RESEARCH ARTICLE

INFORMATION NEED? REVIEWING THE CONCEPT OF WILSON'S INFORMATION NEED BEHAVIOR

*OGBA Chidinma Onwuchekwa

Ekiti State University, Ado-Ekiti, Ekiti State, Nigeria

ABSTRACT

Introduction: Information behavior theory provides three main attributes of need, seeking and use. Seeking and use behavior are active and passive whereas need is not; but is a lack of something and lack can only be acted on. However need has for long been used to qualify behavior even when it lacks definitive attributes for behavior; thereby making the term "need" moribund and not fitting attribute of behavior. This paper analytically looks at need behavior and reviews its concept as attribute of information behavior. **Argument:** Need, presented as information behavior does not fit description of behavior by Wilson. Need is also different from descriptions of gaps in Dervin's theory of information behavior; and description of need in Wilson 1981 model. Need is neither active nor passive by its definition, thus a terminology descriptive of behavior should be used in place of "need". **Development:** Need behavior was analyzed to show its non alignment with either passive or active behavior. This paper showed dissimilarity between definition of need and its description in Wilson's and Dervin's theories. It was shown that "need" is not a right term to qualify behavior since it is an attribute that can only be responded or reacted to. **Conclusion:** It was the conclusion that "need" has no relationship with behavior since it is not active or passive. **Recommendation:** It was proposed that the following terms be used instead of need behavior: reaction of information need, response to information need, reactive need, and active need.

INTRODUCTION

The theory of information behavior as postulated by Wilson has been used extensively as a benchmark to measure information behavior. Other theories by Ellis, Brookes and Dervin (Godbold, 2006) have been encapsulated under Wilson's theory, thereby enriching it. However the concepts which have been paramount among these theories are the concepts of information need, information seeking and information use behaviors. Information need has been described as a concept that leads to information seeking; while information seeking leads to information use. Despite the terminology used to portray processes of information behavior in these theories, they have always portrayed the three concepts of need, seeking and use. Information seeking was portrayed as active behavior that can be felt and seen, a human action; information use as that which can be shared or exchanged through formal or informal means (Wilson, 1999); thus active human behavior. However when it comes to information need, it becomes difficult to epitomize it, and see the activeness in "need behavior"; thereby leading to difficulty in accepting "need" as a behavior. In querying the rationale behind classifying "need" as a behavior by Wilson (Wilson, 1999), the following questions are asked: What is a need? What is behavior? What is information behavior? What is need behavior? What could be the ideal terms for need behavior?

*Corresponding author: OGBA Chidinma Onwuchekwa,
Ekiti State University, Ado-Ekiti, Ekiti State, Nigeria.

These questions are analytically looked at in this paper through the following headings: Information need behavior and Terminology for information need behavior. This paper provides the conclusion that the term: need behavior: as an attribute of information behavior is moribund and requires a change due to its inability to portray active or passive behavior. While it is recommended that the following terms: reaction of information need, response to information need be used as replacement.

Information Need Behavior

Information behavior was defined by Wilson (1999) as all manners of active and passive human behaviour carried out in relation to information sources and channels. This means that the totality of information both assertive and withdrawn ones are information behaviour as far as they are related to identifying information. The inclusion of "Passive" in definition of information behavior could be seen as the rationale behind inclusion of "need" as a behavior since other attributes of seeking and use are inherently active; however this might be an illusion. First and second 1981 models of information behavior classifies information need, information seeking and information use as three main attributes of information behavior (Wilson, 1999). While in Godbold (2006) "need" was classified by Dervin's theory as a gap which needs to be breached through sense making. Sense making is an integral part of need in Dervin's theory; and

sense making on its own is a mental action that leads to a search process. Thus Dervin's description of need provides activeness to it through the inclusion of sense making while it also portrays that gap is socio-contextual since the researcher looks within him or herself, the strengths he or she has and limitations that surround him or her. Socio contextual factors are associated with one's background, experiences, environment and the present reality of a person (Astin, 1984, 1999). Thus gap as portrayed by Dervin(need in this context) becomes a result of discrepancy between one's present environment or situation and previous environment or situation; thereby leading to rationale thinking in reaction of previous state of a person, present state of a person and how to close the gap. Thus "gap" (need) becomes assertive and passive even though its description in theories does not fit into its literary meaning. Wilson (1999) in description of behavior as that which is passive or assertive provided outward activeness and withdrawn one. Jacqueline (2012) in describing passive behavior says that it is behavior that is withdrawn, isolative, not assertive, and not showy; that which is selfless. Thus it is a behavior which is expressed but not loudly; this is different from no behavior, no activeness whether withdrawn or not as is portrayed by definition of need in dictionaries (Dictionary.cambridge, 2018; Merriam Webster Dictionary, 2018). Merriam Webster Dictionary (2018) defines need as "a lack of something requisite, desirable or useful" or "a physiological or psychological requirement for the well-being of an organism (or human being)". This definition places need as a concept that is dormant, missing and which can only be acted on; thus need is neither passive nor active.

In contrast, behavior is defined as "the way in which one acts or conducts oneself, especially towards others" (Oxford Dictionary, 2018). Thus behavior is active or assertive and passive, whereas need is not. Dictionary.cambridge (2018) in defining need also states that it is "a specific response of a certain organism to a specific stimulus or groups of stimuli"; "the action, reaction, or functioning of a system, under normal or specified circumstances". This definition of behavior incorporates passive and active behavior but does not incorporate need which is a lack, something missing; and not a response. The description of need (gap) in Dervin's sense making (Godbold, 2006) was passive; the same is the definition of need in Wilson first model of information behavior. However the meaning of "need" does not portray the intention of behavior in Wilson's information behavior or other theories as Wilson in the 1981 model described need as embodiment of a person, social role or environment, please see the diagram below. Furthermore, the keywords from Dictionary.cambridge (2018) and Oxford Dictionary (2018) are: "response, action, reaction". This means that need can only be reacted to or responded to; the reaction and response to need is what makes it a behavior.

The right terms for need behavior

Information need as portrayed in Wilson theory is neither active nor passive and thus in need of replacement. In Erdelez (as cited in Adams, 2018), information encountering was attributed as an unintended action associated with information seeking. Erdelez (2018) thereby halting current intended information search to immediately cover the need or gap been immediately reacted to This would help a scholar understand the basis behind Wilson's description of basic need as that which is not currently associated with immediate assignment;

but that which is related to a person, his or her environment and social role (Wilson, 1999). Thus, immediate reaction or response to it leads immediately to information search. This does not mean that information search related to a student's assignment is not a search, and it does not mean that the desire to carry out an assignment would not lead to a search. It only means that a basic need provides a response of sense making that would lead to an interest in academic search for information to solve assignment or other academic requirements. A student who is not fluent with English language has a basic need of becoming fluent in speaking English language, a major dormant need which could be overridden by assignments due to the academic environment. According to Wilson, the needs such student experiences in trying to do his or her assignment is not a major need but a primary one, such student's basic need is the need to speak English language fluently. While carrying out assignments, such student would always be distracted as he or she reacts to encountered information on his or her areas of need. Such student would likely prolong his or her studies as he continually react to his or her basic need. Where the need is of a different nature, an inferiority complex boosting, such students in carrying out assignment would likely study exceedingly in order to have a high intelligent quotient that could boost his or her current situation. Thus need is dormant but reacted to by what spurs information search. This means that the activeness behind intended information search becomes nothing more than a reaction to a basic information need. Therefore the right terminology for need behavior should be: reaction of information need, active information need or response to information need. It could also be couched as: reactive need, active need or responsive need.

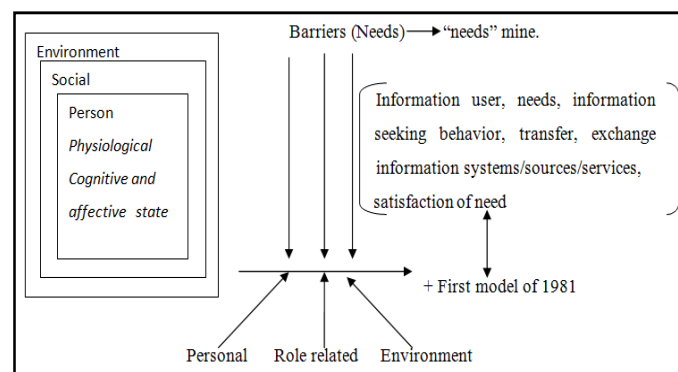## Context of information Behavior in Wilson's Second and First 1981 Model

Figure 1. (Wilson's second and first model as a merger) Adapted from Wilson's 1981 first and second model of Information behavior (Wilson, 1999)

Conclusion

Information need as a behavior has over the years been used to qualify active behavior without a critical look at what behavior stands for. The essence of scholarship is an open mind that looks critically at works and terminology used to qualify theories and models. This work in analyzing information need and its position as a behavior has shown that other scholars can also analyze other theoretical contents and bring up review on other studies. More so, this paper has shown that these terms: reactions of information need, response to information need, reactive need, active need and responsive need can better qualify need as behavior than letting it stand alone. At the same time, it subjects this study to more analytical review by other scholars.

Recommendation

It is recommended based on the analysis in this paper that:

1. The following terms: reactions of information need, response to information need, reactive need, active need or responsive need be used as contextual terms to qualify information need behavior.

2. Other scholars while reviewing literature should critically look at theories, concepts and conclusions to ensure that they can still stand the test of time and events in the society.

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