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Personal Digital Archiving: Strategies, Challenges, and Affecting Factors from a Quantitative Perspective

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Personal Digital Archiving: Strategies, Challenges, and Affecting Factors from a Quantitative Perspective

1 Background

Personal digital content is a large part of the digital universe. Researchers have studied this important and substantial part of information with various approaches. However, there is still little effort to understand the practices and perceptions about personal archiving and management of individuals' digital assets from a quantitative perspective. Also, little is known about the relationships between challenges that individuals felt and their archiving practices.

This study investigates the current status and general patterns of personal digital archiving practices, related challenges, and other technological and personal factors, based on the previous qualitative studies. It investigates to what extent people show a certain behavior or feel a certain challenge when archiving personal digital content and if there were clear associations among the factors surrounding personal digital archiving practices that previous qualitative studies have identified and assumed.

2 Methods

An online questionnaire was conducted, using Amazon’s Mechanical Turk (392 responses).

Questions include:
- Boundaries and values of personal digital assets
- Strategies to manage and preserve their digital content
- Major challenges of digital archiving
- Factors related to personal digital archiving (technology dependency, awareness of personal history, technology-efficacy and memory-efficacy)

Demographics
- Average age: 30.61 years old (age range between 18-61).
- More male (60%) than female (40%)
- Median household income in the range of $40,000 to $60,000 (the mode in $20,000 to $40,000)
- Majority had some college (38.9%, median) or higher (48.8%) education

3 Survey Results

Important content to backup: digital photos (71.4%), music files (67.5%), final versions of documents (66.8%), working versions of documents (55.2%), content saved from Web (46.3%), email content (46.3%)

Backup Method: Replication of files (71.9%); duplication was perceived as long-term preservation method

Backup is a routine activity: about a half (48.6%) showed regularity in backups (from daily to quarterly)

Backup Motivation: When in mood (75.5%), when purchasing a new device (58.4%), when reaching the storage limit (56.4%)

Backup challenges: Respondents generally agreed digital content preservation is difficult, except for the fact that "digital content" is harder to preserve than "physical content".

4 Associations (Factors with Archiving Practices)

Multivariate multiple regression analysis [overall effects]:

5 Highlights

- People show diverse digital archiving practices and are aware of its importance.
- Long-term preservation of personal digital content is perceived challenging, but not particularly more than it is for physical items.
- Digital archiving challenges that are previously identified (digital curation, wide distribution and fast accumulation of digital content) do not influence archiving practices statistically significantly.
- Factors that affect digital archiving practices include technology and memory efficacy, and technology dependency on search functions and storage media.
- The awareness of digital content for personal history also shows an effect on archiving behaviors.

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