Situated within a widely recognized access-to-justice public legal education framework, this research sought to uncover the information seeking and use behaviours of Canadians resolving their own knowledge gaps in support. The research followed cellphone consumers (CCs) within the context of post purchase problem-solving, with particular focus on how CCs select, access and use particular information resources to resolve their own issues in real time.

**FINDINGS**

**Information Uses**

How CCs purposefully search for information to change their own state of knowledge, including: how they used their phone as a tool; how they located various types of information; and what information they prioritized. Responses were then set into three sub-categories: device functionality, social information gathering and targeted information seeking.

**Device Functionality (Internal)**

CCs had clear expectations about how their phones would function. They were generally satisfied with their phones until the device functionality impacted the ease of information use across platforms, often related to a shortage of data availability or limited internal memory. If there were issues with the device functionality - be it through the plan, the hardware or the apps therein - CCs expected the information on optimizing device functionality to come directly from the service provider or app developer without prompting. This internal expectation on such information came up consistently. CCs also sought out seamless integration of information across all device software and selected information pathways others would likely be using; where information was not able to be shared easily across modalities - they would cease using that path.

**Social Information Gathering**

While many CCs indicated they found directly seeking information about their social networks in person (by asking outright) or over a telephone call intrusive, they almost all engaged in daily social information gathering using the apps on their phone to gather emails, local news updates, general information about their social or professional peers and to coordinate schedules with their families. They noted the preference to conduct social information gathering on the phone versus a lap top or tablet, noting ease of use, discretion and portability. When problems with the information they received arose, they would move from this category of general social information gathering to more targeted searches using anonymous forums.

**Targeted information seeking (external)**

As problems arose for the CCs, irrespective of the type of information they required – be it device related, a concern about social information or knowledge gaps – they turned to online social forums to get detailed reviews from other consumers, share knowledge and rate their own experiences. This real-time feedback was preferred over direct communication with Telecoms and was largely seen as a more trustworthy source of information.

**Common Motivations**

Many CCs expressed a tension between the need NOT to be one of “those people” tied to their phone all the time and ignoring their loved ones, but simultaneously explained in detail how they constantly maintain connectivity 24 hours/day - even sleeping with their phones. There seems to be a constant tension for CCs in trying to find the right balance between digitally connected and physically accessible.

**Conflicting Priorities**

CCs had clear expectations about how their phone would function. They were generally satisfied with their phones until the device functionality impacted the ease of information use across platforms, often related to a shortage of data availability or limited internal memory. If there were issues with the device functionality - be it through the plan, the hardware or the apps therein - CCs expected the information on how to optimize device functionality to come directly from the provider or app developer without prompting. This internal expectation on such information came up consistently. CCs also sought out seamless integration of information across all device software, whether others would likely be using it, or they would select another information pathway.

**Literature**


**DISCUSSION: Bridging the Legal Knowledge Gap**

People need real help to navigate and resolve their legal problems. Yet, no tools currently exist to teach the public how to identify or access information resources to empower themselves to perceive “injurious experiences” and take action. Through this iterative content analysis with consumers of telecommunications, we were given a lens for understanding information seeking pathways and information behaviour. Our findings indicate that consumers prefer to conduct general direct information seeking on their own, using text based online mediums. Rather than telephone or in-person support, the most valued sources of information used were those forums that provided real-time peer lead feedback literature centered information and where good information could be voted up, and bad information would be voted down. This suggests that a moderated online social forum, dedicated to sharing legal experiences, questions or issues would be the tool of choice for the public, especially one that could be customized by various legal services offering support to the public. The ability to access such a forum at any time while remaining anonymous would likely increase overall engagement with legal information, as would ensuring that such centralized forum of reliable content could be fully accessed from a mobile phone and not only from a private computer. Finally, as all consumers in the sample prioritized simplicity and ease of use, the development and implementation of any shared space tool for public legal services would need to be customized. Neatly customized would not be practice area, that is as only simpler for those with some level of legal knowledge, but by the type of users of a given legal service that is providing the tool. Ultimately, it is by understanding how people are accessing front-end legal information in their shared-individualized contexts, that the jarring public legal knowledge gaps can be bridged by real-time client-centered legal support.