

Chapter XX

A Snapshot of Digital Library Development: The Way Forward in the Asia Pacific

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Abstract

This chapter highlights selective key issues and assesses the current situation of digital library development in the Asia Pacific under the broad categories of design architecture and systems, implementation issues and challenges, use and impact, and users and usability. Emphasis on cross-cultural and cross-lingual research would especially be beneficial to address the diversity and richness of the heritage, cultures and languages of this region. Nonetheless, a fundamental digital divide problem poses the greatest challenge as almost 70% of the population of the countries of Asia Pacific has little or no connectivity to the digital world. Concerted international collaborative efforts are much needed, not only to push ahead with the various aspects of the digital library research agenda and

realize the global digital library vision of the future, but to derive novel solutions to eliminate or close the gap of digital divide across various parts of the world.

Introduction

The emergence of digital libraries in the 1990s, coupled with the take-off of the World Wide Web, has resulted in a phenomenal growth of online information that is produced and consumed by all facets of the information society, especially in academia, heritage, government, business and industry. The pervasiveness of online information can only increase over time, fuelling a future of more research, design, development, deployment, use, and evaluation activities in digital libraries. The different definitions of digital libraries culled by researchers and institutions over time attest to the growing importance and scope of digital libraries, and the recognition and emphasis of the role of people, knowledge and technology as key to deliver successful digital libraries (Lim, Foo, Khoo, Chen, Fox, & Costantino, 2002).

There is an increasing reliance on digital collections at the expense of traditional print collections. The first wave of digitization efforts afforded by digital libraries resulted in wider and more universal accesses to rare and special collections of cultural institutions and national heritage of various countries (Falk, 2003). There is a growing emphasis to increase substantially the level of collaboration in terms of both disciplines and geographical boundaries to create global digital libraries to reflect the intrinsic nature of digital libraries that are multi-disciplinary and geographically unbounded (Schäuble & Smeaton, 1998). Along with this, the “e” (electronic) wave in e-government, e-learning, e-commerce, e-communities, and other e-initiatives are sound indicators for future digital library options, which are fast becoming infused with the requirements of the knowledge economy, where the advent of the knowledge management discipline has created new forms of information and knowledge portals utilizing digital library technologies.

Digital library potentials, trends and challenges have been previously outlined by various institutions, such as The International Federation of Library Associations and Institutions (IFLA, Cleveland, 1998), and Digital Library Federation (DLF, 2004), corporations such as Sun Microsystems, Inc. (2002), the working groups such as Joint NSF-EU Working Groups (Schäuble and Smeaton, 1998), and authors such as Pope (1998), Fox & Marchionini (1998), Borgman (2002), and Shiri (2003). Chen & Zhou in Chapter I also provided an assessment of digital library development in Asia Pacific while Fox, Suleman, Gaur, & Madalli in Chapter II reviewed key issues and case studies of digital library design

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