

Effects of contextual factors on information searching on the web by postgraduate students at Kerman University of Medical Sciences

Abstract

Background and Objectives: The huge volume of information on the web, the diversity of information formats and users with a wide range of information needs, all are making information retrieval complicated. In this regard, the contextual factors including the goals, experience and topic familiarity play an important role in the process of search and retrieval on the Web. This paper aims to determine the influence of contextual factors on searching information on the Web by postgraduate students at Kerman University of Medical Sciences. This study examines how contextual factors influence search tactics and a user 's perception of the search results.

Methods: This is practical study and a cross-sectional (descriptive-analytical). Data was collected using questionnaires and log files. Thirty postgraduates were selected by simple sampling. The subjects were free to choose a subject and their search behavior was recorded by Camtasia Studio 7.1.0 to determine the tactics used and time duration. Before starting the search, they were asked some demographic questions, as well as information about contextual factors, including goals, topic familiarity and searching expertise and after finishing the search, they filled out a questionnaire about ease of use, usefulness, confidence, satisfaction and relevance judgment. Descriptive and analytical statistics were used to analyze data by SPSS 19 software.

Results: The findings indicated the participants (93.3 percent) use Google, short queries were more used than long queries, advanced search options were used rarely (43.3 percent), and the participant view few searches result pages. According to the findings, navigating tactic was primarily used by the participants. Among different aspects user 's perception of the search results, ease of use and relevance judgments were significantly different based on the contextual factors. According to the results, the contextual factors significantly influenced on the search tactics (including search time, querying and navigating) and a user 's perception of the search

results (including ease of use, satisfaction and relevance judgment), whereas scanning, extracting, and confidence were less affected by the contextual factors.

Conclusions: The results showed that the information search process on the web is influenced by contextual factors. The study includes implications for database and information retrieval systems designers. Since training and experience in search leads in more efficient results, it is suggested to train students, on the other hand, the interfaces should match the user's needs.

Keywords: Contextual factors, Information-seeking behavior, Query analysis, Web, Postgraduate students.