

# **Toward a more inclusive information needs, seeking, and use research: Few considerations**

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The area of information needs, seeking, and use is very important within the broader information behaviour research. Julien and Duggan (2000, p. 291) defines it as “that which is concerned with information seeking, determining people’s information needs, and information use.”

For a research field to be inclusive requires solid theoretical foundations that can be used to study a range of phenomena. Theoretical foundations also provide conceptual repositories, frameworks guiding inquires in new areas, and also the ability to see emerging areas of interest or what areas that have been neglected. So then a logical question comes up – how to ensure having such theoretical foundations in our field of research.

This conceptual piece argues that research in the field of information needs, seeking, and use should be more cognizant of three factors that have shaped—along with other factors—the theoretical underpinnings and hence the intellectual lens through which we include or choose to ignore research topics.

Process oriented research is the first such factor. Specifically, we have been -- and for good reasons -- paying lots of attention to understanding and modelling users’ information seeking and searching behavior. We have accumulated a significant body of research describing the process users follow in searching information for their needs. Then we have also studied ways in which users from different professions, cultural groups, etc. seek information. In doing this research some fundamental questions were rarely asked and hence remained excluded from conceptual repository available to researchers. For example, the concepts of information needs and information use were neither rigorously conceptualized nor empirically validated leading to the use of proxies in studies aiming to assess information needs and information use, leaving information seeking as a construct lacking a thorough nomological network.

Lack of centralist approach to methodology, for example, using solely quantitative methodology without regard to research question, is another factor that sometimes hinder our ability to be inclusive. There are strong viewpoints on the ability of qualitative versus quantitative methodologies to unearth meanings and reality. These viewpoints often times are reflected in feedback on papers under reviews and through other avenues. There should be some room—and there is for vast majority of scholars in LIS—in order to see the appropriateness of each methodology and hence importance for our field.

Aggregation of research findings can be very helpful—and has been—in making information needs, seeking, and use a more inclusive field of research. Discontinuation of ARIST has been a major setback to this aggregation of findings. Though we have other valuable venues for some aggregation in journals such as LISR, but papers cannot be that detailed in these venues due to tight page limits and hence we are at a stage where we do not have a holistic

view of our own field and hence we are not able to be inclusive of what's happening and what should happen in the field of information needs, seeking and use.