Information-seeking behaviours of established professionals when building their wardrobes

Nataliia Mykhaylychenko
Faculty of Information, University of Toronto
nataliia.mykhaylychenko@mail.utoronto.ca

Abstract

The research question lies in the aspect of information-seeking behaviours of professionals when building their wardrobes. Three finance professionals were interviewed, 34 to 39 years of age. The research was conducted using the Information Horizon Interview method by Sonnenwald (2005). It included semi-structured interviews, as well as drawing activities to depict the resources used for the wardrobe-building process; these were later analyzed in unity with verbal responses. Quantitative strategy was used to summarize the resources the participants refer to when preparing for wardrobe purchases. Some resources appeared in responses of all participants which indicate a pattern in information behaviour. The strategy of sensitizing and information behaviour concepts was used for the role of own experience and information encountering. The study revealed that prior shopping experience is crucial in further choice of apparel and footwear stores. However, there is a place in every participant's behaviour for external influential stimuli, such as advertising, sales banners, promotions. The research combined all the aspects of building wardrobes, from planning and selecting stores to purchasing. To explore the subject in depth, separation of these stages is recommended. Participation of other population groups would enhance the overall realm of research on the subject.

INTRODUCTION

The research question of the current study focused on information-seeking behaviours of finance professionals when building their wardrobes. Namely, the topic of exploration was planning, selecting and purchasing of apparel and footwear items at traditional stores, such as shopping malls or separate stores located closely in one area, which provide large choice of items. The interest of research lies in exploring the participants' use of resources, seeking patterns, influence of external and internal factors on selecting and purchasing decisions in the environment of large variety of vendors. The research did not touch upon shopping at online stores, being a cutting point of the study, as well as a broad subject to explore on its own. There was also no limitation on the style of wardrobe items to be discussed: the participants spoke about their experience with selection of casual, corporate and sports apparel and footwear.

A sensitizing concept of the study is to explore the influence of external factors on information behaviour when searching and purchasing wardrobe items.

Several themes were discovered during the research. Own prior shopping experience, as well as the possibility to try on items and observe the quality on the spot, are crucial for all participants. The use of resources varies among interviewees; however, similarities include, among all, the use of online stores for reference before attending a mal and asking for friends' or spouses' opinions. Finally, participants do not tend to research information on wardrobe items, very often the information finds them on its own (information encountering by Erdelez, 1999).

LITERATURE REVIEW

Prior research in LIS concentrates on the role of information and may indirectly relate to the process of building wardrobes.

In his research of serendipity, building on prior studies of other scholars, Agarwal explores the role of accidental discovery of information and its importance for further research (2015). This concept is fundamental for one of the findings of this research, with information encountering concept by Erdelez being an integral part of shopping behaviours. Another study, conducted by Savolainen (2004), focuses on the role of the Internet in everyday life. Internet is one of the most popular resources nowadays, and constitutes an important information resource in the framework of this study. McKenzie's study explores information seeking in everyday life (2003), proposing a model with focus on social interconnections. Hektor (2013) discusses information activities, which can be applicable in everyday life, such as browsing, exchange and searching.

Many other research studies have been conducted to explore people's choices towards shopping. In such studies, people mostly are regarded as consumers, as opposed to information seekers, and studies are conducted by business schools (Kacen&Lee, 2002; Moschis *et al*, 2011). Indeed, the subject of consumer behaviour in retail shopping is tightly connected to information-seeking behaviour, although focuses on commercial aspect.

Overall, literatures available divide into those exploring people's behaviour and choices in everyday life towards shopping, and those exploring the population as consumers (the latter may be most relevant for business development purposes).

The current research paper will build on prior studies in information-seeking behaviours of everyday life, exploring a common activity of choosing and buying wardrobe items. Particularly, with the development and popularization of online shopping, it is important to distinguish shopping in those different dimensions. The current study concentrates on traditional in-store shopping, for apparel and footwear, which are specific topics, not covered by previous studies from the information behaviour approach.

RESEARCH METHODS

The study was conducted based on the Information Horizon Interview method, coined by Sonnenwald (2005) and with help of the instructions provided by Hartel (2017). Three informants were recruited for semi-structured interviews and were asked to respond to questions provided in the interview guide (Appendix 1).

The interviews took place in Toronto, Canada, in the month of November 2017. For the Information Horizon Interview research, three finance professionals were chosen, two male aged 34 and a female of 39 years of age. All of them are married, immigrated to Canada approximately 5 years ago and have been working in the finance industry 7 to 10 years. All the participants possess at least one Master's degree.

After the technical explanations and ethical statement were disclosed, the interviewer proceeded, first, with the questions regarding the participants' preferences and experience in the field of selecting and purchasing their wardrobe items, and further went deeper into the "red thread" inquiries, namely, their information practices and resources. Each interview lasted approximately thirty minutes and was audio recorded; the recordings have been transcribed and destroyed within a week. Simultaneously, the interviewer made field notes which served as a source for analysis of interviews along with the recordings. In addition to verbally responding to questions, the informants produced drawn maps to depict their use of resources in situations of information needs in the context of building wardrobes. Verbal and visual data were analyzed in combination with each other.

FINDINGS

Themes 1 and 2 were analyzed through the lens of information encountering concept (Erdelez, 1999) and information activities of Hector (2003). Using the quantifying research method, all the resources mentioned by the interviewees in the process of planning, selecting and purchasing apparel and footwear were summarized and listed in Table 1, discussed in Theme 3 (Hartel, 2017). Due to the limited resources mentioned and commonalities found, the quantitative approach was chosen as the most suitable to analyze the data in Theme 3. The sensitizing concept of influence of external factors on purchasing can mostly be observed in Theme 3 as well.

Theme 1 – Own experience

Due to the limited free time of people in the finance profession and the structured family budget, there was no tendency for overspending or any striking obsession with shopping. Interviewee 2 even called this process "a chore". Therefore, all the participants rely a lot on their prior experience with shopping, which is the easiest solution. While the readiness to discover new stores and products and invest in new ways of building wardrobes differ from one interviewee to another, overall, they all tend to visit familiar stores, which offer good deals on price and quality.

The particular value of in-store purchasing lies in the ability of trying on items, feeling the quality of the material and seeing right there in the mirror if the look fits. For this reason mainly, the informants prefer in-store shopping to online-shopping. Interviewee 1 highlighted the importance of such experience by drawing a fitting room on the IHI map (Figure 1).

Theme 2 – Involuntary information encountering

All the participants consider the price of the wardrobe items crucial in their planning and purchasing, therefore, they all responded actively to external stimuli about this aspect, such as sales banners, promotions. Time allowing, everyone would visit a store with a large discounts and interesting promotions offered, even if a store is not familiar.

Such behaviour is in line with the information encountering concept discovered by Erdelez (1999). Participants may encounter useful information on sales without purposefully seeking it. In addition to sales banners, information encountering may also occur through pop-up ads on social networks or receipt of promotional emails. Another stimulus is attractiveness of storefronts, and apparel and footwear on mannequins – as per Informant 3, these factors influence the decision of discovering the store's selections (Figure 2).

However, information encountering may occur during the participants' presence at a shopping mall, having a goal to find some wardrobe items, and therefore, being in a perceptive state of mind (Appendix 2, Interviewee 3, Question 1; Erdelez, 1999). This behaviour is on the borderline between information encountering and browse-activity which refers to searching in a limited space or platform and when a goal is somewhat clear (Hektor, 2003)

Theme 3 - Resources

The commonalities among all the interviewees include: 1) Use of own knowledge and experience – all the participants relied on their previous resources accumulated over the years, combined into their own "libraries or stores". All interviewees found it to be their primary resource when building their wardrobes; 2) Participants found the observation of styles of their colleagues or friends very useful for their future purchases. They did not necessarily

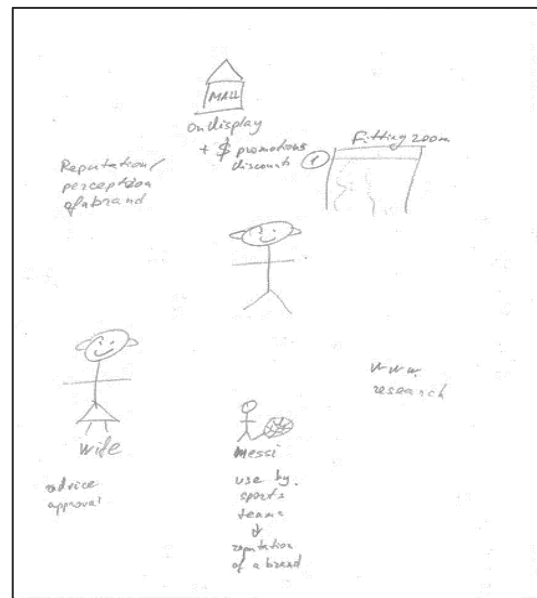| Resources	Int. 1	Int. 2	Int. 3
Own knowledge and experience	x	x	x
Style of acquaintances or strangers	x	x	x
Opinion of spouse/friend at shopping	x	x	x
Online stores	x	x	x
Social network ads			x
Discussions with friends			x
Newsletters from stores			x
Internet research (brand ratings)	x		
Visiting upscale stores			x
Opinion of store assistant		x	

Table 1. Resources

Figure 1. IHI map of Interviewee 1

Figure 2. IHI map of Interviewee 3

find the need to ask any follow-up questions about where the item was bought or what material it was made of; mere observation was enough. Moreover, noticing interesting styles of strangers in public places, such as a cafeteria or public transit, was helpful as well. This type of information resource can be categorized as serendipitous information encountering (Erdelez, 1999); 3) When interviewees shop with the spouse or friends, they consider their opinions about the items selected and how they fit; 4) At the stage of planning their shopping, all participants sometimes use online versions of stores they would visit. This provides them with the information on selections, styles and price range, and if the store is worth visiting.

Additionally, informants use other resources as well. Interviewee 1 highlighted the importance of a brand's reputation, when it comes to items requiring high technology, such as sports footwear. If a brand is used by a well-known sports team or player, it will catch Interviewee's 1 attention. This participant also follows ratings of brands on the Internet (Figure 1). Interviewee 3 visits expensive brand stores, such as Chanel or Valentino, to get inspiration for future purchases; this allows the participant to see the latest fashion trends, to find trendy clothing or shoes in more affordable stores.

DISCUSSION

One of the sensitizing concepts in the study was the role of external influence on people's wardrobe-building process. As it was discovered through the interviews, there are indeed various stimuli that urge the participants to buy spontaneously. Only one participant out of three is more likely to respond to such influences, as attractive store fronts, advertising, promotions; therefore, there is no visible pattern derived from this research.

Prior shopping experience plays a much more important role in building wardrobes of the given population, and the

possibility of trying on clothing or shoes is crucial in the process.

This exploratory research took the broad subject for study. The specific stages of building wardrobes – planning the items to buy, selecting the mall and the stores to visit, actual decision-making towards purchasing – have been regarded as a whole. However, for more precise and elaborate results, further research is needed. Each stage has its own characteristics, and some behaviours would be brighter with certain stages, but not with others.

Based on the conducted interviews, Hektor's browsing activity (2013) is most likely to happen before visiting stores. It may include the online search of mall directory to determine which stores are in the mall, or browsing the online stores before visiting same store in the mall (Interviewee 2), to familiarize with the clothing and shoes selection. Browsing is not limited by the Internet, it also includes passing by stores in search of the one to visit, when already in the mall or a shopping area. Search-activity reflects the actual seeking of stores and items, it can be either done through browsing online, or by discussing with other people. If a "resource" person is found, an information exchange may occur. It requires at least two people to share information, and if it happens, both parties will enrich their knowledge and experience (based on Hektor, 2013). The information need will also be satisfied if a question is answered, even if the discussion does not go further.

Generally, participants did not find themselves overwhelmed with information available out there on the subject of apparel and footwear. With the wide choice of items offered on the market, it is possible to find the item needed without much effort. For these reasons, the "light" information concepts are most applicable for the process of building wardrobes: Hektor's information activities – browsing, exchange and search, and Erdelez's information encountering (Hektor, 2003; Erdelez, 1999), as opposed to more elaborate and methodological berry-picking model by Bates and sense-making theory by Dervin. These assume more goal-oriented and determined information behaviour, when a specific query is weighting over an information-seeker (Bates, 1989; Dervin *et al*, 2003). However, in particular instances, such as when Interviewee 1 needed analytical information about winter jackets or sports shoes, which are made with advanced technology, this informant's behaviour most probably was close to Dervin's and Bates' theories.

METHODOLOGICAL REFLECTIONS

Information Horizon Interview method allowed to accumulate necessary data for the research. The semi-structured interview technique enabled flexibility in the process, with probes for clarification being asked along the way. Overall, the structure of the interview put the

4

informants at ease and facilitated information sharing. From the tone, body language of participants, the interviewer was able to draw additional information about attitude towards the information provided. For this reason, meeting in person, as opposed to a telephone interview, is a crucial characteristic of this study.

Drawing maps represented a special value for the research, providing a summary of the information mentioned verbally, and allowing to identify the highlights of the topic discussed. However, not every informant was willing to do such activity – Interviewee 2 was reluctant to draw and preferred to write down the list of resources instead, being self-conscious of own drawing skills.

CONCLUSION

Important themes were identified in the course of the Information Horizon Interview method. First, own practical shopping experience plays a major role in information-seeking behaviours of established professionals. All the participants find that they get most of the information about the apparel and footwear from actual visiting stores and trying on items. It is important for them to see the quality of the material and how they fit. By remembering which stores offer the best combination of quality, style and price, they build their own "library of stores", where they would come back next time.

Second, information encountering is part of information behaviours of all the informants as well. Everybody is attracted by sales banners of big discounts, and it motivates them to enter the store. There are other types of influential stimuli, such as promotional emails, pop-out ads on social networks, mannequins, nice storefronts.

Among the resources used, participants refer to the Internet - they look up the stores at a certain mall or shopping street and selection of clothing in their online stores, and people - sometimes they like the style on their colleague or friend, or even a stranger in public transit, and they make a note to themselves of how the colours match and that they may look for a similar item next time they shop.

Information encountering and activities such as browsing, exchange and searching are most widely observed information behaviours among the selected population. At times of specific needs, more structured models are applied.

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AUTHOR'S BIO

Nataliia Mykhaylychenko is a first-year graduate student at the Faculty of Information (iSchool), University of Toronto. She studies Library and Information Science and is an aspiring academic librarian. She strives to build on her previous education and work experience in humanities, namely, teaching foreign languages. Currently, she holds two Student Library Assistant positions on campus, organizes the Faculty's student conference and manages the iSchool French club.

APPENDIX 1

Interview guide
(most recent interview questions in Parts 1-4)

1)   Technical Explanation (Hartel, 2017)
The interviewer explained that the dialogue would be semi-structured, and that follow-up questions would be asked in addition to responses for the initial interview questions. The participants were also notified of the interviewer's notetaking and audio-recording during the conversation, the length of the meeting of approximately 30 minutes, and a drawing request at the end of the interview.

2)   Consent Statement (Hartel, 2017)
The interviewer turned on the recorder and read the following consent statement before proceeding to the interview questions:
"I am a graduate student under the direction of Professor Jenna Hartel in the Faculty of
Information, University of Toronto. For a course on information behaviour, I am conducting
a research study to better understand Information-Seeking Behaviour of Established Professionals When Building their Wardrobes.
I have recruited subjects to participate in an "information horizon interview" which will take
approximately 30 minutes. Your participation in this study is voluntary. If you choose not to participate or to withdraw from the study at any time, there will be no penalty.
During the research process, your responses will be audio recorded. The audio recording
will be transcribed within one week and then destroyed. Your name and all identifying
information will be removed from the transcript, which will be kept indefinitely and used for
the purposes of a class assignment. The results of the research may be published, but your
name will not be used.
If you have any questions concerning this research study, you   may   email   myself   at nataliia.mykhaylychenko@mail.utoronto.ca   or   Professor Hartel at jenna.hartel@utoronto.ca. Shall we begin?"

After the verbal consent, the interviewer asked the following questions (with probing for clarification and follow-up questions:

Part 1: Preferences
1.1. Can you tell me about your experience with selecting, planning and purchasing your wardrobe?
1.2. When speaking about shopping for clothes or shoes, do you mostly shop online or at traditional stores, at a mall? Why do you prefer this way of shopping?

Part 2: Experience
2.1. Think about the time when you realized that you needed an apparel or footwear item. Can you describe your thoughts and steps that you make from this realization to the actual purchasing?
2.2. Can you tell me about your last visit to the mall? How did this experience go?

Part 3: Information practices
3.1. Do you normally plan your shopping, or is it usually spontaneous?
3.2. Does it happen that you turn away from your plan of visiting a particular store and make a spontaneous decision to go to a different one (when you already in the mall or in the shopping street)? If so, why does it happen? What can influence you to change your plan?
3.3. Does it happen that you spend more time at a store than planned? What are the reasons?

Part 4: Information resources
4.1. What are the paper or online resources that you use for selecting your clothes/shoes?
4.2. Do you look up to anyone (a colleague, a friend, a celebrity, etc.) in terms of building your wardrobe?
4.3. Are there any people who you normally shop with? Do you find that opinions of these people matter for your shopping experience?

Part 5: Drawing activity
Each interviewee was asked to draw the information resources, including people, which they refer to when they select, seek and purchase wardrobe items.

At the end of each interview, participants were reminded of confidentiality of their responses and maps submitted.

APPENDIX 2
Selection of quotes during the interviews

Interviewee 1:

Question: What are the paper or online resources that you use for selecting your clothes/shoes?

Interviewee 1: "Sometimes I can look at ratings. For examples, when I am looking to buy shoes or suits, I may browse through brands and see their ratings, but then again, I would go to a store to check the quality myself. Usually, I prefer analytical articles by experts who rate brands or stores. Articles written by journalists who did research which provide additional information on quality, technology used, history of the brand. It can be applied to such wardrobe items, as suits, winter jackets, footwear – which require more technology."

Question: Do you look up to anyone (a colleague, a friend, a celebrity, etc.) in terms of building your wardrobe?

Interviewee 1: "I may look up to someone when it comes to sportswear, such as running shoes. E.g. I often hear of a certain brand which makes baseball running shoes, so I get more and more respect for this brand, and I may be more inclined now to go to their store, on top of the ones I usually go to. If professional organizations use that sportwear equipment, which is more technologically advanced, it may deserve some respect, or if it is used by sports stars."

Interviewee 2:

Question: "Do you normally plan your shopping, or is it usually spontaneous?"

Interviewee 2: "If I go to a less familiar mall than I normally go to, I would look up the list of its stores online and try to figure out which ones are more interesting to me. Sometimes I look at stores which I haven't visited before. If our family plans to buy a lot of clothes and spend a lot of time shopping, then I would go to the website of that mall or outlet to see which ones have discounts or sales."

Question: "Does it happen that you turn away from your plan of visiting a particular store and make a spontaneous decision to go to a different one (when you already in the mall or in the shopping street)? If so, why does it happen? What can influence you to change your plan?"

Interviewee 2: "Sometimes it would happen. Time is a big factor, because if I need 1 or 2 items, then I will go to a store where I know I can definitely find them and there is good selection. But if I have a little bit more time and am passing by a store which has similar items, I would check it out."

Interviewee 3:

Question: "Think about the time when you realized that you need a particular piece of clothing. Can you describe your thoughts and steps that you make from this realization to the actual purchasing?"

Interviewee 3: "I went to shop with my friend for her wedding dress, and then I realized that that area was actually at an outlet street, so all the prices are discounted. And then I saw this store, which is normally expensive, but would have a lower price at that outlet street, and I remembered that I needed an evening dress for our company dinner. So, I tried some dresses on, and ended up with buying one."

Question: "Does it happen that you turn away from your plan of visiting a particular store and make a spontaneous decision to go to a different one (when you already in the mall or in the shopping street)? If so, why does it happen? What can influence you to change your plan?"

Interviewee 3: "Sometimes other stores are more attractive than the ones I planned to go to, because of their displays and discounts – I feel more attracted to go there. For example, once I planned to go buy casual clothes, but then I saw corporate attire that I thought was good and decided to explore that. The other time, I was passing by a store which had a promotional "Spin the wheel" game which gave out coupons with discounts. So, I was motivated to go to that store to check it out."