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## **Information under the skin: information experience of tattooed people**

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### **Introduction**

This presentation will give an overview of a research project called Tattoo and Information that explores the information experience of people with tattoos. The central premise of the project is that people experience complex engagement with information during all stages of the tattoo process. Many people enjoy having tattoos and consider them not just aesthetic expressions of their tastes and interests but also an expression of their identities. Tattoos present information on the skin that people interact with and experience daily. A deeper understanding of the meaning, value and experience of tattoos can provide valuable insights to individuals wanting to get a tattoo, tattoo artists and those who wish to preserve tattoo images as part of cultural heritage. In this presentation, we will summarise and reflect on some of the already published data and present work in progress, focusing on three aspects in particular: information creation, information sharing and literacies that support the tattoo experience.

### **Theoretical framework**

Existing literature discusses tattoos from multiple perspectives: as identity expression of individuals and communities (Wilson-Fall, 2014; Krutak, 2017), as memory and narrative devices (Patterson, 2017), as documents, records and sources of information (Fortier & Menard, 2018; Gorichanaz, 2016; Sundberg & Kjellman, 2018; Cwojdzinski, 2019; Pionke & Osborne, 2018), and through information seeking lens (Goulding et al., 2004). The literature reveals that tattoos are a powerful way to capture, express and convey information. However, one aspect that still offers plenty of opportunity for further exploration is engagement with information before, during and after tattoo acquisition. Therefore, we wanted to examine more deeply people's behaviours, attitudes and emotions in relation to their tattoos, as well as how they are influenced by the society and culture in which they live. Information experience is a valuable and suitable theoretical framework to support this research. Information experience is a complex, multidimensional engagement with information that integrates information-related actions, thoughts, and feelings and has social and cultural dimensions (Gorichanaz, 2020; Hughes, 2014).

### **Research questions and methodology**

The Tattoo and Information project explores how people experience information in various stages of tattoo acquisition, from ideation and image creation, through the process of being tattooed, to sharing information and ongoing experience of information through tattoos in a daily context.

The overall project has the following objectives:

- a. To investigate how people search for, experience and understand information about various aspects of the tattoo process (such as information about tattoo design, tattoo artists, health and safety, cultural appropriation, etc.);
- b. To understand how people develop tattoo images that capture their personal or community narratives and memories;
- c. To identify what creates a successful information sharing between a person getting a tattoo and a tattoo artist;
- d. To explore the use of digital technologies in searching for, presenting and sharing information during a tattoo journey.

By meeting these objectives, we are developing a framework for the holistic understanding of tattoos as an information phenomenon, which is a prerequisite for defining a set of literacy skills necessary for a successful tattoo experience.

Using a qualitative approach and interviews as the main data collection method, we have conducted 25 interviews to gather data from New Zealand individuals with tattoos. Narrative inquiry (Clandinin & Caine, 2013; du Preez & Meyer, 2016) guided the interviews to capture individual experiences of tattooing.

We have just started the second phase, in which we conduct interviews with a sample of 15 New Zealand tattoo artists, focusing on their views and practices of information sharing with their clients. In the third phase (in 2023), based on the findings from the interviews, we will design a survey to be distributed online to a wider population. Recruited participants are of diverse profiles: participants of different age groups, gender, lifestyles, Māori and Pasifika participants, immigrants and immigrant descendants, those with traditional and non-traditional tattoos, participants with first-time tattoos and multiple tattoos, those with smaller tattoos and with extreme body modifications, those with positive and negative tattoo experiences. Data analysis is based on coding and thematic analysis of transcribed interviews and interview notes.

## **Research results and discussion**

This project so far has yielded rich and complex data. In this presentation, we particularly want to reflect on the following groups of findings, some of which have already been published and some still in the emerging phase: information needs, information creation, and literacies.

### *Information needs*

Analysis of the findings revealed that the need for information is embedded in many aspects of tattoo acquisition and the consequent experience of having tattoos. People need the information to choose a design for their tattoo image, find the right tattoo artist and inform themselves about health, safety and pain expectations. However, there are other information-related needs, such as understanding tattoos as a communication medium in social and cultural contexts, awareness of copyright issues around tattoo images, and understanding cultural appropriation.

### *Information creation*

Based on empirical findings, we developed a framework that identifies specific phases of tattoo acquisition that lead to information creation (Campbell-Meier & Krtalić, 2022). There are four key phases (conceptualizing, verbalizing, visualizing and pluralizing) and four anchors in between the phases (anticipation, identification, ideation and creation). We discuss the tattoo information creation process in each of the phases, and will complement it with some of the initial findings from interviews with tattoo artists.

### *Literacies*

Findings revealed a set of literacy skills people need to find, create, interpret, present and reinterpret tattoo-related information. People with multiple tattoos develop some of these literacies with time from experience, but those acquiring their first tattoo often don't have that advantage. So far, analysis has identified the following literacies accompanying tattoo acquisition: Health, Financial, Visual, Information, Cultural, Digital, Legal (copyright), and Media literacy (Krtalić & Campbell-Meier, 2021; Krtalić et al., 2021).

## Conclusion

Through the Tattoo and Information research project overview, we reflect on the information experience of people with tattoos. The project has yielded complex and rich data on how people experience information in various stages of tattoo acquisition, from ideation and image creation, through the process of being tattooed, to sharing information and ongoing experience of information through tattoos in a daily context. Three aspects, in particular, will be the focus of this presentation: information needs, information creation, and literacies that support the tattoo experience.

To achieve clarity and coherence in presenting and discussing our findings, we will use a narrative approach to convey some of the main findings and illustrate tattoo information experience. The participants' tattoo images are private and confidential and will not be shared.

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