Information Use and Information Sharing in Marketing: A Diary Study

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ABSTRACT
The study reported in this paper is part of an ongoing research project exploring marketing professionals’ information behavior. A diary study was conducted with seven marketing professionals who contributed a total of 1,198 diary entries during their five working days. This paper presents the results of how marketing professionals use and share information in their daily work activities including report writing, partnership maintenance, competitors’ behavior and performance analysis, and strategic planning. The results show the subsequent use of information obtained and patterns of information sharing occurrence by marketing professionals.

Keywords
Information use, information sharing, diary study, marketing.

INTRODUCTION
Information behavior describes how people need, seek, manage, give and use information in different contexts (Pettigrew, Fidel, & Bruce, 2001, p. 40). In recent years, studies focusing on information needs and seeking within organizational settings and professionals have increased in number (e.g. Alwis, Majid, & Chaudhry, 2006; Ellis & Haugan, 1997; Hertzum & Pejtersen, 2000; Jorosi, 2006; Leckie, Pettigrew, & Sylvain, 1996; Narayanan et al., 1999). However, studies explicitly looking at how work organization, the nature of work tasks, nature of information needed affect information use and information sharing, have still remained scarce. Information use and information sharing are important but understudied of the information behavior dimensions (Sonnenwald, 2006; Wilson 2010); even though some studies discussing these topics may be mentioned.

According to Spink and Cole (2006) who approached information use from the cognitive viewpoint, information use behavior involves incorporating information into an individual’s existing knowledge base. The “real” use of information has been defined in the cognitive sense of use as triggering cognition transformation (Spink & Cole, 2006; Todd, 1999). Savolainen (2006) conceived of information use as a succeeding process of information seeking in which the usefulness of an information source is deemed valuable in order to solve a problem or make sense of a situation. Namely, people’s use of information is based on their acknowledgement of the value of information that is absorbed to solve a problem.

While information use is included in most theories of information behavior, empirical studies have commonly focused more on information needs and information seeking process (Jarvelin & Ingwersen, 2005). Allard, Levine, and Tenopir (2009) employed naturalistic observations and interviews to examine how design engineers and technical professionals in innovative high-tech firms use information in their daily work activities. However, their findings of information usage in the workplace focused on the professionals’ use of accessing channels to information sources. The actual use of obtained information is not reflected in more detail. Less attention has been devoted to how people manage and process the information they find (Bishop, 1999). The present study attempts to understand how marketing professionals deal with acquired information.

Information sharing has been paid inadequate attention by information scientists (Wilson, 2010; Du et al., 2012). As an important component of information behavior, “information sharing is about sharing already acquired information, incorporating both active and explicit and less goal oriented and implicit information exchanges” (Talja, 2006, p. 114). Information sharing is considered to be a complex phenomenon with many dimensions and differs from context to context (Wilson, 2010).

Being viewed as an essential component of collaboration (Sonnenwald, 2006), information sharing has a goal of changing a person’s image of the world and developing a shared working understanding (Sonnenwald, 2006). Workplace studies have taken an interest in how documents are assembled, read, and exchanged within the developing course of practical activities in work environments (Heath,
Marketing professionals face real consequences in applying the information found. Information that is pertinent must be obtained quickly and utilized effectively in order to maintain a leading position in markets (Bennett, 2007). The existing literature on marketing practitioners’ information behavior has more focused on the identification of the types of information needs and preference of information sources. For example, Bennett (2007) surveyed 141 marketing executives and found that 89% of the sample accessed (mainly Internet-based) grey marketing literature and 62% read marketing magazines. Ashill and Jobber’s (2001) findings indicated that marketing managers’ information needs can be defined using six information characteristics including aggregated marketing information, broad scope marketing information, current marketing information, timely marketing information, personal information sources, and impersonal information sources.

Little research has examined the practices of information use and sharing among marketing professionals. The study reported in this paper aims to identify and describe information use and information sharing behaviors in marketing professionals’ everyday work. Specifically, the following research questions were explored in this study:

1. How do marketing professionals use obtained information to accomplish their work tasks?
2. Do marketing professionals’ information sharing behavior follow certain patterns? If yes, what are the patterns of the occurrence of information sharing?

Answers to these questions will not only help enhance our understanding of information behaviors by illustrating information use and information sharing contained in professional settings and how they are represented, but also will provide important insight into workplace collaboration by linking information behavior theory to practice.

**RESULTS AND DISCUSSION**

**Use of Found Information to Accomplish Work Tasks**

How the marketing professionals used information that they had obtained into an adapted behavior or act in the working environment was investigated. The analysis shows that marketing professionals made use of 97% of the obtained information, including 89% of the immediate use (i.e. the found information was utilized immediately to solve the work task at hand) and 8% of the delayed use (i.e. for future use). There were three instances in which participants made no use of the found information because the information either was not new compared to what they had already have, or contained too little value to achieve the task goal.

The problem solving oriented information use was represented as the marketing professionals’ incorporation of found information into their pre-existing knowledge base (Ford, 2004; Todd, 1999),

- by writing a document, for instance, “Used the data to write a short analysis paper”;
- by updating an existing document, for instance, “Updated a PowerPoint presentation for use at Corporate Induction sessions”;
- by collating information in text format, for instance, “Used to prepare confidential guest profiles”;
- by providing guidance, for instance, “Advised the staff how to change item code so that levy is not applied in the future”;

Knoblauch, & Luff, 2000). Talja (2002) identified types of information sharing in relation to document retrieval in academic communities, including strategic information sharing, paradigmatic information sharing, directive information sharing, and social information sharing. The levels of information sharing existing in academic communities were super-sharing, temporary-sharing, occasional-sharing, and non-sharing. Sonnenwald (2006) investigated challenges in sharing information effectively in command and control. Barriers to effective information sharing were identified, including recognizing differences in the meanings of shared symbols; sharing implications of information; interpreting the emotions used in sharing information; and re-establishing trust after incorrect, critical information is shared.
by annotating, for instance, “Made some reflections that I gained from the articles for my own purposes”;
• by making revisions, for instance, “Changed the spelling to the correct one”; and
• by making a decision, for instance, “Determined that Diploma studies were my best option based on my level or education and work experience”.

Those information uses accounted for 65% of the total usage. In addition, the marketing practitioners used the obtained information as information production where information is shared and forwarded, such as reporting to an upper level and directly forwarding information to someone else. They were also found to apply the information in which information is seen as a tool, such as making a record of information, calling somebody, and labeling information.

The participants also reported their current personal knowledge in relation to the work task after the use of information on the 5-point Likert scale (1 stands for no knowledge, 5 stands for considerable knowledge). The results show that the mean rate for all the participants across work tasks was 4.1 (standard deviation=1.22). The higher level knowledge contribution might indicate positive experience of information seeking and use they felt.

Patterns of Information Sharing Occurrence
Information sharing denotes direct communications and information exchanges among those involved in solving a problem (Fidel et al., 2004). Du et al. (2012) proposed a faceted classification of information sharing comprising five facets (each facet has its own values) which were deemed important in the marketing context. Considering the five facets of people, level of proactiveness, purpose, mode, and content, twenty-nine patterns of the information sharing occurrences emerged from the data. Due to the space limit, the frequent occurrences of information sharing based on the dimensions of people, level of proactiveness, and purpose are presented in Table 1.

Information sharing is an essential activity in all collaborative work. When working together, members must continually provide information to others and to some degree mutually understand and use information others provide (Sonnenwald, 2006). The findings reveal that proactively distributing information to people from other units in the organization (O-D-P) and to colleagues in the team (C-D-P), discussing and consulting information with senior management upon request (SM-D&C-UR), and discussing and consulting information with people from other units in the organization proactively (O-D&C-P) were relatively common occurrences (31%) among marketing professionals’ information sharing events.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Information sharing pattern</th>
<th>Description</th>
<th>Example (direct quote)</th>
<th>No. (%)</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>O-D-P</td>
<td>Proactive distributing information to people from other units in the organization</td>
<td>“needs to be circulated so that other things can be arranged.”</td>
<td>7 (10)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>C-D-P</td>
<td>Proactive distributing information to colleagues</td>
<td>“will be shared with colleagues to help guide this year’s marketing activities in Malaysia.”</td>
<td>5 (7)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>SM-D&amp;C-UR</td>
<td>Discussing and consulting information with senior management upon request</td>
<td>“will be used at a meeting with Vice Chancellor to select institutions to focus on.”</td>
<td>5 (7)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>O-D&amp;C-P</td>
<td>Proactive discussing and consulting information with people from other units in the organization</td>
<td>“advised the Finance Officer how to change item code so that levy is not applied in the future.”</td>
<td>5 (7)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>E-D&amp;C-UR</td>
<td>Discussing and consulting information with external people upon request</td>
<td>“I spoke to the journalist on the phone and recommended she emailing the academic.”</td>
<td>4 (6)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>SM-UR</td>
<td>Distributing information to senior management upon request</td>
<td>“An email from my boss requested me to update a report I had written two months prior.”</td>
<td>4 (6)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>E-UR</td>
<td>Distributing information to external people upon request</td>
<td>“generate an invoice request for the client and summary of calculations.”</td>
<td>3 (4)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>M-UR</td>
<td>Distributing information to line manager upon request</td>
<td>“advised my supervisor that the Division Officer would be put on a waiting list for a parking bay.”</td>
<td>3 (4)</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Note: People dimension – team colleagues (C), line manager (M), senior management (SM), people from other units (O), external people (E); The level of proactiveness dimension - proactive (P), upon request (UR); Purpose dimension - distributing to others (D), discussing and consulting with others (D&C).

Table 1. Patterns of frequent information sharing occurrence.
CONCLUSIONS AND FUTURE WORK

Behaviors of information use and information sharing in marketing professionals’ everyday work environment were examined in this study. It is an exploratory study into a developing area of research. Our results, although preliminary, indicate how found information in the marketing context is used, managed, and shared. The enhanced understanding of the information use and sharing process has potential for improving the design of information systems and services for accommodating a broader range of the information needs of workers in information-intensive environments. Further research directions include investigating the implications for understanding and modeling marketing professionals’ information use and sharing behaviors. For example, the problem solving oriented information use and information sharing patterns would shed light onto how collaborative seeking and searching, and analysis can be supported. A potential reason differentiates information use in professional settings from general information use might be that teamwork has been common in the workplace which introduces complex social and contextual factors into the process of use of information. This is an area for further exploration.

REFERENCES


