Everyday Serendipity as Described in Social Media

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Abstract Serendipity has received much attention from library and information science, psychology, and computer science. Yet not much is known about serendipity in the context of everyday information behavior. In general, a key challenge in the study of serendipity is obtaining accounts of serendipitous experiences that provide insight into the phenomenon. The exploratory research reported here approaches this problem by examining naturally occurring descriptions of serendipity as found on blogs. The paper shows how these data can be collected, stored, and analyzed. We also discuss strengths of the proposed approach in comparison to the use of descriptions elicited in controlled settings for the purposes of research. Through a grounded theory approach, we develop a model of serendipity that can inform the design of information systems. The paper contributes to the LIS field by discussing an alternative data collection method for serendipity research, outlining a tentative conceptual model of serendipity, and showing the utility of this model for the analysis of everyday accounts of serendipity found on blogs.

Goals
1: test the effectiveness of an alternative data collection method for serendipity research;
2: propose a conceptual model that outlines the facets of serendipity;
3: better understand serendipity in the context of everyday information behavior.

Data Collection Method
To gain naturally occurring accounts of serendipity:
• Constructed 47 queries
• Searches in GoogleBlog (04/10 – current)
• Obtained large numbers of potentially relevant reports
• Reviewed and identified rich descriptions
• Total current dataset: 94 accounts

Sample Queries
1: “I wasn’t actively looking for sales when I found my findings. I stopped at a whim. Both times we were on a family outing, when I spotted a sign and asked to stop.”
2: “At one particular estate, I was getting ready to pay for my broken vintage jewelry treasures when the cashier asked me if I make jewelry. “YES”, I said and elaborated, “Not only that, but I have friends who also make jewelry and other things out of bits and pieces of pretty vintage things.” The cashier proceeded to pull out a box full of findings. She offered them to me at a price I couldn’t refuse.
3: “My findings…at a whim. Both times we were on a family outing, when I spotted a sign and asked to stop.”

Conclusions
• We confirm that bloggers reflect upon their experiences and circumstances of serendipitous encounters, allowing researchers to construct a rich data set on serendipity from productions in social media environments.
• The collected data strengths
  1) they are freely and publicly available online
  2) created by bloggers independently of the study, and
  3) are written by self-motivated writers for an unknown audience.

References