

## **Collaborative Initiatives of Digital Local Content Among Public Libraries: A Structured Literature Review**

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**Abstract.** In cutting-edge technology, providing access to digital collections to the local communities is inevitable for public libraries. Public libraries' initiatives toward creating local digital content have become possible through the collaborative efforts between Malaysian public libraries. This paper attempts to critically examine the previous literature, with the objective of identifying the main themes of research on the collaborative initiatives of local digital content among public libraries. Data were collected based on the analysis in all major journals in the library collaborative initiatives area. A total of 53 was undertaken using searches of Scopus and Web of Science (WOS) database, were included in this review, covering three major research themes, that is, the collaboration and local digital content issues, collaborative initiatives in digital local content and theories and framework related to collaboration and local digital content. The dimensions of collaborative initiatives identified from the review indicate that future research should focus on the six dimensions of collaborative initiatives: participants, the focus of interaction, the context of collaboration, features of collaboration, collaborative processes, and perceived outcomes of collaborations. Additionally, results differ in various contexts, and there is no universally accepted framework specifically for the digital local content creation collaborative initiatives. However, the theories and framework related to collaboration and local digital content from previous research provide public libraries with a guide to the factors that may affect the collaborative initiatives and help them develop effective collaborative strategies. Suggestions for future research are provided based on thematic considerations.

**Keywords:** Collaborative initiatives, digitization, local contents, public libraries, library management.

## 1 Introduction

Local content is crucial for national economic development and contributes to promoting identity and cultural diversity, protecting minority cultures, and the accessibility to marginalized languages. From library and information science perspectives, local content can be described as relevant to the communities' needs. As Uzeuqbu (2012) explained, local content expressed and communicated local knowledge and experience relevant to the community's situation. These local contents may attract people to read since it is relevant to their needs. Public libraries play fundamental roles in developing and disseminating local content to the communities as gateways to knowledge and culture. These local content may include information about communities such as historical documents, health information, the library newsletter and, local government materials. With local content, public libraries can attract people and encourage communities to use the library services. As mentioned in the definition of local content by Abdul Waheed Khan, assistant director-general for communication and information UNESCO (n.d) (2021); local content is "an expression and communication of a community's locally generated, owned and adapted knowledge and experience that is relevant to the community's situation." From a knowledge management perspective, it is related to the idea of knowledge generation, dissemination, and utilization. It is a multi-disciplinary knowledge and experience generated or created by the community for the use and benefits of beneficiaries and shareable to others. Local content has been transmitted into resources of printed and non-printed formats and made available and accessible to users by many information providers. In order to increase the accessibility and use of local content, the G8 Digital Opportunities Task Force in 2001 had proposed the development of local content through the use of digital technologies. While digital technologies allow individuals to learn and access new information, the public libraries establish critical roles in engaging individuals in society in acquiring new knowledge. Public libraries today faced issues in creating local digital content that fulfills the requirement of the user's needs. The global scenario is expected to evolve as the public's need for knowledge and information provided by information management institutions such as libraries becomes increasingly complex and critical.

Nowadays, the growth of technologies has improved the digital local content initiatives. However, the success of local digital content requires commitment and collaboration from various agencies and communities. According to the Online Computer Library Center (OCLC) (2017) article, public libraries' community-based digitization initiatives engaged in community activities to improve digitization quality. Besides that, these initiatives also need management support, additional training skills of librarians and better tools. Thus, the project of digitization requires strategic planning before the material collections can be digitized. In this way, digital local content initiatives could be achieved. Concerning the Online Computer Library Center (OCLC) (2022) article, the studies continue with the 'Library Collaboration as a Strategic Choice: Evaluating Options for Acquiring Capacity.' Collaboration, or collective effort to achieve a mutual goal, is pervasive across many activities. Individual activists join movements to work together toward social justice causes, companies form

trade groups to advance industry interests, and nations work together in alliances such as the G7 or NATO to promote economic growth and mutual security. Moreover, libraries band together in consortia and other groupings to achieve shared goals. As Valerie Horton observes: “No library stands alone. Library cooperation goes back to the 1880s and is a long-standing tenet of the profession. Collaboration is strongly rooted in most of our current activities.”

According to an investigation by Lampert (2018), the study found that several issues directly bear on how local digital contents are developed and managed in the library. These issues have a significant impact on the development of the local digital content projects in libraries. One of the issues of any local digital content is collaborative initiatives. The study conducted by Zawiyah and Abrizah (2018) found that one of the strategies to transform societies is through strategic and institutional partnering. Their study elaborated that community engagement can be achieved if libraries collaborate with other organizations, such as agencies and private corporations. Another study by Gwynn (2016) also found that collaboration with other libraries and agencies has been a significant factor in large digitization projects for the past two decades or more. Cross-library collaborative initiatives allow libraries to expand into new opportunities of the worldwide information era. The combination of knowledge and expertise will contribute to the effectiveness and efficiency of local digital content initiatives. In this way, the libraries will develop an enormous collection of materials that will evolve with emerging technologies. (Zawiyah and A. Abrizah, 2018).

According to United Nations, Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization (UNESCO) (2017), the local content had a strong relationship with the development of networking and the expansion of local content in the library. In the development of public libraries, the local content was evolved by the growing globalization of the development technology in preserving the information needs by the users. This study shows that the local digital content has policy considerations in evolving this empirical study between fostering the local digital content, expanding connectivity, and promoting Internet access competition.

Since local content is becoming essential to public libraries, the sources of content and their share of global digital local content creation are increasing. The local digital content utilized the information provided to promote a deeper analysis and greater understanding of the local content collections and materials, especially the cultural heritage collection. The policy and procedures in local digital content have been provided in preserving the projects of local digital content into the public libraries. An agreement will be held between other parties so the public libraries can only hold up the local digital content to their public library needs. Not to mention, this local digital content will be provided by public libraries only (Matusiak et al., 2017).

Since this study focused on a rapid transition to the digital dissemination of local content through collaboration initiatives, libraries need to create collaborative strategies to ensure the success of local digital content initiatives. This study believes that libraries have institutional characteristics that lead them to collaborate rather than compete and that the primary institutional characteristic drives the libraries' needs to collaborate. Understanding why libraries collaborate rather than compete could lead

to the evolution of an economic model that is more suitable for organizations that do not compete in the traditional sense, such as government departments and non-governmental organizations. It could also assist libraries in furthering their mission by enabling them to engage more effectively in collaboration. According to Hollebeek (2018), local content's role in fostering consumer engagement, trust, and value will help in the collaborative efforts in public libraries. This partnership consumes the collaborative effort in local digital content, so the value of local content could be preserved in the libraries.

Drawing from a structured reviewed, this paper addresses the dichotomy by providing an explanation of how the collaborative initiatives can be implemented in the development of the digital local content in public libraries. The review based on 53 articles from electronic databases, addresses the following research questions: How can collaborative initiatives be better understood and developed within the local digital content project in public libraries? The review of the literature presented in this paper respect to its theories and models, issues and initiatives in the local digital content development.

## 2 Research Methodology

The method employed in this paper is a secondary data collection and using a document analysis. The authors have adopted a structured process for selection of the appropriate literature. The strategy begins with the identification of the articles through a coded evaluation process in order to identify the relevant information. The data reduction involved a three-stage refinement process. The first stage is to identify the literature through keywords and sentence strings - (“collaboration” OR “collaborative” OR “collaborative initiatives\*”) AND (“local content” OR “digital local content” OR “digitization of local content”) from Scopus and WOS databases. From this, 114 articles were identified.

The kinds of literature considered were in English and Malay published between 2015 to 2021. However, the publications dated before 2015 were accepted for studies related to theories and historical perspectives of collaboration and local digital content. Table 1 summarizes the screening criteria of literature searches.

Table 1: Screening criteria of literature searches

Criteria	Inclusion
Publication timeline	2015 to 2022
Document type	Article (with empirical data) and review
Language	English and Malay
Disciplines of the study	Library; Digital Content

The results obtained from the refereed journal databases (using different combinations of the keywords) were then cross compared for possible overlaps, placed into keyword files and checked for duplication, so as to maintain reliability and validity in reporting. The next process involved reviewing and screening the articles with regard

to the titles and keywords. A total of 114 articles were identified. The abstract and conclusions of those articles were reviewed to ensure criteria compliance. The reduce the number of articles to 53. The information was analysed to answer the research questions. The analysed data were then used to identify the main themes relating to the study context. Finally, draw out a number of important implications for library collaborations toward digital local content.

### **3 Thematic Review**

The main themes of research in the reviewed literature were identified by the authors. The authors examined the keyword and abstracts of the 53 articles to generate a list of recurring themes. As a result, three major themes were found to be the top themes of the research.

#### *3.1 The Collaboration and Local Digital Content Issues*

The review of the literature on collaborative initiatives of the digital content across the public libraries yielded surprisingly few studies that described issues on the collaboration in the context of digital content. The issues of collaboration have been highlighted as one of the issues in collaborative projects. According to Daniella and Misty (2015), the topic of collaborative resource sharing between the public and others agencies still warrants further investigation as various questions arose by the public librarians to understand their participation in the collaborative projects. One of the issues highlighted in the collaboration initiatives is a lack of agreement policies between two parties. Therefore, the parties should clarify collaborative agreements. The collaborative initiatives that contain an agreement should be put an effort through policy and procedures so the collaboration could be ongoing in the growth of collection in the library.

As reported in the Transformation Plan of National Library Malaysia report (National Library of Malaysia, 2015), the collaboration (multiple-helix) with local and international agencies increased networking and strategic collaborative initiatives. The collaborative initiatives in digitization projects could diversify the collections and protect the values of local cultural heritage resources. However, Jyoon and Khasiah (2015) reported a lack of collaboration in implementing resource sharing between libraries and other agencies related to digitization projects. This study also found that the issues have a direct bearing in collaborative initiatives to develop and manage the heritage collections in libraries. According to the National Health and Morbidity Survey (National Survey of Research and Development (R&D) in Malaysia, 2017), the collaboration projects of the social science library in Malaysia in 2017 show that there have never been collaboration efforts among library agencies. Due to the upsurge rate, a lack of collaboration could lead to the slow development of knowledge. The scenario is deemed to be tremendously alarming as it may cause a lack of information, thereby affecting the nation's growth.

According to Pecoskie and Hill (2014), many library agencies participate in collaborative initiatives, including national and international, large organizations, and small organizations. These collaborative initiatives provide opportunities to preserve the digital local content materials, and smaller libraries can be more effective in developing and managing the local content. However, due to several issues, like a lack of skills and limited funds, this smaller institution could not involve in the collaboration initiatives. Therefore, it is relevant to observe whether this collaborative initiative program could be implemented in the digital library initiatives.

The public library provides access to its digital collection of materials to enrich local content in digital format for community and global access. Concerning this, the use of digital collections should be in line with library access and service policies. Besides that, libraries need to expand and explore the new technologies which can preserve and maintain the local digital content of the collections. In order to commit to the development of local digital content, libraries need to change their environment and working culture. It has an impact on the way of librarian's workload.

Atkinson (2019) further described the issues of collaboration as divided into two different levels: the staff's perspectives highlighted that some staff working in a comfort zone are likely hard to change with a new environment. They may be uncomfortable working outside their working routine, their regular colleagues. They also worried about their autonomy in allocating their time and effort. Meanwhile, the organizational perspectives described that it is difficult to establish a common goal since different agencies have different strategic goals, structures, and priorities.

### *3.2 Collaborative Initiatives in Digital Local Content*

The digital library initiatives have been developed, and collaboration linkage with other agencies should be developed too. The library involved people from different professional backgrounds with diverse expertise in promoting deeper analysis and greater understanding of the local content collections and materials, especially the cultural heritage collection. In order to serve the user, the local digital content, several policies have been followed in protecting the value of local content. Based on the research by the OCLC in 2017 in enhancing the national digital platform, the digitization outreach strategies were implemented to overcome the issues related to the content and regional repositories. These strategies are even more significant for the library as it moves into a knowledge-based digital library. For the National Library of Malaysia, the transformation plan through its strategic initiatives increased the networking and strategic collaboration (multiple-helix) of local and international heritage collections. According to Wang (2016), successfully collaborative projects require developing and sharing the digital collection on a national scale. The project should aim to strengthen the libraries network, which allows resource sharing among public libraries.

Another perspective of the success of collaborative projects is related to the skills and attributes of the individuals and teams involved in the collaboration. For instance, Atkinson (2019) described the skills and attributes needed for the individuals and teams involved in the collaboration. He listed that the individual should have the

following skills: ability and activation to network; familiarity with technology; time management skills, general social skills, communication skills, and project management skills. He further described the individual willing to share knowledge, approachable, emotional resilience, and fresh perspectives of the innovation of library services. Meanwhile, the team also needs to have specific attributes to ensure successful collaborative projects. A team's attributes are a shared sense of purpose, a high level of trust, a high degree of personal interaction, flexible approaches and roles, and the most important is respect for fellow teams.

Collaborative initiatives encourage the cross-fertilization of ideas that can lead to innovation and new solutions to public libraries' complex problems in engaging the local digital content that may be obvious, yet, measuring the collaborative initiatives in remains challenging. The relationship of the partnership comes with a clear vision of collaborative initiatives and long-term output result into local digital content (Freitas, 2018). According to Valcarce (2016), the analysis of collaborative initiatives provides an insight into the phenomenon of collaboration partnership, understood as the process of cooperation established between different organizations involved in the generation of news content, whose strategic aim is to meet the challenge of this out coming ecosystem. The cooperation process, mainly digital local content into public libraries, has a nerve in exploring the challenges posed by changes in learning paradigm, delivery, diversity, and the expansion of resources information.

### *3.3 Theories and Framework Related to Collaboration and Local Digital Content*

Whereas some authors focus on studying the particular needs and issues of collaboration, others discuss theories and develop frameworks for collaboration for local digital content projects. The selected models of collaboration and technology evolving have been explored in this paper. These models and theories were included perspective and local content sharing, collaborative initiation in public libraries, and status of collaboration. Valcarce (2016) stated the collaborative models would help in collaboration in partnership with other agencies in providing resources sharing within the mass of globalization of technology digital.

Neal (2011) explores the success factors of the interlibrary cooperative Project for resources sharing. He prefers the term "parabiosis" to explain the relationship between Columbia and Cornell universities in the 2CUL project. The project was one example of a successful interlibrary cooperative project for resource sharing as Menzel et al. (2011) described that parabiosis as reflecting the closest and most absorbing inter-specific associations where two species live together in a common nest. In library cooperation, parabiosis refers to the cooperative theory of the relationship between two agencies in successful interlibrary cooperative projects. Therefore, this study supports the idea of the process by which an organization adopts and implements cooperation between two agencies. Thus, these will influence how a library organization sees the need for, adopts, and successfully implements digital libraries.

The United Nations Sustainable Development (SIDG) acknowledges the improvement of sharing information to foster knowledge services. Even though this goals

collaboration among public libraries or other agencies, the collaborative initiatives should be put forward in the partnership agreement so the various problems could occur in interlibrary cooperative projects (Takaingehamo, 2019). The theory of parasitism helps this study find to aid the environment of public libraries needed through the collaborative initiatives in local digital content. Opportunities in changing expertise, system, and management and collection libraries in the world of technology have made the librarian change their working environment through the interlibrary cooperation digital library projects. Moreover, the cooperative theory of the relationship partnerships will enrich local content in this study. Several authors stated that the theory of parasitism could be applied to library consortia building to overcome challenges of the twenty-first millennium (Sanhado, Izzo, and Brandao, 2008:297 and Ollerton, 2006). Chisita (2017) notes that various changes in the environmental world of libraries have increased the need and the benefits of cooperation between each party that will lead to the various agreements. If librarians of library consortium could benefit equally from each other's, this would help strengthen cooperation, longevity, and success of the agreement of two parties.

Some focus on the creative partnership. The Creative Partnership Model (CPM) was an initiative from the European Union Agenda for Culture 2014. According to the Open Method of Coordination Working Group of European Union Member States' Experts on Promotion of creative Partnerships (2014), collaboration within the partnership is a collaborative structure effort between cultural institutions and other agencies which explicitly aim at transferring creative expertise by bringing together new scope perceptions and resources sharing that will introduce a new way of a working environment. This model identifies and describes CPM based on the principles: a) creative skills; b) elimination of work; and c) mental silos for various new avenues and solutions. The model benefits all participating partners' motivation, dedicating resources, sharing responsibility, and mutual trust as the main ingredients for adapting new processes in collaborative initiatives. The various problems in local digital content could be solved with this principle of interdisciplinary cooperation that will create another new avenue in a librarian's creative skills. CPM model provides public libraries tips for solving the problems of an agreement that will arise through collaboration. It will be the main ingredient in an agreement partnership between two parties.

The model of collaboration developed from the previous study also discussed the mechanism and structure to help collaboration. Atkinson (2019) emphasized seven mechanisms in the collaboration process. These mechanisms are strategy and planning; governance, leadership, and management; senior management buy-in; team-building; consultation and engagement; communication; use, and review and evaluation. Meanwhile, Irvine (2015) described the evolving strategic framework that drives the NSLA re-imagining libraries collaboration. In the new evolving framework, he emphasized the joint digital infrastructures. The revised framework should consider system developments and digital infrastructure planning in the collaborative context. As a result, the evolving strategic framework should include a statement of willingness to look for opportunities to share expertise across all parts of collaborative works and consider the collaborative context in all systems and services, especially to tackling challenging technology development projects. Hainer et al (2014) mentioned that



for any collaborative project to succeed, the collaborations must take advantage of technology, human connections, and expertise. Furthermore, the successful collaborations involved not just libraries but also nonprofit organizations and commercial entities.

#### 4 Conclusions

The initiatives to promote the local digital content have become an essential part of a library's service. As such, libraries and librarians ought to keep track of these changes and provide high commitment to ensure this project's success through different strategies. One such strategy is collaborative work. In library science, a significant number of studies have been reviewed, reported on collaborative works in libraries, with emphasis on the local digital content initiatives. These papers mainly presented the issues and strategies of the collaborative works of libraries' local digital content initiatives. The identified relevant literature focused on three main themes:

- (1) the collaboration and local digital content issues;
- (2) collaborative initiatives in local digital content; and finally
- (3) theories and models related to collaboration and local digital content.

In particular, it was found that libraries faced various problems in collaborative works such as lack of agreement policies between two parties, lack of resource sharing primarily related to digitization, lack of skills and limited funds for small institutions to involve the collaborative initiatives, hard to change to a new environment and to challenge to establish a common goal. These were the main issues that may contribute to the unsuccessful collaborative works. More research is needed to understand the collaborative issues, especially in the public library context. It is also worth exploring whether the issues mentioned above apply to any library or differ on the type of library (e.g., public, academic, and unique library).

In terms of collaborative initiatives, the previous literature found that various initiatives have been suggested and implemented to succeed in collaboration. The libraries were reported to consider some initiatives ranging from developing and sharing the digital collection at a national scale to the list of skills and attributes of the individual and teams that participated in the collaboration and encourage the cross-fertilization of ideas. Further research is needed to explore and identify these initiatives at the large and small libraries. In this context, there is a need to look at these initiatives' impacts on the collaborative works conducted at different types of libraries. The impact of collaboration on kind of libraries is needed to reach broader conclusions.

Finally, the theories and models of collaboration would assist the libraries on how to plan their collaboration initiatives. The previous models and frameworks found that the collaborative models described the elements ranging from the cooperative theory of the relationship between two agencies, to the creative partnership, to the process of collaboration. Finally, the theory emphasized the joint digital infrastructures. As such, a growing need for guidance and assistance emerged, and relevant research is needed to provide a framework for collaborative works for local digital

content initiatives. Further studies in research collaboration are necessary to understand and utilize the advantages of collaborations fully.

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Collaborative Initiatives of Digital Local Content Among Public Libraries: A Structured Literature Review

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