

Chapter 7

A Glimpse of the Information Seeking Behaviour Literature on the Web: A Bibliometric Approach

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ABSTRACT

This Chapter presents a study conducted on literature related to information seeking behaviour available on the World Wide Web. The outcome of searching the World Wide Web using Google Scholar were analysed to present the growth of publications; collaboration pattern of authors; most contributing authors; type of publications in which information scientists preferred to publish their works; highly preferred journals in which information seeking behaviour related works are published; and the impact of information seeking behaviour related literature.

INTRODUCTION

Information is a basic resource like any other resource such as raw materials, land, equipment, labour, capital, and energy, which are required to carry out day to day activities. As such information plays a vital role in human kind's life. At individual level information, affects our personal and professional lives as it is needed to make decisions and various choices. Timely access to relevant, accurate and current information has become more critical, especially in this globalized society which is daily increasingly becoming more and more competitive and complex. Since information is a critical resource it must be managed effectively and efficiently.

Information seeking behaviour (ISB) is an umbrella term for every human interaction with information (Bates, 2010). It is a very important concept in library and information science and occupies a central part of research in library and information studies (Järvelin, 1987). It deals with behaviours and actions exhibited by human beings in their search for information to satisfy diverse information needs.

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Wilson (2008) articulates that “information seeking behavior is the purposive seeking for information as a consequence of a need to satisfy some goal. In the course of seeking information an individual may interact with a manual information system (such as newspapers or library) or with a computer based system (such as the World Wide Web).” Mutshewa (2007) cautioned that the term ‘information seeking behaviour’ could be misleading because it implies the behaviour of information rather than the behaviour of people. Therefore, several researchers (Spink and Cole, 2006; Sonnenwald and Iivonen, 1999; Wilson, 2000) have preferred the term ‘human information behaviour’ to the term ‘information seeking behaviour’; but the majority of researchers still use the term information seeking behaviour. However, Bates (2010) observes that information seeking behaviour is the ‘official’ term used in the *Encyclopaedia of Library and Information Science* and the term used by the *Information Behaviour Conference (ISIC)*.

Wilson (1999) proposed a nested model of ISB to explain what information seeking behaviour research encompasses. He describes ISB as an onion, which consists of at least three layers. The inner layer depicts information searching, which is generally understood as information retrieval or interactive information retrieval, such as occurs in a database. The next layer consists of information seeking, which can occur everywhere else. The outermost layer (the all-embracing layer), comprises information behaviour that embraces all kinds of human interactions with information. Active research is an exchange between the layers, in particular between information retrieval and information, but also between information seeking and the more general behavioural research groups (Tamine-Lechani *et al.*, 2010).

According to cognitive psychology human beings are fundamentally active and goal-oriented and willing to get information about themselves and the world (Eskola, 1998). Their actions are directed by intentions, expectations and response. They maintain knowledge in memory in hierarchically organized structures, schemes, and new knowledge is constructed on the basis of previously learned knowledge. This process of construction has features in common for every human being but the contents are individual. Learning occurs in connection with action and is part of the cognitive process. During the last decades the cognitive approach has emphasized aspects in the contents and the context of learning (von Wright 1994, 16-18).

The library is the most widely-used source of information available to literate societies. Therefore, librarians must be aware of the kind of information being sought and how it can be obtained. Furthermore, because of the rapidly escalating cost of purchasing and archiving print journals and electronic media, the library has the duty to provide and maintain efficient services (Thanuskodi, 2009). Technological advancements and innovations have changed modern libraries from store houses to gateways of information. Information and communication technologies (ICTs) have completely changed the setup of libraries and have transformed and expanded their roles, and the services they provide, beyond storage, preservation and dissemination of information.

Fourie (2006) observes that information-seeking behaviour differs significantly according to background, culture, conditions, needs, and requirements. It is therefore difficult to predict the actual behaviour that a person might exhibit in a quest for information. In order to understand the behaviour of human beings better, there is a need for multidisciplinary research using multidimensional approaches. Fourie further (2006) observes that “information seeking is a complex, dynamic, social human behaviour that needs as rich a picture as possible to truly understand the phenomenon-and even then there will be many unanswered questions”. It is therefore important to study the information-seeking behaviour of various groups of people, in order to serve them better.

Studies of information seeking behavior and related areas were very limited till the early second half of the 20th century. Information seeking behavior has been a focus of research within the library and

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