Personal Digital Information Management practices among University Academic Community: A Case Study

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Abstract

Personal Digital Information Management (PDIM) is exceedingly important in this information era. Digital information plays a significant role in the present academic context, since university academia extensively uses digital material. Though the university academia promptly worked with digital information, limited studies were carried out in the Sri Lankan context. Hence, the literature is lacking in this regard. Objective of this study was statistical analysis of PDIM keeping and organizing practices of Uva Wellassa University academics. The study explored the PDIM practices in relation to organizing and maintaining information of university academics at Uva Wellassa University, Sri Lanka using a questionnaire as a research tool. According to the finding, the tested cohort was awarded the importance of managing personal digital information and nearly half always tried to do so. Most preferred to store web content on their computers and laptops were the most common location for storing personal digital information. They averagely used three digital devices where laptop and Smartphone were the most commonly used digital devices. The cohort preferred to organize information in folder wise in their computers according to the content. Almost one-third of the community believed in cloud based storage services. Almost half of the respondents chose the format of the document that is best known to them, while a handful were interested in voice formats. Zoom was the most familiar social media platform and the main purpose was to share information. The study suggests and recommends conducting more qualitative research on the meta-level personal digital information management practices using more different cohorts from the different universities to generalize the findings.

Keywords: PIM, Personal digital information management, Personal information management

Introduction

Digital information plays a significant role in the present academic context, since university academia extensively uses digital material. Though the university academia promptly worked with digital information, limited studies were carried out in the Sri Lankan context. The correct information management will reduce the piles of information and will guide the correct information to the correct person at the correct time, as each form of information is organized and used to complete different tasks and to fulfill disparate roles and responsibilities in an individual's life (Jones & Teevan, 2007).

Personal information management (PIM) is a new field with ancient roots. It is generally considered that the modern dialog on PIM came up with the article "As we may think" of Vannevar Bush in 1945. Jones & Teevan (2007) defines PIM is both the practice and the study of the activities people perform to acquire, organize, maintain, retrieve, use, and control the distribution of information items such as documents (paper-based and digital), web pages, and email 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.). Further, they have grouped essential Personal information management activities into *Finding/re-finding activities, Keeping activities and Meta-level activities.*

Capra (2009) carried out studies at the University of North Carolina communities' practices in managing their personal information and transferring information among computers and electronic devices. Krtalic, Marčetić, Micunovic (2016) carried out studies to identify habits and practices of archiving personal digital information among students from four different Croatian universities. In Sri Lankan context, De Costa and Balasooriya (2019) had carried out a study to identify the methods of digital information management and information requirements of Open University of Sri Lanka academics. The literature is lacking in the Sri Lankan context as limited studies were carried out though the university academia promptly worked with digital information. Without organizing the information properly, it becomes difficult to re-find information. A well-managed personal information space improves the quality of teaching and learning and provides relevant information when they need it (Diekema and Olsen, 2011).

Objectives

The objective of the study was to statistically analyze personal digital information management in terms of keeping and organizing practices of academics of the Uva Wellassa University of Sri Lanka.

Methodology

As the quantitative research method was revealed as the widely used method for the explore PDIM research practices (Warraich, Ali & Yasmeen, 2018), the same was incorporated into this descriptive study. A comprehensive literature review was followed to design the questionnaire and the questions were adopted from the study of Krtalic, Marčetić, Micunovic (2016). To meet the objective of the study, the questionnaire consisted of twenty-two questions (both close and open-ended questions) about Where *and how do they keep digital information? On which device? In what form? Do they be filed or left in a pile of information? How do they organize information? were asked from the sample selected.* The draft questionnaire was evaluated by three subject experts and the suggestions were incorporated for the final version.

The target population (N=179) was the Uva Wellassa University academic staff members. The sample (S=87) was selected using disproportionate stratified probability sampling techniques. Population was divided into five strata as into a library and four faculties. The sample consisted of Professors, Senior Lectures, Lecturers and Librarians of the university. What is the sample size of each strata?

Limitations of the study as follows. As Digital Information is a pervasive aspect of the present digital era, this study only focuses on Personal Digital Information Management in the university academies. The sample was limited to academics of the Uva Wellassa University of Sri Lanka. The questionnaire distribution was limited to email only due to the prevailing situation. Data was collected within a short period of time.

Results

The response rate was 71.2% and among them 56.5% male and 43.5% female, within the age range of 25-60. 54.8% of the respondents strongly agreed that it is important to manage their digital information, while 46.8% were always trying to organize their information.

The average number of digital devices they have commonly used were three, while maximum recorded as

eight. Results depicted the most common use of digital devices as laptop computers and smart mobile phones.

The most common methods used to organize information in computers were folder wise according to the content type (75.8%). 58.1% of the respondents delete irrelevant or obsolete documents that they feel are not important anymore, while only 8.1% respondent stated that they never delete them.

Laptop computers and external hard drives (90.3% and 41.9% respectively) were identified as the most common locations for storing personal digital information among the community. Out of respondents, 72.6% store the web content on their computers and 56.5% through bookmarking in their web browsers. More than half (71%) of the respondents stated but, sometimes they store the same piece of information in more than one location and 61.3% access them data only when needed. More than one-third of the respondents (79%) mentioned that they always backup their official documents. Out of the respondents 74.2% stated that they believe in cloud based storage services such as Dropbox, Google Drive, Microsoft OneDrive etc.. are a reliable way of storing PDI. Common challenges they faced while keeping backups were insufficient storage space.

When considering the formats, 43.5% choose document formats that are best known to them. Only less of them (33.9%) use voice recording formats. Most academics (82.3%) are familiar with Zoom social media platform. The majority of the respondents (79%) used social media platforms for sharing information. Your findings should be sub-themed as per the questions that you have asked in your questionnaire and described above.

Conclusion and discussion

Study revealed that the majority of the academic community is aware of the importance of managing their personal information and most of them always try to manage their personal information.

Discussion should also be organized as per the questions that you have asked from the sample and described above.

The study results regarding saving information found on the web were somewhat differ from the findings with Capra (2009), as in his study almost all participants reported using bookmarks and in this study it was recorded as 56.5% while majority 72.6% of the community tends to store web contents in their computers. Almost similar facts found among both studies were that in his studies 75% considered their notebook computer to be their primary computer and in this study most common digital device used was laptop computers.

The study found that almost one third 74.2% believe in cloud based storage services, and the finding was almost similar to de Costa and Balasooriya (2019) that they stated Google drive is the most popular storage medium among their cohort. Furthermore, while considering the most frequently used digital devices both communities showed some similarities and differences such as;. in this study laptop computers and smart mobile phones were the most commonly used digital devices among the academic communities, while in their studies mobile phones, desktop computers and laptops were the most frequently used digital devices.

Saeed & Arshand (2020) studies found that majority of 101 (51%) of the respondents of students of Institute of Engineering and Technology and Punjab University College of IT, did not use social media to keep personal

data, though, 98 (50%) used social media for storage of informal digital data like pictures and videos, etc. In this study, it was found out that more than one-third of the academics (82.3%) stated Zoom as the most familiar social media platform and the main purpose was to share information.

Conclusion

Recommendations and suggestions

The study suggests and recommends conducting more qualitative research on all meta-level personal digital information management practices using different cohorts from all universities of Sri Lanka to generalize the findings countrywide.

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