Information Behavior Research in Taiwan: Theses Analysis
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Abstract

Introduction
This paper reports on empirical research conducted from December 2005 to April 2006. The objective of this paper is to understand relevant research on information behavior in Taiwan and to make suggestions to researchers. This analysis shows that the number of instances of information behavior related research has been increasing steadily, while research topics and research subjects were quite diversified. A growing number of disciplines have begun to take an interest in information behavior, though most research was still conducted in the area of Library and Information Science. This study also found that the selected theses' authors emphasized motivation, topic/content, type of information resource and channel via which information was garnered in looking at information needs research. Finally, we suggest that research design and analysis be more rigorous, and that researchers be more creative in adopting research methodology in future studies.

In LIS, “information behavior” is frequently used as a cover term for information needs, information seeking, use of information, and sharing of information, etc. However, what “information behavior” means is debatable. Moreover, literature shows that scholars in different countries may not focus on the same dimension of information behavior. Therefore, this paper examines theses and dissertations on LIS published in Taiwan to explore how the concept “information behavior” has developed and evolved. This research was conducted in two stages. In the first stage, the number of theses conducted in LIS was analyzed statistically to identify the trend of information behavior research. In the second stage, content analysis was conducted on eight theses.

Research design
The research was undertaken in two stages: quantitative and qualitative. In the first stage, a keyword analysis was conducted on the database of National Digital Library of theses and dissertations in Taiwan to identify the general trend of
information behavior studies in Taiwan. Initially, the key words “information behavior”, “information need” and “information seeking” were entered to search theses. Other keywords were obtained through snowballing, and again, were used to find more relevant theses. A total of 375 theses or dissertations (dated from 1981-2004) were found; in these studies, 19 relevant keywords (topics) were identified. Based on this brief analysis, “empirical research on information need” was selected as the focus of study. There were 44 theses on this topic in the database, some of which were selected for content analysis in the second stage.

In the second stage, the 44 theses found in the first stage were categorized into groups according to their research object: “general public”, “professionals”, “users in a specific context”, and “users of a specific age group”; from each of these groups, two theses were selected for content analysis. The objectives of the analysis, then, were to explore how Taiwanese researchers conceptualized “information”, and see if their studies accurately reflected the subject’s information needs.

Research results
1. Quantitative analysis
   a. The past ten years (1995-2004) witnessed a steady increase in the number of studies on information need. Nineteen topics were found in those theses (in the following order): information need, information retrieval, information search, information seeking behavior, information behavior, human-computer interaction, information literacy, information architecture, information use, user studies, information requirement analysis, information processing, information management, information evaluation, information extraction, library automation systems, knowledge management, information access, and information communication. Most of those theses studied one of the following five areas:
   b. The top six topics accounted for more than 80% of the theses. Information literacy and topics ranked after it has only emerged in the past decade (1995-2004).
   c. The common research objects of the theses included “general public”, “people in a certain education environment”, “professionals who work in an organization”, “people in a specific context”, “analysis of information system”
   d. Most information behavior related studies were conducted in the field of LIS, though researchers from other subject areas have begun to study information behavior.
2. Content analysis
   Eight theses on “information needs” were selected for content analysis.
a. The analysis shows that most information studies were conducted with an emphasis on “motive”, “topic/content of information”, “type of information” and “information channel”. It is notable that theses published after 2000 had a different conception of “information need”. To be specific, the researchers began to view information need as a process and pay more attention to the context where people search and use information.

b. Questionnaire survey and interview were most frequently used. Some common problems were found in the questionnaires used in the theses: “too many redundant questions”, “key concepts are not clearly defined”, “a question item may include more than one concept”, “question items are not logically related”, “the terms used are inconsistent”. It should be noted that most of these theses only described the subject’s behavior without further analysis.

Conclusion

Several observations are made about information behavior studies conducted in Taiwan:

1. The concept of information need should be expanded
   Information need often triggers information behavior, and several comprehensive theories have been proposed to account for information behavior. For example, Sense-Making, Dervin (1992), Anomalous State of Knowledge, ASK, Belkin (1980). However, for some of the researchers of the selected theses, information need only means the demand for information topic, information category, and information source. Considering the frameworks mentioned above, a definition as such is too narrow.

2. Paradigm shift in the concept of information behavior
   In recent years, researchers have begun to discuss information behavior in terms of work role, the process of information behavior, and context. These three viewpoints correspond to the methods proposed by Bystrom (1995), Kuhlthau (1989) and Wilson (1997) respectively.

3. New research frameworks should be considered
   The two research methods most frequently adopted in the studies related to information behavior conducted in Taiwan are questionnaire survey and interview. On significant problem is that reliability and validity were usually not well discussed. Moreover, while new approaches and frameworks are proposed for LIS around the world, it seems that previous studies in Taiwan have not paid enough attention to those new developments.

   All in all, the number of M. A. theses on information behavior has kept increasing in the past ten years (1995-2004). And recent research has become more
refined and diversified. For example, some studies are targeted at single females, bloggers, and elders. It is evident that information behavior studies are closely related to the development of the society.

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