

# Information Grounds in the Eyes of the First-Year Information Management Students

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# What and why? A short introduction

- ✓ The ability to identify, interpret and comprehend information needs and behaviour is acquired and crucial and basis for the development of information culture and literacy.
- ✓ Since information literacy incorporates a conscious reactions and other specific reactions of information flow diagnosis, the exploration of this field should be substantial for information professionals and focal for didactic process in information management and information science
- ✓ That is why it was important for us to discover how a novice information management students at the Jagiellonian University observe, interpret and explore their information environment, understand the everyday information activities and the context of human information behaviour as the not innate abilities
- ✓ The social, normative and emotional approach would be easily understandable and acceptable for the information management beginners that is why the Karen Fisher's information grounds model and idea based on people-place-information trichotomy seemed to be proper and useful for the diagnosis.

# What? IG context and theories fundamentals

It is an interdisciplinary model that has been developed on the basis of several theories such as:

1. **Social constructionism;**
2. Brenda Dervin's **Sense Making** meta-theory;
3. Mark Granovetter's concept of the **Strength of Weak Ties;**
4. the theory of **Small Worlds** by Elfreda Chatman;
5. Ray Oldenburg's approach which emphasizes **the role of the place.**

# What? Theoretical framing of Information Grounds (IG) concept

- ✓ The idea of IG was explored, developed and empirically investigated since 90s within various groups.
- ✓ It was formulated in reference to the aspects of the relationship – involving people, places, and information-related phenomena.
- ✓ These attributes with affective and social dimensions, include the size and type of membership, familiarity, actor roles, social roles, emotions and motivations of the participants of information grounds, focal activities undertaken in each space, conviviality, creature comforts, location and permanence, privacy, and noise level.
- ✓ Users of the IG benefit in a physical, affective, cognitive and social sense, participating in formal and informal ways of information sharing and multidirectional information transfer in the incidental, neutral environment facilitating the social interactiveness.

# Presumption of research

The theory of information grounds makes it possible to diagnose various information activities of their participants. Exposing the element of emotional involvement in information transfer and sharing in specific, small, socio-cultural communities motivates the students to reflect upon and study information behaviour, both in the academic community and in the context of everyday life.

# Why? The aim of the research

1. to check whether the students are aware of their participation in information grounds at all,
2. whether the students can recognise the IG in which they participate as well as identify the most typical information grounds and the components that shape these communities,
3. to capture the affective elements indicating involvement in information grounds and the linguistic, lexical, and semantic categories defining these synergistic environments,
4. to diagnose whether and what kind of an affective load or emotions determined the assignment of meaning to and understanding of the concept of IG.



# How? The methodology

- ✓ The research was carried out in a group of 95 first-year full-time undergraduate students of information management at the Institute of Information and Library Science of the Jagiellonian University between November 2016 and January 2017.
- ✓ In class: theory presentation, then a few days observation and preparation the observed IG characteristics in writing. Selected essays were verified during oral presentations.
- ✓ 67 essays were collected and sent directly to the university e-learning platform Pegaz and the entire contents of the essays was manually transferred to a Word file and processed using QDA Miner licensed software.
- ✓ In the corpus thus created, 146 characteristics of information grounds, labelled freely by students (e.g. "A waiting room in a clinic" or "A train journey") were distinguished.

# How? The methodology (2)

The following tasks were carried out with the corpus:

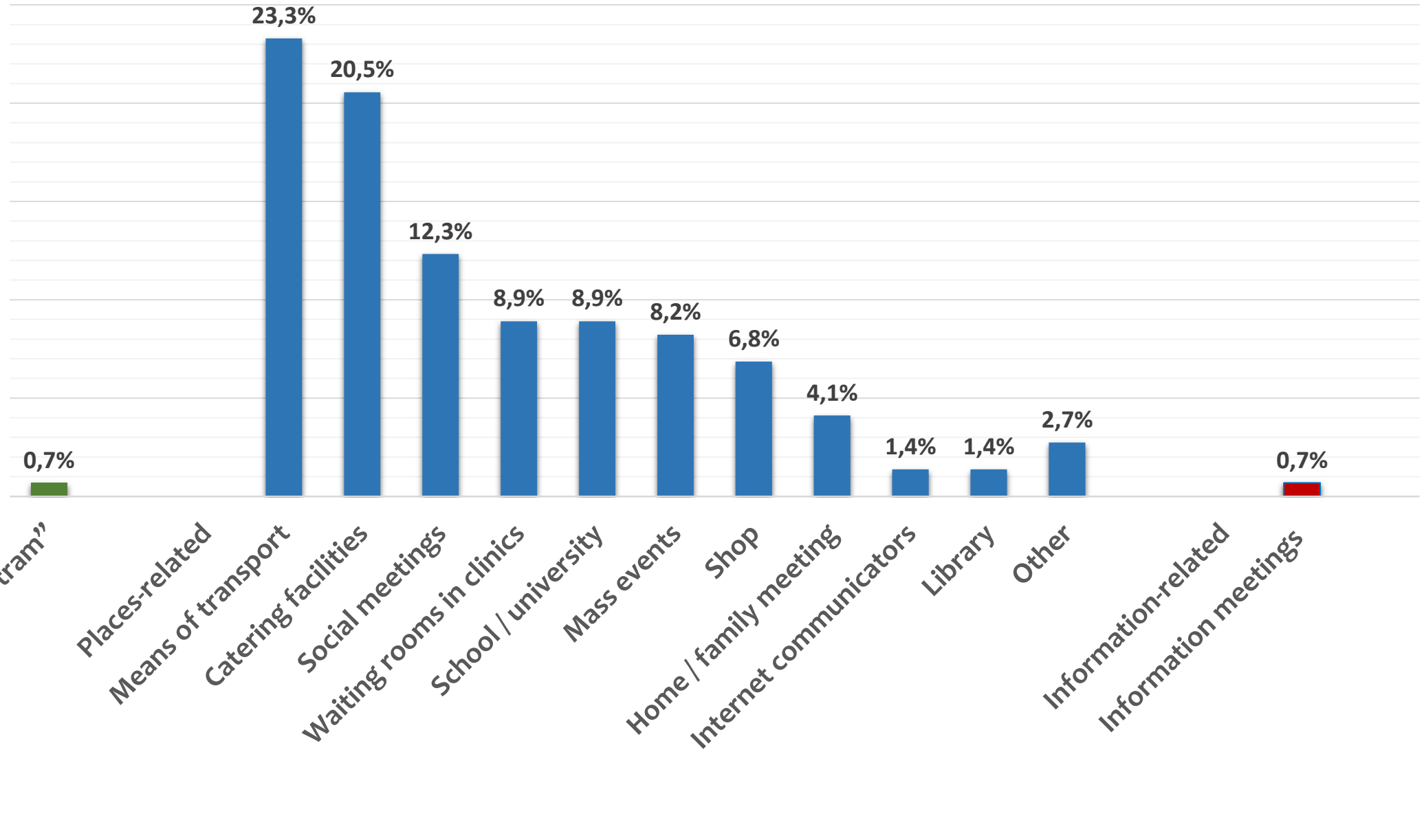
- 1) **thematic categorisation** of the material in terms of the type of the information ground described using the trichotomy phenomena
- 2) thematic categorisation using the list of pre-defined criteria corresponding to IG properties in order to **define the completeness and thoroughness of the characteristics** prepared by students,
- 3) inductive tagging of expressive acts of speech, that is utterances expressing the cognitive and emotional attitude of the message sender to what he or she is saying; the same part of the analysis focused on looking for the **signs of emotions** in students' utterances,
- 4) **tagging the fragments** that fulfilled the genre requirements of a narrative (micro-stories),
- 5) mechanical frequency analyses and calculations **illustrating the difference** in the capacity of characteristics.

# Findings: Students views

The indications revealed in the empirical material are, by and large, quite general, and usually repetitive, most often with a concise explanation only, including the examples provided by the teacher.

Students presented the types and aspects of IG as well as the attributes of those information environments in a limited time and space (classes)

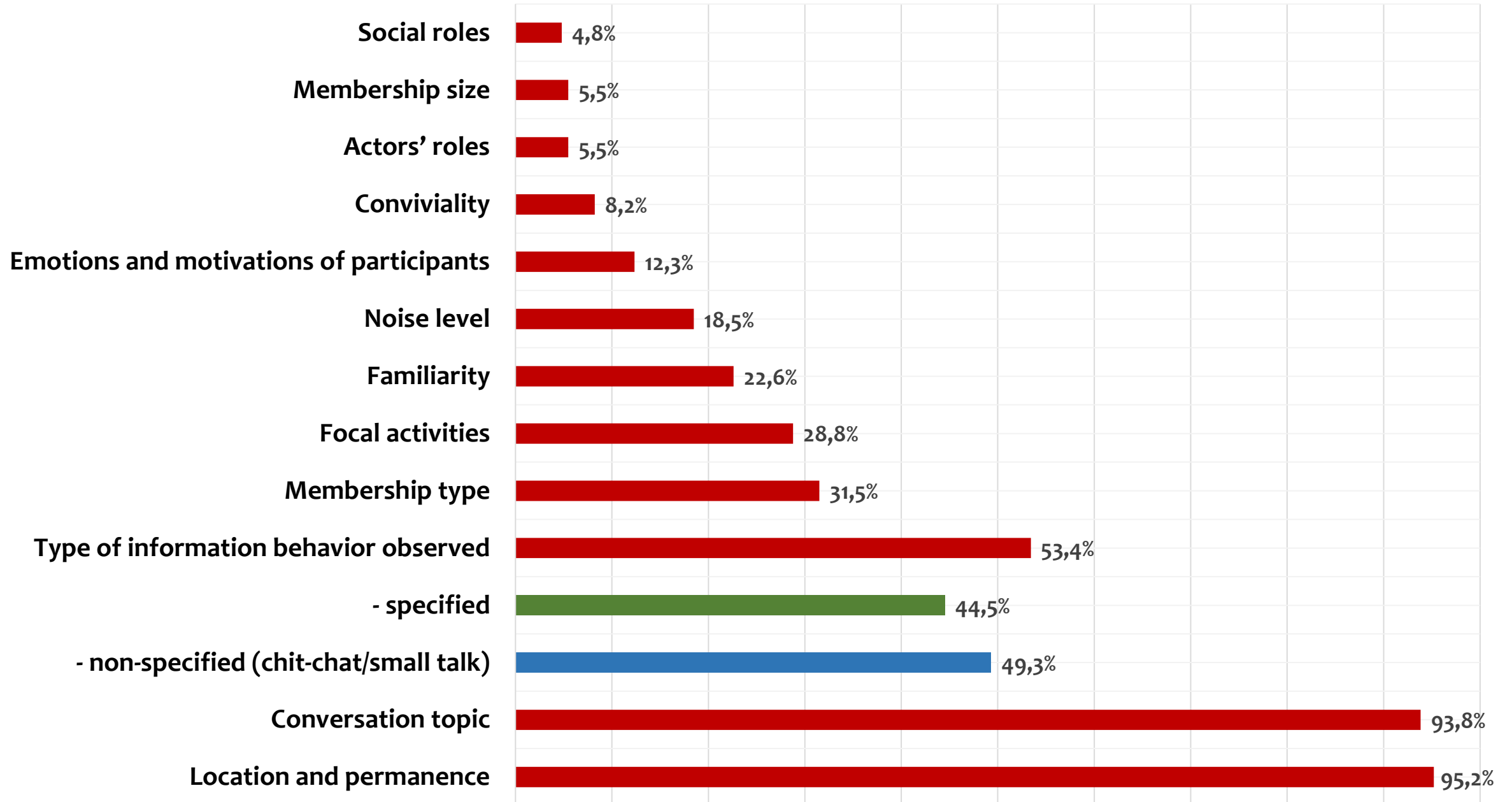
# Types and aspects of information grounds named by the students



# Findings: Students views

- The measure of cognitive attractiveness of the concept of information grounds is the number of attributes that the students could assign to the IGs identified by them.
- The majority of students' opinions reveal information grounds as places where people create ad hoc, incidental communities because of a joint operational aim, but the exchange of information occurs in them as a side effect
- the respondents emphasized the trivial and random nature of the conversations made and it means that they independently identified the communication situations in which the phatic function of the language was realized, the one used to maintain interpersonal relations without any informational value and/or direct practical application of the messages.
- they were usually shallow and quite general, probably because they were written hastily to meet the requirements of the course.
- The descriptions analysed, despite their perfunctory nature, may serve as a source of valuable didactic information on how first-year Polish students, the generation of digital natives perceive the rules of social co-existence and communication barriers.

## Attributes of information grounds named by the students



# Findings: Students views

- The characteristics were developed as class assignments, which is probably why they are impersonal and, as such, deprived of an emotional focus, dominated by a reporting tone, noun phrases and enumerations in the syntactic layer.
- the narrative character of an utterance was an important indicator of the communicative nature of information grounds understood as the ease with students may learn it, that is include it in their personal repertoire of possible scripts used in the perception of social reality.
- that the more micro-stories in the material studied, the greater the probability that the students did try to use the IG concept as a filter facilitating the interpretation of various communication events, including their own and someone else's emotions that lay the foundation for or were the consequence of these events.

# Conclusions

- No flagrant mistakes in the identification of information grounds were discovered in the collection of the students' characteristics.
- there were some ambivalent indications in which the IG indicated were home/family and university classes and the signals of possible instability/fluidity of the respondents' idea of the qualitative differences between information environments based on Ray Oldenburg's are worth exploring in the future
- Identification of IG as places where the phatic function of the language could be fulfilled confirms the rationale of offering some courses *Social Communication and the Media* and *Introduction to Linguistic Pragmatics*, because the communication events experienced by students may be explored in a multifaceted and interdisciplinary way.



# Conclusions (2)

- Characteristics are **generic and perfunctory** and at the next stage of exploration, the techniques applied should not be subject to the distorting effect of coercion/duty.
- The didactic methods applied in the teaching of the theory of information behaviour should be extended to include **the component of the organisation of experiences and knowledge by means of a story.**
- The Fisher's IG concept is a very good starting point in the introduction to the theory of information behaviour because it refers to the information situations and behaviour that the students are familiar with in everyday life and it takes into account the emotional element which is noticed and felt by the students.

# Recommendations

The present findings and conclusions ought to be seen as partial and tentative, because:

- the technique of obtaining empirical material adopted in our study was not optimal for evaluating the cognitive (and emotional) receptiveness of students with regard to information grounds.
- only a convenience sample of information management students from one university was used. To acquire a more comprehensive picture of the perception of IG by future information professionals as well as the didactic value of the theory of information grounds, further research – involving different universities in various countries – is needed.

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