1 Introduction

William Aspray and Barbara M. Hayes

Consider a suburban American family on a weekday morning: parents Kim and Sean, children Jamie and Jordan. Kim powers up the laptop to check the family stock portfolio while preparing lunches. She considers a solicitation from a local charity and browses vacation packages online, comparing them to those advertised in the morning paper. Sean retrieves an email answer to a genealogical query about a distant ancestor. He scours car ads in the paper and ponders whether the family should take advantage of the federal rebates on new, high-efficiency automobiles. With coffee in hand, both adults call Kim's parents on the East Coast to see how they are doing after a bout with the flu and then listen to the local weather and traffic reports. While gathering his books together, Jamie checks the details of yesterday's Yankee game on his cell phone and emails friends in a fantasy baseball league to discuss Derek Jeter's performance. Jordan texts several friends to determine what they are wearing to the school play. All of this activity takes place before breakfast! From the moment they wake to the end of the day, each member of this family seeks and uses information to engage in society and construct the myriad of small decisions that will collectively define their everyday lives.

The Problem This Book Addresses

Many of the everyday activities in American life are information activities. Americans gather information from many sources and in many ways. They seek information about major purchases, local sports events, and community activities. They seek political information and information about their heritage and genealogy. They seek information about the best places to vacation and the best schools for their children. They seek information from government sources about a diverse range of topics including health care, social services, visas, recycling, public

museums, taxes, government forms, and voter registration. In these and many other ways, everyday life in America is filled with information activity. There is a strong belief, largely unexplored, that the Internet has either made American life more information-rich or changed the rules of information-seeking behavior. However, it is clear that Americans receive their information from many sources in addition to the Internet—from family and friends, experts or other trusted members of their community, professional and social organizations, sales people and consumer advocates, print sources and television, and so on. These kinds of information-seeking behaviors went on long before the advent of the Internet, although the Internet may have reshaped that behavior in various ways.

This book is organized around nine specific everyday activities in American life that involve the purchase of goods and services (cars, airline travel), participation in hobbies (sports, genealogy, comics reading, and cooking), being informed about sectors of society (government information, philanthropy), and communication and relationship maintenance (text messaging). In order to add coherence to the book, the chapters all follow a single rubric. Each is a case study of a particular activity, identifying the information-gathering questions that are being asked as part of this activity and the sources used to answer them. Each chapter discusses not only present day information-seeking behavior but also the information-seeking behaviors of Americans in the past and the evolution of those behaviors. Each chapter considers which forces have caused the questions and the sources to change over time. The book concludes with a synthetic essay in which the editors identify some of the common themes in information-seeking behavior in everyday American life and how it has changed over the past century, drawing examples from the nine case studies.

Almost every chapter in the book draws on literature and methods from multiple academic disciplines. Each chapter relies, to some degree, on some type of history, whether it is cultural or technological, because history enables the author or authors to examine change in questions and sources over time. Some chapters rely on other methodologies such as ethnography (of individuals who pursue gourmet cooking as a hobby), psychology (of reasons for philanthropic giving), economics (of the relationship between optimal price and time spent searching for a car), literary theory and cultural studies (on reading comics), and communication theory (on text messaging as a means of youth to stay connected).

Topics Covered

Chapter 2, by William Aspray, examines car buying in America as an information issue since the creation of the Ford Model T and the formation of General Motors in 1908. He identifies fifty questions car buyers would typically ask, in categories such as general understanding of the car-buying process, automobile technology, makes and models, dealers and manufacturers, and financial considerations. The chapter explains how questions buyers ask and the information sources they consult have been shaped by forces endogenous to the car industry such as the strategy and structure of automobile manufacturing firms, available technologies, foreign competition, and interconnected industries such as motels and fast food restaurants; as well as by exogenous forces such as economic depression, war, suburbanization, the entry of women into the workforce, the environmental movement, and oil shortages.

Chapter 3, by Barbara M. Hayes, examines the evolution of an increasingly rich culture of information around philanthropy in everyday American life. The chapter examines how individual motives shape information-seeking behavior related to charitable giving. It explores the ways in which exogenous forces such as religion, war, and economic crisis have, over time, shaped the nature and distribution of information prompting Americans to give. Finally, the chapter examines endogenous factors such as the professionalization of philanthropic workers, the efforts of "citizen philanthropists," and the use of modern digital media, all of which have contributed to a rich information environment designed to engage every American in a lifetime of philanthropic activity.

Chapter 4, by Rachel D. Little, Cecilia D. Williams, and Jeffrey R. Yost, traces airline travel by leisure and business passengers since the first passenger flight in the United States in 1913. The chapter authors consider how exogenous factors such as fuel prices, the general state of the economy, and increases in global commerce, terrorism, and government deregulation have all affected travel and the information issues related to it. They also consider endogenous factors in the airline industry such as technological innovation (including jet engines and pressurized cabins), frequent flyer programs, computerized reservation systems, and the disintermediation of ticketing through the rise of online airline reservation systems such as Orbitz and Expedia and the fall in importance of travel agents.

Chapter 5, by James W. Cortada, traces genealogy as a hobby since the end of the American Civil War. This chapter considers diverse practices ranging from recording family ancestry in the family Bible to use of online

genealogical databases. Forces for change studied by Cortada include the increasing geographic and social mobility of American households, government sources of information such as the decadal population census and passport records, powerful new information technologies for carrying out genealogical research, and key events such as the American Bicentennial and the television miniseries *Roots* that stimulated new interest in genealogy across America.

Chapter 6, by Jameson Otto, Sara Metz, and Nathan Ensmenger, traces information issues—in particular, the obsession for performance statistics—among sports fans and participants in fantasy sports leagues. The chapter authors focus on a series of changes in the media (newspaper, radio, television, Internet) in providing fans with information about their favorite teams and players. They also consider the impact of such factors as local pride, gambling, high salaries for athletes, performance-enhancing drugs and other forms of cheating, and sports business practices such as free agency.

Chapter 7, by Jenna Hartel, considers information in the hobby of gourmet cooking. Based on an ethnographic study, mainly carried out in Los Angeles, of gourmet-cooking social groups and classes, online forums, public lectures, and farmers markets, Hartel examines information issues associated with living a gourmet lifestyle, expressing culinary expertise, staying informed and inspired about gourmet cooking, and trying a new recipe. She sets this work in a historical context by studying early television shows about cooking and the rise of popular magazines on gourmet cooking.

Chapter 8, by Gary Chapman and Angela Newell, discusses access to government information by individuals. It considers the shaping role of government legislation such as the Freedom of Information Act, the creation of the National Archives, the political movement promoting open access to government, the Enlightenment idea of the informed citizen and its adoption by America's "Founding Fathers," the growth of a free press, assaults on free access to information in times of war and terrorism, the development of digital archives, the use of interactive tools in the military, Web 2.0 and the rise of eGovernment, and the need for rapid dissemination of geospatial data in times of natural disasters.

Chapter 9, by George Royer, Beth Nettels, and William Aspray, explores information issues related to the practice of reading. More specifically, this chapter examines the readership of comics, detailing the transition of the comics reader from passive consumer to active participant in shaping both the future of the medium and a participatory reading culture. The chapter

traces comics reading in America since comics originated in 1895, and considers such factors as immigration, newspaper circulation battles, world wars and patriotism, government regulation and comic book industry self-censorship, evolution in the form of comics (strips, books, interactives), direct marketing, the rise of comic book shops, technological advances, and the emergence of readers as creators.

Chapter 10, by Arturo Longoria, Gesse Stark-Smith, and Barbara M. Hayes, considers the use of the medium of text messaging for information exchange and relationship management among youth. New technologies, such as test messaging, Twitter, and Facebook, are ways for young people to construct their own social worlds and navigate through these worlds independently. This can be contrasted with earlier times, when young people used the landline telephone, letters, radios, and other media to communicate with one another; and to meet in such spaces as arcades, restaurants and diners, parks, and clubhouses.

Chapter 11, by the editors, draws from the nine case studies presented in chapters 2 through 10 a set of conclusions about information-seeking behavior in everyday American life, and how the collective questions raised and sources consulted have changed over time. In particular, chapter 11 evaluates the role that the Internet has played in shaping daily information-seeking behavior, and whether the Internet therefore deserves a privileged place in the study of information in everyday American life. This chapter also discusses how the research methodology developed in this book is related to other information-seeking behavior methodologies.

Situating This Book in the Scholarly Literature

We came to this topic through our work on the social and economic influences of the Internet and in particular through the literature on the Internet's role in everyday life. The earliest social study of the Internet investigated what happened online, divorced from the work or home or "third place" setting (e.g., coffeehouse, library, or social club) in which the Internet activity occurred. Starting less than ten years ago, a few scholars began to investigate Internet activity in the home setting. These scholars considered such issues as where the computer was placed in the home, who used it, what it was used for, and how it fit into the social dynamic of other (offline) activities in the home. Only a few, particular everyday home activities, such as staying connected with friends in another part of the world or seeking health information, received much attention. The breakout book in this field was an edited volume giving

various national perspectives (Wellman and Haythornthwaite 2002). This was followed by two small but well-crafted ethnographic studies on the Internet and everyday life—in Canada (Bakardjieva 2005) and Australia (Lally 2002). As far as we know, this kind of study of the Internet in American everyday life has not yet been done. This manuscript advances this line of scholarship not only by covering the American scene of the Internet in everyday life, but also by considering the Internet as only one of many means of gathering information in the pursuit of everyday life.

There are various other literatures that touch on themes similar to those in this book, although none of them is exactly on the same topic. For example, there is a rapidly expanding literature on the social study of the Internet. It includes works examining how youth with ready access to the Internet behave, such as Palfrey and Gasser 2008 and Solove 2008.

From the extensive body of literature in information science on information-seeking behavior, the most relevant perhaps is the work of Karen Fisher and others at the University of Washington (e.g., Fisher, Landry, and Naumer 2007). She and her colleagues focus more on developing abstract social science concepts—such as the notion of information grounds—than on specific everyday activities, and they do not generally employ cultural and technological history in their studies.

There is also a body of scholarship on everyday life, ranging from critical theory (e.g., de Certeau 2002; Lefevre 2008) to American cultural history (e.g., Larkin 1989; Schlereth 1992) to fact books (e.g., McCutcheon 1993). However, none of these books focus on information issues. Some of the most astute historical scholarship on the use of information and of information and communication technologies over several centuries of American history has been written by Daniel Headrick (2000). However, his work focuses on corporations, governments, and nations, not on the home.

This book illuminates information aspects of everyday activities in American life from the nineteenth century to the present. It considers the forces—both those internal to these activities and others more global such as war, economic depression, workforce changes, and social movements—that change the information dimensions of everyday life. This book can be used as a primary text in a course on information in everyday life, or as one of several texts in information science courses on information-seeking behavior and in American cultural studies courses. It could also be used profitably in other courses in communications studies, library and information science, American studies, and American history.

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