

It is more difficult to imagine future generations seeing those images, given the speed of change in this medium.

Significant digital culture exists in many forms. There are records and publications. One type of record is digitally born and the other is a copy of something physical that has been digitized for access. Published e-books, e-journals, music and movies have an identity, fixed by the creator and sustained by publishers, creators, libraries, or other open sources and purchasers. Traditional paper and film-based materials that are organized, described and digitized are made more accessible, but in most cases the original continues to exist. We might still decide to preserve the digital surrogate because of the resources that went into the creation of the resource. Websites represent a hybrid between publication and record, and careful selection/filtering decisions are needed.

This essay is less about the published and digitized culture, and more about unique records. Digital records created by governmental and non-governmental institutions, physical and social sciences data, and personal records, including digital photographs, sound and moving image recordings, including speeches, electronic communications and e-mail, and to some extent social media, including blogs, with all their various forms, are the subject. They all require management in electronic systems designed for preservation. There are some original records in the archival world, such as audio/video records, where the digitized copy may become the record because the original will no longer be accessible. These records, although they are surrogates will need to be managed in the same way as those electronic records that have never existed outside the digital world. For archives, the effort to preserve and provide access to electronic records is still very young and is complicated by the need to apply archival management to the raw electronic data. There is also the extreme challenge of selecting and organizing a constantly growing river of information. The challenge of providing access today and of preserving significant digital records for future generations is great, and continues to grow more urgent and more complex as the volume of digital information grows. It is likely that archives will need more advanced tools for selection/filtering/automatic organization, at the point of record management, in order to ensure that we are preserving what is essential and significant.

Examples of significant electronic records

There are a few significant electronic records that serve to stress the importance of thinking about preservation. One that is increasingly significant is the electronic establishment of identity for individuals. A fixed identity documents the relationship of a person to a governance and social entity that provides both protection and rights. An article in the Economist in 2011, described an initiative in India to document all citizens with electronic identities, including the rural