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22
Everyday Life Information Seeking

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The model of information seeking in the context of way of life (ELIS model) was developed in the mid-1990s by Reijo Savolainen (see Savolainen, 1995). The development of the model was primarily motivated by the need to elaborate the role of social and cultural factors that affect people's way of preferring and using information sources in everyday settings. It was hypothetised that even though individuals select and use various sources to solve problems or make sense of their everyday world, the source preferences and use patterns are ultimately socially conditioned. Thus, an attempt was made to approach the phenomena of ELIS as a combination of social and psychological factors.

The development of the ELIS model was also motivated by the elaboration of terminological issues of information-seeking studies and the need to specify the nature of ELIS, as compared to job-related information seeking. Although the model emphasizes the legitimate nature of the nonwork contexts, this was not interpreted as an attempt to create a dichotomy between the processes of job-related and "other" information seeking because job-related information seeking and ELIS complement each other.

The central point of departure of the model is *way of life*, which provides a broad context for investigation of individual and social factors affecting ELIS. Way of life is approached by drawing on the idea of *habitus* developed by Bourdieu (1984). Habitus can be defined as a socially and culturally determined system of thinking, perception, and evaluation, internalized by the individual. Habitus is a relatively stable system of dispositions by which individuals integrate their experiences and evaluate the importance of different choices, for example, the preference of information sources and channels. Savolainen (1995) defined the concept of way of life as "order of things," which is based on the choices that

individuals make, ultimately oriented by the factors constituting habitus. "Things" stand for various activities taking place in the daily life world, including not only job but also necessary reproductive tasks such as household care and voluntary activities (hobbies); "order" refers to preferences given to these activities. Correspondingly, people have a "cognitive order" indicating their perceptions of how things are when they are "normal." Through their choices individuals have practically engaged in a certain order of things, and it is in their interest to keep that order as long as they find it meaningful.

The major factors that may be used to operationalize the concept of way of life include the *structure of time budget*, described as a relation between working and leisure time; *models of consumption of goods and services*; and the *nature of hobbies*. Because the meaningful order of things might not reproduce itself automatically, individuals are required to take active care of it. This care may be called *mastery of life*; it is associated with pragmatic problem solving, especially in cases where the order of things has been shaken or threatened. Mastery of life is a general preparedness to approach everyday problems in certain ways in accordance with one's values. Information seeking is an integral component of mastery of life, which aim is to eliminate a continual dissonance between perceptions of "how things are at this moment" and "how they should be." Savolainen (1995) defined four major types of mastery of life (see Figure 22.1):

1) *Optimistic-cognitive mastery of life* is characterized by a strong reliance on positive outcomes for problem solving. Because problems are primarily conceived as cognitive, systematic information seeking from different sources and channels is indispensable.

2) *Pessimistic-cognitive mastery of life* approaches problem solving in a less ambitious way: There are problems that might not be solved optimally. Despite this the individual may be equally systematic in problem solving and in the information seeking which serves it.

3) *Defensive-affective mastery of life* is grounded on optimistic views concerning the solvability of the problem; however, in problem solving and information seeking affective factors

dominate. This means that the individual may avoid situations implying a risk of failure and requirements to actively seek information.

4) *Pessimistic-affective mastery of life* can be crystallized in the expression of "learned helplessness." The individual does not rely on his or her abilities to solve every day life problems. Systematic information seeking plays no vital role because emotional reactions and short-sightedness dominate problem-solving behavior.
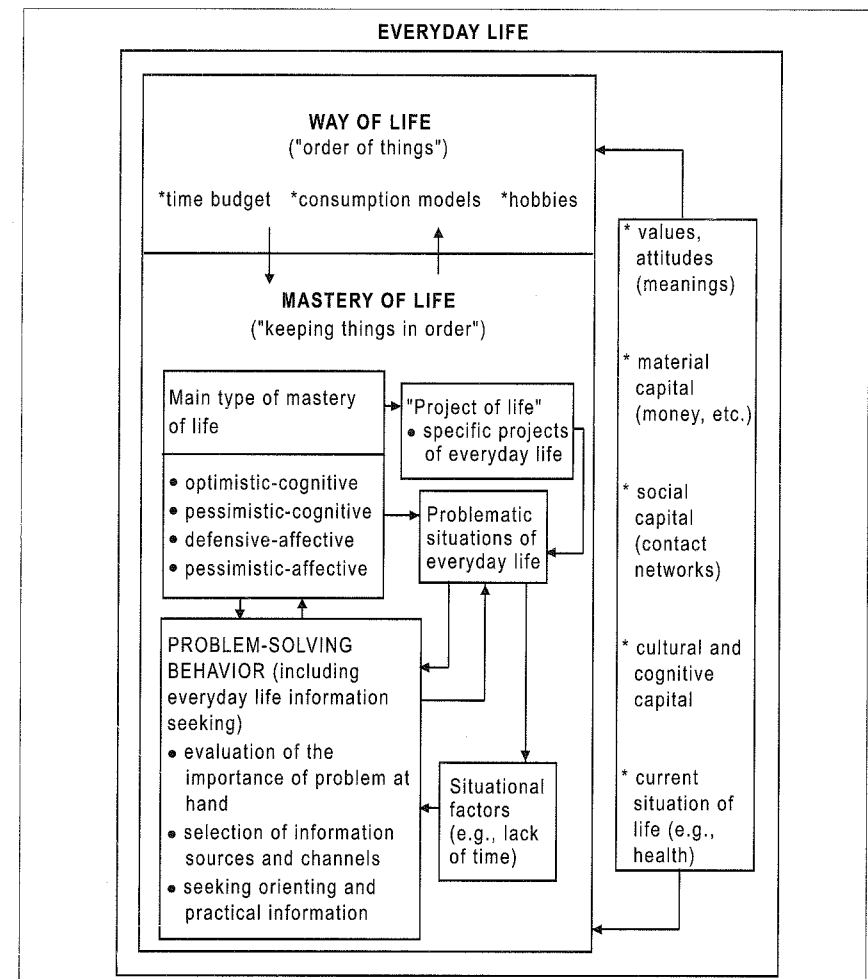

Figure 22.1   The ELIS model.

The model suggests that way of life ("order of things") and mastery of life ("keeping things in order") determine each other. Values, conceptions, and the current phase of life affect way of life and mastery of life. Equally important is the material, social, and cultural (cognitive) capital owned by the individual, providing "basic equipment" to seek and use information. The distribution of the different kinds of capital in relation to capital owned by others determines the total value of the material, social, and cultural capital, thus determining the basic conditions of way of life and mastery of life. However, way of life or mastery of life does not determine how a person seeks information in individual situations. As a constellation of everyday activities and their mutual valuation, way of life provides only general criteria for preferring and using various sources and channels so that the preferences are natural or even self-evident in the light of earlier choices. Similarly, mastery of life describes the tendency to adopt a certain information-seeking strategy in problem-solving situations. Hence, it is necessary also to devote attention to the specific features of the problem situation, for example, the repertoire of information sources available and the acuteness of the problem.

Savolainen (1995) utilized the above model in an empirical study conducted in Finland. The study focused on two groups, representing middle and working class. The study revealed that the habitus-related differences between social classes proved to be quite as expected regarding the nature of work, relationships between work and leisure, and nature of hobbies. The most distinctive differences were found in the nature of hobbies. The consumption models were more distinctive in the purchase of books, magazines, and newspapers. The empirical study strengthened the assumption that way of life directs information seeking in a significant way. Teachers were more eager to seek factual information from various media, and they took a more critical stand toward the supply of light entertainment from radio, television, newspapers, and magazines. However, the study also revealed that personal interest and current life situation affect media use. There appeared to be teachers not particularly interested in the culture or politics sections of newspapers; similarly, some workers preferred documentaries and other serious programs and took a critical view of entertainment.

In the case of seeking practical information the link to way of life appeared to be less evident, because this kind of ELIS is contextualized in specific problem-solving situations. Both workers and teachers preferred informal sources, primarily personal communication, whereas the utilization of formal channels remained surprisingly low. The teachers differed from workers most markedly regarding the utilization of contact networks. The concept of way of life was also used in Savolainen (1999), a study on the ways in which people prefer the Internet in ELIS. These studies indicated that qualitative methods (semistructured theme interviews and narratives of critical incidents) are most preferable since the analysis of the complex relationships between way of life, mastery of life, and information seeking requires nuanced and context-sensitive empirical data.

The ideas behind the ELIS model are related to a number of other models and theories. For example, Chatman's (2000) theory of normative behavior crystallizing the findings of her long research project and Williamson's (1998) ecological model of everyday life information seeking are relevant in this sense. The ELIS model has been cited widely as one of the approaches focusing on the specific issues of everyday life information seeking (e.g., Given, 2002; McKenzie, 2003; Pettigrew, Fidel & Bruce, 2001).

In summary, the ELIS model provides a holistic framework for social and psychological factors affecting people's source preferences in everyday contexts. The model could be developed by elaborating the concept of mastery of life and validating the types of mastery of life. For example, the types of mastery of life could be investigated empirically in relation to people's context-sensitive perceptions of their information-related competencies (Savolainen, 2002). In addition, the relationships between way of life, mastery of life, and ELIS could be thematized more clearly from the social constructionist viewpoint: how do people position themselves as information seekers and users in discourse and how do they construct the issues of way of life and mastery of life as contextual factors affecting ELIS?

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23
Face Threat

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Erving Goffman, an influential sociologist, explored the presentation of the self in social interactions, which has implications for the study of human behavior in intermediated information-seeking contexts. His work on *face threat* is encompassed within the larger body of his life's work in investigating the micro-sociology of face-to-face interactions to make visible the *interaction order* of interpersonal behavior in public and "behind the scenes." The performative aspects of self-presentation in Goffman's work have been described as *dramaturgy*, while the cognitive aspects of how individuals understand their expected roles within a situation and activity are discussed as *frame analysis*.

Goffman theorized that during all interpersonal interactions, individuals are engaged in a process of "impression management"—strategic maneuvers to obtain, share, or hide information that is either supportive to or destructive of a desired public self-image or "face." Goffman (1971) described the personal information that individuals control about themselves while in interaction with others as the "information preserve."

Goffman (1955) defined "face" as the public image of the self as indicated through socially approved attributes in accordance with expected social roles and behaviors. An individual's "face" is socially constructed through perceptions of both the individual and others. It is created from observations of behavior and other available evidence, and can be damaged by "face threatening acts," which attack or undermine the individual's positive public self-image. Threats to "face" include perceptions of loss of autonomy (being perceived by the self or others as unable or incapable) and perceptions of failure to maintain one's expected social role (and thus being perceived as having misrepresented the self). Threats range from direct and intentional attacks to unintended and subtle implications through