

Understanding adolescent information behavior from the perspective of informed decision making process

The role of information in making decisions is well recognized by many scholars who place information seeking among the stages of decision making process (e.g. Simon 1955; Mann et al. 1988; Einhorn and Hogarth 1981; Radford 1994). In their works, information seeking is recognized as an activity which people conduct in order to increase their understanding of the decision making situation they face and to facilitate the decision making process. The importance of information in making decisions is clearly expressed in the concept of informed decision (Bekker et al. 1999). In LIS field, some scholars dealt with information seeking and use in relation to daily life issues. Nevertheless, there is a gap in the knowledge about youth information behavior while they make decisions in everyday life. Mann and his colleagues suggest that adolescents make decisions which may have life-long consequences on their health, psychological well-being and social acceptance (Mann, Harmoni, and Power 1989). So far, in LIS field there has not been much research done to reveal whether the youth engage in information seeking to facilitate making daily decisions, and if they do so, then why and how they do it. On the other hand, some authors point out that adolescents tend to make decisions based on limited information. Štulhofer suggests that the lack of information is among reasons for adolescents' risky sexual behavior (Štulhofer 2009). In a study conducted by Babarović i Šverko (Babarović i Šverko 2011), results show that eight graders who are facing decisions regarding high school selection and future career are insufficiently informed about potential careers. Given that making decisions based on relevant and appropriate information may lead to better life choices, we may say that it is important for adolescents to acquire information necessary to make informed decisions. Accordingly, it is important to explore that topic and increase our understanding of adolescents' information behavior in making everyday decisions. The gained knowledge may help in providing effective information services for adolescents and increase opportunities for them to make informed life decisions. So far, there has not been any research on youth information behavior for decision-making purposes in Croatia.

The aim of the research is to explore emerging adolescents' information needs in everyday life decision making situations and related information behavior. It will try to address the following research questions:

1. What are the information needs of adolescents in daily-life decision situations?
2. Which information behavior do adolescents exhibit when making daily-life decisions?
3. Which sources of information adolescents choose when seeking for information in daily decision making situations?
4. What are the salient aspects of context that influence information behavior?
5. Which barriers to information access adolescents face when seeking for information for daily decision purposes?
6. What degree of importance do adolescents attach to information in the decision making process?

This work draws upon Savolainen's ELIS theory which posits information seeking as an integral part of human endeavors to orient themselves in daily life as well as to solve problems (Savolainen 1995). For the purpose of investigation of adolescents' information behavior from the perspective of informed decision making process, Savolainen's everyday life information seeking theory will be extended in three directions. Firstly, the theory will be revised in the light of some findings from the research on youth information behavior in relation to facing daily life challenges. For example, investigating the role of information in children coping with everyday hassles Lu found that children seek for information to keep

their lives in order as well as to solve problems. Additionally, she found that they do it for some other reasons as well, e.g. to change mood or to escape from the problems (e.g. Lu 2011). Such findings indicate that information plays different roles in coping-with-life-context and that boundaries of everyday life information seeking need extending. Furthermore, Julien's study revealed that much of adolescents do not engage in information seeking for help with making decisions actively nor purposefully, but they find information incidentally (e.g. Julien 1998). Secondly, ELIS theory will be reconsidered in relation to Simon's behavioral decision making theory of bounded rationality and his concept of simplification mechanism of satisficing (Simon 1972). Thirdly, ELIS theory will be extended by the work on adolescent decision making by Mann and his colleagues. Mann developed the GOFER course in decision making for high school students which poses five steps of sound decision making and recognizes the role of information-seeking as one step in the process (Mann, Harmioni, Power, Beswick and Ormond 1988). Moreover, Mann and his colleagues showed that by the age of fifteen years many adolescents show reliable level of competence in decision making (Mann, Harmioni and Power 1989). By introducing their findings, the work will gain a developmental perspective which is necessary when conducting a research on the youth.

In the research based part of the work both quantitative and qualitative research methods will be employed. Data will be collected in two stages using a survey method and semi structured group interview. In the first stage of the study the use of the questionnaire will enable gathering response from larger number of respondents and offer data which will be easily quantified. Additionally, questionnaire will give the respondents an opportunity to elaborate on their answers and will provide some qualitative data as well. It will be used for collection of data on age, gender and socio-economic background of respondents' families. It will also contain questions on adolescents' information needs in daily-life decision situations, on information sources they use as well as on barriers that may hinder information seeking. The sample will consist of six high-school classes (approximately 120-180 students) from three different types of schools (grammar school, vocational school and art school). Students of both genders and all high-school age groups (aged 14-18) will be equally represented. Based on the questionnaire data analysis an interview schedule will be developed. Semi structured group interviews will be used to obtain a deeper insight as well as to enhance the validity and reliability of the questionnaire results. In addition, interviews will provide answers on the source selection, barriers to information access, information behaviors which adolescents exhibit when making daily-life decisions and adolescents' perception of the role of information in decision making process. Moreover, group interviews will be used to address questions on the factors that influence information seeking in various decision-making situations or contexts. The group interview sample will consist of students who will answer positively on the question, asked in the questionnaire, whether they want to participate in an interview. Ten small groups of no more than six students will be formed. Students will be allowed to form groups voluntarily and freely. Groups of that size will be big enough to offer different experiences and encourage the group discussion. On the other hand, in larger groups it would be difficult to keep the focus on the discussion topic. The researcher will encourage relaxed and informal atmosphere and open group discussion among peers hoping for their frankness and honest responses. The use of these two methods will result in gathering both qualitative and quantitative data. Data analysis and interpretation of the results will give answers to the research questions. Finally, the findings will be considered in relation to the theoretical framework

This work will make several contributions to information science. Firstly, it will systematize the existing knowledge on adolescents' information behavior while dealing with daily issues. Moreover, it will provide better understanding on adolescents' information

behavior in making everyday decisions. While doing so, it will better connect decision making theory and information seeking behavior pointing out the role of information seeking and use in decision making process in general. Furthermore, this work will shed a new light on an important area which has not been explored yet in Croatia, and has been explored by wider scholar community only in different and limited context. Lastly, it will raise new questions for future research.

The work is in an early stage. Until now, the thesis synopsis proposal has been written and a pilot study, aimed to set out the methodology for this work, is in progress.

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Curriculum Vitae

Alica Kolarić is a doctoral student at the University of Zadar. Her educational background includes an MA degree in LIS and an MA degree in philosophy and comparative literature. Her main research interests include youth information behavior and library services to youth. She works as the head of branch libraries at Rijeka City Library. She has many years of experience in conducting library programmes for youth and parents and is a vice president of Committee for Children and Young Adults of the Croatian Library Association. She participated in many professional conferences and has published in peer-reviewed publications (such as *Croatian Librarians Herald* and *Proceedings presented at the Round Table on Open Access to Information*).

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