

# CAIS Paper: Information Behavior Research: Where Have We Been, Where Are We Going?

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## **Abstract**

A quantitative content analysis of recently published research in information behavior is compared with previous analyses to create a 30-year profile of work in the field. Variables of particular interest include research methods employed, user groups studied, relative interdisciplinarity, theoretical frameworks applied, attention to affect, and attention to systems design.

## **Résumé**

In addition to the kind of comprehensive and descriptive survey of research in information behavior that has been provided by Case (2012), another important way in which a research field can assess its direction is through more quantitative approaches. By occasionally taking stock of a field's predominant variables and methods, as well as indicators of scholarly progress such as relative interdisciplinarity, and thematic focus, researchers inside and outside the field can assess longitudinal trends and development. The body of research in information behavior has been criticized for theoretical weakness, for conservative methodological approaches, and for failing to translate results for the benefit of information professionals and for application to systems design. As a response to these critiques, this area of scholarship has been examined periodically, from broad and inclusive perspectives (Julien, 2006; Julien and Duggan, 2000; Julien, Pecoskie, and Reed, 2011) and also in narrower slices, by geographic region (Jeong and Kim, 2005), specific theme (McKechnie, Julien, Genuis, and Oliphant, 2008; McKechnie, Julien, Goodall, and Lajoie-Paquette, 2005; McKechnie, Julien, Pecoskie, and Dixon, 2006) or as represented in a subset of literature (Pettigrew and McKechnie, 2001; Jeong and Kim, 2005; Vakkari, 2008). It has been five years since data were last collected to quantitatively analyze the literature in information behavior from a broad perspective (Julien 2011); the study described here will survey the literature published between 2009 and 2013.

The literature in information behavior published from 2009 and 2013 and indexed in Library Literature and Information Science Fulltext will be analyzed using content

analysis (Marsh and White, 2006). Only full-length feature articles in English will be included in the sample (i.e., no book reviews or editorials). The variables analyzed will be those included in the previous studies in the series:

- authorship (researcher [faculty members in academia or research institutes]/practitioner [librarians or other information workers or managers]),
- article type (commentary [opinion, no research]/report of service [describing activities in information services]/research study [reporting systematic collection of data for a particular purpose]),
- interdisciplinarity (as evidenced by citations outside information studies)
- research methods (experiment/questionnaire/interview/ethnography/transaction log analysis/citation analysis/mixed methods),
- journal type (professional [primarily intended for practitioners, discuss practical issues]/scholarly [publishing articles addressing theoretical issues and reports of research]),
- theoretical frameworks used (derived inductively),
- user groups considered (derived inductively), and
- degree of attention to users' cognitive processes, to systems design, and to affect/emotional aspects of human information behavior.

This study will be the most recent in a longitudinal analysis of information behavior research, beginning with work published in 1984; thus, as a set, the studies published in 1996, 2000, and 2011, in addition to the current study, will have analyzed work in this area over nearly 30 years. The paper to be presented at the CAIS/ACSI conference will include comparisons to the data from the previous studies, to show trends and development over the three decades.

The most recent survey (Julien et al., 2011) suggested that survey methods remain predominant in information behavior research, that the application of theory to this research has remained consistent over time, and that attention to affective variables has also remained relatively consistent. In light of multiple calls for increased diversity in method, increased integration of theory, and increased attention to affect, it would be disheartening to find that no improvements have occurred since the last analysis; but, these questions are what the current study will answer. Of equal interest will be to determine whether there remains a gap between the profile of research published by practitioners versus researchers, and whether interdisciplinarity in this research area continues to increase. The results of these analyses have implications for scholars in the area, for practitioners seeking to apply research results, for systems designers seeking to create useful information systems, and for educators of information professionals.

The conference Call for Papers states, “The conference theme points to the increasing need to recognize, explore, and question the social and cultural assumptions of information science as a discipline, and of our chosen research problems and methodologies, in this global context.” This paper relates to the conference theme by

focusing on unmasking the assumptions so easily made about the nature of our research, to provide empirical evidence that highlights our chosen research problems and methods, and that reveals ongoing gaps and weaknesses, among other aspects of our scholarship.

## References

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