Chapter 21
Cultural Factors Affecting Information–Seeking Behaviour:
Case Study of GCC Universities

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ABSTRACT

This chapter investigates the cultural effects on information seeking behaviour in the Gulf Cooperation Council (GCC) universities. The region's unique conservative and collectivist culture played a great role in students' information seeking behaviour. The study was based on Hofstede's cultural concepts of collectivism versus individualism and power distance. It includes also Hall's concept of time cultural dimension. These concepts are measured by information needs, query formulation, task execution, and interacting with systems. It was found that culture has significant effects on students' information needs, query formulation, task execution, and interacting with systems. Undergraduates are more affected by culture, while graduates and postgraduates showed little impact. Cultural impacts on information seeking activities are valuable in adopting new technologies in the libraries, which should culturally be acceptable for better acceptance, utilisation, and implementation. It is culture that hinders people from using some browsers, interfaces, and even databases.

INTRODUCTION

Information-seeking is primarily triggered by how students behave in fulfilling their needs, is a fundamental question in this part of the study. Probably, people seek information to broaden their understanding in the field and keeping themselves abreast of new development in this rapid information development world. The increase in web-based information accessible via the internet has affected information-seeking behaviour among students, faculty, researchers and even ordinary people in the Gulf States[1]. Numerous types of information, as well as abundance search engines in different locations, are available in one place and on one platform (Fidel et al., 1999).

Today, where the types of information and media along with the language which presents them have become diverse and manifold, offering the users limitless options of information they need. Researchers of either gender are concerned with gathering current information and data to meet their requirements of fulfilling research projects. Information-seeking is an essential activity carried out by everyone and revealed through behaviours (Wilson, 2000). The Gulf States' governments recognise the critical role of information and communication technology (ICT) in social development. The strategic plans emphasise the road map long-term vision of events. These strategic plans aimed to transform the individual country into an information society, building a knowledge economy, curbing the digital divide through the utilisation of ICT infrastructure, and providing information services to the local community.

Few studies are dealing with gender differences in information-seeking behaviour. For Wilson (1997), gender is one of the intervening variables in information-seeking behaviour. Conservative culture has a direct impact on GCC students' various aspects of their lives, including conducting academic research and search for information to complete assignments, etc. For instance, Oshan (2007) insisted that women in the Gulf should be modest, respectful, and seldom engage in social interaction with men or discuss sensitive topics such as politics or health. These cultural norms are predicted to affect both male and female students' information-seeking behaviour and the use of information technology in their studies. It is assumed that females particularly, prefer offline sources of information such as asking family, friend, or instructor when coming to specific personal information, need to comply with cultural norms and values. This study seeks to understand how the collectivist culture of Gulf Cooperation Council countries' academic libraries have affected students' information-seeking behaviour in the region as well as how technology contributes to modifying the perception of information-seeking processes. The study includes cultural dimensions set by Hofstede (1997) collectivism versus individualism and power distance. While on the other hand, it consists of the one cultural dimension by Hall (1976) time dimension.

BACKGROUND

There are relative, few studies dealing with gender-specific differences in information-seeking behaviour. These differences were found in topics such as task execution, interacting with systems, and query formulation. Some studies suggested that due to the socio-cultural background of gender, women may be prone to computer anxiety and feelings of low self-efficacy (Wilson, 1997). Gender differences have also been found in the internet information search and use among students investigated by Dubi and Rutsch (1998). Authors observed that female students lacked self-confidence; they behaved with less certainty than male students in the Internet search. Female students felt less competent in dealing with search engines, more often needed assistance and described the system as very complicated to use. The survey by Xie, Bao, and Morais (2006) on gender differences in tourist information search behaviour of Yellow Mountain and Guilin in China. Authors reported that gender is a factor influencing information-seeking behaviour and process. Authors observed that characterisation of men and women as reasons for different activities in seeking information. Men were self-centred, self-confident, and choosy while the female was less self-confident, comprehensive searchers as well as uncertain with their search results. This behaviour is the reason that women's searches are considered as stereo-type and mostly considered complicated.

According to Whitmire (2003) in a study on gender differences in the purchase of presents, reported that there were significant differences between men and women. They observed that women tended to make an extensive and comprehensive analysis of existing information and searched multiple sources to

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