

Book Review

Looking for Information: A Survey of Research on Information Seeking, Needs, and Behavior (4th edition). Donald O. Case and Lisa M. Given. Bingley, UK: Emerald Group Publishing, 2016. 528 pp. \$82.95 (hardcover). (ISBN: 9781785609688)

This excellent book is about information behavior, sometimes referred to as human information behavior (HIB), which investigates why and how humans need, seek, and use information for work, school, and everyday life. There are many related research fields covering this same bit of real estate. Information retrieval (IR) and human-computer interaction (HCI) cover the system side of the searcher-information system interaction. Human information interaction (HII) covers the same territory as HIB, but also studies the searcher-system interaction during the search event itself (Fidel, 2012), while *Looking for Information* limits its investigation to human behavior before and after the search event. It is interested in the broad, often chaotic sociological and psychological context that determines information-seeking behavior, particularly why people have difficulty finding information, the barriers to successful information seeking, particularly for disadvantaged groups in society, and why people avoid information all together.

Every sentence of *Looking for Information* oozes quality, care, and thoroughness, making it very much the essential textbook-handbook for library and information studies students, information science students, and computer science students interested in an overview of the essential, core topics that constitute the field of information behavior. *Looking for Information* has become the go-to book for these core topics. In addition to its popular success, Donald Case won the prestigious American Society for Information Science and Technology's Best Information Science Book for the original version of *Looking for Information* published in 2002.

This fourth edition of *Looking for Information* is coming out a mere 4 years after the previous edition. There have been many changes in these 4 years; the field is evolving rapidly. Donald Case has brought in Lisa Given as coauthor, who in addition to being an esteemed information science professor first in Canada and now at Australia's Charles Sturt University, is a member of the Research Institute for Professional Practice, Learning and Education. Her addition, therefore, reinforces Case's

original 2002 theme: a call for information science research to influence practice. Together the two authors have updated the book's references, deleting 100 old ones and adding 200 new ones. They have updated recommended readings at the end of each chapter. They have added paragraphs on new concepts with new examples. And the authors have expanded the methods chapter (Chapter 9), particularly the text devoted to qualitative research methods.

For information behavior research to influence practice, Case's original 2002 goal was to change the direction of the field, shifting it away from quantitative research utilizing survey questionnaires whose frequent purpose was the allocation of library resources among competing sources or channels of information use. With the change in name from information seeking to information behavior, Case wanted to investigate the deeper contextual issues of the nexus between the information seeker and the world of information. This includes the study of information concepts surrounding the unconscious motivations of the searcher, including the reasons for information avoidance.

Why would anyone avoid seeking information, which in our Information Age we all think is unquestionably beneficial? Because there are barriers to information seeking, both psychological and sociological. Case and Given tackle head on this dark side of information behavior, the seeker's power or lack of it over her own life, for example, and the searcher's perception of her existential place in the world. Does the seeker believe she can effectuate change in their own life or in the world around her? With the internet, the problem of information availability is largely taken care of; so these underlying human motivations and behaviors are key, important. But very difficult to study.

The book's 11 chapters are divided into five parts. Each chapter begins with a detailed table of contents for the chapter; and each chapter ends with a summary of the chapter as well as recommended further readings, which are annotated. The book also contains sophisticated Author and Subject Indexes. For students starting out on a topic, an Appendix containing a Glossary of concept terms, specifies where in the book the term is discussed as well as the two or three most important outside sources illustrating use of the concept "term." A second Appendix gives Sample Questions for each book chapter, which facilitates teaching and discussion of the concepts.

Part 1: “Introduction, Typical Seeking Scenarios, History of Information Seeking Research.” Case and Given begin the book with Brenda Dervin’s (1976) ground-breaking challenge to 10 assumptions or myths about information, information seeking, and how research into these fields should be conducted. The central assumption stated that people make easy, conflict-free connections between external information in the outside world and their internal reality, but this is not true. People actually need, seek, and use information to try and make sense of the world as they progress through it in time and space. It is an extremely awkward endeavor that, however, is the core of human existence. This core value of Dervin’s sense-making theory caused a revolution in research perspective. To illustrate this perspective, in Chapter 2 Case and Given give five everyday information-seeking scenarios; for instance, the context of information seeking to vote on a political issue.

Part 2: “Core Concepts of Information Behavior.” This is the intellectual heart of *Looking for Information*. Case and Given extensively discuss information behavior concepts such as information, information need, and relevance. These concepts are presented as complicated, with differing perspectives on their definitions. For example, the authors devote Part 2’s Chapter 4 in its entirety to the concept of information, beginning with a detailed discussion of Shannon’s (1949) touchstone definition of information as entropy or uncertainty. Much of Shannon is counterintuitive. Most would say information reduces uncertainty, but in fact Shannon defines the information content of a message sent between a source and a destination as having more information content, the more entropy (disorganization) or the more uncertainty the message/signal contains. So information, far from reducing uncertainty, as computer science assumes in its static model of the searcher and her information need, can actually increase uncertainty in the searcher. Thus, information behavior’s focus on the related concepts of the searcher’s information overload, information anxiety, information poverty, and information avoidance, which Case and Given describe in Chapter 6.

Chapter 5’s description of Taylor’s (1968) four-level model of information need conceptualizes why people have difficulty seeking information: the disconnect between the informational question the seeker believes s/he needs answered, which Taylor labels the Q4-level of the information need, and the seeker’s real Q1-level information need, which is unconscious, visceral, and thus to a certain extent unknowable to the seeker him/herself. There are two interpretations of the Taylor model: the “stage” interpretation and the “level” interpretation. In Case and Given’s “stage” interpretation, the seeker starts information seeking for a new work or school assignment in a vaguely unconscious, visceral Q1-stage of the need; the seeker then progresses, via interaction with information, through the Q2- and Q3-stages of the information need, before finally ending up in the compromised, Q4-stage of the need. So

the Q4 compromised form of their information need becomes the goal stage of the seeker rather than an impediment to information seeking. In a pure “level” interpretation, on the other hand (e.g., Cole, 2012), the seeker utilizes the Q4-level, compromised form of the information need at the beginning of researching a work or school assignment because s/he doesn’t know the Q1-level real information need. Utilizing a Q4-level, compromised form of the need, therefore, is considered an impediment to effective information seeking, a negative. And it is the goal of the information system, the librarian, the library catalog, or a search engine such as Google, to negotiate the Q4-level, compromised form of the need, which is usually an “overly general” form of the need (p. 84), down the Q-levels to as close as possible to the Q1-level, real information need.

Part 3: “Models and Theories of Information Behavior.” Chapters 7 and 8 describe the difference between information behavior theories and models, starting in Chapter 7 with descriptions of 12 classic information behavior models (The Ellis Model, The Wilson Model, The Kuhlthau Model, etc.). Each model has a separate diagram. In Chapter 8 they describe the difference between meta-theories, research perspective, and paradigms. One could argue that these chapters should be in reverse order, starting the student off at the broadest level with perspective and paradigm, and from there to theories and finally to descriptive models, but Case and Given explain that, for the student, model development precedes theory-making, and therefore models are the most useful to students and should be put first.

Part 4: “Research Designs and Methods Used to Study Information Behavior.” Case and Given identify for the student the vexing difference between “methodology” (a strategy of investigation such as the grounded theory approach) and “method” (a tactic of data collection/analysis such as the constant comparative method used in the grounded theory methodology). Table 9.1 gives concrete examples of each. The authors then build on this in their description of the five stages of the research process: Stage 2 is the selection of research methodology followed by Stage 3’s selection of methods of data collection and analysis. Always in this book, there is great care by Case and Given to build the student’s understanding of the topic being presented.

In Part 5, Case and Given end the book with Chapter 11: “Reviewing, Critiquing and Concluding.” Here, the authors examine the history of self-criticism of the field by information behavior researchers themselves. Have these negative issues been addressed, answered? Case and Given say yes, there is now more theorizing in the information behavior research presently being conducted, and there is a greater depth in research findings. What this means is that the information behavior research field has switched from decontextualized studies (p. 355) utilizing quantitative methods (with an overreliance, especially, on the survey questionnaire) to much more contextualized

studies utilizing phenomenological methods and grounded theory. Current research studies, however, are smaller in scale, with fewer study participants, often in the $n = 10$ to $n = 20$ range, and in many of these studies the participants self-select (volunteer) for the study, which means there is little possibility for generalizing the study findings to larger populations of information users. Thus, the call by Case and Given for the reestablishment of large-scale, randomized, quantitative studies to test (verify/falsify) the theories and models derived from the small-scale, qualitative studies.

In Part 5, Case and Given point to another lack in current information behavior research: its focus on data that produce findings that are surprising, based on the study participants who show exceptional behavior. The resulting models and theories prescribe as normative information behavior that leaves out disadvantaged or inarticulate study participants. Case and Given point to a remedy for these left-out people both in society and in information behavior studies: to include in information behavior research not only the study of the role of affect or emotion in influencing information behavior (pp. 116–117), but also the study of belief (p. 66; see also Microsoft researcher White, 2014). As a corollary, the inclusions of these other behavior-determining variables may lead computer science's evaluation of information system performance to include more inclusive experiential criteria. This is what information behavior's small-scale, heavily context-rich research can offer in practice!

Looking for Information does not propose a thesis or theme. For a recent, curated treatment of the same topic,

with a dominating arc, almost a thesis, see Ford (2015). But this book remains an absolutely essential book for every student interested in the core topics, as well as the research methodologies and methods underlying the world view, of the field of information behavior's unique and valuable understanding and solutions to the problems associated with information seeking.

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