A comparative analysis of web information seeking behavior among students and staff at the University of Zululand and Durban University of Technology

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This study examines web information seeking behavior among students and staff at the University of Zululand and Durban University of Technology. The aim of the study is to comprehensively understand web information seeking behavior in higher education with the intention that it can serve as a theoretical and professional base for user-centered services and system designs. Integrating user-centered information seeking support into the design of web information services has for long been the aim of user studies. An attempt is made to identify a range of web information seeking/searching behaviors inherent in the higher education environment. The literature review has the following objectives; to understand what web information seeking behavior is, how it is manifested, channels used, challenges faced and the nature of information sought with particular reference to higher education. Rapid technological developments in the higher-education sector have resulted in greater reliance on end-user searching (Bains 1997:n.p). The pace of change in the academic sector, in particular, has been rapid. Patitungkho and Deshpande (2001: n.p) argue that “The increase in information available on the Web has affected information seeking behavior. As the number of available web information retrieval systems and their use is proliferating, knowledge and understanding of users’ information seeking has become increasingly significant. According to Siatri (1998:n.p) taking into account the constant development in the provision of recent electronic systems, the lack of understanding of the information seeking behavior poses an obstacle in the process of interpreting the way in which the electronic information services are being delivered. Carr (2006:n.p) observes that the emergence of information resources in electronic form especially, the advent and pervasive dominance of the Internet serves further to accelerate this new and welcome emphasis on giving prominence to the wants of users, since students and academics generally are beginning to adopt very different forms of information-seeking behavior. Information seeking on the World Wide Web and how information services delivered via the World Wide Web influence behavior as they continue to permeate the work and leisure spaces of students and staff significantly in institutions of higher learning is central to this study.