

Research Article Analysis

Sang Hwa Lee

College of Information Studies, University of Maryland

INST 352-0103 Information User Needs and Assessment

Beth St. Jean

April 15, 2022

Research Article Analysis

The research article chosen was “The Information Search Behavior of the Millennial Generation” by Arthur Taylor. It focuses on the millennial generation user group and their information seeking behavior.

Interest in User Group

This user group of the millennial generation was interesting because I identify as a part of this group. I wondered about this user group’s information seeking behavior as a collective whole. I wanted to learn how well, or not, my generation engaged in information seeking processes.

Summary of Article

Goals and Research Questions

The goal of Taylor’s (2012) research was to “explore the information search behavior of this generation in relation to commonly cited information search behavior models” (Introduction section, para. 1). Taylor stated that information search process models such as Kuhlthau’s, Ellis’s, and Wilson’s were developed before the widespread use of the internet and not focused on the millennial generation; therefore, his goal was to provide more insight into the current information behavior of this generation.

Taylor conducted research by tracking a group of millennial subjects’ information seeking processes. For the research, Taylor (2012) focused on three research questions: “1. Do millennial generation information seekers progress through a search process similar to that of Wilson’s (1999) consolidated model, or is their search behavior different? 2. Do millennial generation information seekers evaluate the quality of Web resources? Are they discerning about quality-related attributes of the sources retrieved from the Web? 3. How do millennial generation

information seekers make use of general information Websites such as Wikipedia? At what stage(s) in the search process are these pages used?” (Research Questions section, para. 1).

Methods of Data Collection and Analysis

Participants who were born between 1985 and 1998 were recruited through an undergraduate business course. About 80 of these participants were drawn from a sample of junior and senior undergraduate students at an American university (Taylor, 2012).

The students were assigned research reports with interim assignments about topics that were similar in difficulty and related to the course. Taylor (2012) collected qualitative data on the participants’ information search processes using “a website with a modified search engine which executed searches using the Yahoo! search engine and then reformatted the results page to provide Web-based data collection” (Research Design section, para. 2). Then, anonymous surveys were integrated into the search engine interface, which contained questions with a pre-determined list of answers. The surveys asked participants about the relevance of the search results, their current stage of the information search process, and the criteria used to make that relevance judgement (Taylor, 2012).

For data analysis, Taylor determined the search stages for each of the interim assignments, which he labeled as deliverables. The search stages were initiation, exploration, differentiating, extracting, and verifying. The deliverables were the abstract, detailed outline, rough draft, and final presentation. First, Taylor used the qualitative data to gain quantitative results by determining the percentage of documents evaluated during each stage of the participants’ information search processes. Then, he evaluated how often participants selected documents from general information sites, such as Wikipedia, in each search stage for each deliverable. Finally, Taylor evaluated the criteria used to judge relevance of search results in

each search stage. For this, the participants were able to choose from a predetermined list, which included effectiveness, amount of information, authority, bias, depth, novelty, recency, source quality, structure, and time constraints (Taylor, 2012).

Key Findings

Taylor (2012) found that the millennial generation participants constantly searched for information, but they did not go through the search stages in a linear order. Also, many of the users moved quickly through the search process, but not to completion or in an orderly manner. Secondly, Taylor (2012) found that the users “were not concerned with the quality, validity, or authority of the documents selected during their information search process” (Discussion section, para. 4). Lastly, a key finding was that the users did use general information sites like Wikipedia, but not consistently (Taylor 2012). Taylor concluded that millennial users do not consider verification of internet sources important, and their measure of information evaluation is subjective.

Critical Assessment

First, the number of participants recruited was too small of a sample to determine a conclusion for a whole generation’s population. However, the data collection method of using surveys was appropriate for this research because it allowed participants to freely engage in their natural information seeking processes and report about them. Also, the data analysis of transferring qualitative data into quantitative results was suitable because it provided observable results.

Information Needs of User Group

An information need of this user group could be incognizance. The users may not even be aware that they have information needs (Jean, 2022) to include validity and more order to their

information seeking processes. To meet these needs, they should be more educated about the information seeking process. As a result, they would also improve their information literacy.

Ideas for Future Research

Taylor (2012) suggested that because millennial users perceived information searching as more subjective, “further research should explicate this view and perhaps the broader worldview of subjectivity versus objectivity amongst the millennial generation” (Conclusion section, para. 5). Another idea for future research could be to conduct this experiment with a wider range of millennials, since this research only included millennials born between 1985 and 1988, as well as Generation Z. The results can then be a basis to find effective information seeking behaviors and inform the future generations to increase their information literacy.

References

- Jean, B. S. (2022, March). *Information User Needs and Assessment*. [Powerpoint slides].
University of Maryland – College Park.
- Taylor, A. (2012, March). *A Study of the Information Search Behaviour of the Millennial Generation*. ERIC. Retrieved April 16, 2022, from <https://eric.ed.gov/?id=EJ971949>
- Taylor, A. (2012). The Information Search Behavior of the millennial generation. *Ubiquitous Learning: An International Journal*, 4(3), 85–98. <https://doi.org/10.18848/1835-9795/cgp/v04i03/40341>