SIG/USE Research Symposium
Context in Information Behavior Research
by Lu Xiao, Kyung-Sun Kim, Rong Tang, Lisa Given, Denise E. Agosto, Gary Burnett and Amanda Waugh

2014 Annual Meeting Coverage

ASIS&T SIG/USE held its 14th Annual Research Symposium at the ASIS&T Annual Meeting in Seattle on November 1, 2014. The symposium entitled Context in Information Behavior Research drew more than 50 information behavior researchers, professionals, students and others interested in exploring the impact of contextual factors on information behavior. It featured a keynote address by the University of Kentucky’s J. David Johnson (http://comm.uky.edu/jdjohnson/; email: jdj<at>email.uky.edu), followed by a series of 14 lightning talks, world café group discussions and the presentation of the SIG/USE awards.

The 2014 SIG/USE symposium planning committee was co-chaired by Lu Xiao, University of Western Ontario, and Kyung-Sun “Sunny” Kim, University of Wisconsin-Madison. Committee members included Nicole A. Cooke, University of Illinois at Urbana-Champaign; Nicole Gaston, Open Polytechnic of New Zealand; Amelia Gibson, University of North Carolina at Chapel Hill; Sei-Ching Joanna Sin, Nanyang Technological University; Sue Yeon Syn, Catholic University of America; and Pertti Vakkari, University of Tampere. Amanda Waugh was the official Tweeter and storifyer for the event. The committee worked with SIG/USE chair Rong Tang, chair-elect Lisa Given and immediate past chair Denise Agosto in planning the event.
The symposium began with opening remarks by Rong Tang. Then, Sunny Kim introduced the symposium committee and the keynote speaker.

**Keynote Address**

*J. David Johnson*, professor in the College of Communications and Information Studies at the University of Kentucky, delivered the keynote address. In *Context: Silos, Boundary Spanning and Opportunities*, Johnson pointed out that the more people operate outside the often narrow silos of academe and span boundaries, the more they will come to appreciate the opportunities for contextual inquiry. Examining information seeking across a wide array of contexts broadens our understanding of it and helps identify the active ingredients serving as the essential foundations of more sophisticated contingency explanations. Many tools, such as hierarchical linear models and meta-analysis, are available for such contextual inquiry. Johnson emphasized the value of contingency approaches that move beyond the enumeration of factors in a situation to specify key situational factors that produce predictable states of information seeking. He encouraged more research with such approaches to investigate contextual elements that shape human information behavior.

The next portion of the symposium featured 14 juried lightning talks. The first round of talks had a theoretical/conceptual focus to studying information-seeking context in general, and the second round covered studies addressing methodological issues as well as context-related empirical studies.

Through a review of current research on information behavior, *Kyungwon Koh, Ellen L. Rubenstein* and *Kelvin White*, University of Oklahoma, tried to identify the ways in which information behavior researchers address the implications and potential impact of their results – the “so what?” question. They concluded that context plays a significant role in generating study findings and implications. Taking Iversen’s 1991 perspective on context [1], *Pertti Vakkari*, University of Tempere, suggested that one can conceptualize context as various levels of social reality. He explained how one can conduct a study of the context from the individual level to organizational level through a multi-level contextual analysis.

One theme that emerged from the lightning talks is that “time” is an underexplored contextual factor in information behavior research. *Anita Crescenzi*, University of North Carolina at Chapel Hill, reviewed how time can be incorporated in information-searching and -seeking models, highlighting time as a contextual factor in studies of information behavior. *Diana Ascher*, University of California, Los Angeles, proposed a framework to bring together two important but under-examined contextual aspects of information behavior – time and cultural orientation. *Yan Zhang*, University of Texas at Austin, presented a study examining the impact of time in health information seeking.

Other talks covered a wide range of topics related to the impact of context. *Yuanyuan Feng* and *Denise E. Agosto*, Drexel University, presented a pilot study that examined how context affects people’s experience and behavior, specifically with respect to mobile information overload. *Carol Landry*, University of Washington, presented a qualitative study that investigated the impact of emotion and time pressure on the information behavior of homebuyers (as examples of high stakes decision makers). *Sue Yeon Syn*, Catholic University of America, conducted a survey study about Facebook users’ information-seeking and information-providing behaviors in health information situations. Her results show that such behavior varies in different contexts. Through an interview study, *Chi Young Oh* and *Brian Butler*, University of Maryland, College Park, explored the impact of context in international students’ information behaviors when they are settling in an unfamiliar environment.
related to theoretical/conceptual and methodological issues in studying context in human information behavior research. The attendees of a table discussed one question in the first 20 minutes, then switched to a different table (if they chose to do so) to discuss the question at that table for another 20 minutes. At least one attendee stayed at the same table during the switch as the table host to debrief what was discussed to the people who joined the table later. Also, a large paper tablecloth was provided at each table for the attendees to put down notes during the discussion (Figure 2). After the 40 minutes of discussions, the table host reported the main issues discussed at the table (Figure 3). Issues discussed are summarized below.

Theoretical/Conceptual Issues. Three of the six tables focused on the concept/theory-related discussion questions: 1) How would we define context? What are the main dimensions of context? 2) What types of context exist? What research gaps exist in studying context in human information behavior research? 3) Which theories/frameworks can we apply to study context in human information behavior research? And why?

World Café Session

After a short break from the lightning talks, SIG/USE symposium co-chair Lu Xiao led the audience in a world café session to discuss six questions related to theoretical/conceptual and methodological issues in studying context in human information behavior research. The attendees of a table discussed one question in the first 20 minutes, then switched to a different table (if they chose to do so) to discuss the question at that table for another 20 minutes. At least one attendee stayed at the same table during the switch as the table host to debrief what was discussed to the people who joined the table later. Also, a large paper tablecloth was provided at each table for the attendees to put down notes during the discussion (Figure 2). After the 40 minutes of discussions, the table host reported the main issues discussed at the table (Figure 3). Issues discussed are summarized below.

Theoretical/Conceptual Issues. Three of the six tables focused on the concept/theory-related discussion questions: 1) How would we define context? What are the main dimensions of context? 2) What types of context exist? What research gaps exist in studying context in human information behavior research? 3) Which theories/frameworks can we apply to study context in human information behavior research? And why?
Applying various theories and methods, we can examine the context more systematically. Studies using stage-based approaches, mixed methods or meta-analyses would help us better understand information behavior in context. Examining and comparing such behaviors in a static moment in time vs. in a lengthy period of time that keeps changing would also shed light on the dynamic relationships between the user and the context.

Elfreda A. Chatman Research Award Presentations

Following the world café discussion session, 2013 SIG/USE Elfreda A. Chatman Research Award winner Waseem Afzal presented his research project. “Information Needs: A Conceptualization, Operationalization and Empirical Validation” aimed to conceptualize, operationalize and empirically validate the construct of information needs, using a mixed methods approach to enumerate and test the core concepts embedded within the construct.

2014 SIG/USE Research and Travel Awards

Awards committee co-chairs Gary Burnett and Heather O’Brien presented this year’s winning submissions at the symposium and reminded the audience to consider applying for the 2015 awards competition. More information about the SIG/USE awards is located at http://siguse.wordpress.com/awards/

The 2014 Best Information Behavior Conference Paper Award went to Wan-Ching Wu and Diane Kelly, University of North Carolina at Chapel Hill, for “Online Search Stopping Behaviors: An Investigation of Query Abandonment and Task Stopping.” Their paper investigates the factors that influence people’s search-stopping behaviors during online information search. The findings of their study show that participants made query abandonment decisions based on the properties of search results, of queries and of search tasks. Their decisions to stop a task were influenced by the content they had examined, the goals they wished to achieve, the subjective perceptions they felt and the study constraints they faced.

Leslie Thomson, University of North Carolina at Chapel Hill, received the 2014 Best Information Behavior Conference Poster Award for “When PIM Goes Public: A Case Study of OrganizedLikeJen.” The poster examines the personal information management system of an informal information provider.
This study identifies an underexplored research area – information “fixation” outside of the specific area of information. This year an additional “Certificate of Merit” was given to Kyungwon Koh, Ellen Rubenstein and Kelvin White for “Implications and Potential Impacts of Information Behavior Research.” In their pilot study, the authors explored ways that information behavior researchers address implications and the potential impact of their study results.

The 2014 Elfreda A. Chatman Research Proposal Award went to Diane Sonnenwald, University of Copenhagen, for “Towards a Theory of Human-Rare Book Information Behavior.” In this study, Sonnenwald will explore how individuals interact with rare historic books with the intention to develop a theory about such interactions. Sonnenwald will present the results of the research at the 2015 SIG/USE Research Symposium in St. Louis, Missouri.

Doctoral candidate Rebekah Willson, Charles Sturt University, received the 2014 SIG/USE Student Travel Award for her proposal entitled “Information in Transition: Examining Information Behavior of University Faculty as They Transition in Academe.” Her proposal focuses on the information behaviors of new tenure-track faculty members, specifically during the transition period from doctoral studies to faculty positions. To explore their information practices, Willson is using both qualitative interviews and content analysis of materials such as blogs, relevant policy documents and research support materials.

Eric Meyers, University of British Columbia, received the Interdisciplinary Travel Award to attend the American Educational Research Association (AERA) in Chicago in April 2015.

Lastly, Gary Marchionini, University of North Carolina at Chapel Hill, received the 2014 SIG/USE Outstanding Contributions to Information Behavior Research award. The award was given during the SIG/USE Annual Business Meeting. Marchionini’s work on information interaction and human-centered computing has made significant contributions to the field of information behavior research, incorporating understanding of the information seeking process, user search behavior and usability principles to the development of interactive information retrieval system interfaces. His 1995 book Information Seeking in Electronic Environments has had a remarkable influence on information behavior research, especially with the presentation of information-seeking process and sub-process models. Over the years, Marchionini’s numerous research and scholarly publications related to interfaces that support information seeking and information retrieval, usability of personal health records, multimedia browsing strategies and digital libraries have played an important role in advancing information behavior research. Marchionini’s international impact on the information behavior, seeking and use field is also seen in his work as the editor for the Morgan-Claypool Synthesis Series of lectures/monographs on information concepts, retrieval and services. In receiving the 2014 Outstanding Contributions to Information Behavior Award, Marchionini joins the SIG/USE Academy of Fellows. The full list of Fellows can be found online at http://siguse.wordpress.com/academy-of-fellows/.

Symposium Conclusion and Wrap-Up

Incoming SIG/USE chair Lisa Given offered closing remarks for the 2014 SIG/USE Research Symposium. She commented on the excitement and engagement of symposium attendees, as well as the innovative context concepts and research that were presented during the lightning talks and by the keynote speaker. Given welcomed attendees to the opening of the ASIS&T conference itself, which included several panels sponsored by SIG/USE. She also made an open call for ideas and volunteers for the 2015 SIG/USE Research Symposium, which was organized at the SIG/USE Business Meeting held during the ASIS&T Conference. Details about the 2015 symposium will be posted on the SIG/USE website in the coming months by the incoming co-chairs of the symposium – Rebekah Willson, Charles Sturt University; Devon Greyson, University of British Columbia; and Amelia Gibson, University of North Carolina at Chapel Hill.


Acknowledgement

Photos were taken by Rong Tang and EunYoung Yoo-Lee.

Reference