Original Research Paper   Library and information science

Information Seeking Behaviour-An Overview

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ABSTRACT

This paper deals with the theoretical study about Information seeking behaviour, studies based on information seeking behaviour, the concept of Information seeking behaviour, its various models and theories developed.

1. Introduction:

Information is power. Information leads the day-to day activities of the people. Everyone use information for their personal, social and official needs. It is a vital source for human beings to lead a life. Effective usage of information determines the level of satisfaction on the fulfilment of needs. The effective usage of information depends upon the behaviour that the information seeker applies in the process of seeking information.

2. Definition:
2.1 Information:
Chen and Hernon (1982) defined information as "all knowledge, ideas, facts, data and imaginative works of mind which are communicated formally and / or informally in any format".

2.2 Information Need:
"Information need is described as an anomalous state of knowledge" (Belkin et al 1982.)

2.3 Information Seeking:
"Information seeking can be defined as "Purposive acquisition of Information from selected information careers". (Johnson 1977)

2.4 Information Seeking Behaviour:
Information seeking behaviour is defined 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 advertisement without any intention to act on the information given. (Wilson 1999.)

3. Concept of Information Seeking Behaviour:
The concept of information seeking behaviour emerged from the broad concept of user studies, which covers a wide range of studies in information science and also has its influence in computer science and communication studies. The broad term Information Science includes within its purview, the term User studies and Information Seeking Behaviour.

There are many definitions, models and theories on the information behaviours and related concepts. To have an extended view, few concepts mined from definitions of Wilson (2000) are given below:

There are four concepts derived from the definitions. They are
- Information Behaviour
- Information Seeking Behaviour
- Information Search Behaviour
- Information Use Behaviour

3.1 Information Behaviour:
'Information Behaviour' can be described as behaviour of human

to sources and channels of information. This behaviour includes both active and passive information seeking, that is to say, an active face to face discussion as well as information received through television that indicates a source of passive information.

3.2 Information Seeking Behaviour:
Information seeking behaviour is a purposeful attempt to seek for information and to satisfy the needs that arise out of a necessity to achieve an objective. Here the information system is consulted either manually or through human computer interaction. In this process, the user consults books or journals or newspapers or any other manual resources or internet by applying information seeking attitudes in a broader sense, that is to say, macro level of application behaviour.

3.3 Information Searching Behaviour:
The strategies followed and attitudes applied in attempting in an in-depth manner to seek for information are known as information searching behaviour.

3.4 Information Use Behaviour:
The behaviour which is involved as to how the information sought is put to use are termed as information seeking behaviour. These behaviours are dealt with making the information, adding it to the context to which it is sought, saving for further use, etc. These activities involve physical as well as mental acts.

4. Studies based on Information Seeking behaviour:
Various researches have been conducted on the study of information seeking behaviour, which is based on:
- Information Needs
- Information seeking Behaviour
- User studies
- Professions
- User Education and Training

5. History of Information seeking Behaviour:
According to Wilson(1994) the term '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 behaviour and information needs. These terms have diverse range of problems such as Bibliometrics, User Education, studies of reading and Information Retrieval Design and Evaluation.

Ayres and MC Kinnie (1916) have conducted a library survey, which is the first trace of study in this direction.

Later, the study of Mc Diarmid's (1940) 'library survey' referred to various kinds of surveys. These library surveys were focussing on how people used libraries and seeking their information and satisfy their needs.

In India, Ranganathan (1970) highlighted User studies through his "Annotation on User Survey. In this direction the study was further carried out by Panwar and Vyas (1976).

6. Models of Information Seeking Behaviour:
Reynolds (1971) defines a model as "by illustrating casual process, models make it easier to see if hypothesis are consistent with what we observe in real life".

Models are developed to represent and to have a clear understanding on specific problems, which leads to the development of formal theories.

6.1 The Wilson Model:
The Wilson model (1981) says that information need perceived by an information seeker gives way for information seeking behaviour 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 information seekers.

6.2 Krikelas's Model of Information Seeking:
The Krikelas model (1983) is an early model and was cited widely. The model contains thirteen components. It is a general model that is applicable to ordinary life. I the model the twin actions namely information gathering and information giving are given at the top. The Information gathering process is carried out based on the needs which are kindled by the person who seeks information. The model shows that the gathered information is directed to memory or personal files. The other kind of action termed as "Information Gathering" which is carried out based on the immediate needs for which the information seeker assumed to select either internal or external sources of preferences. One appealing aspect of the Krikelas model is its simplicity.

6.3 Kuhlthau Model :
The Kuhlthau model (1992) is explained as follows:

Initiation: When a person comes to know the lack of knowledge or understanding, Uncertainty is felt. Thoughts would be vague and action for seeking information would be initiated.

Selection: In this stage the uncertainty on the area, topic or problem is got cleared and the person with a brief optimism gets readies for exploration of the information.

Exploration: While exploring for information people will get doubt on the consistency of the information, confused on the compatibility and get frustrated in the process.

Formulation: In this stage the person gets focused perception while a lead to clarity and the process of seeking for information gets continued.

Collection: The process of information seeking, sense the right direction, information related to the focused perspective is gathered and it minimizes the ambiguity of the information.

Presentation: After the completion of the search the seeker gets new knowledge which the person can present to others and put the knowledge to use.

Assessment: when the information seeker attains the required knowledge, seeker get a sense of accomplishment and the self-awareness increases.

7. Theories in Information Seeking Behaviour:
There are many theories in the context of information seeking behaviour have been developed. Some of them are:

7.1 Zipf's Principles of Least Effort:
The principle of least effort was proposed in 1949 by Harvard linguist George Kingsley Zipf's in "Human Behaviour and the principle of Least Effort'. According to Zipf (1949) each individual will adopt a course of action that will involve the expenditure of the probable least average of his work, in other words the least effort.

7.2 Uses and Gratifications Theory:
The Uses and Gratifications theory has been developed by Katz, Blumber and Gurevitch (1974). The concept has come into existence during 1940 with the researches on the children's use of comics. This theory is concerned with social and psychological needs and the behaviour of the people to media.

According to Elihu Katz, Jay Blumber, Mickael Gurevitch (1974), the paradigm of uses and gratifications is the social and psychological origins of needs which generate expectations of mass media or other sources, which lead to differential patterns of media exposure resulting in need gratification and other consequences, perhaps mostly unintended ones.

7.3 Sense Making Theory:
The sense making theory within the context of information science was developed by Brenda Dervin (1992). According to him, the sense making methodology was described as theory for methodology that builds a bridge between substantive theory and metatheory. The concept was also explained as an active two-way process of fitting data into a frame and fitting a frame around the data. Neither data nor frame comes first; data evoke frames and frames select and connect data. When there is no adequate fit, the data may be reconsidered or an existing frame may be revised.

Conclusion:
The researchers continued to progress on all disciplines that cause emergence of new concepts or subject areas. The new areas attract many people to work or to consume the outputs or initiate research within a given framework of research. In a globalized information technology enabled services are making revolution in the attainment of knowledge. Thus gathering information and integration of the same becomes faster and comprehensive with limited time and resource. Here in this paper, theoretical argument on the information seeking behaviour has been attempted. Though it gives a broader understanding on the issues, empirical verification becomes critical. This needs to be explored further for deeper understanding.

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