

poor who, for the first time, with a known identity will be able to move to get jobs and loans without losing their identity, open bank accounts to electronically receive government payments, to vote, and fully participate as citizens (Nilekani, 2011). Imagine the increased control individuals have and the reduction of vulnerability to corruption. The UNHCR uses electronic tools and data to give refugees an identity so that they can start their new lives (2002). Every natural disaster leads to losses of individual identities that have to be re-established in the aftermath.

Initially, the significance of e-mail as a record was questioned. However, it has been clearly established that e-mails to and from government officials are part of the official record. E-mails have particular issues because the communication portion of the e-mail may be slight, but there may be many attachments, with varying formats. Sustaining these records over time is still particularly challenging. As recently as the last two years, social media tools that might have seemed too ephemeral and personal to have any consequence have become significant for the role they play in creating communities, leading to movements and leading to the transformation of political systems.

Useful archival, technical and metaphorical terms

Whenever we have new partners, whether they are information technology specialists and information technology systems engineers, electronic and software engineers, or long-term colleagues, such as archivists, it is important to explore the meaning of words and the language. “Stop, ask and listen,” when faced with something new. I believe that it is less important that there be consistency in language globally, institutionally or even between two people, than that, when we work together, we are careful to share what we mean and ask to make sure that there is understanding. This is easier in the physical world when we can point something out under a microscope, or show something physical in a process, and explain in that way what is being done.

The word ‘digital’ refers to the form of the information: the bytes, or the 0s and 1s. The equivalent in the physical world might be to say that this is a rug and it is made of wool. It will tell us something about what kind of actions might be needed to preserve this specific kind of object.

One of the terms used throughout this essay is ‘digital record’, which can be the same as a document or intellectual entity. A record refers to the type of object; information that is made accessible as a unit. A digital object is a more generic term that describes a discrete file. The digital record may have several digital objects as attachments.

The digital record as ‘intellectual entity’ includes its digital data, any relevant provenance information (who, where, when), the events in