Understanding the Fundamental Processes of Personal Information Management, a Comparison of Academic's Personal Archiving Methods to the DCC Digital Curation Lifecycle Model

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Abstract
This qualitative research study investigated how academic users manage and archive their personal digital information. Specific focus was placed on learning how graduate students managed their personal digital information. Twelve graduate students from diverse disciplines were interviewed, given a background questionnaire, and then sorted into focus groups that matched their personal information management methods. One focus group discussion was guided by questions that referenced the model I created for a previous study of how graduate students of diverse disciplines manage their personal digital photographs; while the other group’s discussion focused on questions that referenced the Digital Curation Centre’s DCC lifecycle model.

Keywords: Personal information management; personal digital archiving; information management; digital curation; preservation

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1 Introduction
A personal archive may tell a story about a person’s life, serving as a witness to one’s memories. Given the constantly changing nature of technology and digital media set in today’s modern age there is a great need for developing consistent methods for personal archiving. Just as technology is rapidly changing, so has research in the field of archival and PIM studies. During the last few years PIM scholars such as Steve Whittaker and Deborah Barreau, have widened the focus of research from software specific issues, and practical management and retrieval of information, to personal information curation (Huvila et al. 2014, p.1).

According to Jones (2007) these technologies have changed the way we study PIM, because PIM tools facilitate the recording, tracking, and management of certain types of personal information. However not everyone knows how to use these tools and they will require training. Jones (2007) believes that “just as we must each be a student of our own practice of PIM, we must also be a designer of this practice,” and that professionals and people should be in the forefronts of working towards building standard practices that prevent our personal information from becoming obsolete.

PIM fits into the evolution of archival and preservation research because PIM topics and archiving practices share similar functions, which are ongoing maintenance, and eventual archiving (storing) and deletion. However archival, library, and museum communities need to start working towards defining and “promoting the social utility of records and to identify, preserve, and provide access to documentary heritage regardless of formats, by engaging and developing preservation schemes through connecting and becoming involved in a cross-community dialog and development” (Gilliland-Swateland, 2000, pg. 5-6). Forming relationships with the people who are creating and managing their information on a day-to-day basis will initiate conversations and help gain awareness of the many issues behind our lost digital heritage.

The act of personal information management (PIM) involved managing one’s own personal records, which involves a lot of planning and knowledge of preservation. This process involves numerous aspects of different methods used to organize information. According to William Jones and Jamie Teevan (2007), “PIM is both the practice the study of the activities people perform to acquire, organize, maintain, retrieve and control the distribution of information items, such as documents (paper-based and digital), web pages, and mail messages for everyday use to complete tasks (work-related) and not), and to fulfill a person’s various roles (as parent, employee, friend, member of community, etc.)” (p.2).
2 Objectives
This research study explores how academics form, manage and use their life-long personal digital archives. The objective is to learn how personal digital objects are managed daily by academic users to provide insight into the process of how our present and future cultural heritage will be preserved. Learning how personal digital objects are managed would be beneficial to the research community that is interested in creating standards and best practices for digital archiving.

3 Methodology
This study used a qualitative research method to identify whether academic users’ personal information management methods were similar to a model previously created based on study about personal digital photo archiving methods, or to the UK’s Digital Curation Center’s Lifecycle Model. Twelve graduate students from Simmons College were interviewed about how they managed their personal digital information for long-term usage. Students’ methods were matched to the two models mentioned. Graduate students from each of the following graduate schools at Simmons College were purposely sampled: The Graduate School of Nursing/Health Professions; The Graduate School of Library and Information Science; The College of Arts and Sciences Graduate Studies; The Graduate School of Management; and The Graduate School of Social Work.

During the interview portion of this study, students were asked how they maintained their personal digital files. They were also given a paper survey that asked questions relevant to how they manage their information. Then, participants were placed in focus groups. During the focus group sessions, users were then asked questions that led to discussions about the models that were tested.

4 Research Questions
- How do graduate students manage their digital information?
- What are their preferred personal information methods?
- What methods do students use that can be matched to the model I created, and how will the model need to be revised to include practices not previously accounted for?
- What methods do students use that are similar to the DCC Curation Model?

5 Results
This model was created using results from one of my previous studies and can be interpreted as a model that explains the cycle in which personal digital information is created, stored, copied, reused and discarded. Under each of these categories a list of the three most reported answers are provided. Above these categories in yellow are the new additions from the current study’s results.
Figure 3. Demonstrates Average Amount Of Digital Files

Figure 4. Social Media Sites Where Personal Digital Information Is Shared
6 Conclusions

Overall after closely analyzing the focus group sessions the students related to the model from my previous study rather than the Digital Curation Lifecycle model. Participants found it important to use a model in which they could understand the terminology, one that sequentially describes a process of storing, managing, reusing, and disposing of personal digital information. Some students responded after the study that they would consider the use of a model that they can mold according to their everyday needs. Other students had an abstract notion of what it takes to preserve their personal digital information and suggested that they would require assistance when deciding what of their personal information to keep and what not to keep.

7 References


