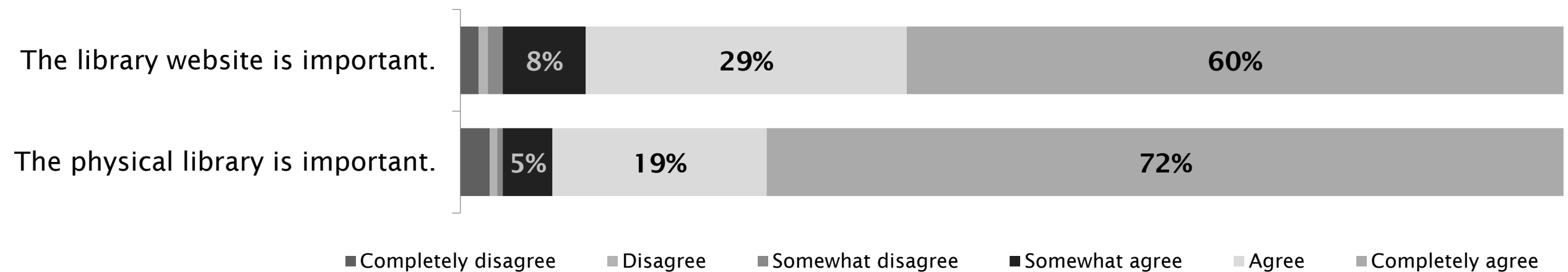


## Survey: user values and perspectives

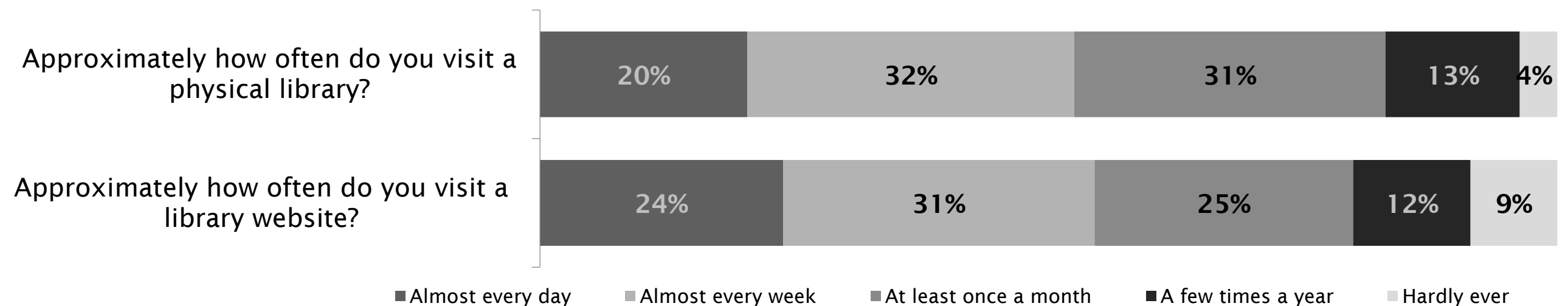


Both a physical and virtual library (via a library website) are rated as almost equally important with respondents visiting both 'spaces' at similar rates.

### Importance of physical library and library website



### Visitation to physical and library websites.

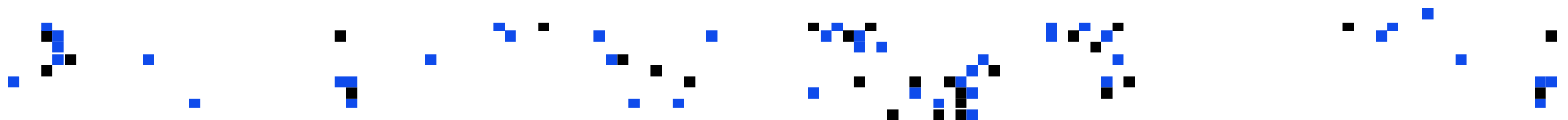
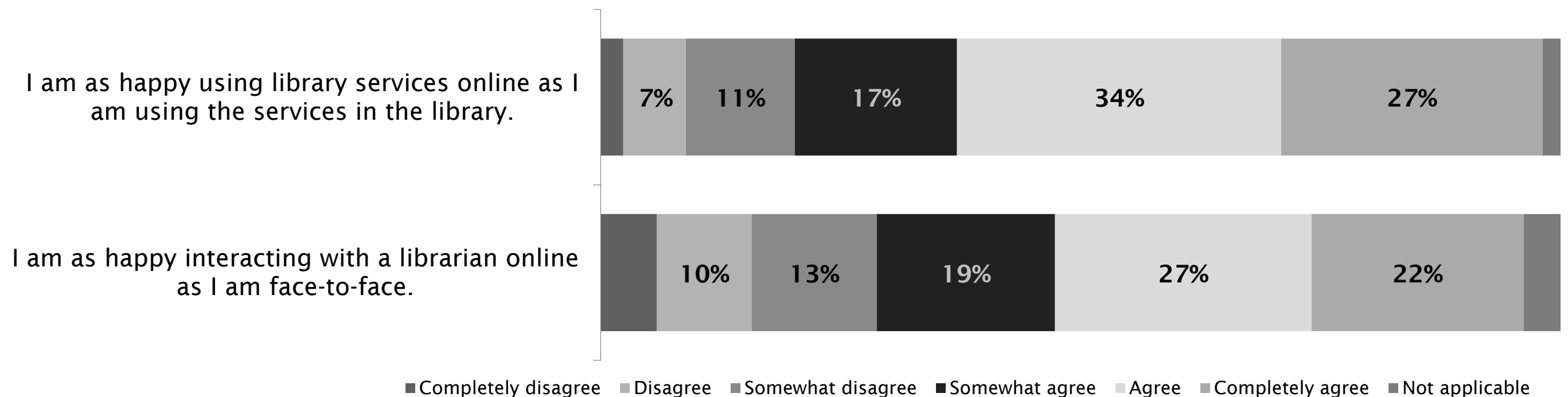




78% of respondents agree to some extent that they are as happy to use online services as they are using services in the physical library.

68% are as happy to interact with a librarian online as they are face to face.

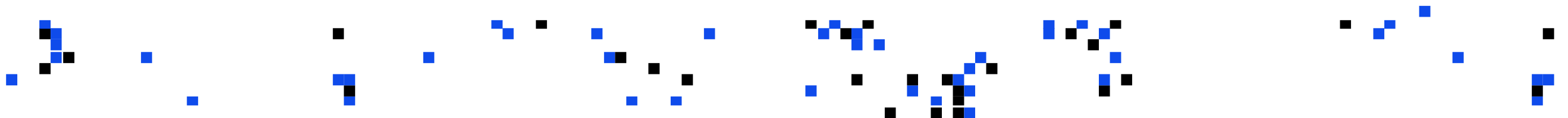
### Using online library services and interacting with librarians online



# User values and perspectives

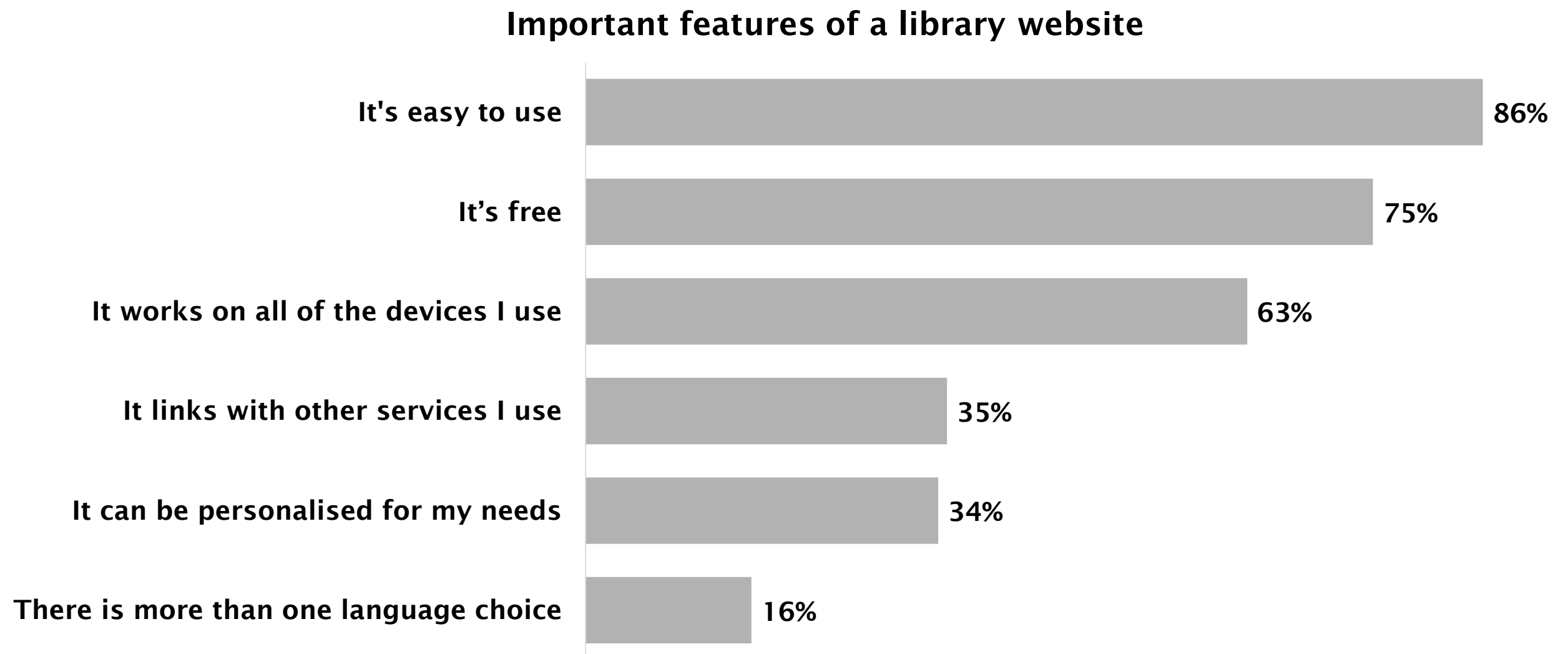
- Online and physical library are equally important
- Surveyed users frequently use both services
- Preferred interacting with librarians face-to-face

*“[Libraries should be] A free space where the community can gather to interact, study, learn and easily locate their preference in reading material be it physical or digital. A connection to the world of information databases etc. A place for all of the community to learn and grow.”*



# Survey: importance of online library features

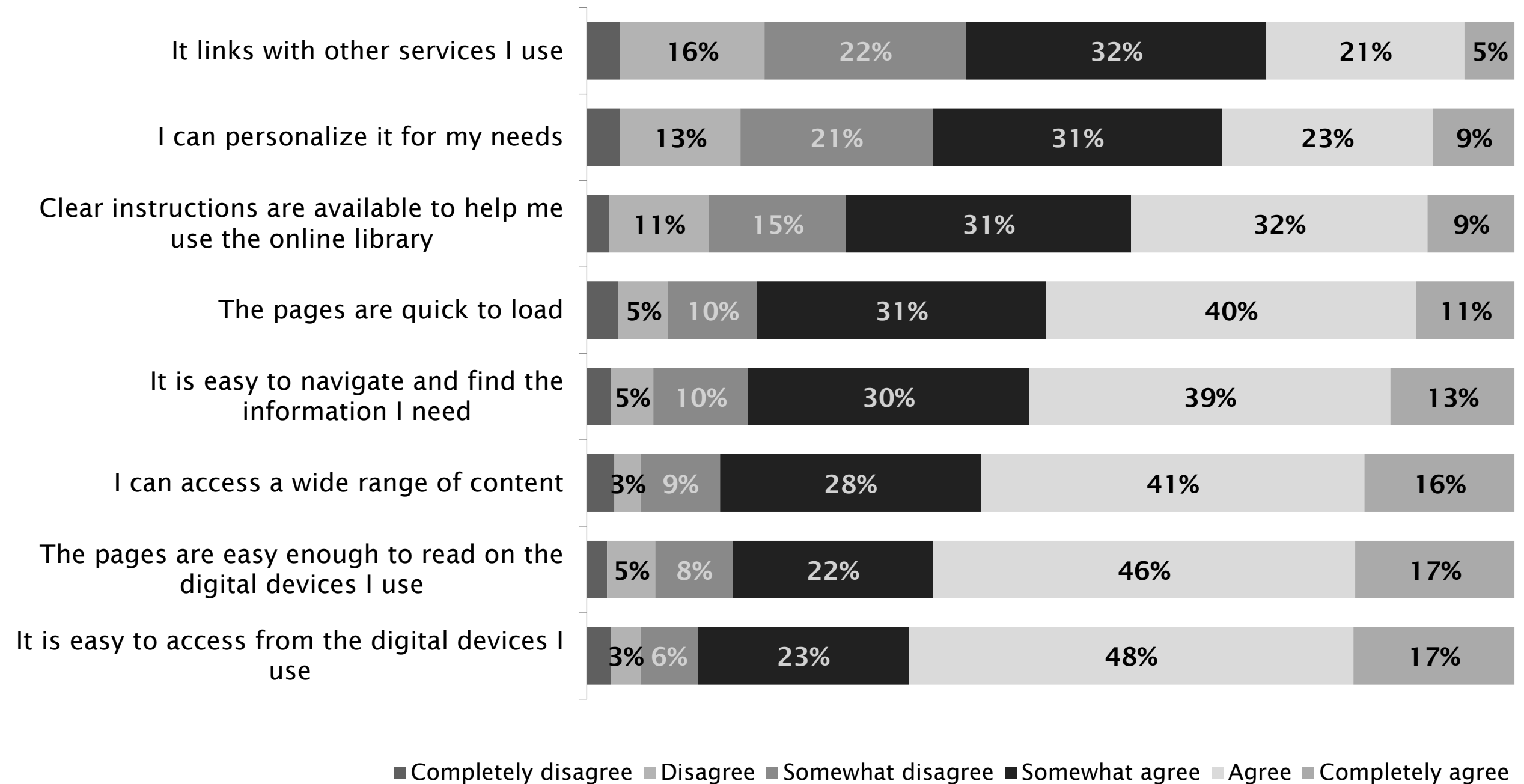
Respondents rated responsiveness and functionality as important, including ease of use, being free to use and its ability to work across different devices.





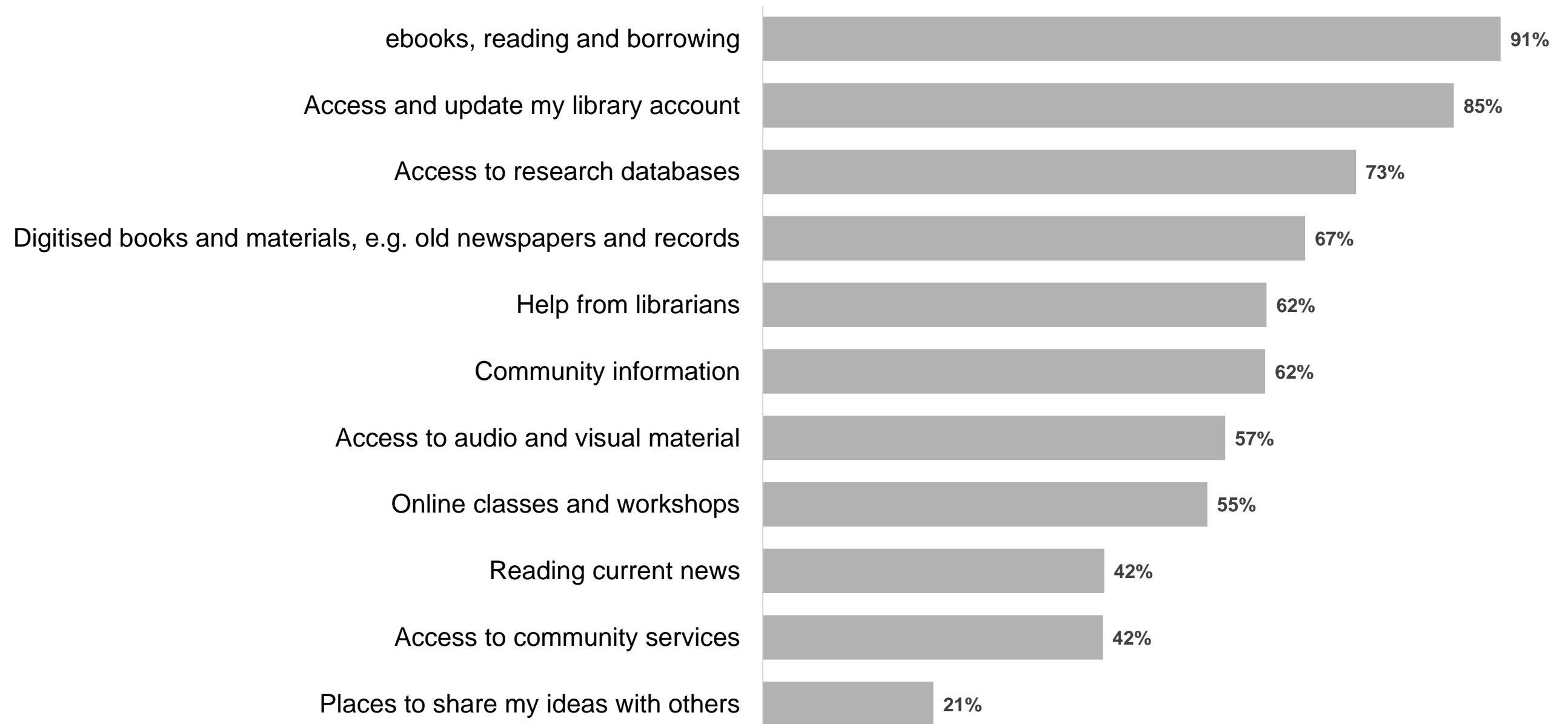
Respondents rate ease of access from their digital devices most highly, followed by being able to read and access content.

### Rating features of online libraries



Users expect to be able to use most library services online, particularly to borrow and read eBooks, be able to use their library account online and have access to digital research databases.

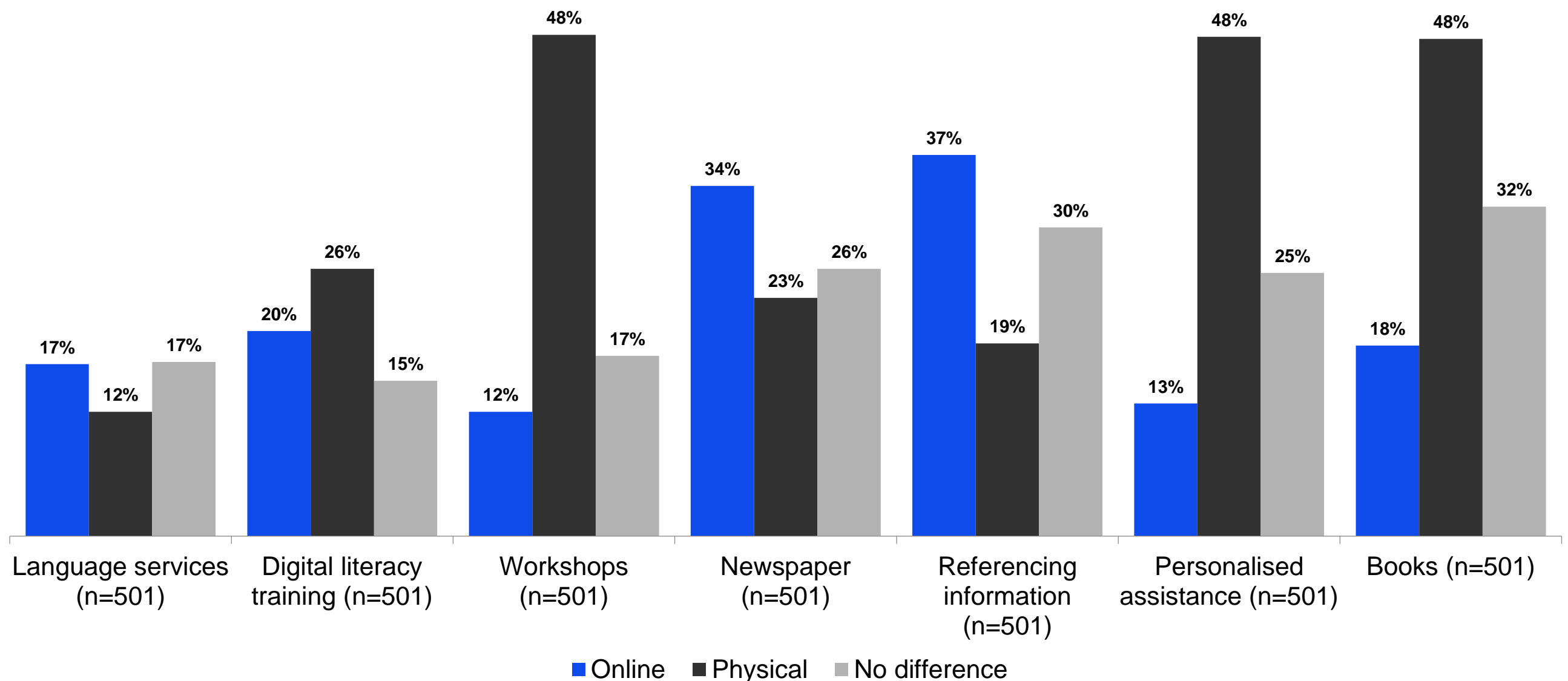
### Services users expect from online libraries



Users perceive books, personalised assistance and workshops as easier to access in a physical space, with referencing information and newspapers easier to access online.

Many users find it as easy to access services online as in a physical library.

### Ease of access in a physical or online library



# Online library features

- Ease of use and access is essential in the online library
- Library websites provide better research and reference services
- Physical libraries are better social and recreational spaces

*“[the library website] provides library services wherever I am i.e. access to the subscriptions and services that you can only get in the library i.e. online papers, ancestry services etc.”*

*“[the library website] has to have meaningful and useful content and must reflect the needs and values of the library service, not the wider corporate brand.”*

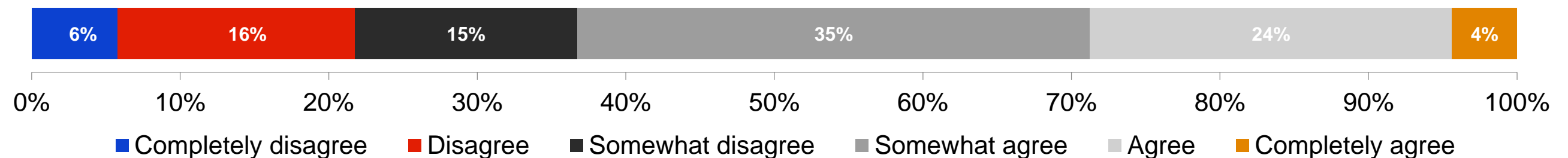


## Survey: interfaces and technology

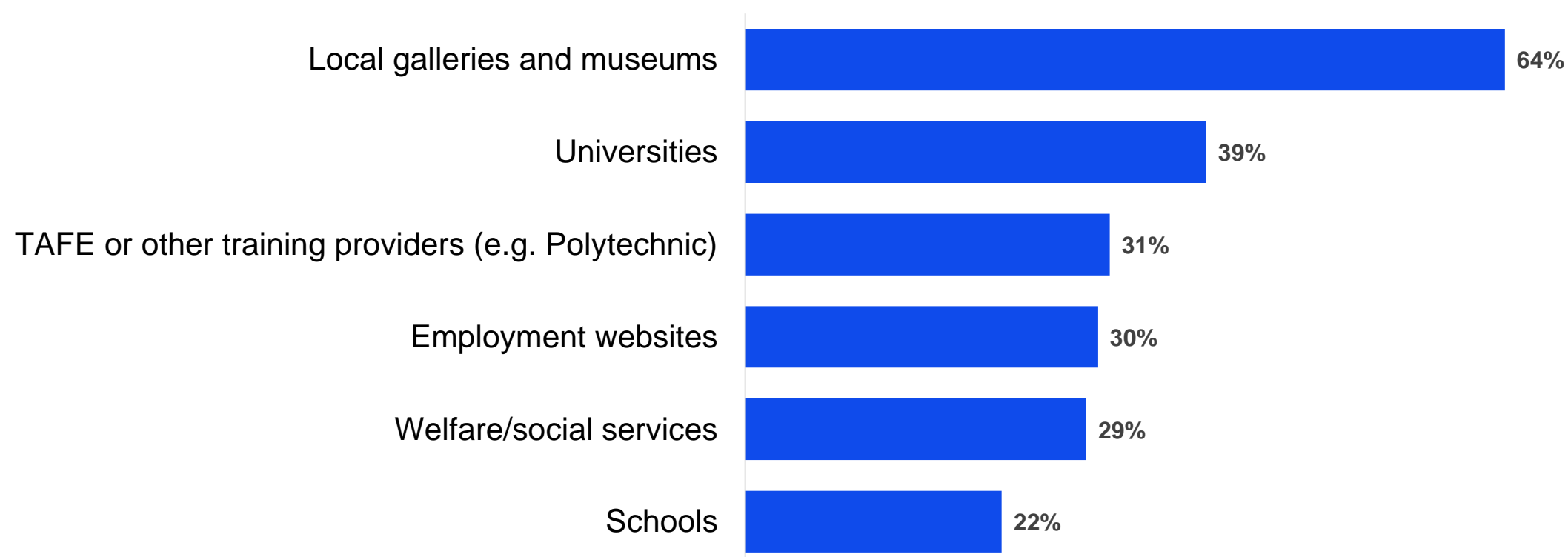


28% of respondents said their library website has links to all other services they needed. They would most like to see links to local galleries/museums and educational providers.

### **The library website has all the links to other services that I need**



### **What links to other services would you like to see on your library website**



# Interfaces and technology

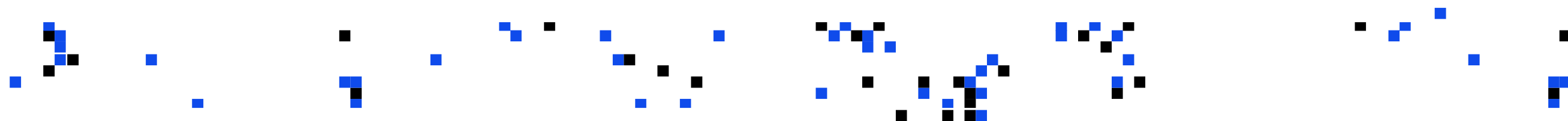
- Library websites need to deliver better user experiences
- Investment in new technologies will help libraries keep up with user expectations

*“Better integration with other libraries. Better integration with schools. Books to be delivered to one's home Better contact with a librarian, possible as an on-line assistant..”*

*“A simple user experience as the face of a lot of information. A simple menu, a huge database with a sweet search engine..”*

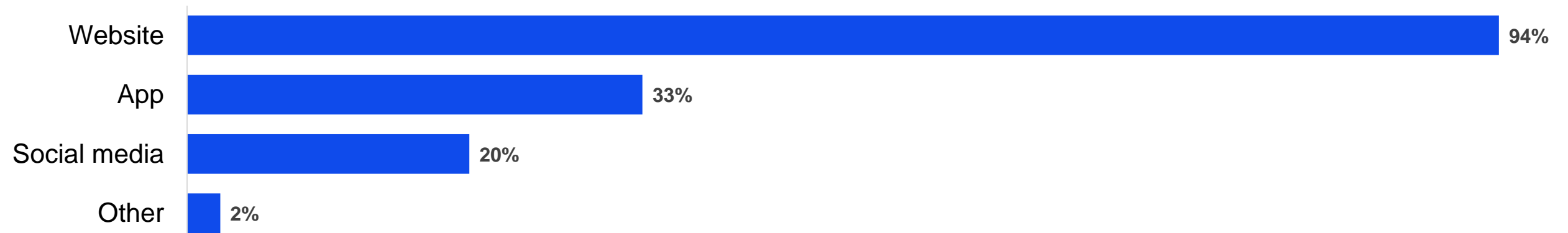
*“With the advancement of technology, the utilization of online libraries will be in greater demand...the use of augmented reality and artificial intelligence will automate many of the common services in a physical library.”*

## Survey: social media and engagement

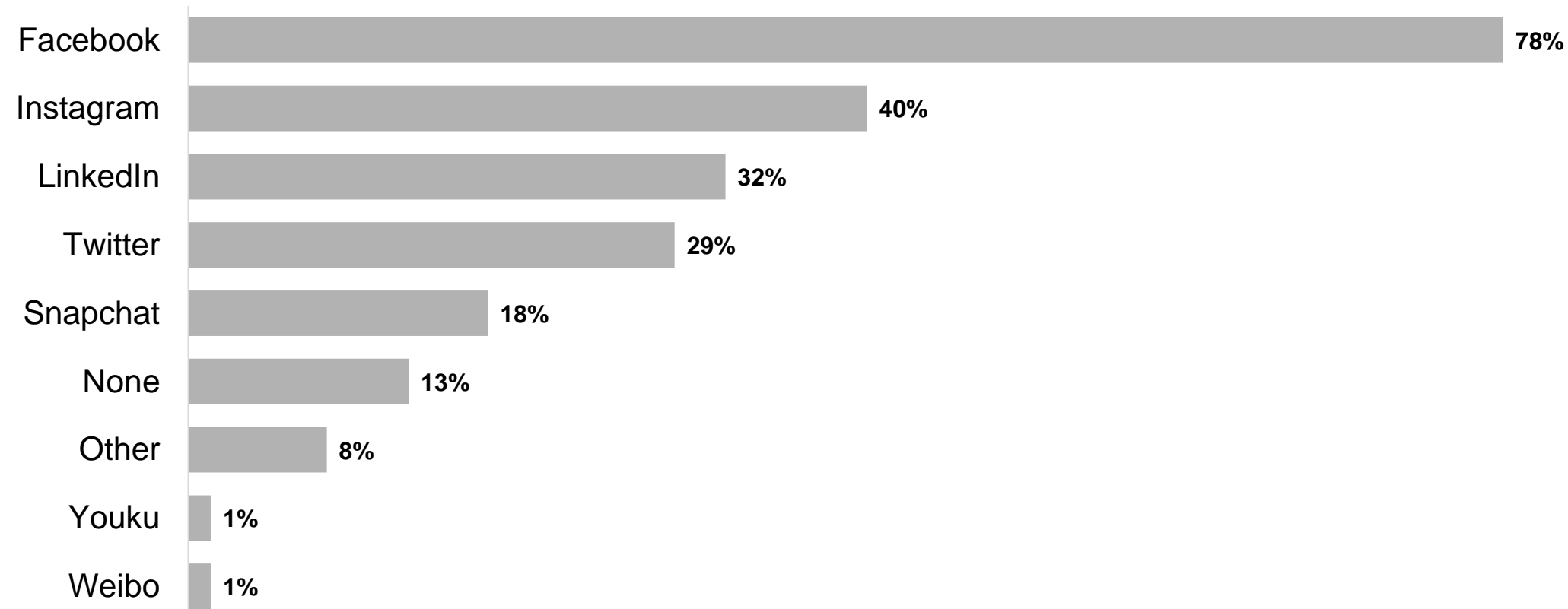


20% of our respondents access online library spaces through social media with Facebook and Instagram the most popular social media platforms.

### What ways do you access content from online libraries



### What social media services do you use



The survey included an open question inviting ideas on how libraries could make better use of social media services. Responses indicate that:

- Social media is regarded as an opportunity to enable online interactions between libraries and users and between different members of the community.
- Many recipients strongly requested more active, 2-way engagement that is more than reposting information or announcing events.
- Libraries encouraged to use different communication styles across different platforms to reach and engage with wider audiences.
- Be consistent and clear with use of social media to make it easier to connect.
- Use it as a tool to incentivise users to advocate for library resources
- Expressed awareness about limitations of social media as a communication channel given library staff expertise and budgets.



# Social Media

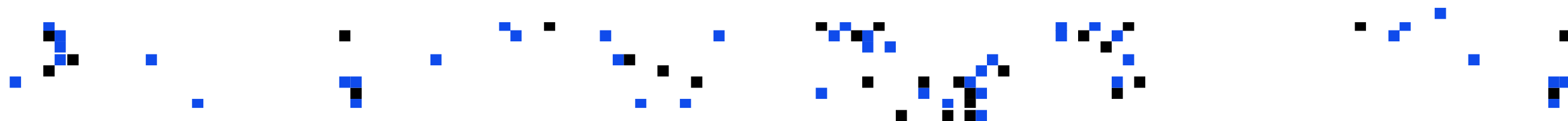
- Most users engage with social media, and with library social media.
- Social media growth could be leveraged to better engage with communities

*“Invite community participation. Being humorous and informative.”*

*“Engage more actively and use different communication styles across the platforms - don't just repost the same content. Vary the approach to reach a wider audience and provide a taste of what the user may experience.”*

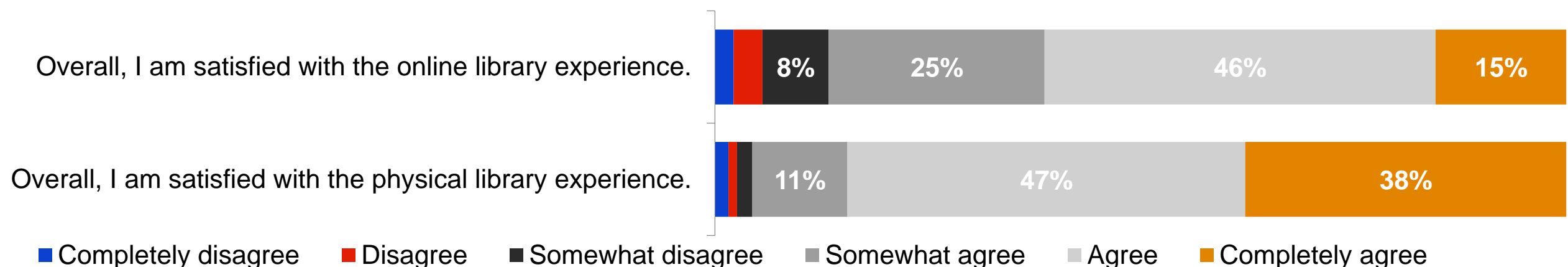
*“[Social media] use it more as an engagement tool rather than a 'push' information tool.”*

## Survey: satisfaction with library spaces



Overall, 85% of respondents were satisfied with the physical library and 61% were satisfied with the online library experience.

This difference is much greater than participants' ratings of the importance of physical and online libraries (91% & 89% respectively)

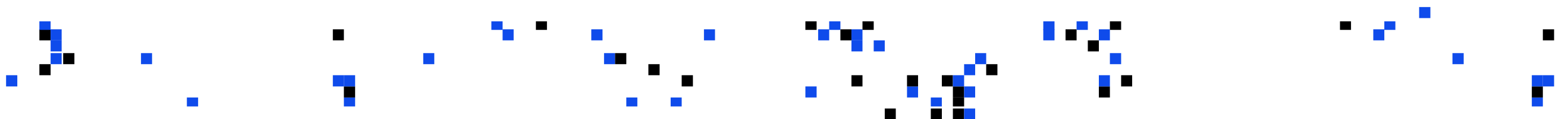


The influence of different aspects of the online library experience was further examined and found that library user satisfaction is most influenced by easy access to the online library (24%), being able to find relevant information (18%) and read on their devices (17%).

This suggests that maintaining these aspects of the online library experience will most likely be related to ongoing and improved customer satisfaction.

# What the survey results suggest

- The experience of the online library has not yet matched the experience of the physical library, and users are anticipating a more seamless experience in libraries of the future.
- Communities are expecting libraries that will offer a more user-friendly experience with better access, readability and integration across the spectrum of services with comparison to commercial services and platforms.
- Many of the responses asked for an easier interface to use that was, at times more intuitive and took advantage of new technologies such as AI and machine learning, and that enabled greater mobility when accessing content.
- Users want to engage more strongly with libraries and request more digital interaction. This requires redesigning online library interfaces to be more socially focused and using social media to engage with the community not to just inform.



# The librarian perspective: Interviews and focus group

# What we asked

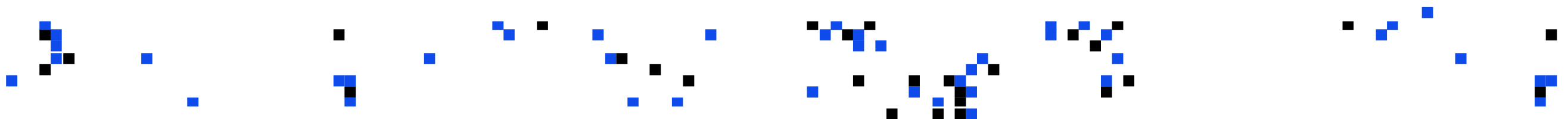
Interviews asked for perspectives on:

- Experience of user perspectives on online libraries
- Uptake of online library development and use
- Ideas for innovation, and better integration of physical, digital and online library services
- Thoughts on the future of libraries

Focus group asked for perspectives on:

- Changes to service delivery
- Uptake and performance of online library services
- The shift towards online library services and the impact on staff
- Partnerships and collaboration
- Challenges and future implementation of online library services

Participants were selected from a Civica customer database





# Changing times

- There is a push towards libraries having greater online presence
- Not necessarily perceived to be driven by library users, but a whole range of different forces at play.
- Libraries are now juggling a range of activities including maintaining physical collections and spaces, developing online interfaces, raising awareness of new services, and educating users in new digital processes.

*“The implementation of online services has worked well, we are learning along with our customers”*

*“We need to build capacity for change and change management. Building resilience, skills and knowledge to handle the change.”*

*“We are not in control anymore. The landscape is changing all the time, there are some terrible funding models, IT models, let alone addressing the poor customer experience.”*

# Challenges

- Shrinking resources
- Poor infrastructure
- Product/interface difficulties
- Competing with commercial platforms
- Cost shifting
- Understanding needs of users
- Managing change

*“Our budgets have halved over the last 10 years, buying less physical resources, investing more in online resources.”*

*“other agencies are moving responsibility for navigating services, such as Centrelink, to libraries without funding.”*

*“Products from vendors are too complicated. Their interfaces don’t quite fit.”*

*“It is hard to keep up with the expectations of commercial platforms.”*

*“We don’t have a cohesive strategy and not necessarily focused on keeping up with customer needs”*

*“There is a resistance to change as people get used to doing things in a certain way.”*

# Opportunities

- Partnerships and collaborations
- Innovation
- User engagement and co-design
- New service delivery models
- Professional development
- Digital leadership and strategy

***“Partnerships with industry enable us to do more. They have to be the right type of relationship and we all need to agree with the business model”***

***“We look a lot to what other libraries are doing in the digital space to push for a better user experience”***

***“Online services should be a more integrated part of what we do, digitisation is an enabler”***

***“Changes to our library are not just about the collection, but also focussing of interaction and service provision.”***

***“Digital experience should be simpler, clearer about purpose and what our users want.”***

***“There is a real gap in training of library staff to work in new ways and get thinking about how to manage and use the technology...a completely different skillset is needed”***

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# Future gazing



- A **hybrid** space that connects the physical and online space
- Greater **engagement and co-design** with the community
- **Collaboration** with vendors, industry partners and government

*"The future library will be hybrid service, with physical presence, but different, providing exposure to digital services."*

*"Engaging with the community you serve whether physical or digital, we need to do that to remain relevant."*

*"We need to connect with people physically to maintain good emotional and physical health ..Online spaces should be an adjunct, something that adds to the physical space - not an alternative to it."*

*"The digital place should change (in accordance) to the way people expect to interact. Mediation is still an important part of what we do and is valued by the users."*

**CIVICA**  
Transforming the way you work

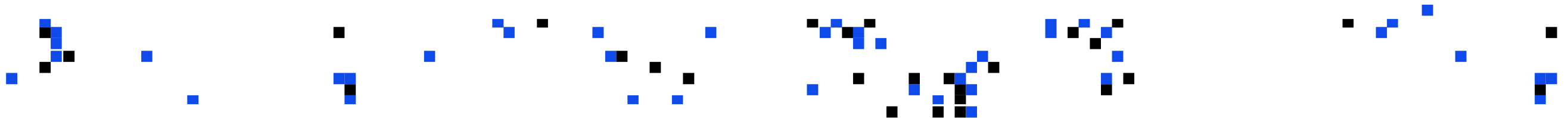
**UTS** Institute for  
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# Changing Landscape™ Report

## The intrinsic value of libraries as public spaces



Physical-digital, communicating the new normal



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# Thank you

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