



serendipity

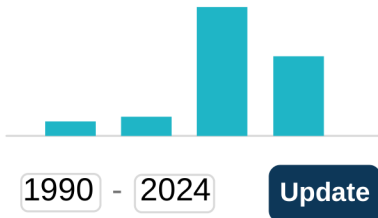


Related terms: information encountering; opportunistic discovery of information; incidental information acquisition

Etymology

British writer Horace Walpole proposed the word "serendipity" to his friend Horace Mann in 1754 after reading *The Travels and Adventures of the Three Princes of Serendip*. He described the titular princes as "always making discoveries by accidents and sagacity, of things they were not in quest of" (Wikipedia).

Publication Date



Disciplines

- Human computer interaction
 - Organizational psychology
 - Business management
- [See more...](#)

Related Articles

Serendipity in human information behavior: a systematic review

Liu et al., Journal of Documentation, 2022

Investigating serendipity: How it unfolds and what may influence it

McCay-Peet & Toms, JASIST, 2015

Serendipity: Towards a taxonomy and a theory

2018



Ohid Yaqub



- Mertonian: "solution ... via an unexpected route" (p. 171)
- Bushian: e.g. re-purposing of drugs approved for existing uses
- Stephanian: "answers to questions not yet posed" (Paula Stephan, 2010, p. 232)

Is there a targeted line of enquiry?	Yes: Searching with a defined problem in mind	What type of solution did the discovery lead to?	
		Solution of the given problem	Solution of a different problem
		Mertonian serendipity	Walpolian serendipity
	No: Searching with no particular problem in mind	Solution of a pre-existing problem	Solution waiting for a problem
		Bushian serendipity	Stephanian serendipity

Information encountering re-encountered: A conceptual re-examination of serendipity in the context of information acquisition

2020



Sanda Erdelez,

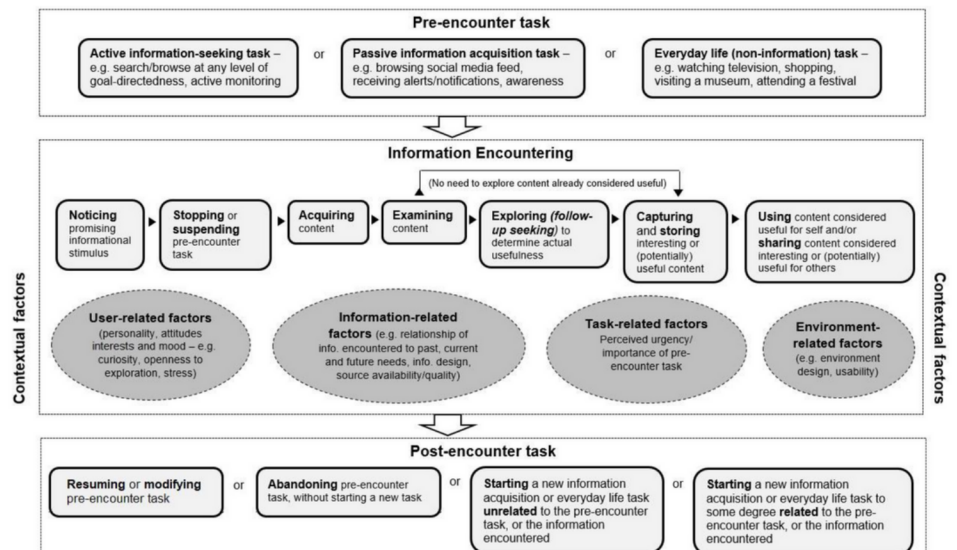


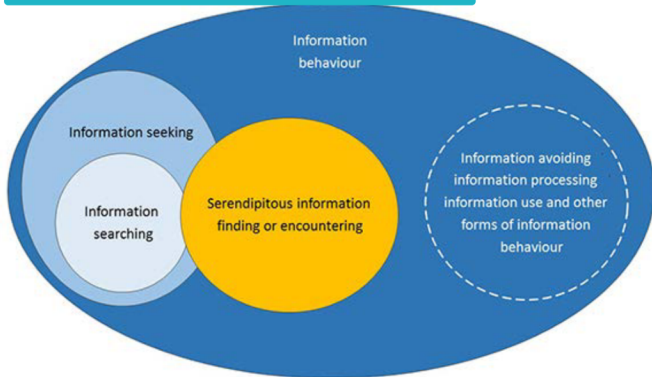
Stephann Makri



IE happens in context (of the user, of their environment, etc) as an interruption that may or may not end in a return to the initial task.

- expands Erdelez's 1997 and 2005 process models to be inclusive of concepts from other emerging models of IE and HIB
- **Critique:** continued difficulty for measuring and researching the phenomenon beyond qualitative self-reporting





Serendipity suffers from differing and overlapping definitions and models with similar elements but different scopes or considerations:

“parallel development of models that incorporate serendipity at different levels of conceptual granularity [leads to] an incomplete understanding of its nature”

ERDELEZ & MAKRI (2020, P. 1)

Historical Examples

- Penicillin
- Potato washing machines
- Stars in galaxies spin in varying directions

Have you had a serendipitous moment?

“When did this event of bumping into information happen?”
(Erdelez 1995, p. 161)

Applying the Models

A group interview is asked to think of as many uses as possible for a set of randomized items. At first, the students offer simple suggestions, like playing “don’t touch the floor” with the balloon. One student suggests an egg race with the plastic egg and spoon. Another suggests playing catch with the tennis ball. Both hand their items to our exemplar student at the same time. Our student has an ‘aha’ moment and suggests a variation of the egg race using the plastic egg, the tennis ball, and the balloon.

During the debrief, the student describes it as **serendipity**: she was in the context of wanting to use all the items and had heard the other, related ideas (**prepared mind**); she happened to be passed items at the same time (**surprise, chance, or accident**); she thought that it would be funny to try to balance the tennis ball on the spoon (**noticing and capturing**); the idea was praised by her peers during the interview (**valuable or favourable outcome**).

Wise Agent Model of Serendipity



Vanessa Chan

Where a **wise agent** in the **context** of factors including their personal knowledge, disciplinary and sociocultural background, and previous research and experience **makes a new connection or idea** when they **do not expect to** or based on information they **did not intend to** encounter.

