Everyday information behavior of marginalized communities in the Global South: Informal transportation as example

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ABSTRACT

Information science is increasingly focused on giving voice to marginalized communities, improving their daily lives, and contributing to Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) and equity, diversity, and inclusion (EDI). However, challenges facing marginalized communities in the Global South are less frequently investigated, yet of great importance. Millions of people depend on information for essential everyday life activities such as transportation. Successful, timely daily commuting between home and work influences financial stability, family time, and safety. Everyday life information behavior as a research lens can reveal information activities, influencing factors, information sources, and contexts applying to informal transportation use by poorer socio-economic groups. Theories of information behavior such as information poverty and information horizons can shed light. Understanding information behavior contexts, and how to bridge the digital divide and promotion of networking, sharing, and learning for marginalized populations through community-led digital literacy training can help tailor interventions.

KEYWORDS

Everyday information behavior; Global South; Information horizons; Marginalized communities; Transportation

INTRODUCTION AND BACKGROUND

Globally millions of people depend on information and information services for their everyday life activities (Case & Given, 2016). Their ability to keep a job, earn an income, get children to school, and acquire groceries depend on these services. This is part of everyday mastery of life (Savolainen, 1995). One such everyday life activity is commuting between home and work and getting to healthcare, shopping, and educational facilities. Although public transportation is used widely by all sectors of society, lower socio-economic communities in particular are dependent on public and informal transportation (Venter et al, 2014; Vilakazi & Govender, 2014). Public transportation includes trains, buses, coaches, and taxi services. Informal transportation includes mini-bus taxi services (South Africa) and boda-boda motorcycle taxis (Uganda), and is the majority form of transport across the Global South. Commuters need information prior to travel, during the journey and upon arrival to make informed decisions on whether, when, and how they travel, on safety, costs, what to expect on arrival at the destination, transfers, and levels of crowding. A lack of information may be a barrier to accessing desired services, and consequently influences the attainment of equity and human development goals such as those targeted in Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) and equity, diversity, and inclusion (EDI).

The Global South (i.e., poorer socio-economic countries in Latin-America, Asia, Oceania and Africa) presents growing challenges. Living circumstances in the Global South has led to an increase in studies on information needs and behavior and mobility behavior (i.e., the use of transportation) (Klopp & Cavoli, 2019)

resulting in practical interventions such as databases on routes and services and analyses of service patterns (Howe, 2021), and products collecting information, e.g., an Android application by WhereIsMyTransport (WIMT). Commuters increasingly rely on social media (Tsao, et al., 2021).

This panel discussion was inspired by a research project, called "Towards the Empowered Commuter: Exploring information needs and information behavior in Uganda and South Africa", being conducted by the Centre for Transport Development in Pretoria, South Africa, and partner organisations (*cc* Acknowledgement for details).

Transportation is one of many examples of everyday life activities where information behavior can serve as a research lens to reveal information needs and a wide spectrum of information activities including information seeking, encountering, and sharing (i.e., information behavior) (Case & Given, 2016).

PANEL ORGANIZATION

This panel brings together academics who recognize the need to address the plight of ordinary citizens in marginalized communities and to give a voice to their information needs, to understand their unique information behavior and in particular information gathering and information sources, to explore appropriate theories and alignment with related issues such as contexts, the digital divide and community involvement.

Background of the transportation project, rationale, and panel introduction. Ina Fourie (8 minutes)

The moderator, Fourie, will first present the goals of the project, Towards the Empowered Commuter, an international transdisciplinary research project that intends to contribute towards nurturing more empowered, well-informed public transport users by supporting both governments and ICT providers to use information more effectively in the provision of sustainable transport in Sub-Saharan Africa. Fourie is a co-investigator of this project, providing information behavior expertise. Fourie will highlight the needs of the Global South, and initiatives in Africa (i.e., Uganda and South Africa) regarding informal transportation information needs and information behavior. Global South challenges are very pressing and targeted by Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs), equity, diversity, and inclusion (EDI) initiatives and could inform related work elsewhere. That is, the issues may also be transferred to other communities of marginalized populations and their everyday experiences. A video clip from the Uganda partner and lead project researcher on the Global South transportation context will supplement her presentation.

Panelists will share their perspectives on how an everyday information behavior lens and appropriate interventions can make a difference to marginalized populations, especially those in the Global South. Fourie will introduce each panelist.

Contextualized understanding of information behavior. Naresh K. Agarwal (8 minutes)

Agarwal will draw on his expertise and work in the area of context in human information behavior. Drawing on his models of the contextual identity framework and the elements of context (Agarwal, 2018) and his persistent effort over the years in synthesizing theories and models in information-seeking behavior and information behavior into a unified model (Agarwal, 2022), he will discuss the importance of context in investigating the information behavior of marginalized communities.

Information horizons. Diane H. Sonnenwald (8 minutes)

Sonnenwald first presented information horizon theory and its methodology over two decades ago. As one of the first visual research methods originating in information science, the information horizon methodology has been shown to be valuable in investigating the information behavior of individuals in marginalized communities. The theory and methodology have received several awards, including an ALISE research methodology award. In this short presentation, examples of how the methodology has been used to illuminate information behavior in marginalized groups will be presented, and aspects of the methodology that increase its usefulness when exploring information behavior in marginalized communities will be highlighted (Sonnenwald, 1999; Sonnenwald, Wildemuth & Harmon, 2001).

Information poverty. Heidi Julien (8 minutes).

Julien will discuss theories of information poverty and life-in-the-round which may be relevant to thinking about information behavior in marginalized populations. These theories were introduced by Elfreda Chatman

(1987, 1996, 1999). More recently, information poverty has been analyzed (Haider & Bawden, 2007) and has been reconsidered and reinterpreted by scholars such as Canning and Buchanan (2019), Gibson and Martin (2019), and Kitzie et al (2022). The potential value and possibilities provided by these particular lenses will be considered.

Need to bridge the digital and content divide. Abebe Rorissa (8 minutes)

Rorissa will discuss the various facets of the digital and content divide, distinctions between the two concepts, their relevance to effective information access and use, and why they need our attention, especially in the context of everyday information behaviors of marginalized communities in the Global South.

Promoting networking, sharing, and learning for marginalized populations through community-led digital literacy training. Brian Detlor (8 minutes)

Detlor will discuss the important role public libraries and social service agencies play in the delivery of digital literacy training to marginalized populations who often have no other means by which to receive such instruction. He will present findings from his recent research project that provides theoretical propositions and practical recommendations on the organizational factors and end-user considerations that affect not only the delivery of such instruction but also impact community member uptake, digital literacy skills development, and digital literacy appreciation among marginalized groups (Detlor et al., 2022).

Engagement with the audience. (35 minutes)

After the presentations, the moderator and panelists will engage with the face-to-face audience, inviting them to share their ideas, experiences with related research, relevant theories, and methodologies. If the audience group size allows, small break-away groups will be formed to discuss the questions for 20 minutes. Each group will nominate a person to give feedback. Audience input will be summarized by the moderator and shared via email with the audience. Initial questions to stimulate the discussion include:

1. How can marginalized communities be more effectively involved in research and enhance research outcomes?
2. Should additional methodologies be used to explore everyday life information needs and behavior such as the transportation needs of commuters from poorer socio-economic groups in developing countries versus developed countries and if so, what do you suggest?
3. Apart from the theories we mentioned, which other theories can deepen insight of information needs and information behavior related to transportation needs and experiences of lower socio-economic groups?
4. How could ASIS&T help to encourage action research related to everyday life information needs?
5. At the conclusion of the session, the moderator will summarize the outcomes of the panel discussions. A more detailed summary will be shared via email (3 minutes).

EXPECTED OUTCOMES

By the end of the panel discussion, the audience will have increased their understanding of the need to address information needs and information behavior regarding everyday life experiences of marginalized lower socio-economic groups, the theories and research methods, broader issues, and interventions required to give voices to such communities and to improve their quality of life, and the need for Global South studies that can be extended to other regions of the world and, in particular, marginalized communities.

PANEL MEMBERS

Ina Fourie is a Full Professor, Head of the Department of Information Science and Chair of the School of Information Technology, University of Pretoria, South Africa. Ina holds positions in the leadership of the ASIS&T Executive Board, ISIC (Information Seeking in Context) Steering Committee and the Research and Supervision Section of the European iSchool Region. Her research focuses on information behavior, especially health information behavior in cancer, palliative care, grief and bereavement. Website address: https://www.up.ac.za/information-science/article/1913412/prof-ina-fourie-bio. Ina represents the research group at the Centre for Transport Development, University of Pretoria, led by Prof Christo Venter.

Naresh Agarwal is a Professor (starting July 2022) and Director of the Information Science & Technology Concentration at the School of Library and Information Science at Simmons University, USA. He is the

President of the Association of Information Science & Technology and was awarded its 2012 James Cretsos Leadership Award. Naresh's research area is information behavior and knowledge management. His first book 'Exploring Context in Information Behavior' was published in 2018. His second book was published in 2021 as 'You know the glory, not the story' internationally and 'Engineering to Ikigai' in South Asia. He has been a keynote/invited speaker at workshops and conferences in the USA, Japan, France, India, Pakistan, Bangladesh, Iran, and South Africa. You can learn more at nareshagarwal.com and projectonenessworld.com.

Brian Detlor is Professor of Information Systems in the DeGroote School of Business at McMaster University, Canada. He also is Visiting Professor at the Centre for Social Informatics, School of Computing at Edinburgh Napier University in Scotland. He currently serves as Immediate Past-President of the Association for Information Science & Technology (ASIS&T). His recent research projects involve the investigation of digital literacy training programs led by public libraries and other local community organizations, as well as the use of digital storytelling by city cultural organizations. His research has been published in several leading Information Systems and Library & Information Science journals, including the *Journal of the Association for Information Science and Technology*, *Journal of Management Information Systems*, *Information Systems Journal*, and *Government Information Quarterly*.

Heidi Julien is a Professor in the Department of Information Science, University at Buffalo, USA and a Research associate at the Department of Information Science, University of Pretoria, South Africa. She has been involved in ASIS&T in a range of roles for over two decades. Heidi serves on the JASIS&T Editorial Board, and several other journal editorial boards. She is also active in ALISE, serving as President in 2018-19, and she serves on the Steering Committee for ISIC (Information Seeking in Context). Heidi publishes primarily in the areas of information behavior, digital/information literacy, and research methods; she won the 2020 SIGUSE Award for Outstanding Contributions to Information Behavior. She has worked as a scholar in New Zealand, Canada, and the USA, and has been honored to serve as a visiting scholar in South Africa, China, Australia, and New Zealand, in addition to giving invited talks in several other countries.

Abebe Rorissa is a Professor and Director of the School of Information Sciences at the University of Tennessee, Knoxville. Before his current position, he worked in the United States, Ethiopia, Lesotho, and Namibia as an educator, researcher, administrator, and practitioner. He consulted for academic institutions, national governments, and international organizations on various topics. He has published extensively in leading international information science journals. He is the President-Elect and was a member of the Board of the Association for Information Science and Technology (ASIS&T) and its Executive Committee, and a recipient of the ASIS&T Watson Davis Award for Service and SIG Member of the Year Awards.

Diane H. Sonnenwald is Emerita Professor at the University College Dublin, Ireland. She currently conducts workshops teaching collaboration skills and strategies and consults with CILIP and the European Commission. She has been a Distinguished Visiting Professor at National Taiwan Normal University and an Erasmus+ Visiting Professor at the University of Osijek, Croatia. Diane has received 25 grants from international foundations, corporations, and funding agencies and published over 130 publications. Her research has focused on interorganizational and interdisciplinary collaboration, and on the design and evaluation of emerging and future technologies. She served as ASIS&T President in 2012, and in 2020 she was awarded the ASIS&T Award of Merit.

CONCLUSION

Everyday life information behavior research can substantially impact interdisciplinary and industry research that can improve the quality of life of ordinary citizens and in particular those in marginalized lower socio-economic communities. Appropriate theories and contextualization, methodologies and community involvement can give voice to their needs and address SDGs and EDI.

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