Lecturers' Interpersonal Information Behavior Research In Academic Contexts

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ABSTRACT

The main objective of the study was to examine how interpersonal information behavior of lecturers in academic contexts. The paper discusses some characteristics of academic contexts and information behavior. Besides, some advantages of social relations between lecturers and their colleagues in university are also analyzed in this paper.

Keywords: Interpersonal information behavior, information behavior, academic context, lecturers.

INTRODUCTION

Information behavior in academic context is one of problems that are concerned by many researchers. There are several approaches to study human information behavior. One of those the social approach, which has often been used to study human information behavior. The cognitive approach focuses on "highlights the influences of social factors on information behavior (Jaeger & Burnett, 2010). In academic contexts, information behavior often entails both work-related and everyday life information behavior (Given, 2002), but many researchers investigating the information activities of scholars, undergraduates, and graduate students. These researches also have focused on work-related aspects using information seeking behavior. Most of them are related to research the purposive behavior in finding information to satisfy their academic information needs.

The social approach allows researchers to have clear explanations about interpersonal sources such as colleagues, students or related people. This paper discusses the relative benefit of using the social approach to examine interpersonal information behavior in academic contexts, especially in setting of university nowadays.

Information behavior and academic contexts

Information behavior refers to those activities a person engages in when identifying their own need for information, determining information sources, searching information in any way and using information retrieval system. Information behavior is understood as our interactions with information that include rising information needs, information seeking and information using. It is "the totality of human behavior in relation to sources and channels of information, including both active and passive information seeking, and information use. Therefore, information behavior includes face-to-face communication with others, as well as the passive

reception of information; for example, "watching television advertisements, without any intention to act on the information given"(Wilson, T.D., 1999).

At Wilson's model of information behavior, it could be seen that there are some components: Context of information need (person in context); activating mechanisms (stress/coping theory, risk/reward theory, social learning theory incl. self-efficacy); Intervening variables (demographic, psychological, role- related/interpersonal, environmental, source characteristics); Information seeking behavior (passive attention, passive search, active search, ongoing search); and information processing and use. Applying this model in research information behavior of lecturers, there is context, which is considered as academic context. This context is a great impact on the lecturers' information need.

In many studies of researchers, information behavior is approached based on the information need of users. Nicholas Belkin called this a knowledge gap (Belkin, 1980). Because of this need, a user starts to seek for information, which eventually ends in satisfaction or non-satisfaction. Researchers did not consider contextual factors. In his revised model of 2000, Wilson added a user's context to his information behavior model, but called it an intervening variable (Wilson, 2000). At that time, researchers acknowledged that users seek within a context, and that a context might have an influence, but as the term intervening variable indicates, it was not something researchers embraced. Still in 2008, Vakkari criticized in his keynote at the ISIC that context remains outside the focus of the researcher's primary theoretical and empirical attention (Vakkari, 2008).

Since then, this situation has slowly changed. Today, researchers accept that information behavior research needs to consider context. Researchers also acknowledge that the earlier models of information behavior do not appropriately reflect its true nature. One of the newest information behavior models, published in 2013 by Andrew Robson and Lyn Robinson, is a good illustration of the complexity of studying information behavior (Robson and Robinson, 2013). It illustrates the importance of knowing about user's context and on taking a user's context into account in information behavior research.

Besides, lecturers' information behavior also has some actions related which include evaluating, organizing and sharing information. These features could be closed with information behavior of lecturers because of some characteristics of academic context where they fulfill their roles.

To understand human information behavior, it is important to know the context of information behavior as well as humans themselves (Fisher and Julien, 2009; Allen and Kim, 2001). While contexts can be conceptualized in different levels and from different angles (Courtright, 2007; Johnson, 2003), most research on information behavior has been in academic research or work-related contexts (Kuhlthau, 1991; Fidel , 1999; McKnight, 2007; MacIntosh-Murray and Choo, 2005), as improving users' performance in such contexts is considered crucial.

Context, as an essential component for understanding information seeking behavior, is receiving increased attention by researchers in this field. Although, more than one decade has passed since this topic was introduced, like information and information needs, many different definitions are given for it. On the other hand, context and situation are often used interchangeably. Some researchers use objectified approaches in their studies and the others believe interpretative approaches to be more appropriate. This article discusses context and its common approaches. The studies focused on this concept are also discussed in brief.

Another term "situation" has at times been used interchangeably with context (**e.g., Allen, 1997**), but researchers tend to define it in contrast with context. **Cool(2001, p. 8**) explains: "contexts are frameworks of meaning, and situations are the dynamic environments within which interpretive processes unfold, become ratified, change, and solidify." For example, the author said that, "when people interact with information resources, an interaction situation is constructed, albeit within some context". Sonnenwald (1999, p. 180) generally agrees: "A context is somehow larger than a situation and may consist of a variety of situations; different contexts may have different possible types of situations." For McCreadie and Rice (1999, p. 58), context is "the larger picture in which the potential user operates; the larger picture in which the information system is developed and operates, and potential information exists" and situation is "the particular set of circumstances from which a need for information arises." Thus, for the purposes of this chapter, context will include those elements that have a more lasting and predictable influence on information practices than situation; situation will be seen as a potential part of context.

Academic contexts are workplace settings that are common in information behavior research. Some author also regarded academic information seeking as work-related information seeking but discovered some overlaps with everyday life information seeking. This process is known as information seeking process. Information seeking is a board term, which involves a set of actions that an individual takes to express his information needs, seek, evaluate and select information, and finally uses it to satisfy his information needs. Various factors affect the information seeking behavior of an individual or a group of individuals, i.e. purpose for information, channels and sources of information and barriers to information. Information seeking is a basic activity of an individual (Wiberley, 1989).

Interpersonal information behavior of lecturers in academic contexts

Every one as well as lecturers have their own information need. They need, seek, search, use and share information by their own specific ways. They have some choices of information sources to seek useful information. One of prominent information sources is personal information source. This information source is established based on the information sharing between this person and other people. They could utilize the other people's available information resources.

In information behavior research, interpersonal information behavior, as they typically assume that information behavior takes place in social interaction and that people can themselves are information providers rather than simply acting as intermediaries. This may contribute to expanding the scope of information behavior research and the role of interpersonal source in academic contexts. (Lee, J.,& Burnett, G. (2015).

Leckie, Pettigrew, and Sylvain (1996) indicated that certain types of professional information, such as medical, legal, and engineering information, plays a crucial role in the continuously changing information needs derived from work-related roles and tasks. Information needs vary with age, occupation, expertise, environment, demand frequency, and task level. Moreover, because the strength of these factors varies, different roles require differing amounts of information to complete the involved tasks.

The information behavior of the lecturers are based on the information needs of their teaching and research activities and information sources, because using information can fulfill the requirements of their teaching and research activities.

Interpersonal behavior is understood is that the behavior and actions that are present in human relationships. The way in which people communicate, and all that this entails, is considered interpersonal behavior. The study of interpersonal behavior in general is a social science that examines the way people interacts with one another.

There are some researchers who concerned the interpersonal approach in information behavior research of various groups of information users, such as students, researchers, and teachers. A majority of information behavior research conducted in academic contexts has focused on "information seeking" behavior of targeted populations. Although such studies acknowledged the influential roles of people, including faculty members and colleagues, as information sources (Barrett, 2005; Catalano, 2013; George et al., 2006), that role was typically limited to intermediaries who simply assisted individuals' information seeking behaviors.

One of those is Given's research. Given (2002) uses in-depth qualitative interviews to explore the information seeking behavior of 25 mature undergraduates at one Canadian university. The results include the role of social and cultural factors in information seeking behavior.

Meho and Tibbo (2003) noted that social science faculty members studying stateless nations frequently consult with interpersonal sources such as friends or colleagues in the information seeking process.

Barrett (2005) examined the information seeking behavior of humanities graduate students in order to improve library services and found that respondents consult with other people to find written materials.

In addition, George et al. (2006) reported the significant influence of people on information seeking of graduate students. As a result, many previous information behavior studies in academic contexts have tended to draw similar conclusions or implications, highlighting the necessity of increasing individuals' information literacy skills.

In workplace and everyday life contexts, many scholars have perceived the role of interpersonal sources as information providers (for example, Agosto & Hughes-Hassell, 2005; Jaeger & Burnett, 2010; Julien & Michels, 2000; Xu, Tan, & Yang, 2006). For example, in everyday life settings, Julien and Michels (2000) found that overall, more than 40% of respondents considered human sources as the most ideal in both work-related and personal situations. Agosto and Hughes-Hassell (2005) examined the everyday life information seeking of urban young adults. Their participants considered people as their main source of information. On the one hand, in organizational settings, some scholars like Xu, Tan, and Yang (2006) and Miller and Jablin (1991) viewed people as an information provider. For instance, Xu et al. (2006) proposed a model of interpersonal seeking behavior, and Miller and Jablin (1991) examined the newcomers' information seeking behaviors from other employees in an organization. In addition, several studies that investigated information behavior in mentoring have relied on an assumption that people are a direct source of information (Ostroff & Kozlowski, 1993).

It is clear that interpersonal factor impacts on some phases of information behavior. One of these is phase of choosing information sources. Information sources for lecturers come in many different forms. Preferred sources include: personal collection, Internet resources, academic libraries, colleagues and friends, professional organizations, etc. ... Before lecturers begin to seek information to solve their problems, they have tendencies to use familiar

information sources, such as their own personal collection, academic libraries, and even colleagues. It took at least the time to acquire and other criteria. Then, colleagues are usually become another best choice for them.

By using an informal interview, most lecturers confirmed that they used to ask their colleagues to satisfy their information need. The results are that they always have relevant information that they need. One reason for this is that lecturers know exactly who could help them to acquire relevant information. Besides, these colleagues also provide them advices to seek information in where. In this relationship, lecturers would contact other lecturers to get information or materials that they need. Even, they also hope their colleagues to buy at bookstores or make a copy for them if necessary. To briefly, interpersonal relation between lecturers and their colleagues helps lecturers satisfy their information need as well as impact on their information behavior. In this context, the role of interpersonal sources is not only as intermediaries, but also as information providers for lecturers.

As an intermediary, interpersonal source provide advice with lecturers where to seek, how to seek or even how to organize information. Those advices are their experiences when they need, seek and use information. Moreover, colleagues also are information providers for lecturers. In fact, lecturers often have their own collection. In some cases, they are willing to share their collection to other lecturers by many various ways, such as having a seminar, making a copy, workshop, and so on. In the other hand, information behavior takes place in social interaction and that people can themselves be information providers rather than simply acting as intermediaries.

Social relation of lecturers with other people brings some benefits for their information behavior. First of all, the lecturers could take advantages these relations to seek information that they need. For example, they can borrow the books or ask for finding other suitable information sources. In some cases, they ask for buying books at foreign bookstores. So, these relations help them have suitable materials or information by widening the information resources.

Secondly, the next benefit that this social relation brings is saving the lecturers' time for seeking information. Clearly speaking, colleagues are also information users who know the most suitable information sources. Therefore, it is quickly for lecturers to find professional information. Moreover, the lecturers could have corporation among other lecturers in seeking information.

However, there are some differences in information behavior among information users. Lecturers are one of them in which. In academic context, lecturers' information behavior also has characteristics. They have their information need related their role of teaching and research. In that context, academic library plays the role for providing, guiding and serving the lecturers' information need. Therefore, academic libraries must understand the information needs of lecturers with the aim of meeting those needs. Based on those results, academic libraries could provide better services, quality information, and improve collection development practices. Therefore, it is necessary to found the information seeking activities of information users in general, of lecturers in particular.

CONCLUSION

This study explored the information behavior, information needs and information use of lecturers in academic contexts. There are some information sources that they prefer, in which; interpersonal relations bring some impacts on their information behavior. To sum up, information is a valuable resource of today's information society. There are many critical activities related to seek, organize, use, and recreate information. For lecturers, information behavior plays the important role for theirscientific research and teaching activities.

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