

When Digital Archives Encounter Digital Natives: The Knowledge Issue

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“An archive is a collection of historical records, as well as the place they are located.”(Wikipedia) Archives are mostly centralized, enclosed internal space & services to keep records, files and documents. While archives turn into digital, even though new technologies introduced, the mentality and the cultural practice of running a digital archive are still the same. Technologies of tomorrow are used to serve yesterday’s construct, which exemplified one of McLuhan’s famous metaphor: “rear-view mirror”: “We look at the present through a rear-view mirror. We march backwards into the future”.

“Digital natives are younger children and youth who have embraced digital technologies and tools as central to their everyday lives and sense of the self – who used (and abused) these technologised spaces in unpredictable and creative ways beyond, and often against, the authority of the State” (Shah; 2007).

When we try to promote the usage of digital archives, especially to digital natives, the contradiction of mentalities of closure vs. openness / inside vs. outside and internal vs. external has really brought out problems & the problematics. Struggles of dominance, taste or “distinction” of cultures, digital divides are embodied or pretended as user behaviors. Besides traditional knowledge which already inscribed in the metadata of the archives, the encountering experience - kinds of dynamic, emerging knowledge - that are re-defining “digital archives” from a new bottom-up perspective.

I will demonstrate current examples of social media / social networking services like Wikipedia & Twitter, accompanying innovative appropriations like Ultrafilter (Mingli Yuan/WPIC, 2010) & Paper.li (SmallRivers, 2010) to explain why we should focus more on certain kinds of dynamic knowledge and innovate digital archives.