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Personal Statement - PIM Workshop

My name is Lilach Alon, and I am a postdoctoral associate in the Department of Information Science at Bowers College of CIS, Cornell University. As an interdisciplinary scholar, my research interests lie at the intersection of information science, psychology, and education. My research on personal information management (PIM) incorporates theories and tools reflecting these diverse interests. In my postdoctoral fellowship, I am conducting research on PIM along with educational research on students in higher education.

I would welcome the opportunity to join an in-person PIM workshop for several reasons. First, it represents a wonderful opportunity to finally meet my community members (even more amazing after the pandemic years). No faculty members or postdoctoral fellows in Cornell's Department of Information Science are interested in PIM; therefore, meeting and brainstorming with other like-minded scholars would be a gift for me. Second, I want to hear about other scholars' work, learn from their perspectives and challenges, and discover new methodological approaches to PIM research. Third, I hope to share my research and ideas about aging with information and perhaps find collaborators who might join me in this research.

In my doctoral research in the School of Education, Tel-Aviv University, I used a mixed-methods approach to examine PIM behavior among people of various ages (from 20 to 76) and occupations, bringing into the discussion the affective aspects of PIM and the gaps between actual and ideal PIM behavior. I discovered that the PIM experience becomes complex for people who manage personal information spaces in a digital, overloaded, and connected world. People are unsatisfied with their PIM behavior and wish to conduct more PIM practices that would enable them to reduce clutter and overload in the personal information space (Alon et al., 2019; Alon & Nachmias, 2020a). Gaps between actual and ideal behavior manifest in a complex and intense affective experience characterized by anxiety and frustration on the one hand but by a sense of high efficacy and little desperation on the other (Alon & Nachmias, 2020b). I also found the affective experience of PIM was correlated mainly with PIM ideal behavior. The more the participants felt anxiety, frustration, belonging, and dependency, the less they deleted information items and the more they filed emails in folders. With increased anxiety and frustration, participants wanted to use PIM practices less (Alon & Nachmias, 2022). A cluster analysis of people's PIM behavior and feelings indicated four types of PIM behaviors differing in their range of affective aspects and in their use of digital PIM platforms (Alon et al., 2020).

My study showed people do not give up on managing their personal information spaces, despite the growing challenges posed by the information explosion and the divergent, multiple information technologies. However, it is impossible to ignore the intense negative affective experience accompanying PIM, including feelings of anxiety and frustration, or the substantial gaps between actual and ideal PIM behavior. Gaps can motivate people to actively reduce the discrepancies between actual and ideal behavior, but large gaps could harm motivation to manage the personal information space and trigger a more intense experience, especially in the unsatisfied type of information management behavior. The study has implications for research, consumer training, and platform design. Theoretically, it suggests self-discrepancy theory and the theoretical framework of the affective aspects of PIM could be useful in future PIM studies and human-computer interaction (HCI) research. In a more practical sense, it suggests principles for a training program to improve people's

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PIM literacy skills. Finally, it indicates the need for platform designers to develop affective-sensitive and type-sensitive digital platforms for PIM.

These findings from my PhD research raised questions about the characteristics of people's interactions with personal information and personal information spaces over the long term. In addition, during the research, I tried to identify the characteristics of elderly people's interaction with personal information, but I only saw a decreased interest in the PIM process and observed a less intense affective experience (Alon & Nachmias, 2020a; 2020b). This led me to think about two new research projects. I have started to work on them during my postdoctoral fellowship. Both use a mixed-methods approach (interviews, guided tours, and surveys) to examine PIM behavior and experiences during various life transitions, aiming to identify strategies to maintain and manage information in the long term.

Professor Andrew Dillon from Austin Texas University (2020) wrote, "Scholars should publish work that looks beyond the technical layer to examine and consider how information is impacting our lives, our work, our education and health practices, our politics, and our economies". His statement emphasizes the importance of my projects, notably their pursuit of a deeper understanding of the meaning of information, including how it could be an important coping mechanism during life transitions.

The first research project focuses on elderly people and their PIM experience. The purpose of this project is expanding the emerging topic of people's behavior and affective interactions with personal information to include implications for persons in the third phase of life (above 65). The study's rationale is that interacting with personal information items allows people to reflect on their life and achievements and think about the future (Jones et al., 2016). Whilst various psychological needs of the elderly have been examined during recent years, the meaning of personal information, its importance, the practices accompanying its long-term preservation, and the affective aspects of interactions with it have yet to be studied.

My goals are to understand if the management of personal information during this stage of life can provide positive affective benefits and to suggest a way to address the PIM needs of the elderly. My research questions address the meaning of personal information for those in the third stage of life, the practices and tools used to maintain personal information, and the challenges accompanying the maintenance of personal information in the long term. I want to better understand the PIM experience of the elderly and define practical tools (e.g., platforms, practices, educational approaches) that could contribute to their well-being, and ameliorate their challenges. The research plan is ready, and I am in the process of finding collaborators to develop the project with me.

The second research project focuses on early career researchers (i.e., PhD students, postdoctoral researchers) who are going through personal and academic transitions (e.g., relocating for academic purposes). Using a life-transition perspective (Shi & Brown, 2016) and relying on PIM literature on immigrants (Krtalic & Ihejirika, 2022), the research aims to identify the challenges of maintaining and managing personal and professional information during transitions and examine practices for a sustainable PIM that may contribute to professional development and the success of these life transitions. I am in the process of interviewing young scholars and trying to frame their experiences from the perspective of PIM.

I look forward to hearing from you, and I hope you consider my participation in the workshop.

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