

Editorial

Introduction

There is no theme to this issue of *Information Research*, just a set of papers that happens to come together, ready for publication at this time. However, there is some commonality of topic among the papers. Two deal with models of information seeking and/or searching, one deals with the relationship between personality factors and information behaviour, and the 'invited paper' from Professor Brenda Dervin, deals with the issue of diverse methodological approaches to 'user studies'. In other words, these four papers are firmly in the 'information behaviour' part of the information science spectrum. The odd one out is the paper by Gary Burnett and his colleagues on an hermeneutic approach to the identification of 'virtual communities'.

Brenda Dervin is well known in the 'information behaviour' community: her *Sense-Making Methodology* has been adopted by many researchers in the field (although I suspect that, as with 'grounded theory', the method is not always implemented as rigorously as Brenda would expect) and her citations probably run into the thousands!

Here, in [*Human studies and user studies: a call for methodological interdisciplinarity*](#), Brenda makes a call for a genuine inter-disciplinary approach to 'user studies', to overcome the boundaries that academic researchers erect around themselves. She notes that research in the field has tended to pile up rather than add up, and concludes:

Without a coherent and methodologically informed approach to inter-disciplinarity applied within the field, it will become impossible, even self-defeating, to address the interdisciplinary information needs of constituencies amid the chaos of the cyber-spaced information confluence and collapsing disciplinary boundaries.

Gary Burnett and his colleagues, in [*Inscription and interpretation of text: a cultural hermeneutic examination of virtual community*](#) ...adopt an anthropological perspective, yoked with a methodology based in hermeneutics, to illustrate how language use both reflects and influences culture in a virtual community. This is done by examining four samples of textual communications from the Usenet newsgroup [comp.security.firewalls](#). The authors conclude that:

This study demonstrates that our conceptual model can provide the foundation for a richer understanding of culture in virtual environments that rely on text-based communication for their interaction.

[*On conceptual models for information seeking and retrieval research*](#), by Kalervo Järvelin and myself has, perhaps, an unusual history in that it has been in the making for about three years, as each of us has grappled with other problems while exchanging ideas on the emerging text. It began when Kalervo and I shared an office while he was on study leave in Sheffield. Fortunately, we are pretty compatible personalities and the sharing involved a great deal of humorous interchange. However, there was also serious interchange and the paper is the result of this - possibly demonstrating the value of the inter-disciplinary work called for by Brenda Dervin, since Kalervo is a computer scientist working in the field of information retrieval and I am a sociologist working in information behaviour.

Barbara Niedźwiedzka's [*Proposed general model of information behaviour*](#) is the by-product of her Ph.D research on the information needs of managers in local government. She employed Wilson's model of information behaviour and this is her account of how she needed to modify the model to make it appropriate for this particular user group.

Finally, Jannica Heinström explores the relationship between personality traits (using the five-factor model of personality) and information behaviour among Finnish university students in [*Five personality dimensions and their influence on information behaviour*](#). Heinström's conclusions are interesting; for example:

The final impact of personality on information seeking is dependent on the unique combination of traits

which distinguish each individual. The more traits that incline towards certain information behaviour an individual possesses, the more likely it is that s/he will take on this behaviour. In some cases conflicting inclinations by different traits may neutralize the impact of personality traits, whereas in other situations, a strong personality characteristic may dominate and override other tendencies. This is the case for instance when a foremost conservative but conscientious person overcomes his/her cautious inclination towards confirming information by taking the effort to explore new challenging documents.

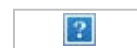
Once again, the authors reinforce the international character of the journal, representing Finland, Poland, the UK and the USA.

The 'best-seller' list

At the end of [my previous Editorial](#) I commented that it was becoming an increasingly time-consuming task to record the 'most hit' papers, now that all of the papers have counters. Following the last issue, I recorded [on the Weblog](#) a ranking of papers by 'hits per month', which took into account the number of months the page had had a counter - this revealed that some papers from the early issues were among the most hit papers, even though the counters had only been added to the paper at the end of 2002. Once again, this confirms the value of open-access, electronic publication.

It is too time-consuming to update that list regularly, but a quick examination of the papers suggests that there has been very little change in the overall ranking. Most interesting is the fact that there are papers from Volumes 1 and 2 that appear in the top ten, even though those volumes have only had counters for less than a year. Again, the persistence of interest in the subjects represented by these papers confirms the value of open-access publication. It is worth noting that the 162 papers have now recorded a total of almost half a million hits (455,519), while the top page of the journal has recorded 154,461 since April 1998. This suggests that using the top page counter as the measure of use is not a very good idea! It is better to think of every paper in the journal receiving 113 hits a month, or 1,356 hits a year, or the journal as a whole receiving more than 220,000 hits a year.

I hope you all enjoy this new issue and, remember, you can discuss the papers by registering with IR-DISCUSS at <http://www.jiscmail.ac.uk/lists/ir-discuss.html>



Professor Tom Wilson, Publisher/Editor-in-Chief
October 2003

How to cite this editorial:

Wilson, T.D. (2003) "Editorial." *Information Research*, 9(1), editorial E91 [Available at: <http://informationr.net/ir/9-1/editor91.html>]

© the author, 2003. Updated 11th October, 2003

[Contents](#)

7 2 1
[Web Counter](#)

[Home](#)
