

If That Which Thou Seekest Thou Findest Not Within Thee,

Thou Wilt Never Find It On The Internet:

How Practitioner Contemporary Pagans and Ritual Magicians

Access and Use Information

#### ABSTRACT

This paper is an examination of the information behaviours and habits of practising Pagans and ritual magicians. Aspects of information behaviour relevant to contemporary Paganism are discussed, before features of Paganism that may affect information needs and use are presented. An online questionnaire covering the six areas of information needs, access, retrieval, quality, use and literacy was administered with 142 respondents, and 5 of those were subsequently interviewed at length, before the results were analysed using an interpretivist methodology, with reference to existing information behaviour models deemed relevant. The results present the beginning stages of a model of Pagan and Occult information behaviour, showing seven sliding scales concerning issues practising Pagans and ritual magicians face when engaging with information, on which each individual may have very different positions.

## Introduction

The aim of this research was to identify, explore and then analyse the relationship that contemporary Pagans and ritual magicians have with information, using a holistic focus encompassing all aspects of information behaviour. The research aimed to form the beginnings of a model of how information functions within Paganism and the Occult, that can be built upon with future research, and put into practice by Pagans and ritual magicians, and the individuals who serve and support them.

Contemporary Pagans of all paths, including Wicca, Druidry, Ceremonial Magick, Heathenry and many others that find their home under this umbrella term, have a pressing need for more research that can provide answers to the issues that they are facing today and going forward. One such issue is the ubiquitousness of information, another is the prevalence of misinformation, and there is an urgency to provide a 'guiding light' to Pagans in consideration of this.

Continuing, there is a rising number of individuals who draw their income from contemporary Paganism, as authors, publishers, and other monetisation options, and a focus on information integrity at this point, outside of the private market, will benefit practitioners everywhere.

## An Introduction to Information Behaviour for Contemporary Pagans

The related areas of information needs, information seeking and information use all possess a large body of knowledge which can be accessed to provide some context to this study. As a very general definition of this area, Ford<sup>1</sup> offered, "*Human information behaviour is all about how we need, find, process and use information.*" It is this wider definition of 'information behaviour' that this study attempts to work within.

1. Ford, N., *Introduction to Information Behaviour* (London: Facet, 2015), 7.

Nicholas<sup>2</sup> presents an extended definition focusing just on information needs, including the initial 'call' for information that will further work or study, and a recognised gap in knowledge that is felt as some form of discomfort.

2. Nicholas, D., *Assessing Information Needs in the Age of the Digital Consumer* (London: Routledge, 2009), 18.

Another part of this, information seeking, as defined by Case<sup>3</sup> "...is a conscious effort to acquire information in response to a need or gap in your knowledge," or to put it more simply, information seeking is an information need in action. Case also mentions the concept of 'serendipity' within information seeking, an important area for this study that is detailed throughout this paper, and of similar relevance, the acquisition of information when, "*others share information that they believe may be useful to you.*"

3. Case, D. O., *Looking for Information: a survey of research on information seeking, needs, and behavior* (Bingley, England: Emerald, 2016), 6.

Furthermore, information use as defined by Ford<sup>4</sup>, “includes recalling, applying, sharing and/or communicating,” and essentially concerns action taken after the information has been acquired. Again, this study attempted to involve all of these definitions in a general and holistic approach.

4. Ford, N., *Introduction to Information Behaviour* (London: Facet, 2015), 20.

A helpful line of inquiry with regards to this research was to next consider the definitions of the words: data, information, knowledge and wisdom. Commonly thought of as a hierarchy with data being the ‘smallest unit’ and progressing upwards, the reality is that the relationship between these four concepts is much more complex.

Nevertheless, an attempt at brief definitions will be made here, starting with data. Many academics argue that this is, “a “raw” type of information,” (Case<sup>5</sup>), made up of discrete units of information without context. The stuff of machine readable information, data is a set of values that has yet to be manipulated for a set purpose.

5. Case, D. O., *Looking for Information: a survey of research on information seeking, needs, and behavior* (Bingley, England: Emerald, 2016), 74.

Moving upwards, information is data with context, that is to say, “*Information is whatever appears significant to a human being,*” (Case<sup>6</sup>). A further distinction, consideration of which is essential to the subject matter of this study, was made by Popper<sup>7</sup> who identified 3 types of information:

- “1. *Objective, external information is that which describes reality (but never completely so).*
2. *Subjective, internal information represents our picture or cognitive map of reality, the structures we impute onto reality.*
3. *Sense-making information reflects the procedures and behaviors that allow us to “move” between external and internal information to understand the world, and usually to act on that understanding as well.”*

6. Case, D. O., *Looking for Information: a survey of research on information seeking, needs, and behavior* (Bingley, England: Emerald, 2016), 56.

7. Popper (1972) in Case, D. O., *Looking for Information: a survey of research on information seeking, needs, and behavior* (Bingley, England: Emerald, 2016), 59.

This distinction between the inner and outer realms, also seen in the area of knowledge below, is a key concept within Paganism, as reflected in this excerpt from the Wiccan ‘charge of the Goddess’ by Valiente<sup>8</sup> “*If that which thou seekest thou findest not within thee, thou wilt never find it without.*”  
8. Valiente in Farrar, S., Farrar, J., *The Witches’ Bible* (London: Phoenix, 1981), 43.

Moving on to define knowledge, Case<sup>9</sup> states this is, “*...information that has been sifted, organized, and understood by a human brain.*” Offering a glimpse of the aforementioned complexity of this ‘hierarchy’, Machlup<sup>10</sup> again makes a separation between the inner worlds and the outer,

“*...information is acquired by being told, whereas knowledge can be acquired by thinking. Through our inner experience of thought, we can form new knowledge without taking in new*

*information from the external environment. Information implies transfer... while knowledge is a state ("knowing")."*

9. Case, D. O., *Looking for Information: a survey of research on information seeking, needs, and behavior* (Bingley, England: Emerald, 2016), 74.

10. Machlup in Case, D. O., *Looking for Information: a survey of research on information seeking, needs, and behavior* (Bingley, England: Emerald, 2016), 75.

The phrase, 'we can form new knowledge without taking in new information,' will be an essential one to keep in mind when looking at information behaviours through the lens of Paganism. Restall Orr<sup>11</sup> described the difference well, stating that inner knowledge and knowing is quite different from outer, calling it, "*primitive and elemental, wholly unfettered by justification.*" She went on to explain that, "*the quest for knowledge can distract,*" (Restall Orr<sup>12</sup>) and put forward her views that Paganism does not lend itself to, "*tidy lines of published words and apparent certainties.*" (Restall Orr<sup>13</sup>).

11. Restall Orr, E., *Living With Honour: a Pagan ethics* (Winchester: O Books, 2007), 18.

12. Restall Orr, E., *Living With Honour: a Pagan ethics* (Winchester: O Books, 2007), 194.

13. Restall Orr, E., *Living With Honour: a Pagan ethics* (Winchester: O Books, 2007), 17.

At the top of this hierarchy, as it is being presented here, stands wisdom: a concept that is greatly prized within Pagan communities. Starhawk offered a comprehensive explanation of knowledge and wisdom, and compared with Restall Orr's comments above, this shows a clear Pagan criticism of traditional knowledge, and high value placed upon wisdom,

*"Wisdom and knowledge can best be understood together. Knowledge is learning, the power of the mind to understand and describe the universe. Wisdom is knowing how to apply knowledge – and how not to apply it. Knowledge is knowing what to say; wisdom is knowing whether or not to say it. Knowledge gives answers; wisdom asks questions. Knowledge can be taught; wisdom grows out of experience, out of making mistakes."*  
(Starhawk<sup>14</sup>)

14. Starhawk, *The Spiral Dance: A Rebirth of the Ancient Religion 2<sup>nd</sup> ed.* (New York: HarperOne, 1989), 92.

The scale of data, information, knowledge and wisdom can be thought of one where information science and Paganism meet. Data is the discrete exclusively 'information science' end of the spectrum, while wisdom is the intangible spiritualist 'Pagan' end, and somewhere blended within the middle, they meet, and this research aims to map, and is placed within, that meeting point.

## Aspects of Contemporary Paganism that Effect Information Behaviour

The ensuing examination is not exhaustive of all of Paganism and the Occult; selected for inclusion are just features that are likely to effect information habits and behaviour.

Paganism does not lend itself to dogma or theology well, as Starhawk<sup>15</sup> explained, "*Witchcraft offers the model of a religion of poetry, not theology. It presents metaphors, not doctrines...*" This diversity of belief is encouraged within Paganism, as Jones<sup>16</sup> maintained, "*I distinguish the strong pluralism of the Pagan outlook with the weak pluralism of mere tolerance.*" How this diversity and individuality manifests was described by York<sup>17</sup> who said, "*...it is less a religion as such, than an internal dialogue among and within different but related religious frameworks,*" and this prioritising of personal autodidactic behaviours and individual self-direction is a key feature that will impact on a Pagan's relationship with information.

15. Starhawk, *The Spiral Dance: A Rebirth of the Ancient Religion 2<sup>nd</sup> ed.* (New York: HarperOne, 1989), 226.

16. Jones in Harvey, G., Hardman, C., *Pagan Pathways: A Complete Guide to the Ancient Earth Traditions* (London: Thorsons, 1996), 43.

17. York, M., *Pagan Theology: Paganism as a World Religion* (New York University Press, 2003), 167.

In undertaking this heterogeneous and autonomous approach to information use, Hutton<sup>18</sup> described the process that Aiden Kelly took when creating his personal 'brand' of Paganism, stating that he, "*self-consciously and openly created a system of ritual by selecting portions of published works, of different ages and contexts, and mixing them together according to his own taste to provide a vehicle for actual experience.*" This describes the actions that each Pagan generally undertakes to some degree, and highlights the importance of a range of sources to draw from in this faith, which will in turn effect information behaviour.

18. Hutton, R., "Modern Pagan Festivals: A Study in the Nature of Tradition," *Folklore* 119, No. 3 (2008): 251-273, <https://doi.org/10.1080/00155870802352178>

Given this high amount variation within practice, and reliance on the self for progression rather than following set doctrines, the organisational structures in contemporary practice naturally favour disordered anarchic operations that allow for the freedom to do as such. Hope and Jones<sup>19</sup> referenced praise for this anti-authoritarian model of organisation, "*Jorgensen and Russell, for example, assert that, although Pagans typically organise themselves in a "highly fluid" fashion, this type of modus operandi should also be recognised as a "highly effective organizational form" which has an "authentic religious character."*" This has significant implications for information habits and behaviour, and a large part of this study did focus on how Pagans establish authority in practice.

19. Hope, T., Jones, I., "Locating Contemporary British Paganism as Late Modern Culture," *Journal of Contemporary Religion* 21 No. 3 (2006): 341-354, <https://doi.org/10.1080/13537900600926097>

Jones<sup>20</sup> spoke of a reliance on, "*...experience rather than on blind faith.*" With this, she signified an emphasis on a 'trial and error' type of learning where aspects of the craft are attempted, and

personally assessed as to whether they resonate with the adherent. She further offered, *“The evidence of each adherent’s own senses standing as the test of any general principles – dogmas – put forward by anyone else.”*

20. Jones in Harvey, G., Hardman, C., *Pagan Pathways: A Complete Guide to the Ancient Earth Traditions* (London: Thorsons, 1996), 37-38.

Expanding, could this be considered as a type of ‘inner knowledge’ that is being accessed through practice, as described in some of the definitions of information behaviour above? Luhrmann<sup>21</sup> certainly believes in an ‘inner world’ that a development of skills can help access, *“Most people have the capacity to become more engaged in that inner world; both ethnography and clinical practice suggested that the dis-connection can be trained.”*

21. Luhrmann, T. M., “Touching the Divine: Recent Research on Neo-Paganism and Neo-Shamanism,” *Reviews in Anthropology* 41 No. 2 (2012): 136-150, <https://doi.org/10.1080/00938157.2012.680425>

There are many occult techniques designed to access this inner knowledge, one example is the concept of the Akashic Records, defined by Farrar and Farrar<sup>22</sup> as, *“The ‘recordings’ left in the Akasha (all-pervading spiritual ether) by every event. Advanced occultists develop the gift of retrieving past events by ‘reading the Akashic records.’”* Documenting individual’s experiences of gaining information in this and other similar ways was another useful line of inquiry.

22. Farrar, S., Farrar, J., *The Witches’ Bible*, (London: Phoenix, 1981), 317.

Again, expanding on this idea further, could the serendipity that is a feature of many of the information models selected to inform this study, seen in the section below, then be viewed as something more than just a phenomenon of the nature of information? Potentially, Pagans perceive meaning behind instances of serendipitous discovery, or perhaps think of them not in terms of ‘accidents’ at all.

Ronald Hutton, in his preface to *The Triumph of the Moon*<sup>23</sup> states that, *“‘pagan’ refers to ancient religions of Europe, while ‘Pagan’ denotes the modern religions which are partly inspired by their example,”* and it is this imperative difference that defines the relationship Pagans have with historical records. Modern Paganism has a complex relationship with what is known about pre-Christian religions. On the one hand, incomplete knowledge of pre-Christian practice is acknowledged almost universally, as Gardner<sup>24</sup> argued, *“We have no real proof that this was the belief in Britain.”* On the other, some Pagans focus particularly on this accurate historical practice, and they are termed ‘reconstructionists’. Rees<sup>25</sup> described this further, *“By ‘reconstruction’ I mean the modelling or building of new traditions out of elements drawn from one or more such native cultures as they existed (or were deemed to exist).”*

23. Hutton, R., *The Triumph of the Moon*, (Oxford University Press, 1999), xii.

24. Gardner, G. B., *The Meaning of Witchcraft*, (Red Wheel/Weiser, 1959), 41.

25. Rees in Harvey, G., Hardman, C., *Pagan Pathways: A Complete Guide to the Ancient Earth Traditions* (London: Thorsons, 1996), 17.

Some historical information, that has later been proved to be inaccurate, has been used as essential building blocks to modern paths and these have remained part of practice, despite developments in academic consensus. One such example is the relationship between the Druids and Stonehenge, detailed in a Guardian archive article showing work of Atkinson<sup>26</sup>, which states that Stonehenge was built more than 1000 years before Druids used it. However modern Druidry demands access to these sites as part of religious equality, claiming true ownership, seen in the activism of Arthur Pendragon<sup>27</sup>. This complex relationship and need for accuracy remains a controversial issue in Pagan communities, and further exploration of how this effects information behaviour would be beneficial.

26. Atkinson, R. J. C., "Stonehenge there before druids – and no human sacrifices," *The Guardian*, 14<sup>th</sup> December 2016, <https://www.theguardian.com/uk-news/2016/dec/14/stonehenge-there-before-druids-archaeology-1959>

27. Morris, S., "Concerns mount over plans for two-mile road tunnel past Stonehenge," *The Guardian*, 2<sup>nd</sup> April 2019, <https://www.theguardian.com/uk-news/2019/apr/02/concerns-grow-as-plans-for-a303-road-tunnel-past-stonehenge-enters-new-phase>

"A spell spoken is a spell broken," is an oft repeated phrase in the witchcraft community, and this epitomises the relationship that Pagans and ritual magicians have with secrecy. This clearly has a compelling effect on information habits, as how can information be known if a person is under oath not to reveal it? Gardner<sup>28</sup> explained the need for this, "...*what makes things work is the witches' secret. I think this was probably the practical secret of the ancient Mysteries also.*"

28. Gardner, G. B., *The Meaning of Witchcraft*, (Red Wheel/Weiser, 1959), 12.

Crowley<sup>29</sup> agreed with this, "...*if the mysteries are to effect inner change, they must always contain elements which we can not understand... the power of the mysteries lies in maintaining their ability to mystify.*" The phrase 'elements' here suggests not everything needs to be hidden knowledge, only part of it, in order for the practice to be effective, while both explanations speak of secrecy as a magickal tool, rather than something practical in terms of data protection or censorship. The function of retaining information behind an 'oath-wall' will be explored in this study.

29. Crowley, V., *Wicca: The Old Religion in the New Age*, (UK: Aquarian, 1989), 18.

Mid way through his key piece of work 'Cyberhenge', Cowan<sup>30</sup> almost sarcastically states that, "...*modern Pagans can tell the difference between nature (a cool forest glade) and machine (a .jpeg picture of that same glade on a 17-inch monitor),*" and this perhaps sets the tone for this particular research project, with it's aggregated focus on both digital and non-digital information. However it is recognised that much of the information accessed by Pagans today will be in digital form, and there are some rich, although dated, studies that attempt to document this.

30. Cowan, D., *Cyberhenge*, (London: Routledge, 2005), 53.

Cowan's pre-social media text considers 'online Pagans' from many angles that are relevant to this research, including establishing expertise through web presence, participating in community and coordinating rituals entirely online. In another co-authored book, Cowan considers the impact this 'pre-social media' web had on students of the craft: "*There is no need to learn from their "elders"; they are able to create their own form of Witchcraft and Paganism.*" (Dawson and Cowan<sup>31</sup>)

31. Dawson, L. L., Cowan, D., *Religion Online: Finding Faith on the Internet*, (London: Routledge, 2004), 177.

How this community uses online information has changed considerably since these seminal works, and current researchers are now beginning the process of documenting this as a discrete area. Two such theses nearing completion are Webster<sup>32</sup> and Slack<sup>33</sup>.

32. Webster, M *Becoming Witch: Creating and Confirming Witch Identities within Social Networking Spaces*, PhD Thesis (University of Wales Trinity Saint David, 2020)

33. Slack, C, *#Witch: Witchcraft Traditions in the Age of the Internet*, MA Thesis (University of Hertfordshire, 2020)

In addition, there is also much available literature on the interaction of Pagans and ritual magicians with libraries and archives. The difficulty of accessing information and the value that librarians and archivists can add to the information seeking process in this discipline was described by Frost<sup>34</sup> "[user] was at this time researching a paper on Starhawk and getting his information from what limited physical resources he had and the voluminous tertiary resources on the internet. What I had in my collection were primary sources, for example, interviews that [user] did not have access to." Here the focus is on an academic student who was no doubt also a practitioner, and this paper seeks to widen this reach slightly to capture the experiences of practitioners outside of academia.

34. Frost, G., "New Age Movements, Occultism, and Spiritualism Research Library: The Making of a Pagan Archive", *The Pomegranate* 19 No. 2 (2017) 251-264, <https://doi.org/10.1558/pome.34051>

Similarly, Reese<sup>35</sup> describes the issues surrounding access to archival information in this subject, and begins to discuss practitioners, stating "*some contemporary Pagans may not be comfortable using the resources, and many may not know how to locate and use such resources even if they did feel comfortable.*" Expanding on this 'may not be' and 'may not know how to' is the crux of this research – what are the experiences of non-academic practitioners, and how can they be supported by librarians and archivists?

35. Reese, G., "The Quandary of Contemporary Pagan Archives", *The Pomegranate* 9 No. 2 (2007) 109-120, <https://doi.org.10.1558/pome.v9i2.109>

While it is true that there are many libraries and archives throughout the world that are dedicated to collections that cover Paganism, ritual magick and the occult, as well as other alternative religions and spiritualities, it's not certain that these are used to full effect by the community of practitioners.



One thesis, by Dubois<sup>36</sup>, gives a comprehensive overview of most of these worldwide collections, and again some of the issues surrounding access.

36. Dubois, C., *Libraries and the Occult*, MA Thesis (University College London, 2004)

Finally, of interest is a scale relating to serendipitous discovery, devised by Erdelez<sup>37</sup> consisting of four categories of people: non-encounterers, occasional encounterers, encounterers and super-encounterers. It is estimated that Pagans believe you can manipulate yourself towards the super-encounterers level of the scale through magickal practice, terming these events ‘synchronicities’, as detailed regarding the Wiccan path by Crowley<sup>38</sup> “...when we first enter Wicca we are likely to find ourselves surrounded by synchronistic events; so much so that we cease to notice them and start to take it for granted that meaningful coincidences will occur.”

37. Erdelez, S. “Information encountering: A conceptual framework for accidental information discovery in Information seeking in context”, *In Information seeking in context. Proceedings of an international conference on research in information needs, seeking, and use in different contexts*, Tampere, Finland, 1996, 412– 421 (Los Angeles, CA: Taylor Graham)

38. Crowley, V., *Wicca: The Old Religion in the New Age*, (UK: Aquarian, 1989), 130.

## Methodology

### Research Paradigm and Methodology

The theoretical perspective deemed most appropriate for this study is that of interpretivism, or the highly similar concept of constructivism. A mixed methods approach was chosen, despite the interpretivist paradigm, using the ‘explanatory sequential mixed methods’ design detailed in Cresswell<sup>39</sup>. Here, initial quantitative research is conducted and analysed, which will then invite further explanation and expansion via qualitative means.

39. Cresswell, J. W., *Research design: qualitative, quantitative, and mixed methods approaches*, 5th ed., (London, Sage, 2018), 221.

### Research Methods and Techniques

The method chosen for this research was a survey, and the techniques included both an online questionnaire and interviews. A high amount of open questions with free text were used in the online questionnaire, to reflect the paradigm chosen and facilitate gathering additional qualitative data before the interview stage. Despite this being a risk, this was responded to very well, as discussed in the results section below.

### Sampling

The researcher’s personal contacts and social media accounts were used to draw attention to the online survey and the response was high. Hence just five participants were subsequently interviewed, the sampling chosen to reflect as wide a range of genders, ages, paths and experience levels as possible.

## Data Analysis

The data was coded into six information behaviour areas: information needs, access, retrieval, use, quality and literacy, and then also analysed through the 'eyes' of 5 information behaviour models, listed below:

- Kuhlthau - Information Search Process<sup>40</sup>
- Savolainen - Everyday Life Information Seeking<sup>41</sup>
- Wilson – General Model of Information Behaviour<sup>42</sup>
- Williamson – Ecological Model of Information Seeking and Use<sup>43</sup>
- Johnson – Comprehensive Model of Information Seeking<sup>44</sup>

40. Kuhlthau, C. C., "Inside the search process: Information seeking from the user's perspective," *Journal of the American Society for Information Science* 42, No. 5 (1991): 381-371, [https://doi.org/10.1002/\(SICI\)1097-4571\(199106\)42:5<361::AID-ASI6>3.0.CO;2-%23](https://doi.org/10.1002/(SICI)1097-4571(199106)42:5<361::AID-ASI6>3.0.CO;2-%23)

41. Savolainen, R., "Everyday life information seeking: Approaching information seeking in the context of "way of life,"" *Library and Information Science Research* 17, No. 3 (1995): 259-294, <https://doi.org/10.1081/E-ELIS3-120043920>

42. Wilson, T. D., "Information behaviour: an interdisciplinary perspective," *Information Processing and Management* 33, No. 4 (1997), 551-572, [https://doi.org/10.1016/S0306-4573\(97\)00028-9](https://doi.org/10.1016/S0306-4573(97)00028-9)

43. Williamson, K., "Discovered by chance: The role of incidental information acquisition in an ecological model of information use," *Library and Information Science Research* 20 No. 1 (1998): 23-40, [https://doi.org/10.1016/S0740-8188\(98\)90004-4](https://doi.org/10.1016/S0740-8188(98)90004-4)

44. Johnson, J., Donohue, W., Atkin, C., Johnson, S., "A Comprehensive Model of Information Seeking," *Science Communication* 16 No. 3 (1995), 274-303, <https://doi.org/10.1177/1075547095016003003>

The models above were selected for various reasons, including in part impact and influence over time, and provenance, but mainly due to the suitability of applying them to contemporary Pagans and their information habits in a holistic sense (i.e. they have a wide coverage including both online and offline information, and cover most of the six areas identified as being focuses for this study). Common threads running through the 5 models selected were a. the models emphasised the affective aspects of information behaviour and b. the models were suitable for application in a setting outside of the workplace.

Analysis was highly iterative and 'organic' in its nature: interviews were transcribed and loosely mapped to the six survey areas and the five information behaviour models, before being 'scanned', re-read, and then the emerging themes were 'picked out' and examined in detail. The possibility that at this point the interviewee would be contacted again was retained, in a process of verification to ensure the interpretation was the correct one in the eyes of the participant. The resultant analysis was intended to be interpreted into a rich narrative, including key themes interwoven with direct quotes from participants. Completing this process eventually gave rise to the initial model detailed below.

## Results, Analysis and Interpretation

The online questionnaire was responded to well, with 142 participants, and a high number of those answering the more open questions. Question 16, “Is there anything else you’d like to say on the subject of how contemporary Pagans access and use information?” elicited 76 responses, and only 5 of those were the words ‘No’ or to that effect. It was therefore found that fewer interviews would suffice for this study, with a total of 5 participants being interviewed in total and focusing on just a small number of points that required elaboration. Each of those 5 interviewees had filled in the questionnaire, and so are included in the following statistics.

The average age of participants was 48, with 129 providing their exact age (Figure 1), and the respondents were predominantly female, with 97 of the 131 (74%) responses to sex/gender stating so. The paths identified were varied and diverse, as free text was allowed in this question: the 126 short descriptions of chosen paths had ‘Wiccan’ as the most common descriptor used, and a definite preference for general ‘non-committal’ words like, ‘Pagan’ or ‘Eclectic’. Finally, the average number of years identifying as Pagan, or ‘time on path’ was 23.3, with many choosing to round this to the nearest 5, and with 110 respondents giving a usable figure.

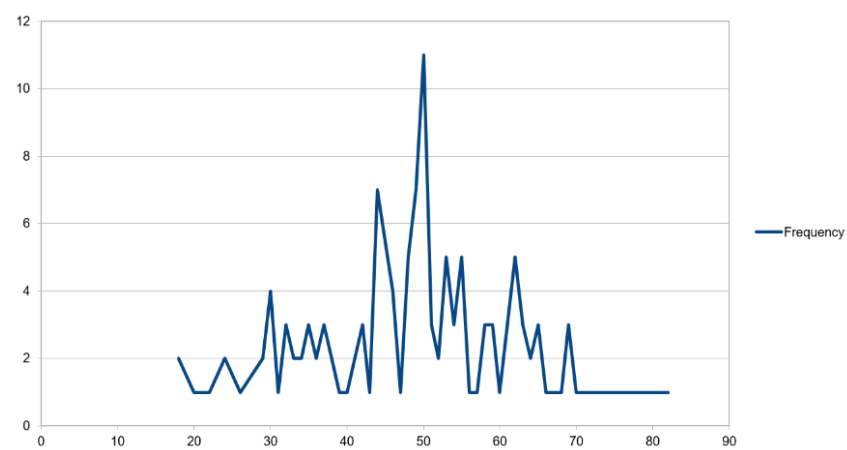


Figure 1: Graph showing the ages of respondents to the online questionnaire

### Information Needs

A question asking directly about information needs was administered (Figure 2), with a mixed response. In the next question, just 23/142 people stated that the *amount* of information was important to them. However, when asked in interviews, all participants mentioned the amount of information as being a consideration. Consider the following quotes from interview participants:

*“I tend not to read anything nowadays. I did when I started off, like everybody else does, but now I tend to work mainly on feelings inside. The way we approach a particular subject is worked by the, if you want, the build up of knowledge that’s in me. I work from that rather than, you know, pick up a book and try and read.”*

*“...as I say I don’t rely on books any more, because there’s so many different people writing these days, some good, some bad, that are coming out with their own particular way of doing things... the fact is that if you are trying to be as open as you can within a working for somebody, then you do not want to be bombarded with this idea or that idea or the other idea...”*

*"I wouldn't know who they'd be because I don't actually read an awful lot any more."*

### What are your information needs as a practicing Pagan?

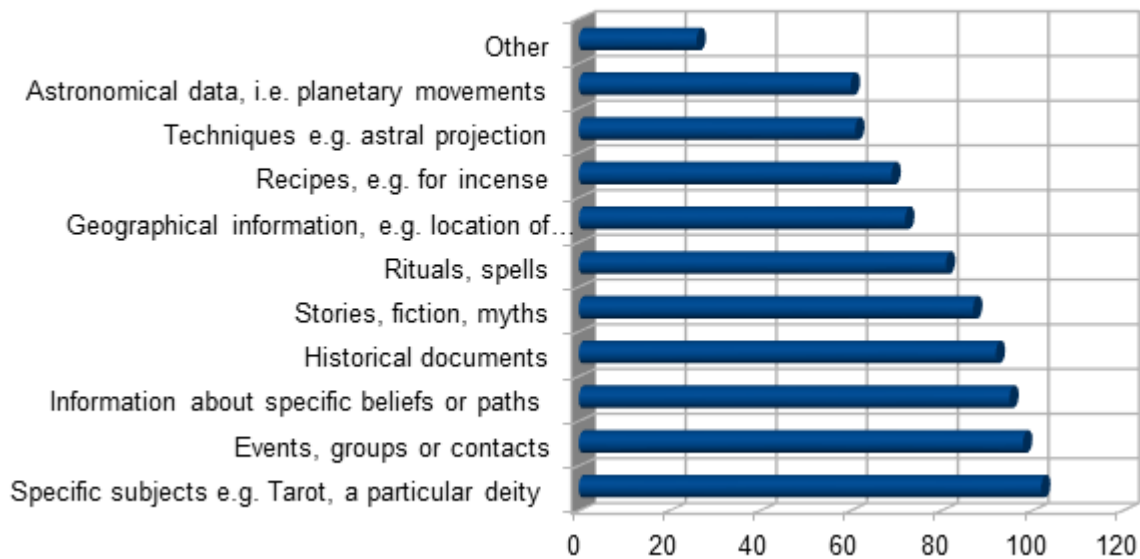


Figure 2: Results of Q1 in online questionnaire

The above quotes suggest that there is a 'critical amount' of information that can be reached, and it is quite small in quantity. Questionnaire participants may have confused the 'amount' question to be implying they need 'a large amount'. Furthermore, in interview, function was seen to be of equal importance to quantity, and very little else mattered to participants aside from the practical usefulness of information:

*"I think as long as something is authentic, it doesn't matter what form it presents itself in. If something is authentic, I find it useful."*

*"So you need to know, like, what incense you need, you need to know what tools you need, and what colours you should be wearing and exactly what point of night you should be doing whatever, or, how you should be doing it. Yeah, and then, you kind of adapt it to what you see is most appropriate."*

*"Rituals, theology, why we do things, why we use certain things, how we behave."*

#### Information Access

The clearest consensus was that Pagans and ritual magicians are definite readers. Books were the most frequently used source of information, with 132/142 respondents selecting this option. Similarly, 113/142 participants said that they buy books, with a marked amount less stating that they accessed free sources of information like borrowing or downloading. There is therefore high demand for the purchase of non-fiction titles in this subject. Some respondents used the 'other' option to state they use some type of 'inner knowing'.

## Information Retrieval

27% stated that there was nothing stopping them retrieving information at all, not money, secrecy or obscurity. The top 3 answers for barriers preventing retrieval are shown in table 2, suggesting that a lot of Pagans and ritual magicians struggle to find and afford the information they need, but also that groups not disclosing information that is under oath is not a problem, as this was not one of the top answers.

A Likert scale of 5 choices showed an almost exact average of 3.08 for the phrase, "I can always find the information on Paganism I am searching for," with a clear difference between "Information IS easy to find," (3.58 average) and "Information SHOULD BE easy to find," (4.41 average). This almost average score and difference of 0.83 of a point on the scale respectively, shows that information retrieval in this subject has definite room for improvement: it would be desirable to have most Pagans feeling like they always find the information they need, or perhaps that their expectations of availability more closely match the reality.

Obscurity: can't find it	60/142 (42.2%)
Availability: can't get a copy	54/142 (38.0%)
Money: can't afford it	50/142 (35.2%)

Table 2: Top 3 answers for Q5: "Do any of the following prevent you from accessing information on Paganism?"

## Information Use

Figure 3 shows that 2 answers concerning how information is used were jointly most popular, 'devise rituals' and 'connect with energies', with 62% of people choosing one or both of these options. This would suggest that what makes a piece of information functional is that it is instructional in terms of practical technique, contains text or prose that can form part of a ritual or provides some kind of model or framework that can be used to actually achieve connection through ritual.

In interviews, participants expanded on this, offering details of other information that they deemed useful. It was expected that, given the need for 'real world' rather than online connection described above, that the names of people and details of events would be spoken about as a key need, however the reality was more subtle and complex than that. Pagans in general were wary of other practitioners and their motivations, as seen in this quote from interviewee 1, "*...you get some other people, who I won't name, who's egos have got so enormous...*" Interviewee 5 echoed this with, "*I would probably try and avoid somebody if I could only view them as the bad kind of irrational.*"

This caused more established Pagans to stick within small close groups, as interviewee 5 shared: "*...there are a small number of people who perhaps I respect more who's advice I would take on board and I would trust them to make that judgement, and not be biased.*" Whether the establishment of these close networks happens after the decision to embrace Paganism or before, where Paganism is introduced through existing networks, was not determined in this study, but if it were shown to be the former case, that's when names and times and places in order to meet in person with other Pagans would be an important use of information.

Interviewee 2 interestingly described receiving pragmatic information that he then used to perform healing and magical workings, from a seeker approaching him, "*Somebody brings something into the circle, Joe Bloggs or whatever wants help with whatever it is, that is the information that's generally*

*brought in in the first place.*” So in fact, the practical details used flowed in two ways, from teacher to learner, but also from seeker to practitioner, and when discussing this, useful information became less about when and where, and more about how and why.

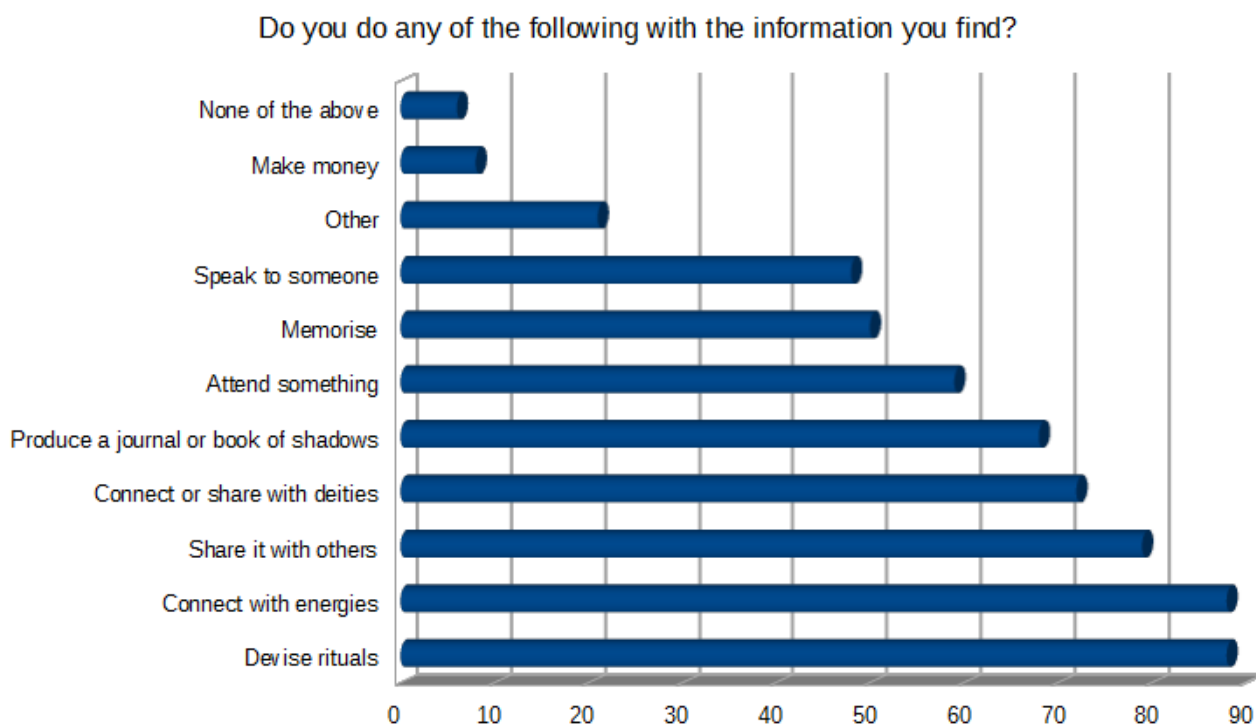


Figure 3: Results of Q12 in online questionnaire

#### Information Quality

Quality and authority are contentious issues in this area, and merely asking about it caused some to comment in such ways as: *“I can think of a few but would prefer not to name them,”* or *“Sorry no insults.”* In general, Pagans are rational in this area and do actively assess quality and do this well, with a preference for ‘sensible’ advice presented by reliable authors, as evidenced in these quotes from three participants:

*“You want some pretty sensible, you know, people think that Paganism is... everyone’s walking round casting spells, flying on broomsticks, and it’s not. You need a good grounding in it...”*

*“I like history and context to be included with explanations as it shows someone has researched thoroughly. I always fact check with several sources when I receive new information and speak to people who have followed their path for several years.”*

*“They practice what they preach. They have been following the path for a long time, are consistent in their teachings and aren’t merely trying to sell things.”*

When asked about authority, interestingly Pagans ranked academics in the interdisciplinary field of ‘Pagan studies’ the highest, and organisations as third, as seen in Figure 4. As equally as interesting was that ‘leaders of closed groups’ scored relatively low, despite being the individuals most likely to be experienced practitioners, and it was estimated that this was perhaps down to a perceived lack of gatekeeping or vetting that would be present in those first and third most popular choices.

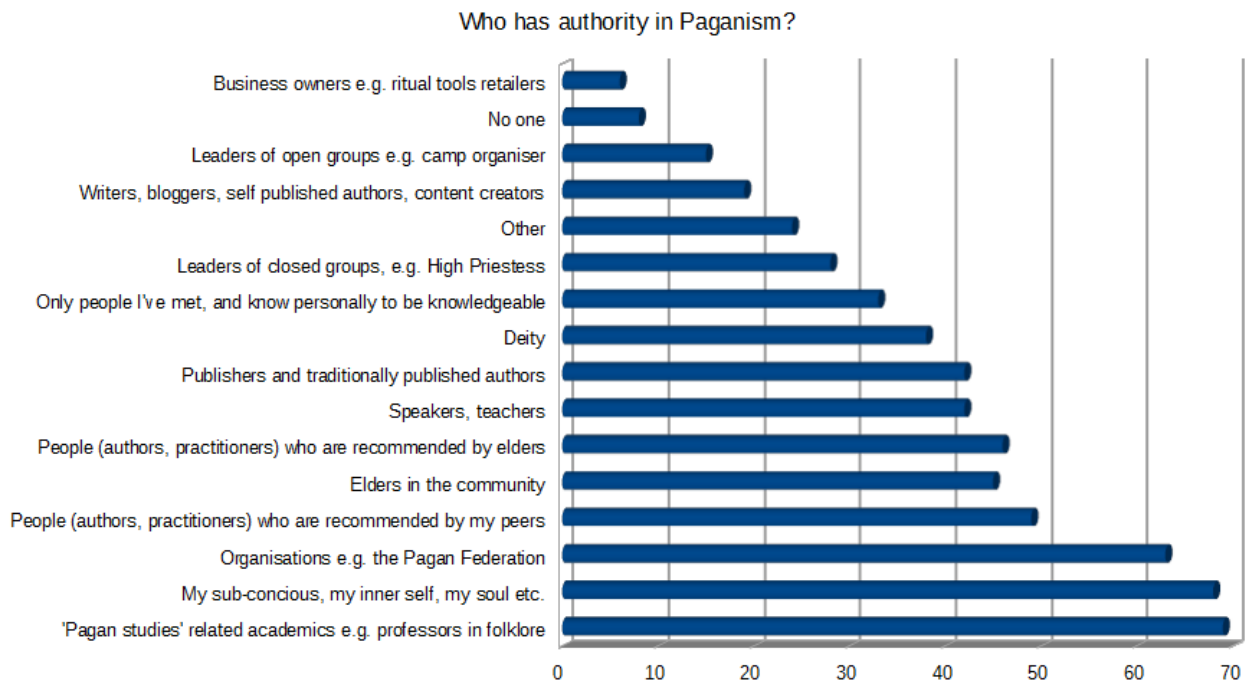


Figure 4: Results of Q9 in online questionnaire

However, when examined in interview it was found that participants felt information with authority was not necessarily information with quality. To a Pagan, quality information is something that, as already interpreted above, can be used and works as part of practical ritual and connection. From the results, it was determined that quality information is also something that 'resonates' with Pagans and ritual magicians, and is independent of authorship, which explains the second most popular selection in figure 13, "My sub-conscious etc." This is a very important part of how information works in this subject, and many of the participants in the online questionnaire used the free text section to speak about this:

*"If I don't agree with someone that does not mean their information is wrong or invalid, they may know what they are talking about but I may have different preferences."*

*"Does the person inspire you; does what they say 'feel right'; do you feel comfortable that you can trust them? If they tell you of something that you have never read or heard of before, but it somehow sounds familiar, as if you are 'remembering it' from a deep or past life source rather than learning it anew."*

*"There are Pagans who have studied many paths, know their pre-Christian history and have practised for many years who I will trust to "know what they're talking about". But still none of their practices might resonate with me. Things said by a Youtuber who has only walked the path for a few years might resonate with me more."*

The concept of separating the idea from its author, or genetic fallacy, became a feature of the interviews: one interview participant said: *"There's a common Pagan and spiritual phrase: take what resonates and leave the rest."* The strong desire to avoid genetic fallacy was alluded to by all interviewees asked about this:

*"I think if it mirrored my beliefs but that person was terrible, I don't think it would put me off believing that, because I'm not that person. So just because they turned out to be terrible or whatever they*

*turned out to be I wouldn't think that me following their beliefs would make me a bad person, because there's quite a few questionable people in the world that sometimes do spout a bit of valuable knowledge."*

*"For me I could do that, I would be OK to take the elements that work for me and leave the other elements behind, and recognise that that's easy for me to do as I'm quite eclectic anyway."*

*"If the working was actually done and it was successful and it worked well and you felt it worked well then it wouldn't matter to me who wrote it, because as we said before even the worst people can come up with some really good stuff from time to time."*

## Information Literacy

Finally, online questionnaire participants were given a few examples of an information need and asked whether they would be able to satisfy it. Some of the examples were deliberately 'unorthodox', the final one asking about: "The message a deity has for you." Many did express confidence and self-efficacy, with statements like, "Yes, fully confident," and, "Sure. Easy to find," and providing full, practical answers as to their search technique and the limitations of it, for example:

*"Favourite occult bookshops or perhaps online sources such as Amazon or eBay. The latter don't offer an opportunity to inspect the book's content and judge its suitability, in which case I might rely on previews and recommendations or reviews."*

Some were not so sure however, especially as the examples decreased in tangibility, using phrases such as, "No idea about this one," or, "Difficult. Interpretation varies from person to person." Notably, there was also a high reliance on simple web searching, with 63 mentions of 'Google' and 21 using the word 'web', suggesting room for improvement in information literacy. Considering as well that in the Likert scale question, participants gave an average score of 3.08 for the phrase "I can always find the information on Paganism I am searching for," it would certainly be helpful to support the community up to a 4 or 5 as average and there is clear scope for doing this.

## Kuhlthau's Information Search Process

Considering the Kuhlthau 'Information Search Process' model, which highlights affective and cognitive aspects throughout, there were very definite feelings demonstrated through the responses received from Pagans, that were evenly mixed between uncertainty and doubt, and confidence and clarity. In addition, there were several thought processes and feelings that appear to be unique to this community and their information seeking, and these were twofold:

1. Strong reliance on whether information 'resonates'.
2. Thoughts and feelings centred around the author's motives.

Regarding the first point on whether information 'feels right', respondents to the online questionnaire scored statements about the importance of this as above average on a Likert scale, as shown in Table 5, and participants were then asked for more detail as to what they believed the nature of this process was (Figure 6). Many were again incredibly rational, and 'your sub-conscious' and 'your personality' ranked much higher than specific models of belief that were less verifiable, such as 'akashic records access' or 'psychic ability'. The concept of 'unverified personal gnosis' was spoken about in interviews, without actually naming it that. Interviewee 3 said that she actively sought opportunities to use unverified personal gnosis,



*“So, the reason that I, you know, when I saw <deity name> there's so little mythology with her that felt really good, it really positive thing, because it means that it's down to me to create that relationship and have those experiences.”*

Option	Totals	Averages
I rely heavily on 'inner knowing' or something 'feeling right' in my practice	570	4.01
'Inner knowing' or something 'feeling right' is more important than external information	506	3.56

Table 5: Results of Q6 of online questionnaire

With regards to 'inner knowing' and something just 'feeling right': which if the following apply to you and your beliefs about what this actually is?

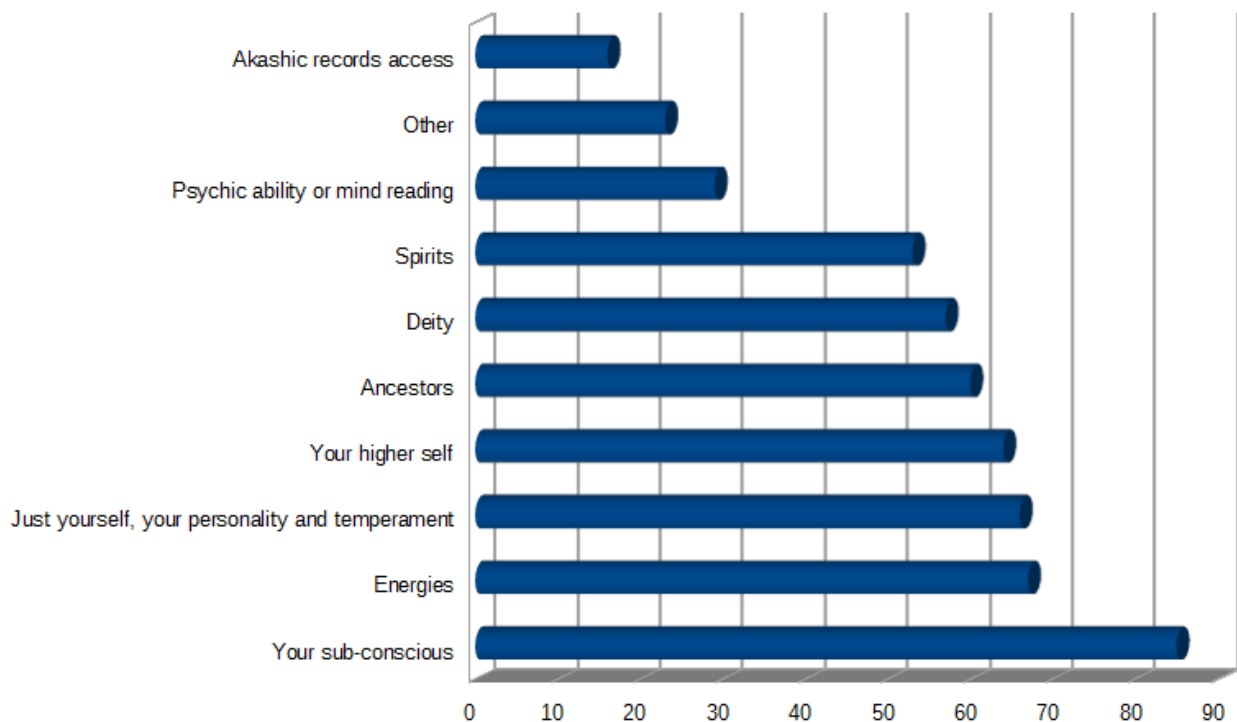


Figure 6: Results of Q8 of online questionnaire

Point two above was evident in a lot of the free text responses to the online questionnaire; it was found Pagans were quick to judge, but were also self-aware about that attempted to do better. Several participants responded with comments of a judgemental nature, expressing frustration:

*“There's a lot of dross out there.”*

*“...hollywood makes newbies gathering accurate information a minefield.”*

*“Well, anybody that's hiding behind a silly name like that, just has lost my respect instantly, you know. She was not called that when she was born.”*

Many had considered this attitude and were aware of it in themselves, and had clearly thought it distasteful, and so instead emphasised the personal nature of their opinion and how feelings could be very different in others, therefore refusing to dismiss any provider of information at all:

*"I can think of a few but would prefer not to name them."*

*"I do not feel any source is bad. I take what I want and leave what I disagree with."*

*"...'high' and 'low' quality of information is a subjective judgment, and as such changes according to current context, interests, needs, level of my own understanding. Many perfectly good sources have become redundant to me over the years. This doesn't detract from their quality for others."*

#### Savolainen's Everyday Life Information Seeking

Savolainen offered models to categorise attitudes to 'mastery of life' and variables that might affect information behaviour. There was much evidence to suggest Pagans and ritual magicians are largely defensive-affective types, where there is information seeking competence within a highly affective environment. Comments from online questionnaire and interview participants that show this include:

*"My spells always have the desired outcome. No need to "make sure.""*

*"Listen. Be as open as possible. Wait."*

*"I am fairly confident I could get the information I needed, but magic working always has an experimental element, and you have to accept that if you're going to do magic. Sometimes you don't get what you want; you get what you need."*

#### Wilson's General Model of Information Behaviour

Wilson's general model of information behaviour allows us to split information discovery into active and passive. Passive, serendipitous discovery was alluded to within the responses received, and more so as the information sought became less straightforward. Some comments from participants in this area came from Q13 in the online survey and included:

*"If a deity has a message for me I expect they would find a way to get it to me."*

*"The answer is... I wouldn't search for that."*

*"...no amount of research really helps until I stumble on the answer."*

However, active search was implied with more concrete information needs, and everything pointed to the fact that Pagans and ritual magicians would use both active and passive search practices:

*"I would read online reviews and ask knowledgeable friends for advice."*

*"A reference library might be my chosen source; an online search could give some initial basic information..."*

*"I would google "<keywords>", collect information and cross-check it, using many sites. I'd look up reviews on the books and ask others for their recommendations."*

#### Williamson's Ecological Model of Information Seeking and Use

The value add of examining Williamson's model in addition to the others is in the expanding circles of personal networks. Intimate personal networks hold a lot of importance for Pagans and ritual magicians, with some quotes evidencing this as follows:

*"Approach my mentor if I wasn't sure."*

*"I've been part of a loose circle, there were 8 of us and we agreed that what stays in circle stays in circle, but it wasn't a formal oath. We learned, we experimented, we didn't even tell anybody else that we were doing it."*

*"...still people pass knowledge mother to daughter onwards, in the same way that old wives' tales have been passed down from those times."*

Mass media was generally distrusted, with many participants mentioning the internet in particular as something to avoid relying on:

*"The internet is full of biased information it's hard to tell if it feels right..."*

*"Can't trust anything on the internet."*

#### Johnson's Comprehensive Model of Information Seeking

Johnson's model offers a way of interpreting beliefs and includes salience. Salience was mentioned by several participants, with evidence that 'easy to find' information was not a positive thing, as follows:

*"I think there is a general lack of will to work and study to gain knowledge, so that easily accessible and easy to use information tends to be favoured over anything that requires effort or commitment."*

*"I think the internet and others' opinions (on FB for example) are very prominent. And it's easy to lose historical accuracy online."*

*"I feel due to technology it makes obtaining information way too easy."*

At odds to this was the results from Q6 of the online questionnaire, where the statement "Information SHOULD BE easy to find," scored very highly (4.41 average). So, Pagans and ritual magicians both distrust and dislike salience yet desire more of it, a paradox that in future studies might require more work to discover the root of.

In terms of beliefs, which are a core part of the entire relationship between Pagans and information, an emphasis on the individual means that beliefs will influence information behaviours in very diverse ways. One interviewee gave his model of how information is received:

*“...these thoughts are going round the world and people pick them up, how this all happens is magick in itself I think really.”*

And another participant gave a very different view:

*“I think, sometimes the nature of your actions leads you to find that information accidentally. I think the whole serendipitous idea of information transfers, I think sometimes you can influence it without knowing in terms of, if you’re absent minded thinking about it, sometimes you can subconsciously find it, because you’re sub-consciously looking.”*

These different stances from just two Pagans will effect information behaviour in different ways, and this is the nature of how Pagan belief impacts information habits: there can be no generalisations, and examination of this at the most granular level is required.

### The Model

The results and interpretations above were condensed into 7 different scales, which can be thought of as 7 paradoxes, and they form the beginnings of a model of the information behaviours of Pagans and occultists. Each scale concerns a different issue or complexity in a Pagan’s relationship with information, and it is down to each individual practitioner to place themselves on each one, according to their beliefs, needs and chosen path.

### Rationality vs Mysteries

Some Pagans want their practice to be taken seriously, and so seek sensible, well researched information that comes from credible sources, includes citations and is preferably authored by an academic. They place theories surrounding information transfer beyond nothing more than the work of the sub-conscious, and are highly wary of author’s motives, seeking to dismiss those who are egotistical, inexperienced or fascist, whilst only doing that dismissing after an author has been ‘heard out’.

However, drama and emotional connection is valued highly alongside this, and a practitioner’s clear demonstration of affect within their practice is desirable and an indicator of authenticity. Letting go of the need for control is seen as a source of strength and power. Pagans are comfortable not knowing how something functions, and are content to accept results derived from Pagan practice as they are; this is what is termed ‘the mysteries’.

### Academia vs Inner Knowing

Pagans and ritual magicians rank highly both information gained through inner channels, and assessing information received through more ‘normal’ methods (like reading) against an inner judgement system. Unverified personal gnosis, although not a widely understood term, is a widely used information source, and information gained in this way is desired before gaining and treasured afterwards. Information, such as details of a deity or ritual, sometimes comes with a strong unexplainable sense of recognition, flow and general good feeling that Pagans pay attention to and actively seek.

At the other end of this scale, academic inquiry has it’s place within Paganism and magical practice, with some using research findings to inform practice, and some seeking structure and authority through organisations or formal learning opportunities.

### Authority vs Anarchy

Pagans would in general love some 'shorthand' way of establishing authority and authenticity, such as checking initiatory lineage, looking to academics or relying on 'vouches' from other members of the community. They found organisations, orders, traditions, schools, charities, publishing houses and businesses in an attempt to do this, although those organisations are small, dispersed and often short lived. In practice, most acknowledge that this is not a 'watertight' method of assessing whether someone is 'any good' and most would much rather go the long way around and listen to an author and make a personal judgement.

Alternatively, some Pagans actively reject any authority, expressing distaste and dislike for any hierarchy or attempts at structuring something 'unstructurable'. Additionally, becoming well known, or some would say famous, among the community is not desirable and is an indicator of lack of authenticity for some.

### Re-construction vs Inspiration

This scale concerns Pagans' relationship with historical information. Some seek an accurate re-construction of ancestral religious practice, and are concerned with historical research and sources that can provide them with a picture of pre-Christian and pre-Roman religion. They acknowledge that these 'pictures' are not complete, with gaps in surviving documentation and differences in academic consensus, yet still consider Paganism to be 'the old religion' that has survived the introduction of Christianity.

Other Pagans disagree, seeing surviving historical information as a source of inspiration, and that neo-Paganism is just that – something brand new. They see paths, such as Wicca, as new practices, devised by individuals that existed within living memory that have developed out of older practice, yet bear little resemblance to it. Some paths, such as Chaos magick, would consider themselves 'post-modern' and will borrow practices, symbols and imagery from anywhere, including fiction and popular culture, rejecting any need for something to have any basis in history at all.

### Mass Rejection vs Genetic Fallacy

Most Pagans who participated in this study showed a willingness to accept the concept of genetic fallacy, so that ideas are easily separated from their author and any person's work is worthy of consideration, disregarding any flaws in character. By extension of this, some ideas could also be rejected without rejecting the whole practice of the author, and this could range from ideas that simply do not match current thinking any more, to political stances, to those that involve committing crimes. Key to doing this well was self-efficacy, and developing confidence in both information literacy and Pagan and ritual practice increases the likelihood of a person being able to separate those ideas out.

Conversely, Pagans also use personal judgement a lot, with some being so repulsed by a person's actions morally that they 'vote with their feet', refusing to have any involvement with that author's work. Rarely is a Pagan practice devised and developed by just one person, so this tends to be in the area of individual books, specific traditions within a wider path or terms coined by that individual. However, in theory, though rare, the ultimate other end of this scale would be to reject a whole Pagan path on principle.

### Happy Accident vs Meaningful Serendipity

The phenomenon of serendipitous discovery is a fact of life, and one that is familiar to Pagans and ritual magicians as well. The scale here concerns how Pagans view serendipitous discovery of information, with some sticking with the clean, matter of fact view present in most of the information behaviour models consulted; that serendipity is just something that happens, it's the nature of information, that's just how it goes sometimes.

Alternatively, Pagans may attach additional meaning to serendipity, and in reality these tended to be quite rational ones, concerning unknown functions of the sub-conscious, or focusing on a topic in a 'law of attraction' type of relationship. More extremely, Pagans could view serendipity as 'divine intervention' involving manipulation of their life by deity or other spirits.

### Salience vs Secrecy

The final scale concerns the 'tightrope', as one interviewee put it, of balancing salience and secrecy. Pagans think their religious and spiritual practice should be accessible, and this includes providing easily discoverable information in order to provide access points for new adherents, as well as to educate others about the nature of Pagan practice and increase the visibility of Paganism on the world stage. Counter to this, some Pagans and ritual magicians equate secrecy with power, authenticity and safety, and would prefer to keep their involvement private for various reasons including the potential for discrimination or as a protective measure against harmful seekers. By extension of this, a group may keep their tradition completely hidden, using oaths as a form of 'copyright' so that their particular way of practising is never made available and so can never be duplicated.

### Conclusion

The relationship that Pagans and ritual magicians have with information is a complex and multi-faceted one, with many conflicting factors affecting information behaviour. As a start, practitioners may consider their own stance on the initial model presented, and awareness of these issues and personal opinions of them will begin to improve information literacy in witches, Pagans and occultists everywhere.