Module 6: Introduction and Learning Objectives

Module 6: Information Behavior

Learning Objectives

1. Define and describe key aspects of information behavior, including information need, seeking, sharing, use, and poverty.
2. Understand the contextual factors that influence how individuals interact with information, such as setting, personal characteristics, and type of information sought.
3. Analyze foundational frameworks like Wilson's model, Dervin's Sense-Making approach, and the Ecological Model to understand different perspectives on information interaction.

To-Do List

1. Read the module overview below.
2. Watch the module lecture or review the transcript.
3. Complete the guided reading activity.
4. Complete Assignment 3: Information Behavior Analysis.

Overview

This week, we focus on **Information Behavior**, a critical aspect of Information Science that examines how people interact with information in various contexts. By understanding how individuals seek, share, use, and respond to information, we can design more effective information systems and services tailored to diverse needs.

What Is Information Behavior?

At its core, **Information Behavior** refers to the ways individuals engage with information in their environment—essentially, **"how people behave with information."** This encompasses a wide range of observable actions and cognitive processes. These behaviors are highly contextualized and influenced by a variety of factors, including the individual's background, the setting in which they operate, and the type of information required.

Key Dimensions of Information Behavior

1. **Information Need**
   - Represents a person's realization that specific information is required to address a knowledge gap.
   - Examples: A student researching for an assignment, a doctor looking up symptoms, or a consumer searching for product reviews.
2. **Information Seeking**
   - The active process of searching for needed information, which may include:
     - Querying a search engine.
     - Browsing a library catalog.
     - Asking peers or experts for recommendations.
   - Often involves both deliberate actions (e.g., using keywords) and exploratory activities (e.g., browsing related topics).
3. **Information Sharing**
   - The exchange of information with others, either intentionally (e.g., posting on social media) or as a byproduct of interactions (e.g., sharing during a conversation).
   - This behavior fosters collaboration and builds knowledge communities.
4. **Information Use**
   - The application of information to solve problems, make decisions, or create new knowledge.
   - Examples include writing a report, implementing a solution based on research, or adjusting behavior based on health advice.
5. **Information Poverty**
   - A state where individuals or groups are unable to access information that meets their needs, often due to:
     - Lack of resources (e.g., digital divide).
     - Structural barriers (e.g., censorship).
     - Social exclusion or marginalization.

Theoretical Models of Information Behavior

1. **Wilson's Model (1981)**

- A foundational framework in Information Behavior, Wilson's model depicts information-seeking as a process driven by a recognized need.
- It incorporates barriers (e.g., time constraints, lack of access) and feedback loops, showing that behavior evolves as individuals encounter and use information.

2. **Sense-Making (Dervin)**

- Focuses on how people address gaps in their knowledge.
- Emphasizes both the cognitive and emotional aspects of information behavior, recognizing that people often experience uncertainty or frustration when faced with information gaps.

3. **Ecological Model**

- Examines how an individual's environment (physical, social, and technological) shapes their information interactions.
- Considers factors such as:
  - Availability of resources.
  - Influence of cultural norms.
  - Impact of digital technologies and interfaces.

Applications of Understanding Information Behavior

1. **Designing User-Centric Systems**

- Knowledge of how people interact with information guides the development of systems and tools that align with user behavior.
- Example: Search engines optimize user experience by studying common search patterns and behaviors.

2. **Enhancing Accessibility**

- Insights into **information poverty** and its causes can help address inequities, such as:
  - Providing free access to online resources.
  - Developing low-cost information tools for underserved communities.

3. **Improving Information Literacy**

- Understanding how individuals seek and use information informs educational initiatives to teach critical thinking and evaluation skills, especially in an age of misinformation.

4. **Advancing Human-Information Interaction Research**

- Exploring psychological and social dimensions of information use supports fields like marketing, education, and healthcare, where tailored communication is critical.

Research Methods in Information Behavior

Since Information Behavior revolves around human interaction, it is fundamentally studied through **qualitative research methods**, including:

1. **Surveys**
    - Collect data on patterns, preferences, and challenges in information-seeking behaviors.
    - Example: Studying how students use digital libraries for academic research.
2. **Interviews**
    - Gain deeper insights into individual experiences and motivations.
    - Example: Interviewing employees to understand how they share knowledge within teams.
3. **Observational Studies**
    - Monitor real-time interactions with information systems or environments.
    - Example: Observing customer navigation on e-commerce websites to optimize design.

This module highlights how understanding **Information Behavior** is essential for improving the way we interact with information and technology. By diving into theoretical models, practical applications, and research methodologies, you'll develop a nuanced view of how people navigate their information needs. This knowledge not only supports better system design but also enhances the overall efficiency and inclusivity of information services.