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## Personal Archives and Their Transformation in Digital Era

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**Abstract:** The social changes that are taking place, such as the digital revolution, affect the work of the archives, largely transforming the nature of their main activities. Personal archives that people create in the process of life are also undergoing significant transformation by replacing analog documents with digital ones and uncontrolled material accumulation, lack of classification and methods of managing electronic documents related to this process. The current situation with personal archives requires arrangement of the processes of accumulation, selection, copying and storage of personal information. In this regard, fund creators need to acquire certain knowledge and skills in this area. The task of archivists is to offer potential fund creators effective and simple methods of managing electronic documents within personal and family archives. Archives in a number of countries publish understandable recommendations on their websites in order to give people an idea of the methods of managing personal archives that exist in a digital format, both at the stage of their creation and when they are archived. The article also examines the types of electronic digital documents that can be used to complete personal funds and the problems that arise in this regard.

**Keywords:** archive, personal fund, document, electronic document, types of documents, digitalization

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## Личные архивы и их трансформация в эпоху цифровизации

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**Аннотация:** Происходящие в настоящее время социальные перемены, такие как цифровая революция, отражаются на работе архивов, во многом меняя природу основных направлений их деятельности. Личные архивы, создающиеся людьми в процессе их жизнедеятельности, также подвергаются существенной трансформации путем замены, характерных для них прежде, аналоговых документов цифровыми и связанных с этим процессом неконтролируемого накопления информации, отсутствием необходимой классификации и методов управления электронными документами. Складывающаяся ситуация с личными архивами требует упорядочивания процессов накопления,



отбора, копирования и хранения личной информации. В связи с этим фондообразователи нуждаются в приобретении определенных знаний и навыков по данному направлению. Перед архивистами стоит задача предложить потенциальным фондообразователям эффективные и простые методы управления электронными документами внутри личных и семейных архивов. Архивные структуры в ряде стран публикуют на своих сайтах доступные для понимания рекомендации с целью дать пользователям представление о методах управления архивами личного происхождения, существующими в цифровом формате, как на стадии их создания, так и при передаче в архив. В статье также рассматриваются виды электронных цифровых документов, которыми могут комплектоваться личные фонды, и проблемы, которые, в связи с этим, возникают.

**Ключевые слова:** архив, личный фонд, документ, электронный документ, виды документов, цифровизация

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## Introduction

The scientific community is increasingly discussing the issue of whether archives in their former, traditional sense will be preserved in the world, where electronic documents (henceforth ED) become the main means of transferring and accumulating knowledge. The task of the traditional archive was to preserve the material carrier on which a document was recorded – papyrus, parchment, paper, birch bark, clay tablets, etc. At the moment, the established paradigm is being destroyed – ED, which are increasingly replacing traditional analog documents not only from the sphere of office work, but from the life of ordinary citizens, are losing their material visualization. The material carrier does not disappear, as such, but it is reduced to a digital code, with the help of which ED information is recorded. In this regard, the task of the archives changes as well. Traditionally, archives have preserved the historical memory of previous generations by retaining historical sources – documents recorded on material carriers. Now it is aspects of information content that come to the fore, and the preservation of ED is directly related to communications. There is anxiety for the preservation of archives not only at the level of archival practice, but also at the level of legal norms that do not keep up with the pace of digitalization. The increased attention to this issue is confirmed by the UNESCO World Memory Heritage program, which supports such projects as “Archives in Danger.”<sup>1</sup> As part of this project, together with the French National Institute of Audiovisual Materials (INA), UNESCO has been digitalizing its audiovisual heritage.

The moment when ED, both in terms of the method of creation and the form of storage, began to dominate over traditional ones dates back to the early 21st century. According to statistics, in 1986 1 % of documents were created in a digital format, in 1993 – 3 %, in 2000 – 25 %, in 2007 already 94 %.<sup>2</sup> Since the 2010s, on the Internet there have been rapidly developing social networks which are currently actively used by specialists in various fields of knowledge. Information accumulated in social networks has a very

<sup>1</sup> *Report on the Implementation of the International Decade for the Rapprochement of Cultures (2013–2022). 197 EX/9.* Paris, 8 August 2017, April 15, 2021, <http://unesdoc.unesco.org/images/0025/002528/252833e.pdf>

<sup>2</sup> S. Allegrezza, “The Impact of Digital Transformation on Private Archives: What Future for Personal Archives?” *Atlanti* 28, no. 3 (2018): 79–90.

limited storage period, which has attracted the structures involved in the storage of documents. In 2010, the Library of the Congress concluded an agreement with Twitter on preserving users' posts. Similar agreements were concluded by the French National Institute of Audiovisual Materials (INA) on preserving the content of the year on the YouTube or Dailymotion video platforms, in 2013 – network radio channels, in 2014 – messages on Twitter, audiovisual materials professionally created in France. Similar practices are used in Sweden, Australia and some other countries. Thus, social networks are becoming a new source of acquisition of ED archives and, above all, personal funds.

While the acquisition of archives by the funds of institutions or organizations due to their economic importance, current legislation, research demand for documents, are in the focus of attention of archivists, the acceptance of ED as part of personal funds remains behind the scenes, although it is personal funds that are subject to increased risk of loss. This was the reason for considering in this article the transformation of the sources of acquisition of personal archives during the period of replacement of analog documents with electronic ones, as well as a number of issues related to this.

### **Types of personal documents and the form of their presentation in the context of digitalization**

When preparing guidelines for personal funds, we faced the fact that the archives understand the inevitability of acquiring personal funds by ED. The types of documents traditional for personal funds, such as letters, postcards, diaries, have already switched to digital format. They are replaced with emails, WhatsApp messages, electronic versions of phone books and calendars. Recordings and lectures are kept in a digital format. Analog photographs are superseded by digital photographs and video films. Printed geographical maps as such have disappeared. School and medical documentation has been digitalized. Personal websites, blogs, including those in social networks, online publications can also be considered as sources of acquisition of personal funds. Personal documents are usually stored on electronic media – hard drives, flash cards, CDRoms, or online services, with secure access through user authorization.

With the transition to the digital recording, the types of personal documents format remain the same; the form of their presentation changes. A considerable part of documents is created by a fund creator on a personal computer; they are text documents that can be printed on paper or transferred to other media and thus be accepted into the archive. Difficulties can arise with emails, which often have attachments in the form of files, links to Yandex disk, graphics and multimedia paste, which will not allow limiting to just printing them, but it will require full download of the sample and its storage. The archive will inevitably have to deal with the examination of e-mail attachments and their description, especially if this was not done by the owner of the fund. Descriptions will also be required for attachments rejected by the archive.

Some researchers believe that personal websites, blogs, Facebook profiles, Twitter accounts, Instagram, etc. represent new types of documents.<sup>3</sup> In our opinion, there is no

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<sup>3</sup> *Allegrezza S.* “L'importanza degli archivi digitale di persona e di famiglia per una nuova percezione della disciplina archivistica,” *Atlanti. International Review for Modern Archival Theory and Practice* 29, no. 2 (2019): 58–76.

reason to speak about new types of documents just because the environment for a document has changed. In fact, these are the same publications or columns in a newspaper, albeit an electronic one, travel and thematic diaries and publications.

### **New sources of personal funds acquisition**

It is personal websites that can become a source of acquisition of personal funds formed in a digital format. Numerous versions of the software environments used in which they are created complicate their acceptance into the archive. The situation can be simplified by accepting for storage PDF pages of a personal website with a link system, or by framework standards developed by archives for receiving multimedia. PDF formats, which make it possible to store both textual and graphic information, seem to be the simplest solution to accepting personal ED into the archive.

Blogs can also become sources of acquisition of archives, including, in some cases, personal collections. A blog is, in fact, similar to a personal e-zine or a thematic column in an e-newspaper, the main content of which are entries containing text, images or multimedia regularly added by its owner. Comments of visitors are unlikely to be of interest to archives.

When selecting materials from personal websites or blogs, it will be especially important to examine the value of both the website or the blog as a whole, including its personification, and the selection of elements of its structure for storage. Archives should think about the fact that the materials presented on the Internet were originally created on a personal computer; it is there that files that reflect the various stages of the blogger's work on the text should be stored. This may simplify acceptance to archive not of the entire blog, but the corresponding personal files, which will also determine the use of materials. There is some practice of Informregister in this matter, which registers and stores websites that their creator regularly replenishes and provides copies for storage according to the schedule set in the contract.

It should be noted that blogs and personal websites are initially created and are public objects. They are likely to be stored in the archive in the public domain as well.

### **Specifics of creating personal archives in the context of digitalizing society**

Although the storage of ED in personal funds will be similar to other archival funds, in terms of acquisition there are certain specifics. The difference lies in the initially uncontrolled process of forming a personal archive, which is expressed: in the spontaneous accumulation of personal documents, their dispersion by posting on various media, information platforms and networks; in making numerous copies; in the lack of examination and selection of ED for personal archives, as well as in the lack of a clear classification of the entire array of accumulated ED. The lack of criteria for systematizing documents at the stage of forming personal archives using chronological or digital classification, collecting ED in one or several folders in certain areas of life are typical of all personal archives in a digital format. Creators of personal archives traditionally tend to over trust the electronic resources on which they store ED: posts on Facebook, tweets on Twitter, photos on Instagram, e-mails in webmail, not thinking that if such a resource is terminated, their ED will be lost.

## **Possible scenarios for the loss of personal archives**

An unregulated array of personal ED, when accepted into an archive will be much more difficult to reorganize than a traditional one, which may also lead to the loss of documents.

In the case of the transfer of a personal archive by the heirs of a fund creator, the loss of documents may also occur for technical reasons, such as the illegibility of solid-state storage media on which the documents were originally stored, the lack of access to the personal account for service storage or to the personal computer of a fund creator due to ignorance of the login password, due to the closure of the online service, etc. Even if the remote servers that the fund creator used and the password to access them are known, the validity period of this password for entering the service storage is limited in time and can be closed by providers, so the work on restructuring existing documents, the inventory making and examining of the archive cannot be postponed, as in the case of analog documents. To the already mentioned difficulties there is added the lack of legal norms for the transfer of electronic documents in the order of inheritance, in respect of which the law on private property applies.

## **Preserving a personal archive for posterity or the basics of archival science**

Although in the last decade the “digital literacy” of the population has greatly increased, the knowledge of organizing and managing personal and family archives created by a variety of people in a digital format has remained at the same level. Potential fund creators need information on the fundamentals of archival science, primarily the conceptual apparatus (the concepts of ED, directory, archive; the life cycle of ED). In addition, they need knowledge of the main stages of creating an archival fund in a digital format; of the rules for naming documents and directories, dating documents, making copies, of the structure of metadata; of the criteria for choosing electronic formats; of the application of classification schemes in funds of personal origin and family funds and some others.

Equally important for fund creators is information on organizing the process of managing their archives, primarily on actions related to the formation of metadata and their change, searching for copies, comparing texts and photographs, automatically renaming files and directories, backup, as well as e-mail, which occupies a significant place in personal funds and has its own characteristics both in management and in the strategy of long-term storage. Potential fund creators should have an idea of selecting, examining electronic messages; reliability and security in the e-mail system and long-term storage of personal funds in a digital format in general. It is necessary to be aware of the legal norms and ethical ideas.

## **International experience**

Currently, some foreign entities involved in the storage of documents post on their websites information related to organizing and managing personal archives in a digital format, both at the stage of their creation and already established. Within the framework of the National Digital Information Infrastructure and Preservation Program (NDIIPP), the Library of the US Congress promotes, among other things, personal archives.<sup>4</sup> The Uni-

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<sup>4</sup> *Library of Congress. Perspectives on Personal Digital Archiving, National Digital Information, Infrastructure and Preservation Program. 2013, April 15, 2021, [www.digitalpreservation.gov/documents/ebookpdf\\_march18.pdf?loclr=blog-sig](http://www.digitalpreservation.gov/documents/ebookpdf_march18.pdf?loclr=blog-sig)*

versities of Oxford and Manchester are implementing the Paradigm project, dedicated to the problem of ensuring the preservation of the personal archives of British politicians. Currently, there has been created an annual conference on the problems of personal funds in a digital format – Personal Digital Archiving.<sup>5</sup> The Tri-College Consortium Libraries website provides guidelines for the preservation and proper maintenance of ED such as letters, photographs, posts and messages in social networks, websites and e-mail, which form the basis of personal collections.<sup>6</sup> The “Save My Memories” website of the International Imaging Industry Association is dedicated to creating personal archives in terms of storing digital photographs.<sup>7</sup> In Italy, under the auspices of the University of Bologna, there is a center for international research “Personal Digital Memories,” which participated in the development of the instructions for working with personal funds.<sup>8</sup> There are no similar educational programs in Russia yet. Significant assistance to those wishing to create their own personal archive in a digital format can be provided by applications to computer software: MyLifeBits of Microsoft, which allow creating, maintaining and developing one’s own electronic heritage on a daily basis.

Among the special studies on this subject, there are the articles of Italian researchers S. Allegrezza, L. Gorgolini on reorganizing and inventory making of mixed documentary funds,<sup>9</sup> S. Vettore on managing personal digital archives,<sup>10</sup> Maffeo Lauren on preserving digital documents in social networks,<sup>11</sup> as well as American researchers who consider that the refusal to discuss the most problematic aspects of storing personal ED and developing standards for the formation, maintenance and preservation of personal funds in a digital format may lead to the loss of part of the documentary heritage, which is a valuable source for a number of areas of scientific knowledge.<sup>12</sup>

## Conclusions

Thus, the digital revolution, which manifested itself in all spheres of the life of modern society, also affected the formation of personal archives of citizens, primarily by replacing analog documents with electronic ones. ED can only be stored on a storage device – hard drive, flash drive or in the “Cloud” virtual space. They should be recorded in an electronic format that allows their reading, for which a “technological platform” is

<sup>5</sup> *American Library Association. Personal Digital Archiving. Webinar*, April 15, 2021, <http://www.ala.org/alacts/confevents/upcoming/webinar/pres/042413>

<sup>6</sup> *Tri-College Libraries. Personal Digital Archiving*, April 15, 2021, <https://guides.tricolib.brynmawr.edu/pdad>

<sup>7</sup> *International Imaging Industry Association. Save My memories*, April 15, 2021, <http://www.savemymemories.org/>

<sup>8</sup> *Associazione Italiana Biblioteche*, April 15, 2021, <https://www.aib.it/>.

<sup>9</sup> S. Allegrezza, and L. Gorgolini, eds. *Gli archive di persona nell'era digitale. Il caso dell'archivio di Massimo Vannucci* (Bologna: Il Mulino, 2016), April 15, 2021, [www.archiviomassimovannucci.it](http://www.archiviomassimovannucci.it)

<sup>10</sup> S. Vettore, “Gestione degli archivi digitali di persona: strategie e problematiche,” *Il mondo degli Archivi. Sezione. Studi*, 4 febbraio 2014, April 15, 2021, [www.mda2012-16.ilmondodegliarchivi.org/index.php/primopiano/item/283-gestione-degli-archivi-digitali-di-persona-strategie-e-problematiche](http://www.mda2012-16.ilmondodegliarchivi.org/index.php/primopiano/item/283-gestione-degli-archivi-digitali-di-persona-strategie-e-problematiche)

<sup>11</sup> Maffeo Lauren. *Googl's Vint Cerf on how to prevent a digital dark age*, April 15, 2021, [www.theguardian.com/media-network/2015/may/29/googles-vint-cerf-prevent-digital-dark-age](http://www.theguardian.com/media-network/2015/may/29/googles-vint-cerf-prevent-digital-dark-age)

<sup>12</sup> Bell G., Gemmel, J. *Total Recall: How the E-memory Revolution Will Change Everything*. Penguin Group USA, 2009.

needed. However, solid-state media are subject to fairly rapid obsolescence, as are electronic formats whose original software becomes obsolete over time. This could also be said of technology platforms, the result of which may be the illegibility of ED. The situation with personal archives that are spontaneously completed with ED demands that archivists develop simple and effective requirements that could be followed by fund creators for forming and storing personal documents created in a digital format with the potential for their further transfer to archives.

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