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Getting Creative in Everyday Life: Investigating Arts and Crafts Hobbyists' Information Behavior

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ABSTRACT

While there has been increasing interest in how creative professionals find information to drive creative outputs, previous information behavior research has largely ignored how arts and crafts hobbyists look for information sources in their everyday lives. To fill this literature gap, we conducted interviews and observations with arts and crafts hobbyists to find out how they conceive potential DIY projects. The findings highlight three themes: the dearth of human sources, the prevalence of domain-specific information, and the use of self-curated information. In addition to empirical results, this work also broadens the understanding of information behavior in an arts and crafts context by studying populations beyond professional artists.

KEYWORDS

Information behavior; sources; arts and crafts; hobbyists

ASIS&T THESAURUS

Information seeking; information sources

INTRODUCTION

There has been increasing research interest in how creative professionals find information as both a driver and enabler of creative outputs (see, for example, Hemmig, 2009; Makri, Hsueh, & Jones, 2019). Moving beyond work contexts is important, as it allows for a fuller understanding of behaviors. Hartel (2003) has suggested the significance of studying information-rich hobbies to gain a broader understanding of information behavior. The arts and crafts hobby is one activity that has received little attention from previous information behavior research. Seeking

creative inspiration usually is an information-heavy process, as sources of inspiration are varied, idiosyncratic, and exist everywhere (Hemmig, 2009). To this end, we investigate how hobbyists navigate information sources in the arts and crafts domain to motivate their creative practices.

BACKGROUND

Previous literature divides information sources into different categories. For instance, Savolainen (2008) classified six source types: human sources, printed media, networked sources, broadcast media, organizational sources, and other sources, and found human sources were the most favored approach. Another kind of source in everyday life, which does not fall into this classification, is domain-specific sources (Ocepek, 2016). Domain-specific information directly relates to the information environment unique to the activity and helps individuals in those spaces acquire information. For example, labels and in-store signs are domain-specific information in grocery stores which are likely to affect grocery shoppers' information interaction.

In the arts and crafts context, prior research has typically examined how professional artists interact with information (e.g., Gorichanaz, 2018; Hemmig, 2009). From their findings, it is apparent that artists rely on various sources, such as memories, conversations, and personal works, to seek inspiration. Moving beyond examining professionals can provide meaningful insights for information source development and provision.

METHODS

We examined the information behavior of arts and crafts hobbyists at two sites: one digital - Pinterest (pinterest.com), the other a brick-and-mortar crafts store. We recruited 20 participants in total (10 for each site) with self-declared interests in arts and crafts, through weekly university newsletters, flyers, and personal contact. Our study included semi-structured interviews and think-aloud observations. The study began

with pre-interviews to learn participants' experiences with arts and crafts and their current interests. Next, the participants explored the sites for 30-minutes and were observed. During the observations, participants were asked to browse for 15 minutes and then seek a particular item for 15 minutes. We asked participants to verbalize their feelings and thoughts throughout the observations. After the observation, we conducted two post-interviews for participant debriefing and data validation. We audio-recorded each interview, observation, and took notes. A bottom-up Thematic Analysis of transcripts and field notes was conducted to identify sources of information used.

FINDINGS AND DISCUSSION

Between the data collected at both sites, we identified 27 information sources from interviews and observations. Within the 143 mentions of sources, domain-specific information—the top source of this study—was mentioned 72 times. These sources had slightly higher mentions from Pinterest participants likely due to the ability to organize information in the Pinterest setting. Networked sources were mentioned 50 times, with 41 and 9 mentions by Pinterest and store participants. Additionally, there were 10 mentions of human sources, 8 mentions of printed media, and 3 mentions of organizational sources. Based on empirical data, we identified three interesting themes.

The Dearth of Human Sources

The first theme we noted from the diversity of sources was the dearth of human sources. In our findings, human sources were mentioned 10 times, and there were two types of them: friends and store staff. Participants regarded friends as sources by meeting with them regularly. For example, one Pinterest participant described how she interacted with friends to seek ideas: *"We have like a club that we meet once a month, and we just kind of talk about ideas."* Store staff, not just those in the brick-and-mortar store in this study, became sources when participants questioned them and learned something new from them. For instance, one store participant mentioned he liked chatting with store employees: *"I feel in small stores, staff is more familiar with their products and are more passionate about introducing what they have. I like interacting with staff like that and learn from them."* Unlike previous literature, human sources were less covered by our participants, possibly due to the explorative nature of seeking inspiration. Such tasks are not driven by knowledge gaps typically having exact answers. Instead, as ideas can be everywhere, arts and crafts hobbyists may try to discover numerous sources to optimize creativity.

Domain-Specific Information

The second theme we identified was the common uses of domain-specific information from participants. For Pinterest participants, when seeing pictures selected by Pinterest, they frequently considered them as potential projects they could work on. For store participants, many of them mentioned they

liked the layout of the store and how products were displayed because they could spark their inspiration. One store participant said she would revisit the store in this study when seeking future craft ideas: *"I get a lot of ideas when I am walking around place like this, so I would definitely come here for things like that."* Domain-specific information was found to be a popular source in grocery stores as individuals relied heavily on things such as price tags or expiration dates when selecting items (Ocepek, 2016). This research aligns with the previous finding on domain-specific sources and extends the literature into the arts and crafts context.

Self-Curated Information

The third interesting theme we saw was participants' habits of preserving useful information. For example, when participants found something engaging, they liked to collect and organize them for later use. We call this type of source self-curated information. One store participant shared how she used self-curated information found online in grocery stores: *"Sometimes I like to print pictures out because then when I go to the grocery store, I have a list of what I need. Sometimes I can just put it on my phone so I'm not gonna lose it."* Self-curated information sources were more observed by Pinterest participants. This may be because of the special functions Pinterest has for individuals to save images ("pin it") and categorize them ("make boards"). One Pinterest participant explained how she used these tools when seeking craft ideas: *"When I get ready to do the project, I'll pull up the boards that I pin those to, and kind of look at them and get more inspiration."* Here boards and pinned pictures were participants' self-curated information. We categorized these sources as domain-specific information.

CONCLUSION AND FUTURE RESEARCH

This work identifies the information sources arts and crafts hobbyists use when seeking ideas. We identified three interesting themes: the dearth of human sources, the prevalence of domain-specific information, and the use of self-curated information. Future work can determine whether these themes extend to other creative everyday life domains (e.g., photography, gardening). This study provides insight into the use of information sources for creative purposes and provides a more holistic understanding of information behavior in the arts and crafts domain that extends beyond the behavior of professional artists.

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