

**Lara Dodd**  
**Thesis Summary**

**Title:** Using social media to capture the information seeking behaviour of aspiring undergraduates.

**The problem being addressed**

Using the popularity and prevalence of social media, the proposed study examines the information seeking behaviour of aspiring undergraduates. This research is particularly timely as only a fifth of schools now ensure that their students receive the information, advice and guidance needed in the UK (Ofsted, 2013). In addition, the introduction of new qualifications (e.g. Diplomas), have helped create a confusing marketplace for educational professionals to navigate; let alone students (Guardian, 2011). Arguably the struggle to make sense of curriculum offers and pathways has only been compounded as from 2012 onwards schools/colleges have been responsible for arranging their own advice and guidance and many of the learner-centred support structures have also been removed (BBC, 2011).

The aim of the proposed research is to map and then model the information seeking behaviour of aspiring undergraduates at key points from the learner's initial UCAS application in January through to their eventual enrolment at university the following September. Arguably it seeks to examine how learners are meeting information needs which charities, education regulators and even the National Careers Council themselves (NCC, 2014), agree aren't being adequately met elsewhere.

**The proposed work plan**

In order to examine and consider the behaviour of potential undergraduates during this period, a relatively new qualitative methodology is being employed. Mico-blogging website Twitter has been mined for relevant information, producing large volumes of qualitative data. Whilst this activity in itself has generated certain amounts of useful quantitative data (e.g. how many aspiring undergraduates included URL links in their posts), a qualitative approach is being otherwise employed (Bryman, 2008) in order to observe and analyse the nuances of behaviour during this period. In terms of locating relevant data, hashtags and stem search words (e.g. UCAS) have been used to build a semantic framework, which has been built into searches.

**Description of work to date**

An initial data trial was conducted during the ten days leading up to the UCAS deadline on the 15<sup>th</sup> of January 2015. The following points summarise what tentative conclusions we can draw at this early stage:

- Mining and software stress tests (using NVivo 10 software) indicate that in practise there should be no problems mining, importing, handling and subsequently modelling the data. More than 18,000 relevant posts in relation to the application process were retrieved.

- There was clear evidence of information seeking and sharing taking place on both Twitter and Tumblr. Both displayed very different patterns of information seeking behaviour, which increased in volume proportionally up until the deadline.
- A minimum of 23% of the related posts came from commercial companies, though how their presence affects information behaviour and how prospective learners engage with this clearly bias material will doubtlessly warrant further investigation.
- The key challenge presented during the trials was the notable amount of visual content (e.g. pictures, memes) to communicate. This can be addressed by employing more dynamic methods of content analytics rather than merely text analytics.

Subsequently all three main data collections are now complete and the evidence is now being handled (e.g. removing personal names to comply with ethical requirements) and inputted into a master database ready for analysis.

### **Summary research problems you have encountered**

These are the current key challenges to date, which I would like to discuss at the workshop:

- **Establishing the information needs of learners themselves.**  
Fortunately as Donald Case (2012) reiterates one of the most widely researched areas in Information Behaviour is that of education and students. However, it is unclear to what extent learners know what their own information needs actually are at this key transitional point in their academic careers. Critically if they are uncertain of what they want, or, need, then this makes it difficult to ascertain to what degree their information needs are, or possibly aren't, being met.
- **Disparity in information behaviour across different social media sites.**  
It had originally been anticipated that evidence would be collected from Tumblr as well as Twitter. It had been hoped that without the character limits on Twitter themes might be explored in more depth on a site without these restrictions. However, this was not possible as the information behaviour was so drastically different it made any straightforward comparisons impossible.
- **The increase in the use of hybrid-visual methods to communicate online.**  
The increase in the use of emojis, memes and GIFs are changing the way social media users communicate online. Critically given that entire information exchanges can exist entirely in a visual format what implications are there for the behavioural analysts of the future?

## References

BBC Newsbeat. (2011). *Teenage job advice is cut by £100 million in England*. [online] Available from: <http://www.bbc.co.uk/newsbeat/15359844> [Accessed: 2nd March 2015].

Bryman, A. (2008). *Social research methods*. 3<sup>rd</sup> Ed. OUP Oxford.

Case, D. (2012). *Looking for information: a survey of research on information seeking, needs and behaviour*. 3<sup>rd</sup> Ed. Bingley: Emerald Group Publishing Limited.

Guardian. (2011) *Pupils confused by 'preferred' A-levels*. [online] Available from: <http://www.theguardian.com/education/2011/feb/01/a-levels-university-places> [Accessed: 2nd March 2015].

National Careers Council. (2014) *Taking action: Achieving a culture change in careers provision*. [online] Available from: <https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/careers-guidance-provision-national-career-councils-second-report> [Accessed: 9th March 2016].

Ofsted. (2013). *Going in the right direction? Careers guidance in schools from September 2012*. [online] Available from: <http://www.ofsted.gov.uk/resources/going-right-direction-careers-guidance-schools-september-2012> [Accessed: 9<sup>th</sup> November 2014]

## Contact details:

### Lara Dodd

Personal Contact details: 31 Elms Road Coton in the Elms South Derbyshire England DE12 8HD  Tel: 01283 769 934 Mob: 07921 368 555 E-mail: lara.dodd7@gmail.com	University address: Room F7, Pandon Building Northumbria University Newcastle upon Tyne NE2 1XE  Tel: 0191 232 6002 E-mail: lara.dodd@northumbria.ac.uk
---	--

## Supervisor

Dr Geoff Walton  
E-mail: [geoff.walton@northumbria.ac.uk](mailto:geoff.walton@northumbria.ac.uk)  
Tel: 0191 232 6002

Pandon Building  
Northumbria University  
Newcastle upon Tyne  
NE2 1XE

## Lara Dodd

### Academic resume

#### PERSONAL DETAILS

31 Elms Road  
Coton in the Elms  
South Derbyshire  
England  
DE12 8HD

Tel: 01283 769 934  
Mob: 07921 368 555  
E-mail:  
lara.dodd7@gmail.com

#### CAREER STATEMENT

A well presented, organized and motivated graduate with notable industry experience. Possesses strong analytical and problem-solving skills and adapting quickly to new environments. Excels at finding creative solutions to challenges. Extremely organized and works well under pressure. Excellent communication and management skills

Currently seeking a suitably challenging post-doctoral role with a progressive employer.

#### AREAS OF EXPERTISE

Qualitative research

Big data

Analytics

NVivo expert

Report writing

Social media

#### ACADEMIC QUALIFICATIONS

*Northumbria University* **2014 – 2017**  
PhD, Information Behaviour of Aspiring Undergraduates

*University of Central England* **2002 – 2005**  
BA (Hons), Management, Design and Communication

*St Augustine's College* **2000 – 2002**  
A levels in Business and Economics, English Literature and Language, and French.

*St Gregory's School* **1995 – 2000**  
11 GCSEs including Maths, English and Science.

#### ACADEMIC AWARDS AND DISTINCTIONS

Northumbria University Scholarship 2014  
MEX Scholarship 2012

#### PUBLICATIONS

2014. Review of quality of marking in exams in A levels, GCSEs and other academic qualifications. Final report.

2014. Coaching for success: The key ingredients for coaching delivery & coach recruitment.

2014. Quality of marking in general qualifications – Survey of teachers 2013.

2014. Review of quality of marking in exams in A levels, GCSEs and other academic qualifications. Findings from survey of examiners, May 2013.

2013. Consultation on the removal of speaking and listening assessment from GCSE English and GCSE English Language.

## **Lara Dodd**

### **Academic resume**

31 Elms Road  
Coton in the Elms  
South Derbyshire  
England  
DE12 8HD

Tel: 01283 769 934  
Mob: 07921 368 555  
E-mail:  
lara.dodd7@gmail.com

2011. Evaluation of the Functional Skills pilot.

Summative Report.

2010. Sub-Saharan Africa evaluation.

2009. Diploma delivery 2009.

### **CONFERENCES**

Attended: 11<sup>th</sup> Northumbria International Conference on Performance Measurement in Libraries and Information Services (2015)

Presented: EMoTICON Network Postgraduate Researcher Workshop (2015)

Presented: MmIT 2015 Conference (2015)

### **SCHEDULED CONFERENCE PRESENTATIONS**

Presenting: CILIP 2016 Conference

Presenting: Northumbria Negative Online Behaviours Conference

Presenting: Northumbria University's PGR Conference

Proposed paper submitted: ISIC 2016

### **PROFESSIONAL EXPERIENCE**

#### ***Lecturer***

***2015 – 2016***

Northumbria University

Teaching Qualitative Research Methodology to MA students and staff, Media Marketing to undergraduates, and, Business Information Systems to Foundation Degree students.

#### ***Researcher***

***2015 – 2015***

Northumbria University

Assisting on a British Academy funded project examining information discernment in adolescents.

#### ***Director***

***2013 – To date***

Eunoia Media Ltd.

Running my own company delivering qualitative research training and research services. Clients include: Ofqual, The Institute of Leaderships and Management, and City and Guilds.

#### ***CMAT Researcher***

***2011 - 2013***

Staffordshire University

Role included locating, pitching and assisting in research projects for the Centre of Media, Arts and Technology. Projects ranged from additive printing, app and game development to hyper-local media platforms.

## **Lara Dodd**

### **Academic resume**

31 Elms Road  
Coton in the Elms  
South Derbyshire  
England  
DE12 8HD

Tel: 01283 769 934  
Mob: 07921 368 555  
E-mail:  
lara.dodd7@gmail.com

### ***Research Consultant***

***2008 - 2011***

Crown and Banks

Working in a freelance capacity providing software training and research services. Clients included: The British Council, QCA, QCDA, NAA, Nottingham University and Tribal.

### ***Business Consultant***

***2006 – 2008***

Freelance

Delivering one-to-one consultancy.

Clients include: Barclays Bank, Birmingham City Council, Creative Insight, First Steps

### ***Business Learning Manager***

***2005 - 2006***

Birmingham City Council

Responsible for arranging, and delivering, business advice sessions, talks, business fairs and online support and training services.

### **ADDITIONAL TRAINING**

NVivo advanced training	2008
Business consultancy training	2005

### **HOBBIES AND INTERESTS**

A keen cook I had my own kitchen licensed for public consumption in 2011! I thoroughly enjoy long distance swimming several times a week and write crime fiction when I can.

### **REFERNCES**

- Available on request.