

Digital storytelling as a method to embed diversity and inclusion in GLAM structures

Dr Yaming Fu

School of Cultural Heritage and Information Management, Shanghai University
ymingfu@126.com

Prof. Simon Mahony

Department of Information Studies, University College London
s.mahony@ucl.ac.uk

Keywords: Diversity, Inclusion, DEI strategy, Reinventing approaches, Digital storytelling, GLAMs

GLAM institutions govern and manage cultural heritage and diverse forms of historical and cultural collections, work with professionals, experts, supporters, and all kinds of social groups in their governance (Avdikos et al., 2023). The varied forms of cultural heritage, the multiple stakeholders, and the responsibility for public education drive GLAMs to find ways to promote anti-racism, diversity, equity, inclusion (DEI) and accessibility in all their activities (Ho et al., 2023). DEI is also included as an institutional strategy by many GLAM institutions, specifically to ensure the allowing and respecting of differences, diversities, human rights and freedoms, building upon shared understanding of fairness, dignity, and respect (CILIP, 2018; ALA, 2017). According to the report by the GLAM Diversity Subgroup of the Digital Library Federation (DLF), GLAMs and their parent organizations are perceived as only engaging in a limited set of DEI activities, specifically “collection highlights”, “public events or programs” and “optional employee training/professional development” (Ho et al., Deng, 2023). Against this backdrop, our research focuses on exploring ways to implement diverse and inclusive structures for GLAMs' collections by using digital storytelling, a method that has emerged in the context of the "participatory turn", with the digital tools and new media forms available for public engagement (Klaebe et al., 2007).

Digital storytelling is the practice or method of using digital tools and multimedia forms to create, express, interpret and share stories, and personal experiences. The research on digital storytelling has evolved from the early exploration of diverse narrative formats, through the uncertainty of technological development, to scholars' attempting to break away from traditional narrative theories and construct new theoretical frameworks to interpret this new narrative paradigm (Cunsolo et al., 2013). The virtual space that is formed with the practice of digital storytelling is defined as a “shared

infrastructure” by Couldry (2008) where individuals and communities can express and reflect upon stories that ultimately work towards “invigorating the community thereby encouraging participation” (Conrad 2013, p.262).

The application of digital storytelling in promoting DEI has proven effective in areas such as the exploration of collective religious group identity (Clark & Dierberg, 2012), and providing services for disabled groups (Bliss & Fisher, 2013). Digital methods allow this in ways that are not possible in print or the confines of an exhibition gallery (Brennan, 2019). Digital storytelling breaks the one-way delivery scenario derived from text and print communication, and emphasizes subjective initiative and interactivity, such that everyone has the right and opportunity to participate and can choose multiple ways of expression. To achieve the mission to balance public cultural services and cultural memory, GLAMs may need to make structural adjustments, such as including interpretation of the stories of their collections from not only professionals, but also from ordinary citizens, including multiple stands to ensure that the discourse and stories they present are not biased or blurred by the influence of the technology that is being used. Technology is never neutral and unconscious bias, fuzziness, and uncertainty, may be introduced either in the way that the technology is set up and applied, or in the way that the algorithms are engineered or implemented (Slate, 2012). This potentiality of digital storytelling provides a new pathway to promote DEI in GLAMs, helping to develop a more diverse, balanced, equal, and inclusive environment (Fu & Mahony, 2023).

Our research uses Shanghai Library as a case study and builds on the ongoing DH project, Shanghai Cultural Collections¹, an online platform with various forms of historical collections of Shanghai city (including archives, documentations, old photos, maps, newspapers, magazines, and motion-pictures). Based on the collections, we construct a framework (see Figure 1) to include voices from diverse social groups that are usually silent (minorities and the marginalized), collect their stories, experiences, and memories about the collections (and the content of the collections) by digital storytelling, to enrich the presentation of the collections as the end goal. The digital means bring not only the simple extension, enhancement, or enrichment of formats for expression, but also facilitate structural changes and an evolution of the production, processing and disseminating of the historical narrative. The framework contains five stages, and we shall present the detailed process at the conference using a pilot study.

¹ Link: <https://scc.library.sh.cn>

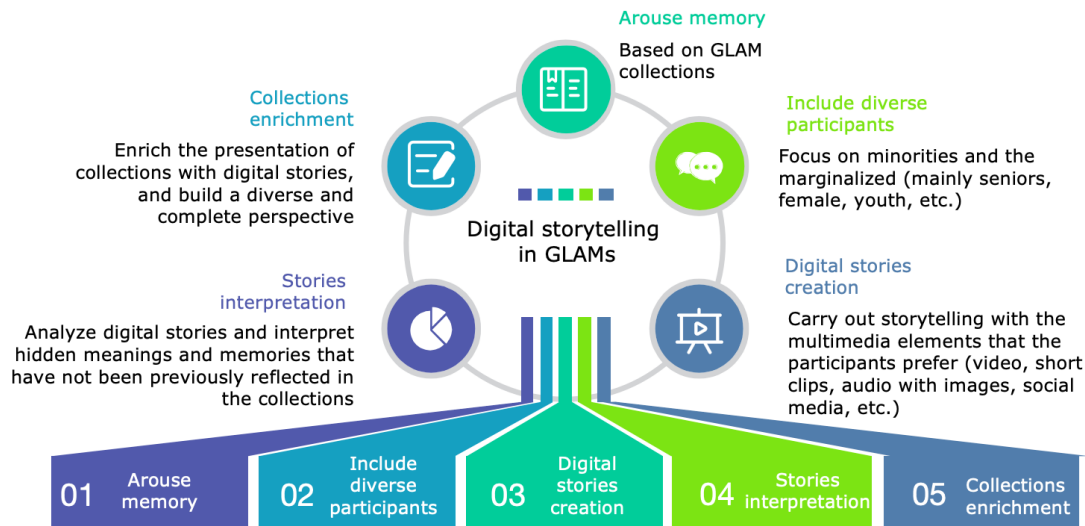


Figure 1 Methodological framework

We encourage local people to construct their own ‘history’, and to choose their own ‘digital presence’ regarding the stories and present that as part of the collections themselves to build a more diverse and complete perspective about the holdings. These voices express their experiences and memories about the city, important events, historical buildings, and their colonial occupiers. How do their personal histories enable us to reevaluate our understanding of and engagement with the collections, and how might we envisage and understand a framework to facilitate this? Historical collections themselves are a reflection of the history and collective memory, while the digital stories from local people add another layer to that, whether resonant, antagonistic, or strengthening. Through this process, the digital stories that are created capture and echo the experience of the marginalized ‘others’; they use voices from diverse groups and hence reflect on the dominant strand to help to move away from the inherent bias in our collections coming from the historical, ideological, colonial, or simply the elitist perspective (Guilliano, 2022). The formal historiography needs to be balanced by using the stories and reflections of the ordinary people. These give us a diverse and inclusive interpretation on GLAMs’ historical collections, helping to build a ‘democratic’ presentation of the history.

The framework that we use in the study aims to raise awareness of the need for inclusivity and engagement with the wider community. It will go some way to remove the bias and implicit inequality often found in GLAMs collections, particularly in areas with a significant post-colonial legacy.

(Word count: 958)

Bibliography

ALA (2017) Equity, diversity, inclusion: an interpretation of the library bill of

rights. American Library Association. Available at:
<http://www.ala.org/advocacy/intfreedom/librarybill/interpretations/EDI>
(accessed 1 December 2023)

Avdikos, V., Dragouni, M., Michailidou, M., & Pettas, D. (2023). Rethinking GLAMs as commons: a conceptual framework. *Open Research Europe*, 3(157).

Brennan, S. (2019). Digital history. The Inclusive Historian's Handbook. Available at: <https://inclusivehistorian.com/digital-history/>
(accessed 1 December 2023)

Bliss, E., & Fisher, J. (2013). The journey to a good life: Exploring personal and organisational transformation through digital storytelling. In Rinehart, Barbour & Pope (Eds.), *Ethnographic worldviews: Transformations and social justice* (pp. 93-107). Springer.

Clark, L. S., & Dierberg, J. (2012). Digital storytelling and collective religious identity in a moderate to progressive youth group. In Campbell (Ed.), *Digital religion* (pp. 147- 154). Routledge.

Conrad, S.K. (2013), Documenting local history: a case study in digital storytelling, *Library Review*, 62(Nos 8-9), 459-471.

Couldry, N. (2008), Mediatization or mediation? Alternative understandings of the emergent space of digital storytelling, *New Media and Society*, 10(3), 373-391.

Cunsolo Willox, Ashlee, et al. (2013). Storytelling in a digital age: digital storytelling as an emerging narrative method for preserving and promoting indigenous oral wisdom. *Qualitative Research*, 13(2), 127-147.

De Jager, A., Fogarty, A., Tewson, A., Lenette, C., & Boydell, K. M. (2017). Digital storytelling in research: A systematic review. *The Qualitative Report*, 22(10), 2548-2582.

Fu, Y., & Mahony, S. (2023). Toward implementing equality, diversity, and inclusion for virtual conferences within the LIS professions. *Journal of Librarianship and Information Science*, 0(0).

Guilliano, J. (2022). *A Primer for Teaching Digital History: Ten Design Principles*. Duke University Press.

Klaebe, Helen, Foth, Marcus, Burgess, Jean, & Bilandzic, Mark (2007). Digital Storytelling and History Lines: Community Engagement in a Master-Planned

Development. In Docherty, M (Ed.) Proceedings of the 13th International Conference on Virtual Systems and Multimedia. *United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization (UNESCO)*, France, pp. 108-120.

State, L., (2012) 'If It's Neutral, It's Not Technology', *Educational Technology*, 52(1), 6-9.

Ho, J., Schiff, L., & Deng, S. (2023). DEI Efforts Across GLAM Organizations: A Report by the GLAM Diversity Subgroup of the DLF Committee for Equity and Inclusion. Zenodo. <https://doi.org/10.5281/zenodo.8433043>