

# INFORMATION SEEKING BEHAVIOUR ON INTERNET: A REVIEW

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## Abstract

*This paper deals with how people search the required information from the internet and also to identify the patterns of information seeking behaviour on internet if any through literature review. Though most of the studies found that the users are able to get information from internet using different strategies but still they feel that instructions and training are needed for the internet users.*

**Keywords:** Information seeking, information need; Information retrieval; Search strategies

## 1. Introduction

We are living in the so called 'information society' or 'information age' where information is one of the important factor of life. Kemp (1976) said that "indeed, information has been described as the fifth need of man ranking after air, water, food and shelter".

Every one needs information about everything even in his day to day life also. People needs information, right from the organisational level to the personal level, from the highly educated and experience person to school children, from a very famous person to an ordinary person, for taking the right decision in every step of life. Modern society incessantly produces and uses information. Information diffuses through society in many ways. In this information age there is so much of information being generated that we are confronted with information explosion, information pollution and exponential growth of information. Due to this information explosion or information pollution the people are confuse about the information need, information access and information sources. With the impact of new technologies such as information technologies most people are interested in accessing the information through these sources because of faster accessibility.

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## 2. Information

The word information became famous since 1950's. The terms information and communication are very close to each other that they are consider to be of the same meaning. The dictionary meaning of the term information is "knowledge", "intelligence", a "fact", "data", a "message", a "signal" and a "stimulus". Debons (1988) defined information as the cognitive state of awareness (As being informed) of given representation and physical form (data). This physical representation facilitates the process of knowing. Chen and Herson (1982) defined that information is all knowledge, ideas, fact, data and imaginative works of mind which are communicated normally and informally in any format. Ford (1980) defined "information as the structure of any text which is capable of changing the image structure of recipient". Information is the data which is processed or in other words we can say that data is the raw material of information and after processing it, it became information.

### 3. Information need

Information is needed in every field of life. Everybody need information in everyday life like in education, research etc. The information need is different from one person to another which means that it will not be the same though it might be similar.

Kumar (1990) defined that users are different in (1) Attitudes and Believes, (2) Goals or Objectives, (3) capabilities, (4) Uses, (5) Communication Attitudes, (6)

Experiences and Habits, (7) Cultural Backgrounds, (8) The Sources they used. Line (1974) defined that information need is what an individual ought to have for his work, his research, his edification, his creation etc. Hernon and Chen (1982) defined that information need occurs whenever people find themselves in situations that required some form of knowledge for resolution. Ford (1980) and Krikelas (1983) defined "information need as an awareness or recognition of not knowing or existence of uncertainty". Kumar (1990) defined that the identification as information need may be expressed as an input-process-output model. The basic components of the systems are (1) problem (existing situation) (2) problem-solving process and (3) solution.

### 4. Information Seeking

Seeking means when a human beings search something which they want to get it means that the thing which they don't have but they need it. Information seeking is the process of searching the information from the information resources. Information seeking differs from person to person, that is, the ways and means they are using in seeking and the information they need are different.

### 5. Information Seeking Behaviour

Information seeking behaviour is the technique or the process of searching for the information. Information seeking behaviour depends on the types of information need of the people. So information seeking behaviour arises when the person is able to recognise what type of information is needed, what are the goals or objectives and what kind of information resources to use. The term information seeking behaviour used here includes information searching and information gathering which means that after identifying what type of information they need they search for it and gather it from different sources following their techniques or processes of searching (i.e. a simple or complex search).

### 6. Internet

The first true internet was ARPANET system, a military network established in the United States in the late sixties. The interconnection of computers is known as a network. The internet is nothing but a network of networks or is a huge network of computers that links the different type of computers around the world. The internet has many user-friendly tools which help the users to interact with the internet and get the information they need. Some of these tools are Gopher, Archie, and World Wide Web (WWW). The internet is rich resource of information and provides the information to its users faster than any other resources. Therefore it became the most popular resource of information.

## 7. Review of Literature

Nicholas (1996) carried out a study on "An Assessment of the Online-Searching Behaviour of Practitioner and User" in order to determine what were the searching characteristics of end-user in a non-academic environment and explains it in the light of their information needs. The result shows that they did search with a limited range of commands and more of their searches produced no results and search statements were simply constructed. However there were variations between individuals and users and it was found that an end-user group that match an information professional group on one aspect of online searching or another. The online behaviour of end users was very much related to their general information seeking behaviour and to the fact that they were not trained.

Bruce (1998) carried out a study on "user Satisfaction with the information seeking on internet". His study deals with who uses the internet to seek information and how much they are satisfied with this channel that is internet. He conducted this study in the Australian academies. 200 e-mail addressed were invited to take part in this research. These email address are randomly selected from a list consolidated from the e-mail directories of five universities in the State of New South Wales. And the results show that a majority use the internet for information seeking at least once per month, and a large proportion use the internet in this way everyday. Thus the study found that Australian academic generally have a high expectation of success when they engage in information seeking on the internet, and are satisfied with the process regardless of how frequently they use the network or whether or not they have received formal training.

Fidel, Davies, Douglas and etal (1999) conducted a study "A visit to the information mall: web searching behaviour oh high school students" in order to analyse the web searching behaviour homework assignments of high school students. It was conducted at West Seattle high School, Seattle, W.A. using observation and interviews methods. The result of this study shows that the students enjoyed searching the web because it had a variety of formats, it showed pictures, it covered multitude of subject and it provided easy access to information. And one of the most appealing qualities of the web was the speed of providing information needed. Where as difficulties and problems according to the students depend on the tactics or the techniques or the search strategies of the users.

Voorbgil (1999) in his study "Searching Scientific Information on the Internet: A Dutch Academic User Survey" examines the use and perceived importance of the internet amongst students and academics in the Netherlands. He distributed a detailed questionnaire among 1,000 members of the academic community and three focus group interviews were held with faculty members. The result of the study shows that the use of the World Wide Web is not without difficulty. The World Wide Web is being used by the members primarily to seek general, factual, ephemeral, or very specific information. According to Voorbgil though the internet may have conquered a place for itself, it has not pushed aside traditional printed and other information resources.

Dagleish and Hall (2000) conducted a study on "Uses And Perceptions Of The World Wide Web In An Information-Seeking Environment" to identify the ways in which the World Wide Web can be used as part of the students learning process. This study was conducted with 12 participants who were students, all from university. A series of interviews, with open-ended questions were conducted. The main findings of the study was that the key factor which influence the students to use the web as an information resource is time, in the sense of obtaining information quickly and easily, not experiencing difficulties in locating the required information, and avoiding inherent delays in the computer systems.

Hsieh-Yee (2001) in the article "Research on Web Search Behaviour" which is a review of the studies conducted between 1995 and 2000 on Web search behaviour. The reports of the studies were both on children as well as on adults on their information seeking behaviour on the web. The findings were that most of the studies on children described their interaction with the web and research on adult searchers focused on describing search patterns, and many studies investigated effects of selected factors on search behaviour, including information organisation and presentation, type of search task, web experience, cognitive abilities, and affective states. \*It shows that as users gain more experience with the web, their need will expand The growth of the amount of information on the web has affected information seekers' use of the web. It shows that 57% of internet users search the web each day and searching is the most popular activity after e-mail. A study of university faculty and students found that 83% of the respondents used the internet for gathering information related to academic studies, and 73.85 used it for non-academic work. Therefore, it shows that the internet has become one of the most important information sources for many users.

Kellar (2006) conducted a study on "An examination of user behaviour during Web information task" with 21 participants in order to understand the characteristics of information seeking tasks on the web and how the tools of current web browsers are being used within information seeking tasks. The result of the study was that there are several differences in how users interacted with their web browser during different tasks. The information gathering tasks takes longer time than the fact finding tasks but both were search-based with the heavy use of Google.

## **8. Strategies used in information seeking:**

Notess, Greg R. (1997) conducted a study on "On The net: Internet Search techniques and Strategies". According to this study successful searching of information on the internet depends on techniques such as going straight to the information source, guess work and developing strategies for when to use subject directories and search engines.

1. Straight to the information source: This strategy is utilized when the user knows their needs, type of information and contents. Then they will be able to identify the source.
2. Guesswork: After identifying the source then they will have to locate the URL. "http:///" is common while guessing the URL but they can also use "www" to begin a host address.
3. Subject Directories: General topics without narrowing it can be submitted in subject directories like Yahoo, Google etc to explore at least some related topics from the information available on the Net.
4. Correct spelling: While seeking information it is important to spell correctly in order to reach the source.
5. Search Engines: While seeking the information from internet the users should use more than one search engines because only one search engine cannot be considered as comprehensive.

## **9. Conclusion**

After reviewing the above studies carried out by different persons in different fields it appears that most of them are using internet as the best source for seeking information because of its speed no matter what problems they face in finding the information, especially students. The internet is overloaded with information because of information explosion or information pollution. Information

seeking on the web is a complex phenomenon, it involves many search engines and it depends on the users to choose because search engines are meant for a specific search. Though some users agreed that using internet is not without difficulty but these difficulties and problems depends on the techniques and strategies applied by the users. The main problem with the internet is that it is difficult to locate the required information, because of excessive information. The Austrian academics are able to express their level of satisfaction with information seeking on the internet especially, in terms of quantity or amount. Though internet has advantages but it still inherent disadvantages, users need training on how to use a system design based on user seeking and searching behaviour.

Therefore instruction is needed for the internet users on how to use it. System designers must think from the user's point of view rather than from their technical point of view. The internet users are required to know its latest trend and development for effective satisfaction of information needs. Even with the best search attempt of some users but still successful information retrieval will be able only with many attempts not only once

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