Information practice and information behaviour: on the need for conceptual and theoretical clarity

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Abstract

Introduction. Literature on people's dealings with information sometimes suggests that the concepts of information behaviour and information practice are interchangeable. These concepts are often used without theoretical underpinning. This contribution presents an in-depth examination of the concept of information practice in relation to theoretical contributions within the information behaviour literature.

Method. This conceptual paper critically examines the theoretical foundations of two central concepts by exploring existing information research and literature on social science theory. It aims to unpack the intellectual roots from which these concepts have emerged.

Analysis. Based on an established distinction between theories of action and theories of practice, a fine-grained comparison of theoretical differences between information behaviour and information practice research is presented.

Results. Contributions based on the concept of information behaviour are anthropocentric in nature, psychologically oriented, and portray dealings with information as planned behaviour grounded in individual choice. The information practice literature leans towards a posthumanist perspective through its focus on materiality and distributed agency.

Conclusion. Theories and concepts are ambiguous phenomena that can be imbued with different meanings by different authors. This does not necessarily pose a problem if authors strive to clearly explain their theoretical premises and what they mean by the central concepts they use.

Introduction

In the subfield of information studies that focuses on people's interaction with information, there has long been a discussion about which key concept is best suited for conducting and presenting such studies. The debate primarily concerns the established concept of *information behaviour* and the less widespread but increasingly adopted concept of *information practices*. There have also been other conceptual initiatives, such as the proposal to introduce *information experience* as a key concept (e.g. Bruce, 2014). In this contribution we focus on the concept of information practices, but discuss it alongside information behaviour.

More than 15 years have passed since Savolainen (2007) published his influential article on information behaviour and information practices as umbrella concepts within information seeking studies. About the same amount of time has passed since the then well-known debate between Tom Wilson and Reijo Savolainen, where they, along with a few other debaters, examined and discussed the two concepts (The behaviour/practice debate, 2009). Recently, an extensive review of information behaviour research (Huvila and Gorichanaz, 2024) covering the period between 2016 and 2022 was published. The review conveys to readers that, while some authors prefer to employ the concept of information practice, such contributions can nonetheless be incorporated into the literature on information behaviour, effectively treating them as a natural subcategory within the broader framework established by the concept of information behaviour. This is a standpoint akin to the one taken in Wilson's (2013) edited volume on theory in information behaviour research. In that work, practice theory, along with several other theories, is positioned as one among many under the broader category of theory in information behaviour research. However, Given et al. (2023), in their review of the literature, state that works drawing on practice theories '*account for the strongest recent growth in citation among information behavior investigators*' (p. 134).

In the discussion this contribution engages with, there is no shortage of literature that seems to dismiss the concept of information practice in a seemingly disparaging way. Often, this dismissal involves presenting the concept as merely a semantic preference rather than a theoretically considered choice. It has for example been claimed that the practice proponents aim to '*re-christen*' (Gorichanaz, 2018, n.p.) the field of information behaviour to information practice, as if it were simply a matter of a name change. Another example is the tendency to regard practice theories and other emerging theoretical orientations as '*the latest fashion in theoretical frameworks*' (Julien and Williamson, 2011, n.p.), as though serious theoretical contributions to the literature were merely a matter of launching a new trend.

At the same time, we believe we see in the literature an expansion of precisely this phenomenon – that is, authors substituting behaviour with practice as if the terms were interchangeable. We also see contributions where both terms appear together in a way that raises questions about the theoretical foundations of these two key concepts, for example when it is claimed that '*information practices [...] [are] explore[d] [...] through the lens of information behavior*' (Narayan et al., 2024, n.p.). This is a trend that makes Rouse's (2006) early reflections on the spread of the concept of practice within the social sciences at large seem justified: '*[p]erhaps the ubiquity of practice talk merely reflects current intellectual fashion with no substantial conceptual significance, or worse, an underlying theoretical confusion assimilating incompatible conceptions of social life under a superficially common term*' (Rouse 2006, p. 500). In a somewhat similar vein to Rouse's suspicion, Savolainen (2007, p. 109f) poses the rhetorical question whether '*researchers [have] reflected on the content and meaningful scope of the above concepts, or are they used in an unreflective manner?*'

We acknowledge that the scepticism expressed in the quoted texts may hold some relevance for the research we address in this paper. However, it is not our task to assess whether this is indeed the case. We are also not attempting to present the concept of information practice as a corrective to other theoretical frameworks (cf. Tuominen et al., 2002; Bates, 2002). Nor do we propose that practice should replace behaviour. Instead, in analogy with the literature in the field of conceptual

change – which argues that researchers '*must build new ideas in the context of old ones*' (diSessa, 2014, p. 88) – we seek to illuminate the concept of information practice and its theoretical underpinnings in relation to information behaviour.

In the years since Wilson and Savolainen initiated this debate, a few insightful contributions have been published that commendably unpack various information practice approaches (e.g. Huizing and Cavanagh, 2011; Cox, 2012; Pilerot et al., 2017). Nevertheless, we still lack an updated discussion on information practices and its theoretical foundation in relation to information behaviour. It is this white spot on the map that this contribution aims to illuminate.

The structure of the contribution is as follows: the next section addresses a selection of previous reviews, focusing on theory in the literature on information behaviour. To facilitate reasoning about the use of concepts, a brief discussion follows on how concepts can be applied at different levels. This is followed by a section that outlines various perspectives on what constitutes social science theory. Then, a relatively extensive section examines a set of practice-theoretical ideas for the study of interaction with information. In the concluding discussion, a comparative analysis is presented, highlighting overarching characteristics of the two approaches based on information practice and information behaviour.

On theory and theorising in the field of information behaviour

Even though the focus in this paper is on the sort of theorising that supports studies on information practice, we maintain this focus by recurringly relating it to the kind of theorising put forth by those who propose information behaviour as a key concept. There are numerous references to '*information behaviour theories*' and/or '*information science theories*' (VanScoy et al., 2022, n.p.) in the area of information behaviour.

Over the years, several reviews of the literature on information behaviour have been published, with one of the aims being to examine the use of theory within the research field (e.g. Vakkari, 2008; Julien et al., 2011; VanScoy et al., 2022). Although it is unclear in some of these contributions what is meant by *theory*, they collectively provide some interesting insights. Vakkari (2008, n.p.) has analysed and compared ISIC contributions from the 1996 and 2008 conferences and observes, among other things, that a '*current theoretical silence*' characterises the contributions to the 2008 conference. He is furthermore highlighting a trend towards descriptive studies focusing on what he refers to as an individual level, '*which leaves the social context of the information behaviour untouched*'. Among the very few theoretical approaches explicitly mentioned in Vakkari's (2008) paper are '*social constructivism and phenomenology, grounded theory, naturalistic paradigm and discourse analysis*'. One of his conclusions is that '*there is a declining trend of theoretical*' approaches. He also finds that '*central concepts used were often insufficiently defined*'.

Julien and her co-authors (2011, p. 20) have a broader scope in their review, both regarding the material analysed (749 articles published between 1999 and 2008) and the variables included in the analysis, of which '*theoretical frameworks used*' is one of eight. Nevertheless, they conclude that their results are consistent with Vakkari's (2008), '*which identified decreasing use of theory over time*' (Julien et al., 2011, p. 21).

The recent review by Huvila and Gorichanaz (2024), covering more than 1200 articles, concludes that '*the vast majority of the work published in information behavior is atheoretical*' (p. 14). It is therefore somewhat surprising to see the claim made by VanScoy and her co-authors (2022, n.p.), that most of the ISIC conference papers between 1996 and 2020 that they reviewed in search for theory usage (in total 243) '*include theory and more than half of them use theory substantially*'. The differing conclusions in these reviews are likely due to the authors' varying interpretations of what constitutes *theory*.

However, by consulting one of the field's more influential publications one can gain an indication as to why theory appears to be a relatively prominent issue and why certain authors may claim that there is an abundance of information behaviour theories while others do not. In the volume *Theories of information behavior* (Fisher et al., 2005), the table of contents has a main heading reading '*The theories*', after which a long list of *theories* follows. However, what we see here is a clear illustration of our suspicion that it seems widespread in information behaviour research to confuse models with theories. Among the *theories* listed in *Theories of information behavior* we find, for example, '*Berrypicking*', which Bates (1989, p. 407), the originator of the concept, describes as '*a new model of searching*'. Moreover, we find – according to the headings in the book's table of contents – '*Ellis's Model of Information-Seeking Behavior*' as well as '*Krikelas's Model of Information Seeking*', and many more models presented as theories. And this is not a one-off. Papers continue to be published where models are confused with theories (e.g. Million et al., 2023). Another striking example of how models are confused with theories is offered by the previously mentioned paper by VanScoy and co-authors (2022). In their review of theory usage in empirical research in ISIC conference papers, between 1996 and 2020, models are consistently described as theories. However, '*a model is not the same as a theory [even if it] can be employed as a form to represent a theory. A model simply represents an object or process so as to highlight its key components and their connections*' (Shoemaker et al., p. 13).

Although, as we will explore below, the literature on information behaviour has evolved through various phases, it seems that a lingering dominant trait persists – particularly regarding the numerous models focusing on individuals' information seeking. This trait appears to stem from the so-called cognitive or user-centred turn in the field. This is largely characterised by psychological approaches focusing on cognitive states, mental models and where information needs are viewed as internal phenomena. That this is the case is evident from, among other things, the fact that contributions by authors such as Belkin (e.g., 1980), Dervin (e.g., 1999), and Kuhlthau (e.g., 1991) continue to steadily generate citations within the field.

A different reading of the information behaviour literature, with regards to the treatment of theory than those presented above, is offered in another recently published literature review (Nicolini et al., 2023). Here, the authors note that '[t]*he arc of development in the literature on information behavior*' (p. 196) can be said to encompass four developmental phases. The first of these is labelled in the review as '*Information seeking: a systems-oriented view*'. According to the authors' analysis, the focus here is on information sources and systems and their use. However, this approach came to be criticised within the field, with the argument that it was perceived to ignore cognitive aspects and users' attributes.

In the next phase described by Nicolini and co-authors (2023), labelled with the term '*Information behavior*', a strong focus is placed on users' cognitive states and individual characteristics. At the core of this approach are individual needs and motivations, personal knowledge structures and actions. Prominent during this phase is also a sensemaking view, with attention directed towards how users make sense of and turn information into meaning. The criticism put forth of this phase is, in short, that needs and motivations cannot be observed and that the link between a certain need and how someone acts based on it remains unclear. Additionally, the perspective does not fully illuminate unintentional information behaviour and often results in simplified descriptions of complex phenomena.

In a third phase, named '*Social perspective on information behavior*', the emphasis is on how information should be viewed as constructed and reconstructed in social contexts rather than as some kind of objective, independent entity. Here, the focus is on how social relationships affect and shape people's ways of interacting with information in various networks and small worlds. The criticism of this perspective highlights that information behaviour still appears as a separate activity, and information takes the form of some quasi-substance that moves among people, while

the material aspects of information are overlooked due to an overly strong focus on the discursive dimension of the study object.

According to Nicolini and co-authors (2023), the fourth phase, finally, described under the title '*Information practices and information work*', can be traced to practice-theory-oriented researchers in the field who emphasise that information practices must necessarily be seen as embedded in broader work or life practices. The focus here is thus no longer on needs and preferences but on socially and materially sustained (information) practices and their people.

Conceptual use on three levels

On an analytical level, concepts can be viewed as useful on at least three different levels (cf. Pilerot, 2016). Both information behaviour and information practices function as a kind of label used to name a particular area of interest and the activities occurring within that area. This is how we refer to the field within information studies that focuses on people's interaction with information as the research field of information behaviour (or information practices); as expressed by Fisher and Julien (2009, p. 317) in an earlier review: it is '*a broad field that in its widest interpretation includes just about any paper that deals with information and people*'. Using the concept as a label, we are referring to the research conducted in that field, the conferences organised, the literature produced and, in general, the ideas and discussions that relate to the area.

When the concept is used empirically, however, the focus is more specifically on the activities being studied – that is, how people in different contexts seek and use information; in short, what is done, and what is said in relation to people's interaction with information and where and through which means these interactions take place.

On a third level, concepts are used to analyse or theorise about a particular occurrence or phenomenon. The use of concepts at this third level must necessarily be grounded in a more or less elaborate set of starting points and assumptions about what is being studied. In other words: we argue that if we claim to use a concept theoretically, we must also show how it is grounded in the theory we are working from.

To this discussion of concepts and the suggestion that concepts can be understood and used on three different levels, it must, of course, be added that we are making an analytical argument. In practice, the three levels are intimately connected and overlap. Emphasising the theoretical function of a concept presupposes having a clear understanding of the concept when used for empirical purposes, since the empirical object is the subject of analysis and theorisation.

On theory

Fully explaining what theory entails is obviously not possible within the scope of this contribution, even if we limit ourselves to social science theory, as we do here. A commonly accepted view is to categorise theories into three groups based on their scale and the scope of their contributions.

Grand theories, such as functionalism (e.g. Parsons, 1991) and structuralism, are broad, overarching frameworks that aim to explain large-scale social phenomena or human behaviour as a whole, whereas micro theories such as symbolic interactionism (e.g. Mead, 1972) or ethnomethodology (e.g. Garfinkel, 1984), broadly speaking, focus on interpersonal relationships and group dynamics. Middle-range theories, finally, fall between these two approaches. In the words of Merton (1949, p. 48), they '*deal with delimited aspects of social phenomena, as is indicated by their labels*'. In Wilson's (2013) volume on theories for information behaviour research, the included theories are referred to as middle-range theories.

To shed light on practice theory's stance toward what is studied, this type of categorisation of theoretical perspectives can also be applied to their respective approaches to dualisms, such as structure and agency, individual and collective, or part and whole. Using Layder's (2006)

framework, we can identify the following three positions: 1) *a view-from-on-high*, which roughly corresponds to the previously mentioned macro perspective and regards overarching structures and systems as the primary unit of analysis; 2) *a where-the-action-is* perspective, which, similar to a micro perspective, focuses on activities and interactions; and 3) *a breaking-free-and-burning-bridges* perspective, characterised by an ambition to simply avoid dualisms of this kind altogether. The latter camp includes authors such as Foucault, Giddens, Bourdieu and Schatzki. This stance is also emphasised by most practice theorists, regardless of their specific orientation (e.g., Shove et al., 2012; Feldman and Orlikowski, 2011; Schatzki, 2012). As Schatzki (2012, p. 2) puts it, practice approaches '*counter the subject-object split that defined much philosophical thought in the modern era*'. Instead, they aim to '*steer a path between individualism and societism*' (Schatzki, 2005, p. 469).

According to a classical understanding of theory, which has its origin in philosophy, social theory can be regarded as a system '*with unambiguous definitions, premises, and [where] conceptual conclusions has been established*'; that is, a system that '*claims to have the widest possible scope of applicability [and which] forms a unified whole and is self-contained*' (Reckwitz and Rosa, 2023, p. 23). Practice theory, however, which repeatedly is presented by its proponents not as a unified theory but rather a family of theories (e.g. Nicolini, 2012) should not be seen as such a system. Instead, practice theories can, in Reckwitz' (Reckwitz and Rosa, 2023, p. 25) words, be understood as a tool that forms a '*conceptual network*', which '*can evolve in multiple and unpredictable ways*'. As he concludes: '*One can embrace certain aspects of the old while turning away from others. In this way, theory thus takes on the form of a bricolage of concepts to be tinkered with*' (Reckwitz and Rosa, 2023, p. 25). This is a stance towards theory that in many ways resembles the ideas put forth in a now classic and highly cited contribution to the literature on social theory. In his paper, DiMaggio (1995) presents several aspects of what constitute '*good theory*'. It can, for example, be seen as a '*surprise machine*' – a device helping the theorist to see the unexpected – which he describes as '*a set of categories and domain assumptions aimed at clearing away conventional notions to make room for artful and exiting insights*' (p. 391). In line with the previously mentioned network model, it is also stressed that there must be room for theoretical hybrids developed intuitively in interaction with the empirical data. Even though some sort of focus in theorising is reasonable to strive for, theory must also be open to a certain aspect of '*multidimensionality*'; namely '*the extent to which theory includes reference to agency, culture, structure, and several other abstract categories in its rhetoric*' (DiMaggio, 1995, p. 393). Finally, regarding DiMaggio's reasoning on social theory, we should also be open to the idea that theory is '*created by its readers as well as its writers – it is then recreated by the authors who employ it*' (p. 394).

Practice theory for the study of people's interaction with information

Against this background, where social theory is depicted as a conceptual network, a bricolage of concepts to be tinkered with, which admittedly renders it a rather fluid character, one could perhaps question whether there is any unifying core at all in practice theories. However, even though suggestions regarding what constitutes a practice vary, it stands clear that they expose common denominators. Among the most prominent theorists are Reckwitz (2002) and Schatzki (2002). Reckwitz (2002, p. 250) posits that a practice is a '*routinized way in which bodies are moved, objects are handled, subjects are treated, things are described and the world is understood*'. For his part, Schatzki (2002, p. 87) proposes it to be '*a temporally evolving, open-ended set of doings and sayings linked by practical understandings, rules, teleo-affective structure and general understandings*'. In the information studies literature, it has been claimed that a practice can be understood as '*a set of interrelated, routinized actions (including linguistic statements); more or less established and shared ways of understanding the world; more or less pronounced rules ('one must...'), norms ('one should...') and conventions ('one usually...'); as well as the material objects people interact with, including the places they are located in*' (Pilerot and Lindberg, 2017, p. 256). At their core, all these suggestions about what constitutes a practice highlight, albeit with different degrees of emphasis, routinised activities, shared understandings and material objects.

In the following paragraphs, we are taking our departure in a claim made in previous research (Pilerot et al., 2017) that there is a set of prominent tenets that hold together the family of practice theories. Apart from avoiding dualisms and viewing the notion of practice as an ontological and epistemological base unit, practice theorists, to start with, tend to conceive of practices as *sets of activities* that are *socially recognised and named*, comprising both *individual and collective agency*, and that *embrace bodies and materiality*. It is moreover highlighted that practices are *oriented towards ends*, situated in *time and space*, and that they comprise *inconsistencies and tensions*.

To unpack the specific notion of *information* practice, and to illustrate the claim about prominent tenets made in previous research, we are referring to yet another suggestion for how to conceptualise a practice.

Any odd set of activities cannot be regarded as a practice before it has been established as such. In line with Shove and co-authors (2012), one can employ an understanding of the concept of practice as including three key elements. These interconnected elements, which together constitute a practice, include *material* components (such as physical objects like various tools for information interaction and their attributes, the spaces where information is sought and utilised, and the body itself); *competence* (encompassing forms of understanding and practical knowledge related to information and its associated activities); and *meaning* (the socially constructed, collectively agreed-upon, and symbolically significant aspects attributed to the enactment of information practices and related activities).

By conceptualising dealings with information as a practice in this way, not only the information technologies (in their widest sense) and the body, but also places and infrastructures, constitute examples of the material element. This is linked to the two other elements: the competence in knowing how to engage (or not) with information, like assessing credibility, and the meaning in the form of the significance attributed to information and its related activities (and technologies), for example related to claims about the importance of information literacy. According to such a view, information practices are performed not only by individuals but are also sociomaterially and societally positioned. When elements, over time, become linked in new or different ways, and when these new constellations eventually get recognised and named, practices evolve or change. A perhaps banal but illustrative example of how an information practice evolves is the recognition in the early 1990s of a new mode of information search and seeking that became named *surfing the Internet* (For the origin of this phrase, see https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Jean_Armour_Polly). This is an example of how an established practice of information seeking, albeit previously named differently and enacted through a different constellation of material objects, took shape through changes in technologies and infrastructure. In the light of algorithm-driven and AI-assisted information search, the expression surfing the Internet appears distinctly outdated. However, this example highlights how materiality (in concert with other agents, such as people) contributes to shape and transform, or give rise to new, information practices.

Even though it perhaps already has been made clear, it should be highlighted that activities (as a cornerstone of the constitution of practices) also include discursive activity, which is evident from a recurrent phrase in the practice idiom, namely '*doings and sayings*' (Schatzki, 2002, p. 87). Coining a phrase such as surfing the Internet is not necessarily a prominent feature of an information practice, but it is clearly part of the practice of surfing the Internet.

Returning to a few more of the previously mentioned prominent tenets in the practice theory literature identified by Pilerot and co-authors (2017), it should be highlighted that as practices emerge and evolve, and if they seem meaningful to others than those that already practice, they become picked up by other practitioners who, in Shove and Pantzar's words (2007, p. 164) become '*carriers of practice*'. In this sense, we can say that practices are *(re)productive of the sociomaterial* – of ways of interaction with people and material objects – and, even though they gradually change,

contribute to sustain trajectories between past and future. An information practice, like seeking for information, that once was enacted using, for example, a card catalogue in a library has in this way, through changes in material, competence and meaning, transformed into a practice that some refer to as surfing the Internet. And it is not only a matter of a transformed practice, but there is also certain expectations and assumptions connected to practices, which implies that practices are *generative of rules and norms*, such as ideas about the right (or wrong) ways of interacting with information.

To once again bring the reasoning about information practice into relation with information behaviour, there is a useful distinction for discussing the overarching difference between the two orientations. Gherardi (2009) draws on Cohen's (1996) suggestion that one can distinguish between *theories of action* and *theories of practice*. In line with the gist of information behaviour theorising, as it emerges from our overview, the former emphasise the intentionality of actors and stress the importance of scrutinising subjects and their meaning making, whereas the latter concentrate on how practice is enacted or performed. Cohen (1996, p. 74) posits that regardless of theoretical orientation, '[t]he theoretical trick is to locate the source of the patterns we want to find'. It is here, we argue, that the fundamental difference between information behaviour theorising and information practice theorising lies. Gherardi (2009, p. 115) summarises this line of reasoning like this:

> [T]heories of practice assume an ecological model in which agency is distributed between humans and non-humans and in which the relationality between the social world and materiality can be subjected to inquiry. While theories of action start from individuals and from their intentionality in pursuing courses of action, theories of practice view actions as 'taking place' or 'happening', as being performed through a network of connections-in-action, as life-world and dwelling.

Already from the above quotation it can be discerned that the two theoretical orientations take on different perspectives. In Cohen's (1996, p. 74) words, their respective attempts '*to locate the source of the patterns*' they are looking for clearly take different forms. In the concluding discussion we delve deeper into what characterises the respective orientations.

Concluding discussion: characterising theories of information practice and theories of information behaviour

Already in the behaviour/practice debate (2009, n.p.), Savolainen emphasised the importance of clarifying '*the meaning of key concepts*'. He urged us to '*continue the analysis of conceptual issues by scrutinizing how information behaviour and information practice are related [...]*'. We agree with this, but must conclude, building on the above reasoning around concepts and theories, that the concept of information behaviour, even though widespread and deeply established in information studies, mainly is used not as a theoretical concept but as a label denoting a research field. Working with concepts that can potentially be used on different levels, without clear signals to the reader, has the consequence that the concept in question is left too open. It thus becomes polysemic and generates distracting interpretive possibilities. If an author fails to clarify the meanings of the concepts they use, their presentation is often perceived as atheoretical.

Notwithstanding this confusion, there are of course explicit theoretical groundings in several of the approaches associated with the kind of research that presents itself as information behaviour research. We have already touched upon a few pertinent examples through our references to what must still be considered key works in the information behaviour literature (by e.g. Belkin, Dervin and Kuhlthau). It has been pointed out before (Cox, 2012, p. 184) that '*the field [of information behaviour] is not very sociological*', which was already highlighted by Savolainen in the aforementioned debate. There he asserts that '[b]*ehaviour draws more strongly on the tradition of*

psychology (or social psychology) while the conceptualizations of practice draw more on sociology (Bourdieu, Giddens) and social philosophy (Schutz, Schatzki, Wittgenstein)' (The behaviour/practice debate, 2009, n.p.). Since this observation, much has happened. Not least, the practice-theoretical approach has evolved toward a broader adoption of posthumanist ideas (e.g. Cozza and Gherardi, 2023), which, among other things, emphasise the futility of separating the material from the social and, as a result, agency distributed across humans and material objects. If one attempts, schematically on an overview level and based on theoretical starting points, to describe the main differences as reflected by the two key concepts between how the two orientations approach their study objects, this effort may result in the arrangement presented in Table 1.

Information behaviour	Information practice
Anthropocentric	Posthumanist
Individuals	Individuals, groups, material objects – in concert
Psychological	Sociomaterial
Cognition	Materiality and bodies
Thinking, doing	Actions, habits, routines
External conditions in change	Internal dynamics in change
Planned behaviour, rationality, individual choice	Spontaneity, social, coincidence, shared
Deterministic	Generative, reproductive
Structure, discrete events	Motion, flow, flux

Table 1. Comparison of theoretical differences between Information behaviour and Information practice research.

The presentation in Table 1 is the result of an overarching analysis aimed at illustrating the most prominent distinctions between the two orientations as pedagogically as possible. We do not argue that the distinct differences we wish to highlight are always as discernible as they appear in a schematic representation of this kind. However, it is not unreasonable to observe, in a comparison, that the information behaviour camp adopts what could be described as an anthropocentric position, with its strong analytical focus on human thinking and actions. On the same grounds, it seems reasonable to describe the information practice camp, with its emphasis on distributed agency and its focus on materiality – often inseparable from the social – as posthumanist in orientation (though this cannot be said of all practice-theoretical approaches). Rather than focusing on individuals' thinking, experiences and actions, this orientation uses practices as its unit of analysis.

As noted in our review of previous overviews of theory usage in the information behaviour literature, the field is characterised by its extensive use of psychologically oriented approaches. In contrast, the information practices literature increasingly emphasises the necessity of focusing attention on sociomaterial configurations – thus, individuals, groups and material objects acting in concert. In this vein, we also observe a distinction between the emphasis on cognition in the information behaviour camp and the tendency of information practice proponents to engage more with matters concerning materiality and embodiment. Another trait in the information practice theorising is its accentuation of habits and routines portrayed as doings in motion and flux. That differs from the information behaviour proponents' focus on modelling individuals' actions as discrete events according to a certain structure, which not least is reflected in their propensity to produce models. These models give an impression of planned information behaviour grounded in rationality and individual choice, whereas the information practices literature seeks to avoid modelling and instead try to capture through thick descriptions the coincidences and spontaneity of practices as something that happens in a shared and social space among carriers of practice.

This latter point also relates to the differences regarding views on how change comes into place, where the information behaviour camp seems to place more importance on external factors, and the information practices proponents view change as emanating from within practices. Rather than to some sort of causality, practice theorising locates change, as we have seen in the example based on Shove and her co-authors (2012), in the reproductive and generative character of practice.

The present study suggests that the key concepts within the field generally referred to as information behaviour are, to a significant extent, used '*in an unreflective manner*', to borrow Savolainen's (2007, p. 110) words. The practice-theoretical turn within information studies has occurred relatively recently – around 2007 (Pilerot et al., 2017). Those aiming to introduce a new concept along with its supporting theoretical underpinnings probably experience a greater obligation to articulate their theoretical foundations compared to those who have been part of the field longer and can rely on a kind of implicit consensus about what the central concepts mean. Theories, models and concepts are inevitably ambiguous phenomena that can thus be understood and imbued with different meanings by different authors. However, this does not necessarily pose a problem as long as we strive to clearly explain our theoretical premises and what we mean by the central concepts we use.

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