

GUEST EDITORIAL

Information Behavior and Information Practices: A Special Issue for Research on People's Engagement With Technology

The set of articles in this special issue bring together a diverse set of scholars concerned with research that illuminates people's experiences with and perceptions of information within the traditions of information behavior (Wilson, 1999) or information practice (Savolainen, 2007).

While there is a well-established body of frameworks and models (Case & Given, 2016; Fisher, Erdelez, & McKechnie, 2005) which support theorizing information behavior and information practice, there are questions about how these help conceptualize the changing relationship between technology and information. In proposing this special issue, we were particularly interested in new theoretical perspectives and theoretical developments. These include the "practice-turn," affordances and sociomateriality (Gibson, 1977; Orlikowski, 2007; Schatzki, Knorr-Cetina, & von Savigny, 2001). We were particularly interested in the ways in which these theories contribute to information studies and demonstrate that the discipline offers a fertile landscape for expanding these theories. We expected that scholars would present articles that used or developed these theories to focus on the ways people engage with information technology and the way it changes how people interact with information. What we found, however, was that most of the submissions looked towards other forms of materiality and interaction providing a theoretically rich, stimulating, and novel set of alternative understandings.

In the first article, "Information Experience in Personally Meaningful Activities," Gorichanaz uses interpretative phenomenological analysis to understand three domains of personal meaning: Bible reading, ultramarathon running, and artmaking. Identifying that there is an emerging body

of work that focuses on personally meaningful information activities, he notes that this has not yet been fully theorized, particularly from the perspective of what it means to be human and reflecting on ethical notions of "craft." In this article he addresses this gap by asking the question: How do people experience information in personally meaningful activities? Although readers will find links between this article and other contexts of everyday-life information seeking, including studies of serious leisure activities, Gorichanaz's work is unique in that he illuminates four unique themes to address the research question: identity, central practice, curiosity, and presence. The technological implications are to consider how technologies (such as social media) contribute to and/or detract from the ways that people cultivate deep, personal meaning in their lives.

The second article, by Lloyd and Olsson, "Untangling the Knot: The Information Practices of Enthusiast Car Restorers," similarly explores a chosen activity; however, the article takes a different methodological position. Rooted in scholarship focusing on information practice, Lloyd and Olsson provide a thoughtful contribution to our understanding of the materiality in information practice and extend their earlier work on the embodied nature of practice. They do this through the study of the information practices of a community of enthusiasts engaged in the restoration of vintage and classic cars. A significant contribution of the article is the way in which they explore objects and tools made and manipulated by humans, illustrating how they are entangled in practice and shape practical and symbolic understanding. Interestingly they indicate that digital tools took a secondary and limited role in this practice. As such, the article not only makes an interesting methodological contribution but also contributes to the growing literature on "serious leisure," illuminating the gendered narratives of a community of practice.

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The third article turns to “Materiality in Information Environments: Objects, Spaces, and Bodies in Three Out-patient Hemodialysis Facilities,” where Veinot and Pierce utilize Stamper’s (1991) “Semiotic Framework for Information Systems Research,” as extended by Boell and Cecez-Kecmanovic (2011). They use the framework to provide a sociomaterial analysis of everyday life information environments and their influence on patients’ information behavior. The rich qualitative study provides a thoughtful contribution to both our understanding of social groups as a whole and a diverse range of information behaviors. The article concludes by providing a sociomaterial guidance for designing information environments.

In the fourth article, Kitzie, in “‘That Looks Like Me or Something I Can Do’: Affordances and Constraints in the Online Identity Work of US LGBTQ+ Millennials,” uses affordances as a process concept to investigate how search engines and social networking sites influence the identity-related information practices of 30 LGBTQ+ interview participants between the ages of 18 and 38. Three key affordances—visibility, anonymity, and association—both constrain and enable participants’ activities. Participants are highly skillful in their appropriation and use of technological features to meet their needs, even as they must contend with the hetero- and gender-normative identity discourses embedded in the technologies. Kitzie makes a number of important recommendations for how library and literacy practices can be improved by taking into account how technological and structural issues mediate LGBTQ+ identity and information practices and literacies; she makes further recommendations for transformations in the design approaches used in the development and deployment of information and social networking systems.

A second area of interest was methodological developments in the light of new and evolving technologies, and the data they generate. These afford new opportunities for studying information behaviors and practices. The Special Issue is concerned with how information scholars are rising to these challenges and developing or building upon existing methods to take advantage of technological advances to understand information in a far more nuanced and fine-grained manner. In “Revisiting Personal Information Management Through Information Practices With Activity Tracking Technology,” Feng and Agosto deploy a personal information management (PIM) approach to explore the ways activity tracking technologies (ATT) such as Fitbit have been employed by long-term users. Through qualitative analysis of 10 in-depth interviews supplemented by photo-elicitation techniques, the authors find, in part, that there are important differences between how we have thought about ATT use and what users actually do with these technologies in actual practice. In addition to making recommendations for modifying our conceptual approaches to studying both PIM activities and ATT use, the article suggests that design changes to ATTs could better meet diverse user expectations, including more fully supporting

users’ efforts to understand and make use of data related to their physical activities. The article argues for enhancing the ability of ATTs to incorporate more advanced data analytics with personal informatics and the specifics of unpredictable and unique characteristics and practices of individuals such as changes in health conditions and lifestyles.

In the article “Bias Effects, Synergistic Effects, and Information Contingency Effects: Developing and Testing an Extended Information Adoption Model in Social Q&A,” Sun and colleagues build on the Information Adoption model (Sussman & Siegal, 2003) and propose an Extended Information Adoption Model (EIAM). The authors do so by considering bias effects, synergistic effects, and information contingency effects. Their extended model is empirically tested through a 2 by 2 by 2 experiment in a peer-to-peer interactions setting relevant to asking and answering questions in a crowdsourcing mode (Yahoo! Answers and Quora in the US, and Zhihu in China). In addition to extending the model with these three important considerations, they demonstrate the relationships between these factors as well as with the original Information Adoption Model factors. The authors outline the implications for theory development around information adoption models as well as the practical implications that are applicable to Question and Answer service providers.

In their article, “The Things We Talk About When We Talk About Browsing: An Empirical Typology of Library Browsing Behavior,” McKay, Chang, Smith, and George Buchanan take a different perspective by extrapolating from physical behavior to support the design of digital tools. Arguing that e-books mean that traditional browsing practices are no longer available, and that digital tools that enable browsing have poor adoption, they undertook work to understand this phenomenon and support its use within digital libraries. The empirical data were derived from two studies. The first was a reexamination of data gathered through a series of observations of shelf use, coupled with interviews. The second study consisted of interviews taken at the point where readers were borrowing books. The outcome of their research was a typology of Six Shelf-Based Information-Seeking Behaviors: Grab-and-go, Satisficing, Opportunistic browsing, Search seeding, Location seeding, and Wandering. Of these they note that five included some form of browsing. In each type they identify implications for online browsing. They also offer an additional form of analysis classifying each of these in three ways: the influence of serendipity on the reader’s experience (and vice versa); how precise was the reader’s need when they approached the shelves; and how broad (or narrow) was their starting point for browsing. Although browsing studies have a long history in information science, and have shaped the design of physical libraries and catalog systems, the implications of e-book technologies on users’ browsing activities remains an emerging area in the discipline.

Koh, Snead, and Lu's article "The Processes of Maker Learning and Information Behavior in a Technology-Rich High School Class" explores the role of information during the creative production and learning processes in a technology-rich context. Although maker spaces are now common in schools, museums, and public libraries, worldwide few studies explore users' engagement with these facilities. The authors note that the empirical work they report on, is part of a 4 year project investigating the processes of maker learning across school, library, and museum contexts. The work draws upon Dervin's (1998) Sense-Making Methodology to explore the behavior of 20 members of a maker class. A multimethod approach was taken to data collection including: individual interviews, novel visual process mapping activities, and maker process surveys. The work contributes to our understanding of the information behavior of young people (ages 0–18 years) who, as the authors noted, were born into this technology-rich society. It describes their maker learning as sense-making processes, with implications for the design of maker spaces in the future.

Overall, this collection of articles addresses the complexities of people's experiences in a world that has embraced and embedded, deeply, technological advances. As universities, governments, and industries embrace 4.0-generation tools and ways of working, people's activities—at work, in the home, and in various leisure contexts—adapt and change. What these studies demonstrate is that humanity (that is, human needs, experiences, and adaptations) deeply influence the user's experience of technology and will continue to shape our understandings of information behaviors and practices in the decades to come.

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