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**Book Review**

*Theories of Information Behavior*. Karen E. Fisher, Sandra Erdelez, and Lynne McKechnie (Eds.). Published by [Information Today](#), 143 Old Marlton Pike, Medford, NJ 08055-8750, USA. 2005, XXII, 431 p., Hardcover, ISBN 1-57387-230-X, 49.50\$

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Theoretically, information behaviour is one of the richest research areas in the field of library and information science (LIS). Since the calls for conceptual enrichment within the field of information behaviour in the post-1978 literature, which was emphasised in the [Dervin and Nilan's](#) seminal review chapter in ARIST (1986), much effort has been expended to generate new theories and develop new models of human information behaviour. There has also been a paradigm shift from focus on the system to focus on the user. During the sixties and seventies the focus of the studies was rather on the system and researchers tried to understand the users and their needs through the study of the system or the resources used. Since the paradigm shift researchers have paid more attention to the user and their characteristics. Different approaches have been adopted for the study of information behaviour of different user groups and new methodologies have been developed or adopted from other fields such as social sciences. However, most of the literature in this field of study has been scattered in research papers and book chapters. There has been a real need to bring the core of all this literature together in a monograph.

*Theories of Information Behavior* edited by Fisher, Erdelez and McKechnie is the first book that provides an overview of most of the important theories and conceptual frameworks of information behaviour. The book has been written as a researcher's guide and covers some of the main theories and conceptual frameworks, both older ones such as Dervin's sense-making theory and more recent ones such as the concept of information horizons.

This hardback book comprises of 75 chapters written by 85 well-known scholars from ten countries. The first three chapters are longer and rather introductory. In the first chapter Bates gives an overview of some key theoretical concepts in LIS literature. She uses examples to define and discuss three important concepts that are theory, metatheory and model. The second chapter by Dervin uses sense-making methodology as a case to elucidate the relationship between method and theory. Wilson in the third chapter delineates the evolution of his model of information behaviour, a model he has developed during last two decades. While chapter one is very helpful for understanding theoretical concepts of this area and their relations, chapters two and three are beneficial to those readers who want to know more about the methodology and process of theory generating.

The other 72 chapters that compose the bulk of the text, which is 'The Theories' section, are arranged in alphabetical order of titles from 'Affective Load' by Nahl to 'World Wide Web Information Seeking' by Turnbull. Each of these short chapters illustrates one information behaviour concept, theory or model. The chapters follow a similar structure, which covers the description of the theory, its purposes, methodological implications and its uses. The variety of concepts covered in the book is fascinating. Models of information

behaviour such as Ellis's, Kirkelas's, Kuhlthau's, and Foster's; theories such as The Ecological Theory of Human Information Behaviour, Diffusion Theory, Social Positioning, Reader Response Theory, Optimal Foraging, Library Anxiety, and Flow Theory; concepts such as Information Encountering and Serious Leisure; and overview of information behaviour in particular environments such as the Web are all presented in the book.

One of the good features of the book is its structure that with the help of an effective back of the book index practically has turned the book into a valuable and handy reference book. However, it would be better if the index covered all of the cited names and authors in the entries. This would help readers find out about the connections between different theories and conceptual frameworks as it would be easily possible to see which authors or theories cited a particular author or theory.

The book, which is definitely a worthwhile read, is targeted at researchers who are active in the area of information behaviour. However, due to its structure and organisation, it can be used as a reference book for postgraduate and research students. The references provided at the end of each entry are a valuable guide for leading inquiring authors to more detailed research material. Given that the book has been targeted at the research community, the only slight criticism of this book could be that not enough methodological information has been provided in some entries. However, a considerable number of references and the fact that the book serves as a guide rather than an extensive source of research information would compensate for this small shortcoming. It also seems that a number of important references are missing from some of the entries. For example in the chapter about 'The Domain Analytic Approach', Talja has forgotten to cite one the most important articles of Hjørland who introduced this approach. The missing article is 'Domain analysis in information science' published in the *Journal of Documentation*, 2002, 58 (4), pp. 422-462.

In spite of the considerable number of contributors from different countries, which makes it expectable to have a variety of writing styles, good editorial work has made the text's writing style consistent and comprehensible. Most of the entries have been written in plain English.

To sum up, this enlightening book presents an authoritative overview of many conceptual frameworks that help understand and interpret people's information behaviour including their information need, information seeking, and information use activities and so forth. It is a valuable source of information for those who want to know about theoretical foundations of research in information behaviour, and also for postgraduate students who will to do a research in this field.

## References

- Dervin, B., and Nilan, M. (1986). Information needs and uses. In: M.E. Williams (Ed.), *Annual Review of Information Science and Technology*, White Plains, NY: Knowledge Industry Publications. Vol. 21, pp. 3-33.

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**This book review has been cited by other articles:**

- Zani, M. (2006). [Theories of Information Behavior, a cura di Karen E. Fisher, Sandra Erdelez e Lynne McKechnie](#). *Bibliotime*, Vol. IX, No. 1, March.
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