Digitizing Dress Collections for Discoverability, Searchability, Diversity, and Inclusivity

Monica Sklar, University of Georgia
Dina Smith-Glaviana, Virginia Tech
Clare Sauro, Drexel University
Katherine Hill McIntyre, Costume and Textiles Collections Consultant and Co-Principal Blubox Consultants

Keywords: Digitization. Dress collections, Discoverability, Diversity, Inclusivity, Searchability

Reviewing the results of our four research studies, the authors have prioritized the shared goals of discoverability, searchability, diversity, and inclusivity. There are variations among cataloging professionals in how they categorize and describe artifacts (Smith-Glaviana et al., 2023). Further, there are discrepancies between keywords entered by users of online collections and published titles or descriptions on collection websites, which result in failed searches (Kirkland et al., 2023). Finally, language choices are evolving based on cultural responsiveness. Therefore, to build searchable websites that result in public and industry usage with strong retrieval effectiveness, we need to start with metadata, the information recorded about an artifact. Using the right metadata gets collections 'out of the box' and online for education, research, industry advancement, and public engagement.

Previous research indicates that most historic costume collections are not digitized, or the existing database is not searchable, discoverable, and does not use inclusive language (Kirkland et al., 2015; Kirkland et al., 2023; Sklar & Hill McIntyre, 2022, Wiebers et al., 2022). Collection managers often have responsibilities touching upon curation, cataloging, education, outreach, and often do not have the proper computer science or library science training (Marcketti & Gordon, 2021). However, there is an expectation that they have fully functional, searchable websites. Thus, these initiatives are hindered by limited personnel and budgets, limited technological knowledge, and the lack of standards regarding protocols and workflow. Critical cataloging is integral for cultural humility and archival ethics (Drabinski, 2015; Olson, 2001; Perera, 2022).

These multi-faceted projects were developed together to contribute to the creation of digital products through synergistic research building four deliverables: (1) increase retrieval effectiveness of collection websites (Figure 1), (2) establish nomenclature standards adapted for web searchability, (3) expand the "Costume Core" (CC) metadata schema (Kirkland, 2019), and (4) employ the post-custodial approach to bring digital museum practice to under-funded private collections. These IRB-approved projects included: (1) an experiment to investigate the search processes of users accessing public websites of historic dress collections, (2) using Natural Language Processing (NLP, a form of artificial intelligence; Figure 2) and crowdsourcing metadata to identify potential terms that could be added to CC (Figure 3), (3) transformation of privately-owned, Syrian diaspora garments into an accessible archive via a socially dynamic collaboration between the family and museum professionals on database development regarding provenance and terminology for inclusive descriptions (Figure 4), and (4) establish nomenclature standardization considering AI capabilities, user practices, and cultural sensitivity.

Results advance digital product creation by developing best practices around metadata and website builds. These initiatives lay a foundation for how the visual depictions of artifacts (e.g., 3D models and images) on websites are documented and then understood. This work has highlighted the need for additional terms to be included in metadata descriptions drawing from lay, retail, international, niche, and cultural heritage professions to help make collections more searchable and discoverable (Kirkland et al., 2023; McIrvin et al., 2023; Sklar et al., 2021; Smith-Glaviana et al., 2023). We have done this using AI to extract terms from Google News, working with cultural knowledge keepers, crowdsourcing the public, students, and industry, and updating university collections databases. Further implications include changing academic promotion and tenure benchmarks and expanding publishing and granting potential around what had formerly been thought of as "ghost labor" (Marcketti & Gordon, 2021, p. 2).

References

Drabinski, E. (2015). Teaching the radical catalog. In K. R. Roberto (Ed.), *Radical cataloging: essays at the front* (pp. 198-205). McFarland & Company, Inc.

Kirkland, A. (2019). Costume Core: Metadata for historic clothing. *Visual Resources Association Bulletin*, *45*(2). https://online.vraweb.org/index.php/vrab/article/view/36.

Kirkland, A., Sklar, M., Wiebers, L., Sauro, C., Idacavage, S., & Mun, J.. (Published online 2023). "I'm not searching the right words": User experience searching historic clothing collection websites. *The International Journal of the Inclusive Museum*.

Kirkland, A., Martin, K., Schoeny, M., Smith, K., and Strege, G. (2015). Sharing Historic Costume Collections Online. *Dress 41*(2), 107-27.

Marcketti, S., & Gordon, J. (2021). Professional development of curators and collection managers of historic textile and clothing collections: A conceptual framework. In *International Textile and Apparel Association Annual Conference Proceedings*, 78(1). Iowa State University Digital Press.

McIrvin, C., Miller, C., Smith-Glaviana, D., & Ng, W. N. (2023; forthcoming). Automatic expansion of metadata standards for historic costume collections. *Journal of eScience Librarianship.*

Olson, H. A. (2001). The power to name: representation in library catalogs. *Signs* 26(3), 639–68.

Perera, T. (2022). Description specialists and inclusive description work and/or initiatives—An exploratory study. *Cataloging & Classification Quarterly, 60*(5), 355–86. https://doi.org/10.1080/01639374.2022.2093301.

Sklar, M., Hill McIntyre, K., & Autry, S. (U). (Published online 2021, Print 2022). Preserving cultural craft heritage: digitizing a traditional Syrian clothing collection. *Craft Research*, *12*(2), 317-333. doi: 10.1386/crre_00055_1

Smith-Glaviana, D., Ng, W. N., McIrvin, C., Miller, C., & Spencer, J. (2023; forthcoming). Comparative study and expansion of metadata standards for historic fashion collections. *Visual Resources Association Bulletin.*

Wiebers, L. Sklar, M. Kirkand, A. & Kelly, K. (2022). Panel discussion. Building standards and communities around digital clothing collection preservation: Intersecting paths to the CSA portal project. Costume Society of America national symposium.

Sklar, M. & Hill McIntyre, K. (2022). Moving threads: Using the post-custodial archive model to preserve a collection of Syrian clothing, craft, and heritage techniques. *Costume Society of America SE/MidAtlantic combined regional symposium.*