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PRE-ONLINE INFORMATION SEARCHING MODEL OF DOCTORAL STUDENTS: A GROUNDED THEORY APPROACH

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AUTHOR'S DECLARATION

I declare that the work in this thesis was carried out in accordance with the regulations of Universiti Teknologi MARA. It is original and is the result of my own work, unless otherwise indicated or acknowledged as referenced work. This thesis has not been submitted to any other academic institution or non-academic institution for any degree or qualification.

I, hereby, acknowledge that I have been supplied with the Academic Rules and Regulations for Post Graduate, Universiti Teknologi MARA, regulating the conduct of my study and research.

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ABSTRACT

This study was conducted with the purpose of exploring the beginning stage in information searching process. As far as it is concerned, most would agree that information searching is a constructive and evolving process that has several stages. Based on few discoveries, pre-searching was found to have existed much earlier than the actual search or main interaction stage of the information searching process. However, not all users including doctor of philosophy (Ph.D.) degree students were successful in the beginning of their information searching. One way to look at this problem is to understand their pre-searching. The importance of pre-searching in information searching is that it has a significant impact on the quality of the search result. During the study, the data gathering activity involved a great length of doctoral students pre-searching experiences which were obtained through semi-structured interview sessions. The selection of twenty three doctoral students as participants started with purposive sampling which was used to draw the first participant, while subsequent participants were selected based on theoretical sampling. Data was later transcribed and interpreted according to the coding paradigm of the grounded theory approach where emerging concepts were identified, arranged, linked and presented in a meaningful way. In addition, the constant comparative technique was also applied throughout the coding process which had helped to develop the emerging-theory. As a result, an inductive theory describing the pre-searching phenomenon had been constructed. In actual, the theory is based on five categories that had emerged during the analysis phase. The first two categories which are *exploring* and *venturing* explain doctoral students' activities in relation to the identification and retrieval activities of their research topics. Besides the two, another category named *enriching* shows how they would interact and learn from what they have retrieved from the first two categories. Another category known as *ensuring* describes how they would further enhance their learning and understanding process. The last category is *engaging* which enlightens doctoral students' activities that are associated to the development of search terms that was used to engage pre-searching. Thus, this could also be seen as the earliest encounter in preparing a candidate search terms to be used later during the real information searching session. All emerging categories found in the present study are devoted in answering an area which before this has little explanation and understanding, hence is hoped to contribute to the body of knowledge and become the basis for future research.

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CHAPTER ONE

INTRODUCTION TO THE STUDY

1.1   OVERVIEW

This chapter outlines the background of the study, problem statement, research objectives and questions, significance, and limitations of the present study. In the background of the study, the discussions start from the broad discipline in which the context of this study has been framed. A more focused discussion to the context rest under the problem statement that describes the gap that needs to be addressed. In addition, the approaches to the problem are described in the purpose of the study. A number of benefits which the present study hopes to contribute are discussed under the significance of the study. The study limitation which was set at the end of this chapter contains the challenges that the present study could not address.

1.2   BACKGROUND OF THE STUDY

The present study originated from the need to understand the nature of philosophy doctorate (Ph.D.) degree students or in short doctoral students' information searching activities that occurred prior to their interactions with information retrieval (IR) system. The prior activities during that stage is also known here as the pre-online information searching or pre-searching in short. It forms part of various studies seeking to understand user information searching behaviour (Joseph, Debowski & Goldschimdt, 2013; Wilson, 1999a, 2007). Previous studies have covered many aspects of user information searching behaviour which resulted in the development of various models (Wilson, 1999a, 2007). Details in those models contain various approaches adopted by users, which could be used to explain and understand their information searching activities.

The focus of the present study was to understand the nature of pre-online information searching which is the earliest part in online information searching.