Historically, information seeking research has concentrated on the phenomenon of information seeking within occupational fields. More recently, information seeking research has branched out to include the everyday life information seeking (ELIS) of individuals. Although the field has grown, less is known about the information-seeking needs, behaviors and channels of ethnic minorities. This study explores the everyday information seeking needs, behaviors and channels of members of the Occaneechi Band of the Saponi Nation through interviews and data analysis.

Four major themes emerged during the data analysis process: subjects’ complex, often realistic relationship with the Internet; the differing success rate reported by subjects in ELIS versus tribal information seeking; the importance of interpersonal channels in tribal information seeking; and the challenges of data management.

Headings:

Information Needs

Information Retrieval

Online Searching

Native Americans
THE INFORMATION SEEKING BEHAVIORS, NEEDS AND CHANNELS OF MEMBERS OF THE OCCANEECHI BAND OF THE SAPONI NATION

by
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A Master’s paper submitted to the faculty of the School of Information and Library Science of the University of North Carolina at Chapel Hill in partial fulfillment of the requirements for the degree of Master of Science in Library Science.

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Introduction

The Occaneechi Band of the Saponi Nation (OBSN) is a small community made up of lineal descendants of the Saponi and related American Indians who occupied the Piedmont of North Carolina and Virginia prior to European contact. The community’s current home base is located in Mebane, North Carolina.

According to the OBSN’s vision statement, the “Occaneechi Band of the Saponi Nation will be a unified and self-reliant tribe” (Occaneechi Band of the Saponi Nation, Inc., n.d.). Likewise, the OSBN’s tribal mission statement reads,

The Occaneechi Band of the Saponi Nation is continuously committed to the preservation, protection and promotion of our history, culture and traditions; while providing social, economic and educational resources, opportunities and services that will contribute to the well being of the tribal community” (Occaneechi Band of the Saponi Nation, Inc., n.d.).

Additionally, the OBSN is currently partaking in the Homeland Preservation Project, started in 2005, in which the Occaneechi are beginning to buy back their ancestral lands. They have created a permanent ceremonial ground and a tribal orchard. A 1701 Occaneechi Village and 1880s era farm are currently in construction. Educational nature trails, a tribal museum and a community center with administrative offices and classroom space are all in the planning phases. During the process of the following study, the OBSN successfully moved their tribal administrative offices to a different location in Mebane, NC.
Notably, the OBSN became one of the eight state-recognized tribes of North Carolina in 2002, but currently the OBSN is not a federally recognized tribe. After speaking with OBSN Tribal members, it became clear that obtaining federal recognition is also a long-term goal for the tribe. The OBSN is also a 501(c)(3) non-profit organization.

The goals, missions, history and projects of the members of the OBSN suggest a unique opportunity to study the information needs, information seeking behaviors and information channels of a specific ethnic group. This study will explore the everyday life information seeking needs, behaviors and channels as well as the tribe-related information seeking needs, behaviors and channels of members of the OBSN.

**Literature Review**

In this paper, the goals of this literature review are two-fold and thematic. The first goal is an attempt to review the literature on the history and evolution of the field of human information behavior in order to grasp an understanding of current practices and integration of approaches. This goal does not strive to be an all-inclusive study of the field, but to serve as an evolutionary overview. The second goal of the literature review is to examine prior studies on the information seeking needs, behaviors and channels of minorities and to reveal the shortcomings of the present literature.

Development of Everyday Life Information Seeking (ELIS)
Prior to 1948, studies within the field of Library Science were heavily focused on the information needs of library users. In fact, little to no studies were conducted on subject’s information needs outside of a library context. T.D. Wilson (2000) dated the beginnings of information seeking research to 1948. 1948 was determined by Wilson to be the birth of information seeking due to a significant study led by Herbert Menzel (1960). This study, entitled *Review of Studies in the Flow of Information among Scientists*, explored information use among scientists and cited references post-1948. Additionally, Donald J. Urquart noted in his 1948 paper, *The Distribution and Use of Scientific and Technical Information*, that earlier studies on how people used information had not been traced (Wilson 2000; Urquart 1948).

In the beginning years of information seeking research, researchers sought to understand how people used information in work situations and how they incorporated information into science and technology (Wilson, 2000). A trend in the information field for many years was to examine the information use of scientists. Researchers would “determine how information sources could be made more useful to scientists, and how scientists could be persuaded to make better use of such sources” (Wilson, 2000, p.50).

Up until 1971, researchers often examined the more formal information channels used by subjects. A shift happened in 1971 when Maurice B. Line, while examining the information uses and needs of social scientists, suggested the importance and preference of other non-library methods of information seeking. Among the non-library methods of information seeking, Line suggested the preference for information seeking through informal channels like friends, colleagues or relatives over the more formal channels available in the library. Amanda Spink and Charles Cole (2000) attributed Line’s
suggestion to reconfiguring the focus of INLS research within the last few decades to a focus on information needs starting with the recognition of a problem situation (Wersig, 1971; Spink & Cole, 2000).

But before more modern information seeking models and standards are explored, definitions of current terminology are warranted. Several key terms are essential in the understanding of the field of human information behavior. Wilson’s (2000) definition of information behavior is cited within other research (Spink and Cole, 2000) and thus indicates somewhat of an agreement of the definition within the field. Wilson (2000) defined human information behavior as “the totality of human behavior in relation to sources and channels of information, including both active and passive information seeking and information use” (p. 49).

Accordingly, Wilson (2000) also defined information-seeking behavior and information-searching behavior. He defined information-seeking behavior as searching purposively for information to meet an end goal. Information searching behavior he defined as “a behavior employed by the searcher in interacting with information systems of all kinds” (Wilson, 2000, p. 49).

Spink and Cole (2000) noted that the term “information seeking” is becoming less popular within the INLS field due in part to the spread of the Internet. Instead, the terms “everyday life information seeking” and “information foraging” are becoming more prominent. Everyday life information seeking (ELIS) is defined by Reijo Savolainen (1995) as “the acquisition of various informational (both cognitive and expressive) elements which people employ to orient themselves in daily life or to solve problems not directly connected with the performance of occupational tasks” (p. 266-267).
Information foraging began as a concept within the field of evolutionary psychology. It was later taken on by information science researchers to describe an information-seeking approach (Spink and Cole, 2000). William J. Bell (1991; Spink and Cole, 2000) describes the optimal foraging theory as the efficient searching for nutrition and mating opportunities in which natural selection punishes divergence from the best design.

Although much of the literature surveyed contains a clear grasp on the history of information seeking and current, accepted terminology, appropriate models and framework for studying human information behaviors are less established.

Reijo Savolainen, a well-known and respected researcher in the field of ELIS, proposed a model in his 1995 article, Everyday Life Information Seeking; Approaching Information Seeking in the Context of “Way of Life” that was significant in beginning to establish a framework for ELIS studies. Savolainen’s model proposed an integrated view of human information behaviors, and unlike several other proposed ELIS models, attempted to test the framework in an empirical study based on interviews. In his findings, Savolainen (1995) reported two contexts that for the study of ELIS: way of and mastery of life. “Way of life is defined as the ‘order of things,’ manifesting itself, for example, in the relationship between work and leisure time, models of consumption and nature of hobbies” (Savolainen, 1995, p. 259). In juxtaposition to way of life is mastery of life. Mastery of life is defined by Savolainen (1995) as the way in which people position themselves in a “typical problem situation and seeks information to facilitate problem solving” (p.265). In the present study, both way of life and mastery of life contexts are explored.
Although Savolainen’s research was vital in establishing a basic framework for information seeking, he admitted that further testing on his framework should be done and that specifications within the concept of mastery of life are needed. Finally Savolainen adds, “information seeking research may never find indisputable answers” (p. 290). But by factoring in mastery of life elements such as culture, one may see a fuller picture of ELIS. The explorations of mastery of life elements, specifically culture, are particularly relevant in this study.

More recent human information behavior models include Wilson’s (2000) proposal for a more integrated model of human information behaviors and Spink and Cole’s 2006 approach in creating a model for a very specific population. Notably, ELIS and information foraging were absent from Wilson’s model. Spink and Cole’s (2006) research, published six years later, paints a more complete picture of an integrated, broad approach because it takes into account ELIS and information foraging’s importance in human information behaviors.

Minority Groups’ ELIS

In the current literature, there are several studies that investigate the information-seeking channels, needs and behaviors of specific minority groups. The following glimpse into the literature will take a chronological approach.

In 1985, Elfreda A. Chatman published a study that explored the contributions and roles of mass media in the information world of the poor. Participants in the study were fifty women who were interviewed with intentions to explore their use, preferences, and attitudes of credibility of the mass media and the public library. These women were
enrolled in an urban Comprehensive Employment and Training Act. Although this article does not use the phrase ELIS, possibly due to its date of publication, everyday life information is often sought through mass media channels. This article remains relevant in the creation of a broader, more culturally aware view of the ELIS field.

In 1993, Cheryl Metoyer-Duran published findings from her study on the function of gatekeepers. Gatekeepers, within her study’s context, are defined as people within the minority community who provide information to other group members. This study was conducted using interviews from information gatekeepers from five minority groups—American Indian, Chinese, Japanese, Korean and Latino. Metoyer-Duran’s (1993) study of gatekeepers within minority groups documents an unseen factor within the study of ELIS and presents a gap within the present models of human information behavior.

Metoyer-Duran’s study population, in comparison to other study populations reviewed within this paper, contained relatively high proportion of American Indian participants. In fact, 20 percent of Metoyer-Duran’s pretest sample self-identified as American Indian. Metoyer-Duran’s sample is more representative of the population studied in the present paper than any other populations within this literature review.

Notably, 87.5 percent of the American Indians within Metoyer-Duran’s study believed that an information and resource center was a “very good idea,” this belief was higher among American Indians than any other group (Metoyer-Duran, 1993, p. 369). The present study was conducted in the hopes that the information from the data collected will help identify programming needs and services that would correspond to OBSN members’ information seeking behaviors and would additionally provide data for tribal leaders to consider in the planning of a future museum and tribal community center.
In 1997, Mengxiong Liu and Bernice Redfern conducted a preliminary survey to “obtain insight into how university students from diverse ethnic groups discover, select, and use information and communication resources” (p. 349). The study also examined the information channels, communication patterns and cultural and educational background of a diverse group of students. It sought to provide answers to the questions, “How do colleges and university libraries respond to the needs of a more diversified college library?” and “How do librarians provide more effective and efficient services to their multicultural patrons?” (p. 348). Although members of the present study’s population may or may not be graduate students and all are Americans, this study is valuable in its comparative methods of minority and majority groups. The pitfall of this research study is the researchers’ choice to employ the web-based, anonymous survey publisher, Survey Monkey, as a collection tool. Although free and convenient, this survey tool does not promise security of the data and thus, may have compromised the integrity and ethics of the survey collection process.

Lui’s and Redfern’s study was created with the intent to aid librarians in developing services to their population. Similarly, this study was created with the intent to aid OBSN tribal council members with the development of information services for their members.

In 2001, a study by Amanda Spink and Charles Cole explored the information seeking and information needs of low-income households in the residential housing urban development project of Wynnewood in Dallas, Texas. The households consisted of mainly African American residents. The focus of the study was the channels that low-income residents use when they participate in information seeking. The study also
offered a theoretical model for residents’ information seeking and the corresponding task, which provides a framework for future testing. Additionally, Spink and Cole performed the study in the hopes to include a wider range of behavior influencing factors than average information user assessment studies. Spink’s and Cole’s study of the information channels used by African American low-income households is one of the most informative studies included in this literature review in regards to the present research.

Spink and Cole’s study’s results were based on 300 volunteer households’ oral interviews. This research in comparison to prior research within this literature review reflected data from a much larger population and presented a model of the residents’ information environment. Spink and Cole’s (2001) research is particularly relevant because it took into account ELIS and sought to find the channels used by residents. Similarly, the present study strived to discover the ELIS channels used by OBSN members.

Although information seeking behaviors, needs and channels of ethnic minorities have been studied in the past, the specific needs, channels and behaviors of tribal members is an unexamined phenomenon. The information gained from a study of tribal members will not only contribute to tribal council’s understanding of their members specific needs, but will also add to scholarly discourse on the subject of ELIS. Additionally, it will further the understanding of library patron needs, behaviors and preferred channels.
Methodology

Description of Method

The purpose of this study was to explore the information seeking needs, behaviors and channels of the members of the OBSN. This study attempted to answer four major research questions:

1. What are the needs and behaviors exhibited by OBSN members in events of everyday life information seeking?
2. What are the needs and behaviors exhibited by OBSN members in events of tribal information seeking?
3. What channels do members of the OBSN use to seek information in their everyday life?
4. What channels do members of the OBSN use to seek information about their own tribe?

To gather data for analysis, this study employed semi-structured interviews as the primary data collection device. Semi-structured interviews were chosen as the most appropriate collection device for several reasons.

The first reason for employing semi-structured interviews was the freedom that it allows. Barbara M. Wildemuth (2009) wrote, “Semistructured interviews give the interviewer considerable freedom to adjust the questions as the interview goes on and to probe far beyond a particular respondent’s answers to the predetermined questions” (p. 233). Wildemuth (2009) also added, “Semistructured interviews are one of the most useful data collection methods for studying a wide range of information behaviors” (p. 240). But unlike their unstructured counterpart, semistructured interviews allow for consistency throughout the interviews.

Prior to this study the information needs, behaviors and channels of OBSN tribal members was unexamined. Therefore, the exploratory nature of semistructured interviews was most appropriate form of research in the creation of a base structure for
the information needs, behaviors and channels of OBSN tribal members and similar minority groups.

Population and Sampling Techniques

The population for this study is OBSN tribal members in Mebane, North Carolina and surrounding areas. There were three requirements for participation in the study. Firstly, subjects had to self-identified as an OBSN tribal member, those who did not identify themselves as members of the OBSN were excluded due to the purpose of the study. Secondly, participants had to be over the age of 18 to ensure that all participants were consenting, legal adults. Finally, all subjects had to speak English due to the researcher’s limited language abilities. Gender and health had no determination in the exclusion of subjects.

To recruit participants, the researcher began by corresponding with gatekeepers within the organization. Due to the importance of ethnicity within this study, the researcher used a population of convenience supplemented by snowball sampling. Snowball sampling was used because OBSN members, as members of an urban tribe, were difficult to locate. In this case of snowball sampling, participants identified other members of the OBSN who were also willing to participate.

As incentive to participate, subjects were entered into a raffle to win a $100 dollar cash prize.

Ethical Issues
The researcher attempted to take all possible precautions to uphold the standards of ethical research. Since the tribe’s population is relatively small, identifying a member through deductive reasoning was an ethical issue. Therefore, the researcher took all possible precautions to protect the study participants’ identities. All names were removed during the process and subjects were given a non-gender specific pseudonym. Subjects were also warned about the possibility of identification through deductive reasoning before the interview.

Another possible ethical issue was the subjectivity of the researcher. Due to the long history of exploitation of American Indians, the researcher found it necessary to gain trust with OBSN members by revealing her tribal heritage and establishing a friendly rapport with the subjects. The researcher is not a member of the OBSN, but she is a member of local American Indian organizations and is invested in the American Indian community. Although the researcher is invested in the community, she believed that impartiality was not sacrificed during the process of gaining trust with the subjects.

Procedure

After potential subject were identified, the researcher contacted the subjects to schedule a time to meet for the interview. The researcher and subject met at a private location convenient to the subject, such as a study room at the local library or the subject’s home. The interviews lasted 30 minutes to an hour.

The researcher employed a five-step interview process put forth by Colin Robson (2002) in Wildemuth (2009). First, the researcher introduced herself and warmed up to the subject through small talk. The researcher then explained the purpose of the study and described the ways in which she will assure anonymity of the user. The researcher
also verbally informed the participants of the unlikely potential for deductive disclosure. Subjects were also informed that the interview will be audio recorded and participants were asked to sign a consent form before they proceeded.

The researcher left the room when the subject was looking over the consent paperwork to avoid coercion. The researcher then returned to the room and proceeded according to the subject’s wishes. At that time, subjects were given the option to proceed or decline participation.

The interview began with demographic information to be used in the analysis of the data. The demographic information is not linked to the individual subject. It then proceeded to the main body of the interview in which the interviewer employed the critical incident technique developed by Colonel John C. Flanagan (1954). The critical incident technique recommends selecting extreme incidents for the subject to recall, such as the most successful and least successful occurrence, due to their ability to most likely be remembered in detail. During this time the interviewer also asked about the feelings, sources and preferences of the user.

The interview ended with a cooling off time in which the interviewer eased the conversation out of the interview and the closure in which the interviewer thanked the subject for his/her time. Finally, the researcher let the subject know they would only be contacted further if they win the $100 cash prize from the drawing.

Transcriptions of each interview were prepared after the conclusion of each interview. The drawing was conducted after the transcription process was complete. Numbers were assigned to each subject and the winner was chosen via an online random
number generator. The winner was then contacted and the prize was mailed to the winner.

Notably, the subject had the right to withdraw from this study at any time. By withdrawing from the study, the participant forfeited their right to be entered into the drawing. The investigator also had the right to stop participation at any time. This could have been because of an unexpected emergency, failure to follow instructions, or because the entire study had been stopped. During this study no subject chose to withdraw from the study and likewise the investigator saw no reason to stop any subject’s participation or any interview.

Description of Instruments

In accordance with the semistructured interview method, a set of questions was developed by the researcher to guide the interview. This set of open-ended questions created consistency throughout the interviews, but also allowed the researcher the freedom to ask follow up questions, to delve deeper into subject’s answers, and to ask for clarification if necessary.

The interview guide began by asking subjects to tell the researcher about his/her activities on a typical day. This question was intended as a warm up question, but may have also given the researcher a glimpse into the everyday information behaviors of the subject. Next, the interview guide was broken up into areas. Each area addressed one of the four main research questions of this study. The questions employed the critical incident technique developed by Flanagan (1954). The critical incident technique recommends selecting extreme incidents for the subject to recall, such as the most
successful and least successful occurrence, due to their ability to most likely be remembered in detail. During this time the interviewer also asked about the feelings, sources and preferences of the user in follow-up questions. More specifically, the interview guide provided questions intended to explore subject’s everyday life information seeking experiences, his/her tribal information seeking experiences, his/her feelings associated with each experience and his/her preferred channels for seeking each type of information. Possible follow up questions also addressed specifics such as approximations of channel use and data management.

The interview guide and schedule used in this study is located in the appendix of this paper.

Data Analysis

After interviews were conducted and transcripts of each interview were completed, data was analyzed using qualitative data analysis techniques. Comparison of all of the transcripts allowed the researcher to create a coding schema to identify common themes throughout each interview. A coding scheme was not developed prior to the interviews due to the variable nature of semistructured interviews. This type of data analysis is particularly useful in conjunction with semistructured interviews due to the flexibility of the process. Through a qualitative data analysis, themes emerge organically as opposed to other methods in which themes are imposed onto the data.

Method Advantages and Limitations
Both semistructured interviews and the qualitative analysis techniques employed by the researcher have significant advantages and limitations. Semi-structured interviews, as previously stated, allowed for a great deal of freedom for both the researcher and the participant. But by allowing such freedoms, the semistructured interview created less statistically significant findings, than it’s structured counterpart. Additionally, the freedoms that semistructured interviews allowed make semistructured interviews difficult to replicate, therefore decreasing the reliability of the study.

And although, semistructured interviews allowed for a certain amount of freedom, the freedom of the subject’s responses may have been limited. Semistructured interviews may be invasive and unnatural to the participants involved. Therefore, interviews may not have reflected the true feelings of subjects.

Like the semistructured interview, the qualitative analysis technique employed by the researcher allows for flexibility, but the subjectivity of the process may be called into question. The researcher determined the coding scheme and subsequent themes; therefore the subjectivity of the results may not be as strong as other studies. This was determined to be a necessary flaw in the study, due to the importance of heritage on behalf of the researcher and due to the previously unexplored nature of the subject.

Results

Overview

Four members of the Occaneechi Band of the Saponi Nation participated in this study. Although disappointing, the small number of participants was satisfactory due to the qualitative nature of the research. Possibilities for the small subject participation
included, but were not limited to, the time constraints placed on this study, occupation and everyday life obligations, and the physically dispersed nature of the tribe.

Three subjects were female and one subject was male. At the time of the interviews, participants ranged in age from mid 40s to mid 50s. All subjects were employed and lived in or around Mebane, North Carolina. Several of the participants were either acting chairs or former chairs on the OBSN’s tribal council. Several of the subjects were also related to one another. All subjects were aware of the other participants in the study and knew each other prior to the study. Participants had varying degrees of education and held a wide variety of hobbies. Food preparation was identified as hobby among three out of the four participants.

Although subjects participated in a wide variety of information seeking behaviors and had different ELIS needs, several major themes culminated during the transcription process. The major themes are as follows: subject’s complex, often realistic relationship with the Internet, the differing success rate reported by subjects in ELIS versus tribal information seeking, the importance of interpersonal channels in tribal information seeking and the challenges of tribal data management.

These commonalities are briefly touched on in subject responses under the headings associated with the study’s four research questions. These statements are necessary for a deeper understanding of the research questions and participant responses. The major themes resulting from the interviews will be further explored in the Discussion section of this paper.
Research Question 1: What are the everyday life information seeking needs and behaviors of OBSN members?

The first set of questions under the first main research question heading addressed the needs and behaviors of subjects. These broad, open-ended questions addressed overall behaviors and needs by asking subjects to describe both a successful and an unsuccessful ELIS event. Follow up questions were asked as needed.

The successful and unsuccessful situations described by subjects varied widely. Subject A described a successful event in which she was looking for a recipe for a caramel chocolate pecan cake on the Food Network’s website. Subject B described a successful event in which she found veterinary services for her new kitten. Subject C described a successful event involving an agenda and clarification by telephone communication. Subject D described a successful information-seeking event that stemmed out of the rebuilding of a tractor.

Three out of the four successful everyday life information seeking events described by the subjects involved searching for information online. Subject B noted, “In terms of a personal basis, finding information, I feel like I do it 1,000 times a day. And it is one of those things that the Internet has been so helpful with.” Subject D’s response reflected the independence and helpfulness that the Internet provided in rebuilding his tractor. He stated,

I rebuilt my tractor myself using the Internet and purchased text from the Internet…After I got it cranked things started breaking, so I ended up having to do more research on the Internet to make sure I diagnosed the problem, ordered the parts through the Internet, then learned how to fix it based on Internet forums.

Subject D also expressed the daily need to check the weather through websites due to his profession.
I turn on the Internet to check weather and news… and depending on what time of year it is, or where I am going that day, I usually type in the city for weather, [using Weather.com] to check the weather, because I usually have to travel up to three hours one way. So, I have to know exactly what the weather is going to be like here at home or where I am going—especially in the wintertime.

And although the Internet was used in three out of the four successful events described, it was not always the preferred or deemed the most appropriate channel for the event. In describing the information-seeking event of finding a veterinarian for her new kitten, Subject B stated,

It is almost like, you can look on the Internet, and we did, but I feel like because it was so personal to us, that we wanted to take that extra step to have voice contact, to really have that extra layer of gauging, is this a trustworthy place for us? So, I think the phone was the best thing there just because we were so connected to the situation.”

Subject C reflected her preference for voice contact in everyday life information seeking:

I am a people person, I still like to go to people and do my research and talk to them and then go back. Don’t get me wrong, I do use the Internet, but if I were to go home at night that is the last thing I am going to turn on unless I am feeling like a good game.

When asked to describe an unsuccessful everyday life information-seeking event, all subjects reported a relatively low level of unsuccessfulness. Subject A stated,

I don’t recall a time when I was unsuccessful in finding information. The only time I can think of is when I am not able to pull up information, an article, because I don’t have access to the university search engines anymore. But what I do is I have friends who are in graduate school and I can ask them to get it. So even if I am unsuccessful, I can still get the information.

Subject B stated,

I would say as feeling unsuccessful with it sometimes, maybe twice a week, and that is definitely based off multiple searches and multiple tasks, so I feel like it is pretty minimal on the unsuccessful side as opposed to when I am able to find things.
Subject C reflected those thoughts,

My problem is my boss might tell me what she is looking for, and I might not actually get it, but I get so close to it that she is jumping on it. And I think it is because the reason that I don’t see myself, don’t see it as being a failure, not to, I just see it as she doesn’t give me enough information to know exactly what she is searching for. And you can only do so much with nothing.

Subject D’s response reflected the possibility that a low rate of reported unsuccessfulness was due to the persistence of the subjects in information seeking events,

“I am usually pretty persistent. It will take me a while to find it and if I am unsuccessful in finding it, it means that I really just don’t need to be involved in it.”

Question 2: What information channels do OBSN tribal members use to seek information in their everyday lives?

The second set of exploratory questions under the second research question heading were asked to elicit the everyday life information seeking channels of subjects used by the subject, as well as the preferred sources for ELIS. These broad, open-ended questions addressed subject’s perceptions, preferences and attitudes towards different information channels. Follow up questions were asked as needed.

Subject A identified face-to-face conversations as her preferred everyday life information channel. She stated,

Because I come from an oral tradition, I prefer to sit and have conversations, especially with the elders and with my grandmothers. So, I prefer to talk, to have conversations, to glean information and gain their wisdom that way. But I also enjoy written form. My house is a virtual library.

Subject B identified the Internet and search engines as a particularly useful way to find information. She stated, “Google is a verb, you know? It is just so effective and
useful…” She attributed her preference for Internet research to her profession stating, “I work everyday in front of a computer and that is the quickest resource for me. And to be honest, I would ten times rather do research like that to figure out things like that instead of making phone calls.”

Subject C again stated her preference for face-to-face conversations because “it is easier to just talk to people.” Subject C also expressed her frustration with Internet research stating, “I don’t know search engines or the magic words that you use to put in. I normally don’t get the things.” Later in the interview, Subject C identified her preference for the search engine, Ask.com as opposed to Google due to the ability to enter a search question instead of key words.

Subject D identified his process ELIS process as follows,

I usually start of with the Internet, Google… I get a reference from Google then I go to the public library right down the street… So, after the Internet, I go to the library. If the library doesn’t have it, I will actually go out online and buy it. So usually it is the Internet based for brief information, the library to see if they have anything in bound edition… But then I just breakdown and buy it for myself, usually offline—the cheapest route with the best condition.”

Much like subject’s preferences, their attitudes towards unfavorable sources varied. Subject A when asked about sources she would not use in ELIS stated, “I don’t have any sources that I wouldn’t use. I exhaust everything that I know.”

Subject B identified the newspaper and phone books as unfavorable sources. She stated,

I don’t feel like the newspaper is a good resource for me, I don’t check the newspaper. I know there is a lot of good information in there, but it is not really something that helps me do searches… Now I think the newspaper and the phone book is not that useful anymore… I mean the phone book used to be a wonderful resource for almost anything that you needed. Right now it is not that because I think there is so many media sources out there that you cannot say there is just
Subject C reflected Subject B’s attitudes towards newspapers and also identified magazines as an unfavorable source. Subject C stated,

You just cannot go to a newspaper and ask that a question, you have to wait for the article to come out and the same with magazines. And I’ve kept plenty of articles, and when I go back to them, they are pretty much obsolete because things change so much.

Question 3: What are the information seeking behaviors or needs of OBSN members when searching for information about their tribe or heritage?

The third set of questions were asked with the intentions to explore the tribe-specific information seeking behaviors and needs through events in which subjects searched for information about their tribe or heritage. First subjects were asked if they have participated in information seeking events in which he/she searched for information about his/her tribe or heritage. If subjects answered affirmatively, in accordance with the critical incident technique, subjects were asked to describe a successful and unsuccessful tribal or heritage information-seeking event. Follow up questions were asked as necessary.

Subject A described an information-seeking event in which she successfully found a mention of the OBSN in a volume at UNC-Chapel Hill’s Undergraduate Library. Subject B described an event in which she and her husband had “randomly happened upon” a book in a public library that mentioned a trading pass used by the OBSN. Subject C, who was involved with the initial incorporation of the tribe and the pursuit of state recognition, described an event in which she and other members of the OBSN
visited a tribe in New England to observe their operations and see how they “ran their tribe.” And although the event was successful and “amazing,” she confessed that during the visit to the New England tribe she “didn’t get the nitty-gritty facts that I needed.”

Subject D described an event in which he found and ordered a book online on the history of the OBSN based on a visit by a European explorer.

Subjects were also asked about frequency of tribal information seeking events. Three out of the four subjects participated in tribal information seeking events at least on a weekly basis. But several subjects also admitted difficulties in either finding information or finding the time to research. Subject B gave a possible explanation for the time constrains on tribal research, “We all work, we are an urban tribe, most people are professional people, educators, you know, they are in professions, they are definitely 8-5 type people. And it is really hard to make that [research] happen.” Subject C also reflected the difficulties of tribal research, she stated, “It would just be so hard to be successful in finding that [tribal information].”

**Question 4: What information channels do OBSN tribal members use to seek information about their tribe or heritage?**

The final set of questions in this study sought to explore the information channels used by OBSN tribal members, as well as their attitudes and preferences towards specific sources. Follow up questions were asked as needed.

The Internet was identified as a channel for tribal information seeking by several subjects, but it was generally used in casual information seeking events. Subject A described an event in which she used her preferred search engine, Google, to “see what
[tribal information] is out there.” Similarly, Subject D identified the Internet as a starting point for tribal research that may lead to other channels, such as books.

In the case of more formal information seeking events about one’s own tribe, subjects often looked to other tribal members and relationships with outside organizations to gather information. Subject A conveyed a strong preference to talking with her grandmothers and elders within the tribe. She explained the importance of the oral tradition in her own life and alluded that her preference to seeking information through others was due to what she was taught. She explained,

I understand how important it is to have information recording, but also… understanding what I’ve been taught, when you write something down, say a story, it becomes as lifeless as the piece of paper it is on… And our wisdom and knowledge is just as valid even though it is not captured somewhere in a dusty library.

Subject C also identified her preference for human interaction in tribal information seeking. She stated, “You have to go to yourself, you have to go to your ancestors before you.” Subject B identified her preference for both books and the knowledge of other tribal members over the Internet. She stated, “When you look for historical information on the Internet, you’ve got to be very careful of the resource.” Subject D identified tribal information seeking with outside academic research organizations. He stated, “We are also supported by UNC researchers down in Hillsboro and knowing those fellows, the researchers and staff personally, I know that I could always go down there and get whatever I needed.” He also identified a collection of documents found by previous research at the tribal office as an information source.
Discussion

Prior to this study, the information seeking behaviors, needs and channels of OBSN tribal members were unexamined. This study does not seek to be an inclusive report of information seeking within members of the OBSN, but to glean themes and emerging trends from the interview.

However, during analysis the researcher identified four major themes as the reoccurring, significant themes of the study. Themes were considered to be major themes if three out of four participants reported aspects of the theme. The major themes, which are as follows, are discussed below:

- Subject’s complex, often realistic relationship with the Internet
- The differing success rate reported by subjects in ELIS versus tribal information seeking
- The importance of interpersonal channels in tribal information seeking
- The challenges of tribal data management.

Subject’s Relationship with the Internet

In the article, *Enthusiastic, realistic and critical. Discourses of Internet use in the context of everyday life information seeking*, Savolainen (2004) identified three major interpretive repertoires to Internet searching: Enthusiastic, Realistic and Critical.

The Enthusiastic repertoire emphasizes the strengths of the Internet, conceiving it as a ‘great enabler’… In the Realistic repertoire, source preferences are constructed as situation-bound choices… Finally, the Critical repertoire is characterized by a reserved standpoint on the advantages brought by the Internet. (Savolainen, 2004, para 43).

Similarly, Katz and Rice (2002) identified three user perspectives on the Internet:

Utopian, Syntopian and Dystopian.
According to Savolainen’s (2004) designation, subjects may exhibit different repertoires depending on the questions presented in the interview. Subjects within this study may have wavered slightly between repertoires, but overall subjects expressed a Realistic repertoire or the Syntopian viewpoint. Three out of four subjects exhibited the traits of a Realistic Repertoire. In this viewpoint,

The Internet is given no absolute priority but its value is seen to depend on the relative advantages contingent on the use situation and its specific requirements. The subjects are constructed as deliberative problem-solvers making use of the situational cues of information seeking (Savolainen, 2004, para 43).

Subjects within this study commonly expressed the duality of their attitudes towards Internet research and commonly judged the appropriateness of the channel by the situation. Everyday life information seeking events that were not of a “personal” nature were deemed appropriate for Internet research. But in the situation of tribal research seeking events, Internet research was only deemed appropriate as a starting point, and many subjects were wary of the validity and reliability of Internet sources. Subject D stated, “The good thing about the Internet is, it is relatively all encompassing, but the flip side is, things are fleeting—especially historical documents.” Likewise, Subject B commented on the effectiveness and usefulness of the Internet but also added, “When you look for historical information on the Internet, you’ve got to be very careful of the resource.”

Although occasionally leaning towards the Realistic repertoire, one subject could be classified as generally exhibiting the Critical repertoire. In accordance with the Critical repertoire, this subject commonly reported “the low amount of relevant information available in the Internet and the poor organization of networked information…” (Savolainen, 2004). This subject also suggested “a subject position which
is characterized by reserved views on the quality of networked sources and doubts about one's ability to master increasingly complex networked information systems” (Savolainen, 2004). This subject reported several “frustrating” events in Internet information seeking and reported Internet information seeking as a final resort due to the time consuming nature of the channel. No subjects exemplified the characteristics of a solely Enthusiastic repertoire.

**Everyday Life Information Seeking versus Tribal Information Seeking: Differing Success**

Although most subjects demonstrated a Realistic repertoire, subjects reported a high success response in ELIS. Regardless of problems with the Internet, subjects were generally satisfied with the information they found in ELIS events. This reflects the findings of Reijo Savolainen and Jarkko Kari (2004): “Even though the networked services had not met the expectations of many respondents, the Internet had largely been accepted as an information source” (p. 225).

The high reported success rate in ELIS events may also be a product of the decision-making strategy, “satisficing.” Satisficing is a term created by Herbert Simon in 1956 to describe the process in which humans choose the path that meets their immediate needs or a path seems to address most needs rather than the “optimal” path. Simon (1956) theorizes that humans are not mentally capable of detecting the optimal path. Therefore, subject’s tendency to choose the paths in reported information seeking events may have been the more “satisficing” choice and lead to a high reported satisfaction rate.
Notably, the success rate reported in tribal information seeking was significantly lower than that of ELIS. Also, more unsuccessful events in tribal information seeking were reported than in ELIS events. Several participants attributed their lower success rates in tribal information seeking to the inexistence or inaccessibility of tribal information. For example, Subject C spoke of the existence but inaccessibility of archival, historical information about the tribe in England. Subject D also spoke about an unsuccessful event in which he tried to rediscover information about beans that were common in the OBSN during the 1700s. He explained,

There were some beans that were taken from this region, back in the early 1700s up to the six nations. We ordered some, some years ago and grew them, but the deer ate a lot of them. And we were not very careful in keeping the seed. Now there is no reference for Tutelo beans. So I know where they came from—who the vendor was—but he doesn’t carry them anymore. So the actual term “Tutelo beans,” in present time, based on the Internet is non-existing.

The Importance of Interpersonal Channels in Tribal Information Seeking

A major theme in tribal information seeking by subjects was the need for human interaction. All subject participants identified talking to other tribal members as an information-seeking behavior and the majority of participants, three out of four, identified interpersonal channels as their first choice when presented with a tribal information-seeking event. Subject B even described tribal information seeking as “an internal process.”

These findings are reminiscent of other information seeking channel studies involving ethnic minorities. Amanda Spink and Charles Cole (2001) studied the information seeking channels used by African American low-income households in the Wynnewood Parks neighborhood of Dallas, Texas. The study found that residents’
information behavior focused on family and neighbors. Spink and Cole (2001) also hypothesized that “the Wynnewood resident was raised in an environment where information was processed as a group, thus, the Wynnewood resident prefers to receive news information from family members” (p. 63). Although the present study does not contain enough information to make such hypotheses, the similarity in information seeking behaviors is worth noting.

When recalling interpersonal tribal information seeking events, several subjects identified a specific tribal member as the “go-to” person for information on the history of the tribe. This “go-to” tribal member or gatekeeper ties into an information and referral process study by Cheryl Metoyer-Duran (1993). She defined gatekeepers as “people in minority communities that serve as information providers” (p. 359). Gatekeepers within her study, as well as the present study, played an integral and indispensable role in the communities they support.

One possible explanation for subjects’ preference towards interpersonal channels in tribal information seeking may be due to mastery of life, cultural elements. Savolainen (1995) explained: “one is born in a culture within a social class which gives basic models for mastery of life. These models concern typical ways of approaching everyday problems” (p. 264).

American Indian cultures have had a long, strong history of oral tradition and storytelling. Joseph Bruchac, an author of Abenaki decent, in his 2003 book, *Our Stories Remember: American Indian History, Culture and Values Through Storytelling*, described stories as the “heart” of all American Indian cultures. “Stories,” he wrote, “were never ‘just a story’ in the sense of being entertainment. They were and remain a
powerful teaching tool.” He further explains, “Lesson stories were used by every American Indian nation as a way of socializing the young and strengthening the values of their tribal nation for both young and old” (Bruchac, 2003, p. 35).

During the interview, Subject A expressed that her preference towards gathering information in face-to-face conversations stems from the oral tradition of her tribe and the lessons she was taught as a child. Subject C similarly explained that in order to learn the history of her tribe she had to “go to” her ancestors. Therefore, a preference and need for interpersonal communication in tribal information seeking events may be a result of the mastery of life, culture constructs of participants.

The Challenges of Information Management

Three out of four subjects interviewed identified challenges associated with the tribe’s current information management system. Currently, the tribe’s historical documents are housed in filing cabinets at the tribal office. One subject described the system as “somewhat organized, somewhat disorganized” filing system. With a laugh, another subject described the tribe’s historical research paperwork as “looking like it has been stirred up with a spoon.” During the time of this study, the tribal administrative office was relocating. This factor may have contributed to the disorganized nature of the paperwork. Only one subject reported using the tribe’s records in a tribal information-seeking event.

These findings are consistent with other studies regarding research practices within non-profit organizations. Randy Stoecker (2007) in *The Research Practices and Needs of Non-Profit Organizations in an Urban Center* claims, “of all the capacity issues
facing nonprofit organizations in the United States, perhaps none has been so neglected as their research data needs” (Stoecker, 2007, p.97-98). Stoecker surveyed 80 nonprofit organizations in Toledo, Ohio. The results of the survey indicate “nonprofits collect data on a wide variety of topics, but do not use much of the data that they collect (Stoecker, 2007, p. 97). The study also found that more than half of nonprofits surveyed indicated a need for training on how to conduct evaluations, how to use data management software, how to conduct research, and how to find funding. The findings of Stoecker’s study, as well as this study, suggest an opportunity for libraries to reach out to nonprofits and create programming based on their specific research and information management needs.

Summary

This study sought to examine the information seeking behaviors, needs and channels of an ethnic minority group. The study was conducted in the hopes of answering four research questions,

1. What are the needs and behaviors exhibited by OBSN members in events of everyday life information seeking?
2. What are the needs and behaviors exhibited by OBSN members in events of tribal information seeking?
3. What channels do members of the OBSN use to seek information in their everyday life?
4. What channels do members of the OBSN use to seek information about their own tribe?

Research on the history of information seeking and the information seeking needs, behaviors and channels preferred by ethnic minorities in the Literature Review reveals a significant absence of American Indian tribes as a previously studied population in INLS. By studying American Indian tribal members, specifically members of the OBSN, this
study may add to the dialogue and framework of current ELIS models. More specifically, this study may contribute to the understanding of cultural influences within Savolainen’s way of life context. This study may also contribute to the groundwork required to further study the specific information needs, behaviors and channels of OBSN tribal members or similar American Indian organizations.

Although this study did not employ the methodology to be an all-encompassing study on the information needs, behaviors and channels used by members of the OBSN, through analysis, several themes were identified that may be important for further examination of OBSN members. These themes included subjects’ complex, often realistic relationship with the Internet, the differing success rate reported by subjects in ELIS versus tribal information seeking, the importance of interpersonal channels in tribal information seeking and the challenges of data management. These major themes all reflected research currently studied in INLS and could provide support for future studies.

In addition to providing support for future research, this study could provide valuable information for local libraries that cater to members of the OBSN, as well as information to be considered by the OBSN tribal council in the planning of a community center and museum.
References


Appendix

Semi-Structured Interview Schedule and Guide

Introduction:
Researcher introduces herself and makes small talk with the subject.

Explanation of the purpose of the study:
This study’s purpose is to explore the information seeking behaviors, information needs and information channels used by members of the Occaneechi Band of the Saponi Nation.

Ensure anonymity of subject:
Your name will not appear in the published paper. I will assign you a pseudonym. The audio recording, if you consent to allowing an audio recording, and the transcriptions will be stored in a password protected file on my personal computer and on a password protected external hard drive. My faculty research adviser and I are the only ones to see the data. Any hardcopies of data will be kept in a locked cabinet in a private home. Within two months of this interview, the data will be deleted.

Since you are part of a relatively small tribe, it is unlikely, but possible that someone may identify you in the published paper through deductive reasoning. I will make the effort to de-identify all subjects in the final, published paper.

Consent paperwork:
The researcher will leave the room during this time.

Stop if subject chooses to not participate. Or proceed with or without audio recording.

Please state your name and gender.
Please state your age.

Warm-up Question:
Can you walk me through the events of a typical day?

Research Question 1:
What are the needs and behaviors exhibited by OBSN members in events of everyday life information seeking?
Tell me about a time in your personal, everyday life when you were successful in finding information that you were looking for.

Possible follow-up questions:
How did you feel after you successfully completed the task?
What are your preferred sources for looking for information in your everyday life?
How often do you feel successful when you are seeking information?
What kind of information have you successfully searched for in the past week?
When you found this information, how did you keep up with it?

Tell me about a time in your personal, everyday life when you were unsuccessful in finding information that you were looking for.

Possible follow-up questions:
How did you feel after you were unsuccessful?
What sources have you had trouble with or which sources do you not prefer?
How often do you feel successful when you are seeking information?
What kind of information have you had trouble finding in the past week?

Research question 2:
What are the needs and behaviors exhibited by OBSN members in events of everyday life information seeking?

Do you ever look for information about your tribe or your heritage? If so,
Tell me about time when you successfully found information about your tribe or heritage.

Tell me about a time when you unsuccessfully found information about your tribe or heritage.

Possible follow up questions:
Approximately how many times in the past week have you looked for information about your own tribe?
What kind of information about your tribe/heritage do you often find yourself looking for?

Research Question 3:
What channels do members of the OBSN use to seek information in their everyday life?

What sources do you use to find information in your everyday, personal life?

Possible follow up questions:
What are your preferred sources for everyday life information seeking? Why?
What sources have you used unsuccessfully/successfully?
Approximately how often do you use each source?
Research Question 4:
What channels do members of the OBSN use to seek information about their own tribe?

If subject seek information about his/her own tribe or heritage:
What sources do you use to find information about your tribe or heritage?

Possible follow up questions:
What are your preferred sources for finding information about your tribe/heritage? Why?
What sources have you used unsuccessfully/successfully?
Approximately how often do you use each source?

Cool-off time

Thank the participant for their time:
Thank you for your time. I will be contacting you at a later date if you have won the raffle.