Research Proposal Draft: Addressing Weaknesses and Gaps in Current Audio-Visual Archiving Practices

**Needs Assessment**

Audio-visual technology has been an ever changing source of technology. Content including video recordings, audio recordings, and multimedia files have become integral to modern life. Preservation of these audio-visual formats is significant in media, education, history, and entertainment. However, current methods of archiving these formats face numerous challenges that hinder accessibility, long term preservation, and effective retrieval. This needs assessment identifies these challenges and will touch on the importance of developing more accessible, efficient, and user-friendly archiving systems for audio-visual formats.

Technology is the main component when it comes to audio-visual archiving. Technology is rapidly changing every single day. Many audio-visual formats are subject to technological obsolescence. Audio-visual formats such as VHS tapes, film reels, audiotapes, and floppy disks are becoming more and more difficult to access due to the lack of compatible playback equipment. The lack of devices to read these formats make it difficult for archivists to maintain and retrieve these materials. This research proposal will discuss the urgent need for the development of archival systems that support migrations from outdated formats to modern, more durable storage media. Other topics that will be discussed in this research proposal that will provide archivists the tools to better preserve audio-visual material are the following, more standardized metadata framework, more universal design principles such as closed captions and subtitles, more secure and sustainable solutions, establishing ethical management and copyright compliance, more training opportunities for individuals who are interested in preserving audio-visual formats, and addressing the gaps that exist in the preservation of certain audio-visual materials such as early video games, interactive media, and niche broadcasting content.

Preservation and accessibility of audio-visual materials are becoming more important in today’s digital age. After addressing the challenges identified in this needs assessment, we can ensure audio-visual content can be preserved for future generations while also making it available to a broader, more inclusive audience.

**Significance of the Study**

As the world has grown in technological advances new art forms have emerged such as film, television, radio, music, and video games. For about the past century, we have been working to preserve these audio-visual formats within archives. This study aims to identify areas that could be improved in preserving these materials and what strides can be made in making them more accessible and discoverable to students, scholars and educators. Identifying these areas of improvement is crucial to ensuring proper long-term preservation of these materials and allowing others to learn about and study the historical and cultural significance of these art forms for generations to come.  The outcomes of this study will support the creation of more inclusive and effective archiving practices that will benefit both librarians and library users such as researchers, students and educators.

**Research Goal:** Our research goal is to identify areas of audio-visual archiving that can be improved as we continue deeper into the digital age and what sorts of digital content can we work on preserving or developing new ways of preserving to make more accessible to students and scholars.

**Research Questions**

What are some weaknesses of current audio-visual archiving practices?

How can we improve these methods?

How discoverable and accessible are these materials to students and scholars?

What gaps are there in preserving audio visual materials? What materials are being neglected?

How can we bridge make these materials more accessible to students and scholars?

**Literature Review**

Research on best practices for audio-visual archiving is not incredibly new within the scholarly world, but as we move farther into the digital age, research into this area is only becoming more prevalent. Prior to our current moment, audio-visual archiving has existed for about a century, focusing primarily on film, television, radio, and music. However, it began to grow exponentially in the second half of the 20th century as the need for preserving these materials increased with their mass production. The *Philosophy of Audiovisual Archiving* (UNESCO) outlines how early preservation efforts concentrated on physical conservation, emphasizing the safeguarding of culturally significant materials (Edmondson, 2004). Despite these efforts, archivists struggled with the degradation of analog formats and a lack of standardized methodologies, which often led to the loss of historically valuable media.

As digital technology advances, so do the methods of archiving, shifting the focus from physical preservation to digital migration. However, this transition has introduced new challenges, particularly concerning format obsolescence, metadata inconsistencies, and barriers to accessibility. A study of oral histories in *Library Management* (Yap et al, 2018) discusses the limitations faced by many archives, which continue to rely on outdated storage formats and lack the infrastructure necessary for large-scale digital preservation. Similarly, a *Science* article (Toledo et al, 2015) underscores the difficulty of ensuring long-term digital accessibility, as rapidly evolving technology frequently renders past storage solutions obsolete. These challenges not only threaten the longevity of preserved materials but also hinder researchers, students, and scholars from discovering and utilizing these resources effectively.

One critical component of modern audio-visual preservation is implementing standardized metadata frameworks. Metadata plays a vital role in organizing and retrieving archived materials, yet inconsistencies in metadata standards can significantly impact the accessibility of digital collections. A study on archival excess (McMurray, 2015) highlights the necessity of uniform metadata practices to enhance discoverability and usability. Without proper cataloging and indexing, valuable media may remain hidden within archival repositories. Additionally, emerging best practices advocate for the integration of universal design principles—such as closed captions, subtitles, and alternative text descriptions—to improve accessibility for diverse user groups (Bradsher, 1988). These approaches align with broader efforts to create inclusive and sustainable archiving systems that serve researchers, educators, and the general public.

Despite these advancements, gaps still exist in the preservation of certain audio-visual materials. Some formats, such as early video games, interactive media, and niche broadcasting content, remain underrepresented in archival collections. Addressing these gaps requires collaboration among archivists, technologists, and policymakers to develop sustainable solutions that ensure long-term access to diverse media formats. Research on oral histories and archival excess suggests that future advancements in artificial intelligence, cloud-based storage, and ethical archiving practices may further improve digital preservation efforts. By identifying and addressing these gaps, archivists can refine best practices and ensure the lasting of audio-visual materials for future generations.

By examining the historical context, challenges, and emerging solutions in audio-visual archiving, this study contributes to the ongoing discourse on preserving digital heritage. The findings from this literature review will give recommendations for improving archiving practices and ensuring that these valuable materials remain accessible and discoverable in the years to come.

**References**

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The following is a discrete 10 question survey aiming to gather insights into current audio-visual archiving practices and explore what areas need improvement. Participation is voluntary, and all responses will remain confidential. All information collected will be solely used for research purposes.

**Survey Questions:**

1. What types of audio-visual materials do you typically work with or access in archives? (Select all that apply)

o   Film (e.g., nitrate, acetate)

o   Audio recordings (e.g., tapes, discs, cylinders)

o   Video recordings (e.g., VHS, Betamax, digital files)

o   Born-digital AV content

o   Other (please specify)

2. How often do you encounter challenges related to outdated audio-visual formats or playback equipment in archives?

o   Very frequently

o   Frequently

o   Occasionally

o   Rarely

o   Never

3. How would you rate the effectiveness of current metadata or cataloging practices for audio-visual materials in archives?

o Excellent

o Very good

o Good

o Fair

o Poor

o Not applicable

4. For what do you utilize audio-visual materials in archives for? (Select all that apply)

o Academic research

o Educational purposes

o Creative projects/filmmaking

o Historical documentation

o Other (please specify)

5. How would you assess the quality of access (viewing/listening conditions, availability of copies) to audio-visual content in archives?

o   Excellent

o   Very good

o   Good

o   Fair

o   Poor

o   Not applicable

6. To what extent do you agree that copyright restrictions significantly limit access to audio-visual materials in archives?

o   Strongly agree

o   Agree

o   Neutral

o   Disagree

o   Strongly disagree

7. How discoverable do you find information regarding the preservation history (migration, restoration) of audio-visual resources in archives?

o   Very discoverable

o   Somewhat discoverable

o   Not very discoverable

o   Not at all discoverable

8. To what extent does your institution offer services or programs that encourage and facilitate the use of audio-visual collections by students and scholars (workshops, digitization services)?

o   To a great extent

o   To some extent

o   To a little extent

o   Not at all

o   Unsure

9. Please rate your agreement with the following statement: "My institution adequately balances preservation needs with the need to provide access to audio-visual materials."

o   Strongly agree

o   Agree

o   Neutral

o   Disagree

o   Strongly disagree

10.  How would you rate the clarity and ease of the policies and procedures for accessing and using audiovisual materials in archives?

o   Excellent

o   Very good

o   Good

o   Fair

o   Poor

o   Not applicable