A Small Exploratory Study on Generation Y's Information Seeking Behaviours for Novel Dining Venues

Tiffany Luk
University of Toronto, Faculty of Information
tiffany.luk@mail.utoronto.ca

Abstract

The purpose of this small exploratory study is to explore the information activities and resources associated with finding information on a novel dining venue (i.e. food adventure) in a library and information sciences (LIS) perspective. The Generation Y population was chosen to learn about the impacts of the Internet and social media on their information behaviours. The Information Horizons Interview (IHI) methodology developed by Sonnewald *et al.* (2001) was used to gather ethnographical data from three informants. The IHI methodology involved a semi-structured interview and a graphical elicitation called the Information Horizons map in which informants were asked to describe and draw all the information activities and resources they associate with researching for a dining venue. Findings were analyzed using Hektor's model of information behaviours and activities (2001). The main information behaviours were seeking, gathering, and communicating. The major information activities were searching and retrieving, browsing, monitoring, and exchange. Primary information resources include Google, social media networks, blogs, review sites, and word of mouth. The study could be extended to include more informants, of different genders, varied ethnic backgrounds, and covering a wider age range of Generation Y. The study added to the small, growing subject of project-based leisure in the LIS field.

INTRODUCTION

Generation Ys are "fans of eating out" and see dining out as a primary social activity (Lachman & Brett, 2013, p. 22). This exploratory study will explore the information behaviours of Generation Y who are in the process of planning out a food adventure. A food adventure, defined for the context of this study involves the discovery of a novel dining venue, then researching about it, and finally, the thrill of trying the dishes and sharing the experience with friends and family.

The motivation for this study stems from an interest to gain insight on the information journey that Generation Ys partake before going on a food adventure. The information journey includes the information activities performed as they engaged in seeking novel dining venues and the information resources accessed for researching about the venue. Their point of discovery of the novel dining venue and their perception of the overall information seeking experience (e.g. reliability of resources) will be examined.

Generation Ys grew up with the Internet, are seen as technology-savvy, and social media plays a huge role in their daily lives (Bilgihan, Cheng, & Kandampully, J., 2014, p. 350). Belonging to the Generation Y cohort, the author is interested in learning about how people in this age group look for information for a leisure pursuit with the prevalence of online resources and social media.

Thus, the research question (RQ) is: What information activities and resources are associated with finding information on novel venues for casual dining?

LITERATURE REVIEW

Leisure is defined as an "un-coerced activity undertaken in free time" (Stebbins, 2009, p. 619). Leisure is not a broadly covered subject in the current literature of library and information sciences (LIS) but a "small, growing stream of inquiry in information science", studied predominately through exploratory research (Hartel, 2010, p. 3264). It was not until 1995 that leisure emerged as a research topic in information science when Savolainen introduced the phase everyday life information seeking (ELIS) (Hartel, 2010, p. 3263). Further to that is Hektor's (2001) study about the information activities in everyday life and the Internet in which he analyzed the information behaviours and activities of 10 Swedish citizens based on their diaries using his analytical model (p. 81). The serious leisure perspective (SLP) theoretical framework developed since 1974, by the leisure sociologist, Stebbins was introduced into the information sciences field by Hartel (2003) as an SLP diagram which allows for differentiated

1

approaches to study the role of information based on the type of leisure activity (i.e. casual, serious or project-based leisure) (Hartel, 2010, p. 3264).

In recent years, a number of empirical studies involving casual dining and the role of information in social media networks and Generation Y have been done in the LIS field. However, the implications of these studies focused on consumer behaviour and implications for marketing. Cox & Blake (2011) studied food blogging as a serious leisure and explored the "creation, seeking, sharing and management of information by food bloggers, in the context of Stebbins' serious leisure perspective" (p. 209). Bilgihan *et al.* (2014) studied Generation Y's dining information seeking behaviours on social networking sites, but the study focused on consumer behaviour and social media marketing. Kim's (2015) dissertation focused on the sharing of restaurant experiences on social media networks to satisfy psychological needs, such as self-esteem and need to belong, and its implications for social media marketing.

This study aims to build on the existing LIS literature by taking a LIS approach, with an emphasis on information activities and resources involved in researching novel dining venues as a project-based leisure, and analyzed using Hektor's model (2001).

RESEARCH METHODS

Empirical data from three informants was gathered using the Information Horizon Interview (IHI) methodology developed by Sonnenwald, Wildemuth, and Harmon (2001) in their example study based on Sonnenwald's (1999) Information Horizon (IH) theoretical framework. It is an ethnographical and qualitative methodology consisting of a semi-structured interview and a graphical elicitation of the informant's IH (i.e. IH map). The informants' IHI responses coupled with the explanation of their IH maps were used to study their information behaviours and resources accessed, including people when looking for information on a novel dining venue.

The study is exploratory, as only three informants were selected. Purposive sampling was used with the criteria being in the Generation Y cohort (i.e. born between 1980 and 2000) and having dining experience.
Their profiles are as follows (actual names were replaced by aliases):
Informant 1: Ada (female, age 26, East Asian) is a foodie who actively searches for new food adventures and dining venues. She dines out with her boyfriend and friends.
Informant 2: Jessica (female, age 27, East Asian) dines out occasionally with her family and friends.

Informant 3: Carmen (female, age 28, East Asian) dines out a few times a week in her neighbourhood with her boyfriend and family.

A semi-structured interview guide (See Appendix A) was used to interview the informants about the information activities and resources they associate with researching for a novel dining venue. The in-person IHI interviews were audio recorded and transcribed for data analysis (See Appendix B for a transcript highlights). The IH maps were also collected for data analysis (See Appendix C for enlarged IH maps). Ethical considerations taken in the data collection included reviewing an informed verbal consent with informants, removing personal identifiers from the transcripts and graphical elicitations to ensure confidentiality of the informants, deleting the audio recording within one week of the interview, and allowing informants to withdraw at any time without penalty.

FINDINGS
The Analysis Approach
A deductive analysis approach was used to find trends in the data. The informants' information activities were classified according to the information behaviours and activities in Hektor's model (Figure 1) based on the researcher's interpretation of their IHI responses and IH maps (see Appendix C). Hektor's model (2001) was chosen because it is "the most developed treatment of project-based leisure" in information sciences (Hartel, 2010, p. 3267). Table 1 allows for comparisons of information activities and behaviours vs. resource type, and the informants' preference rankings for the resource type. The findings were presented in the sequence of a food adventure: discovery phase, research phase, and sharing phase, and will end with a brief analysis of resource preferences.

Discovery of a novel dining venue
According Table 1, social media plays a significant role in the discovery of a novel dining venue. Ada and Carmen *browsed* Facebook and Instagram to actively *seek* posted pictures of food adventures by friends to assess the visual appeal. Carmen said,

"It [Instagram] tells me if the food looks good or not…Or what is the most popular picture of the post from the restaurant."

Both informants use these social media networks on a routine basis (*monitoring*) to *gather* information via social tagging in a post or picture by friends.

Table 1: Instances of information activities by resource type exhibited by informants during a typical food adventure based on Hektor's model (2001). A ✓ represents one or more instances of the information activity exhibited by the informant. Corresponding information behaviours are listed in brackets. The numbers represent the informant's preference rankings for the resource type (e.g. 1 is highest preference, 5 is lowest preference). Equal rankings indicate the same preference for a resource type. NA means resource not mentioned by informant or not ranked.

Information Resource Information Activity (Information Behaviour)	Ada	Jessica	Carmen
Google Search Engine	2	1	1
Search & Retrieve (Seeking) e.g. looking for specific information	✓	✓	✓
Browse (Seeking) e.g. browsing for specific information	✓	✓	✓
Browse (Gathering) e.g. browsing search results	✓	✓	✓
Google Apps (Reviews, Maps)	2	NA	1
Search & Retrieve (Seeking) e.g. browsing for specific information	✓	NA	✓
Social Media Networks (Facebook, Instagram)	3	2	2
Browse (Seeking) e.g. browsing for specific pictures	✓	NA	✓
Browse (Gathering) e.g. browsing pictures on Instagram	✓	NA	✓
Monitoring (Gathering) e.g. routine browsing on Facebook	✓	✓	✓
Unfolding (Gathering) e.g. watching video on tagged post	✓	NA	✓
Exchange (Communicating) e.g. chatting	✓	NA	✓
Dressing (Communicating) e.g. posting pictures of food	✓	NA	✓
Social Media (Blogs e.g. BlogTO, Narcity; Reviews sites e.g. Yelp, Trip Advisor)	4	2	3
Browse (Gathering) e.g. browsing review sites	✓	✓	✓
Advertisement (newspapers, TV, and online ads)	NA	3	4
Monitoring (Gathering) e.g. routine reading of newspapers	NA	✓	✓
Word of Mouth	1	4	5
Exchange (Communicating) e.g. talking face-to-face	✓	✓	✓
Physical Encounter (passing by the venue)	NA	5	NA
Browse (Gathering) e.g. browsing on the street	NA	✓	✓

All informants learned about new restaurants through talking (*exchange*) with family, friends, and colleagues. Also, Jessica reads the free newspaper when she takes the subway (*monitoring)* and *gathers* information about new venues from ads. Jessica and Carmen physically encounter new restaurants by passively *browsing* on the streets but both reported that this is not as common as via online resources.

Ada and Jessica performed *search and retrieve* using a Google search to *seek* venues of a specific cuisine. Regarding a Google search, Ada exclaimed,

"So if I am in the mood for sushi, I can just type in 'Sushi Toronto' and out will come a couple of places."
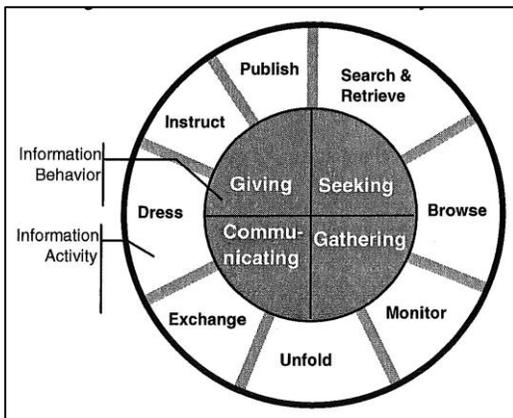
Figure 1: Hektor's model: Relation of Behaviour and Activity, adapted from "What's the use? Internet and information behaviour in everyday life", A. Hektor, 2001, p. 81, Copyright 2001 by Linköping University. Four information behaviours are displayed in the inner circle with the corresponding eight information activities in the outer circle.

Researching about a novel dining venue
After the discovery phase, all informants reported that they *browsed* through Google search results and/or review sites to *seek* particular information about the dining venue, such as location, price, cuisine, menu, atmosphere, best-time-to-go, trendiness, and user reviews. Ada explained,

"If it is word of mouth, my first move is to check on Google to make sure I spelt the place right."

Jessica said,

"If I go to Blog TO…they have short write-ups and cover information like location and popularity. Then I would need to go on Google to look up specifics like branch or price."

After being tagged on a Facebook post, Ada and Carmen would read the blogpost or watch the video (*unfolding*) to learn more about the venue.

Social Sharing
Ada and Carmen exhibited *dressing* when they posted pictures of their food adventures on social media and contributed reviews to Yelp and Google Maps.
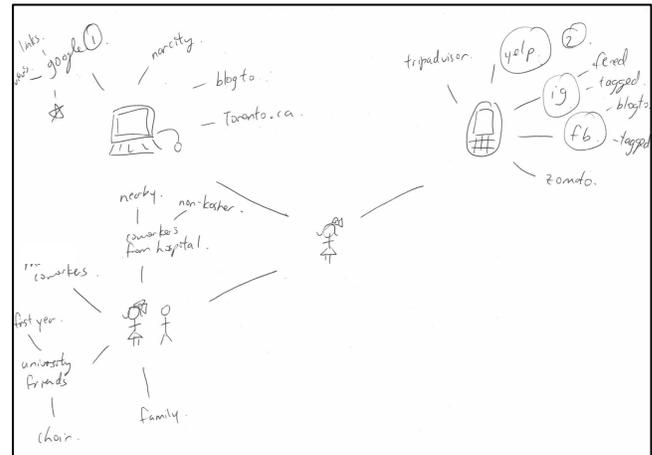
Figure 2: Ada's IH map representing how she accesses information resources about dining venues through her desktop computer at work, her cell phone, and a community of people. (See Appendix C for enlarged version.)

Commonality in Preference for Google Resources
All informants had a high preference for Google resources as they believe that it is best in terms of ease of use, usefulness, reliability, and the variety of information. Jessica stated,

"I can get selective about the sources I click on Google, and I can confirm with other sources and results to see if the information is true or not."

Carmen explained that "there are more people using Google guides. I actually found that some the reviews on Yelp aren't very accurate."

On the variety of information, Carmen commented, "it [Google] shows me pictures, ratings, contact information of the restaurants and reviews of not just the food but also the environment…"

Ada said,

"Not only is it [Google] a portal that gives its own review but [also] a portal to other reviews."

Differences in Preferences

Ada and Carmen performed many information activities on social media, while Jessica displayed less usage, except for blogs (Table 1). Ada ranked word of mouth as her first preference for information as she has access to a large community of people resources as represented on her IH map (Figure 2). Carmen ranked word of mouth lowest (Figure 3), as she states, "I just don't trust their food choices."
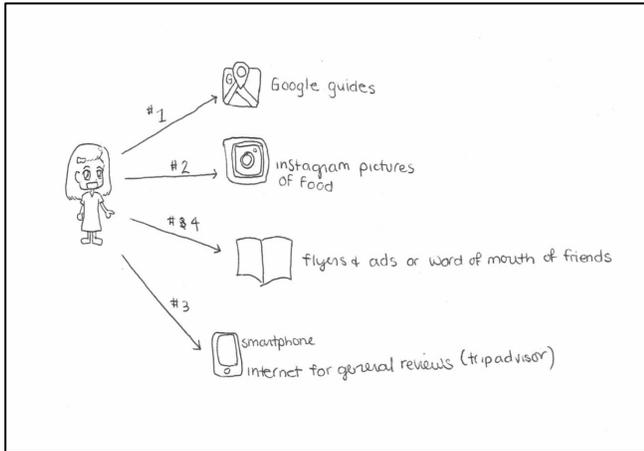

Figure 3: Carmen's IH map representing the phone apps and resources she uses to find information on dining venues and her preference rankings for each (#1 is highest preference). (See Appendix C for enlarged version.)

DISCUSSION

As this small study is exploratory, generalizability of the results is limited. This study may act as a pilot study for further research involving more informants of different ethnic backgrounds, different genders, and covering a wider range of Generation Y. This would improve the validity and reliability of the findings and prevent cultural and gender bias. The informant's level of dining experience should be considered, as it may affect their information activities and resources. Gender and cultural differences and preferences for information resources based on credibility could be explored in futures studies.

Hektor's model (2001) worked well to categorize the information behaviours and activities described by the informants in their IHI responses and IH maps. However, the validity of the classifications depended on the researcher's interpretation of the empirical data. For example, browsing (gathering) and monitoring (gathering) activities are very similar so the researcher had to use their judgement. A limitation of Hektor's model is that it did not account for information resources, which was one of the major focuses of this study. Perhaps a different model, such as Bates' berry picking model (1989) could be used in

a future study to bring focus to the search process and online resources in a different perspective.

Based on the IHI responses and IH maps (see Appendices B and C), it can be implied that informants generally used routine search strategies and preferred resources, indicating that the food adventure is an occasional project-based leisure by the SLP. This pattern of information behaviour may be compared to other project-based leisure activities in future studies.

Future studies may also focus on the social aspects of seeking for novel dining venues using two information behaviours/concepts commonly displayed by people in leisure pursuits (Hartel, 2010) as described below. The pictures and posts on social media networks, blogs and review could be seen as a socially constructed community that informants look to for insider information. This community can be seen as Pettigrew's concept of information grounds (1999) where foodies come together to gather and share information serendipitously through social tagging, commenting, and reviewing. As well, informants displayed information encountering (Erdelez, 1999) through browsing and monitoring activities.

Overall, the findings of this study agree with the recent studies on dining and consumer information seeking behaviour on social media networks and Generation Y presented in the Literature Review section. Generation Ys see dining out as a primary social activity (Lachman & Brett, 2013, p. 22) and often use of technology and social media to access information (Bilgihan, Cheng, & Kandampully, J., 2014, p. 350). The information resources (i.e. Google, social media) reported by the three informants and their information activities reflected both trends (Table 1). However, a more comprehensive study with an LIS approach needs to be done to generalize the findings.

METHODOLOGICAL REFLECTIONS

Overall, the IHIs were successful. At times, the questions in the interview guide interrupted the natural flow of conversations and informants went off topic. However, the interview guide helped to redirect them back to the relevant content.

Although, all informants found the graphical elicitation of the IHI to be a unique method for data collection, most informants had trouble understanding what they were required to draw. Most informants had questions regarding the meaning of "graphical representation" and "information horizon". I resolved their queries by reassuring them that IHI maps are free-form drawings, reiterated the "information activities and resources" portion of the instructions, and reminded them of the questions they had just answered.

All informants trusted that I would delete their audio recording within one week. Most informants were mindful of the alias ethnical consideration and tried their best not to mention names of people or places.

CONCLUSION

In this small exploratory study, the information activities and resources associated with finding information on a novel dining venue by Generation Y was studied. Data was collected using Sonnenwald's IHI method (2001) which included a semi-structured interview and a graphical elicitation. The informant's information behaviours and activities were analyzed using Hektor's model (2001). The study focused on the use of online resources and social media and examined the findings in the sequence of a typical food adventure (i.e. discovery phase, research phase, social sharing) and looked at the informants' resource preferences.

In the discovery phase, informants exhibited seeking, gathering, and communicating behaviours, and searching and retrieving, browsing, monitoring, and exchanging information activities. Information resources included Google resources, social media networks, word of mouth, advertisements, and physical encounter. In the research phase, informants exhibited seeking and gathering behaviours, and browsing and unfolding activities. The resources were Google resources and review sites. Social sharing involved communicating behaviour and dressing activity using social media networks. All informants found Google resources to be the most useful, reliable, and having the greatest variety of information.

The study was exploratory and was done with three informants of the same gender, age range, and ethnic background so the findings could not be generalized. Suggestions for future research include analyzing the findings using Bates' berry-picking model (1989), focusing on the social aspect of the research process, and examining gender and cultural differences in information behaviours. The study added to the small, growing LIS literature on project-based leisure activities and provided insight on the information journey before a food adventure. "Oh, I just heard of a new place. We should go there!" exclaims Ada.

REFERENCES

Bates, M. J. (1989). The design of browsing and berrypicking techniques for the online search interface. *Online Review, 13*(5), 407-424.

Bilgihan, A., Cheng, P., & Kandampully, J. (2014). Generation Y's dining information seeking and sharing behavior on social networking sites. *International Journal of Contemporary Hospitality Management, 26*(3), 349-366. Retrieved from http://myaccess.library.utoronto.ca/login?url=https://search-proquest-com.myaccess.library.utoronto.ca/docview/1515094747?accountid=14771

Cox, A. M., & Blake, M. K. (2011). Information and food blogging as serious leisure. *Aslib Proceedings*, *63*(2/3), 204-220. Retrieved from http://search.ebscohost.com.myaccess.library.utoronto.ca/login.aspx?direct=true&db=llf&AN=525915324&site=ehost-live

Hartel, J. (2010). Leisure and Hobby Information and Its Users. In M. J. Bates & M. N. Maack (Ed.), *Encyclopedia of Library and Information Sciences* (3rd ed.). Retrieved from https://doi-org.myaccess.library.utoronto.ca/10.1081/E-ELIS3-120043076

Hartel, J. (2003). The serious leisure frontier in library and information science: Hobby domains. *Knowlege Organization*, *30* (3/4), 228–238.

Hektor, A. (2001) What's the use? Internet and information behaviour in everyday life. Linköping: Linköping Studies in Art.

Kim, D. (2015). *Restaurant experience sharing on social network sites: Examining the effects of psychological factors and motivations* (Order No. 3736274). Available from ProQuest Dissertations & Theses Global. (1747116923). Retrieved from http://myaccess.library.utoronto.ca/login?url=https://search-proquest-com.myaccess.library.utoronto.ca/docview/1747116923?accountid=14771

Lachman, M. L. & Brett, D. L. (2013). *Generation Y: Shopping and Entertainment in the Digital Age*. Washington, D. C.: Urban Land Institute.

Pettigrew, K. E. (1999). Waiting for chiropody: Contextual results from an ethnographic study of the information behavior among attendees at community clinics. *Information Processing and Management*, *35*(6), 811.

Savolainen, R. (1995). Everyday life information seeking: Information seeking in the context of "way of life." *Library Information Science Reviews*, *17*(3), 259-294.

Sonnenwald, D. H. (1999). Evolving perspectives of human information behavior: Contexts, situations, social networks and information horizons. In T. D. Wilson & D. K. Allen, eds., Exploring the contexts of information behavior: proceedings of the second international conference in information needs, seeking and use in different contexts. London: Taylor Graham, 176-190.

Sonnenwald, D. H., Wildemuth, B. M., & Harmon, G. L. (2001). A research method to investigate information seeking using the concept of information horizons: An example from a study of lower socio-economic students' information seeking behavior. *The New Review of Information Behaviour Research*, 2, 65-86.

Spears, J. (2015). Generation Innovation. *Public Libraries*, *54*(4), 26-27. Retrieved from http://search.ebscohost.com.myaccess.library.utoronto.ca/login.aspx?direct=true&db=eue&AN=109261771&site=ehost-live

Stebbins, R. A. (2009). Leisure and Its Relationship to Library and: Information Science: Bridging the Gap. *Library Trends*, 57(4), 618-631. The Johns Hopkins University Press. Retrieved November 27, 2017, from Project MUSE database.

AUTHOR'S BIO

Tiffany Luk (tiffany.luk@mail.utoronto.ca) is a graduate student of the Master of Information program at the Unviersity of Toronto's Faculty of Information. She specializes in the Library and Information Science concentration. Her interests include public librarianship, virtual reference service, and innovation hubs.

APPENDIX 1: Semi-Structured Interview Guide

Grand Tour Question
What types of restaurants do you usually go to for casual dining?

Mini Tour Question
Can you describe a recent experience of doing research for a restaurant (or dining venue) that you have not been to before?

Information/Red Thread Questions
How do you typically find out about new restaurants/venues?

What information or types of information do you look for about a restaurant or venue?

What are some resources, including people that you use when looking for information about restaurants you have not been to before?

Follow-up questions:
- What information/types of information does this resource provide you?
- Which resources do you use most often? Why?
- Which resources are easiest/hardest to access?
- Which resources provide you with the most useful/reliable information?
- If a particular resource did not give you complete/sufficient information, which other resource would you go to?
- Which resources provided you with satisfying (or dissatisfying) research experiences?

Information horizon/graphical elicitation
Could you draw a graphical representation, which we refer to as an Information Horizon or Information Horizon Map, of all the information activities and resources, including people that you typically access when you are looking for information about a dining venue? You may start by putting yourself on this piece of paper. If you are able to, talk about it as you are drawing.

Follow-up questions:
- Which resources do you go to first? Why would you go to this resource first before going to this other resource?
- Which resources do you prefer? Why is this resource preferable to this other resource?
- Previously, you mentioned [xyz] resource, would you include it your information horizon? Where will you put it on your diagram? Why or why not?

APPENDIX 2: Transcript Hightlights

Informant 1, Ada
"When you look for information about new restaurant or venue, what information or types of information do you look for?"

"So, when I am looking for a place, different avenues provide different information. If I am on Yelp, I look at the general consensus which is shown as a rating. If I am looking for a really trendy place, I would go to Narcity or BlogTO and see what review they have of it and look at how recent the review was of it. Lastly, I would look for aesthetics…whether the food looks good, for which Instagram would be really helpful."

"When you go to a resource and it did not give you complete or sufficient information, what other resource would you go to?"

"So for that, I have a hierarchy. I find…hm…what resources? The first one would be…Word of mouth, I find that most convincing. If someone tells me a place is good, that trumps everything, I will go! Or at least it will be on my list of places to go. The next thing would be my Google search. So if I go on a Google search, and it has a pretty good list of results and it is the type of food that I want, like my food mood, I'll go. The next one would be Yelp, so if it has more than 3.5 stars, probably good… After that there are a couple of other ones; they are equally good. After that Zomato, Trip Advisor…that's the other two main ones I look to from time to time. At the bottom would be Instagram. And then, the last two: Narcity and BlogTO, I would put them above Yelp and Zomato."

Informant 2, Jessica
"Which resources do you prefer? How would you rank them?"

"So, Google would be number 1, second place would be blog, third place would be media, media being things like TV or newspapers, fourth is friends and colleagues, and fifth would be on the streets walking and seeing things."

"What information does Google give you?"

"For Google, I generally do a keyword search e.g. [restaurant name] with "Toronto" added after it because I live in Toronto. It usually gives me pretty good information like the website of the restaurant, possible alerts, reviews, sometimes food safety information…"

Informant 3, Carmen
"How do you typically find out about new restaurants or venues?"

"Oh, I look on Instagram! I look at people's food adventures and I look at the location tag of their pictures. Sometimes, there are Facebook ads that pop up randomly and Instagram ads and friends who post on Instagram. Word of mouth occasionally but not too much…"

"So, can you go through the resources and the process that you take when finding a dining venue, such as your preferences with the rankings. Which one do you go to first?"

"The first one is Google guides, because it is something that I use on a regular basis since I participate on the ratings of restaurants and I upload pictures on there as well. So there are photos of food, photos of the restaurants, reviews of the food, reviews of the décor of the restaurant, environment of the restaurant, contact information, access for disable people and what not. So I think Google guide is more comprehensive. For visual appeal, to see whether the food is appealing, I look at Instagram photos, sometimes from the place itself, sometimes from friends, like friends who have gone and posted the pictures. And then some other resources that I would look for would be Trip Advisor, people who have gone to certain places and tried restaurants and have recommended them…Sometimes Yelp, so I am just generally cruising the web and then sometimes from word of mouth or friends, which is the lowest rank in my opinion."

APPENDIX 3: Enlarged Versions of Information Horizons (IH) Maps
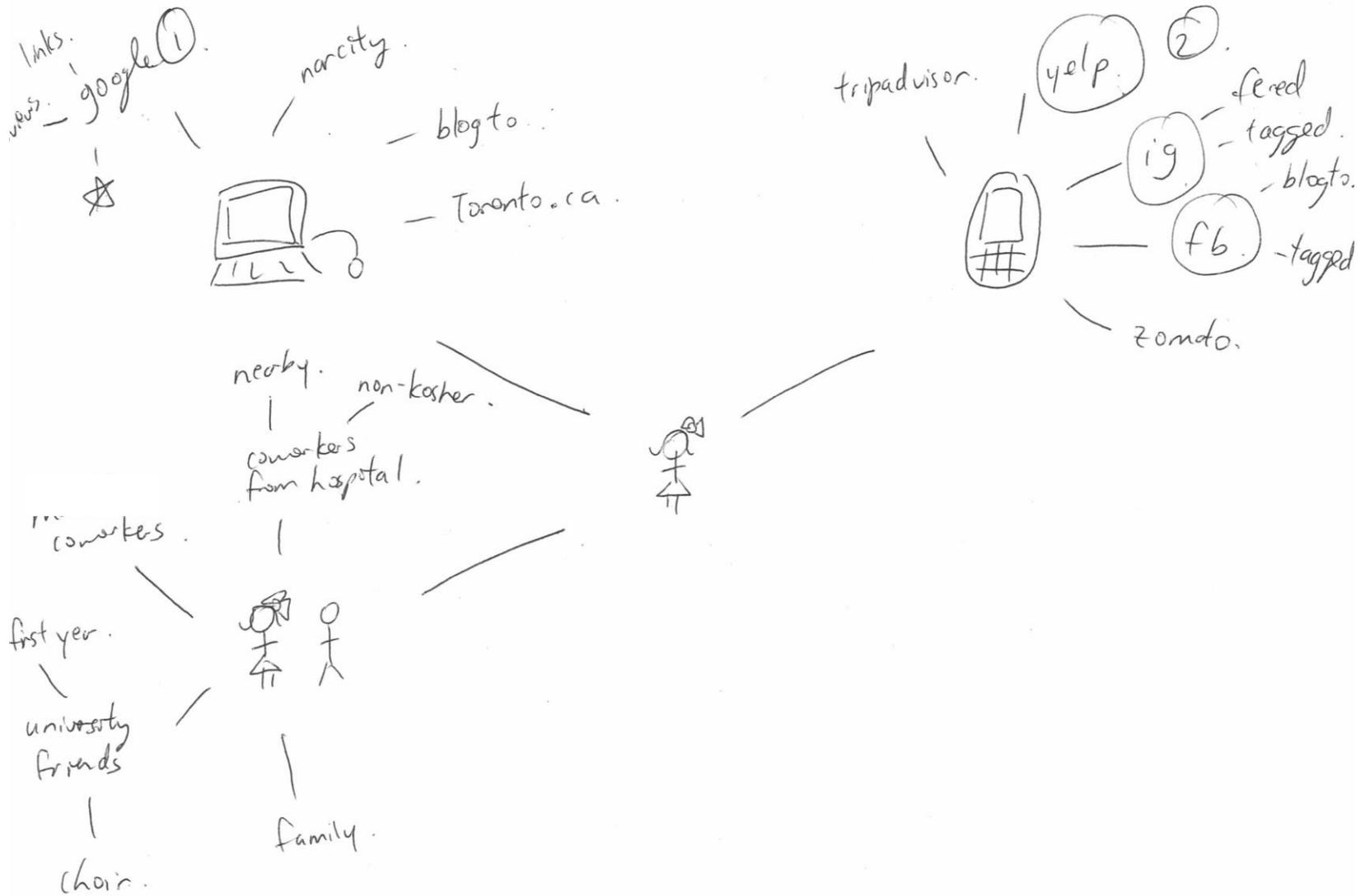
Informant 1, Ada's Information Horizon Map
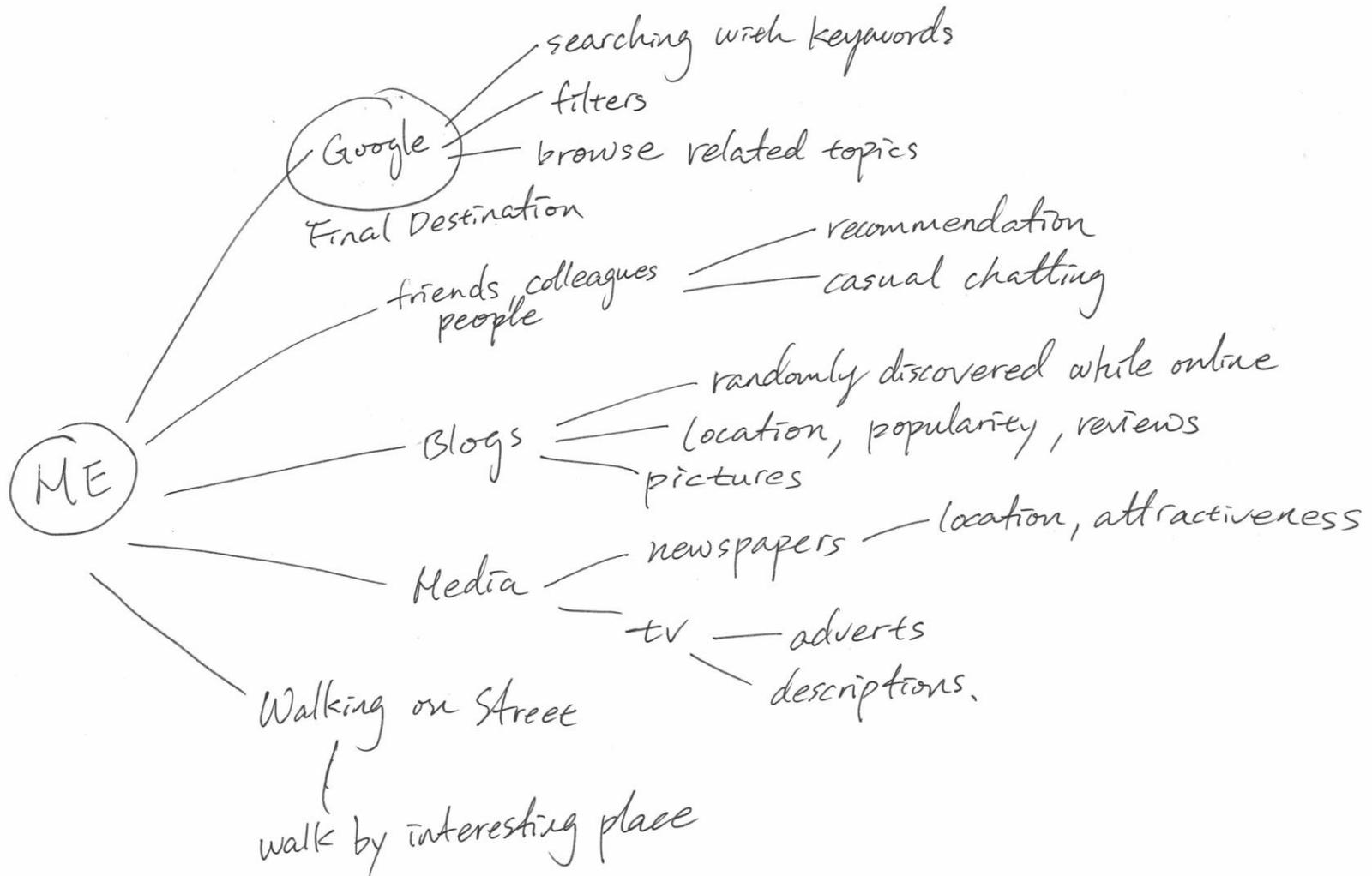
Informant 2, Jessica's Information Horizon Map

Google guides

#1

#2 → Instagram pictures of food

#$4 → Flyers & ads or word of mouth of friends

#3 → smartphone internet for general reviews (tripadvisor)
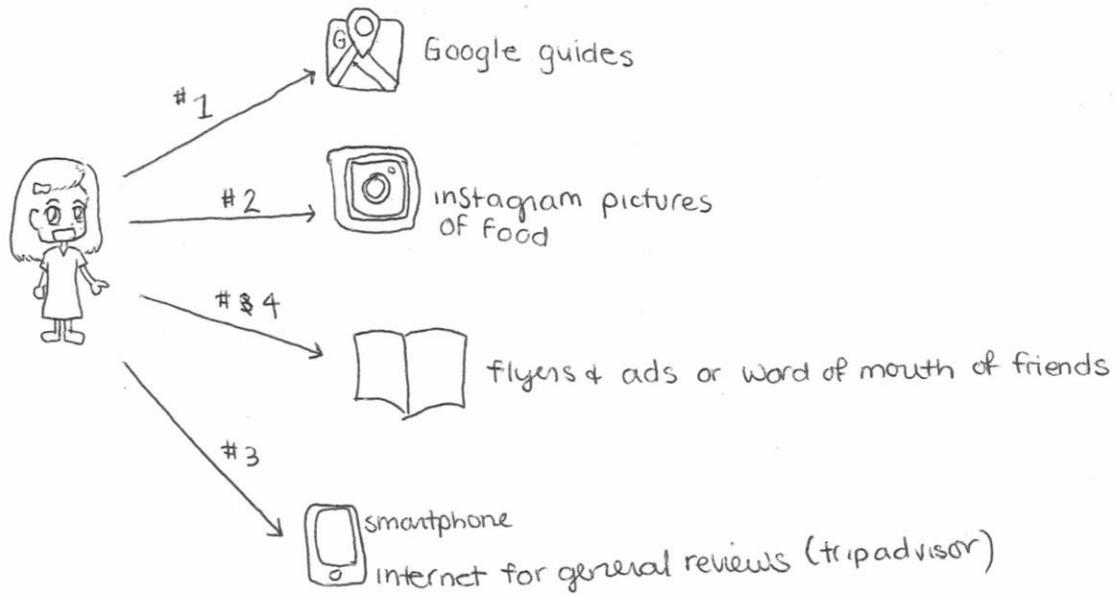
Informant 3, Carmen's Information Horizon Map