ABSTRACT

Research on how people collaborate in groups for sharing, retrieving, managing and disseminating information is still an emerging field in Library and Information Science.

The purpose of this poster is presenting the research findings of my Master Thesis on Information and Knowledge Society at the Open University of Catalonia (UOC), which had the aim to study a specific case of collaborative information behavior in completely online groups that initiated, developed and completed a teamwork project in the virtual learning environment of the UOC’s Virtual Campus.

The study methodologically developed a multidimensional analytical approach, built from a set of twelve interrelated variables in three dimensions. A field study was conducted using virtual ethnographic techniques.

Findings reveal that the collaborative information behavior in completely online groups seems to be particularly influenced by the factors related to the internal group dynamics (e.g., leadership style, degree of cohesion, or group rules).

INTRODUCTION

Teammwork is encouraged nowadays as an imperative skill to better perform all critical factors, including information, that are involved in the project-based structures of many organizations.

The inherently collaborative nature of group activities generates new relationships with information which uncover collaborative informational behaviors when the groups search, retrieve, manage and disseminate information.

Karunakaran, Reddy and Spence2 synthesize up to date theory and research produced on Collaborative Information Behavior (CIB) and propose a new definition (see fig. 1). Their Model of Collaborative Information Behavior in Organizations is one of the most recent contributions to CIB (see fig. 2).

Groups in online contexts show specific characteristics concerning how their members communicate to each other, how they use technology and how the group dynamics impacts on collaboration.

That is why research on collaborative information behavior in completely online groups reveals understandings of the phenomenon distinct from those related to face-to-face groups1.

METHODOLOGY

A multidimensional analytical approach was built based on twelve interrelated factors that the literature review uncovered as significantly relevant. Factors were categorized under three broad dimensions: communicative, social and technologic-informational (see fig. 3).

A field study was conducted based on virtual semi-structured interviews among a sample of three completely online groups. Content analysis techniques were applied to the qualitative data in order to inference and understand their meanings.

CONCLUSIONS

This research contributes a new multidimensional approach to the study of collaborative information behavior.

Results reinforce the need for a good balance between the three dimensions for a group to exhibit successful collaborative informational practices.

Specifically, collaborative information behavior in completely online groups seems to be particularly influenced by the socio-relational dimension, that is, the factors related to the internal group dynamics (e.g., leadership style, degree of cohesion, and group rules).

REFERENCES