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Highly Dedicated Enthusiasts: Online Museum Visitors Doing Everyday Life Information Seeking

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Abstract

A current trend is to make museum collections widely accessible by digitising cultural heritage collections for the Internet. The present case study aims to add to previous studies by exploring what characterises online museum visitors in an everyday life information seeking context. Three factors are explored: information needs, information seeking and information use. A triangulation of research methods is applied. A web questionnaire survey gave initial, quantitative information about online museum visitors to a Military Museum. The follow-up interviews with 24 online museum visitors obtained rich, qualitative data to validate and elaborate the characteristic of online museum visitors' information seeking behaviour. Based on the serious leisure perspective two different user groups are identified: collectors and liberal art enthusiasts. Across the two hobby classes, user study participants can be characterised as special interest museum visitors pursuing a long-standing interest or hobby. Participants' dedication and often considerable time spent on the hobby indicate that their hobbies are integrated components of everyday practices. Although overlapping, the two hobby types have distinct profiles including the nature of knowledge acquisition. The identified information needs were surprisingly well-defined known item needs and only few exploratory information needs were identified. In relation to information sources and channels, participants stressed the importance of personal channels and the social context of the hobby. The present study contributes confirmatory to the research area of everyday life information seeking within serious leisure. The results also contribute to the emerging field of museum informatics by adding to the characteristic of the elusive online museum visitor, e.g., visitor motivation and the leisure context of the museum visit.

Keywords: everyday life information seeking; user study; serious leisure perspective; museums; cultural heritage
