Chapter structure

Variations on the theme of information experience

Conceptualizing information experience

Future research directions

References

INFORMATION EXPERIENCE: NEW PERSPECTIVES AND RESEARCH DIRECTIONS

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Abstract

In this closing chapter the editors review key themes that have emerged through the book. We recognise the varied and dynamic nature of information experience across multiple contexts, and present our own conceptualization of information experience. Finally, we consider possible future directions for information experience research.

Variations on the theme of information experience

This book has explored the nature and potential of information experience research from a range of perspectives. Rather than impose a definitive understanding or model, the chapters have presented a set of variations on the theme of information experience. The authors' insights have all contributed to an emerging collective understanding about what constitutes information experience.

Authors consider various topics such as:

- the nature of experience;
- the idea of information experience;
- the nature of people's information experiences, including what constitutes information and how information is experienced; and
- the significance of information experiences.

Taken as a whole, the book reveals that information experience is complex, multidimensional and grounded in real life. It highlights the varied, contextualised and constantly changing nature of people's engagement with information in myriad forms and contexts. The book also shows how information experience integrates people's thoughts, feelings, senses, and actions; as well as their social and cultural influences.

Conceptualizing information experience

Editing this book has provided a valuable (and valued) opportunity for dialogue with colleagues around the world about our shared interest in information experience. This dialogue has enabled us to interrogate various understandings and research approaches. The process of conceptualizing and editing this book has also provided us with an opportunity to consolidate our own understanding of information experience, and to reflect on our own journey.

About 20 years ago, Christine Bruce began a program of research exploring people's experience of information literacy. For Bruce, the work was predominantly about the different ways in which people experience using information to learn. In this work learning was interpreted as a change in how we experience the world (Marton & Booth, 1997), and that approach to information literacy has begun to be applied across a wide range of contexts.

4. Information Experience: New Perspectives

As this research program has evolved, we have come to articulate what was previously a less emphasised understanding: that the work is not only about people's learning experience, but also about their information experience. While the idea of information experience was present in the earliest work, it has not been until relatively recently an explicit focus.

The idea of information experience has continued to surface in information literacy and other research that adopts phenomenographic, ethnographic, and grounded theory methods, and, in our team, is typically interpretive. Our interpretive work in these areas has frequently adopted experiential research approaches and is now identifying information experience as a specific research object. While our studies have consistently applied an experience lens to research that deals with information use, as a research team we are now recognizing the need for explicit attention to both the learning experience and the information experience.

In our QUT research team, people's information experience is clearly developing as a significant research strand. While we have long recognized the holistic nature of information experience, we now seek to formally establish it as an area of research through this book. Therefore, as a research team we propose that information experience be recognised, articulated, and delimited as an independent research domain (Bruce and Partridge, 2011; Bruce, 2011). We believe it is time to widen the field of information research by turning attention towards both researching information experience and establishing it as a domain of study.

We suggest information experience can be considered broadly as people's engagement with information, the nature of people's engagement, and how they relate to information as they go about their daily life and work. As researchers, we mainly attend to what phenomenology describes as people's *lived experiences* in their *life worlds*. Specifically, we consider people's information experience and their informational life worlds, where people and their information environment are considered to be inseparable; indeed, these experiences are inseparable from the purposes and contexts within which they occur. Researching people's information experiences takes us deeply into their existence to explore what is experienced as information and how it is experienced, how information is present or appears, how it is created, and its role and influence in people's lives (adapted from Bruce & Partridge, 2011).

We embrace experience based learning theory which suggests that learning is

"coming to experience the world, or aspects of the world in particular ways" (Marton & 1997, vii). Our interest in experience prompts our interpretivist research approaches. Our research group at the Queensland University of Technology brings a number of research approaches and epistemological frameworks to the study of information experience, but the interpretivist perspective is a strong theme. For us, interpretivist research provides a powerful way to explore people's information experience, leading to powerful new understandings about their situation and responses to their needs. We have a strong background in phenomenologically informed research, where description of the world is faithfully interpreted and grounded in being:

> We do not consider people and the world as separate. People live in a world that they experience. We deal with people who are experiencing aspects of the world – neither bearers of mental structures nor behaviourist actors. By learning how people experience the world we may learn what the world is like, and what the world could be like (adapted from Marton & Booth, 1997, p. 13)

Increasingly, members of the team are also adopting constructionist perspectives to the study of information experience, with the understanding that reality and meaning are constructed by people interacting with their world, including other people. "Constructionism claims that meanings are constructed by human beings as they engage with the world they are interpreting" (Crotty, 1998, p. 43).

The variety of methods used, including phenomenography, grounded theory, and ethnographically informed research designs, builds our understanding of information experience. Regardless of the epistemological framework or research methodology, a common thread across our research is the focus on individuals and their lived experience, and a holistic perspective on people's engagement with information.

We recognize that our approach to information experience differs from that of many colleagues contributing to this volume. We trust that the different approaches will continue to flourish, to inform each other, and to reveal the many and varied aspects we are beginning to identify as information experience.

Future research directions

The varied contributions to this book indicate that the idea of information experience is likely to have ongoing influence in research and practice across a range of domains. The authors have proposed a number of questions throughout the text that we would like to highlight. These questions provide a useful basis from which to move forward with information experience research in its many forms.

Firstly, there is a strong need to develop our understanding of information experience as an object of study. The following questions are indicative of the work that could be done in this space:

- Does the phrase "information experience" adequately convey the dynamic nature and extent of this research domain?
- Where do information experiences begin and end? Do they begin and end?
- What is the relationship between information experience and context?
- How can we integrate ways of being as well as ways of knowing in information experience research and practice?
- What are the strengths and limitations of attending to information experience in research and practice?

In order to refine our understanding of information experience, we must consider how best to progress the discussion regarding information experience as an object and domain of study:

- What is information experience as a research object? What is its nature? What are its qualities?
- What might different research methods and worldviews reveal about the idea of information experience, and what might they contribute to information experience research and practice?
- What are the boundaries of information experience research?
- How does information experience relate to other information research objects (e.g., information literacy, information seeking, information sharing, and information practice)?

7. Information Experience: New Perspectives

Additionally, as we strive to position information experience as a domain of study, we need to consider the research landscape and the relationship of information experience to other domains of study in information research:

- Where do theories of information experience sit in the existing information research landscape?
- How might information experience research complement research in other domains?
- What are the possible inter-relations between information experience, information behaviour, information practice, and information literacy?

We must also consider the relationship between information experience and other experience-focused research domains outside information research:

- Where does information experience research sit in the wider research landscape?
- What are the differences or complementarities between user experience, learning experience and information experience?
- How can we meaningfully position information experience as an interdisciplinary field of study?

Of vital importance are implications for practice, and the development of new technologies and service environments:

- How can contemporary systems be brought to inclusively reflect diverse values and relationships central to people's information experiences?
- How can organisations, educational institutions, and community groups enhance information and learning experiences of clients, staff, educators, students, and members?
- How can organisations capitalise on emerging understandings of information experience to better meet the needs of clients?
- How can organisations draw on information experience to inform both platform and service design?
- How can organisations exploit emerging understandings of information experience to connect with people and communicate key messages?

This book is an invaluable first step in drawing together existing interpretations of information experience. As a research group, we will continue to develop understandings about experience in general and information experience in particular as theoretical constructs, including exploring how they are interpreted in information research. We will turn our attention to building information experience as a frame for information research, and exploring the relationship between information experience research and existing information research domains and discourses. We will also explore possible theories of information experience. In the course of continuing research we anticipate that colleagues, including information, learning, and technology researchers will also build new theoretical lenses, conceptual frameworks, and models for information experience research and practice. We look forward to the unfolding discussion.

In line with the ever-changing nature of human experience, we anticipate that our exploration of information experience will continue to evolve. We offer heartfelt thanks to all our authors for their insights and collaboration in bringing this book to life. We plan to embrace continuing collaborative thinking and research in this vibrant information experience domain.

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