An empirical study of everyday life information seeking behavior of urban low-income residents in the Haizhu District of Guangzhou, China

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Abstract This paper reports an investigation on everyday life information seeking behavior of urban low-income group in the Haizhu District of Guangzhou City. Empirical data were collected via in-depth interviews with low-income urban residents and were analyzed using qualitative methods. This paper discusses the research findings based on the more noticeable results of information seeking behavior among these people. Our approach touches on a focused study of such issues as what the role of information seeking in their everyday life is, what information they care about, which information channels they prefer to use, which factors influence their information seeking behavior, how difficult it is to seek the information they need, and how they use public libraries. Based on our research findings, we propose that public libraries should provide customized information services for urban low-income residents according to the unique characteristics of their information seeking behavior in everyday life.

Keywords Everyday life information seeking (ELIS), Information behavior, Urban low-income residents

1 The background and purpose of this study

1.1 Background

Everyday life information seeking (ELIS) is the acquisition of various types of informational (both cognitive and expressive) elements which people employ to conduct themselves effectively in their daily lives or to solve problems not directly connected with their performance of occupational tasks[1]. In 1970s, large-scale surveys were made to investigate citizens’ information needs and information seeking behavior such as Dervin’s survey on the information needs of Seattle’s citizens[2]. However, this type of quantitative surveys became more infrequent by

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the end of 1970s. Instead, qualitative research methodologies on this topic have made inroads, which have been gradually accepted by the library and information science (LIS) scholarly communities. The empirical research on ELIS has since attracted more attention from LIS scholars. Moreover, more research projects were delved into, though on a smaller research scale, the study of people of different social strata in the practice of ELIS. A good example is Chatman’s study of the information behavior of the working poor by the adoption of an ethnographic method[3]. Since Savolainen’s first introduction of ELIS in 1995, this conceptual orientation about information needs and information seeking behavior of a particular social stratum toward its “way of life” has become gradually a high-profile research issue among LIS scholars in Europe and in the USA. Research in this field has also been fruitful, as indicated by the biennial International Conference on Information Seeking in Context (ISIC), in which ELIS is featured as one of the most important conference themes.

Overseas scholars have paid a great deal of attention to the information behavior of economically deprived social groups in the ELIS field. Childers and Post first studied the information behavior of low-income people in an information-poverty context[4]. In 1970s, Greenberg and Dervin found that low-income people depended a lot on television for their information intake, which is not only an important source of information and of new knowledge in their ELIS pursuit, but also a device for alleviating the boredom of their monotonous life routine[5]. From 1980s to 1990s, Chatman conducted extensive research of everyday life information behavior of various economically deprived social groups such as low-income women, janitors and low-skilled workers. As a result, several theories were formulated such as information poverty, life in the round and normative behavior[6–8], which have had great impact on the field of everyday life information behavior research. At the beginning of the 21st century, Spink and Cole conducted a survey on the information seeking channels of African-American low-income households in their daily lives[9]. Hersberger, using the theory of social networks, studied the information needs and information sources of homeless populations[10–11].

In China, several scholars have conducted empirical researches on the information needs and information behaviors of urban disadvantaged groups. The opportunities for knowledge acquisition of rural migrant workers in big cities such as those in Beijing, Shenzhen and Wuhan were examined, and resulted in raising a high calling for public libraries to take the responsibility in creating and providing educational and cultural services to rural migrant workers. Such has been advocated repeatedly by Prof. Wang Zizhou and his several other colleagues at Peking University[12–14]. In Chengdu, a southwest city in Sichuan Province, the information needs of such disadvantaged groups as the disabled and rural migrant workers in their daily lives
The information needs and information seeking behavior of urban disadvantaged groups, both biologically and sociologically speaking, were studied, and the barriers hindering their information seeking activities were also analyzed. In addition, the impact of information technology on the information behavior of the information disadvantaged groups in Liuzhou, a medium-sized city in Guangxi Zhuang Autonomous Region, was also investigated. It should be noted that, as far as the research on the information behavior of the urban disadvantaged groups is concerned, Chinese scholars have paid more attention to such disadvantaged groups as rural migrant workers and the disabled, and they have put more emphasis on the opportunities of information acquisition of these groups. In comparison, the information needs and information seeking behavior of urban low-income residents have been overlooked generally speaking.

1.2 Purpose

According to the recent report on the development of Chinese cities issued by the Chinese Academy of Social Sciences, the urban impoverished population in China can be classified into 3 categories: 1) Rural migrant workers, 2) laid-off workers who used to work in state-owned enterprises, 3) recently-graduated university students who have, most probably, not yet been employed, but taken up residence temporarily in urban impoverished areas. In the Chinese LIS field, scholars have paid more attention to the information needs of rural migrant workers, whereas research papers on urban low-income residents such as laid-off workers are scarce and rare in between. Because of the geographic areas (most in urban villages, where these urban low-income people dwelled), their living conditions have substantial impact on the process of urbanization in China. Based on the method of in-depth interviews, our study aims to take a closer look at the information needs and information seeking behaviors of urban low-income residents in their daily lives, so as to help public libraries provide better customized information services to fulfill their institutional mandate of providing universal and equitable access to public cultural services.

2 Research design

2.1 Definition of urban low-income residents

Urban low-income residents are people who, because of social, personal and other reasons, cannot acquire necessary income to sustain a normal living standard and live in an impoverished state. These people are of a specially disadvantaged group during the process of urban economic development and the accumulation of social wealth. According to the statistics from the Chinese Academy of Social Sciences...
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in 2010, most of the urban impoverished population is of age between 40 and 50 years old, who live beyond their means and dwell in poor housing conditions. Urban low-income residents are populated in diverse geographical areas in China. Using the principle of convenient sampling, we chose the urban low-income residents in the Haizhu District of Guangzhou in Guangdong Province as the targeted participants of our study.

2.2 Research methodology

The in-depth interview is an important method to gather research data for a qualitative analysis. It is also a commonly applied method in ELIS research. Bates proposed that narrative and episodic interview techniques are qualitative research methods that sustain a person-centered paradigm of human information seeking behavior and also provide a particularly useful methodological framework for studies of ELIS behavior[20]. We also believe that personal interview techniques are especially useful for collecting research data on such disadvantaged groups as urban low-income residents for the study of their ELIS behavior due to their lack of sufficient electronic communication tools. Therefore, we opted for the in-depth interview method for gathering sufficient qualitative data from the targeted interviewees for our research purposes.

An interview guide was formulated according to our research purpose. Considering that urban low-income residents normally would receive their low-income welfare benefits from their residents’ neighborhood committees, we contacted the officials at those neighborhood committees who did the liaison work for us to contact the potential participants for our research. All of these interviewed participants lived in the jurisdictions of various residents’ committees in the Haizhu District. In this way, we were able to select 50 urban low-income residents from 22 residents’ committees to be our interviewees. We conducted our actual investigation in July 2010.

Prior to the interviews, a pre-training session for interview skills was given to the field interviewers. We especially emphasized that field investigators should explain our research purpose clearly to the interviewees and also to assure them of the confidentiality of the information being obtained from them. After the interview, the field investigator would give the interviewed participant a gift or tutor his/her child homework as a token of appreciation. Each interview lasted for approximately 30 minutes.

The interview guide can be available from the authors if needed.

Investigators were selected from library science students at School of Information Management, SYSU, including Ailing Zeng, Minfei Liang, Haiyan Deng, Qiuting Chen, Yanmin Liang, Yi Lin, Suiyan Liu and Fuyong Cao. Most of them have fluent Cantonese language skills, which are a necessity for the success of the interview process. The authors would like to express our sincere appreciation to them.
30 minutes, and the places for conducting these interviews varied anywhere from the participant’s home or work place to the office of a participant’s own residents’ committee. Because the field investigator conducted the interviews via the liaison work of residents’ committees, all the interviewees were quite happy to participate in our study.

However, some of them did not answer all the questions asked, especially with regard to the question of how difficult it was for them to acquire information in their daily lives. One of the interviewees did not reveal her educational level for unspecified reason. As most of the interviewed participants were not willing to be recorded during the interview session, the field investigators could only take notes manually during the interview session. They wrote down the high points within 24 hours after the interview had completed. The submission time of those interview notes varied slightly somewhat within the specified time frame depending on the length of the field investigator’s notes and the duration of his/her memory retention. All the transcripts of the interview were coded manually. When the related transcript of an interview was cited in the paper, the code of the transcript was indicated accordingly.

3 Basic information about the interviewees

3.1 Age and gender

The interviewees are from various neighborhoods of the Haizhu District. Their age ranges from 17 to 78 years old. As indicated in Fig. 1, 68% of the interviewed participants (34) are of age between 40 and 59 years old, who are usually breadwinners in their families. As far as the gender is concerned, 72% of the interviewed participants (36) are women, whereas 28% of them (14) are men.

![Fig. 1 The age distribution of the interviewees.](image-url)
Therefore, there were far more women than men who participated in our study. It is shown that the reasons for family poverty are varied. The breadwinner of the family (most often the husband) usually suffers from a serious disease or a divorce or has passed away, resulting in a single parenthood situation. As most of the children from these families are still at school, the interviewees who can participate in our study are therefore mostly women.

3.2 Educational level

As indicated from Fig. 2, the overall educational level of the interviewees is relatively low. 44% of them received a 9-year compulsory education; 26% of them received only a primary education; whereas 18% of them received a senior high school education or vocational education. There is one interviewee who has received a college education. It is worth noting that, four surveyed participants were almost illiterate. One interviewee would not reveal her educational background.

3.3 Employment status

Fig. 3 shows the employment status of the interviewees. 44% of them (22) were not employed, either because of an illness, old age, low educational level, a lack of skills, or because of their responsibility of taking care of a family member who suffered from a chronic disease. Some of them lived strictly on a government welfare program. 38% of them (19) held temporary jobs such as domestic helper or served as volunteer at the office of their residents’ committee. Only 8% of them (4) had stable jobs, and 4% of them (2) were self-employed; one was operating as a newsstand owner and the other, as a copy shop owner. In addition, 6% of them (3) were high (or vocational) school students from urban low-income families.

Fig. 2 The level of education of the interviewees. Note: a, illiterate; b, primary school; c, 9-year compulsory education; d, senior high school; e, vocational school; f, college; g, others.

Fig. 3 The employment status of the interviewees. Note: a, Unemployed; b, temporary jobs; c, stable employment; d, self-employed; e, at school or college.
3.4 Living condition

All of the interviewees are registered citizens in Guangzhou. Most of them live in a shabby, secluded urban village (e.g., Kangle village) where low-income people live in densely populated blocks. Most of urban low-income residents live in poor housing conditions. However, they do usually have a television set in their homes. 30% of them have their own personal computers at home, most of which have Internet access. There are no public libraries in most of these neighborhoods. Nonetheless, there are possibly small collections of books, magazines and newspapers available in some of the offices of the neighborhood committees for the local residents either to borrow or to read on site.

4 Research findings from the interviewees

4.1 The role of information in their daily lives

Information plays a very important role in the daily lives of urban low-income residents as they face family, work or emotional problems. Previous research publications on this topic indicated that low-income people acquire their needed information primarily via traditional mass media or from interpersonal communication. Yet at the same time, low-income people are described as if they were living in a seemingly dysfunctional world. The fact is that these urban low-income residents are incapable of taking full advantage of the critically needed information at will for solving the problems that they are facing[21]. For instance, one interviewee has a daughter who suffers from an illness of “attention-deficient hyperactivity disorder” (ADHD). She obtained a certain amount of information about this disease sporadically from her doctors or from some children’s health magazines. Other than this, she had no idea of where else she could get this illness related information. In addition, it is shown from our investigation that not all problems of these low-income people can be solved simply by an informational therapy. In several other cases, these interviewees also expressed a need of emotional support and of companionship from their immediate family members, relatives and/or friends. In a few other cases, they resorted to alleviating their pressure by reading religious books, novels or simply watching TV.

4.2 What kinds of information they need

As indicated from Fig. 4, urban low-information residents need all kinds of information in conducting their daily lives more effectively. They include but not limited to such essential information as those about medical care, education and healthy living. The information they need are very practical and their information seeking behaviors are very closely related to their daily necessities. In our
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Fig. 4 The kinds of information the interviewees care about. Note: a, Medical care & medical welfare; b, education; c, healthy living; d, cookery; e, news & current affairs; f, social welfare; g, prices of goods and products; h, employment; i, housing; j, national policies; k, traffic & transportation; l, summer jobs; m, others.

In the investigation, more than half of the interviewees claimed that medical care information was what they needed most. 80% of them had at least one family member who suffered from a disease, which was a primary cause of their poverty. Under such circumstances, they needed information not only about medical care, but also about medical welfare programs by which they could better manage their medical expenses. Educational information was ranked the second most needed information for them. 84% of them had at least one child who was still at school. As such, educational expenses were an obvious financial burden on the family. To help their children do better at school, most of the parents were very interested in reading about educational information, especially about information regarding scholarship and stipulations for possible remissions of tuition and miscellaneous fees. Information about healthy cooking and living are also needed as many of them believed that a healthy lifestyle was helpful to reduce their medical expenses.

Moreover, they were more interested in reading about or listening to the societal news, such as local news on robbery, riots, natural disasters and man-made accidents. Some of the interviewees claimed that watching or listening to this kind of news was helpful in keeping them aware of events that happened around them so as to keep them away from troubles and misfortunes. 12% of the interviewees said that they needed not get any information proactively as they were usually told by their friends and neighbors about those pieces of information that they needed to hear. Our research survey found that the urban low-income residents definitely have a need about many kinds of practical and entertaining information for their well-being and survival. However, it is also true that they are often not aware of their true information needs themselves. As suggested by Chatman, life of the poor is full of information problems, but they are not active in seeking information and they also do not know how to express their problems. Previous research publications on ELIS also show that the information need of urban low-income people is very similar to
that of such disadvantaged groups as rural migrant workers and the disabled, but there are some differences between them. Therefore, we need to delve more deeply into the information need of the urban low-income people, so as to provide more customized information services for them.

### 4.3 Channels for acquiring the information they need

Various channels for the interviewees for acquiring information are indicated in Fig. 5. Firstly, they tend to obtain everyday life information from mass media, especially from local television programs and newspapers. This research finding echoes the findings of earlier research works in the USA, such as those authored by Greenberg and Dervin\(^8\) and Chatman\(^9\). Secondly, residents’ committees serve as an important source for low-income people to acquire their everyday life information, especially that about medical care and education. It is shown that the officials at residents’ committees often help the low-income residents apply for medical welfare, because most of them are not familiar with the application policies and procedures. Thirdly, interpersonal communication is another important channel for the interviewed participants to acquire everyday life information. They tend to resort to their family, friends and other people who are in the same social stratum as themselves in getting and passing on the needed information. Whenever they are not able to acquire certain information, they would try to get help from such individuals who are in a higher social stratum (as defined by the higher level of income and other tangible assets) or have specialized training in a certain field such as medical doctors or government officials. As suggested by other Chinese scholars, the principle of least effort is especially applicable to the information seeking behavior of the information disadvantaged group, and it is only when they cannot solve their problems in a more convenient way that they will resort to other solutions\(^{17}\).

![Fig. 5 Information channels for acquiring information by the interviewees. Note: a, TV programs; b, residents’ committees; c, newspapers; d, friends and colleagues; e, radios; f, books; g, magazines; h, doctors; i, schools; j, family members; k, Internet; l, personal experience; m, government officials; n, agencies; o, social organizations.](image)
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It is worth noting that the interviewed participants rarely obtain their everyday life information from printed resources due to their inferiority in terms of the timeliness of the information. Some of them would acquire relevant information from government offices such as the Social Security Bureau and the Civil Affairs Bureau. They claimed that the information from the residents’ committees is often either not timely enough or out-of-date. Since the information about medical care or education is very closely related to their everyday lives, they need to pay special attention to the most updated information for such. It should also be noted that these interviewees rarely acquire information via the Internet. One of the reasons is that they do not know how to use computers. Whenever they need some kind of information, they would ask their children or friends for assistance. Moreover, some of them do not have the motive to learn how to use computers as they think that they are too old to learn. This research finding also validates the findings of other Chinese scholars that the information seeking behavior of the disadvantaged groups is confined within traditional media and these urban low-income residents have not yet benefited from the development of information and communication technologies in any significant way in their information seeking activities.

4.4 Factors affecting the information seeking behavior

Pursuant to Savolainen’s ELIS model, which is a typical model to elaborate the role of social and cultural factors that affect people’s ways of preferring and using information resources in everyday life settings, we attempt to analyze the information seeking behavior of the interviewees in order to have a better understanding of the information behavior of urban low-income people.

4.4.1 Material capital

Poverty is a major characteristic of low-income people. It is shown that money is the most important factor in affecting both their prioritization of certain subject-specific information needs and the selection of their preferred means in accessing such needed information. As mentioned before, most of the interviewees are interested in the information related to medical care, education and healthy living (Interviewee No. 10 and No. 34). It is also noted that these interviewees seldom use printed resources to satisfy their information needs. The reasons for this are not just their low educational level, but also the higher cost involved for purchasing those printed resources such as books and magazines (Interviewee No. 4, 14 and 37). For example, one interviewee (No. 4) said, “I do not buy books at bookstores because they are too expensive. I would rather buy them on bookstands. Although the books there are pirated ones, they are much cheaper. Sometimes I would spend 1 Yuan to...
buy *Guangzhou Daily* for reading current events. I would read it from cover to cover. I need to make the most value of my hard-earned money”.

### 4.4.2 Social capital

Social capital consists of someone’s social relationships and resources. Because of economical, cultural, biological and other reasons, low-income people usually live in a small world\(^{[23]}\). They often have a strong sense of family-tie and are usually preoccupied with the handling of all kinds of domestic chores in fulfilling their filial responsibilities in their daily lives. In addition, they are seldom in contact with others for their information needs because of their low self-esteem. Therefore, urban low-income people lack the social capital, which may curtail their options for information accessing channels. For example, one interviewee (No. 36) was looking for jobs via job agencies. Although it cost him money, he said, “It is difficult for me to look for jobs by myself. I rarely keep in touch with my relatives and friends. Or I should say that they are probably not willing to contact us, because they worry that we might want to borrow money from them”.

### 4.4.3 Cultural and cognitive capital

Cultural and cognitive capital can be acquired by education and training and it can be converted into economic capital. As mentioned before, the overall educational level of the interviewed participants are relatively low. Most of them have just received a 9-year compulsory education. A few of them are even illiterate. The educational level can have a great impact on people’s information seeking behavior. Those who are less-educated can often have a sense of low achievement, which to some extent affects their interest in learning and in seeking needed information. As for the illiterate interviewees, most of them revealed that they had no special preference in getting any kind of information as in most cases they received information in a passive way. When asked about whether they would occasionally read books, learn how to use computers or go to libraries, their answers were generally negative.

### 4.4.4 Current situation of life

Current situation of life is the context in which information users live. Information needs arise from information problems, and information seeking behaviors arise from contexts. In other words, the environmental context affects how people define information and how they use information. It is revealed from our investigation that the interviewees who have family members suffering from an illness would place a premium value on medical care and welfare information, whereas those who have children at school would assign foremost importance to school-related educational
information. For example, an interviewee (No. 37)’s husband has been suffering from a cancer illness for several years, which has prevented their daughter from attending the kindergarten due to their family’s financial difficulties. She needs relevant information about the cancer disease her husband has. As the family has already spent a fortune on paying for medical care of her husband, she cannot afford at the same time to bear the cost of the educational expenses for her daughter. She is looking for information about which kindergarten may be most suitable for her daughter.

In addition, we found that a person’s age has a substantial impact on his/her information seeking behavior and attitude toward information. For those adults whose children are still at school, they care a great deal about school-related educational information. They often obtain their needed information via the Internet. For those whose age is between 30 and 59 years old, they are more interested in information about medical care, children’s education and housing, in a descending order, which are all closely related to their everyday lives. People of this age group tend to acquire information from TV programs and interpersonal communication. For those whose age is 60 and over, they care more about the information on healthy living and medical welfare. Moreover, they depend a lot on the residents’ committees to pass on the information that they need in their everyday lives.

4.4.5 Values and attitudes

Values and attitudes can have great influence on people’s initiatives to acquire information. It is found that some of the interviewees are open-minded, optimistic, and they tend to take their initiatives to acquire information (Interviewee No. 13). On the other hand, there are also some who are pessimistic towards life and they tend to passively receive information from others such as from the officials at the residents’ committees. An interviewee who suffers from a chronic illness of hypertension said, “I do not need too much information. Owing to my old age, I easily forget what I have read. So, if I can get some information, that is fine with me. Otherwise, I do not care too much about it”.

4.5 How difficult it is to acquire everyday life information

As far as the easiness in accessing everyday life information is concerned, our research finding indicates that 42% of the interviewed participants said that it is “easy” or “relatively easy”. 28% of them said that it is “not very easy” or even “very difficult”, whereas the rest of them basically did not give any clear answer. In their everyday lives, urban low-income people would encounter various problems but they managed to solve some of these problems by sharing personal experiences of similar situations. Sometimes, they are aware of their information needs, especially
with regard to social welfare and expert opinions. However, they usually acquire this type of information via interpersonal communication or via mass media. Such tactics do not seem to fully satisfy their information needs. As suggested by some Chinese scholars, personal and social factors often contribute an invisible barrier for the urban disadvantaged groups to acquire the information they need. Personal factors consist of material, cultural, social capitals, current situation of life, values and attitudes in the ELIS model, whereas social factors refer primarily to the lack of a nationally centralized platform of information resources and a social networking infrastructure at large in China[16].

5 Use of libraries

As suggested by the IFLA/UNESCO Public Library Manifesto, the public library should be the local center of information, making all kinds of knowledge and information readily available to its users. The service of the public library should be provided on the basis of equality of access for all, regardless of age, race, sex, religion, nationality, language or social status[23]. Therefore, to provide information service for urban low-income residents is one of the major responsibilities of public libraries.

5.1 Use of libraries by the interviewees

As indicated in Fig. 6, 86% of the interviewees said that they have never used libraries, 6% of them said that they used to go to libraries, but they stopped using them for some unspecified reasons. 8% of them said that they do go to libraries. The libraries they use are mostly public libraries such as Guangzhou Children’s Library, Guangzhou City Library and Haizhu District Library. A lot of them would read in the libraries while taking their children there. Apart from public libraries,
the children of some interviewees would go to school libraries. It is shown that the current situation of the library use by urban low-income residents is left much to be desired. Public libraries are far away from meeting their information needs. Compared with the research findings on the library use by rural migrant workers in China\cite{12-14}, we can see that library service rendered to urban low-income residents is even more untenable. This phenomenon should be seriously addressed by researchers and practitioners in the Chinese LIS field.

5.2 Reasons for not using libraries

During the interview, our field investigators asked the interviewed participants why they do not use libraries. They gave us various reasons as follows: 1) They do not have time. They are too busy and preoccupied with either their jobs, or with taking care of their family members. Some of them feel “under too much pressure”, and they “have no mood to go to libraries”. 2) They know very little about library’s full-range information service operations. Some of them do not know where their local public libraries are located, whereas some of them mistook bookstores as libraries. 3) Physical reasons, such as old age, bad vision and poor health. Any one of such malaises could pose an overwhelming obstacle inhibiting them from going to a library. In addition, some of them mentioned that there are books and magazines to read or borrow in the offices of the residents’ committees, and therefore, there is no need for them to visit libraries.

5.3 Suggestions of library services for urban low-income residents

Based on the investigations we carried out on the information seeking behavior of urban low-income residents, we put forward suggestions for public libraries to provide customized information services:

- To promote and improve public library service delivery to urban low-income residents, especially to provide fee-free and practical information that is closely related to their everyday lives. Public libraries should also exempt their fees from applying for a library card and should offer them free access to the Internet. For those who are not familiar with the physical layout, resources and services of their local public libraries, public libraries should offer them a series of good library orientation programs.
- Public libraries should develop a collection of specialized digital resources and related information searching tools for urban low-income residents. There should be specialized network resources on library websites for this special group. To help them better benefit from information and communication technology, free training courses should be provided in order to improve their information and computer literacy skills.
Public libraries should organize various readers’ activities for urban low-income residents. We believe that public libraries should be a public space for all residents in the community. The organization of readers’ activities is helpful for them not only to cultivate their reading habits, but also to acquire more social capital and thus to have more channels for them to acquire information.

Public libraries should provide outreach service to neighborhoods where urban low-income residents live by cooperating with officials of the residents’ committees. It is revealed from our study that urban low-income residents depend a lot on officials of the residents’ committees for acquiring the information they need. In offices of the residents’ committees where there are books and magazines available for local residents to read or borrow, public libraries can offer group loan services. Of course, the development of community libraries in these neighborhoods would be a far better solution.

6 Conclusions

As a special social group, urban low-income residents have attracted more attention from LIS scholars and practitioners. Our study has revealed that the information seeking behavior of urban low-income residents has unique characteristics in terms of their capital resources, values, attitudes and current situation of life. The utilitarian value of information is of great importance to them. Their information seeking behavior is very much oriented toward the actual necessities of their everyday lives. They care about the information which can satisfy their basic everyday life needs, rather than that on entertainment and recreation. Most of the time, they are not aware of their information needs, even when they do have access to most of the information. They are only rudimentarily knowledgeable about using a very limited number of channels for acquiring information, which is also constantly undermined by their poor information literacy skills. With an aim to develop a universal, equitable public cultural service system in China, public libraries should provide more customized and effective information services for urban low-income residents.

Qualitative and quantitative methods are two complementary research methodologies in social science research. In our study, we primarily adopted qualitative approach. However, in our future research, we need to combine our study with an added quantitative approach in order to achieve more objectivity and validity in our research findings.

Finally, we need to point out that our research samples were only limited to the Haizhu District of Guangzhou due to the limited funding and manpower made available for us to conduct this research project. It is obvious that we need to expand
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our research further into other districts of the City in order to enhance the credibility of our analytical interpretations. Also, because Guangzhou is a microcosm of the better-developed cities in China, it is desirable that we should also investigate the situation of urban low-income residents in other cities of China for a comparative analysis. Specifically, we need to examine, at our next opportunity, whether there are any differences of information seeking behaviors among urban low-income residents in different geographical areas of China. If there are some differences indeed, then we also need to delve into more deeply the reasons for such differences.

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