Eudaimonic information behavior: Looking for meaning, value, and fulfillment

Description

Eudaimonic Information Behavior: Looking for Meaning, Value, and Fulfillment

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A few years ago, when I first came across eudaimonia as an emergent term in the well-being scholarship, I had no idea how this concept would inform my research later. However, recently eudaimonia is becoming a new conceptual framework in my research practice and gives me new directions to conceptualize the empirical data that I collect in my ongoing investigation of human information behavior in serious leisure.

—Eudaimonia is an ancient Greek word in Hellenistic philosophy that means to live a flourishing life in harmony with virtues and values.—

Eudaimonia is an ancient Greek word in Hellenistic philosophy that means to live a flourishing life in harmony with virtues and values. Aristotle defines eudaimonia as a life of goodness and excellence to pursue authentic happiness, which is achieved by exercising and expressing virtues (Ryan & Deci, 2001). From an Aristotelian perspective, eudaimonia is the goal of practical and ethical wisdom. Therefore, we can be eudaimonically happy when our life is in harmony with our true values and is based on virtues. Then, we will be able to fulfill our potentialities and reach self-actualization. Therefore, a eudaimonic life is a fulfilled life full of pleasure, passion, and purpose. However, it is not limited to hedonistic happiness. It has profound elements of decency, worthiness, and virtuousness.

As you see, eudaimonia is an ambitious goal and has several levels and aspects. That is why well-being
scholars consider it as an appropriate term with a massive capacity to depict a holistic picture of well-being. It can provide a comprehensive framework to accommodate various aspects of well-being such as emotional, intellectual, occupational, spiritual, ethical, and social wellness (Huta, & Waterman, 2013; Park & Ahn, 2022).

Research shows that the domain of serious leisure is a productive realm to promote eudaimonic well-being. Serious leisure activities such as hobbies, voluntary jobs and amateurism provide people with numerous opportunities to experience meaningful engagement with their chosen activity, learn new skills, challenge their capabilities, pursue highly substantial actions, and enrich their everyday life routine. Furthermore, these activities generate positive emotions and develop their competence, enhance their sense of authenticity, and all these achievements are aligned with eudaimonic well-being (Stebbins, 2016).

This conceptual framework informs my current research in gaining new insight into unique features of information behavior in the context of serious leisure. My research shows that people involved in serious leisure have a particular attitude toward the information resources relevant to their hobbies or voluntary activities. Their attitude is different from information behavior in the workplace or educational contexts. First, they are passionate about the available information on their favorite topic. Therefore, they enthusiastically seek information from various resources ranging from rare books in libraries to social media on the Web. Moreover, they are willing to share their knowledge with their peers to foster their social ties in their communities of interest. They join clubs and attend social events relevant to their interest to have more opportunities for information seeking and sharing. For example, in my most recent project about information practice of bonsai growers in Australia, I found that there are 57 bonsai clubs in Australia, and most of them are members of the Association of Australian Bonsai Clubs (AABC). Besides, there is the National Bonsai & Penjing Collection of Australia (NBPCA) in Canberra (The National Arboretum Canberra, 2022).

Bonsai clubs organize training workshops, contests, and exhibitions at the local, regional and national levels. These group activities provide bonsai enthusiasts with various information seeking and sharing opportunities to enhance their skills and learn new tips and techniques from each other. However, solving a problem or performing a specific task are not the only motivations for their information behavior. Instead, they have many more reasons to initiate an information activity. For example, they are curious about almost anything newly published about their hobbies. In other words, they seek and share hobby related information because they love to learn something new about their interests or share their stories and
happiness of discovery with others. Therefore, these information activities help them enhance their knowledge and assist others regarding a shared interest. All these information activities are aligned with their transcendental goal of aesthetic features of bonsai trees and admiring the beauty and excellence of the bonsai trees. Therefore, their information behavior is motivated by eudaimonic aims and can be called eudaimonic information behavior.

In summary, in eudaimonic information behavior, access to information is not necessarily a means to perform a task or resolve a problem. Instead, it is a goal on its own embedded in a broader picture and to pursue a transcendental vision. Therefore, the user is motivated and inspired to seek and share various types of information relevant to their interest regardless of its functionality in practice at that time. Of course, most of the time, the information they seek, share, and create is helpful in practice. Nonetheless, functionality is not their priority because they are fascinated by the topic and chase a greater goal. Moreover, they do not need an external element of motivation as a source of inspiration for information seeking, sharing, and production. They have this inspiration as a result of their personal interest. Furthermore, their information experience is usually pleasant and joyful because they are passionate about what they do in that context.

Engaging in serious leisure activities requires learning new skills or knowledge, so serious leisure participants always need information. On the other hand, there is no final point in the mastery of a skill, and there is always room for improvement. For example, in my most recent project, I learned from bonsai hobbyists that growing a bonsai tree is an ongoing project and never will be a complete project. They believe they never own a bonsai tree, but they are just the custodian because the tree may live longer than them, as many bonsai trees live through several generations. Moreover, bonsai is much more than just a hobby to plant and shape miniature trees. They look at it as a source of mindfulness, an opportunity to experience flow, and even as a unique lifestyle because, in the long term, it changes their identity and their social life. Therefore, they are engaged in a hobby that provides pleasure, passion, and purpose, enhancing their well-being to live a fulfilled life, and their information activities play a significant role in this context, and within the eudaimonic conceptual framework, I call it eudaimonic information behavior.

References


