

Future trends of Arabic full-text databases

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Article - Summary

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Abstract

The emergence of the Internet revolutionized electronic publishing and led to the development of databases, which initially took root in the West and subsequently spread to Arab countries. Initially, these databases focused on indexing information sources and providing abstracts. Over time, they evolved to offer full-text access through various platforms such as microfiche, microfilm, laser discs, DVDs, and ultimately, the Internet. This progression introduced terms like digital libraries, electronic libraries, virtual libraries, and libraries without walls, reflecting the diverse nature of the available information sources.

While it is unlikely that databases will completely replace printed sources, both will coexist and complement each other through the use of modern technologies. Challenges such as the COVID-19 pandemic have significantly increased reliance on electronic resources, as traditional libraries were forced to close. This shift has underscored the importance of electronic resources in maintaining access to information.

Keywords

Full text databases, Arabic databases

1. Introduction:

The advent of the Internet facilitated the rise of electronic publishing and the launch of numerous databases, which first emerged in the West decades ago before appearing in Arab countries. Initially, these databases focused on indexing information sources or providing abstracts. Over time, they evolved to offer full-text access. The formats for these databases progressed from microfiche and microfilm to laser discs, DVDs, and more recently, online platforms. This evolution introduced terms like digital libraries, electronic libraries, virtual libraries, and libraries without walls, reflecting the diverse nature of the information sources available.

Although databases are unlikely to completely replace printed sources, they will coexist and integrate through the use of modern technologies that continue to evolve. However, various challenges and crises can influence the dominance of one format over the other. A prime example is the COVID-19 pandemic, which has disrupted all aspects of life globally. This crisis has significantly increased the reliance on electronic and audiovisual information sources, as traditional libraries and printed materials became less accessible. With the world transitioning to remote work and study, the necessity of electronic resources has been highlighted. For instance, Egypt replaced traditional exams with research projects for the second semester of the 2019/2020 academic year. Researchers and postgraduate students had to rely on electronic databases due to the closure of libraries. Consequently, the importance of full-text databases and electronic information sources has been underscored, leading to an increased use of digital over printed resources. This study aims to explore the future directions of these databases in light of current global circumstances.

2. Objective of the Study:

The aim of this study is to review the origins and history of full-text Arabic databases and their development up to their current state. This includes examining the services they provide and the types of information sources they contain. By presenting their history, current status, available evidence, and the surrounding environmental conditions, the study seeks to predict their future trajectory.

3. Definition of the Study Phenomenon:

This research focuses on full-text Arabic databases, regardless of whether they are entirely full-text or partially so, and irrespective of the forms of information sources they include. For example, the Al-Manhal database provides full-text access to books, university dissertations, journal articles, and reports, all of which are searchable. In contrast, databases like Mandumah and Maarifa include both indexing and full-text elements. It has been observed that some full-text content in databases like Maarifa is available only for viewing and downloading in image format, making it non-searchable.

This study will examine prominent full-text Arabic databases that have recently gained significance in the Arab world, specifically: Al-Mandhumah, Al-Manhal, Al-Obeikan (Enriching Knowledge), and Maarifa. The analysis will cover their origins, nature, objectives, services, challenges, and future outlook.

4. The Current State of the Phenomenon Under Study:

Full-text databases hold significant importance, especially with the rapid advancements in technology and the vast volume of intellectual production. A study conducted at the Central Library of King Faisal University found that full-text databases were the most favored among the study's participants, which included female master's students and faculty members. Among the notable full-text databases currently available in the Arab world are the Al-Manhal database, the Mandumah databases, the Obeikan Digital Library, and the Ma'rifa database.

4.1 Emergence of Full-Text Arabic Databases:

Al Mandumah Databases:

Established in 2004, Saudi System House Company is responsible for the Mandumah databases. The company specializes in building and developing scientific information databases for research and academic fields. It boasts extensive cumulative experience in organizing digital information content, developing information bases, and designing search mechanisms. Since its inception, the company has focused on serving the research and academic sectors, forming alliances with academic publishers and scientific societies to elevate Arabic scientific content to the level of global scientific information bases.

Al-Manhal Database:

Founded in 2010 by Mr. Muhammad Al-Baghdadi, Al-Manhal aims to provide the Arab world with a reliable, transparent, and effective platform. This platform enables the publishing community to achieve maximum regional and global interaction with its intellectual assets, generating income to finance research activities. It also facilitates access to high-quality, professional academic content for academic and research communities at an affordable cost. Recognizing the scope and scale of his vision, Muhammad sought strategic partnerships to ensure the successful establishment and management of an ever-expanding information network.

Ma'rifa Database:

The Ma'rifa database was established in January 2008 by the Knowledge World Foundation for Digital Content in Jordan. Its launch was announced at the twenty-third conference of the Arab Federation for Library and Information Sciences, held in Sudan in December 2011. The official launch took place in January 2012 through a dedicated press conference.

Obeikan Digital Library and Enrichment of Digital Knowledge Database:

Established around 2015, the Obeikan Digital Library aims to create the largest Arab digital library, encompassing all Arabic publications across various fields of culture, science, and knowledge. The library's diverse forms of publication ensure that readers, researchers, and students worldwide can access, classify, and organize information according to the latest classification methods and search tools, making information access easy and efficient.

These full-text databases represent significant strides in making Arabic academic content more accessible and integrated with global scientific standards. Their development and continuous improvement underscore the growing importance of electronic resources in today's digital age.

6. Future Vision of the Phenomenon

Based on the review of sources detailing the emergence, launch, and current use of full-text Arabic databases, the researcher anticipates several future trends. Here is the researcher's vision for these trends:

1. Increase in Electronic Publishing and Database Growth:

The researcher expects a significant increase in electronic publishing and a doubling of full-text Arabic databases in the near future. This expectation is driven by the heightened importance of digital resources during the COVID-19 pandemic, which forced the world into quarantine, necessitating study and work from home. Additionally, the rising cost of paper, leading to higher prices for printed information sources, will further fuel this growth.

2. Implementation of Bibframe for Indexing:

Full-text Arabic databases are expected to adopt Bibframe for indexing as an alternative to, or alongside, MARC 21, especially as libraries transition to the new RDA (Resource Description and Access) indexing rules.

3. Exploitation of Linked Data:

Databases are likely to harness the properties of linked data to connect all forms of textual and non-textual data sources, including audio and visual materials.

4. Integration of Print and Electronic Sources:

Databases are expected to market printed sources similarly to how Al-Manhal and others operate, promoting the principle that all resources should be available from a single source. This means becoming a hub for both print and electronic sources.

5. Subscription Availability to Individuals:

Subscription models are predicted to expand beyond institutions to include individuals, shifting from a B2B (Business to Business) model to a B2C (Business to Consumer) model. Al-Manhal has already pioneered this approach, albeit on a different platform with distinct features for the Arab academic community.

6. Formation of Alliances and Consortia:

The researcher anticipates the formation of alliances among electronic publishers to provide specific services. Such alliances offer substantial benefits for both suppliers and beneficiaries.

7. Inclusion of Latest Foreign Sources in Science and Technology:

To cater to the needs of researchers, especially in the fields of science and technology, it is expected that full-text Arabic databases will include the latest foreign sources. This integration is crucial since the latest developments in pure sciences and technology are often found in Western databases. Arab databases have two potential paths: directly contracting with publishers or researchers to publish cutting-edge scientific research, or forming collaborative agreements with global databases to ensure access to the latest scientific advancements.

The study conducted on Egyptian universities revealed a dissatisfaction among researchers in science and technology disciplines regarding the adequacy of full-text database subscriptions. These databases often fail to meet their research needs. Thus, addressing this gap by either direct contracting or cooperation with global databases is essential for the advancement of Arab research communities.