

Personal Information Management Strategies in Higher Education



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To Do List - Objectives

Aim: To investigate micro and macro factors, which influence PIM activities and further understand how these factors influence the creation and maintenance of student's PIM strategies.

1. Explore how students perceive their own purpose or intentions throughout their PIM activities during interviews and observations using Narrative Inquiry
2. Use identified theories as a lens during the data analysis to discover and describe the factors which influence strategies used by students during PIM activities
3. Develop a model of external and cognitive factors and their effect on how students articulate their actions whilst performing PIM activities

Personal Information Management is...

"the acquisition, organisation, maintenance and retrieval of the information people keep for their own use" (Jones, 2007)

"the methods and procedures by which we handle, categorise and retrieve information on a day-to-day basis" (Landsdale, 1988)

"system developed or created for an individual for personal use in a work environment" (Barreau, 1995)

Introduction

Personal Information Management (PIM) is a complex non-linear process, described by Jones (2007) as the acquisition, organisation, maintenance and retrieval of the information people keep for their own use; it is, however, a concept with which we are all familiar. For students growing up with digital information, but studying in a transitional environment, the complexity is marked by the increasing importance given to their strategies for organising information which are themselves complicated by the rapidly changing digital formats.

Today's higher education students inhabit a new digital environment (CIBER, 2008), academic applications are increasingly embedded into their courses (e.g. WebCT, Moodle) and rich online tools allow them to save both electronic and 'real world' artefacts for later search and retrieval. New behaviours in this digital environment are emerging. No longer turning to books and traditional library services for their information students use an array of digital resources and turn to "peer-based learning" (Ito, 2008) rather than traditional authority figures to support their educational needs.

The unique nature of each individual system creates methodological challenges in how to collect and analyse data and how to study the behaviour of user interaction with these items.

Preliminary Study

Aim: To explore student practices in an increasingly complex digital academic environment.

Methods:

- Pilot questionnaire of 43 Information & Library Management students at MMU
- Screen captures of students digital workspaces
- Qualitative analysis of an online discussion about PIM at <http://www.donationcoder.com>

Findings:

- Information collections become fragmented across multiple devices as students work in multiple locations
- Use of physical resources and printing is still common
- Few students are aware/use PIM software
- Social networking is popular amongst students although these sites are rarely used for academic purposes.
- Use of highlighting, bullet-points and underlining often create meaning
- These formatting conventions become problematic when working with digital items.

Main Study

Whilst many studies of Information Behaviour have concentrated on the process of information seeking there is a lack of understanding about influencing factors whilst acquiring, organising, maintaining and retrieving new digital resources. PIM is growing in complexity with the increasing prevalence of digital resources, social networking and other web 2.0 technologies.

During the preliminary study it became apparent that people like to tell stories and share experiences of their own PIM problems and successes; these serendipitous encounters happened without seeking out specific participants or stories. This led to Narrative Inquiry (NI) being chosen as the methodology for the main study.

NI is an event-driven methodology, it aids the identification of key events and the details that surround them to describe the research phenomenon. Using a variety of events to explore the phenomenon is achieved by analysing; **Critical events**, events selected because of their unique, illustrative and confirmatory nature; **Like events**, which further illustrate and confirm the experience expressed in the critical event; and **Other events** offer further evidence supporting data collected from Critical and Like events.

Many data gathering methods can be used to inform narrative sketches or critical events, for this study observation and interview will form the main body of data with additional data gathered from documentation and informal conversations. Survey data from the preliminary study has provided a basis for further investigation into the phenomenon.

Data collection and analysis is scheduled for the Autumn term of 2010.

Why PIM is important

It is evident from the preliminary study that students are forming strategies to aid their PIM activities, but are not seemingly using known PIM software to assist them. Forum users were able to identify and articulate the individual issues and strategies they employ in their PIM.

- PIM is individual
- There is no "one size fits all" solution
- A PIM strategy is crucial for students

References

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