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# Personal influence in information-seeking behaviour of art students

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## Abstract

*This article investigated personal influence in the information-seeking behaviour of art students. A qualitative approach was followed, and the data were collected by means of interviews with 11 art students of The Open Window School of Visual Communication, located in Pretoria, South Africa. The Open Window offers degrees and postgraduate honours degrees in Visual Communication. The key findings revealed that the personal dimension in information-seeking behaviour has a significant influence on art students' information needs and is prevalent in their personal interests and preferences and their motivation to seek information. The findings provided insight into how the art students' information-seeking behaviour might influence the library as an information service.*

**Keywords:** Information-seeking behaviour, art students, cognitive influence, affective influence

## Introduction

The Open Window School of Visual Communication (hereafter referred to as The Open Window) is registered as a private higher education provider by the South African Department of Education. At the time of this study (2015) The Open Window had approximately 750 registered undergraduate students. Art students need to be able to link academic coursework (theory) with creating art (creative work) (Frank 1999: 446). This also involves applying different types of information (for example, textual and visual) for different purposes. The combination of conventional learning (academic coursework) and creative

learning (practical coursework) challenges art students to adopt a particular way of thinking about information, which will influence how they perceive and use information. Perception and use are part of the thought processes (mental activities) that reveal a person's inner experiences when interacting with information. Inner experiences can have a fundamental influence on a user's information-seeking behaviour, as pointed out by researchers such as Davies and Williams (2013: 548).

Many information behaviour researchers are aware of the role of personal influence in the information process (Dervin 1983; Kuhlthau 1991). Meyer (2016) identified personal influence in information behaviour as one of the core components in her proposed model of information behaviour. Nahl (2001) pertinently outlined the mental structures in which cognitive and affective thoughts reside.

Studies of information behaviour reflect how cognitive and affective factors of information behaviour manifest themselves in a human's need for information and how humans process information (Wilson 1984: 197; Kuhlthau 1991: 361; Nahl 1997: 13; Savolainen 2015a). Wilson (1984: 197) explains that "meaning" and "understanding" are the core of the cognitive approach to information behaviour and the way in which humans process information. Affective information behaviour involves emotions and feelings, such as the motivation for a user's quest to seek information (Nahl 1997: 13). Because of a lack of understanding, feelings can reflect as an initial stage of uncertainty when users initiate the information-seeking process and move to a stage of confidence as they progress with the information-seeking process (Savolainen 2015a).

Nahl (1997: 14) divides cognitive, sensory and sensorimotor thoughts into separate structures where thoughts reside in the human brain. Nahl explains the cognitive and affective structures of the personal component in the human behaviour process by using the example of the stage when students engage in daily studying because they are continuously motivated to pass (affective domain), and memorise or process information (cognitive domain), while listening, reading and taking notes (sensorimotor domain).

The following background description of arts students in an academic context serves as a backdrop to the purpose statement.

## Background and purpose statement

The higher education art degree curricula at The Open Window comprise academic and practical coursework. The Open Window follows a multidisciplinary approach to design so that the students gain a diversity of

skills, practical experience and knowledge during their studies. Courses range from Visual Arts, Film Arts and Animation Arts to Interaction Arts. Kenney (2009: 1) defines visual communication as “a social process in which people exchange messages that include visual sources”. Visual sources include drawings, paintings, photographs, videos, films, computer graphics animations and virtual reality displays.

The nature of the art students’ coursework requires the students to make use of diverse information sources that include textual and visual information. Depending on the requirements of any practical project, students might draw on sound and moving images as information sources to create projects. Art-based teaching and learning also require students to be original, which compels them to look for new ways to be creative.

The purpose of this article is to report on research undertaken into how the personal domain in the information-seeking behaviour process influences art students’ information-seeking behaviour. The analysis criteria were art students’ motivation to seek information, their processing of information, and their personal information preferences.

## Information needs

An important aspect of information needs is that they are not isolated, but connected to a larger context and can be linked to various information needs (Naumer and Fisher 2009: 2454). Regarding personal influence in information behaviour, certain cognitive and affective aspects such as feelings, motivation and sense-making and understanding might determine users’ information needs. From a cognitive perspective Allen (1997) links personal influence in information-seeking behaviour and information needs with knowledge structures and perceptions. Allen (1997: 111) notes that “information needs may occur whenever there is a failure in people’s knowledge needed for perception, alternative identification, or alternative selection”. Allen (1997) also argues that from a cognitive perspective two people will experience different information needs in the same situation because they have different understandings of the situation.

Dervin’s (1998: 42) sense-making approach considers that information needs are conceived by people’s desire to make sense of a situation, which is a mandate of the human condition. Naumer and Fisher (2009: 2454) view sense-making as the process when users reach a point where they need help to bridge a gap in their understanding and then develop a need for information to move forward.

Harter (1992: 602) suggests that information needs are parallel to a person's mental state, and change as people acquire new information, thus arguing that personal perceptions determine a person's information needs. Wilson (1981: 8) explains that "physiological needs may trigger affective and/or cognitive needs and affective needs may give rise to cognitive needs and problems relating to the satisfaction of cognitive needs (failure to satisfy needs) may result in affective needs (motivation, reassurance)". Belkin (1978: 56) claims that within people's cognitive structure needs arise when they recognise that there is something wrong with their current knowledge base that needs to be resolved.

Wilson (1981: 8) and Naumer and Fisher (2009: 2453) suggest that an explicit information need is often considered to be the motivating force behind a user's action to seek information.

## Personal influence in information-seeking behaviour

Research in information-seeking behaviour positions humans as the focus of information behaviour (Wilson 1981: 4). Wilson (2000: 49) defines information behaviour as "the totality of human behaviour in relation to sources and channels of information". For Pettigrew, Fidel and Bruce (2001: 44) information behaviour is the way in which people need, seek, and use information in different contexts, such as the workplace and everyday living. Cognitive and affective influences in information-seeking behaviour play a significant role in how humans interact with information and their information environment. Dervin (1983), Kuhlthau (1991), Nahl (1997), Wilson (2000), Savolainen (2015b), and Meyer (2016) found that there is a direct link between information-seeking behaviour and the cognitive and affective structures of the personal domain of an information user. Wilson (1984: 200) draws attention to the fact that if the concepts of " 'image', 'world view', and 'frame of reference' mean anything, it can be regarded as the way the reality of these concepts affects people's information behaviour".

In her taxonomic approach, Nahl (2001: 2-3) makes a clear distinction between the affective (feelings), cognitive (understanding) and sensorimotor (perceptual actions of searchers) structures of the human mind. Nahl explains that the process of personal involvement in information-seeking entails certain feelings and thoughts that are universal to information behaviour at large. It includes feelings of uncertainty or resistance and doubt (affective behaviour), confused thoughts (cognitive behaviour), resistance to new information (affective behaviour), and frustration and anxiety (affective behaviour).

A cognitive-affective factor is "interest", because it incorporates motivational elements (Savolainen 2015a). Savolainen (2015a: n.p.) states that " 'interest'

deals with intellectual engagement and personal interest increases as the exploratory enquiry leads to formulation in the information search process". He found that studies on students' information-seeking behaviour confirmed that motivation resulting from personal interest increased after the midpoint of the search rather than at the beginning. Kuhlthau (2004: 198) suggests that when choices have to be made, such as selecting a topic or a focus area, personal interest influences these choices. It seems evident that the interaction between the structures of the personal domain gives rise to information needs, which lead to and influence users' information-seeking behaviour (Meyer 2016).

The significance of the cognitive and affective attributes of personal influence in information behaviour is also reflected in the various information behaviour models, such as Kuhlthau's (1991: 363) model of the information search process, which is based on stages of the information search process with cognitive and affective influences. Dervin's (1983: 9) sense-making theory model incorporates equal cognitive, affective and situational components to explain information-seeking (Savolainen 2015b: 176). From a personal and information needs perspective, both Wilson's (1999: 252) information behaviour model and Meyer's (2016) model of the building blocks of information behaviour link the personal influence in information behaviour with cognitive and affective states of the human mind.

The following section discusses practical examples of how attributes of the respective mental structures might affect information behaviour.

### Affective influence

The affective behavioural influence includes behavioural acts that relate to feelings, such as interests, values, motivation, purposes and goals (Nahl 1997: 13). When it comes to the processing of information, these affective elements may influence users' capabilities and judgment (Kuhlthau 1991: 363).

According to Savolainen (2015a), feelings are subjective representations of emotions; that is, feelings correspond to emotions, for example, feelings of pleasantness or unpleasantness can lead to positive or negative emotions. During the stages of the information search process, users may experience feelings of uncertainty, pessimism, dissatisfaction, confusion, hesitation, self-doubt and disappointment (as well as their opposites) (Kuhlthau 1993: 343; Nahl 2004: 191). These feelings might also change, depending on the progress of the search process (Kuhlthau 1993: 343). Nahl (2004: 191) maintains that people are usually able to convey their feelings at any given time.

## Motivation

Nahl (2004: 192) suggests that motivation is the chief activator for searching, while cognitive factors such as problem-solving are driven and guided by certain affective motivations and feelings that define the goal. To Nahl the affective level is the driving force that is tied to a particular goal or feeling of satisfaction and determines the outcome of a search activity. Frank (1999: 447) furthermore noted that art students frequently referred to personal incentives and self-motivation for using academic libraries.

When users have to complete certain tasks, the motivation to complete those tasks is driven by affective reactions such as the driving force to complete those tasks, feelings and emotions when faced with those tasks (Nahl 2004). Savolainen suggests that the affective attribute behind motivation may be users' emotional reaction to a learning task, in other words, the users' feelings about the learning task. Affective reactions might be pride or anxiety. Studies have revealed that students showed negative feelings when they had to prepare for tests and experienced test anxiety (Savolainen 2012).

## Emotions

Savolainen (2015a: n.p.) describes emotions as “a relatively brief episode of coordinated brain, autonomic and behavioural changes that facilitate a response to an external or internal event of significance for the organism”. Emotions can be displayed in the form of happiness, sadness, anger, fear, disgust, and surprise (Lopatovska and Arapakis 2011: 576). Savolainen suggests that emotions as motivational factors can influence users' interaction with sources of information, for example, they can either make an attempt to approach the information sources or avoid the information sources. Some emotions, for example, anxiety, may motivate people in multiple ways, ranging from starting information seeking to information avoidance, while other emotions, such as joy, are typically experienced while starting or expanding information seeking (Savolainen 2015a).

## Feelings

Savolainen (2015a) suggests that feelings are subjective representations of emotions. Kuhlthau (1993: 343) identifies a number of feelings, such as anxiety, confusion, doubt and uncertainty, which she links to the various stages in the search process. Uncertainty is an affective feeling of unease due to the presence of cognitive uncertainty and can be experienced as irritation, frustration and anxiety, and information users may experience these feelings at any time during the information-seeking process (Savolainen 2012). Savolainen (2015a: n.p.)

claims that uncertainty is “a cognitive state that causes affective symptoms of anxiety and lack of confidence”. To Nahl (2004: 193) uncertainty is an affective component that accompanies information searching and it is generally experienced as negative when it is intense. Luo, Nahl and Cheo (2011: 5) found that users’ level of uncertainty varied with task complexity; users experienced greater uncertainty when faced with more complex tasks.

## Cognitive influence

The cognitive aspect of information behaviour forms part of the personal influence in information behaviour and focuses on the idea of meaning, understanding and knowledge structures, as well as seeking solutions to problems, for example, students learning a skill or endeavouring to gain an understanding of a subject (Wilson 1984: 197). According to Wilson the cognitive approach to information behaviour underlines the need for people to make connections between the meaning of everyday life and the information they can use in everyday life. Wilson (1984: 197) explains that everyday life can have different meanings to different people, depending on the context in which they need that information. For example, in a student’s environment, everyday life can mean a student needing information to do research, or, in other environments, professionals needing information to practise a profession. Wilson (1984: 200) also implies that the aim of the cognitive approach is that users’ frames of reference might change, depending on the availability of information, their choice of information and how information might change. Nahl (2001) states that the knowledge which people acquire through information acquisition forms part of the cognitive component of information behaviour. Nahl (1997) further adds when people develop their cognitive skills they are able to identify and become aware of changes or new elements in their environment and follow up on those new elements and changes.

Oddy, Belkin and Brooks (1982: 65) also focus on users’ perceptions (frame of reference) to explain that, from a cognitive viewpoint, the way humans interact within themselves, with one another, and their environment, is determined by their frames of reference and what makes sense to them. Gatten and Bryant (2010: 65) have found that art students focus on people whom they believe have the knowledge to help them find information, such as lecturers, technical experts, and fellow students. Nahl (2001) explains that the processing and interpretation of information is consistent with cognitive behaviour where the user attempts to make sense of information by interpreting, classifying and connecting acquired information to other information. Savolainen (2015a) states that within the cognitive state of information behaviour users might adopt particular information-processing strategies, depending on their frame of

reference. Belkin (1980: 134), Cole and Spink (2006: 26), and Case and Given (2016: 69) describe information-processing as cognitive mental acts of transforming information in a meaningful way, which also involves problem-solving. Frank (1999: 448) found that some art students explored information outside their realm to connect their art with their subject matter, such as studying anatomy and biology to create human forms, or engineering to create moving artwork (installation art).

Kuhlthau (2004) also links cognitive behaviour with sense-making, to the extent that people try to make sense of information by moving from the initial stage of the information need to the goal state of resolution by a series of choices made. These choices, according to her, are influenced by prior experience, knowledge, interest and the information available. Cognitive behaviour involves memory where people draw on past experiences and memories to process information (Nahl 2001). With cognitive memory in mind, Nahl (1997) implies that users select information sources they know and are familiar with and then are able to process that information effectively. Cobbleck (1996) states that memories of life experiences inspire the artists to develop the visual and conceptual elements of their work. These visual and conceptual elements vary according to the artists' focus on different art forms. Frank (1999) found that art students studied visual sources, such as photographs, sculptures and other visual forms of artwork to add meaning to their coursework and to generate inspiration and creativity. Replaying videos of violent weather allowed a painting student to incorporate the appearance of storm energy in his work (Frank 1999). Both cognitive and affective aspects of the information-seeking process influence users' information-seeking behaviour, in that a gap exists between how users process information and the availability and delivery of information (Kuhlthau 1991). Nahl (2001) argues that cognitive skills cannot be developed without the simultaneous development of affective skills. With this approach, Nahl (1997) argues that what a user can feel, choose, infer or think relates to information behaviour.

## Research design

A qualitative research approach was followed to analyse the data collected and to learn more about the personal influence of information-seeking behaviour of art students. The sample included first-year, second-year, and third-year students. The researcher wanted to ensure that there was a degree of representativeness of The Open Window students in the sample. The researcher announced her need for volunteers to be interviewed for a research study during the students' compulsory Visual Culture lectures. In total, 11 students volunteered (three first-year, four second-year, and four third-year students). The interviews were then arranged according to the students' lecture schedules.



For the purpose of determining the factors that influence the students' information-seeking behaviour, the primary data were collected by means of a semi-structured interview schedule, consisting of open-ended questions. The interview schedule was adapted based on the outcomes of a pilot study. The researcher recorded and transcribed the interviews using an audiotape recorder as a data collection device to enable accurate data analysis. For the research to be conducted ethically, informed consent was obtained from the participants in advance.

## Findings

For the purpose of this study, the findings were analysed by comparing viewpoints found in the literature and Nahl's (1997: 13-15) adjective taxonomy approach that feelings, thoughts and meanings humans form about information influence their information behaviour.

### Affective experience

Consistent with Nahl's (1997: 13) taxonomy approach to users' information environment, the findings revealed that affective behavioural acts that relate to inner feelings, experiences and emotions influence the art students' information-seeking behaviour. These affective behavioural acts are an indication of art students' personal influence on their information-seeking behaviour.

### Inspiration

Inspiration refers to inner feelings, which is an affective experience (Nahl 1997: 30). The majority of respondents seek inspiration for creativity and to produce and complete practical projects. Inspiration is sought from conventional and unconventional sources, which include books, personal experience, listening to music, playing video games, speaking to people, looking at other artists' and students' art creations, visual references, the environment, travel, advertising, news, films, and social media. One respondent replied as follows:

I try different experiences like go to events or concerts I will not normally go to. I try and experience different creative things. Not everyday life stuff but a different environment that I am not used to.

This comment shows that the art students' inner feelings are reflected in what inspiration means to them. These affective experiences are motivated by personal interests with which the students can identify. This finding confirms

Nahl's (1997: 18) theory that feelings are mental behaviour units that can be identified and described.

### Uncertainty

The majority of respondents expressed feelings of uncertainty when it comes to using sophisticated information retrieval systems. The respondents' uncertainty about using full-text electronic journals is reflected in the following quotation:

I have been taught how to use electronic journals, but because it is not second nature to me to use it, it doesn't jump to mind. But I will first start to look for books. I mean if I have a choice, electronic journals don't jump to mind immediately. I forget about JSTOR. It is a mind-set that needs to be changed like using *WhatsApp* versus sending a SMS. If I learn how to use that environment it will be easier, because if I do Google it is sometimes confusing.

The comment of this respondent is an indication of the respondents' lack of knowledge about the use of information retrieval systems, causing the uncertainty. The findings support those of Lee (2008: 217), who found that students often felt uneasy about more complex information systems and their lack of familiarity with using these systems made finding information challenging.

### Frustration

The majority of respondents stated that it took them a long time (two hours up to a week) to search for information and that after searching for long periods, they were then unsure about how to use the information. One respondent stated:

It takes me all day and quite long to filter through the information that is relevant or non-relevant. I lose track of what actually I am looking for and go off track. Then when you go back to that information you see that you can't use it. Then you must start over. It takes time to find what I want.

Nahl (1997: 16) refers to feelings of uncertainty and frustration as a form of self-directed interaction with an information environment. When users are challenged with solving problems while interacting with information, feelings of uncertainty and frustration might arise. Nahl (1997: 17) argues that learning is impeded when various types of negative feelings affect or interfere with desired positive outcomes of information behaviour.

## Trust

The majority of respondents relied on people as sources of information when they could not find the information they needed. The respondents stressed the importance of personal contact. They would rather ask a lecturer or someone else to help them. They relied on experts in their subject fields for creative ideas and inspiration. They mentioned that they gained better understanding of their projects when an expert in their study field explained the work to them. This view was summarised by the following quotation:

It is very important in the sense that if you have personal contact it is not a waste of time, because usually the person you ask for information knows more than you, such as the librarian. I struggle if I don't know where to find the information and it takes time... You can explain yourself to a person and the other person will know what you are talking about whereas the internet does not always understand your way of thinking. A person that knows more than you can see the problem in context and they can share their knowledge with you. Whereas, Google [can] only read words.

The respondents indicated that they would approach the librarian for assistance in advancing their information literacy skills. This shows that they trusted the librarian as competent in technical information rather than knowledgeable about art-related matters. The respondents also relied heavily on step-by-step tutorials with visual aids for practical coursework.

## Emotions

The findings revealed that some of the respondents experienced emotional reactions to learning tasks, such as avoidance. One respondent stated that he would work his way around the information he could not find:

If I really cannot find the information I would drop that part of the argument and stop looking for it and then work around not having that information.

This is a typical example of the influence of affective behaviour: when a problem at hand cannot be resolved, it is avoided (Savolainen 2012). Nahl (1997: 20) refers to this stage of information behaviour as the affective personalisation of information, when users<sup>2</sup> might experience powerful symptoms of rejection or avoidance when they are unsuccessful when interacting with information.

The majority of respondents also experienced an underlying need for seeking skills training and content evaluation. This confirms Nahl's (1997: 14) view that with the affective approach to information behaviour, users' inner feelings

relate to their immediate personal information environment, such as expressing feelings to improve their skills.

### Motivation

The primary motivation behind the respondents' need for information is to gain better understanding of their coursework, pass their coursework and find inspiration. This confirms Nahl's (2001) theory that the motivation to learn is an affective reaction to cognitive elements. One respondent also mentioned that she was motivated to seek information for self-enrichment.

I look for information to do my work and to help me with my practical assignments. But also to nurture myself. I am looking not only for academic information but for self-enrichment to help me when I take on a career.

The art students' feelings are reflected in Nahl's (1997: 18) theory that users' feelings are manifested in what emotions they are feeling at a particular time and how strongly they are motivated to do a particular task.

### Cognitive experience

The findings are consistent with Nahl's (1997: 13) description of cognitive behaviour, that cognitive behaviour can be regarded as behavioural acts of knowledge and interpretation that influence the information-seeking behaviour of the art students of The Open Window.

### Personal interests

The findings indicate that the art students' preferences for information sources are preceded by their personal interests. This is in line with Wilson's (1991: 263) view on cognitive authority, that people's personal experiences, interests and what they know and learn influence their information-seeking behaviour.

The visual elements in information sources are important, as they help the respondents to gain perspective about their academic and practical projects. According to the respondents, visual imagery helps them to gain understanding of their theoretical coursework and the visual imagery must complement the textual information.

The respondents had specific preferences with which the information they found had to comply. Visual information had to be visually appealing, contemporary, current and easy to access. Textual information had to be reliable, well-researched, concise yet descriptive, supported by evidence and easy to access.

The majority of respondents also preferred to receive their information in print format, as print format is easier to read than electronic format. The following example explains personal interest as a cognitive experience:

Because we are more visual people ... to make notes. When we make notes we usually sketch it out visually ... I can then study it better and make sketches from it.

All the respondents mentioned that for practical projects, they use step-by-step tutorials with visual aids to help them interpret their practical projects. Tutorials with visual imagery strengthened their ability to interpret information as intended in their coursework.

Ease of access, instant gratification and convenience are the main reasons the respondents claimed to make use of the internet to find information. This finding is consistent with Connaway, Dickie and Radford's (2011: 185) viewpoint that when information users find themselves in a specific situation, convenience and ease of access determine their actions, choices of information sources and satisfaction with the sources.

Consistent with 21<sup>st</sup> century students, art students are now also turning to information communication technologies for inspiration. The findings revealed that the majority of respondents also claimed that they used the World Wide Web as source for inspiration. Social networks such as Pinterest and Behance are favourites. Pinterest is a social media website where people discover new ideas and find inspiration. Pins are saved to boards, keeping ideas organised and easy to find (Pinterest 2018). Behance (2017) is a network of sites and services, owned by Adobe, which specialises in self-promotion, including consulting and online portfolio sites. The respondents argued that these visual social sites were visually appealing, offering a big variety of information to choose from; easily accessible and providing expert advice. One respondent admitted that she was addicted to Pinterest because "it is so visually appealing."

Nearly half of the respondents (five of 11) preferred books for textual information. They mentioned that information contained in books can be trusted and is well-researched.

Art students' personal interest in the selection of information sources and preferences relate to Nahl's (1997: 16) theory that personal interest can be regarded as cognitive internalisation. According to Nahl, when users identify with certain elements in their environment, they connect their environment to the information they seek.

## Art students' processing of information

Personal influence is also present in how the art students of The Open Window process information in that there is no set pattern in the respondents' information-seeking activities. The findings revealed that the respondents processed information according to their own interpretation and they attempt to solve information problems accordingly. Each respondent followed different steps in the information-seeking process. These findings relate to Nahl's (1997: 26) view that when users process information they create a personal context within which that information is processed.

Personal influence in art students' processing of information is also evident in a respondent's statement that he was not interested to learn more on search techniques, as he was used to spending long hours searching for information and therefore it did not bother him.

### Sense-making

The findings revealed that the art students' actions were focused on finding meaning when they created, transferred and used information. One respondent stated that his thoughts centred around orientating himself and stated how he generated meaning as follows:

To orientate myself, I first decide which point of view I am going to take on a topic, for example, argue for or against a point, and then I will decide which source to use which is best for the topic, like the library or JSTOR.

Some respondents reverted to the internet first to get background information on a topic; thereafter they would change to other information sources. One respondent indicated that scanning the internet was second nature to him and comes first to mind when he needs information. This confirms Kuhlthau's (1991: 361) explanation that information-seeking is viewed as a sense-making process where the individual is actively involved in finding meaning which fits in with a personal frame of reference.

### Evaluation

The findings revealed that the art students needed to compare their own work with other work in order to evaluate their work. The majority of respondents stated that they studied other artists' work to evaluate their own improvement and progress. In particular, visual examples of other artists' and designers' work and visual examples of projects by fellow students assist them to evaluate their own work. This finding relates to Kuhlthau's (1991: 361) explanation that

as part of the problem-solving process, users evaluate information that means something to them and thereby integrate the usefulness of the information into their own world.

## Discussion

Art students' information behaviour is influenced by the personal and subjective meaning they attach to information, which causes them to view and experience information in a certain way. Art students' motivation to seek information (affective influence) is driven by their perceptions (cognitive influence) of information. This is in conjunction with statements made by Nahl (1997: 13) and Wilson (1984: 197-200) indicating that personal influences determine or contribute to information behaviour and that information has different meanings for different people.

### Affective behaviour

Affective behaviour of inner feelings, emotions and experiences, trust and motivation influences art students' information-seeking behaviour, as underscored by Nahl's (1997: 17) findings. Inspiration is important to the creative process and art students get their inspiration from diverse sources, influenced by their inner personal experiences and interests. Nahl (1997: 16) states that often users' own interests, motivation, purposes, and goals determine their source selection and information use. It is also important for the library as a service to the students to keep abreast of the students' information needs in terms of textual and visual information.

The art students' reliance on people as information sources can relate to Kuhlthau's (1991: 16) theory that when success of an outcome is predicted, typical actions are to confer with others.

The art students' feelings of uncertainty and frustration, as well as emotions of avoidance and rejection when dealing with information problems can be contributed to their basic skills when dealing with information tasks. This affective behaviour, relates to Nahl's (1997: 17) claim that when users experience negative affective feelings, which interfere with positive outcomes, a type of learned helplessness occurs that can affect comprehension. Nahl (1997: 18) referred to negative or positive feelings as the personalisation and internalisation stage in information behaviour, where users begin to identify specific feelings and emotions at a particular moment in time. Kuhlthau (1991: 366) also claims that these feelings of uncertainty and frustration are common during the initiation and exploration stages of the information search process.

The library can also learn from this in terms of how the library and library staff as trained information specialists can help the students with their information problems and provide assistance in enhancing their information literacy skills.

The art students are primarily motivated to seeking information to gain a better understanding of their coursework and finding inspiration. This confirms Nahl's (2004: 191) theory that motivated states are linked to goal-directed thinking. Nahl (2004: 191) also refers to motivation as 'personal motivation' and maintains that on an affective macro level, continuous motivation is equivalent to the feeling of 'not wanting to stop'. Nahl argues that feelings and motivation are the main activators for seeking and searching of information.

### Cognitive behaviour

Kuhlthau's (1991: 366) states that during the selection stage of the information search process, thoughts (cognitive) are generally centred around personal interest, assignment requirements and information available, which supports the findings that art students' information preferences are preceded by their personal interests.

Tutorials with visual imagery strengthen the art students' ability to interpret information as intended in their coursework and thus strengthen their cognitive abilities. Art students' personal interest in the selection of information sources and preferences relate to Nahl's (1997: 16) theory that personal interest can be regarded as cognitive internalisation. Nahl explains that when users identify with certain elements in their environment, they connect their environment to the information they seek. The art students' personal interest in the selection of information sources, might guide the library to provide in the students' information needs.

The art students process information according their own interpretation and attempt to make sense (meaning) of their environment by creating their own problem-solving efforts. Consequently, the findings revealed that there is no set pattern in their information-seeking activities and the students focus their information actions on finding meaning in their own way when they create, transfer and use information. These findings relate to Nahl's (1997: 26) view that when users process information they create a personal context within which that information is processed. To Kuhlthau (1996: 361) the information search process is a construction of the whole experience of the person involved, which includes feelings, thoughts and actions.



Nahl (2001) states that acquiring information is an interactive, affective-cognitive skill, where motivation to learn is the affective component and the knowledge acquired is the cognitive component. She argues that the integration of the affective-cognitive domains allows humans to interact with information in new ways.

## Conclusion

Art students, form part of a user group that uses information for academic purposes and for developing their chosen craft, much like engineers and architects. For this reason, they need to apply both textual and visual information, as well as seeking information not only for academic purposes but also for inspiration and creativity. In order to gain an understanding of the information-seeking behaviour of art students it was necessary to determine personal influence in the information-seeking behaviour of art students.

The findings can serve as a valuable guideline for libraries in how to support art students and meet their specific information needs.

## Acknowledgement

The author thanks Dr Madely du Preez and Professor Hester Meyer, Department of Information Science, University of South Africa, for the useful discussions and advice during the preparation and construction of this paper.

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