

# Discussion of

## A Comparison of the Information Seeking Patterns of Researchers in the Physical and Social Sciences

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David Ellis, Deborah Cox, and Katherine Hall

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# Purpose

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- Compare two groups of researchers
  - They are usually studied separately
  - Studies can't be compared because they differ so much in aim and design
  - The studies employ a shallow conceptualization – lack “explicit theoretical framework”



# Recall the Physical Scientist study?

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- Research physicists and chemists
- Information-seeking patterns analyzed for key patterns
  - Starting
  - Chaining
  - Browsing
  - Differentiating
  - Monitoring
  - Extracting
  - Verifying (new)
  - Ending (new)



# Social Scientists

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- Study took place before that of physical scientists
- Nomenclature standardized between studies



# Conclusion?

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- “no overriding differences between the groups”
- “characteristics ... fundamentally the same”
- “remarkable degree of homogeneity between the information seeking patterns of the physicists, chemists, and the social scientists”



# Starting

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- Definition: activities characteristic of the initial search for information
- Same : reliance on starter references, reviews, informal contact
- Different: chemists made more use of secondary material



# Chaining

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- Definition: following citation connections between material
- Same: backward chaining
- Different: physicists more aware of Science Citation Index than Social Scientist were aware of Social Science Citation Index



# Browsing

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- Definition: semi-directed or semi-structured searching in an area of potential interest
- Same: browsing journals, Current Contents, abstracts, library, bookstores, poster displays
- Different: Browsing not so important to chemists





# Differentiating

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- Definition: activity which uses differences between sources as a filter on the nature and quality of the material examined
- Same: core journals
- Different: ?



# Monitoring

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- Definition: activity of maintaining awareness through regularly following particular sources
- Same: personal contact, journals, Current Contents
- Different: Physicists – no books or newspaper articles



# Extracting

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- Definition : Going through a source and extracting material
- Same:
- Different: not a significant activity for chemists except when writing reviews



# Comments on information technology

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- Ellis states information technology had a “minor impact” on information seeking and communication activities of the three groups (1993)
- Still the case?



# Comments on electronic conferences and journals

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- What is an electronic conference?
  - Still the same?
- Ellis notes “lack of formal recognition of electronic media as representing legitimate outlets for publication”, “lower division outlets for minor league research”
  - Still the case?



# Questions

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- Why didn't they employ the same definitions through both studies?
- Does it make sense to study Social scientists separately from physical scientists? When?