

## Personal Factors Impacting on Information Behavior of Lecturers

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***Abstract** - Information behavior is one of important research fields in many disciplines, including Library and Information Science which concerned by many researchers since 1970s. In academic environment, information behavior of lecturers are impacted by many various factors such as cultural factors, social factors, psychological factors, and personal factors. This paper reviews understanding of information behavior with various authors' views. Besides, this article emphasizes the importance of considering personal factors for understanding lecturers' information behavior. The focus point is the relation between personal factors and information behavior which based on analyzing recordings of some interviews with lecturers. It is shown that lecturers' information behavior could be impacted by personal factors.*

**Keywords :** Information behavior, lecturers, Library and Information Science

### Introduction

Information behavior is one of a fundamental aspects of everyone' life in general, of lecturers in particularly. There are many studies relating to information behavior have increased every year. Information behavior refers to those activities a person engages in when identifying their own need for information, determining information sources, seeking and searching information behavior in any way and using information retrieval system. In academic environment, lecturers' information behavior is considered as crucial characteristic for accomplishing their roles in teaching and research as well as other individuals' activities. Understanding information behavior helps information institutions as well as organizations to design information systems and develop the organizations' capability, especially in academic communities. For individuals, it is very important to be information literate, and then each of lecturers recognizes their information need, the way to seek, search, evaluate, use and share what they found. For academic libraries, librarians and information professionals should be people who design and provide information services for lecturers, students, etc. ... with many different needs. Specially, information behavior of lecturers has been influenced by many factors. Understanding lecturers' information behavior will help in the identification and decrease of difficulties for them to use information. Moreover, the lecturers could use information as a valuable source for teaching, research, learning and solving problems. This study explores some crucial factors impacting the lecturers' information behavior. Based on those results, academic libraries could provide better services, quality information, and improve collection development practices.

## Research Questions

This study aimed to explore the influence of personal factors on lecturers' information behavior. The overall aim of this study was to explore how lecturers' information behavior could be impacted by personal factors. Information behavior includes inner processes and outer factors, which influence information seeking and affect the individuals' way of responding to their information need (Wilson, 1997). The main following research question would be conducted through this study is that "how do personal factors influence information behavior of lecturers?"

## Methodology

Analyzing literature was used to review a brief insight on what information behavior is as well as on the information behavior of lecturers. A focus interview with lecturers is used for analyzing typical characteristics of information behavior of lecturers. Also, the focus of this paper is on personal characteristics. A focus group was used to collect data relating to some factors impacting on lecturers' information behavior, including personal factors. Focus group was chosen as the desired data gathering methodology because of aiming to gain information about opinions and attitudes about information need, information source, information seeking behavior, and their evaluation of the role of academic library. This focus group was conducted on a group of eight lecturers in different majors, at University of Social Sciences and Humanities, Vietnam National University, Hochiminh city, Vietnam.

## Results

### 1. Theories of information behavior and personal factors

Information behavior is the totality of human behavior in relation to the sources and channels of information, including both active and passive information seeking and information use. Thus it includes face-to-face and online communication with others as well as the passive reception of information (Wilson, 2000). Information behavior is influenced by some factors such as psychological, demographical, role-related, interpersonal, environmental and source-related characteristics as Wilson's model. One of these is personal factor as well as role related variables that impact on information behavior of users. Some authors defined information behavior based on the general model of information behavior developed by (Wilson 1997), in which include at least three elements: an information need and its drives lead to an individuals perception of need; the factors that affect the individuals response to the perception of need; and the processes or actions involved in that response the needs. With this definition, information behavior is concerned with three main components: information needs, information seeking, and information use.

### Information need

Information need is an anomalous state of knowledge (Belkin, Brooks and Oddy, 1982), or a gap in individual's knowledge in sense making situations (Dervin and Nilan, 1986). For a person to

experience an information need, there must be a motive behind it (Wilson, 1997). There are some kinds of information that vary in specific situations at particular time, including current information need, exhaustive information need, everyday information need and catching up information need.

- *Current information need:* This kind of information need helps information users up to date in their respective fields of development. Current information is intended to make available right information in the right formats for information users.
- *Exhaustive information need:* This information need is related to the need of drawing suitable conclusion in a particular area of activity.
- *Everyday information need:* Every user needs different kind of information with different requirements at different points of time. Some users need information about a particular activity every day.
- *Catching up information need:* With this need, information users need precise information. Simplicity and availability of catching precise information are main characteristics of information, so that information users could catch it easily.

According to Leckie et al. (1996), information need is not constant and can be influenced by a number of variables. Such as age, experience, education and geographic location, etc.; the context within which the information need arises, the frequency, importance and the complexity of the tasks are also important factors. All of these factors can influence the formulation of information need.

## **Information seeking behavior**

Marchionini (1995) has narrated that information seeking is a natural process of human life. It could be said that information seeking behavior is the purposive seeking for information as a result of a need to satisfy some goal. Ikoja-Odongo and Ocholla (2004) described information seeking as a process that requires an information seekers, or what might be called “personal information structure” such as a person’s cognitive abilities, his or her knowledge, skills in relation to the problem or task domain, knowledge and skills specific to a system and knowledge and skills regarding information seeking. Information is undertaken to identify a message that satisfied a perceived need (Wright and Guy, 1997). This activity may be actively or passively done when taking steps to satisfy a felt need (Ikoja-Odongo, 2002). Andersen (2000) in another dimension noted that research on information seeking has looked at how individuals go about finding the materials they needs. This definition is related to the information need of users. At the perspective of the ways of seeking information and information source, Kakai, et al. (2004) defined information-seeking behavior as an individual's way and manner of gathering and sourcing for information for personal use, knowledge updating, and development. Faire-Wessels (1990) referred to it as the way people search for and utilize information.

## *Information use*

Although information use is a fundamental concept, there are no definitional or methodological approaches that are broadly accepted or applied. Taylor (1991) identifies the following eight classes of information uses:

- *Enlightenment*. Information is used to develop a context or to make sense of a situation by answering questions such as, “Are there similar situations?” “What are they?” “What is our history and experience?”
- *Problem Understanding*. Information is used in a more specific way than enlightenment—it is used to develop a better comprehension of a particular problem.
- *Instrumental*. Information is used so that the individual knows what to do and how to do something.
- *Factual*. Information is used to determine the facts of a phenomenon or event, to describe reality.
- *Confirmational*. Information is used to verify another piece of information.
- *Projective*. Information is used to predict what is likely to happen in the future.
- *Motivational*. Information is used to initiate or sustain personal involvement in order to keep moving along on a particular course of action.
- *Personal or political*. Information is used to develop relationships, enhance status, reputation, and personal fulfillment.

With the perspective of information use as outcomes, Kirk (2002) developed an outcome model. This model shows that information use not only the merely functional, the problem solving, or the performing of tasks, but also includes the construction of new knowledge and new meanings, the transformative act of shaping decisions and influencing others, and the movement and exchange of information with colleagues. Besides, Kirk’s (2002) study also concluded five different ways of using information as, including information packaging, information flow, developing new knowledge and insights, shaping judgments and decisions, and influencing others”. The first way is *information packaging* that refers to information use as repackaging existing information in a different form and format so that it is accessible to others, an activity that is often part of facilitating information flow. The second one is *information flow* is information use as enabling the flow of information by transmitting it to people or exchanging it with them. Another way of using information is *developing new knowledge and insights* that concerns information use as a forward-looking process that creates new ideas and meanings. Furthermore, *shaping judgments* and the last one is *influencing others* refer to the use of information to guide decision-making and to influence the behavior of others.

These five modes in an outcome space of the phenomenon of information use is divided into three levels (figure 1 below). At level 2, information is considered as an object, which is packed and contributed to create information flow. At the second level, new knowledge and insights are created by information as a construct. The last third level is that information is perceived as a transformative force that shapes judgments and influences others.

<b>Information Use Outcome Space</b>	<i>Manager in foreground</i>	<i>Organization in foreground</i>
<i>Level 3 Information as transformative force</i>	Shaping judgments and decisions	Influencing others
<i>Level 2 Information as construct</i>	New knowledge and insights	
<i>Level 1 Information as object</i>	Packaging information	Information flow

**Figure 1. Information use outcome space. (adapted from Kirk, 2002)**

### Personal factors and information behavior

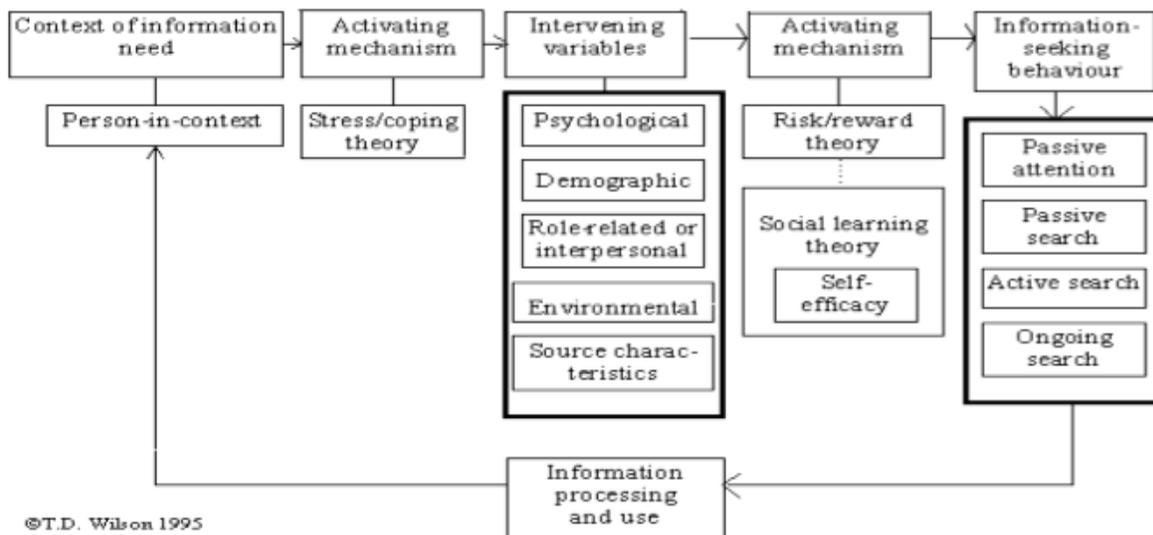
There have been numerous theoretical perspectives in personal factors. According to the Health Promotion Model, personal factors are categorized as biologic, psychological, or socio cultural (Pender et al., 2002). Personal factors are defined as those distinguishing characteristics, which might affect behavior. They are divided into the sub-categories of biological (age and body mass), psychological (self-esteem and self-motivation), and socio cultural (ethnicity and education). Another viewpoint of marketing is that, personal factors play an important role in affecting consumer buying behavior, including occupation, age and human lifecycle, economic condition, lifestyle, personality. Besides, educational level is also one of personal factors related to information behavior.

Many researchers emphasize that there is a relationship between information behavior and task performance (Bystrom, 1999; Jarvelin, & Wilson, 2003; Vakkari, 2001). Wilson (1997) believes that to study and understand information behavior, it is important to get an overall understanding of the context within which the information need arises. Chowdhury (2004) has mentioned that information seeking behavior of users depends on a number of factors which includes the professional and educational level of the user; the skill of user to get to information sources; and the time that a user has to see information systems. However, this study emphasizes that lecturers' information behavior are shaped by personal variables including age, gender, educational level, and specially on work-related variables- occupation (such as role, task, experience).

There is some more recent research, however, about the factors (both systematic and individual) that influence individual information behavior. For example, Bates (2010) identified the frequently demonstrated dominance of the “principle of least effort” in information seeking.

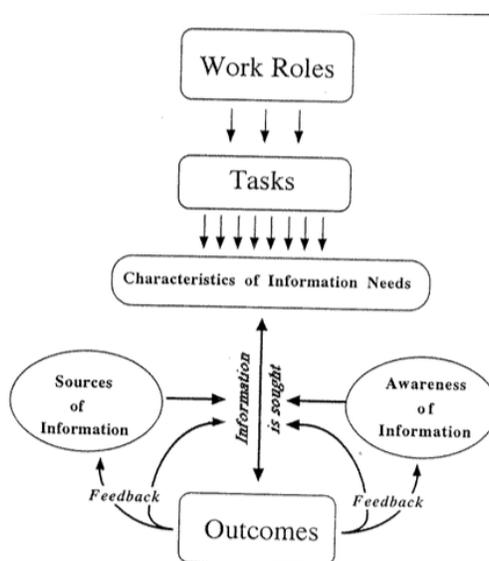
Some cases are that information users in most fields prefer informal sources and channels if available. In many cases, the principle of least effort may cause information users to avoid information seeking. Some users could use Search Engine like Google, or reliable information sources. The author also analyzed the relation between emotion to information behavior (seeking, withholding and sharing) such as stress and self-concept.

Wilson (1997) provided a general model of information seeking behavior. This general model of “information behavior” includes a number of stages that begin with the context of the information need. The second stage is the activating mechanism i.e., the motive or reason for seeking information. The third stage is of intervening variables that may act as barriers to information seeking and/or processing, such as the personal variables and the characteristics of the source. Information seeking behavior is the active and/or passive search for information. Information processing and use is the next stage, which acts as a mechanism of feedback for the information searcher/user and may give rise to more information needs (See Figure 2).



**Figure 2. A Revised General Model of Information Behavior by Wilson (1997)**

Leckie, et al. (1996) also assumed that information seeking is related to the performance of a particular role and its associated tasks. The below figure shows that particular roles and their related task results in information needs, which are, in turn, affected by factors, such as sources available, intended use of sources, individual characteristics of the users, and environment surrounding the users.



**Figure 3. Leckie's model**

The theory of information activities in work tasks (Bystrom 2006) focused on the role of task complexity in the use of information types and sources. The author argued that complexity of tasks leads to information users use more information types. Sometimes, they are less knowledgeable about the type of information they need to obtain. Furthermore, the information users also have tendency to rely on experts as an information source. Role theory explains individuals' preferences by situating their search for information in a social context within a social system. Lecturers' criteria for stopping an information search are based on publication requirements and deadlines and the amount of time available for preparing and delivering lectures and presenting papers. Time constraints are an overwhelming factor for faculty in deciding how much effort they are willing to invest in satisfying their information needs.

Characteristics of information needs are shaped by variables like individual demographics, context, frequency, predictability, importance and complexity. Professionals seek information from colleagues, librarians, handbooks, and journal articles and their own personal knowledge and experience. Information sources can be formal or informal, internal or external (within or outside organization), oral or written. Information seeking is influenced by awareness of information (direct or indirect knowledge of various information sources), whereby variables can be accessibility of sources (easy access), familiarity and prior success, trustworthiness, timeliness, cost, quality etc. Besides, Leckie, et al (1996) has pointed out the factors affecting information seeking. According to them, professionals use a variety of information sources, which can be characterized by the types of channels – formal and informal; internal or external; oral or written; and personal.

G. de-Alwis, Majid and Chaudhry (2006) have found in a descriptive study that there has been a transformation in managers' information seeking behavior over the decades. Based on an extensive literature review, the authors analyzed the factors that have influenced managers'

choice of source preferences. Their review not only reveals four key dimensions used to study source preferences, i.e. contextual, situational, personal/socio-cultural, and informational but also identifies common factors under each. The factors given main weight in the literature are accessibility, quality, and richness of the information, as well as individual and institutional characteristics. Wilson (1997) believes that the use and impact of other information sources on information seeking behavior should also be explored, such as mass media and use of computer-mediated technologies etc. According to Wilson (1997), whatever the situation in which a person perceives a need for information, engaging in information seeking behavior is not necessary consequence. There may be a number of reasons for this, including personal characteristics, social/interpersonal variables and environmental variables.

## 2. The impact of personal factors on information behavior of lecturers

Every lecturers have their own different need of information in order to fulfill their task, such as completing lectures, writing articles, books or fulfilling master theses, doctoral theses, etc. ... Related to the lecturers' information needs, there are many purposes for the lecturers to seek, search and use information. Determining the source of information is the first stage for lecturers to satisfy their need. Some of them determine the information sources as using academic libraries for borrowing books, reading magazines, accessing database, which related to their fields.

*“For academic libraries, I usually use academic library in order to read specialized magazines, in which there are ones in different disciplines”.*

When evaluating the role of academic libraries as information source, they also have concerned about it. However, they found that there are some disadvantages for them to use academic libraries, and that is also the reason why all of them do not often use academic library.

*“Because of some various reasons for me not to go to libraries, and there are several disadvantages to indirect access to libraries”.*

Concerned about the reasons why most of lecturers hardly use academic libraries are shortage of suitable specialized materials for their needs

*“In our academic library is shortage of Chinese materials; the second is that most of materials in academic is textbook while I have them at home. Some of them are not suitable for information need”.*

All of lecturers who attend in interview said that in order to excavate information to support activities of research and teaching of lecturers, there are many sources of information that help them effectively such as Internet, personal collection, friends, colleagues, students, etc. ... With these characteristics of work-related variables of lecturers, most of them said that one of best information sources for them to seek information is their own collection. Next choices could be from Internet, colleagues, bookstores, and finally from academic libraries.

*“It is not difficult for me to seek Vietnamese materials. Specially, there are two crucial information sources that I seek foreign materials. The first source is on Internet, which is load for my personal collection. And the second one is buying original materials.”*

Furthermore, two of lecturers who take the role of managers also said that their information need is appeared through the time of research. However, they do not have enough time to read books at academic library, but they often choose the way of searching on the Internet, or even there are not sufficient materials for their need of information. Therefore, frequency and time of using academic library is very limited.

Related to lecturers' information seeking behavior, as observed and interviewed results, often lecturers' information seeking behavior involves active or purposeful information as a result of the various needs of information. Analyzing the recordings of interview shows that, the lecturers who are dean, vice dean of faculties have shortage of time to use information source like academic libraries although they appreciate highly the role of academic libraries as a great source for seeking information. In order to satisfy their information need or seeking materials, information, they usually take advantages some support from their colleagues, students within university whom study abroad. One of lecturers said that, he often buys suitable materials from his abroad business trip, or go around foreign libraries to read them. Another manager-lecturer found that the academic library is one of the great sources of information that she often takes priority when she has need of information seeking. When lecturers couldn't seek relevant information, they tend to try to use more relevant alternative information sources. There are three main information sources which lecturers often excavate. The first source is free links of materials, which shared via Internet. In fact, Internet is really a giant information source where users could use freely or some specific constraints. The lecturers can search, read, copy or download for their own collection relevant to their subjects. The second choice of information source is library, such as academic library of university within system of university as well as the other libraries such as public library, other university libraries. The third one is information source from their colleagues, students, friends or experienced lecturers at related-field. Furthermore, the last choice is bookstores as information source where the lecturers seek information.

For the ways of using information, information use is dependant on the information need of every lecturers. They have many different purposes to use information, they refer to both need of teaching and research. Sometimes, the amount of time when the lecturers spend searching for information is depend on the time they have prepared for giving lecturers, conducting seminars, making presentations or conducting a research, writing a book or journal articles.

Based on Kirk (2002) model of "outcome space of the phenomenon of information use" that is divided into three levels, the information behavior of lecturers are also categorized into the same three levels, including five ways of using information: information packaging, information flow, developing new knowledge and insights, shaping judgments and influencing others. At the first way, lecturers whom attend interview said that information or materials are collected from different information sources, they would be stored and organized in the lecturers' collections such as personal library, computer storage, online tools of storage, shelves, etc. ... Then, lecturers could use information for their specific purposes, share with concerned colleagues. With this way, information is easy to be accessible, as well as enable to transmit them for other people. Related to the role of the lecturers, they always aware that developing of new knowledge and

insights is one of their roles. Based on that, they create new ideas and meanings, as research projects, lectures, scientific papers, books, etc. ... that could be shared in academic communities, such as teaching students, publishing on journals, storing in the academic library and even influencing other people and their behaviors.

## Conclusions

To sum up, personal factors of lecturers are important for their decisions of the way they behave with information, the way of seeking information or collecting information, using and sharing information. Most of lecturers take main responsibilities for teaching and research. Besides, some of them also play manager's role of university, faculty or department. Therefore, diversity of lecturers' roles makes contribute to differ their information behavior. There are many theories proved that information behavior of everyone is different based on many complex and different work roles. In academic environment, lecturers' awareness of their roles create information needs, that leads to information seeking behavior.

It could be clearly seen that information behavior of lecturers has been impacted by some variables related to personal factors. Their information behaviors have differences with the need of information, the ways of seeking information and the ways of using information. Similarly, they have many choices of sources of information. One of the information sources is academic library. Recognizing these factors as well as characteristics is very meaningful for academic library to responding the information need of lecturers in particular and the information users in general. It couldn't deny that the role "*academic library is one heart of knowledge in academic environment and university*".

Academic library is an institution that responsible for dissemination, processing, management and distribution of information and knowledge to information users with the aim of responding to their information needs. Information seeking behavior differs among user groups, in which lecturers. Academic libraries must understand the information needs of students, faculty, and scholars with the aim of meeting those needs. The academic library is to fulfill some needs for documents and information for present information users as well as potential information users. There are such need related to educational activities, to research activities, to professional activities, to recreation activities, to cultural activities or to personal development. When lecturers have information need, they decide to approach information source, to seek and search information through those sources with the aim of satisfying their information needs and their goals. For achieving these objectives, the academic library should recognize the needs of information of the potential users and the present users. Based on that, the library could provide the information users with the relevant and in time information, products and services of information with high quality.

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