

Information seeking behavior of an Opera Enthusiast

INTRODUCTION

The Opera Enthusiast information community is defined by its shared interest in the world of opera. In order to examine the information behavior of the Opera Enthusiast information community, one member was interviewed. The interviewee is a 35-year old high school music teacher who lives in Oklahoma.

INTERVIEW

Question: What is your interest in the world of opera?

Answer: I studied classical voice at Manhattan School of Music. I intended to become a professional opera singer, but I got married and had a family. My husband and I left New York City when we started our family. I became a music teacher, which is a much more reliable and practical career than singing! But I still consider myself an opera singer, and I like to keep up on what's happening in the opera world.

Question: Where do you get information regarding opera?

Answer: Well, I do have a subscription to Classical Singer magazine, but I get most information from the Internet. Since there are not a lot of live productions in my area, I like to watch broadcasts online. There are a few opera companies who offer free broadcasts, but you have to know where to look, because they are usually available for a limited amount of time. Also, I enjoy reading one blog in particular. He is a professional opera reviewer, and is very knowledgeable, but he is also opinionated and hilarious. His blog attracts tons of opera aficionados.

Question: What types of information sources are the most useful to you?

Answer: I don't know if I would use the word 'useful,' but I like to visit websites that contain opera reviews. They keep me up on who is doing what, and who are the new and hot singers and directors. And, as I said before, I read a blog several times a week. If there is anything interesting happening, it will be in the blog. I'm not sure I actually 'use' this information in my job as a high school teacher or in my daily life, but I feel that it keeps me connected.

Question: Which websites do you visit, and how often do you visit them?

Answer: I visit Opera Today about once a week. It's a news site. Parterre is the blog I like. I probably check in a few times a week. Those are the two that I visit regularly. Then I go to other sites for broadcasts, but they're not always the same ones.

Question: Do you participate in any forums or discussions, or do you contribute information in other ways?

Answer: Usually I just read the discussions and comments. Once in a while, if I know the answer to somebody's question, I comment. But not often.

Question: Do you feel that you are part of a community with other opera enthusiasts?

Answer: Yes, I do. These people are very knowledgeable about opera, and I appreciate that. We understand each other because all of us have either been through rigorous training, or have been dedicated and passionate fans. It's not something you come across every day. I feel that there is a part of me that lives through this community.

DISCUSSION

The responses of the interviewee indicate that opera enthusiasts require information on a daily basis. Members of this community seek information within the context of their interest in opera performances, news, recordings, events, and other

related material. Therefore, their information behavior can be considered as everyday life information seeking (ELIS) as described by Savolainen (2009). The Information Search Process (ISP) is carried out primarily on the Internet. New information is assimilated with previous knowledge by each member, and creates a new, more complete view of the contemporary world of opera (Kuhlthau 1991). Rather than obtaining all information in one place, opera enthusiasts gather bits of information from various sources. Bates calls this type of behavior "berrypicking" (2009, p. 2393).

The interviewee indicates that opera enthusiasts enjoy participating as members of a small world in which there are implicit understandings. There is a shared language, with terminology that relates to opera music, voice types, composers, directors, opera companies, styles, singers, etc. This is a typical feature of Chatman's Theory of Life in the Round (Fulton 2010).

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