The Evolution of Information Behavior Research: Looking Back to See the Future

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ABSTRACT
This panel will examine past, present and future trends for one of the central bodies of research within information science – human information behavior (HIB). Beginning with a brief history of the settings, populations, methodologies, theories and other key features of HIB research, the panel will then explore possibilities for the future. Attendees will engage in an interactive ‘working session’ exploring the key research questions being addressed (or that should be addressed) in HIB research, as well as trends in methods and techniques that will inform future work. The panelists have received numerous grants for research on human information behavior, have published widely on the topic, and have served as research leaders within the discipline. They are all very engaging speakers, having presented at numerous international conferences and symposia. These panelists are well-placed to facilitate an engaging discussion of trends in this important research area of the discipline.

Keywords
Human Information Behavior; Research Methodologies; Research Methods; Participants; Theoretical Frameworks; History; Research Settings; Information Practices

INTRODUCTION
In the last few decades, research studies exploring human information behavior (HIB) have increased in number, substantially, as have the range and diversity of topics, settings and participant groups explored. Bibliometric studies and content analyses have documented the rise in HIB research (e.g., Åström 2007; Järvelin and Vakkari 1990; Julien et al., 2011), while other reviews point to the breadth and depth of this rich area of research (e.g., Bates 2010). New technologies, new social policies, new research methodologies, and other factors have shaped the evolution of HIB research in exciting ways. Some of these trends are documented in review articles (e.g., Caidi, Allard & Quirke, 2010; Davenport, 2010; Fisher and Julien, 2009) and monographs (e.g., Case 2012; Fisher et al. 2005), which outline many of the key milestones in information behavior research.

However, what is less clear is where HIB research is going in the future. As the concepts, theory and terminology that define this area continue to emerge and be debated (including discussions of information seeking, information needs, information practices, etc.), there is little doubt that studies of HIB are at the core of research in the library and information science (LIS) discipline. Indeed, just as the American Society for Information Science and Technology prepares to celebrate its 75th anniversary, a recent study has identified HIB as a key area that is establishing itself as a fourth major branch of research alongside library science, information science and bibliometrics/scientometrics (Milojević, et al., 2011). The panel will discuss key issues in the evolution of HIB over time, with a focus on current trends and future possibilities.

PANEL OVERVIEW
This panel will explore the evolution of HIB research, to date, and serve as a platform for an interactive discussion of new directions for the future. The panel will first provide an overview of the state of HIB research in three key areas: 1) a contextual overview, which will examine the places, spaces and people that scholars have studied over the years; and, 2) a practice overview, which will explore the theories, methodologies and methods used in these studies; and 3) an emerging trends overview. Finally, the panel will engage the audience in an interactive activity designed to gaze into the future of HIB research.

In terms of structure, the panel will begin with three, short (15 minute) presentations, followed by an interactive discussion with audience members. The panel presentations will include:

Panel Presentation #1 – Dr. Donald Case (15 minutes)

This panel presentation will provide an overview of trends in information behavior research over the past 70 years, including how the HIB research context has been defined – i.e., topics explored in HIB investigations; research settings; user groups sampled, and so forth. In particular the evolution of HIB research on health-related topics will serve as an example of recent trends.

Dr. Case is Professor of Information Studies at the University of Kentucky College of Communication and Information Studies since 1994, and was Director of the School of Library and Information Science for three years. Case’s book, “Looking for Information: A Survey of Research on Information Seeking, Needs, and Behavior”

Panel Presentation #2 – Dr. Heidi Julien (15 minutes)

This panel presentation will provide an overview of historical trends in HIB research practices – i.e., the bodies of theory used; the methods/methodologies employed; and, interdisciplinarity.

Dr. Julien is Professor & Director of The University of Alabama School of Library and Information Studies. She has examined the information behavior literature in detail through her multiple content analyses of publications in the area. Her own contributions have focused on adolescents’ career decision-making, affective aspects of HIB, and information literacy. She is a prolific author and presenter in HIB, is past president of the Canadian Association for Information Science and former editor of the Canadian Journal of Information and Library Science. Currently she serves on the editorial boards of Library and Information Science Research, as well as Cosmopolitan Civil Societies.

Panel Presentation #3 – Dr. Lisa M. Given (15 minutes)

This panel presentation will explore recent trends in HIB research to set the stage for gazing into the future. This will include discussions of holistic approaches to understanding HIB (e.g., affect; embodiment), interdisciplinary and team-based research, emergent research methods (e.g., arts-based approaches), and web 2.0 research tools and practices.

Dr. Given is Professor of Information Studies at the School of Information Studies, Charles Sturt University, Australia. She has published more than 80 books, chapters, journal articles and other scholarly works, including results of several information behavior studies. A former Director of the International Institute for Qualitative Methodology, her research examines various populations (seniors, undergraduates, etc.) and settings (e.g., health information; virtual spaces). She is editor of The Sage Encyclopedia of Qualitative Research Methods and co-editor (with Dr. Gloria Leckie and John Buschman) of Critical Theory for Library and Information Science: Exploring the Social Across the Disciplines.

Interactive Discussion – Proposed Activities (45 minutes)

After the third panel presentation, the audience will be presented with a series of questions designed to guide the group through a round-table brainstorming activity. The room will be organized into small groups (tables of 8-10 participants) who will be asked to reflect on three key themes: 1) hot topics in HIB research – where will we go next? What should we explore?: 2) new research methods and theories – what will/can HIB research look like in the future?: and 3) new technologies – how will these shape HIB research in the next decade and beyond? The groups will work together for 20 minutes (documenting their result on flip-charts) with 25 minutes to share comments around the room.

CONCLUSION

HIB constitutes one of the central bodies of research in information science. The 75th anniversary of ASIS&T provides an outstanding opportunity to collectively examine our past and shape future work in the area.

REFERENCES


