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NEED OF INFORMATION SEEKING BEHAVIOR AMONG PG STUDENTS

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Abstract

The concepts defining information, information needs, information seeking and information use have undergone significant evolution since they were first introduced. A number of information seeking and retrieval studies seem to focus on these concepts, albeit in different ways. It is widely understood that concepts form the basis for describing and explaining phenomena and processes in a field of study. Within the field of Information Science, many of the concepts used need to be understood in terms of research context, as a variety of meanings can be attached to most concepts. This in turn may be of interest to researchers and students within this field. The article concludes that context should be the foundation for any research within this field, with the observation that many of the models discussed describe general information seeking behavior, without catering for variations.

Keywords: *Information Seeking; Conceptual Framework*

INTRODUCTION

The field of Information Seeking behaviour in Information Science can broadly be defined as that which is concerned with determining user's information needs, searching behaviour and subsequent use of information. Disciplines concerned with understanding how people seek and make use of information, the channels they use to get information, and the factors that inhibit or encourage information use include: the study of personality in psychology, consumer behaviour, innovation research, health communication studies, organisational decision-making, and information requirements in information system design.

The roots of information 'finding and gathering' are as old as the human race. What is new, is perhaps the fact that information seeking is researched under the relatively young domain of Information Science. During the 1940s -1970s, focus was placed on the evaluation of information collections, concentrating on information services and systems and how to make them more relevant to their users.

By the early 1970s – 1980s this position changed, as attention shifted: from looking at physical information systems as sources of information, to information seeking both as concept and process. Research conducted during this period attempted to depict the

characteristics of users as a sociological group, which tried to explain the steps people take to satisfy their information requirements. The studies focused on discovering useful information about the research habits of individuals or groups such as geologists, engineers, etc., in order to design appropriate information systems and services for the defined groups.

Concepts refer to major phenomena studied, eventually forming the foundation of the conceptual framework of the subject under investigation. They may also be viewed as mental images expressed as subjective thoughts around things encountered in daily life. As it is not possible to communicate these thoughts directly, words, symbols, and phrases of language are used to represent these mental images, providing an arena for communication. In daily communication, a system of general and often vague agreements about the use of terms often results in misunderstandings. Depending on the context within which many concepts used within the field of Information Science are used, they can assume different meanings, hence the need for clarification.

The interchangeable use of the concepts data, information and knowledge add to the confusion. Data can be described as measurements and representations of the world around us. In and of itself data is meaningless, but by assigning meaning to relationships and patterns that occur over a period of time, data becomes information.

Westbrook (2013) supports the notion that data, through a process of change, becomes organised, thus becoming information, whilst Miller argues that information as such is static and lifeless, existing in forms such as magazines, television, Compact Disc-Read Only Memory's (CD-ROMs), letters, and the like.

This concept views information as including readily available data from an individual's environment. This data may be communicated both intentionally and unintentionally for human processing, and is gained from objects, artifacts, sounds, smells, visual and tactile phenomena, events or natural phenomena.

NEED OF INFORMATION SEEKING BEHAVIOR

An information need is a requirement that drives people into information seeking. An information need evolves from an awareness of something missing, which necessitates the seeking of information that might contribute to understanding and meaning.

Belkin, Oddy & Brooks (2012) see information as a method used to solve problems. A problem is regarded as an inadequate state of knowledge, better known as an Anomalous State of Knowledge (ASK). Information seeking is used to resolve the 'inadequacy' which

can manifest itself as a gap, shortage, uncertainty or incoherence. Citing MacKay, Taylor (2011) describes an individual with an information need as having a certain incompleteness in his picture of the world – an inadequacy in what we might call his 'state of readiness' to interact purposefully with the world around him.

This 'inadequacy' led Taylor to discribe four levels of information needs: 1) The visceral need is an existing need one that either on a conscious or unconscious level is still unexpressed. It can manifest itself in the form of 'unease', which could potentially develop into action as more information becomes available.

2) The conscious need is an expressed need, albeit expressed rather vaguely, ambiguously and indecisively. By communicating the need, it is hoped that clarity can be achieved.

3) The formalised need is formally stated as a rational statement. This activity incorporates a series of encounters with information within a space of time, rather than a single reference incident. Finding information is therefore an engagement an individual gets involved in to try and rectify uncertainty in the process of moving through space and time. Searching for information is therefore experientially not a straightforward act. It is a process and form of problem solving that goes through problem recognition, problem articulation, source selection, query formulation, search execution, examination of results, extraction of required information, and reflection.

Information seekers can either take responsibility for their own processes, or work through or with an intermediary. Once relevant information is located, the information seeker studies, copies and integrates it with what is already available, thus enabling problem solving.

Should the problem remain unresolved, the process may be iterated. This is, however, subject to the internal restrictions of the individual, either the enthusiasm to proceed with looking for further information or ending the process. Information seeking is seen as a process with which humans engage to purposefully change their state of knowledge. This process is said to be internally active as information seekers direct attention, accept and adapt to stimuli, reflect on progress, and evaluate the efficacy of continuing.

It is thus a process in which knowledge states are changed through inputs, purposive outputs, and feedback. In order to proceed with information seeking, the process requires an information seeker to apply their personal knowledge and skills.

Marchionini (2012) describes it as a memory scan or personal infrastructure. These infrastructures or skills are: general cognitive abilities, knowledge skills in relation to the

problem/task domain, knowledge and skills in general, knowledge and skills specific to the system, and knowledge and skills regarding information seeking.

The seeking process can be active or passive, purposeful or unintentional. It is thus a strictly human process that requires adaptive and reflective control over the afferent and efferent actions of the information seeker. Progress during the information seeking episode is thus a product of information seeker attributes, information environment attributes, and the communication channel through which it flows.

DISCUSSION

Studies in information-seeking behaviour stem from concerns surrounding how people use information in their work environments. Information seeking behaviour arises as a consequence of a need perceived by the information user, who in order to satisfy it, makes demands upon formal or informal information sources or services, resulting in either success or failure.

Krikelas (2013) observed over two decades ago that an information need is perceived within the context of an individual's environment. The individual recognises an inadequacy in his/her knowledge that needs to be resolved in order to deal with a problem. The effort to satisfy the perceived need results in information seeking behaviour.

Information is power. It is a vital source for human beings for living a prosperous life on the earth. Information is all around and is utilized in all walks of life right from purchasing a pin to writing a research article by the human beings irrespective of caste, creed, gender, rich, poor, educated and uneducated. Thus the information helps against social imbalance. It is the supreme asset than all other movable and immovable asset that the people hold on earth. In the contemporary world people are valued as rich and poor not because of their assets; but they are valued as information rich and information poor. The information rich people are those who are highly skilled in identifying their information needs and apply seeking behaviours so as to access the information from both online and traditional resources successfully and satisfying their information needs. The information poor people are lacking in their skills in getting their information needs be satisfied.

Information seeking behavior is the application of attitudes through set of actions in order to achieve desired information need. When attitudes and actions are collaborated the performance emerges. Based on the level of performance, the satisfaction level of the acquired information is determined.

Wilson defines the term information seeking behaviour as 'the totality of human behaviour in relation to sources and channels of information, including both active and passive information seeking and information use. Thus it includes face-to-face communication with others, as well as the passive reception of information as in, for example watching television advertisements without any intention to act on the information given.

Case (2012) defined information behaviour as "Information behaviour encompasses information seeking as well as the totality of other unintentional or passive behaviours (such as glimpsing or encountering information) as well as purposive behaviour that do not involve seeking such as avoiding information"

The emergence of the concept of information seeking behaviour can be understood by knowing the origin of User Studies, since the user studies cover users' characters, needs, and dependency and satisfaction level by nature.

'User studies' covers a wide range of research areas in Information Science and which can be expanded to include parts of Computer Science, Communication Studies and other fields. Its associated terms are information seeking behavior and information needs. These terms have diverse range of problem areas such as Bibliometrics, User Education, studies of Reading and Readership and Information Retrieval Design and Evaluation.

The Wilson model says that information need perceived by an information seeker gives way for information seeking behavior to occur. In order to satisfy the information need, the user demand for formal and informal information sources and systems. The demands lead him for either success or failure in getting required information. On success, the user gets his need be fully or partially be satisfied. On failure, the user restarts his search process. It was also explained that information seeking behaviour may involve other people through information exchange by means of passing the useful information to them as well as using the information by the seekers themselves.

It deals with the aspects as to why some seek more prompt information than others, reason for the more usage of resources from a particular source than others and ambiguous status among people in pursuance of a goal successfully based on the perception on their own efficacy. Features of the model are Activating Mechanisms for seeking information which are affected by the Intervening variables of six types: Psychological aspects, Demographic background, Role related to social aspects, Environmental variable and Characteristics of role. This model recognizes search behaviours: Passive attention, Passive search, Active

search and ongoing search. The term in the model 'information processing and use' implied that the information is evaluated to know its effectiveness on satisfying the need.

CONCLUSION

It can further be explained that an entity, organization, or system puts an effort either to make itself suitable for the emerging requirements of the environment or to change the environment in which it exists. For any of the above efforts the entity, organization, or system prefers an easier way of approach and cost.

With respect to information seeking, the principle of least effort postulates that the information seeker chooses a course of action that will involve most convenient search method for information seeking. The user will apply the searching tools that are most familiar and easy to use so as to find results. This happens in spite of the user having proficiency in technical searching. Since libraries are user centric entities, the principles of least effort becomes important in planning the library system and conducting research in modern library concepts.

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