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Positive information science: An emerging area of research, policy, and practice

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Introduction

- I reflect on the past four years of my ongoing research program about human information behaviour in the context of serious leisure.
- In my research, I try to understand how people engage with various forms of information as part of their leisure activities; and to what extent their information practices/experiences are meaningful and joyful.

Also ...

- I explain how the concept of “*Positive Information Science*” emerged from my research and led my program towards new directions.
- I also explain how *Positive Information Science* can provide LIS scholars with a multidisciplinary conceptual framework for their future studies.

Positive Information Science

- The term initially was coined in a panel at the ASIS&T conference 2009 by Jenna Hartel, Jarkko Kari, Robert Stebbins, and Marcia Bates.
- They offered a counterpoint to the predominantly problem-oriented research approach in LIS.
- They called for more attention to the positive qualities of information systems and users' positive characteristics and habits, the positive contexts of information interactions (Hartel et al., 2009).
- However, this idea has been mainly neglected in the LIS scholarship afterwards.

An overview of information behaviour research

Explored areas	Less explored areas
<ul style="list-style-type: none">Information seeking	<ul style="list-style-type: none">Information sharing
<ul style="list-style-type: none">Work and study contexts	<ul style="list-style-type: none">Leisure and fun contexts
<ul style="list-style-type: none">Cognitive aspects of HIB	<ul style="list-style-type: none">Affective aspects of HIB
<ul style="list-style-type: none">Negative emotions	<ul style="list-style-type: none">Positive emotions
<ul style="list-style-type: none">Textual information	<ul style="list-style-type: none">Non-textual information
<ul style="list-style-type: none">Quantitative methods	<ul style="list-style-type: none">Qualitative methods
<ul style="list-style-type: none">Personal perspectives	<ul style="list-style-type: none">Social perspectives
<ul style="list-style-type: none">Diagnostic approaches	<ul style="list-style-type: none">Motivational approaches

So what?

- There is a gap in human information behaviour scholarship. The gap impedes a deep and comprehensive understanding of the interaction between humans and information in real situations.
- To address this gap, we need more qualitative studies about affective aspects of information behaviour in everyday life contexts.
- We also need to focus on underexplored topics such as information sharing in fun and fandom activities.
- There is a difference between looking for information and becoming informed.

A call for more LIS research on *Higher Things in Life*

- We have neglected pleasurable and profound phenomena, experiences or activities that transcend the daily grind (Kari and Hartel, 2007).
- We have focused on the negative aspects such as affective load, affective filter, technophobia and affective coping skills (Nahl, 1996, 2004).
- One of the most obvious gaps in information behaviour research is the analysis of the relationships between informational and entertaining elements of information (Savolainen, 2021).

What is positive psychology?

- A new movement since 1998 to study contentment about the past; hope for the future; and happiness in the present.
- It is about positive personal traits such as the capacity for love, courage, aesthetic sensibility, perseverance, etc.
- It is also about various virtues and institutions that move individuals toward better citizenship, responsibility, altruism, etc.

(Seligman and Csikszentmihalyi, 2000).

Focusing on what works!

- Positive psychology is not about the answers. It is about the questions and how we ask them.
- It is not about happiness as a feeling, it is more about flourishing and wellbeing.
- In the past it was all about what went wrong, now we need to look at what works well.
- According to Martin Seligman, the positive psychology movement can be described as studying of what constitutes the *pleasant*, *engaged* and *meaningful* life. (Seligman, 2018)

What is NOT positive psychology

- It is not synonym with positive thinking.
- It does not deny the realities of life.
- It does not ignore unhappiness and pain.
- It is not a topic to study. It is a movement, an approach and a way of looking at the world.
- It is not about hedonic happiness at the individual level.

(Peterson, 2008)

Three levels of happiness and wellbeing

- Hedonic happiness for a pleasant life
- The state of flow for an engaged life (Csikszentmihalyi, 1990)
- Eudaimonic wellbeing for a purposeful and meaningful life

(Seligman, 2002)

Five aspects of the PERMA model by Martin Seligman

- Positive Emotion
- Engagement
- Relationships
- Meaning
- Accomplishment

(Seligman, 2018)

Examples of emerging areas

- Positive sociology or sociology of happiness and wellbeing:

“An area of research that examines social aspects of leisure life with a focus on the optimal functioning of relationship, group, community, organization, and other social units.” (Kono, et al., 2020, p. 2)

- Positive education

To teach both traditional skills and wellbeing skills (Seligman, et al., 2009)

Positive Information Science

- It is a multidisciplinary concept with solid links with positive psychology and wellbeing studies highlighting the role of “*Positive Information Experiences*” in our overall wellness.
- The empirical data from my past and present projects illustrate the concept’s applicability in the LIS research, policy, and practice.

Fun and fandom information behaviour

Fun related information behaviours create various forms of communities such as:

- Communities of interest
- Communities of practice
- Communities of play
- Communities of relationship

(Price and Robinson, 2017)

Conclusion

- The framework can enable them to conceptualise and contextualise empirical data to better understand human information experiences in various contexts.
- Furthermore, the framework is a productive ground to design and develop more interdisciplinary studies in the LIS research.

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Thank you for your attention!

Any questions or comments?



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