

Annotated Bibliography: Remote/Virtual Users

Mickayla McDowell

Department of Library and Information Science, San Jose State University

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Dr. Jessica Bushey

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Abrams, S., Antracoli, A., Appel, R., Caust-Ellenbogen, C., Denison, S., Duncan, S., & Ramsay, S. (2019). Sowing the Seeds for More Usable Web Archives: A Usability Study of Archive-It. *The American Archivist*, 82(2), 440–469.
<https://doi.org/10.17723/aarc-82-02-19>

Abrams et al. (2019) are a part of the Archive-It Mid-Atlantic Users Group. In this study they analyzed the usability of Archive-It, “a web archiving subscription service of the Internet Archive” and one of the most widely adapted web archiving tools. In recent years usability studies focusing on web archives have become more prevalent, however this was the first study ever conducted analyzing the usability of Archive-It specifically. Abrams et al. did not control or account for computer literacy in their study, nor in variations of user profession or the type of institution they were researching. I think the biggest weakness in their study was not accounting for the prior knowledge of technology, and how this could impact the usability of Archive-It. Additionally most participants came from an academic background, and it would be interesting to see how usable Archive-It is towards the general public or just a wider sample size. The results of this study lead to 6 key areas of improvement for Archive-It: develop a more comprehensive search box, add metadata for video content, add tooltips/glossary for unfamiliar terms, normalize and index date field, allow for a “unpublished” metadata option, and allow users to easily customize metadata labels. More content in archives is becoming digitized or is born-digital, which makes web-archiving tools increasingly important. As of now, Archive-It is the most widely used tool and understanding how users interact with Archive-It can show where improvements need to be made to increase usability.

Jaillant, L., & Aske, K. (2024). Are Users of Digital Archives Ready for the AI Era? Obstacles to the Application of Computational Research Methods and New Opportunities. *Journal on Computing and Cultural Heritage*, 16(4), 1–16. <https://doi.org/10.1145/3631125>

Jaillant & Aske (2024) conducted an open-call survey and semi-structured interviews with archivists, librarians, digital humanists, literary scholars, historians, and computer scientists to address how and why researchers are (or are not) using computational methods to analyze digital collections. The sample size was small in this study, and mainly focused on people who had some digital or computational experience. Studies on Artificial Intelligence are extremely limited, since it is a new technology and AI is still at an experimental stage within an archival setting. What Jaillant & Aske widely found was that survey participants felt digital archives were difficult to access or not very user-friendly. So users were tempted into focusing on more traditional research methods. Additionally, spending time to learn computational methods was often unfeasible and collaboration with other departments or specialists went unrewarded in professional settings. Another flaw with computational methods was issues of bias, representation and transparency found in AI models, however more research is needed into this area. Jaillant & Aske recommend computational training in postgraduate programs, rewards for cross-disciplinary collaborations, and that funding agencies promote the development of software that will allow more engagement with digital resources. As AI becomes more advanced and more tools are implemented in digital archives, more studies focused on how users interact with AI are needed.

Jaillant, L. (2022). Design Thinking, UX and Born-digital Archives: Solving the Problem of Dark Archives Closed to Users. In *Archives, Access and Artificial Intelligence* (Vol. 2, pp. 83–108). Bielefeld University Press. <https://doi.org/10.1515/9783839455845-004>

In Lise Jaillant’s book, “Archives, Access and Artificial Intelligence”, she addresses Dark Archives that are closed to users and ways to improve access in Chapter 3. Using an autoethnographic method, she theorizes that by using design thinking – as popularized by Tim Brown and his IDEO team at Stanford – archives can design and improve access procedures with the user at the center. She discusses examples where this has been tried, like the Wellcome Collection in London that organized a workshop on born-digital archives and the British Library brought together inter-disciplinary academics to discuss and test born-digital and “hybrid” archives. She proposes that the researcher or end-user of an archive needs to no longer wait for access to improve, but take a collaborative role in the design creation of digital or web-based archives. Jaillant also proposes collaboration with UI/UX designers and conversation analysts to improve ease and inclusion of web designs. Jaillant additionally argues that the archive sector needs to “facilitate the use of innovative methodologies such as Artificial Intelligence...[as] some users... favor hybrid approaches,” to research. There are two main critiques with Design Thinking when it comes to improving access and use of born-digital archives, resources of archives and “quick and dirty” prototypes. The first issue, resources of archives, is important to acknowledge because many smaller institutions might now have access to collaboration with professionals from outside their discipline or the ability (i.e., time, money, and resources) to study their user base. Smaller institutions will have to wait for large-scale studies to be done before being able to implement any of these designs. The

second critique, is that by Jaillants own acknowledgement “a prototype inspired by design thinking is ‘quick and dirty’ and can be improved over time” (94). However, many would argue that if institutions are to implement large changes and resources to improve access it might be better to invest into more sustainable designs. Additionally “quick and dirty” prototypes could easily scare away users from a web-archive, as they aren’t as good as they might like. As this is not a full study, but rather an argument based upon personal experience and expertise it would be interesting to conduct a study of users and archivists to see how they respond to the concept of design thinking within an archival setting.