Identification of a dynamic ethos within a dispersed information-dependent community: Computational discourse analysis of *The American Gardner* publication

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The proposed dissertation research intends to examine ethos as a dynamic concept within the dispersed information-dependent community of American gardeners. Accepting Foucault's (1972) concept that it is through discourse that the meaning of things is created, I theorize that it is similarly true that it is through discourse that ethos is created within a dispersed information-dependent community. As such, I suggest that the ethos of a dispersed information-dependent community can be identified within its primary means of discourse. Based on this, my dissertation research will examine the ethos of the dispersed information-dependent American gardening community by analyzing its primary discourse — *The American Gardner* — the member publication of the American Horticultural Society, the largest and oldest gardening organization in the United States.

The study builds on Savolainen's (1995) call to extend information behavior research to the everyday life domain and adopts Hartel's (2003) use of Stebbins' (1982) serious leisure concept, which found that a unique ethos develops around some information-dependent forms of leisure. Previous information behavior research in the leisure community domain has stopped with simply concluding that a community ethos exists by identifying the presence of some form of a social network. However, such an approach fails to identify the exact nature of the community ethos. This, combined with the generally small-scale ethnographic approaches favored by current information behavior research, has led to an unexamined assumption that ethos is a static concept. In contrast, the proposed research argues that the ethos of a dispersed information-dependent community is dynamic in nature as it changes over time and is influenced by the opinions of various community actors.

The proposed study will take a novel approach to information behavior research by examining a dispersed information-dependent leisure community's archived textual discourse as evidence of its ethos. The data for this study will consist of the entire print run of *The American Gardner* magazine from 1922-2022, which encompasses 100 years of discourse and identifies the specific community actors engaged in that discourse. Drawing on the features of ethos identified by Stebbins (1982) – special beliefs, moral principles, norms, values, and performance standards – the proposed study will operationalize each as textual features and apply a mixed methods approach to identify each within the data. Results will be analyzed longitudinally and categorically based on specific community actors to assess community ethos as a dynamic concept. In doing so, the research will employ a variety of text and statistical analyses, including word frequency analysis, topic modeling, sentiment analysis, regression modeling, trend analysis, and effect estimation.

While the proposed research's primary intent and thus contribution is identifying community ethos as a dynamic instead of static concept, the study will nonetheless make additional contributions to both the information behavior and serious leisure domains. First, it will reinforce Stebbins' (1982) and Hartel's (2003) arguments that some forms of leisure activity are information-dependent and that communication and use of information between members allows for the creation of a unique ethos around these activities, especially within dispersed communities. Second, it will expand the means by which community ethos can be assessed within the domain, from the simple identification of a social network to a thorough description of the characteristics specific to a given community's ethos. Finally, the proposed study will demonstrate a technique by which information behavior research can move beyond the limits of small-scale ethnographic study to investigate information behavior within Savolainen's (1995) everyday life domain using large archival information datasets to incorporate longitudinal changes as a factor of information behavior.

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