Qualitative Research in Library & Information Science: Use of Narratives

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Research in LIS has mainly been quantitative as very often the library and any information system has to justify its existence. However the use of qualitative methods is now catching up. Not only do we need to know how many people are using our OPAC but we need to know why and how they are using the OPAC and if they find it useful or not, and what was their experience while using it.

Various studies have suggest that library managers feel it necessary to have data available, if required to provide evidence of the value and impact of their services. With only quantitative data collected there may be uncertainty amongst library managers about how to interpret and communicate it for the best outcome for the service. In such cases, there is a strong case for "supporting" qualitative stories or narratives.

While narrative has not been apparent in the library instruction and information literacy literature, there has been a growing interest in understanding students' experiences with research more holistically, including an awareness of the importance of the affective dimensions of that experience. Although not the first to identify it, Kuhlthau advanced the idea of an affective dimension of thestudent research experience by incorporating it into her Information Search Process model. In creating any information service, the librarians first need to find out what the readers, wants and how they would like an information service to be.Kuhlthau encourages librarians to see the information-seeking process ina much more holistic way, acknowledging that students' previous backgrounds and knowledge are important in their process of meaning construction.

This paper attempts to make a case for the use of qualitative research in LIS and especially for the collection of narratives to examine and better understand users and their behavior in physical and online settings.

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