


Chapter 10

The New Automation: Artificial Intelligence and the Archives Discourse

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ABSTRACT

Artificial Intelligence (AI) is transforming how records and archives are acquired, processed, and distributed. This has a profound impact on the future of the archives theory, methodologies, practices, and scholarship. The chapter uses ECM vendors' rhetoric to predict the impact of AI on the records and archives discipline. The chapter juxtaposes AI, automation, ECM, and archives to illustrate complex relationships that exist between the archives discipline and other disciplines and to expose multidisciplinary issues affecting the archives discipline in the digital age. In so doing, the chapter highlights the role of intelligent automation in reshaping the archives discourse and provokes debate on records and archives automation. The chapter is essential for a systematic integration of AI into records and archives work. Records and archives practitioners and scholars seeking to understand the intersection of AI, automation, ECM, and archives will find the chapter useful.

INTRODUCTION AND BACKGROUND TO THE STUDY

AI breakthroughs in the last decade are promising to transform records and archives automation in an unprecedented manner. There are early signs that AI is refocusing records and archives automation compass. There is both frenzy and bewilderment among records and archives management (RAM) practitioners and scholars on what AI brings to records and archives work. Colavizza, Blanke, Jeurgens,

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and Noordegraaf (2021) and Rolan, Humphries, Jeffrey, Samaras, Antsoufov, and Stuart (2019) report that AI is being experimented with and integrated into various records technologies. In the marketplace, records and archives technologies vendors are hyping their products' AI capabilities, including content generation, big data analytics, and workflow automation.

Yeo (2021) concedes that AI will transform the RAM discipline both conceptually and methodologically. As suggested by Yang (2024), the incorporation of AI into business systems will alter content generation, capturing, and distribution processes. Yang (2024) and Yeo (2021) envisage that changes in generation, capturing, and distribution processes will have an impact on RAM concepts of acquisition, appraisal, arrangement, description, and provenance. Moreover, the archives professional will have to contend with AI-generated content. Mordell in Fewster and Arias-Hernandez (2021, p.6) suggests that AI-generated content may compel the archives profession to change its assumptions of a record's authenticity, integrity, and trustworthiness. According to Yeo (2021), this may mean changing our conceptualizations about archives and archiving.

The reconceptualization of archival theories, methodologies, and scholarship in the face of emerging technologies is not a new phenomenon for the archives profession. There is a longstanding relationship between technology and the archives discourse. There is, in fact, a strong and justifiable claim that the archives concept is not permanent but is heavily shaped by the technology of the day (Yeo, 2021; Upward, Mckemmish, & Reed, 2011; Schwartz & Cook, 2002; Ketelaar, 1998; Derrida, 1996). To illustrate this point, Ketelaar (1998) argues that “if our ancestors could have used email, not only would their archives have looked quite different, but the archived events would also have taken another course.” (p.56). Given the impact of technology on the archives concept, Yeo (2024) argues that “concepts of archives are very diverse, and ideas about what archives are and how they function will continue to evolve.”

Undoubtedly, AI will have its mark on RAM discourse. What remains unclear is the exact nature of the changes. At the moment, AI capabilities in records and archives are only emerging and certainly not a production-ready ‘silver bullet’ (Rolan et al., 2019). There are yet to be industry-wide AI standards and guidelines that the RAM profession can turn to resolve the emerging issues (Yeo, 2021). While there is increasing scholarly activity on AI, the intersection of AI and records and archives work is yet to be comprehended (Yeo, 2021; Rolan et al., 2019).

The chapter employs a rhetorical analysis method to examine ECM vendors' AI marketing rhetoric to predict the impact of AI on records and archives discourse. While there are many other ways AI enters the RAM practice, there is evidence from records and archive literature that ECM technologies vendors' rhetoric is central to AI knowledge and its adoption in records and archives services. Other contem-

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