

Strategies for seeking serendipity and how to support them in digital information environments

October 30 2014



Research carried out by Lecturer in Information Interaction in City University London's Department of Computer Science, Dr Stephnn Makri suggests that serendipity is more than a 'happy accident.' Though it cannot be directly controlled, it can indeed be influenced. He also maintains that creative people who follow a variety of strategies can make their own luck by 'seeking' serendipity.

Titled "Strategies for seeking [serendipity](#) and how to support them in digital information environments", Dr Makri's research is published in

the *Journal of the American Society for Information Science and Technology* and is co-authored with Professor Ann Blandford (University College London), Professor Sarah Sharples (University of Nottingham), Mel Woods (University of Dundee) and Deborah Maxwell (University of Edinburgh). The work had its genesis in a £1.82m UK Research Council-funded Digital Economy project named 'SerenA: Chance Encounters in the Space of Ideas'

The 'serendipity strategies' include varying one's routines, relaxing one's boundaries, being observant, making mental space, drawing on previous experiences and seizing opportunities. These strategies, according to Dr Makri, have important implications for the design of digital tools aimed at supporting people to experience serendipity:

"Technology has great potential to create opportunities for serendipity - not simply by providing users with unexpected and potentially valuable experiences 'on a plate' but by supporting them to carry out the strategies we have found in our research. Imagine a [search engine](#) that supports us in relaxing our intellectual boundaries by diversifying the search results it presents us in appropriate situations, a search engine that augments our observation skills by pointing out relationships between search results we're currently looking through and those from previous (seemingly unrelated) searches we've made, or an app that makes it easier to seize serendipitous opportunities by reminding and supporting us to follow up on unexpected ideas we've had or potentially valuable networking connections."

As part of his research in identifying these strategies, Dr Makri interviewed 14 creative professionals, including an artist, composer, choreographer, comedian, filmmaker and musician and asked them share their serendipity stories with him. He also asked them about the importance of serendipity in their work and in their everyday lives and if they did anything they thought increased the likelihood of serendipity

happening to them.

Dr Makri, who has been researching the phenomenon of serendipity since 2010, adds:

"It is somewhat paradoxical that we might try to 'seek' serendipity; after all, this is a phenomenon that involves unexpected circumstances and therefore an element of luck. However, as Louis Pasteur famously stated, 'luck favours the prepared mind' - we can certainly make sure our mind is open to experience serendipity and prepared to notice it when it happens. We can also influence serendipity by ensuring that we take actions to seize the serendipitous opportunities that present themselves."

More information: Makri, S., Blandford, A., Woods, M., Sharples, S. and Maxwell, D. (2014), "'Making my own luck': Serendipity strategies and how to support them in digital information environments." *Journal of the Association for Information Science and Technology*, 65: 2179–2194. doi: 10.1002/asi.23200

Provided by City University London

Citation: Strategies for seeking serendipity and how to support them in digital information environments (2014, October 30) retrieved 26 April 2024 from <https://phys.org/news/2014-10-strategies-serendipity-digital-environments.html>

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