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Information Behaviour. Volume 5 of Age of Access? Fundamental Questions of the Information Society.

Review of Hobohm, H.-C. (2024). *Informationsverhalten. Age of Access? Grundfragen der Informationsgesellschaft, Band 5*. Berlin, Boston: De Gruyter Saur. 444 p. ISBN: 978-3-11-039618-8

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This book, written in German as a volume in a multidisciplinary series on fundamental questions about the information society, reviews many decades of English- and German-language research on information behaviour and broadly related topics such as theoretical bases (e.g. concepts of information and behaviour) and manifestations in actions like seeking and using information. The aim of the book is not to be a textbook for student reading but rather to use a transdisciplinary perspective on information behaviour (IB) to situate it among broader scholarly discussions and to enable such discussions. Paraphrasing the foreword, the intended outcomes are (a) to allow experienced information scholars to see beyond the usual, somewhat narrow inner discourse of IB research and (b) give people from other relevant fields access to that research. A result of the wide view is 444 pages that draw together over 800 sources from many distinct but relevant fields. The author, Hans-Christoph Hobohm, is a Professor Emeritus at the University of Applied Sciences in Potsdam, Germany with three decades of experience in teaching and research in library and information science on topics such as libraries and technology in the digital society, information behaviour, and knowledge management.

The book is organised into three parts following its preface and foreword (7 pages together): (I) Information, (II) Behaviour, (III) Information Behaviour. There is no explicit conclusion.

Part I consists of three chapters (1-3) on information in our world, the study of information, and the conceptualisation of information. Chapter 1, *We can all Google (Wir können alle Google*, pp. 3-29), characterises digital transformation at a societal level and the role of information in various crises (e.g. through concepts like media types and changes, the infosphere, information formats and flooding, information in politics, and information ethics) and presents implications such as information anxiety and the backgrounding of humanity among technology. Chapter 2, *Information Science (Informationswissenschaft*, pp. 30-52) provides an overview of the origins, development, inherited theories, and the identities of information science; it notes for example that its roots were not in behaviour, nor indeed were they originally in *information*, and that its development was influenced heavily by the expansion of information technology. Chapter 3, *Information* (pp. 53-87) closes Part I with an examination of the concept of information, including what it is and/or how it is defined (according to different authors), how it relates to phenomena like data and knowledge, some of its debated properties (e.g. truth and physicality), related concepts such as documents and evolution, and the presence of the concept in other scholarly disciplines.

Part II consists of four chapters (4-7) characterising notable features of (human) behaviour primarily with the works of fields other than IB research. Chapter 4, *Human (Mensch*, pp. 91-123)

presents determinants of human behaviour such as the co-evolution of genes and culture, social factors like cooperation, embodied and semantic cognition, and human psychology alongside characterisations of human behaviour at scale. Chapter 5, *Perceiving (Erkennen)*, pp. 124-152, explores how people make sense of the flood of perceptual information by presenting topics from cognitive and perceptual psychology such as information input, shared communication, multisensory experience, attention, and language. Chapter 6, *Deciding (Entscheiden)*, pp. 153-180, characterises selection and decision as a topic of concern to economic research with examples and ideas from neoliberal economics, information asymmetry, typology of goods, decision theory, rational choice theory, and systems theory among others. Chapter 7, *Practice (Praxis)*, pp. 181-216, abstracts the discussion to a sociological and philosophical level by presenting broadly relevant, established ideas like social prescription and order among humans in society, the information society, sociological and cultural views that centre information, the lifeworld (*Lebenswelt*) of human experience and embodiment, practice theory and praxeology, and theories like actor-network theory and activity theory.

Part III consists of four chapters (8-11) characterising IB via select topics of information science but with return references to some of the ideas introduced in Parts I and II. Chapter 8, *Information Research (Informationsforschung)*, pp. 219-241, situates IB research among many long-familiar information models and theories as well as some discussed in Part I (e.g. theories of German researchers). Chapter 9, *Searching (Suchen)*, pp. 242-286 presents search processes, models, and behaviour in different contexts with component phases and phenomena such as information need, seeking and avoiding, uncertainty and curiosity, evaluation and matching, affect and cognition, pleasure and reward, personality, and barriers. Chapter 10, *Finding (Finden)*, pp. 287-337, presents relatives of search less characterised by intentionality together with further aspects of searching including passive search, monitoring, serendipity and encountering, sense-making, everyday seeking and leisure, information landscapes, information poverty, (bounded) information horizons, triggers, and various characterisations of approaches to finding information (e.g. strolling, wayfinding). Chapter 11, *Using (Nutzen)*, pp. 338-381, examines cases and contexts of information use, such as personal information management (PIM), keeping and remembering, collecting, inscripting and curating, organising, caring/balancing, steering/sculpting, flows of information (in and outwards), connecting, and ultimately experiencing.

Following Part III, the book ends with the references, index, author biography, and an overview of the volumes with which this book forms a series. The other volumes include entries in English on disinformation, media, relevance, digital philology, and attention, and in German on informational justice, accessibility of information of systems, and other topics.

The book achieves its goal of characterising IB and IB research with a wide perspective, and we see the value in doing so through inclusion of foundational concepts not only from within but also from beyond information science. It seems valuable to present IB not only as a concern of information science or as specific groups' information needs, sources, and challenges. By doing so the book demonstrates the relevance of IB research to many scholarly disciplines and vice versa, especially those concerned with human behaviour that IB research often declines to build upon. We are unaware of any other German-language review of IB that is so extensive and wide-reaching nor of any work that organises so many ideas relevant to IB. Such may be useful to information scientists who (read German and) wish to see how IB (the phenomenon) transcends their disciplinary boundaries or to those working in other fields who wish to (e.g.) explore how IB is relevant to their work but need to approach it via familiar ideas. We also find it valuable that the book summarises works of scholars or topics whose literature have been published mostly in German (e.g. Rainer Kühlen's) and those that do not always intersect with or get picked up by international discussions on parallel topics (e.g. work on *Informationsdidaktik*); these summaries may increase the visibility of such work to the benefit of scientific discourse in any language.

The breadth of work covered comes with some drawbacks, namely that synthesis and narrative are constrained and that when big ideas make small appearances one may have the experience of reading many *Zettelkasten*, or organised notes, in succession without a clear takeaway. The chapters' brief opening statements and closing core statements (*Kernsätze*) together help the reader return to the big picture but the nature of some noted and implied connections and particularly the implications (for IB and for the other fields) could nonetheless be clearer and more narrated. There are many existing overviews of information behaviour published in German and in English (e.g. Given, Case, and Willson's classic *Looking for Information*, 2023, and Hobohm's own recent handbook chapter, 2024) and of the topics reviewed within the book (e.g. Jones et al.'s encyclopaedic chapter on PIM, 2017), which by virtue of their narrower scope can provide more complete reflections of the topics and further commentary on foundations, trends, and connections. And although not everything can be included in one book, sometimes breadth was also lost where it contemporary additions to the presented scholarly discourses could have helped form the broader perspectives; examples include social and critical ideas and voices within PIM discourse, notable critiques of the presented views of the concept of information, considerations of (commercial) algorithmic information systems as co-constitutive of social practices and knowledge regimes, and not least the work – in both German and English – of Lewandowski (2021, 2023) and colleagues on search engines and their use. For the book to distinguish itself not as a compendium or (expert) annotated bibliography but rather as a compelling thesis to open transdisciplinary connections, further synthesis and narrative would be valuable, especially but not only through a concluding chapter that follows up on the promise of such connections or hints how such may be done in light of the body of the book (analogous to a discussion of results). That would of course require more space or further limiting the scope of the topic or breadth of the perspective.

German-language reviews of the book identify similar limitations (Cicek et al., 2025) but nonetheless recommend that the book be translated into English (Griesbaum, 2025). A translated and updated version would provide the opportunity to address the limitations, possibly by further balancing depth with breadth rather than expanding. Doing so would of course widen the audience of the book, which, if a wide of view of and interaction with information behaviour research is desirable, can only be a good thing.

Jesse Dinneen, Jutta Haider

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