

Digital Storytelling for Institutional Memories: Lessons from SMUuseum

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Agenda

- Setting the Context
- Case Study: SMUuseum
- Governance & Collaboration
- Insights from Regional Practice
- Practical Takeaways

SHAPING IMPACT, TRANSFORMING LIVES



VISION

Asia's premier global city university
 At the nexus of management, social sciences and technology
 Driving innovations, transcending boundaries, transforming lives



MISSION

- Nurture a community of independent lifelong learners and change agents
- Enable world-class researchers to address societal challenges
- Harness partnerships to serve as gateway between Asia and the world
- Transform lives to create sustainable futures



IMPACT

- Human Capital Development
- Knowledge Creation
- Economic Development
- Social and Community Life



PRIORITIES

- Digital Transformation
- Sustainable Living
- Growth in Asia

STRATEGIES

EDUCATION

In a world of technological disruptions and longer lifespans

- 1 Develop distinctive graduate qualities across all segments (Undergraduate, Postgraduate Professional, Postgraduate Research and Professional & Continuing Education)
- 2 Drive innovation in pedagogy, andragogy, curricula, and co-curricula to strengthen distinctive graduate qualities
- 3 Strengthen lifelong learning across all segments

RESEARCH

In a world that needs solutions from the best ideas

- 1 Invest in academic and translational research to address three societal challenges (Sustainable Cities, Resilient Workforces and Longevity Societies & Economies)
- 2 Implement a research assessment framework that recognises academic and societal impact
- 3 Forge collaborations across academia, government, and industry to harness data and AI technologies

PARTNERSHIPS

In a world made stronger with collaborations

- 1 Deepen SMU's presence in key Asian cities through a three-tier approach
- 2 Forge regional and international partnerships for talent development and knowledge creation with the academic community, 3P (Public, Private, and People) sectors, and multipliers
- 3 Create strategic value for high-impact partners by effectively bringing the world to Asia and bringing Asia's story to the world

ENABLERS



Talent



Financial Resources



Digital Infrastructure



Physical Infrastructure



Brand & Reputation

Singapore Management University (SMU)

Established in 2000, SMU's mission is to generate **leading-edge research with global impact** and to produce **broad-based, creative, and entrepreneurial leaders** for the knowledge-based economy.

SMU's education is known for its highly interactive, collaborative, and project-based approach to learning as well as its **wide range of undergraduate and postgraduate programmes** as well as **interdisciplinary combinations**

Home to over 13,000 students across undergraduate, postgraduate professional and postgraduate research programmes, SMU comprises eight schools:

- **Lee Kong Chian School of Business**
- **School of Accountancy**
- **School of Economics**
- **School of Social Sciences**
- **School of Computing and Information Systems**
- **Yong Pung How School of Law**
- **College of Integrative Studies**
- **College of Graduate Research Studies**

SMU Libraries – Li Ka Shing Library



SMU Libraries – Kwa Geok Choo Law Library



Quick Facts

- Over 1mil visitors in 2024
- Open – 96 hours per week during term time
- Learning Commons – 24/7 hrs
- 2,300 seats and 10,700 sqm across 2 libraries
- Physical and virtual learning environments and services
- 40 staff – 24 professional librarians



Quick Facts

- Over 550,000 books (Over 480,000 e-books)
- 85,000+ electronic journals
- 170+ electronic databases
- Access to 34,000+ titles of streaming media
- Print and electronic magazines and newspapers in lifestyle collection
- Art collection 450+ works
- > 10 million downloads from InK (Institutional Repository)



Pacific Rim Research Libraries Alliance 2023 Meeting

PRESERVATION, DEVELOPMENT AND DISCOVERY
OF ARCHIVES AND SPECIAL COLLECTIONS
IN PRRLA LIBRARIES

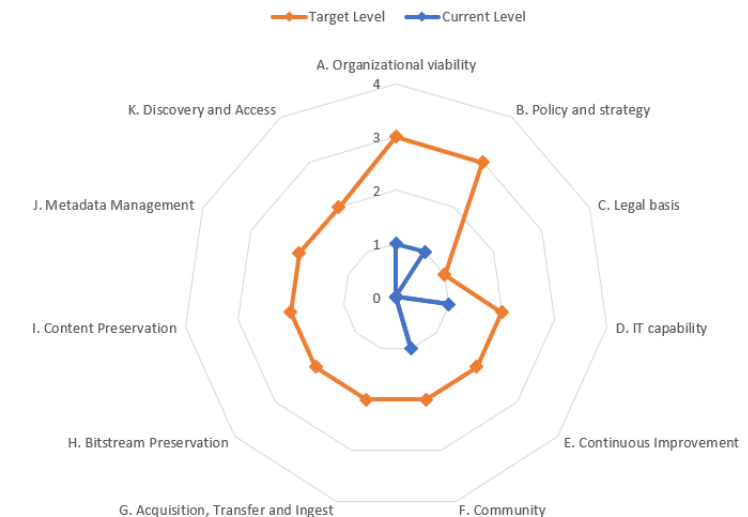
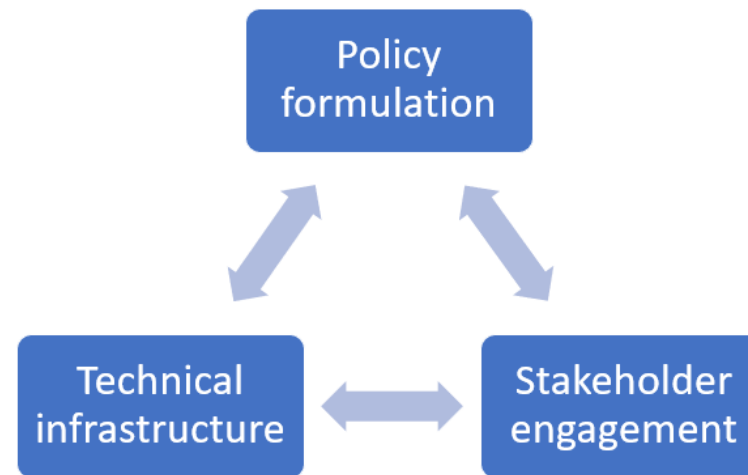
Sun Yat-sen University, Shenzhen, China. Oct 17-21, 2023.



- Purpose
- Capabilities
- Challenges
 - Policy formulation
 - Stakeholder engagement
 - Technical infrastructure

Preserving the Past: Starting a Digital Preservation Service for the Future

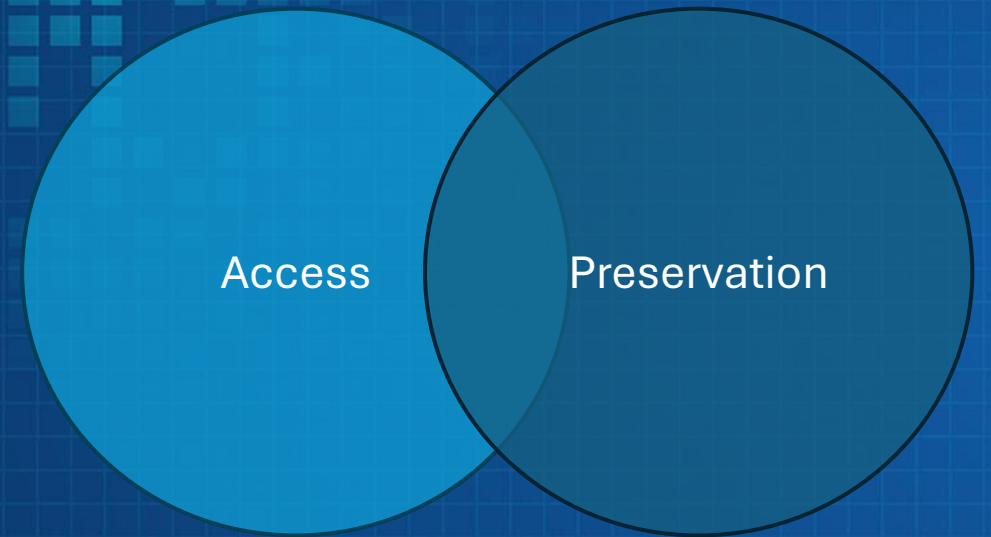
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Why Institutional Memory Matters

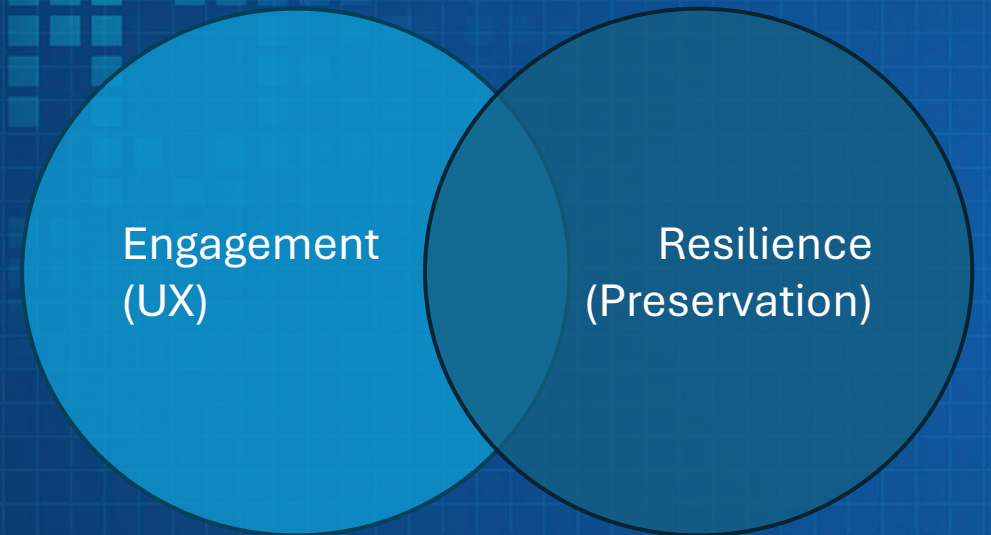
From Archives to Narratives

- Universities as memory institutions
- Shift from passive repositories
→ active narrative platforms
- Risks of losing context, meaning, and trust if preservation is not intentional



Libraries as Storytellers *and* Stewards

- Public engagement vs long-term resilience
- Tension between UX-driven access and preservation constraints
- Why libraries are uniquely positioned to bridge this gap



Introducing SMUseum

What is SMUseum?

- Singapore Management University (SMU) ‘digital museum’
- Publicly accessible platform
- Curates photographs, videos and multimedia stories
- Organised around **People, Places, and Purpose**

SMUuseum



Search record e.g. "Frank, Ronald Edward"

🔍 Search

Celebrating 25 Years of Meaningful Impact

As SMU marks 25 years of meaningful impact, this exhibition invites you on a journey through three thematic collections—People, Places, & Purpose. Through these stories, step back in time to reminisce about cherished moments, celebrate the milestones that shaped us, and reflect on the values that brought us here. Let these memories inspire us to dream bigger and look ahead to the next 25 years with hope and purpose.



Visionaries, Trailblazers & Pillars



Innovative, Transformative &
Sustainable



Inspirational, Purposeful &
Impactful

SMUseum Origin Story

From Anniversary Project to Digital Heritage Platform

- Silver Jubilee catalyst
- Libraries as platform owner and preservation lead
- Collaboration with Silver Jubilee Taskforce and central units
- Decision to design a *living* digital museum, not a static exhibition



Narrative Framework: People, Places, Purpose

Why These Themes Work

- Human-centred entry points
- Chronology without rigidity
- Flexible enough for future growth



Content Strategy & Curation

From Raw Assets to Stories

- Sources: galleries, oral history, departments, events
- Selection principles: representativeness, reuse potential, rights clarity
- Editorial lens: “What does this *mean* to the institution?”



Government didn't even really have an idea as to what kind of university they wanted. We went through so many permutations-from a

Excerpt of interview with Ho Kwon Ping on his first involvement with setting up SMU

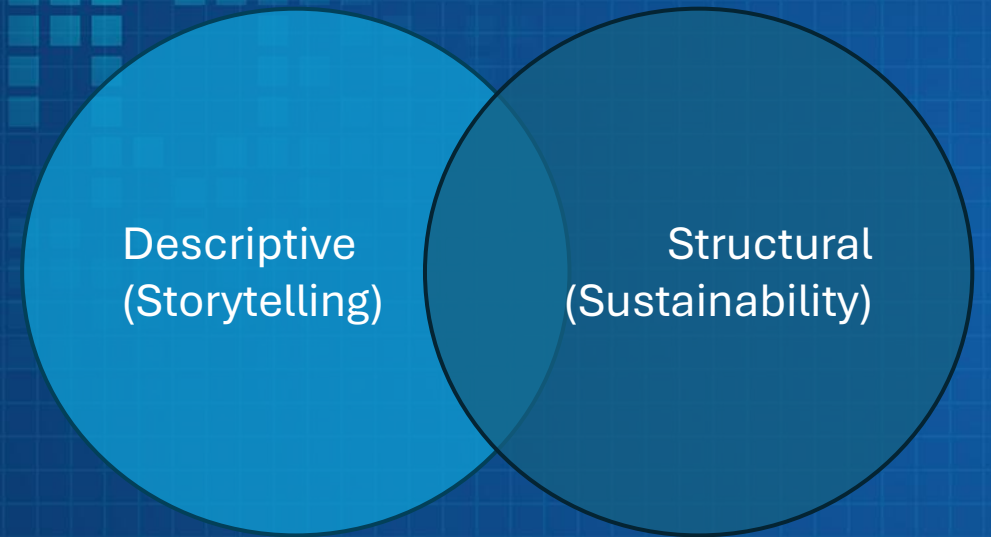
The pioneer SMU Steering Committee, led by Dr Ho, was a collective of remarkable individuals, each entrusted with a critical role. From defining the University's vision and mission to shaping its teaching pedagogy, financial frameworks, and legal foundations, this committee worked tirelessly to turn bold aspirations into reality.

<https://smuseum.smu.edu.sg/smu25/people>

Metadata & Contextualisation

Designing for Discovery *and* Preservation

- Descriptive metadata for storytelling
- Structural metadata for sustainability
- Contextual captions vs archival description



UX & Storytelling Decisions

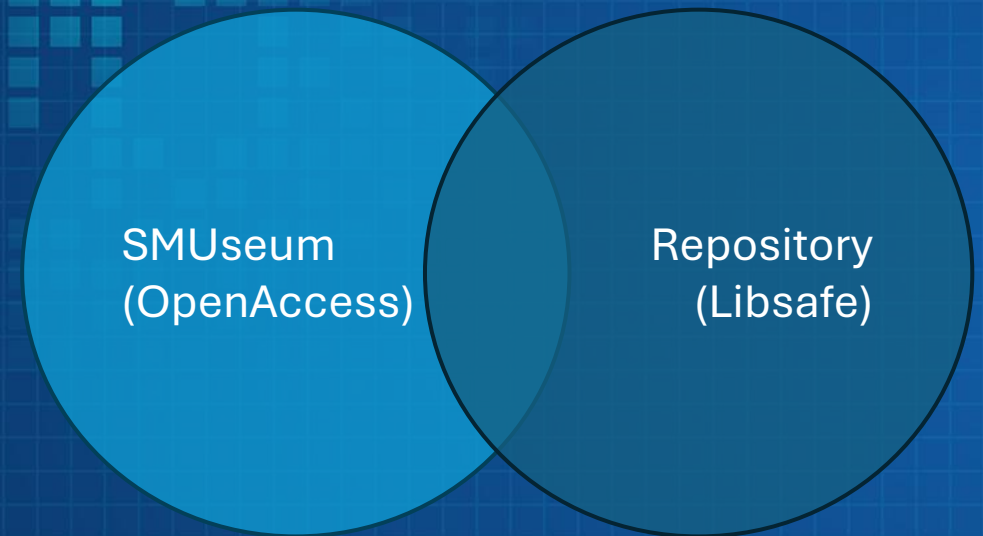
Designing for Public Audiences

- Browse-first, curiosity-driven discovery
- Search as secondary but powerful tool
- Visual hierarchy and narrative flow

The screenshot displays the SMU Museum website. At the top left is the SMU Singapore Management University logo. The main header features the 'SMUuseum' title in a large, stylized font. Below the header is a search bar with the placeholder text 'Search record e.g. "SMU Buildings &..."' and a 'Search' button. The main content area shows a list of records with filters for 'Collections' and 'Subject'. The 'Collections' filter is expanded, showing categories like Purpose (191), People (108), Places (97), Convocation & Academic Year Opening (63), Patron's Day (58), Arts Festival (51), Commencement & Graduation (50), and Open House (12). The 'Subject' filter is also expanded, showing categories like Student Life (127), SMU Buildings & Architecture (78), Ho, Kwon Ping, 1952- (71), Patron's Day (57), Convocation (56), and Commencement (50). The record list includes three entries: 'Federal Building' (a view of the building in the 1990s), 'DPM Tony Tan with SMU and SIM Representatives' (Deputy Prime Minister Tony Tan examining a model), and 'Announcing Location of SMU's Permanent Campus' (Deputy Prime Minister Tony Tan announcing the location). Each entry includes a small image, a title, a brief description, and a 'Collection' label.

Aligning Access with Longevity

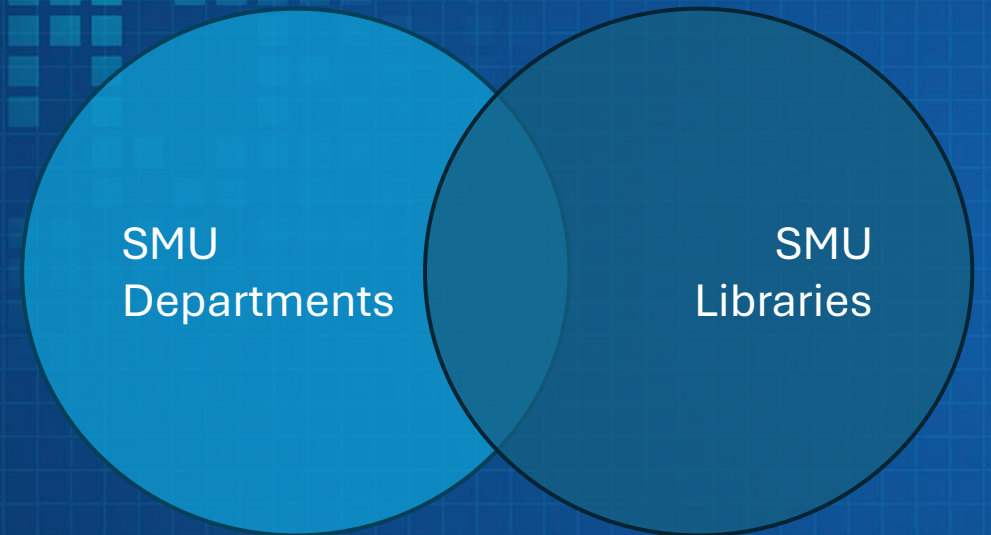
- Separation of access layer and preservation layer
- File formats, storage, and system boundaries
- UX choices tie back to long-term access and reuse



Governance & Collaboration Model

Who Decides, Who Curates, Who Preserves

- Libraries as stewards and convenors
- Clear roles across departments
- Decision-making process
→ collaborative “work-in-progress”





**PACIFIC RIM RESEARCH
LIBRARIES ALLIANCE**

Karl Lo Award 2024 at PRRLA 2025 Annual Meeting
Tohoku University, from October 29th-31st 2025

- Aim: Evaluate the current state of digital preservation practices among PRRLA member libraries
- Method: Survey questionnaire sent to members in January, interview with selected members

Yeo Pin Pin, Singapore Management University
Pimnapa Amaritworachai, Chulalongkorn University
Liu Suqing, Peking University

**Report on Assessing the Digital Preservation Landscape
and Capacity of PRRLA Libraries**

Yeo Pin Pin, Singapore Management University

Liu Suqing, Peking University

Pimnapa Amaritworachai, This

October 2025

https://ink.library.smu.edu.sg/library_research/235/

Digital preservation is happening - even without policy

- **30 respondents** conduct digital preservation activities.
- Only **~21%** have an **implemented digital preservation policy**; the rest are in draft, discussion, or have no policy at all.
- Asia-based institutions are **more likely to operate without a formal policy** compared to North America, even while actively preserving content.

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Funding and staffing are the dominant constraints

- **Lack of funding (65.5%)** is the top challenge, followed by **lack of policy (58.6%)** and **lack of staff (48.3%)**.
- Most libraries have **fewer than five staff** dedicated to digital preservation; some rely on **project groups with no permanent roles**.
- Training is uneven: about **one-third provide no training at all**, while others depend heavily on external courses.

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What gets preserved: heritage still dominates

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- Top preserved materials:
 - **Rare books & special collections (28.2%)**
 - **Institutional heritage (23.5%)**
(photos, videos, oral histories)
 - **Institutional records (23.5%)**
- **Rich cultural and historical value** of above materials, especially in Asia.
- Possible that **vulnerability of born-digital resources** are **underrecognised** despite their **higher technical risk** (format obsolescence, metadata loss).

AI is experimental, targeted, and cautious

- AI is currently used by a minority, mainly for:
 - **Metadata generation** (26.6%)
 - **Image recognition** (20%)
 - **Handwritten text recognition (HTR)** (16.6%)
- Strong interest in expanding AI use for **datamining, data cleaning** and **data analysis**.
- Libraries remain cautious due to **accuracy, reliability, and long-term preservation risks** tied to AI-dependent formats and tools.

Report on Assessing the Digital Preservation Landscape and Capacity of PRRLA Libraries

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Collaboration is the strongest success factor

- **Cross-institutional collaboration** to complete or enrich collections.
- **Shared-cost funding models**, especially for storage.
- Leveraging **milestones** (anniversaries, staff retirements) to trigger donations and digitisation.
- Alignment with **international standards and communities** (DPC, CoreTrustSeal, nestor, CLOCKSS).

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Practical Takeaways: Designing for Story and Stewardship

Design-to-Preservation ‘Checklist’

- Start with content, not platforms
- Design metadata for tomorrow, not just today
- Experiment without committing too early
- Release in phases to maximise impact
- Put governance and policy in place early

Practical Takeaways: Designing for Story and Stewardship

What SMUuseum Demonstrates

- Libraries can tell compelling digital stories
- Preservation does not have to limit engagement
- Institutional memory thrives when narrative and stewardship are designed together

Questions?

<https://smuseum.smu.edu.sg>

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<https://smuseum.smu.edu.sg/smu25/places>

<https://smuseum.smu.edu.sg/smu25/purpose>

https://ink.library.smu.edu.sg/library_research/213/

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Thank You!

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Organised by:

