

## “Knitting keeps my mind sharp and my fingers nimble”: Knitters’ information seeking and sharing during the COVID lockdown

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### EXTENDED ABSTRACT

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#### Topic

This paper reports the initial results of an ongoing study about the information seeking and sharing patterns of knitters during the first year of the COVID pandemic. Knitting is a creative and inexpensive hobby that possesses all the six qualities of *serious leisure*, which are: perseverance and commitment, the potentiality to turn into a career, significant personal effort based on specific knowledge, durable personal and social benefits, unique ethos within a social world and developing new identities associated with the chosen activity (Stebbins, 1982). Almost forty years of research shows engagement in serious leisure activities (e.g. hobbies, amateurism, and volunteering) brings a range of physical, mental, and emotional benefits for the leisure pursuers. These benefits range from pure pleasure and a sense of fulfilment to self-actualisation and a sense of belonging (Heo et al., 2013; Riley, 2013; Kim et al., 2014; Corkhill et. al, 2014; Liu and Yu, 2015; Mansourian, 2021). However, serious leisure always happens in a context and several contextual elements can potentially boost or hinder leisure engagement. For example, during the COVID lockdown, group activities like outdoor hobbies faced various limitations. Nonetheless, indoor hobbies such as gardening and cooking increased in one way or another as people had more free time at home (Ling, 2020; Young, 2020). On the other hand, engagement in any hobbies or amateur activity, especially for beginners, requires access to some forms of information to learn the required knowledge and skills. Therefore, serious leisure is usually an information-rich context and the participants need to actively seek, search, organise, share and produce information about their hobbies or voluntary activities.

Regarding the restrictions of the lockdown, online information was the only option for many. As a result, most hobbyists and amateurs used online resources to satisfy their information needs during the lockdown. Knitters were not an exception, and they also used digital platforms such as YouTube, Facebook, and Instagram. As knitting is a craft, watching tutorial videos is an effective way of learning the necessary skills. Therefore, YouTube has always been a popular platform for knitters, and during the lockdown, it was even more popular. This study aims to discover how knitters seek and share information via YouTube and to what extent it is a rich information source. Also, it aims to find out to what extent they found this hobby an effective coping strategy to deal with the pandemic's stress and the role of information seeking and sharing in achieving this goal.

### **Value of the contribution**

Information science scholars adopted the *Serious Leisure Perspective* (Stebbins, 1982) as a theoretical framework to understand human information behaviour in the leisure context. They observed information behaviour patterns of various groups of hobbyists and amateurs to identify their information needs, information-seeking patterns, and how they produce information about their hobbies. So far, they have researched several groups such as music record collectors (Margree et al., 2014), genealogists (Fulton, 2005, 2016), basketball Twitters (Sanchez, 2020), music fans (Bronstein and Lidor, 2020) and knitting groups (Prigoda and McKenzie, 2007; Lampitt Adey, 2016). These studies formed a body of knowledge to explain how people seek, share, and produce information during their leisure time. Nonetheless, our understanding of their information behaviour in some situations is still limited. For example, we do not know how they seek and share information during a long-term crisis such as the COVID pandemic. More importantly, we still need to understand how their hobbies help them deal with the crisis and to what extent their information skills are significant for their success in that situation. The current study contributes to this area by providing evidence from publicly available data to address these questions. It will inform policymakers and information practitioners to have a more realistic view of human information behaviour during a crisis.

### **Research outline**

The current study is based on a sample of user-generated content posted by knitters across the world in response to the most popular knitting videos on YouTube posted during the first year of the COVID pandemic (March 2020 to March 2021). User-generated content is a common data collection technique in a range of research areas such as marketing, tourism, and hospitality (Lu and Stepchenkova, 2015; Narangajavana Kaosiri et al., 2019; Arora & Lata, 2020).

To identify the most relevant and most visited videos, the researcher searched YouTube with a combination of keywords such as “knitting AND lockdown”, “knitting AND pandemic”, “knitting for beginners”, “crochet during lockdown”. He sorted the result based on the number of visits and focused on the top ten items in each search. In each video, the top 100 comments were selected. If a video had less than 100 comments, all the comments were included in the sample. Based on this formula, the sample included 748 comments from ten popular knitting video. The unit of analysis was sentences, and single-word comments (e.g. excellent, wonderful, etc.) were removed from the analysis. The remaining comments were analysed based on a qualitative thematic analysis method to identify the main themes and patterns embedded in the data (Schreier, 2019).

### **Findings**

Most of the vloggers (video bloggers) and commenters were female knitters engaged in knitting to enjoy a meaningful, creative, and challenging hobby. They seek and share online information about various aspects of knitting and crocheting. They are usually passionate about their hobby and enjoy a sense of fulfilment. They found knitting and crocheting beneficial for their mental health and wellbeing, which is compatible with the existing evidence from the literature (e.g. Riley et al., 2013; Lampitt Adey, 2016, 2018; Court, 2020).

In addition to information seeking and sharing, some of them began vlogging (video blogging) during the lockdown. Some of the vlogs were popular with hundreds of thousands of viewers, and some received only a few hundred views. Nonetheless, most visitors were actively engaged with the contents in both cases, as they mostly reacted positively to the videos, and most of their comments were supportive and appreciative. Their comments indicate they typically found the contents helpful. Most viewers passionately share their information with others and usually receive several answers to each question. The findings also suggest that knitting as a creative, relaxing, and challenging hobby has been helpful for them to deal with the lockdown stress.

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