

Five Functions of Information Sharing in Serious Leisure: Releasing the Power of Information among Passionate People

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Introduction

Information sharing seems to be a fundamental part of our life and an essential element of our existence as social creatures. However, have you ever wondered why we feel compelled to share information with others? What motivates us to share our thoughts, whether posting on social media, blogging, or simply chatting with someone about an area of our interests? For example, what urges me to write this article and share my thoughts with you?

The answer to this question is far from simple and depends on many factors, including our situation, motivations and the type of information we share. Even the platform we choose to share information impacts our information sharing pattern. For instance, research shows tourists prefer sharing visual content above narrative or textual content through social media (Munar & Jacobsen, 2014). Nonetheless, since motivation is the fundamental force that causes humans to act, it has been broadly considered one of the main predictors of information sharing in different contexts (Kim et al., 2023).

Nevertheless, when it comes to serious leisure, the motivations behind information sharing and the purposes and patterns become even more complex. Serious leisure is the pursuit of hobbies, voluntary activities or amateurism that requires effort, dedication, commitment, specific skills or knowledge, and the possibility of becoming a career (Stebbins, 1982). In this article, I reflect on my research on serious leisure with a glimpse into the literature to discuss five themes underpinning information sharing in serious leisure. By exploring these themes, we can gain a deeper understanding of the role of information sharing in the context of serious leisure.

—It is not just about what we share but also about the attention we give to the information shared by others—

Creating social bonds

As humans, our need for social interaction is intrinsic, and information sharing facilitates various forms of interaction in physical and virtual settings. Therefore, information sharing is among the common ways to create and strengthen social ties and bonds. When we share information with others, we open a window for them to see our thoughts, beliefs and experiences, which can be a catalyst for building deeper relationships. As a result, information sharing is a powerful tool for creating social bonds. Research shows that those more willing to share information with others have more opportunities to interact and participate in group activities. This interaction is vital in enhancing a sense of belonging and social ties (Kim et al., 2021).

Furthermore, information sharing is a two-way street (Pham & Williamson, 2018). It is not just about what we share but also about the attention we give to the information shared by others. When we actively engage with others' ideas and perspectives, we demonstrate a willingness to listen and learn, which can foster trust and mutual respect. In particular, people with common interests, like hobbies or voluntary activities, have more motivation to share information with like-minded people (Pilerot, 2012).

Engaging in collaborative learning

Information sharing is an indispensable component of the learning process. We gain new knowledge and skills through our interactions with others. Moreover, sharing knowledge and experiences creates a feedback loop that helps refine our understanding. This is especially true when it comes to serious leisure activities because engaging in hobbies that require some skills and a high level of commitment in the long term presents an opportunity for individuals to learn from one another and strengthen their collective knowledge.

People engaging in serious leisure need to continually acquire and share information in their leisure pursuits, such as mastering a new musical instrument or learning a new craft. Through this process, they can better understand the activity and improve their skills. However, it is not just the act of sharing information but also the guidance and support of a friend or mentor who can provide insights and direction. Therefore, engaging in serious leisure activities, such as sports or hobbies, not only provides an opportunity to learn new skills but also allows us to connect with others who share our interests (Roued-Cunliffe, 2017).



Collaboration and problem solving

The importance of access to accurate and credible information to solve a problem is more evident than it needs to be explained. Nevertheless, the importance of information and knowledge sharing in solving problems has yet to be explored (Carmeli et al., 2013). This is important in both work and leisure contexts. Of course, serious leisure enthusiasts face different types of challenges and problems in different contexts. However, they are more eager to participate in solving each other's problems because of their shared interests.

Serious leisure enthusiasts are passionate about their hobbies and volunteer work, which makes them even more eager in helping each other solve problems. They are often knowledgeable about the area of interest and have much experience to draw upon. They can overcome obstacles and develop innovative solutions by sharing information and collaborating.

Of course, the types of problems and challenges that serious leisure enthusiasts face vary depending on the context. For example, someone passionate about hiking encounter different issues than someone involved in volunteer work with a local animal shelter or a motor sport enthusiast (Joseph, 2016). However, regardless of the specific nature of the problem, the importance of information sharing remains almost the same.

Generating joyful experiences

“*Shared joy is a double joy; shared sorrow is half a sorrow*” is a self-evident proverb highlighting the role of sharing happiness in boosting our emotional wellbeing. As humans, we are social creatures, and sharing our emotions with others is a vital aspect of our life that can strengthen relationships (Lee et al., 2022). Therefore, information sharing can be an excellent source to create joyful experiences, especially regarding topics that ignite our passion. Whether it is a hobby, sport, or another field of interest, the more knowledge we acquire, the more likely we are to experience pure happiness. For example, an ice hockey fan finds it enjoyable to acquire information about a match on an online forum (Savolainen, 2022). Moreover, sharing our knowledge and experiences about the topics we like enriches our understanding of the topic. In this way, information sharing becomes a powerful platform for spreading happiness and positivity on both an individual and social level (Tinto & Ruthven, 2016).

Sharing information in the field of interest between two or more people can be a basis for happy experiences for them. Moreover, gaining knowledge about a fascinating topic creates more awareness; the more this passion grows, the more likely it will generate joy for the participants. Therefore, sharing information about a hobby or sport is a good platform for spreading happiness on an individual and social level.

Forming communities of interests

People who have similar interests, like those interested in a particular hobby or amateurism, usually form clubs or associations with like-minded individuals. For example, there are 57 bonsai clubs in Australia and many more across the globe. Research shows that a sense of belonging to a community is one of the essential elements of the intention to seek and share information. This is the case even for weakly connected members, like investment groups, who participate in online communities (Park et al., 2014).

These groups can provide fertile grounds for building a supportive community that encourages and motivates members to pursue their interests. The possibility of free sharing of information within these groups is essential to creating a foundation for growth and success. It allows members to learn from one another, share resources, learn new skills and perspectives. The availability of information is crucial for the sustainability of these groups, as it facilitates collaboration, generates new ideas, and fosters a sense of trust and belonging among members.

Conclusion

Information sharing can bring personal and social benefits for everyone involved. Of course, the outcome depends on numerous factors, such as the quality of the shared information, timing, and many contextual elements. Nonetheless, in an optimal situation, the benefits of sharing information extend beyond personal pleasure. Connecting with others over a shared passion builds stronger relationships and a sense of community. We can learn from each other's experiences, gain new insights and perspectives, and even discover new passions we might not have considered otherwise. It is particularly important in serious leisure because people engaged in serious leisure activities develop long-term commitment to a hobby or voluntary activity and are actively involved in information seeking, sharing, using and producing.

In general, a reflection on my research shows we share information with others to create social bonds, engage in collaborative learning, seek and offer help to solve problems, generate joyful experiences and finally form communities of interest. Nonetheless, our motivations and achievements are broader than these themes, and we need further research in this area supported by empirical evidence.

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