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**Bruce, Christine S., and Partridge, Helen L. (2011) *Identifying and delineating information experience as a research domain: a discussion paper*. From: Social Media and Information Practices Workshop, 10-11 November 2011, Boras, Sweden.**

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# **IDENTIFYING AND DELINEATING INFORMATION EXPERIENCE AS A RESEARCH DOMAIN: A DISCUSSION PAPER**

Christine Bruce, Helen Partridge

On behalf of the QUT Information Studies Group, especially Kate Davis, Sylvia Edwards, Hilary Hughes, Mandy Lupton, and Mary Somerville.

A line of information and information literacy research has emerged that has a strong focus on information experience. Strengthened understanding, profiling and theorising of information experience as a specific domain of interest to information researchers is required. A focus on information experience is likely to have a major influence on the field, drawing attention to interpretive and experiential forms of research.

Researching information experience allows a broad understanding and interpretation of people's engagement and interaction with the information environment. A focus on experience offers a more holistic approach to understanding peoples' engagement with information than the behavioural approaches. Such a focus takes into account the interrelations between people and their broader environments in a manner which considers people and their world as inseparable. It also provides deep insights into the ways in which people relate to their informational life-worlds.<sup>1</sup> While a body of work has been established in this area, especially amongst researchers of information literacy in Australia and Europe (Lloyd, 2009, 2010; Hughes, 2009; Tilley, 2009; Bruce, 2008; Lupton, 2008; Andretta, 2007)<sup>2</sup>, information experience as a theoretical construct needs development. Such development is required to progress information experience as a research domain.

How might we develop the notion of information experience as a research domain? Information experience is as yet not well articulated, delineated or explored. While it shares with information behaviour a strong interest in information users and their contexts, the objects of research such as information literacy, information skills, information practice, information seeking and use, and information sharing, would be interpreted and researched differently in these two domains.

Presently 'information behaviour' (Chelton & Cool, 2007; Nahl & Bilal, 2007; Spink & Foster, 2007; Fisher et al, 2005; Wilson, 2000) forms the dominant paradigm in information user research. The interaction between information behaviour and information experience research has led to concerns such as the following:

- Information research focussed on experience may appear under the information behaviour research umbrella (e.g., Julien, 2007; Parker & Berryman, 2007; Limberg, 2005). Thus, information research focussed on investigating experience is sometimes assumed to make a contribution to understanding information behaviour, rather than to understanding information experience in the context under investigation.
- Information literacy research alternates between largely behavioural, experiential or

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<sup>1</sup> Within this broad interpretation of what it means to attend to experience, the position of phenomenographers and socio-cultural researchers may be distinguished as follows: phenomenographic researchers are interested in variation in experience and sociocultural researchers are interested in the co-construction of experience.

<sup>2</sup> These are just a few examples representative of a much wider pool of material...

discursive perspectives (Limberg, Sundin, and Talja, forthcoming) but is not widely recognised as doing so. Consequently, information literacy research is sometimes contrasted with information behaviour research, even though information literacy is often researched behaviourally. It needs to be recognised that information literacy research could belong to either space depending on how it is researched.

In order to establish a better elaborated and more coherent domain we need to:

- deepen our understanding of experience and information experience as theoretical constructs and how they are interpreted differently in information (user) research;
- build our understandings of information experience as an alternative frame for information research;
- understand more fully what it means to adopt an information experience perspective, in contrast with an information behaviour perspective, on information research;
- consider ways of understanding the relationship between information experience research and information literacy research;
- understand what different research methods and world views reveal about people's experience of information use and the idea of information experience as a theoretical construct;
- understand what different contexts reveal about people's experience of information use and the idea of information experience;
- identify models and studies that are focussed on information experience and draw them together as representing a coherent domain;
- examine and synthesise the currently disparate/fragmented thinking and theorising on information experience;
- explore possible theories of information experience.

Researching information experience is of interest in at least two research groups in Australia. At QUT, researching information experience commenced in the early 1990s with research into doctoral students' experiences of literature reviews (Bruce, 1994). The work has expanded nationally and internationally and has grown to incorporate different research approaches, methods, and techniques. Directions in this area for the QUT Information Studies Group include:

- profiling information experience consistently as a research area in journal writing;
- producing a proposal for an edited book, *Information Experience* (please let us know if anyone would like to join the team of authors);
- generating grant applications focussed on theorising information experiences;
- supervising research students working with the idea of information experience.

A strand of the QUT team's focus is the phenomenographic approach to researching experience. Other approaches used at QUT which focus on researching experience include grounded theory, ethnography, evidence-based practice and the expanded critical incident approach. Understanding the nature of the contributions of these approaches to exploring information experience offers an important future direction for researchers worldwide.

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