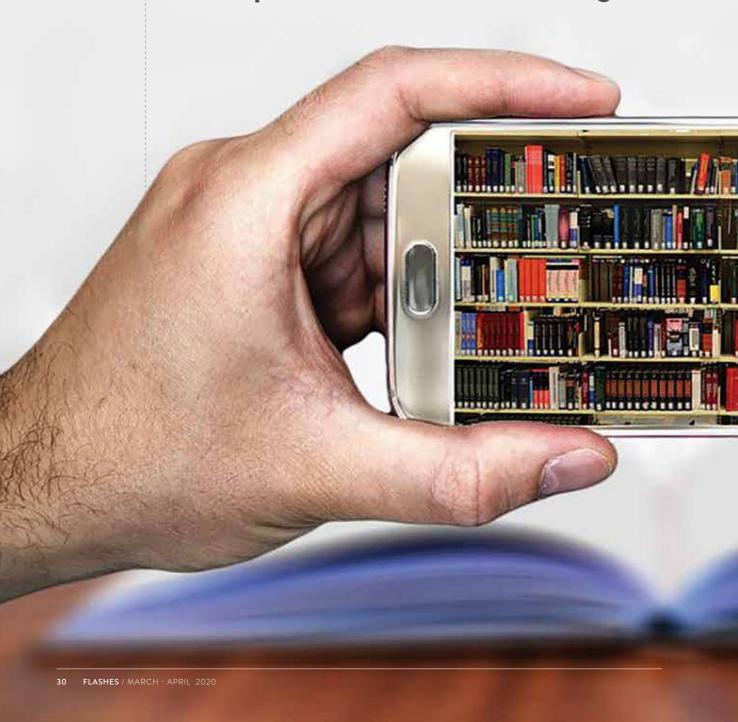# The Digital Library:
A Passport to Modern Knowledge

Researchers and writers no longer have to seek out only the traditional libraries, but the digital ones as well for their research, discussion, and reviewing books. The Arab world is yet to tap into the opulence of digital libraries since some of the important books are still not available in digital form.

In this article, Flashes looks at different models of digital library projects with diverse content that is readily available to the public once it is connected to the Internet. We also highlight a number of pioneering experiences such as the Saudi Digital Library, the Dubai Digital Library, and glimpses of global experiences, as we explore the role of digital libraries, their value and future importance.

An umbrella for researchers

In an interview with Flashes, Dr. Saud bin Musa Al-Salahi, the former general supervisor of the Saudi Digital Library, said: "The library provides advanced information services, which include making digital information sources of various forms available and making them accessible to faculty, researchers, and students."

"The library provides an umbrella for all Saudi universities and negotiates with publishers through the conglomerate under the umbrella of researchers, which makes it one of the largest collections of digital information sources in the

Arab world. It currently contains more than 446,000 digital books with full texts, and 169 global and Arab information databases that include the full texts of millions of academic articles, more than five million university theses, and 461,000 multimedia including images and films in various scientific disciplines of interest to educational institutions. They were obtained through more than 300 international publishers," Al-Salahi explained.

He calls for the development of an integrated vision for digital libraries, allowing all parties to the library system, starting from the author to the user, to participate. "The importance of digital preservation of books is, it protects libraries from natural or human conditions that can cause material damage, such as fires or looting, in addition to the ease of making it available globally."

World of Knowledge

Ibrahim Fathy Moawad, Professor of Artificial Intelligence, Faculty of Computers and Information, Ain Shams University, and Director of Electronic & Knowledge Services Center at the Supreme Council of Universities (SCU), Ministry of Higher Education in Egypt, believes that there is a global trend towards preserving information in a digital format, and providing virtual information services that reach all segments of society.

Moawad told Flashes, "All the major libraries in the world, such as the US Library of Congress, the British Library, and the libraries of major international universities such as Harvard and Oxford, have large digitization projects that predict a shift in providing library services and exploiting the potential provided by the great technological breakthroughs in the internet, and the associated information and communications technologies."

Moawad also makes mention of international bodies and search engines such as the World

Digital Library created by UNESCO, the Google Books, the European Digital Library, and Project Gutenberg that have projects for digital libraries plus other digital library initiatives and digitization projects.

He sees the Arab world as being at the stage of transition to a knowledge society where the economy, development, education and culture have become dependent on information, yet the volume of digital information in the Arabic language does not exceed 3% of the total knowledge available on the Internet.

Moawad stressed the importance of an Arab digital library that monitors Arab digital content in its locations and allows users to access it anytime, anywhere.

Professor Moawad explained that the digital library is important in bridging the so-called digital divide due to its critical contribution to the work of researchers and other users.

Knowledge is everyone's right

"You are about to access nearly 2,606,604 digital articles and 245,906 titles." This is a magic ticket to another world of knowledge, through which minds travel and learn about different cultures

Dubai Digital Library was launched four years ago, becoming the largest online repository of Arab literature with a rich content of books and a diversity of knowledge.

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which you can find on the homepage of the Dubai Digital Library (DDL) website. The website is an affiliate of the Mohammed Bin Rashid Al Maktoum Knowledge Foundation (MBRF).

To know that you are in front of this huge amount of information sources available to all is amazing. Dubai Digital Library was launched four years ago, becoming the largest online repository of Arab literature with a rich content of books and a diversity of knowledge.

Dubai Digital Library seeks to consolidate the principle of access to knowledge, as stated by Dr. Khaled Abdel Fattah, advisor of knowledge and digital solutions at MBRF, during a knowledge event organized by Jamal Bin Huwaireb Studies Center in 2019. He explained that it depends mainly on the knowledge to which everyone has a right, and it is the most important product and service in the current era.

Accordingly, Dr. Khaled Abdel-Fattah explained that the largest Arab open library, Dubai Digital Library is unmatched in terms of the volume of available content, which amounts to more than 250,000 titles, and 600,000 distinct digital items including books, periodicals, newspapers, magazines, articles and researches as well as heritage materials covering all areas of human knowledge in a unique and distinctive diversity. The library has more than 1,600 books covering the fields of computer and information sciences, public works, social sciences, applied sciences, religions, literature, natural sciences, mathematics, history, and general geography, with 50% as free content.

He pointed out that the library provides books and other references at very low prices, further noting that the quality of the readers has now varied from paper lovers to the new generation who enjoy technology; and therefore, libraries are developing their work to cope with this reality. This is why the Dubai Digital Library is compatible

with Smartphone applications by building an application system compatible with Android and iOS systems, as it has sought to develop for the front ends of the web to operate according to the principle of "Smartphones first."

Digitization of information

The Advisory Board for the Project of Arabic Collections Online, chaired by Marilyn Booth, Khalid bin Abdullah Al Saud Professor of the Contemporary Arab World, Magdalen College, Oxford University, notes that the project of Arabic collections online currently provides digital access to 12,810 volumes across 7,469 subjects drawn from rich Arabic collections of distinguished research libraries. This project desires to feature up to 23,000 volumes from the library collections of New York University (NYU) and partner institutions in literature, business, science, and other fields.

The project of Arabic collections online, according to its website, aims to digitize, preserve and provide open access to a wide range of books in the Arabic language on topics of literature, philosophy, law, and religion, among others, upon a realization that a lot of Arabic knowledge materials are not readily available online, which is why it is provided to digitalize Arabic books for future generations.

According to the website, the contributing partners in the project are: New York University, Princeton University, Cornell University, Columbia University, American University in Cairo, American University of Beirut and the National Archives of the United Arab Emirates. At the same time, anyone interested in Arabic works can use the website of the Arab groups online from anywhere in the world. Specifically, the target audience is students, scholars, academics, researchers, librarians, and readers.