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Hedonistic information behaviour: Definition, scope and implications

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Joy in looking and
comprehending is
nature's most
beautiful gift.

Albert Einstein



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Introduction

- In this presentation I describe the concept of *hedonistic information* and *hedonistic information behaviour* with a number of examples to illustrate the importance of this topic in information behaviour scholarship.
- I also explain the links between satisfying *hedonistic information needs* and different types of wellbeing (e.g. social, emotional and eudaemonic/eudaimonic)

Furthermore,

- I discuss the significance of this type of information behaviour in everyday life information seeking context.
- Also, I provide a number of themes about research implications in this area in terms of designing information systems and information services in the GLAM sector.

Looking for
wealth, power and
reputation vs.
Looking for health,
authenticity and
serenity

Profit and
Progress vs.
Pleasure and
Purpose



What is leisure?

- Leisure is all about *authenticity* and *autonomy* more than anything else.
- Leisure is a context for doing what you love and loving what you do.
- Leisure is a pathway towards catharsis, liberation and emancipation.



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Estella, 2020

What is pleasure?

- Pleasure is far more complicated than just a sensation (Berridge and Kringelbach, 2008).
- Nature has placed mankind under the governance of two sovereign masters, pain and pleasure. It is for them alone to point out what we ought to do, as well as to determine what we shall do. (Bentham, 1789, p. 25)
- The concept of pleasure is fundamental to aesthetics. Aesthetics arose in the eighteenth century as a specific style of philosophical meditation on the nature of art and beauty. Herwitz (2014).

Different kinds of pleasure

- The pleasures of sense
 - The pleasures of wealth
 - The pleasures of skill
 - The pleasures of amity
 - The pleasures of a good reputation
 - The pleasures of power
 - The pleasures of piety
- The pleasures of benevolence
 - The pleasures of malevolence
 - The pleasures of memory
 - The pleasures of imagination
 - The pleasures of expectation
 - The pleasures dependent on association
 - The pleasures of relief

Bentham (1789, p. 24-26)

What is the ultimate good in life?

- Nobody knows for sure!
- However, different schools of thought (e.g. epicureanism, stoicism, mysticism, utilitarianism, existentialism, hedonism, etc.) have their own answers.
- It might be *happiness*, *eudaimonia* (Aristotle), *pleasure* (Epicureanism), *virtue* (stoicism) or other ultimate goals.

Casual leisure and hedonistic activities

- Casual leisure is a kind of leisure which is immediately, intrinsically rewarding, relatively short-lived pleasurable activity requiring little or no special training to enjoy it (Stebbins, 1997).
- Passive entertainment, active entertainment, sociable conversation, plays, games and sensory stimulation.
- It is considerably less substantial and offers no career of the sort described elsewhere for its counterpart, serious leisure (Stebbins, 1992).

Casual leisure and pure pleasure

- Terms such as ‘pleasure’ and ‘enjoyment’ are the more appropriate descriptors of the rewards of casual leisure in contrast to terms such as ‘satisfaction’ and ‘rewardingness’, which best describe the rewards gained in serious leisure. Stebbins (1997, p. 21)
- Casual leisure activities share one central property: all are hedonic. More precisely, all produce a significant level of pure pleasure, or enjoyment, for those participating in them. Stebbins (2001, p. 305)

Relevant research areas

Scholars in a number of research areas explore hedonic/hedonistic issues such as:

- Marketing and fashion studies
- Tourism and hospitality
- Positive psychology and wellbeing
- Leisure studies
- Decision making
- Criminology

A growing cluster of terminology

- Hedonic needs/desires
- Hedonic responses/reactions/rewards
- Hedonic consumption/shopping
- Hedonistic morality/hedonic calculus
- Hedonistic forms of leisure
- Hedonistic versions of ethical theories
- Hedonistic utilitarianism

Different types of wellbeing

- Physical wellbeing
- Economic wellbeing
- Social wellbeing
- Emotional wellbeing
- Psychological wellbeing
- Eudaimonic wellbeing
- Overall wellbeing



Hedonistic information behaviour

- Hedonistic information exists in various entertaining and recreational contexts such as musical, sport, fashion, spiritual, artistic, and hobby related activities.
- Hedonistic information behaviour covers a wide range of information activities that people experience in their leisure time including searching, seeking, browsing, collecting, sharing and using for hedonistic purposes.
- Hedonistic information behaviours usually are not task-based or goal-oriented.
- Users often enjoy the process of information seeking in the context more than the result of their searches.

Examples of hedonistic information behaviour

- Fashion information seeking by consumers (Chowdhary, 1989)
- Finding pleasure in information seeking: Leisure and amateur genealogists exploring their ancestry (Fulton, 2005)
- The pleasure principle: The power of positive affect in information seeking (Fulton, 2009)
- The utilitarian and hedonic outcomes of music information-seeking in everyday life (Laplante and Downie, 2011)
- Casual leisure information behaviour (Elsweiler, et al. 2011)
- Musicians information seeking behaviour: A case study on a community concert band (Kostagiolas, et al. 2015)
- Music information seeking behaviour as motivator for musical creativity (Lavranos, et al. 2015)
- Modelling the information practices of music fans (Vesga and Vinchira, 2019)

Features of hedonistic information activities

- *In terms of motivation:* Usually no specific task, poorly defined or even absent information needs and no particular knowledge gap to bridge.
- *In terms of focus:* The focus is often on the experience in terms of engagement, satisfaction and enjoyment and not the contents.
- *In terms of importance:* The value of information and significance of information activity is evaluated differently from work-based information behaviours. (Elsweiler, et al. 2011)

Research themes

- Our knowledge about emotional aspects of information activities in the contexts of leisure, fun, fashion and entertainment is still limited.
- Investigating the joy of information for *collectors*, *observers* or *performers* will produce useful results.
- Comparing diverse groups in this context can shed light on similarities and differences of their experiences in these contexts.
- Some phenomenological or ethnographic studies will be useful to understand the essence of joyful information activities.

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The purpose of
art is washing
the dust of daily
life off our souls.

Pablo Picasso



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Charles Sturt
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Celebrating
30 years in 2019

Thank you for your attention!

Any questions or comments?