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Disciplinary differences in library search: insights into researchers' mental models



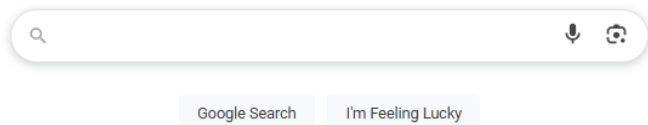
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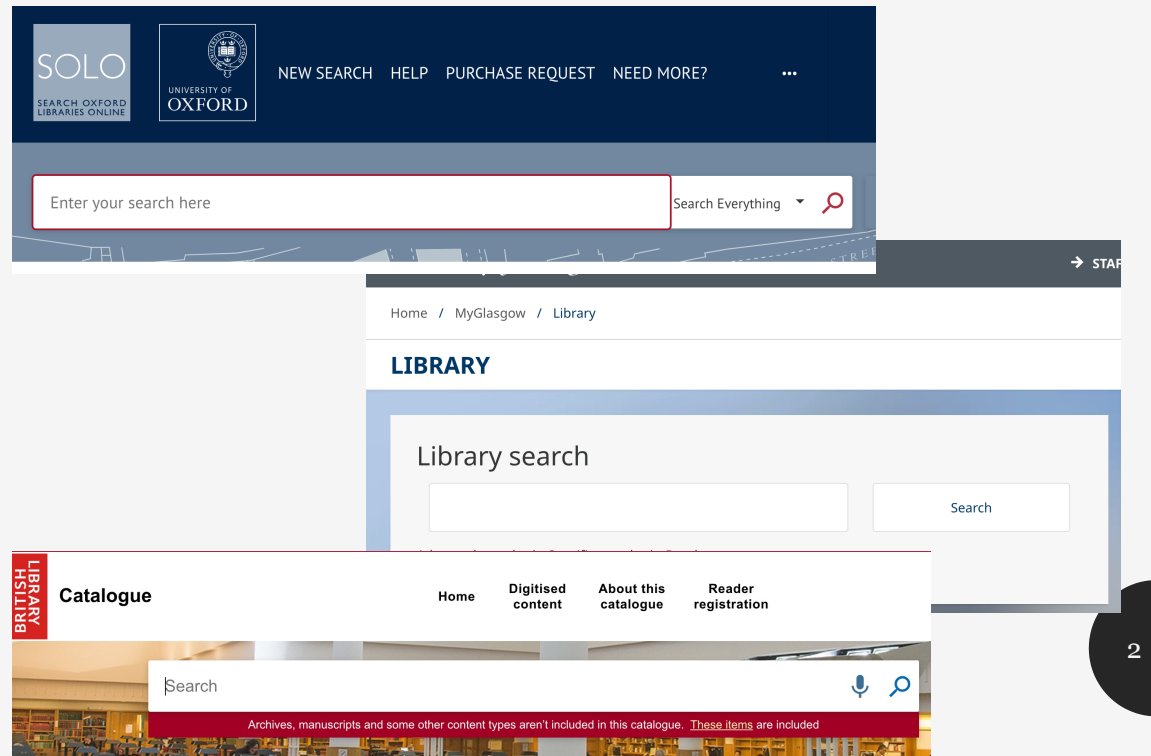


Introduction



<https://www.google.com/>
<https://solo.bodleian.ox.ac.uk/>
<https://www.gla.ac.uk/myglasgow/library/>
https://bll01.primo.exlibrisgroup.com/discovery/search?vid=44BL_INST:BLLO1&lang=en

Today, many library interfaces look like Google. library design is generalist and simplified, implying a blanket approach for everyone.



Literature

But there are LIS studies that surface differences in search preference, needs, and practice between groups of researchers, particularly between disciplines, which simple interfaces do not account for



Supporting the Changing Research Practices of Chemists

Research Support Services: Chemistry Project

Matthew P. Long
Roger C. Schonfeld

A Research Information Network Report
April 2011

Reinventing research? Information practices in the humanities

Research question

This study asks, why do researchers look for information in different ways?

Can scholars' mental models (internal representations of external world / assumptions, beliefs, expectations) tell us something about what motivates scholars to search in particular ways?

Are there disciplinary differences researchers' mental models (MMs) of knowledge that lead to different information seeking behaviours?



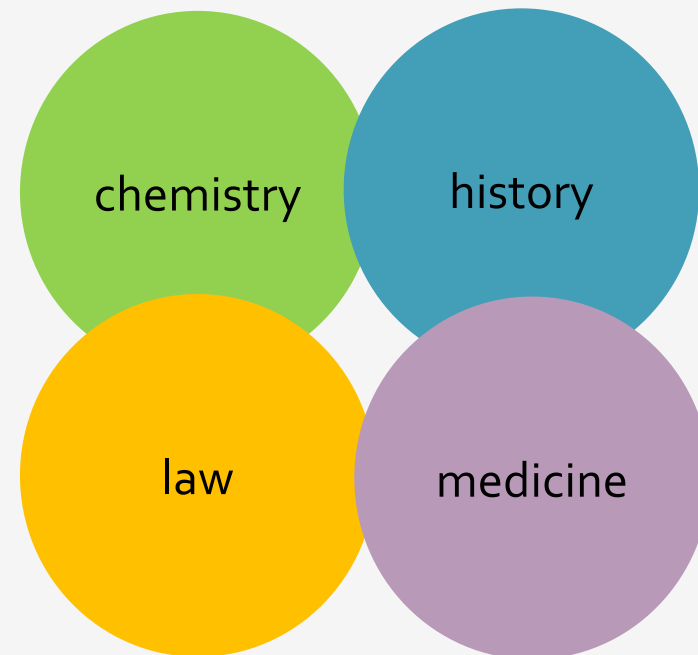
Method

Drawing upon a combination of approaches from library UX, ethnography, cultural studies, and information science, the study used visual and semi-structured interview techniques. It also used a grounded approach to data analysis, working bottom-up.



Case studies

40 researchers were interviewed
Half of the participants were based in the
University of Glasgow and the other half in
the University of Oxford.



Findings Part 1

MMs of scholars in different disciplines are shaped differently depending on the databases and search platforms they use.

Scholars adapt their thinking over time to align with system designs to find information. Frequent use of specialist systems shape and reinforce researchers' MMs.

P38: 'my mind is in it now.'

Findings Part 2

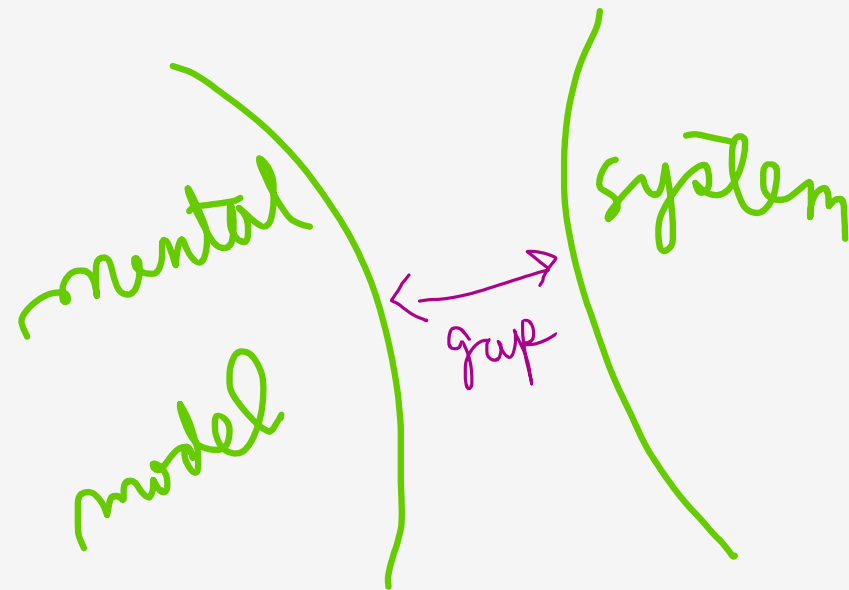
Degree of alignment between MM & system:

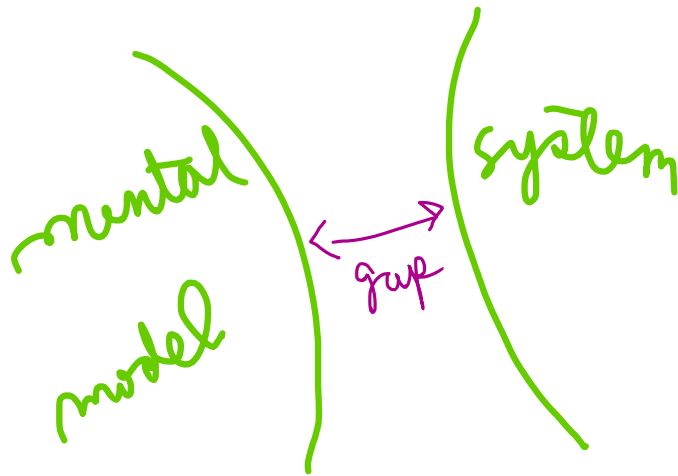
- **Chemistry and Law** - benefits from specialist centralised platforms like Reaxys and WestLaw that meet expectations of search and facilitate research processes, reinforcing existing disciplinary MMs.
- **History** - struggles with dispersed materials, bespoke systems, and inconsistent access.
- **Medicine**: in between.

This fosters confidence and trust in some researchers whilst leaving others frustrated and sceptical.

Mental model– system divide pt 1

Scholarly mental models and expectations of search are not uniform across all disciplines. Scholars experience different degrees of convergence between MMs and system designs across disciplines.





Mental model– system divide pt 2

Scholars' MMs align more closely with systems especially where systems are designed with disciplinary MMs from the outset by professional organisations, thus supporting & reinforcing existing mental models.

Chemistry and **law** have the smallest gap between researchers' MMs and systems; **medicine** is in between, as researchers show mixed degrees of confidence across specialisms; **history** has the greatest gap, showing greatest scepticism about discovery layers, pointing to lack of transparency and contextual information.

The end.

Thank you for listening.

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