

A PILOT STUDY OF INTERNATIONAL STUDENTS' ONLINE HEALTH INFORMATION SEEKING BEHAVIOURS

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INTRODUCTION

UNESCO Institute for Statistics defines international students as "students who have crossed a national or territorial border for the purpose of education and are now enrolled outside their country of origin" (Sin et al, 2013, p.107). For international students, information retrieval in a second language is an informal learning process.

Health ranks second in the daily information needs of international students (Sin et al, 2013, p.111). The internet has become a health information platform satisfying multiple purposes. Numerous resources focus on international students and health information seeking respectively, however, only a few studies focus on international students' capacity for using online health information

Research Objectives

- 1) Investigate international students' awareness of online health information
- 2) Investigate searching behaviours of international students
- 3) Investigate the relationship of English ability and searching success

RESEARCH METHODS

A survey was conducted online and distributed on Dalhousie Halifax Campus.

- **Demographic information** (gender, age, and study level)
- **English language abilities** (length of stay in Canada and English environment in participants' home countries)
- **Online health information searching behaviours** (Preferred sources to start research, online health information search frequency, search language, search motivations, information credibility, searching tutorials, and primary barriers)

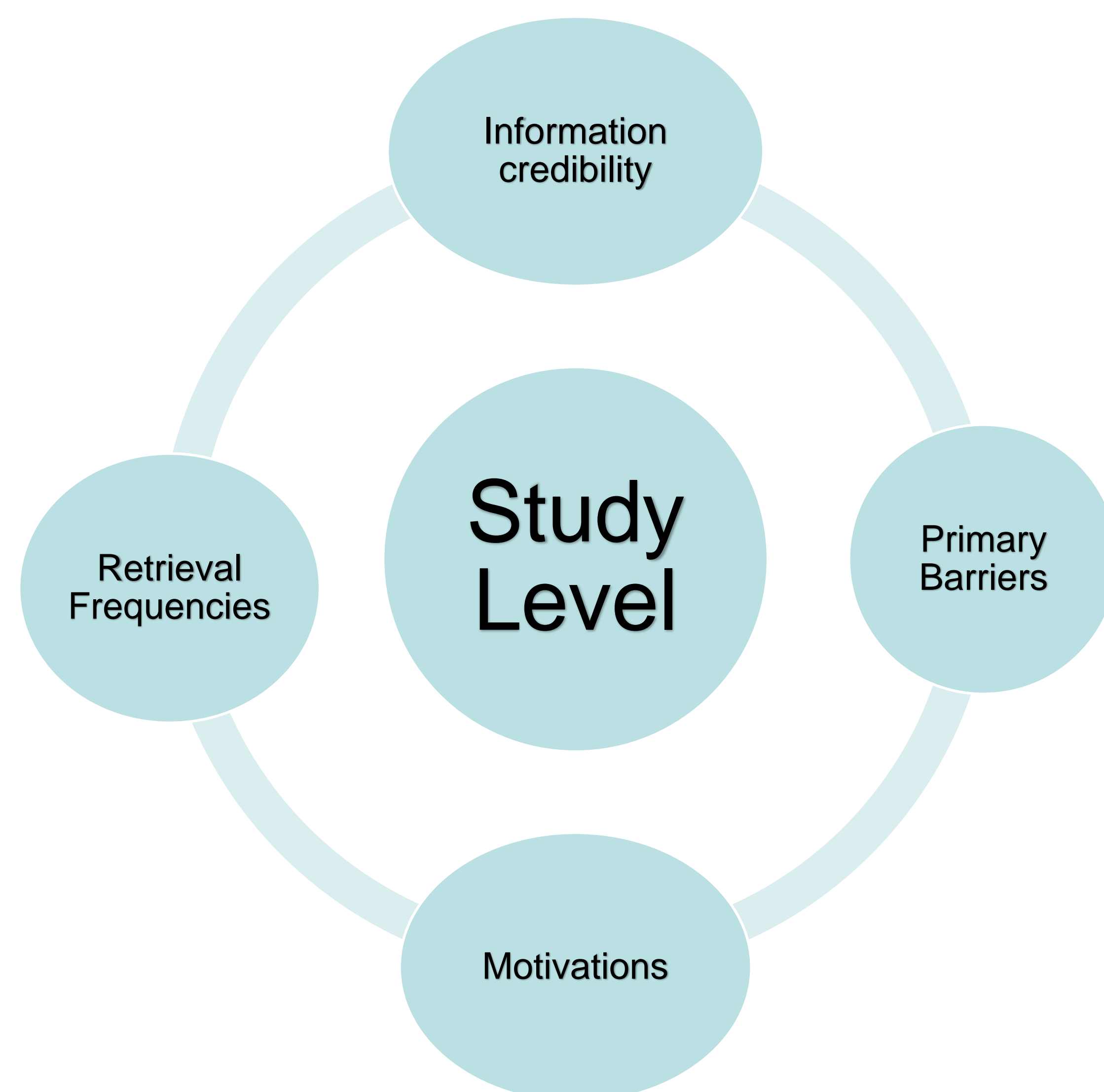


Chart 1 Key analysis of investigated factors

PARTICIPANTS

Sample Size	N = 53	F: 34%	M: 66%	Others: 0%
Age Range	18-22 38%	23-27 43%	28-32 13%	> 32 6%
Study Level	ESL 2%	Undergraduate 39%	Graduate 53%	Ph.D. 6%
English Environment in Home Countries	Non-English 62%		English 38%	
length of stay in Canada	<6 months 19%	6-12 months 26%	1-4 years 38%	> 4 years 17%

RESULTS

O(1): investigate international students' awareness of online health information

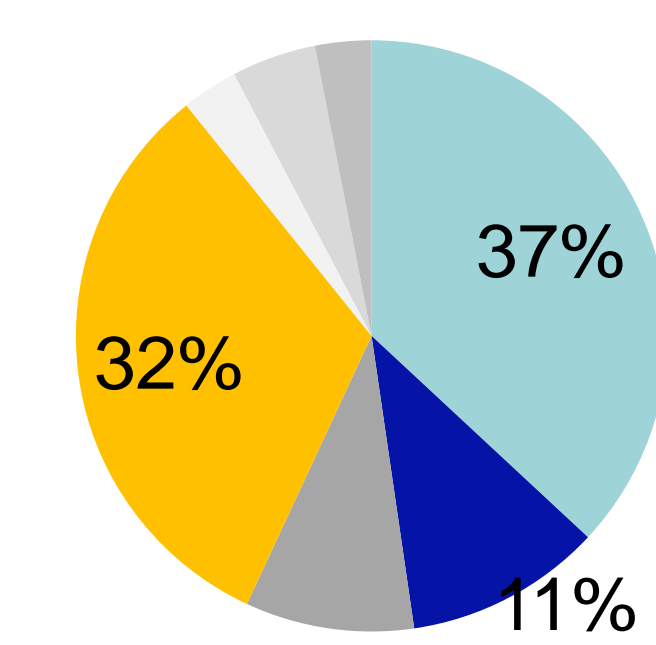
1. Participants (both female and male) with **higher degrees** tend to search health information on the web more **frequently** and share similar preferences.
2. There are **no correlations** between study levels and concern in online **information credibility or quality**.

RESULTS (CONT)

O(2): investigate searching behaviours of international students

O(3): investigate the relationship of English ability and searching success

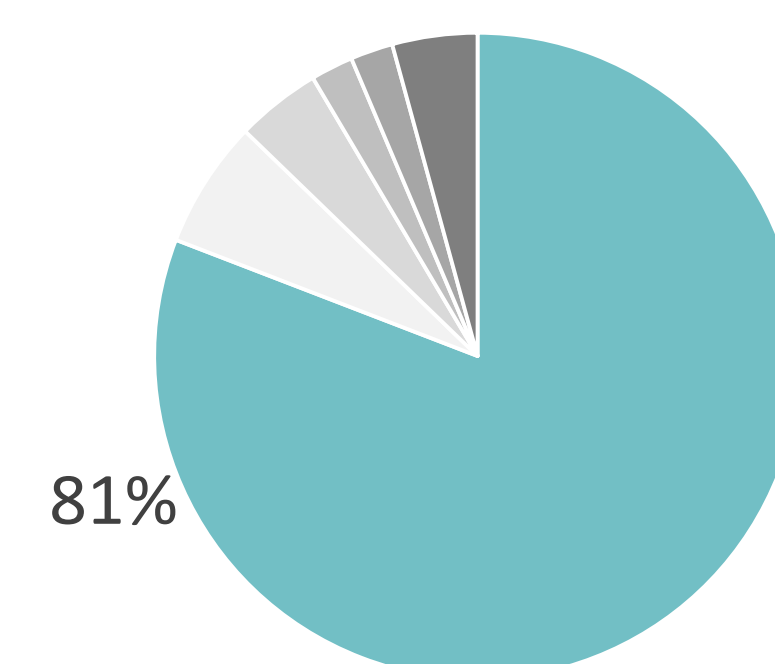
1. Chart 2 Top three motivations for searching online health information



- A. Look for information about medical treatment
- B. Look up drug information
- D. Maintain well-being and prevent diseases

Impacts of language: English-speaking undergraduate participants have a significantly higher rate on looking for drug information

2. Chart 3 Preferred information sources to start Online health information



- A. Search engines (e.g. Google)

Impacts of language: Non-English speaking participants have more diverse preferences for information sources.

References

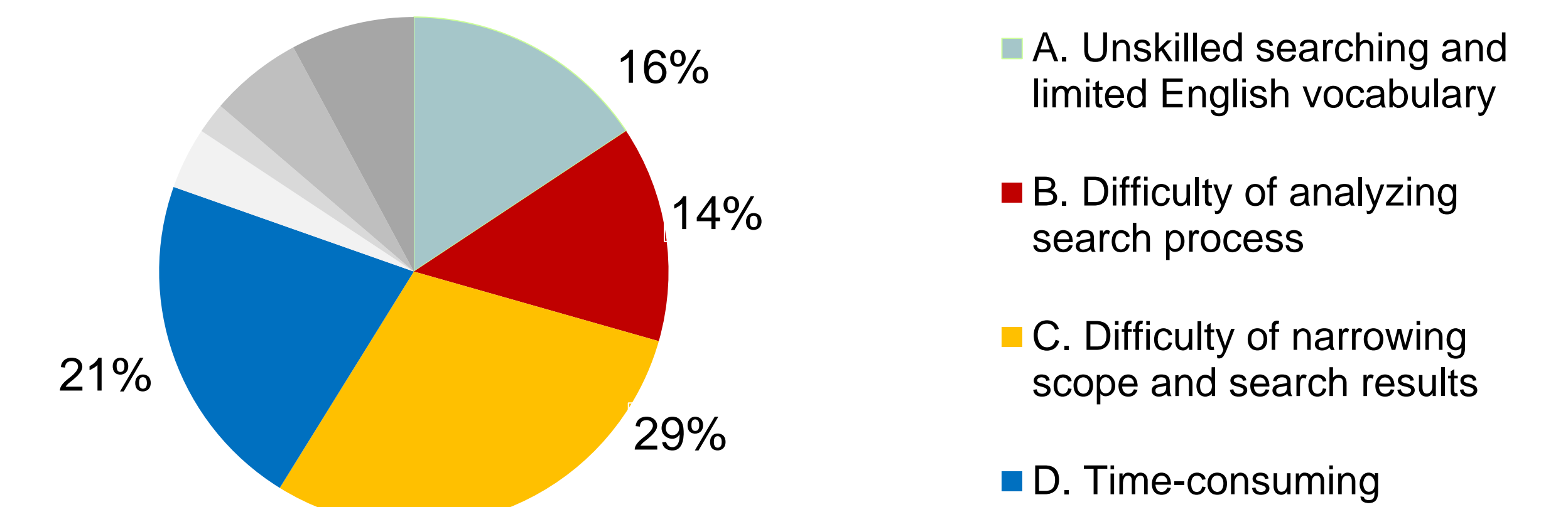
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RESULTS (CONT)

O(2): investigate searching behaviours of international students

O(3): investigate the relationship of English ability and searching success

3. Chart 4 Top barriers of searching online health information



Impacts of language : Non-English speaking undergraduate participants are more affected by their language abilities.

Barriers across study levels : 1) Difficulty of narrowing scope and search results 2) time consuming

4. **length of stay in Canada** does not impact participants' searching.

5. **Searching tutorial** receives **low** reviewing rate among participants (77%).

DISCUSSIONS

1. The prevalence of search engines may be related to flourishing grey literature market on the Internet (Schöpfel, 2007, p.1).
2. Grey literature has problems with classification, interface and information. Libraries' standard cataloguing and literacy guidance may contribute to smooth searching experience (Sampson, 2009, p947).
3. Health information searching is probably not viewed as important as intensive academic studies which take up most of participants' time and energy.
4. Over confidence and substantial amount of online information may cause misjudgments on the result of information retrieval, particularly for native English speakers (Fleisig, 2011, p.739).
5. Compared with academic studies, professional development significantly reshapes searching behaviours regarding the relationship of time, available information and task performance (MacDonald, 2011, p256).
6. Unskilled searching behaviours may be related to low review rate of search tutorials

CONCLUSIONS

- International students are aware of online health information sources, however, emphasis on information's ease of use and flexible access may affect their searching experience.
- Proficiency of English ability enhances searching effectiveness, while non-English speaking participants tend to use diverse channels to compensate for language problems.
- Information organization is important for smooth searching experience of both native English speakers and non-English speakers.

Limitations: This study does not investigate the impacts of urban environment, university education, personal traits and cross-cultural adaptation.

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