ASIS&T ANNUAL MEETING PRE-CONFERENCE ACTIVITIES

Evolving and Emerging Research Methods: 2012 ASIS&T SIG/USE Symposium

by Lorri Mon and Jeanine Williamson

EDITOR’S SUMMARY

SIG/USE celebrated members’ work and achievements in research methods at the 2012 ASIS&T Annual Meeting through a keynote speech, brief talks and awards. In her opening talk, professor Lisa Given challenged attendees to expand research methods to engage participants more fully, include qualitative findings and explore information behavior in nontraditional media. The topics of two-minute lightning talks ranged from research techniques for exploring young people’s information behavior to imaging brain activity related to relevance decisions. Others addressed incorporating mobile technologies in research, collaborative search, direct interaction with participants in contrast with background server log checks and working with data collections from social Q&A sites. Following the talks, small group discussions further explored topics such as cognitive approaches, content analysis and text analytics and usability. The symposium wound to a close with the 2011 Elfreda A. Chatman Research Award presentation on information strategies of the homeless and a preview of the 2012 proposed study on refugees’ information seeking. Additional awards were presented for best paper and poster to support travel and further presentations. Pertti Vakkari was recognized for outstanding contributions to information behavior research and was inducted into the SIG/USE Academy of Fellows.

KEYWORDS

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A SIS&T Special Interest Group/Information Needs, Seeking and Use (SIG/USE) has a rich tradition of exploring new ways of information sharing, from experimenting with a fishbowl dialogue on the history of information behavior research to [1] extending conversations at the SIG/USE Symposium into the virtual world of Second Life [2]. At ASIS&T’s 75th Anniversary Annual Meeting in Baltimore, the SIG/USE Symposium launched a series of lightning talks on innovative research approaches and evolving and emerging research methods.

Lisa Given on New Research Methods

With more than 60 researchers in attendance, Dr. Lisa Given of Charles Sturt University, Australia, delivered a keynote presentation on new research methods incorporating photography, participant-driven methods and arts-based approaches. Given called for researchers to integrate methods that capture participants’ experiences in situ – holistic and multisensory approaches engaging participants directly and actively in the research through techniques such as autoethnography, participatory mapping and photovoice, which uses snapshots taken by research subjects as a visual record of information-related activities.

Given identified two major challenges confronting researchers in information behavior, seeking and use: first, how we see the scope and boundaries of information behavior, such as in considering the boundary areas of retrieval in relationship to information behavior research, and second, how information behavior can be represented in context.

Arguing that “our writing tends to be reductionist, functional, traditional and text heavy” or primarily text focused, Given challenged authors and journal editorial board members to push back for inclusion of qualitative...
findings sections and for exploration of non-traditional representations in research such as poetry, dramatic scripts and imagery. Given also encouraged researchers to “push the writing envelope” by writing in other disciplines, and she argued for the need to produce more methodology papers.

Lightning Talks

With the challenge set by Given, SIG/USE Symposium participants responded by delivering two-minute lightning talks on new and emerging research methods (for lightning talk abstracts and photos from the symposium, see http://siguse.wordpress.com/2012/10/11/sig-use-12th-annual-research-symposium/). These brief presentations sought to push the boundaries of research in information behavior, seeking and use. Chirag Shah, assistant professor at Rutgers University, moderated two rounds of lightning talks, equipped with a digital klaxon to keep everyone in line, on time and on track. Topics for the lightning talks ranged across a wide spectrum of research approaches, from Foucauldian discourse analysis of rules, norms and power relations to magnetic resonance imaging for revealing neural processes in information seeking and evaluation.

Several researchers discussed new methods of working with youth. Eric Meyers, assistant professor at University of British Columbia, captured video of young people at play in virtual worlds using machinima for analysis of verbal and non-verbal information interactions (Using Machinima to Study Information Exchange in Children’s Virtual Worlds). Philip Fawcett of Microsoft Research worked with professor Karen Fisher of University of Washington (Teen Design Days: Lightning and Enlightening) to explore young people’s information behaviors as creators, remixers and intermediaries for both information and technologies via social network mapping tools and techniques such as storytelling, images, dramatic play, smartphones and other technology tools. Kyungwon Koh, assistant professor at Oklahoma State University, adapted Dervin’s Sense-Making to group interviewing in studying young people and their experiences and perceptions of information activities (Exploratory Application of Dervin’s Sense-Making Methodology to Group Interviewing With Teenagers).

Researchers traversed the boundary areas of search, retrieval and relevance mentioned in Given’s keynote speech. Jacek Gwizdka of Rutgers University discussed neuro-information science in seeking to determine whether there are fundamental neural processes associated with relevance decisions by using techniques such as electroencephalography (EEG) and functional magnetic resonance imaging (fMRI) (Peeking Inside a Searcher’s Brain: Prospects for Neuro-Information Science). Xiaojun (Jenny) Yuan, assistant professor at University at Albany, SUNY, explored the possibility of retrieval systems accepting input from speech and gestures via a “wizard of Oz” research method with a hidden observer person interpreting and typing information into an interface (Wizard of Oz Techniques).

Chirag Shah extended the exploration of information search and retrieval into collaborative searching and seeking, discussing research in information seeking within both search engines and question-answering online communities (Distributed Searching, United Searchers: Investigating Social and Collaborative Aspects of Information Seeking). Rong Tang of Simmons College examined another aspect of collaboration activity, engagement and problem-solving in the shared use of a Microsoft Surface Table at the Harvard University Library (Towards a Multi-Phased and Multi-Methods Usability Assessment of Microsoft Surface Table (SUR40) in Libraries).

University of North Texas professor Linda Schamber brought mobile technologies and social media into the mix, with considerations of how these new technologies impact information evaluation behaviors and perceptions of credibility (User Information Evaluation Behavior). Lorri Mon, associate professor at Florida State University, discussed research into social media with doctoral student Jisue Lee on the Military Suicide Research Consortium (http://msrc.fsu.edu) with exploration of influence, reach, content, sentiment and self-presentation in information revealed and concealed, suggesting as well that “rulebreaking” in social media highlights areas where information sharing needs are not being met (Information Behavior and Information Seeking Research in New Virtual Environments).

Assistant professor Sanghee Oh of Florida State University described challenges of extracting knowledge from a large-scale data collection through content analysis and text mining in the online social question-and-answer community site of Yahoo! Answers (Understanding Health
Information Behaviors in Social Q&A: Using the Research Methods of Content Analysis and Text Mining.

Presenters discussed a variety of methods for actively engaging participants in the research. Soo Young Rieh, associate professor at the University of Michigan, used Mihaly Csikszentmihalyi’s Experience Sampling Method [3] in prompting users to answer questions about their information behaviors and online activities at random points throughout the day, which could integrate online and mobile technologies into the prompting and reporting process (Using the Experience Sampling Method (ESM) in Human Information Behavior Research). Ji Yeon Yang, a doctoral student at the University of Michigan, described using the experience sampling and event sampling with a web-based diary survey method in workplace research tracking advice-receiving and advice-providing (Diary Method: Data Collection and Analysis Strategies). Beth St. Jean, assistant professor at the University of Maryland, integrated card sorting into research on diabetes-related information seeking for people with type-2 diabetes (Developing a Card-Sorting Technique for Use in Information Behavior Research). Shelagh Genuis, postdoctoral research fellow at University of Alberta (Capacity Building through Photovoice), and Rachel Magee, a Drexel University doctoral student (Expressive Methods), spoke about methods such as photovoice, in which the research participants take pictures in a visual record of events and other active approaches to engaging participants in visual record-keeping such as expressive artwork.

Researchers also described more unobtrusive research methods for examining the artifacts of user-generated data in written works, online comments and digital server logs. Sean Goggins, assistant professor at Drexel University, spoke about research with Christopher Mascaro using electronic trace data such as server logs as part of studying information behavior in technologically-mediated online groups and comparing online groups with each other and with face-to-face groups (Group Informatics). Jen Pecskie, assistant professor of Wayne State University, described research by Nadine Desrochers, Diane Rasmussen Neal and Caroline Whippey on text and subtext in user comments and tags in YouTube, Blogger, Flickr and Twitter. (why am I crying?!.’)<3. Pecskie also presented on her research with Nadine Desrochers (Reading the Writing on the Wall, Page, Book, Site: Using Paratext to Study Writers and Readers’ Informational Habits), discussing paratext (textual and visual cues), peritext (illustrations and prefaces) and epitext (related material such as metadata, author interviews and reviews of a work).

Several researchers presented on methods involving language in content or discourse analysis. Barbara Wildemuth of the University of North Carolina at Chapel Hill re-coded a dataset using gerunds in initial coding to reveal activities and processes involved in what people do (Initial Coding using Gerunds: Keeping the Focus on Processes). Leanne Bowler, assistant professor at the University of Pittsburgh, used visual metaphors to reveal metacognition around information behavior in the knowledge and beliefs of participants about their own memories, also referred to as “metamemory” (Using Visual Metaphors to Reveal Metacognition in the Context of Information-Seeking). Michael Olsson of the University of Technology in Sydney, Australia examined power, rules and norms expressed in language (Foucault Power/Knowledge and Critical Discourse Analysis).

Due to hurricane Sandy, which was bearing down on the Eastern seaboard at the time of the ASIS&T SIG/USE Symposium and hit the area the following day, some of the researchers whose lightning talks had been accepted were unable to travel and speak at the session. The additional accepted talks had included a variety of approaches in exploring information behavior and information seeking. From Emporia State University, Ann L. O’Neill, Sarah W. Sutton, doctoral student Samia Azzouz and masters student Sara de Caro had planned to discuss online research in a social networking site (Use of a Social Networking Site for Health Information about Fibromyalgia). Sanda Erdelez of the University of Missouri had planned to discuss an instrument developed to measure tendencies to engage in opportunistic information encountering, with activities such as noticing, stopping, examining, capturing and returning to the original search task (Development of a Scale to Measure Individual Differences in Opportunistic Discovery of Information). Kendra Albright of the University of South Carolina would have described her work with psychodynamic theory and projective tests in revealing underlying thoughts and inner feelings relevant
to information behavior (Investigating the Role of Unconscious Influences in Information Behavior Using Projective Techniques). A cancelled talk by Tiffany Veinot of University of Michigan would have focused on a “whole family methodology” of family group interviews and home tours in exploring family group networks and information activities (Making the ‘Meso’ Visible: Methods for Investigating Information Behavior in Families and Communities).

**Breakout Sessions: Small Group Discussions**

Following the lightning talk rounds, SIG/USE Symposium participants joined small groups to engage in discussions on research methods such as cognitive approaches, social approaches, content analysis and textual analytics, interviewing, diaries, critical approaches, usability and human/computer interaction (HCI), grounded theory approaches and online/virtual research techniques. Members from each group reported out after the discussions on notable issues and challenges that had emerged around the research methods in the small groups. For example, Microsoft researcher Phil Fawcett discussed the diary group’s challenge to interpret visual as well as textual data and to deal with stories, music, video, drawings and SMS text messages. Sanghee Oh, assistant professor at Florida State University, noted that the textual analytics group identified a need “not just to stick with the text but to expand the scope to other objects created by users.”

Rong Tang of Simmons College reported from the cognitive approaches group on issues of mental models and both group and individual cognition in the investigation of information processing in the mind. Shuyuan Ho, assistant professor at Florida State University, shared two key observations from the usability and HCI discussion group: 1) paired users might be preferable to a solitary individual in implementing think-aloud techniques, since this gives the research participant a more natural sense of talking to another person and 2) eye tracking can be deceptive in that looking at something is not necessarily equivalent to thinking about it.

From the critical approaches group, Maria Souden, postdoctoral research fellow at University College Dublin, spoke of the need to be more critical about our discipline, our assumptions as researchers and our own results. Gary Burnett of Florida State University summarized for the content analysis group noting the need for careful definitions, as there can be slippage from intention in the encoding of language within documents and texts.

Lynn Westbrook of University of Texas at Austin of the online and virtual methods group noted the issue in research approaches of respect for the authenticity of online worlds. After being challenged to sum up the online and virtual methods group’s discussion in just one sentence, Westbrook replied with a haiku:

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shadow truth cuts hearts
shoving in old methods
re-create our space.
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Westbrook recited a limerick to complete her summary:

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We step into giant’s land
where truth is really just sand
getting online hugs
and working out bugs
holding a virtual hand.
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**2012 SIG/USE Travel and Research Awards**

At the conclusion of the SIG/USE Symposium, awards chair Gary Burnett presented the results of the 2012 ASIS&T SIG/USE awards for travel and research (for more information, see http://siguse.wordpress.com/awards/). The 2012 SIG/USE Student Travel Award of $500 to help support student travel to the ASIS&T Annual Meeting went to Laura Christopherson, doctoral student at the University of North Carolina at Chapel Hill, whose research is in the area of social media and games. Roberto González-Ibáñez, doctoral student at Rutgers University, received $200 for the 2012 Interdisciplinary Travel Award to support travel to alternative conference venues for presenting research. González-Ibáñez studies collaborative searching and computer-mediated communication.

The 2012 SIG/USE Best Behavior Conference Paper of $200 was given to University of Maryland researchers June Ahn, Mega Subramaniam, Kenneth R. Fleischmann, Amanda Waugh, Greg Walsh and Allison Druin, who studied youth as online storytellers and information creators in “Youth Identities as Remi...
Strategies, and Values” [4]. The paper examined the remix as an emerging information practice among youth. This award honors the best paper presented on information behavior at the ASIS&T Annual Meeting.

University of Michigan researchers Ji Yeon Yang and Soo Young Rieh received the 2012 SIG/USE Best Conference Poster Award of $200 for their research using diaries and interviews to examine information seeking and advice provision in the workplace (Dual Roles in Information Mediation at Work: Analysis of Advice-Receiving and Advice-Providing Diary Surveys). The award honors the best poster presented at the ASIS&T Annual Meeting for the area of information behavior, broadly defined as focusing on how people construct, need, seek, manage, give and use information in different contexts.

The 2012 ASIS&T SIG/USE Elfreda A. Chatman Research Award of $1,000 went to Joung Hwa “Joy” Koo, Yong Wan Cho and Melissa Gross of Florida State University to support their research on information seeking practices of North Korean refugees (Is Ignorance Really Bliss? Understanding the Role of Information-Seeking in Coping with Severe Traumatic Stress Among Refugees). The award supports and provides funding for proposed research in information behavior, and the winning researchers return to the ASIS&T SIG/USE Symposium the following year to give a presentation on the results of their research.

Pertti Vakkari of the University of Tampere in Finland was named the 2012 ASIS&T SIG/USE Award Winner for Outstanding Contributions to Information Behavior Research, receiving a $500 award and induction into the ASIS&T SIG/USE Academy of Fellows. This award honors scholars who have, over a period of time, contributed in an outstanding way to the development of the information behavior research field. Vakkari’s research on task-based information searching and information-seeking strategies has made significant contributions to the field of information behavior research, bridging the interactive information retrieval and information behavior fields, and in recent research he has explored the impact of technology use in public libraries in Europe. Vakkari’s international impact on the field of information behavior, seeking and use is also seen in his efforts toward launching and supporting two important conferences in the field, CoLIS and ISIC: Information Behavior in Context.

SIG/USE Elfreda A. Chatman Research Award Presentations

The SIG/USE Symposium concluded with two research presentations delivered by the 2011 and 2012 Elfreda A. Chatman Research Award winners. This year’s winner Joung Hwa “Joy” Koo delivered a five-minute presentation on her proposed research, followed by 2011 Chatman Award winner Julie Hersberger with a 20-minute presentation on research completed over the past year.

Joy Koo, a doctoral student at Florida State University, spoke first about her proposed research with Yong Wan Cho and Melissa Gross (Is Ignorance Really Bliss? Understanding the Role of Information-Seeking in Coping with Severe Traumatic Stress Among Refugees). In the tradition of Elfreda Chatman’s work on the information worlds of underrepresented groups, the proposed research follows the information seeking practices of North Korean refugees living in South Korea. The work will focus on the relationship between symptoms of post-traumatic stress disorder (PTSD) and the refugees’ information needs and seeking behaviors.

Julie Hersberger, associate professor of University of North Carolina at Greensboro, the 2011 SIG/USE Elfreda A. Chatman Research Award winner, closed the symposium with a presentation of her award-winning research on information needs and information-seeking strategies of the homeless (A Resilience and Information Behavior Model: Understanding Information Roles and Use Outcomes in Homeless Populations). Hersberger found that catalysts for the need to be resilient could include disasters as well as life events such as illness or job loss. Those among the homeless that she described as functioning with high affect and low cognition tended to demonstrate denial, a low sense of self-efficacy and an “external locus of control” in perceiving themselves as not in control of their own destiny [5]. Among the homeless that Hersberger spoke with, she observed that “nobody thought that they were not resilient,” and those who were chronically homeless believed themselves to be “resilient because they were not dead.” Hersberger also commented on an observed phenomenon of “resilience by proxy” in which homeless individuals felt that they needed to be resilient for someone else. Hersberger’s work may lead to ways for performing assessments that may be useful in tailoring information services to individual needs.
The 2012 SIG/USE Symposium in Baltimore was the culmination of the efforts of symposium organizer Jeanine Williamson, University of Tennessee, along with planning committee members Karen Fisher, University of Washington; Lisa Given, Charles Sturt University, Australia; Lorri Mon, Florida State University; Soo Young Rieh, University of Michigan; Chirag Shah, Rutgers University; Maria Souden, University College Dublin, Ireland; Rong Tang, Simmons College; Barbara Wildemuth, University of North Carolina at Chapel Hill; Bo Xie, University of Texas; and Guo Zhang, Indiana University. We look forward to the 2013 ASIS&T SIG/USE Symposium in Montreal, Canada.

Resources Mentioned in the Article


