Chinese Individual Investors’ Information-Seeking Behavior on the Web

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Abstract
This study explores what types of information Chinese individual investors seek on the web and how they seek information online, based on 19 semi-structured in-depth interviews conducted in China. The results indicate that investors seek different types of information online, such as policy information, individual stock information, economic information, industrial information, and unexpected event information. Policy information is the most important for the investors, followed by individual stock information. The study also identifies several investors’ information-browsing patterns, such as focused, main-complementary, parallel, referenced, and goal-driven. The study indicates that investment context in China, the way of supporting information provision, and information-seeking tasks and goals greatly shape investors’ information-seeking behavior. The study helps researchers understand characteristics of investors’ information-seeking behavior. As well, it informs online investment information provision and organization and has implications for interface design of online information systems.

Keywords: information-seeking behavior; investors; browsing; information-seeking pattern

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1 Introduction
Various studies indicate that context or environment shapes users’ information-seeking behavior to some extent (e.g., Taylor, 1991; Järvelin and Ingwersen, 2004; Freund, Toms, and Waterhouse, 2005; Courtright, 2007). According to Dewey (1960), context is “...a spatial and temporal background which affects all thinking and a selective interest or bias which conditions the subject matter of thinking” (p.90). Taylor (1991) defined “information use environment” (IUE) as “the set of those elements that (a) affect the flow and use of information messages into, within, and out of any definable entity, and (b) determine the criteria by which the value of information messages will be judged” (p.218). Moreover, he identified a few IUEs, and categorized users into professionals, entrepreneurs, special interest groups, and special socioeconomic groups. So far, researchers have made a great effort to explore and model users’ information-seeking behavior in different contexts or environments (e.g. Ellis, 1989; Kuhlthau, 1991; Leckie, Pettigrew, and Sylvain, 1996; Ellis and Haugan, 1997; Algon, 1999; Tsai, 2004; Nicholas et al., 2009; Choi, 2010). These studies have developed different information-seeking models, identified information-seeking patterns, or characterized information-seeking behavior based on examining different user groups, including social scientists, students at different levels, different types of professionals, and R&D groups in industries, in traditional or web-based environments. These studies illustrate that users in various contexts show different characteristics when seeking information. They select different information sources and types of information, gather different amounts of information, taking different search strategies, and interact with IR systems in different ways. These studies also suggest that it is necessary to examine users’ information-seeking behavior in different contexts or information use environments.
Although many studies have investigated users’ information-seeking behavior in different contexts, few studies have examined the characteristics of individual investors’ information search behavior (Loibl and Hira, 2009; Pandey, Sharma, and Mittal, 2011). In fact, investors always face a fast-changing, complicated, and risky investment context. That is quite different from the contexts other user groups face. Such context requires that investors keep informed, and thus it motivates a great need for investment information. The information not only supports investors’ decision-making, but also helps them keep monitoring the change of the market. Moreover, because investment is related to personal or family asset security, real-time and accurate information is what the investors need (Li and Hu, 2012). This study attempts to examine what types of information investors need and how they seek information on the Web based on a case study in China.

Some literature has revealed that the investors seek information from friends (Li and Hu, 2012), family members (Williamson, 2008), financial analysts (Lin and Lee, 2004), and other traditional media, including newspapers, TV or radio programs (Li and Hu, 2012). However, because the Internet is such a powerful tool in information dissemination, a lot of investors now use it to gather information (Lin and Lee, 2004; Williamson, 2008; Li and Hu, 2012; Li & Liu, 2014). According to the investigation conducted by horise.com, 85.4% of investors in China are online traders and 80.93% of the investors seek information from the Web (horise.com, 2010). Therefore, the Internet has been one of the most frequently used information sources of investors in China. Though some studies have identified different types of information sources investors use (Lin and Lee, 2004; Li and Hu, 2012) and the factors influencing their usage of information sources (Lin and Lee, 2004; Loibl and Hira, 2009), it is still unclear what types of information they seek and how they seek information on the Web.

Therefore, this study addresses the following research questions:

Q1: What types of information do individual investors seek from the Web?

Q2: How do they seek information on the Web?

The first question attempts to identify information types that investors seek online. The second one aims to see how investors seek information on the Web, by examining whether they prefer to conduct analytic searches or browsing strategies for finding useful information. Analytic searching and browsing are two basic information-seeking strategies (Qiu, 1993; Chang, 2005). Information searching or seeking behavior has been widely examined in information science, and various theoretical models have been proposed (e.g. Ellis, 1989; Kuhlthau, 1991; Wilson, 1999). With regard to browsing, according to Chang (2005), users conducted monitor browsing, situational browsing, evaluative browsing, focus browsing, and other types of browsing. Along this line, the present study attempts to recognize investors’ information-seeking patterns.

2 Literature Review
As mentioned above, limited studies have been done on investors’ information-seeking or search behavior (Lin and Lee, 2004; Loibl and Hira, 2009; Pandey, Sharma, and Mittal, 2011). Previous studies mostly focus on information sources that investors use, based on that to identify their search strategies. Also, the factors that affect investor information search behavior are also examined.

Mezick (2001) reported that investors mostly used magazines and newspapers; friends and relatives, web pages, and search engines followed. However, with the development of the Internet, Kingsford-Smith and Williamson (2004) found that all of the online investors interviewed in their study spent quite a large amount of time in seeking and using online information. They identified a list of information sources of investors, including brokers’ sites and other online information. The Internet was the major information provider, especially the websites of online investors (Williamson and Kingsford-Smith, 2010). Li and Hu (2012) examined investors’ information sources used for investment decision-making in China, and their results support the findings of Kingsford-Smith and Williamson (2004) and Lin and Lee (2004). All Chinese
investors interviewed used online information frequently. Furthermore, Li, Hu, & Liu (2013) found that browsing is a dominant information-seeking strategy of Chinese individual investors.

The Internet has been an important information source for the investors with higher levels of education, more subjective knowledge, those who are younger, and those with more household income (Lin and Lee, 2004). Some studies have examined investors’ information-seeking behavior in online social networks, online investment communities, or investing forums. Tan and Tan (2012) found that online communities played a limited role in investment informational social support. However, the online environment encouraged more collaborative and information-dense environments (O’Connor, 2013). Drake, Roulstone, & Thornock (2012) concluded that the information demand of individual investors was increasing over a period surrounding the earnings announcement. Also, it was positively associated with media attention and news, but negatively associated with investor distraction. Park, Gu, & Leung et. al. (2014) found that in online investment communities sense of belonging, entertainment value, and perceived usefulness were significant antecedent factors of both intention to share and intention to seek, which subsequently lead to information-sharing and information-seeking behaviors. Intention to seek was positively related to information seeking behavior, and intention to share was positively related to only information-sharing behavior.

Besides the Internet, Kingsford-Smith and Williamson (2004) identified a list of kinds information sources for online investors, such as newspapers, journals and other printed information, and personal sources of information (family, friends and acquaintances). Their further study confirmed that traditional newspapers, journals, and the electronic media were important information sources of investors in Australia (Williamson and Kingsford-Smith, 2010). Lin and Lee (2004) found that literature (e.g., books, newspaper articles, consumer magazines, etc.) media (different types of TV programs, radio programs, and so on), the Internet, friends/family, and professional financial service providers greatly support consumers’ investment decision-making. Li and Hu (2012) identified similar information sources of Chinese investors, including personal sources, newspapers, and journals. Differently, Chinese investors relied quite heavily on information from financial programs on TV and some investment expert’s blogs.

Loibl and Hira (2009) identified five typologies for investor information searching based on how the investors used different sources of information, such as the balanced investor, online investor, moderate investor, workplace investor, and reluctant investor. Different groups of investors use different types of information sources and adopt different approaches to locating useful information. To investigate investors’ information sharing and use in virtual communities, O’Connor (2013) analyzed the data from three investing forums. She found that the sources mostly cited in the forum included discussion forums and posts, books, rating services sources and news, followed by comprehensive finance web sites, financial tools, guru sites and blogs, commercial finance web sites, and magazines, journals, and newsletters. The study indicated that the investors still greatly used personal sources of information and took monographs and newspapers as authoritative information sources.

The review indicates that individual investors exploit quite similar information sources when seeking information in different countries. The difference lies in that some sources are dominant in some countries (for example, the Internet in China), but in other countries, it may not be so important due to various information sources being available.

3 Method

Surveys are widely used in exploring investor information searching (e.g., Mezick, 2001; Lin and Lee, 2004; Williamson, 2008; Loibl and Hira, 2009; Nilsson, Nordvall, and Isberg, 2010). Some researchers have also approached the question via content analysis (O’Connor, 2013). Only a few studies have conducted interviews. For instance, based on interviews with 26 investors from Australia, Williamson (2008) presented different findings from the survey. Semi-structured interviews have been widely used to examine users’
information-seeking behavior (Case, 2007; Fisher and Julien, 2009). Therefore, to deeply understand what information investors seek on the Web and their information-seeking patterns, the current study conducted semi-structured in-depth interviews to tackle the research questions.

3.1 Demographic Characteristics of the Interviewees

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Investment experience</th>
<th>Not too much (year&lt;3)</th>
<th>Fair (3≤ year &lt;6)</th>
</tr>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td><strong>Outcome</strong></td>
<td>Successful</td>
<td>Fair</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>6 (32%)</td>
<td>8 (42%)</td>
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<tr>
<td><strong>Investment mode</strong></td>
<td>Long-term</td>
<td>Both</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>9 (47%)</td>
<td>3 (16%)</td>
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<tr>
<td>7 (37%)</td>
<td>5 (26%)</td>
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<tr>
<td><strong>Sources of subject knowledge</strong></td>
<td>School education</td>
<td>Self-taught</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3 (16%)</td>
<td>15 (79%)</td>
<td></td>
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<tr>
<td><strong>Self-assessed subject knowledge</strong></td>
<td>Not too much (1, 2, 3)</td>
<td>Fair (4)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>7 (37%)</td>
<td>6 (32%)</td>
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<tr>
<td><strong>Investment mode</strong></td>
<td>Long-term</td>
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Table 1. Demographic characteristics of interviewees

The literature review indicates that well-educated and young investors are more likely to seek information on the Web. To target the research questions, these two aspects were taken into account during the recruitment of the interviewees. Nineteen interviewees with investment experience were recruited by distributing recruitment notices to online forums, the university campus, and bus stops. Among them, five were from industries and three were MBA students; others were undergraduate or master’s students, teachers, government officials, or self-employed individuals. Twelve males (63.16%) and seven females (36.84%) were recruited. Their ages ranged from 20 to 45 years. Among them, seventeen interviewees had earned a Bachelor degree or higher.

The interviews were conducted from December 2010 to July 2011. Each interview lasted from 40 to 60 minutes. Also, the interviewees were from different cities in China. Thirteen were from Tianjin and others were from Guangzhou, Shenyang, and Harbin.

Table 1 shows the interviewees’ investment experience, self-assessed success or not, investment mode, sources of subjective knowledge, and self-assessed subjective knowledge.

3.2 Data Collection and Analysis

Though the data was collected five years ago, considering that the Internet has been more developed in China in these years, it is possible that the individual investors more rely on the information on the Web. Thus, the data is still valuable in terms of examining individual investors’ information-seeking behavior on the Web.
The interview was guided by the following questions:

- Entry questions on years of investment, investment mode (long-term or short-term investment), sources of subjective knowledge, self-assessment of subjective knowledge, evaluation of investment environment, and education.
- Questions on general information of investment, such as the purpose of investment, specific sectors of investment, trading methods, investment knowledge, and information sources.
- Questions on information-seeking activities in general, such as the reasons to collect information, the time and the ways to collect information, comparison of different ways, and their evaluation of different information sources.
- Questions on web information-seeking activities, such as the ways they collect information online, the web sites they frequently visit, information search strategies, criteria to judge credibility of information, and evaluation of the quality of web information.

A pilot study with two interviews was conducted to test the interview protocol. The analysis indicated that the protocol was appropriate in general but a minor revision was necessary for clarifying a few questions. The interviews were recorded by an electronic recording device and transcribed after the interviews. Two researchers analyzed the text via open coding separately. Then, they discussed, compared, and categorized all codes to identify information types and information-seeking patterns.

4 Results

The interviews indicate that the investors usually gathered information from financial websites, portals, and general search engines. This section addresses information types the investors seek on the Web, their information browsing patterns.

4.1 Information Types

The investors sought different types of information, including policy information, economic information, industrial information, individual stock information, and unexpected event information.

Policy information includes state plans, industrial policy, and monetary policy. By studying policy information, investors can foresee the industries or regions that the state favors, because the corresponding stocks’ prices will typically rise if such favor happens. If the state formulates expansionary monetary policy, more money can enter stock markets and push the markets up. The investors understand this well. As S17 said, ‘The government issues some policies for macro-economic control. Your investment should follow these policies, and then you will find some patterns in the development of the financial market in China.’ S5 gave an example: ‘For example, regarding macro-economic control for real estate, each policy issued by the government impacts the stock market a lot...Also, the adjustment of bank deposit ratios greatly influences Chinese stock markets.’ S12 also agreed with that. He said: ‘I, in fact, pay attention to different types of information, but policy information is the most critical one.’ Therefore, for Chinese investors, it is important to monitor any change in policies by seeking related information.

Economic information includes economic development level and inflation. Investors try to evaluate the status of the economy, e.g., growth or recession. The economy influences stock markets. For example, the subprime mortgage crisis dragged world-wide stock markets into recession. In China, inflation is a critical factor that influences the Chinese stock market. When S14 discussed his decision-making for the time to access the market, he said, “the investment was motivated by the CPI (Consumer Price Index) and negative interest rates at that time, which finally pushed me to take a binding offer.” S2 also pointed out that for him/her economic information mostly referred to the CPI, based on which he made decisions in investment. Overall, policy information affects stock markets’ short-term trends, while economic information affects the long-term trends of the financial market.
Industrial information includes the future of industrial development, the performance of the stocks in industries, the degree of policy supportiveness. Investors can seek leading stocks of the industry that the state backs. They can also learn the stocks in the sector and compare the stocks. As S4 pointed out, "(I) seek some industrial information, for example, (information about) the wine industry. Such information could tell which industry is more promising in the future. Also, policies affect the development of an industry. For example, if bank interest increases, then the industry will change accordingly. Again, the development of an industry affects stock market significantly." This indicates that industrial information is also critical for the investors.

Individual stock information includes the fundamental information and technical information about a stock. Fundamental information covers the corporation's profile, industry status, shareholders' composition, financial performance, and main operation. Technical information covers stock price trends, trading volume, large transactions, highs, and lows. Some investors seek individual stock information, especially before making a decision to buy a new stock. For example, when discussing individual stock information, S17 said, "(I) seek individual stock information before buying. For instance, Hualan Bio conducted an R&D program for producing vaccines last year and invested 0.2 billion. However, the government rejected to pay for the research and production in the end since the situation changed." Such information greatly affected the investors' decision-making. Also, S3 pointed out that the information related to new products, corporate mergers and reorganization, or other big changes in a corporation was important information for investors.

Unexpected event information influences stock markets. For example, sudden bad news for a corporation can cause the stock's price to deeply drop, and some investors understand this well. When discussing what information investors seek online, S16 said, "I can give you an example. Several days ago, political unrest in Libya and Egypt has influenced the price of gasoline a lot, so has nuclear radiation in Japan. You need to analyze the information and could see how greatly these events impact the stock market."

Figure 1 shows the distribution of information types that the investors sought on the Web. It is interesting that almost all the investors sought policy information, probably because Chinese stock markets are heavily driven by policies (Heilman, 2002; Wang, Haslam, and Marston, 2011).

The analysis indicated that the investors differently weighed the importance of each type. 73.68% of the investors ranked policy information as the most influential one. For example, S5 said, "Once a policy is issued, there must have some people who trade upon the policy"; S8 said, "I closely track policy information. Chinese stock markets very rapidly react to policies." They believe that Chinese stock markets are shaped by policies. Only 15.70% of the investors ranked individual stock information as the most influential one. These investors assumed that a corporation’s fundamental information determined the stock’s price trend. S9 stated, "I concentrate on the fundamental but consider policy information as well. Policy information affects the overall economy and has a limited effect on an individual corporation. In contrast, individual stock information, e.g., a plan for a new project or a lawsuit against the corporation, will impact the price of the stock." Other information types are also necessary but not as important as policy information and individual stock information.
4.2 Information Browsing Patterns

During the interview, the investors were required to describe their information-seeking activities and processes. Several information-seeking patterns surfaced, such as focused, main-complementary, parallel, referenced, and goal-driven patterns. This section elaborates these patterns.

Focused: The investors seek information only from a few comprehensive and credible web sites. For example, S3 stated, “(I) mainly searched business.sohu.com and Donghai Securities. I think that is enough!” S3 explained, “On one hand, I have no so much time (to go through the whole Web). On the other hand, all (finance) web sites are similar.” To S2, he visited only one site (JRJ.com), and that was enough for him. Therefore, these investors sought information from quite limited information sources. However, limited information sources could provide sufficient information from their point of view.

Main-complementary: Compared to the focused investors, the main-complementary investors take some web sites as their major sources, but some other sites as a supplement if necessary. They highly value the comprehensiveness of their main source. As S1 said, "(I) mainly visit horise.com. Sometimes I visit wind.com, not that frequently, and also sina.com and people.com." S5 also pointed out that "Sina.com provides real-time information, very comprehensive. You can find any information you want. If sometimes I could not, I went to Baidu.com or some blogs." Therefore, the main-complementary investors first browse the main source(s) to gather as much as information from comprehensive or specialized web sites. If the main source(s) cannot satisfy their information needs, they then move on to complementary sources.

Parallel: The investors seek information from different sources. However, unlike the main-complementary investors, they weigh the sources equally in information providing and do not distinguish sources as main or complementary. Also different from the focused investors, they do not concentrate on very limited sources when seeking information. They go through various sources and gather useful information. As S17 said, “(I) collected information from the following web sites: horise.com, eastmoney.com, yicai.com, and sina.com.” Scanning and gathering as much as possible information is their main purpose when seeking information on the Web.

Referenced: The investors realize that some information online is not credible. They prefer to search different sources and compare the information from these sources to identify high-quality information. As S9 pointed out, "I gather some information from the QQ forum. However, if I would like to verify information, I go to search comprehensive web sites since the information from these web sites is more credible. It is hard to judge whether the information from QQ forum is real or not." Some investors sought information
from web sites overseas, for example, from finance ifeng.com (a Hongkong-based web site), in order to verify
the information collected from domestic web sites. As S8 stated, “Finance ifeng.com is not based on
mainland China. Some information from this site is not censored by the government of Mainland China, so
from these web sites I can get more credible information.” S18 also took a similar approach. He said: “(I)
visit horise.com most frequently because it is the first web site I searched for financial information. I
sometimes visit horise.com and also go through other sites. If the information is similar, I do not go deep;
otherwise, I take a look at the information more closely.” These investors more care about the credibility
of information compared to others.

Goal-driven: The investors are motivated by specific seeking goals or tasks. For example, S9 sought
information from different sources because of his different seeking goals, namely, to “search” or to “verify”
information. Others are driven by specific information-seeking tasks. S14 said, “If I need the annual reports
of companies, I go to cdxd.net.cn; for daily stock market information, I use horise.com; for reports of
brokerage houses, I search microbell.com.” S15 and S16 also presented a similar information-seeking pattern.

Though the study identifies several patterns, some investors’ information-seeking activities could
be characterized into more than one pattern. For example, S9 could be a “referenced” or “goal-driven”
investor based on the interview data. S15 sought information only from limited information sources and
could be categorized into the “focused” investors category. However, he sought information from these
sources for different purposes: he went to microbell.com for research reports of the stock market, while
he/she went to wenku.baidu.com for deeper information. Therefore, it is appropriate to label him a ‘goal-

driven’ investor as well.

5 Discussion

Based on semi-structured in-depth interviews, this study examines how individual investors seek information
on the Web in China. Some researchers have examined investors’ information search behavior in different
countries or regions, for example, Australia (Williamson, 2008), India (Pandey, Sharma, and Mittal, 2011),
USA (e.g. Loibl and Hira, 2009), and Taiwan (Tseng and Yang, 2010). For Mainland China, investment to
the stock market has been open to individual investors only for around 26 years. The market is still
immature, and individual investors greatly rely on public information sources online. This study adds new
knowledge to the community and helps improve understanding of how individual Chinese investors seek
information on the Web.

It is agreed that analytic searching and browsing are widely used information-seeking strategies. In
traditional IR systems, searching is a dominant approach for locating relevant information. With the
development of IR, different types of IR systems have been constructed, such as digital libraries, search
engines, and web portals or gateways. As a result, browsing for information by following hyperlinks has
been another important approach. The study indicates that specialized finance search engines are lacking
in China. However, there are different existing specialized finance portals or gateways. Therefore, browsing
has been a dominant information-seeking strategy of investors in China. This suggests that the way
providing information on the Web shapes users’ information-seeking behavior to some extent.

The results support previous studies (Lin and Lee, 2004; Loibl and Hira, 2009) and indicate that
individual investors’ information-seeking behavior is quite different from users who use traditional IR
systems or digital libraries, with regard to the methods used to locate information, select sources, develop
search strategies, to the information types they need, and to their information-seeking patterns. For
investors, information seeking on the Web frequently happens as their daily work, and browsing is their
major information-seeking strategy. Information-seeking activities for most of the investors are similar to
environmental scanning (Choo, 2001). In this way, they can monitor the market and try to catch up even
small changes that could threaten their asset security or boost their earnings. That leads to more browsing
than searching. Also, the current study adds more knowledge on user’s browsing behavior, specifically in
terms of investors in China. They present some general characteristics of browsing behavior (Chang, 2005), such as monitor browsing and situational browsing. They also show some special characteristics when browsing, for example, referenced and main-complementary browsing. They present more concern about information credibility and comprehensiveness for their decision-making.

The study indicates that investors seek information from different sources based on their specific seeking tasks. Tasks are an important factor shaping users’ information-seeking behavior (e.g. Marchonini, 1989; Qiu, 1993; Kim, 2009; Li and Belkin, 2010). The investors need to seek different types of information and select different information sources accordingly. Most investors scan general information for monitoring the stock market. For this end, they conduct more browsing than searching. When they need to gather comprehensive and real-time information, they conduct focused, main-complementary, and parallel browsing; for identifying credible information, referenced browsing is usually conducted for comparing information from different sources.

Besides, the process of information seeking of main-complementary and parallel investors present characteristics of ‘berrypicking’ described by Bates (1989). They visit different sources and pick up useful information from each source.

Unlike investors in other countries who are concerned with financial information, Chinese investors seek policy information more frequently. Most of the investors evaluated it as the most important information they seek on the Web. This is influenced by the investment context in China. As mentioned above, the Chinese financial market is still immature, and state policy affects the market greatly. Some researchers call it a ‘policy-driven market’ (Heilmann, 2002; Wang, Haslam, and Marston, 2011), which leads investors’ preference to policy information. Also, an immature and policy-driven investment context pushes investors to conduct more browsing than searching to gather general investment information, so that they can keep monitoring the investment environment in China and the world. Therefore, the investment context facing the investors is an important factor that shapes their’ information-seeking behavior in China. This also supports the view that considering user information behavior under a social context is necessary (Allen, Karanasos, and Slavova, 2011).

This study has limitations. The small sample possibly biases the research results. Moreover, the interviewees could only represent young and well-educated (above college education) Chinese investors. Also, the research results are based on the analysis of interview data, which may not completely reflect all the investor’s information-seeking activities. Information-seeking strategies and patterns of investors may not be completely revealed. In addition, the study was conducted in China. The results may not be generalizable to the investors who are facing a significantly different investment context from that of China. In addition, it is not easy for individual investors to access to professional financial information services in China, e.g. Bloomberg. On one hand, it is expensive for individual investors to subscribe to such kind of databases; on the other hand, they may lack professional knowledge to use such kind of databases. During the interviews, few individual investors mentioned their information-seeking activities in professional financial information services. This is also a limitation of this study.

However, the implications of the study are salient. As mentioned above, the study contributes new knowledge on individual investors’ information-seeking behavior to the community. The study recognizes different types of information that investors seek on the web and identifies information-seeking patterns of investors. The findings inform other investors in the Chinese stock market how to effectively and efficiently gather investment information. The study also reveals that investors’ information-seeking behavior is quite different from other user groups, for example, social scientists, students, and so on. On the one hand, they are more concerned with real-time, comprehensive, and credible information due to interest-driven investment activities. On the other hand, they mostly browse information on the Web. The patterns identified in this study describe not only how investors use the sources, but also how they access and judge information on the Web.
Some studies indicated that the Internet has been one of the most important information sources of investors (Willimson, 2008). However, few studies specifically focus on investors’ information seeking on the Web. To fill the gap, this study explores investor information-seeking behavior on the Web, and provides a different perspective from previous studies (e.g. Loibl and Hira, 2009) that mainly examined how information sources are used. Move a step forward, this study extends the findings in previous studies by identifying information types investors seek on the Web, their strategies, and information-seeking patterns.

The study attempts to reveal characteristics of investors’ information-seeking activities, and thus informs improvement of information retrieval systems design. Specifically, the understanding of their information-seeking behavior could inform specialized financial search engines or web sites to improve information provision, including the quality of content, information organization, and interface design. It is necessary to provide comprehensive, real-time, credible, and accurate information in order to attract investors in the competitive information service market in China. Moreover, online financial information systems should be adapted to the way that investors seek information online: different types of information could be reorganized on the Web sites based on the information types they seek, and interfaces should also be designed to facilitate their information browsing, considering different information-seeking patterns. Moreover, in light of investors’ information-seeking patterns, some new systems could be designed to improve financial information services. For example, some meta-web portals or gateways could be developed to collect information on similar topics from different financial web sites and provide comparison services, which could facilitate investors to verify information. From this angle, the study has implications in informing online financial information systems designs and improving investment information services.

6 Conclusions

The study explores what types of information investors seek on the Web and how they seek information online in China based on 19 semi-structured interviews. The results indicate that the investors seek different types of information online, such as policy information, individual stock information, economic information, industrial information, and unexpected event information. Policy information is the most important from most investors’ point of view, followed by individual stock information. To most of the investors, browsing is the most important way to approach information. The study also identifies five information browsing patterns: focused, main-complementary, parallel, referenced, and goal-driven. The study suggests that investment context, the way that information is provided, and seeking tasks or goals greatly shape investors’ information-seeking behavior. It has implications in helping information providers understand characteristics of investors’ information-seeking behavior, and thus informs on information provision, organization, and interface design of online information sources.

Future studies will further examine investors’ information-seeking behavior. It is necessary to verify the information-seeking patterns identified in this study through recruiting more participants. Also, this study indicates that information-seeking tasks motivate different types of information-seeking patterns to some extent. A further study will continue to examine how tasks, including work tasks and seeking tasks, shape investors’ information-seeking behavior.

7 References


