Embodiment, information practices and documentation: A study of mid-life martial artists

Michael Olsson¹ and Joacim Hansson²

¹ University of Technology Sydney, Australia
² Linnaeus University, Sweden

Introduction. This study explores the concepts of embodied documentation (Hansson, 2017) and embodied information practices (Olsson & Lloyd, 2017) in the context of a study of martial artists in mid-life and beyond. The focus of this paper will be the practices through which they develop, maintain and share the embodied knowledge needed to pursue their martial arts.

Method. Data collection included semi-structured interviewing, participant observation, auto-ethnographic diaries and reflective writing.

Analysis. Analysis was undertaken using an inductive, thematic approach.

Results. Participants’ information practices are social, multi-sensory and embodied in nature. The findings reveal the importance of nonconscious information practices aligned with the Zen Buddhist concept of mushin (無心の心). The study’s findings demonstrate that martial arts embodied information practices are unquestionably codified, embedded in long standing traditions of ‘correct’ practice.

Conclusions. Participants’ embodied practice related explicitly to the codified martial arts form manifested through movements, technique and postures. That what is learnt is not random or situational in an ontological sense. Instead, codification challenges the established notion of tacit knowledge as it carries in it structured rules which relate to a documentary status of the embodied practice.

Keywords: information practices; embodied information practices; embodied documentation; documentalism