
Preface

The basic argument of this book is twofold. First, accessing and browsing resources are fundamental human activities, considered in a variety of ways and under a variety of terminologies across a variety of research areas. Second, they are insufficiently understood or identified in any particular research area or service situation, so that unidentified aspects or uninspected biases prevent people from providing and obtaining the desired or necessary resources. This book reviews literature from a wide range of research areas on these two fundamental human activities—accessing and browsing resources. Further, it considers two fundamental human resources—information and communication. These reviews are used to identify common and unique perspectives of each of the research literatures. These perspectives are integrated to develop preliminary frameworks that are both more general and more comprehensive than any particular research area’s treatment of the concepts. Then, using multiple sources of evidence, these preliminary frameworks are evaluated, refined, and validated.

Some notable features of this book include

- Extensive and comprehensive review of related theory, research, practice, and implications from a wide range of disciplines
- Analysis of converging contexts such as mass media, online information services, libraries, public spaces, grocery stores, the Internet and World Wide Web, store windows, architectural design, advertisements, organizational communication, and information system evaluation
- Comparison of common and unique conceptualizations across multiple disciplines
- Development and refinement of general, interdisciplinary frameworks
- Explicit operationalization of concepts within a broad array of dimensions
- Clear explanation of methodological procedures
- In-depth qualitative and quantitative analysis of case studies, intentionally chosen to increase theoretical variance

- Extensive use of tables and figures to summarize and illustrate the concepts and analysis
- Comprehensive bibliography

This book is primarily intended for researchers, teachers, graduate students, and service providers interested in issues of accessing and browsing resources (here, information and communication). We would hope that the reviews, operationalized concepts, and refined frameworks could be of use to reference librarians, organizational managers, system designers, message designers, consumer researchers, policy-makers, social psychologists, and others. Its scope, coverage, and detail make this a rigorous academic book, but there is very little statistical analysis, and all theoretical materials are fully described with case-based examples.

The development of the concepts from a wide variety of research literatures and the detailed case studies should make the material broadly applicable and understandable. As the fundamental conceptual and empirical bases of the book come from a wide variety of related research literatures, it would seem that by definition this book would be relevant to the over half-dozen areas represented here. We would hope that this book could become a foundation for a new approach to information seeking and could serve as part of an established curriculum that wishes to extend its boundaries to factors earlier in the traditional information-seeking process, to communication processes as well as to information, and across disciplines and practice areas.

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Although very little of the following is directly reprinted (almost all of the material on browsing is considerably different), we would like to acknowledge the following source:

Chang, S.-J., and R. E. Rice. 1993. Browsing: A multidimensional framework. *Annual Review of Information Science and Technology* 28: 231–271.