Information needs and information behavior of Catholic priests in pastoral work

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Summary
The aim of this dissertation is to discuss recent theoretical insights into information behavior of Catholic and other Christian priests in the world, offer research methodology, conduct research and critically analyze results of the research which will identify information needs and behavior patterns of Catholic priests in Croatia in their pastoral work (liturgy, catechesis, counseling, parish management). Study will be conducted using quantitative (questionnaires) and qualitative methodology (semi structured interviews).

Introduction
Information seeking behavior of Christian priests for their pastoral roles has been researched since early 1990-ies. At the end of 20th century more scientific studies on that topic were published, especially in Canada and the USA (for example Wicks, D. A., 1997; Wicks, D. A., 1999). Significant number of papers on information behavior of priests has appeared just few years ago (for example Lambert, J. D., 2010; Michels, D. H., 2012). In available scientific literature several groups of clergy, whose information seeking behavior has been investigated, can be identified. These groups belong to different Christian religions such as priests of Roman Catholic church (Wicks, D. A., 1999; Curran, C.; Burns, K., 2011), Baptist pastors (Wicks, D. A., 1997; Lambert, J. D., 2010; Michels, D. H., 2012), Protestant clergy (Roland, D., 2012), clergy of Evangelic church (Roland, D.; Wicks, D. A., 2009). Moreover, some recent studies deal with information behavior of non Christian, Muslim clerics (Bakar, A. B. A.; Saleh, A. G., 2011). As a rule, in all this studies participated a small number of the respondents from one country. Therefore, it is necessary to conduct similar studies on a larger sample and in different societies (countries) in order to check if the results of research can be generalized.

Literature Review
D. A. Wicks (1999), one of the most fruitful authors in this area, explored information behavior of clergy from six different religious groups in Canada. His findings showed that clergy had closed pattern of information seeking in preaching role, caregiving role and parish management role, and was open for information outside their social group only in caregiving role. It was revealed that denomination affects openness of ministers for outside information in preaching role and that Baptist, Pentecostal and Presbyterian ministers were more open for outside information than those from Anglican, Catholic and United church. Survey questionnaire was conducted on a sample of 378 respondents. Wicks also measured liberal or conservative attitudes of ministers with the help of scales with religious beliefs (Christian dogma), and found that closed sources were related to the theological world of ministers, while open sources were not related to that world. Information sources (books and religious journals) that respondents indicated they used in a preaching role, caregiving role and management role were coded as liberal or conservative (by the two independent investigators). According to the results ministers with liberal religious attitudes often used liberally sources of information, and conservative ministers had more closed patterns of information behavior.

In a newer pilot study D. H. Michels (2012) investigated how leaders of Baptist Christian churches in Canada seek information for personal faith and corporative decision making. Author conducted interviews with five participants. J. D. Lambert (2010) studied information seeking habits of Baptist ministers in USA. In his interviews carried out with the help of a critical incident technique ten respondents have participated. Results of his study showed that the most often types of tasks during which ministers needed information belonged to preaching role and teaching (for example wedding arrangements) and management (for example coordination of church activities). Ministers most often stopped seeking when they had enough information to complete a task, and when seeking was time consuming. To the similar insights came D. Matsveru (2013) who researched information behavior of pastors from different Christian denomination in Namibia, and found that respondents needed information mostly for evangelization, sermon, teaching, direct prayers, leading Bible groups and leading service wherein for sermon and teaching they mostly consulted personal libraries, internet and church documents. Study was conducted with the help of quantitative methodology (138 filled questionnaires) and qualitative methodology (16 interviews).

D. Roland (2012) in his study revealed that Protestant clergy during information seeking and choosing of information in preaching role was influenced by Bible literacy among members of religious community, structure of believers...
who listened sermon, knowledge on information which members of community wanted to receive and knowledge on political attitudes which members of community had. His results confirmed Wicks’ conclusion that clergy work under closed information system. The study was conducted in USA with the help of interview (sample consisted of 5 respondents).

A. B. A. Bakar and A. G. Saleh (2011) have examined information seeking behavior of Muslim clerics in Nigeria. As well as in most of the studies mentioned, their findings have also showed that preferred information sources of the respondents were religious books and personal libraries, while information use depended on a role of preaching, counseling, management and church leadership. Survey questionnaire was conducted on a sample of 233 respondents. On a slightly larger sample (281 respondents) the same authors later reveal that Muslim clerics most often use sources from personal library for preaching purpose, while in a role of counseling they consult secular information sources and informal channels, such as friends and relatives.

C. C. Curran and K. Burns (2011) are one of the rare authors who were exclusively interested in information behavior of Catholic priests. Results of their study indicated that during everyday pastoral duties (preaching, catechesis, caregiving, parish management, liturgy, counseling, personal growth) Catholic clergy most often used personal print sources of information and personal contacts, while less consulted were libraries and the internet. Study was carried out in the USA (Columbia) using qualitative methodology and sample consisted of parish priests, a university chaplain and an ordinary priest.

**Theories and models of research**

Since the research is oriented on pastoral roles of priests, its aim is to apply a *General model of the information seeking of professionals* in the research. According to that model professionals have many complex and different work roles. Tasks from each role create information needs, and encourage information seeking. This model was tested on engineers, health care professionals, lawyers and recently on Muslim clerics. In the model five professional roles are mentioned: service provider, administrator or manager, researcher, educator and student. Under these roles exist specific tasks (for example assessment, counseling, supervising, report writing, public appearances), and information seeking is related to the particular role and its associated tasks. Characteristics of information needs are shaped by variables like individual demographics, context, frequency, predictability, importance and complexity. Professionals seek information from colleagues, librarians, handbooks, journal articles and their own personal knowledge and experience. Information sources can be formal or informal, internal or external (within or outside organization), oral or written. Information seeking is influenced by awareness of information (direct or indirect knowledge of various information sources), whereby variables can be accessibility of sources (easy access), familiarity and prior success, trustworthiness, timeliness, cost, quality etc. Results of the information seeking process are outcomes like providing a service or product, completing paperwork, and achieving professional development goals. In case when information need is not satisfied, further information seeking is required and that is conceptualized as a *feedback loop*.

Methodology of proposed research will be also based on theories of information seeking which developed Elfreda Chatman (Chatman, E. A., 1999). According to her theories social norms of particular group determine perception of information and information use outside this group (*Theory of life in the round*). Individuals will not use information outside their social group, although they can be useful (*Small world theory*). Affiliation of individual to the particular social group (in this case Catholic clergy) may cause *information poverty*.

Theory of social network implies interpersonal transactions that assist the individual in meeting problems. This theory consists of several concepts: structural attributes (size of social contacts), homogeneity (types of relationships in network), density (nature and degree of interaction among members of the network), content (social and material resources that are exchanged in the networks) and dispersion (spatial distribution of network members). Social networks enable to explore who communicates with whom, about what, via which media, and who is the most strategically positioned to receive and forward information. Network ties are determined by the types of interaction and the ways of media use. Ties in a group can be weak, if a small number of resources of similar type is exchanged or strong when many different resource types are exchanged (Haythornthwaite, C., 2001).

It is assumed that theory of social network is applicable in a proposed research since the Catholic priests in their pastoral work mostly use information from Catholic church, which represents a specific social network and possesses its own hierarchical structure.

All methodological models will be adjusted to the particularities of Catholic priests’ community in Croatia.

**Research questions and Hypothesis**

Research questions are:

1. From which fields of knowledge do Catholic priests need information in order to carry out their pastoral work?
2. How do the Catholic priests find information that they need for pastoral work?
3. Do different pastoral roles affect information seeking behavior of Catholic priests and types of information sources they use?
4. Are there differences in information needs and behavior (information seeking and use) of Catholic priests in relation to various demographic characteristics (for example age, education level, length of service conducting, size of place where the parish is situated etc.)?

Hypothesis:
1. For their pastoral work Catholic priests need information from different fields of knowledge (for example economy, pedagogy, psychology etc.)
2. Catholic priests find information that they need for pastoral work through the active seeking of information
3. Information seeking behavior of Catholic priests is open and oriented on informal and web sources in pastoral roles of counseling, caregiving and parish management, while it is closed and based on formal and print sources in the roles of liturgy and catechesis
4. Among Catholic priests there are differences in information needs and behavior in relation to various demographic characteristics

5. **Methodology**

**Respondents and sample**

Sample consists of priests from Roman Catholic church in Croatia who manage parishes in five archdiocese (Djakovo-Osijek archdiocese, Rijeka archdiocese, Split-Makarska archdiocese, Zadar archdiocese and Zagreb archdiocese) and ten diocese (Bjelovar-Krizevci diocese, Dubrovnik diocese, Gospić-Senj diocese, Hvar diocese, Krk diocese, Pozega diocese, Pula and Porec diocese, Sisak diocese, Sibenik diocese, Varazdin diocese). The whole population counts 1025 parishes.

**Methods**

In the research a combination of quantitative and qualitative methods (questionnaires and semi structured interviews) will be used. The data on information needs, types of information sources used and information seeking behavior of Catholic priests will be collected with the help of the survey questionnaire. Respondents will be asked to participate in the qualitative research. According to the collected data from the questionnaire and wishes of respondents to participate in further research, a smaller sample of the respondents will be formed for the semi structured interviews. In the semi structured interviews parish priests will be asked about a specific case (critical incident) of information seeking and using for decision making within their pastoral roles in order to find out the purpose of information use, impact of pastoral roles on information seeking behavior and closed or open patterns of information behavior. In the context of social network theory the research will try to determine the purpose and way of priests’ communication with colleagues and (arch)diocese as superior institutions as well as types of information that priests obtained from the (arch)diocese.

**Expected scientific contribution**

It is expected that the findings will contribute to a development of scientific insights on information needs of Catholic priests and their patterns of information seeking and using in different pastoral roles, testing and conceptualization of theories and models that will be used in this research. The research methodology can serve as a starting point for a further similar research.

**Keywords: information needs, information behavior, pastoral roles, parish priests, Roman Catholic church**

**REFERENCES**


**Curriculum Vitae**

**Darko Lacović** is a teaching and research assistant at Department of Information Sciences, Faculty of Humanities and Social Sciences in Osijek and a doctoral student at the University of Zadar (Croatia). His main research interests include human information behavior and library services to socially excluded persons. He has published in peer-reviewed journals such as Croatian Librarians Herald, Libri and New Library World.