

growth in the capacity of transistors to store and process data).

Whilst these laws might appear immutable, the line between law and belief is not immutable and the laws represent rather the extent to which a set of beliefs has played a very significant role in the evolution of information science as a discipline. The current research sets out to explore these and other forms of information belief.

2. Problem statement

The existence of information beliefs might seem very obvious, given just a moment or two to reflect. It is, therefore, somewhat surprising that their existence has as yet not been acknowledged in a systematic way and nor has any attempt been made to classify them or consider what they might tell us about the human experience. As a first step it is essential to map the types of information belief that exist. In setting out to find evidence of information beliefs as an early exploratory stage of an ongoing research project, focus groups were chosen, as they provide way to evidence information and test the capacity of such data to provide the raw material to build a classification and taxonomy of information beliefs. In this first stage the aim of data collection is to collect examples of information beliefs as phenomena of human information behaviour.

The research therefore investigates the challenges facing humans in interacting with information in an information rich world and the extent to which information beliefs influence their information behaviour. There is much evidence that people struggle to make sense of their information worlds. Research into information beliefs will create further knowledge about not just how people behave when using information but what beliefs affect that behaviour. The self moderated focus group, a heretofore little used and untested approach, was believed capable of being a useful tool in gathering evidence of information beliefs with minimal researcher bias and this research tests its value for information science research.

The study builds on information science and psychology research where work on, for example, cognitive dissonance is relevant. The results will primarily be of interest to those working in information science but have impact for researchers in a very wide variety of fields, where information behaviour and use affect researchers and practitioners alike, including search interface providers such as Google who might build on personal information beliefs to hone search approaches. It is perhaps interesting to note in this context that there are those who believe that Google (and other less used search engines) are forming a new epistemology or way of constructing knowledge (Tavani, 2012, rev 2016).

3. Literature review and underpinning theory

For the purpose of this study a belief is defined as the acceptance that something exists or is true which is either i) possible to accept or reject, or ii) not capable of absolute proof. Information beliefs are defined as beliefs held by people about the nature of information and how to interact with information and use it. Information is not defined; it consists of whatever the research participants believe to be information.

There is no literature focusing specifically on the concept of a belief system or systems in relation to information behaviour. This in itself offers an opportunity for blue sky thinking and an original contribution to knowledge. While there is a body of literature exploring LIS philosophies, as more abstract discussions of the grounds of LIS research, these are excluded from the review which follows. The literature to be found in the extant information science canon which is most relevant to the proposed research draws on epistemology or the psychology of beliefs about knowledge and knowing. The impact of such beliefs on aspects of information behaviour is explored by a handful of researchers, as, for example, Mokhtari's (2014) research into the influence of students' epistemic beliefs on their information seeking.

Information literacy has drawn to a limited extent on epistemology in works by, for example, Swanson (2006), who drew parallels between theories of personal epistemology and the ways in which individuals build knowledge from an information literacy perspective. Whitmire, in two studies (2003 and 2004), examines four epistemological theories alongside Kuhlthau's (1993) information search process model in terms of their power to explicate information behaviour. Chen and Chang (2005) found that student epistemic belief influenced approaches to information seeking. The current research constitutes a primary investigation of human information beliefs, with no a priori assumption that these necessarily reflect or will prove to be consistent with epistemic belief theory.

The second area of information science research that has relevance for the current proposal has developed models of information seeking behaviour which seek to explain behaviour by drawing on process analysis or psychology to build theory. In considering the extent to which existing models of information behaviour related to safety information behaviour, Marcella, Pirie, and Rowlands (2013) found that during critical incidents the stages in information seeking tend to merge and become chaotic in a non-linear manner, with the presence of multiple players, systems and types of information. Under pressure, information seeking becomes less systematic and subject to physical constraints of time and place. The influence of the affective, in terms of heightened emotions, feeling overwhelmed and frustrated was also clear and respondents noted states of uncertainty, anxiety and confusion, with a concomitant desire on the part of the information seeker for certainty and clarity. However little in the way of verification or authentication of information took place during critical situations. The pressure to focus also resulted in avoidance of information, arguably to reduce dissonance and enable individuals to deal with the crisis they faced. The tendency in such circumstances to draw on a core belief system in terms of what was known or trusted, drawing on knowledge and experience, was also prevalent. Information sharing and use was influenced both by the availability of systems and by cultural antecedents around openness and trust, in line with Wilson's (1994) theory of the "person in context" and the influence of variables on information behaviour. Marcella et al. (2013) concluded that while "there are hypothetically limitless variables which can and do influence information behaviour which must be understood, and ... models go some of the way towards achieving this ... [because they are] ... rooted in a rationalist view of the world, while ... intuition rather than analysis may be a relatively common mode of dealing with complexity". The current research eschews model-making in favour of developing ab initio from primary data a typology or system of beliefs that may have an impact in complex, multi-faceted ways on information behaviour.

Information behaviour models tend to interpret theory from psychology as activating mechanisms or intervening variables, built on core rationalist assumptions, drawing on Dervin's (1983) concept of sense making as the predictor of information need. Typical assumptions or beliefs might include: i) that information seeking will be rationally engaged in, in circumstances of need; ii) that more information is a good thing; iii) that ignorance will incite information seeking; and iv) that information seeking is a linear and analysable activity.

Equally much research has sought to understand human information need in context—in the workplace or the professional environment—with information being reflected upon from a rationalist perspective and with the sense of an ideal approach to information seeking. This sense of the ideal also permeates information literacy research, where good information handling is seen as a skill that can be developed. But do humans interact with information in a rationalist, logical and codable manner that is capable of being enhanced? Such approaches may fail to recognise the myriad of other influences on human information interaction. Other intervening variables, to use Wilson's terminology, include cognitive dissonance (Case, Andrews, Johnson, & Allard, 2005), information avoidance or blunting (Folkman & Lazarus, 1980), self-sufficiency and relevancy when users halt a

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