



Infopreneurship: New Career for University Graduates

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Abstract. This paper aims to discuss the significance of Infopreneurship as a future academic course and job option for university graduates. Infopreneurs can be defined as an entrepreneur who recognize opportunities and utilize information, products and services available for creating an information-based business. This paper covers the importance of infopreneurship, roles and skills, challenges and curriculum suitability of infopreneurship.

Keywords. Infopreneur; Infopreneurship; Curriculum suitability; Information broker

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1. Introduction

For the past decades, the importance of information in this world is experiencing significant growth from time to time. The power of information sometimes had overwritten the power of money. The unstoppable creation and sharing of information in everyday life led to an information explosion. We are surrounded with lots of information and to some extent, we are drowning in it. The expanding amount of information available requires experts who can find, sort and process it. As a result, the emergence terms such as information broker, information consultant as well as infopreneurship has stolen the limelight. But where or how can we draw the line between these 3 entities? What are the fundamentals that should be practiced

and opportunities that should be grabbed in order to fill the gap between information and information seeker? This paper will look at the information as the prime commodity to be and also professional services that can be offered.

Traditionally, a job that deals with managing information, also known as a librarian, records manager, and Information Technology (IT) manager. Librarian manages the monograph collection before the digital edge. Records manager on the other hand, manage primary source records or unpublished materials while IT manager manages information that resides in a computer/database. Today, it has become more challenging because online information grows rapidly in unimaginable numbers. Librarian and record manager, in this case, does not only deals with printed materials or information but also in digital form. Unlimited information in digital forms is easily accessed by users as long as there is internet access. Information brokers and information consultant refers to a person or an individual or an organization who plays as mediators between a person who need information and the information itself. An information broker is “someone who is able to extract information, to repackage it quickly, economically and expertly in a form wanted by a particular user” [1]. In other words, information broker is someone who collects information from various sources, rearranges it to suit a client and then sells it to the client.

To certain extend, the borderline between information broker, information consultant, and information entrepreneur is almost unseen. The job scope of the person involved in these fields, sometimes overlapped between one another. They advise, search and provide all relevant and required information as demanded by customers. But the level, urgency, amount of the information might help to draw the line.

2. Definitions

Basically, information is a physical commodity that can be produced, purchased, replicated, distributed, manipulated, passed along, controlled, traded and sold [2] also as a resource [3]. Meanwhile, entrepreneur is defined as someone who mobilizes production factors to produce product or services. Combining these two words (information entrepreneur) or infopreneur will create a person who is willing to take all the risks with information product and services [3].

Limited information searching skills, money constraints, time constraint as well as limited access to online information services have empowered the roles of information brokers and information consultants. They are capable of assisting, search, evaluate, consult and provide the required information to its customers. Loads of information from various sources might cause confusion among users in searching for the right information. Based on these facts, in developed countries, information broker, and information consultant have created lots of job opportunities. Infopreneur is an information professional who is skilled in a number of areas, for example, skills in providing the best chances of finding the information needed by their clients [4].

3. Importance of Infopreneurship

Nowadays, the introduction of the technology makes an individual access to information immediately. However, not every individual know how to acquire the right information via the internet because they do not have abilities and skills in finding the accurate information.

Additional to this, time constrain also make an individual decide on the easy and fastest way to gather information. As a result, infopreneur takes the responsibilities to organize and categorize information and make it accessible in a logical manner in order to fulfill the need of an individual which is providing the right information at the right time for the right people. Thus, as a correlation, the existence of infopreneur is important and beneficial in many ways which are:

- (i) Save time and cost. Nowadays, the current trends of people in seeking information in order to fulfill the tasks are through access to the internet and consult with the information professionals. This is happening because people trust the role and the experience of an expert in the field of information searching thus an infopreneur saves the time and costs that would have been incurred by the user if another route were taken [4]. In addition, infopreneurs anticipate and assess needs of information and also deliver added value information and services in a timely way [5].
- (ii) Reliable. The need to survive drives individuals to engage in entrepreneurial activity thereby bringing about entrepreneurship [6]. In doing so, they maintain a good reputation and are noticed by more potential clients. Major asset and function of infopreneur are acknowledged through good service [4]. This means, infopreneur acquire and make available the right information to the right people at the right time. Furthermore, an individual tends to turn to infopreneur when there is no solution and no clarification to acquire information needed [7].
- (iii) The accuracy of Information. Based on the field of Library and Information Science cover on the issue of information value [3]. The major factors in determining the information value are accuracy, comprehensiveness, proximity, relevance, reliability, timeliness, and ability to understand. Therefore, infopreneurs need to have skills and knowledge in order to supply accurate information to the user and also to support the information needed by the user.
- (iv) Act as an advisor to advise on certain pieces of information. The additional aspect of infopreneur is the provision of advisory services. Commonly, advisory services are provided by knowledgeable and skilled people or expert. The view as an infopreneur is that the person needs to give advice and counsel to his or her clients based on their unique information needs [5].
- (v) The value of information provided. The quantity of information provided by infopreneur has value because a person would not charge a fee for providing a service, except that person is sure that the information is valuable. The kind of information provided by the infopreneur is value added information [5].

4. Objectives and Roles of Infopreneur

The objective of infopreneur is to search and discover information offered by numerous suppliers of information [8]. The flow can be illustrated when infopreneur gets queries from users and struggle to respond the information need of the user.

Infopreneur has always dealt with information. Infopreneur has the ability to find the information for their clients in various formats. They also know how to execute the search and develop a search strategy effectively and efficiently. The roles of an infopreneur are to locate, retrieve and assimilate the constituent services such as information for their clients, customize and integrate the information if required. An infopreneur should know that there are multiple sources of information and knows how to access them in order to be a skilled and successful infopreneur.

5. Skills Needed by Infopreneur

Infopreneur should have skills in a variety of areas, particularly forms of research and have the tools and knowledge to find out exactly what their client needs. Below are several examples of skills needed by infopreneurs.

- (i) **Consulting Skills.** Infopreneur is also known as information research consultants. They locate, analyze and interpret information for clients. Individuals, businesses, government agencies, colleges, and others hire infopreneurs to do research for them. The nature of the job of an infopreneur is providing consulting services. As infopreneurs, they always deal with the clients in delivering and obtaining the information that the client needs. So, they should have the knowledge to develop skills in performing consulting activities in a professional manner including report writing, contracting, etc.
- (ii) **Use of information technology (IT).** The use of information technology is essential and important nowadays for everyone. A professional such as infopreneurs always deal with the need of using information technology in completing their job and task. Furthermore, they must be skillful with the internet and other database searches. Besides that, they should also have a good sense to organize the information they have collected [4].
- (iii) **Research Skills.** It is also important for an infopreneur to have a broad range of interest so that they can understand the topics of searches or the needs of their clients. A good infopreneur must have an interest in various fields such as the economy, social science, medicine, politics, accounting and much more. Besides that, infopreneurs also can complete their job in various ways, including the old fashion way, which means go to the libraries, record center, read books, interview other persons, do market research, conduct surveys, and many others.
- (iv) **English Skills.** English skills are the vitality and significance skills that should have by the infopreneur. Currently, 90% of the information, especially on the internet is in English, which makes proficiency of the English language is a necessary skill for the infopreneurs. Besides English, infopreneurs are also dealing with different type of clients so the ability to speak and communicate well in many languages gives advantages and benefits to them to interact with their clients.
- (v) **Communication Skills.** Infopreneur should have outstanding writing and communication skills. Once the infopreneur has all the information they need, they must verify it to make sure that the information is accurate and up to date [9]. So, they should have the ability to use a variety of research techniques and strategies to confirm the relevancy of

the information. Besides that, infopreneur also should know how to keep up to date on the latest research strategies and techniques and have a variety of sources to contact in the event that information needs to be confirmed. In business, developing communication skills is one of an essential skills that infopreneurs should have. As a whole, no matter how brilliant you are, your communication skills is the only attribute that will help you to persuade your clients.

- (vi) Marketing Skills. Another important skill, infopreneur must be an excellent salesperson. Before infopreneur helps clients to make the right decisions, they must secure the clients for the long term, and this, of course, requires self-promotion and ability to persuade the clients. Equipped with these skills, new infopreneur can start the practice of creating themselves as a well-respected infopreneur and be successful in the future [12].

6. Infopreneur Curriculum Suitability

Infopreneur is essential to be included in the curriculum of Information Science as its setting a balance between teaching entrepreneurial skills and managerial skills [3]. The curriculum of infopreneurship was designed to enhance infopreneurial behavior among graduates in higher education institutions as it has the potential to guarantee employment by sharpening their entrepreneurship skills and end up with managing their own information-based business.

A previous study [10] focus on the infopreneurial behavior primarily amongst undergraduates at the National University of Science and Technology in Zimbabwe that offers information entrepreneurship courses to degree level students in the faculty of Communication and Information Science. The syllabus and course outline is interrelated to the selling, marketing and promotion of information products and services categorized according to their degree program. The findings lead to a strong suggestion to emphasize some content in infopreneurial courses that stress more on "How to start infopreneurship businesses" covered towards budgeting and funding options, business planning and proposal writing, also concerned with legal registration and intellectual property issues.

The introduction of infopreneurship courses at higher institutions presents benefits and should be adapted and practically orientated in ways to meet the unique needs of the University graduates. Although researchers argue that only a few students might have moderate to strong entrepreneurial skills and abilities, graduates who attend infopreneurship courses will certainly have a fuller understanding of the entrepreneurial phenomenon, and possibly become and entrepreneurs in the future [3].

Infopreneur courses may help unemployed information professionals to find new career paths [4]. The rationale behind developing this infopreneur curriculum is that University graduates should look at the world of the information entrepreneur as optional opportunities for new or future career, as well as offer numerous possibilities for people with entrepreneurial skills in line with the rapid changes in information technology. To this end, infopreneur courses are designed with the aim of supplying undergraduates with knowledge and understanding that could enable them to pursue infopreneurship as a career choice.

7. Challenges of Infopreneurship

In this 21st century, one of the most successful living skills is infopreneurship. In a wider sense, infopreneurship can be said as or has become a booming business. As mentioned in the introduction, infopreneurship is considered to be neologism portmanteau and derived from the words 'information' and 'entrepreneur'. However, the function already exists with the existence of an information broker or information consultant. As a result, challenges that associated with infopreneurship has existed ever since. The challenges [11] faced by infopreneurs among others are:

- (i) The size of business. Mostly, infopreneurs are only one man businesses or small enterprises. There are still hard to see a large business entity that represents infopreneurs as a whole.
- (ii) Urban-centrism and elitism. This means that most firms or infopreneurs offices are located in urban areas. Because information is a commodity in a business and mostly used by literate and elite group that is mainly located in urban areas, especially in developing countries. Therefore, rural areas like villages are lagging behind in getting the infopreneurs services.
- (iii) Temporality, part time or full-time occupation. Nowadays, many infopreneurs that jump into infopreneurship field doesn't have that eagerness to sustain their job. The results of temporality in the field of infopreneurship is because when the people inside it or the infopreneurs themselves act quickly relented after suffering only a failure and choose to go for a normal job. When a person requires the services from infopreneurs, they have to wait for the infopreneurs availability because most of them are doing it on a part-time basis. Actually, this profession can be a permanent job or full-time job if they are doing it vigorously. Then, in future, there shouldn't be any issues on the availability of the infopreneurs to provide the services to people.
- (iv) Interdisciplinary factors. Infopreneurs means that the person must come from the related discipline such as librarianship, records management, science and communication, information and media technology and information management. However, people that have a different background from the related discipline are mostly becoming the infopreneurs nowadays. For example, people that come from the account and statistic field become the infopreneurs.
- (v) Expertise. To become a very good infopreneur, a person must have vast experience and knowledge and also sufficient exposure to the subject. Therefore, high demand towards experts in the areas of infopreneurship is needed. The problem right now, there are not enough expertise in the field of infopreneurship and that's lead to other people from the other background that become an infopreneur.
- (vi) Setting up of clinics. No infopreneurs who are brave enough to make changes in the world of infopreneurship. Infopreneurs should do something in order to make the world realize that they exist. Experts from another discipline can set up a clinic to provide their services to people. For example, medical experts set up a clinic to ease their patients using their services to their potential customers. So, why don't infopreneurs set up their own clinics and provide services like medical profession did?

8. Conclusion

Information searching skills differ from one person to another. The level of information awareness, information literacy skills, information access and information technology application skills, among others contributed to the factor. Having access to information (mostly online) is almost undeniable, but subjected to their information searching skills that will influence the search result. Since information plays a vital role in making this world go round, the tendency of people or organization to obtain their desired information has made information as one of the most traded commodities in the world.

Overall, information broker, information consultant, and information entrepreneur play unique roles, even though it has certain similarities and overlapping in its job scope. Lots of measures can be taken in order to ensure that these three entities can emerge as a "new" profession in Malaysia. But the most points to be highlighted is entrepreneur subject, in this case, should be viewed as one of the pertinent components to be taught in universities in Malaysia. It is proposed that this subject be taught comprehensively at degree and postgraduate level in the information science field. By doing so, it will provide an option for the graduates of considering, an information broker, information consultant and information entrepreneur as their carrier. Furthermore, people and organization who are in need of information can turn to those who are already experts in providing the information to do it for them.

Information experts in those three fields also can indirectly be created. For instance, students from a different educational background who pursue their studies in information science postgraduate level will be able to be the subject expert in their respective field. Since they are taught about the nature and importance of information, they will able to search, use, utilize, process, expand and even create information within their expert field. Therefore, information that is demanded by respective customers is more relevant, accurate and useful. Information seekers with legal, pharmaceutical, business, engineering and many others discipline can have a peaceful mind knowing that their desired information is being searched by experts called infopreneur.

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Competing Interests

The authors declare that they have no competing interests.

Authors' Contributions

All the authors contributed significantly in writing this article. The authors read and approved the final manuscript.

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