MAPPING THE INFORMATION NEEDS AND ISSUES OF CANADA'S CELLPHONE CONSUMERS
Bridging the Legal Knowledge Gap with Consumer-Driven Information Pathways

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1 PROBLEM STATEMENT

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.

2 METHODOLOGY

Total interviews (17)
-1 incomplete-
English: 10
French: 6

Service providers
Rogers: 4
Bell: 4
Telus: 1
Koodo: 5
Others: 2

MAINSTREAM 7
• Prioritizing iPhone culture & identity
• Collaborative Tech Needs
• 24/7 Access to Social Media

TECH SAVVY 5
• Prioritizing Android or Non-iPhone culture
• Comparative Tech Needs
• Security and Privacy

SECONDARY USERS 4
• Prioritizing Lowest Cost
• Need for Ease of Transactions
• Self-directed general searching

Iterative Content Analysis

The research methodology pulled qualitative and quantitative content analysis from a data set of 17 English and French CCs information interview transcripts generated by a class of graduate students in Information Studies at the University of Ottawa. The interviews were initially coded for inductive text analysis and overall interpretation, then sub-coding was identified and refined through inter-coder reliability intervals for language consistency and topic accuracy. The results indicated a strong preference across profile types for independently searchable peer-based support forums where issues could be discussed and resolved in real time. These findings provided the foundational understanding of the preferred user-based framework which will be used to develop a multi-dimensional concept map and frontline tool to support the public legal access- to-justice system in phase two.

Limitations

The small sample of 17 made it difficult to find significant relationships from the data, as a larger sample size would be needed to ensure a more representative distribution of the population. Notably the method itself also had some limitations as the interviewers were not consistently asking the same questions, though broad topic categories remained consistent. As such, some key questions were not asked to all participants and in retrospect, providing a question grid could have helped address particular issues around profile sub-types that emerged later in the study. Finally, it must be acknowledged that this remains self-interpreted data and thus may be limited by researcher bias.

Literature

Abrahamson, J. A. & Fisher, K. E. (2007). "What's past is prologue': towards a general model of lay information mediary behaviour. *Information Research*. • Currie, A. (2009) "The legal problems of everyday life". Access to Justice. 1-41. • CRTC. (2015). Wireless Code public opinion research 2015: Quantitative research report. • Pavlovic, M. & Israel, T. (2014). Canadian consumers' rights with the respect to retail telecommunications services. Ottawa.

3 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 about 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.

"I had already been looking for reasons why I was having crashing issues [...but that's] just a waiting game for the service provider to send the update to me." –CC #1

"I use my phone for everything thing I need to find out, but it has to work. The convenience of the phone is key but the information has be easily saved and have the option of being put into various apps like calendars, chats and social media tools; otherwise what is the point?". –CC #5.

"C'était vraiment plutôt pour faire du Facetime, toutes mes sœurs, toutes mes ami(e)s avaient ça, on s'est dit on va prendre Apple comme tout le monde [pour] se parler plus." -CC #9

"Oui, c'est presque uniquement sur mon téléphone que j'utilise les médias sociaux, comme des applications comme Snapchat et Instagram qui sont presque faites pour le téléphone intelligent, en fait Snapchat est fait pour ça, et les tablettes je crois donc pas sur les ordinateurs. Instagram c'est fait pour le téléphone intelligent plutôt que l'ordinateur parce qu'on peut seulement mettre des photos à partir de son téléphone."-CC #2

"I use it for checking e-mails, taking and sharing pictures, using social media, playing games, browsing. I use my cellphone frequently to stay connected with people in my social, academic and professional network."-CC #8

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.

"Forums I find are the most useful source of information because it's basically as if you're trying it yourself, but someone else tried it instead. It's almost like a personal experience. You can't really get that kind of experience from a manufacturer or provider themselves. It's just advertising and marketing for them. If you want to see what it's actually like to use a phone you have to go see what people are experiencing." – CC #1

"I used the Internet to find people who actually have the phones and see what they liked, what they disliked, and what their experiences were.. I did go on forums and stuff like that and I did research the problems. But the best information out there is from what other people are dealing with right now."-CC #6

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 being digitally connected and physically accessible.

"My biggest concern is distancing myself socially in my immediate life. I see parents with their children and the children watching. I don't want my daughter or son to be watching me with the phone and thinks its okay [to use it all the time] and they have to have one. There are social barriers that come with always just sticking to technological use instead of one-on-one." – CC #4

"[The phone] is a great tool to facilitate a .... social connection. [It's] been a great tool in staying connected with friends in my neighborhood who have interesting schedules. I text them- that keeps me connected to them socially when not in person. [if] we didn't have our phones, it would be harder to connect and we probably would not do it at all or do it less often. The cellphone makes it easier every day to connect and to exchange times with people. It is such a helpful tool that I use for finding things to buy, to search for a telephone number, where something is - really everything." – CC #4

Conflicting Priorities

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Immediacy and Currency

CCs prioritized information pathways and tools that could give them immediate real–time updates in a manner that kept them at the forefront of technology, with the most current information available.

La nouvelle technologie m'intéresse beaucoup, je pense que ça fait partie de la génération « millénium », c'est comme si on est ancré dans la technologie et on doit continuer à avoir le meilleur…. Souvent c'est plus facile sur le téléphone parce qu'il est plus accessible et plus à la disposition, c'est plus rapide." –CC #2.

"My phone is updated with the latest applications, videos, and movies that hold my interest. It also consists of a number of instant messaging and social networking sites that keep me occupied and amused throughout the day." – CC #8

Primacy of Text

Overwhelmingly CCs preferred text-based online mediums they could access independently over calls, helplines or in-person discussion. Many of them noted they find it awkward to call someone, as they see texting and emails the new social norm.

"[People] probably don't want to talk to you anyway, they just want a message. It's kind of the social norm to message people." – CC #1

C'est seulement les textes. [Mais maintenant il y a] aussi l'obligation de répondre à toutes les fois que tu reçois quelque chose dans les minutes qui suivent. Tu peux même avoir accès à tes courriels sur ton téléphone, avoir une notification à chaque fois que tu reçois un courriel. Notamment les personnes qui ont des datas, elles reçoivent toute ça à mesure, il n'y a plus de répit, il n'y a plus de pause. - CC #7

"I actually [had] unlimited talk [but] noticed that I didn't even come close to [needing it]. So that really was almost unimportant for me. …I was really more looking at the data, because of texts …I think that's probably the way we communicate. - CC #6

"I think, in general, the cellphone is one of the greatest inventions of the modern science. It appears that without the cellphone, life would not be as easy as it is today. It would be difficult to lose the convenience of all the services and other useful information that I use on my cellphone. I would like to mention that I share a close relationship with my cell phone and feel INCOMPLETE without it." – CC #8

4 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 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 customizable. Ideally customization would not be by practice area, as that is 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.