

Online Access in Archives as a Challenge for Archives, Archivists and Archival Material: An Evaluation of Viewpoint a Group of Archivists*

Arşivler, Arşivciler ve Arşiv Malzemesi İçin Bir Tehdit Unsuru Olarak Online Erişim: Bir Grup Arşivci Gözüyle Değerlendirme

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Abstract

Today, online access has become an essential requirement, especially for new-generation users who follow and take advantage of technological innovations. Online access also provides a number of advantages both for archives and users; not only does it save time, but it also offers more materials to more users and eases the archivist's workload. For this reason, the issue under discussion is an important process for the archives. Today in most archives, in addition to many other techniques, the digitization of archival material is being carried out; moreover, programs are being implemented to provide online access for archival material. However, despite all the advantages that online access offers, the question whether online access present a challenge for archives, archivists or archival material needs to be asked? At this point, the first challenges that come to mind are the security of the archival material, the future of reference archivists and archives as institutions, and archival awareness being erased from the public memory. The potential challenges of online access should be analyzed in detail in order to ensure that archives are affected to the minimum. In this context, this study determines the potential challenges of the online access process. At this point in the study, a survey-study with 53 archivists was carried out, investigating what the advantages, disadvantages and potential challenges of the online access process are; in the light of the results, online access will be examined as a challenge for archives, archivists or archival material.

Keywords: *Online access; challenge; archives; archivists; archival material.*

Öz

Günümüzde, online erişim özellikle teknolojik yenilikleri takip eden ve avantajlarından faydalanan yeni nesil kullanıcılar için temel bir gereklilik olmuştur. Online erişim aynı zamanda hem arşivler hem de kullanıcılar için birçok fayda sağlamaktadır. Online erişim sadece zaman tasarrufu sağlamamakta aynı zamanda daha ok kullanıcıya daha fazla malzeme sunmakta ve arşivcinin iş yükünü hafifletmektedir. Bu nedenle, online erişim arşivler için önemli bir süreçtir. Günümüzde, diğer birçok tekniğin yanında arşiv malzemesinin dijitalleştirilmesi üzerinde durulmaktadır, bunun da ötesinde arşiv malzemesine online erişim için programlar uygulanmaktadır. Online erişimin tüm avantajlarına rağmen, online erişim arşivler, arşivciler veya arşiv malzemesi için bir tehdit unsuru olabilir mi? Bu noktada, akla gelen başlıca tehdit unsurları arşiv malzemesinin güvenliği, referans arşivcilerinin geleceği ve kurum olarak arşivlerin, arşiv bilincinin hafızalardan silinmesi olarak sıralanabilir. Arşivlerin tehdit unsurlarından en az seviyede etkilenmeleri için potansiyel tehdit unsurlarının detaylı bir şekilde analiz edilmesi

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gerekmektedir. Bu bağlamda, çalışma kapsamında online erişimin potansiyel tehdit unsurları belirlenmektedir. Bu noktada, çalışmada 53 arşivcinin katıldığı bir anket uygulaması gerçekleştirilmiştir. Anket ile online erişimin avantajları, dezavantajları, potansiyel tehdit unsurları araştırılmış ve elde edilen sonuçlar ışığında online erişim arşivler, arşivciler ve arşiv malzemesi için bir tehdit olarak ele alınmıştır.

Anahtar Sözcükler: Online erişim; tehdit; arşiv; arşivci; arşiv malzemesi.

Introduction

Angelika Menne-Haritz (2001, p. 59) expresses the importance of archives and access in the following words:

'Archives do not store memory. But they offer the possibility to create memory. Their function is that of amnesia prevention. They allow us to construct memory, refine it, correct it or reassure it whenever it is needed. This is reflected by the new developments, that let the focus of archives shift from storage to access and that influence all areas of archival work. The main service that archives offer to the emerging global societies is access to the raw material for memory, and thus they guarantee the capability to construct and shape memory in a way that helps us to understand the present problems and prepare us for the future.'

As Menne-Haritz expresses above, ensuring access to archival material is one of the leading missions of archival practice. This mission has changed in keeping with the requirements of the information age.

Conway (2014, p. 2) states that;

"The convenience and efficiency of access to digital surrogates create a lively and interactive communication between the evidence of our past and our present human condition, as well as with our hopes and aspirations for the future."

Today "online access" is a prestigious application for archives. It is obvious that online access provides many advantages both for archival institutions and, more particularly, for archival material. Its leading advantages are saving time, saving money, providing more materials for more users, etc. However, in addition to these advantages, online access can be a challenge for the archival institution, archival material and/or archivist. At this point, these challenges should be determined and kept in mind for the success of the online access process.

This study examines online access in archives as a challenge and it addresses the following questions:

1. In what ways is online access a challenge for the archival institution?
2. In what ways is online access a challenge for the archivist?
3. In what ways is online access a challenge for the archival material?

In this study the potential challenges of online access in archives have been determined with the help of an analysis of a survey of 53 archivists. In addition, some important points to neutralize these challenges will also be presented in the study. An important point about the survey analysis is that the survey was sent to many archivists from both public and private sector but only 53 of them have responded to the survey.

Online Access in Archives

Access is one of the important missions of archivists and archives that provide information services. In the 21st century, known as the Information Age, rapid and continuous access to information is a minimum requirement. At this point, online access becomes essential for archival organizations.

The concept of access describes a professional strategy that is not dependent on the personal and individual empathy of the archivist for the contents or his understanding of the users' questions. It is a strategy that is neutral towards the content, but passionate concerning openness and availability of information potentials, and thus strictly user-oriented (Menne-Haritz, 2001, p. 63).

Providing access to the information acquired and preserved by an institution is central to the delivery of an archival program. It is only when records are used that archives can best demonstrate their usefulness to society. The aim of researcher access services, consequently, should be to lower the intellectual and psychological barriers to archives so that as many individuals as possible can read, touch, learn from, and enjoy those documents that illuminate past experience. It is not enough to know that there may be pertinent or interesting information in archives; users must be able to retrieve and consult that information, particularly in an era when information has become a valued commodity (Blais, 1995, p. 23). In this context, it is important in the Information Age we live in to ensure digitally accessible archives.

Lyons (2002, pp. 25-26) discusses online and automated access in the following words:

'For people with internet access, it is far easier to click on a web site than to visit a repository and go through the procedures, waiting to examine the records. Digital access also reduces wear and tear on the original documents. This is particularly significant for young people, who, rightly or wrongly, have often been considered not careful or responsible enough to handle archival materials on their own. In some situations, automated access may also lessen pressures on archives staff, for example, by reducing the number of group visits by students to a repository. And since online education is now a hot topic, developing archival web sites can sometimes be a way to secure institutional and external funding.'

All the information processing and communication tools of desktop technology produce digital make it possible to produce what were previously analog records, as well as new kinds of records. Perhaps because some, at least, of these newer forms of electronic records are narrative or visual, and thus familiar record types, they have come under the archival spotlight, becoming a focus for archivists and traditional communities of archival users (O'Neill, 2007, p. 24).

Access is a process that should be planned very carefully because of the special characteristics of archival material. Every country should present their access principles and should act according to these principles. Automated access principles should be taken account for an effective online access process. Especially the ones about the right to access to archival material. The International Council on Archives has determined 10 main principles of access to

archives as follows (ICA, 2012, pp. 8-12):

- The public has the right of access to archives of public bodies. Both public and private entities should open their archives to the greatest extent possible.
- Institutions holding archives should make known the existence of the archives, including the existence of closed materials, and disclose the existence of restrictions that affect access to the archives.
- Institutions holding archives should adopt a pro-active approach to access.
- Institutions holding archives should ensure that restrictions on access are clear and of stated duration, are based on pertinent legislation, should acknowledge the right of privacy and respect the rights of owners of private materials.
- Archives should be made available on equal and fair terms.
- Institutions holding archives should ensure that victims of serious crimes under international law have access to archives that provide evidence for the assertion of their human rights and in order to document violations of the same, even if those archives are closed to the general public.
- Users have the right to appeal a denial of access.
- Institutions holding archives should ensure that operational constraints do not prevent access to archives.
- Archivists should have access to all closed archives and perform the necessary archival work on them.
- Archivists should participate in the decision-making process on access.

During the process of digital archiving there are some important points to be considered. In the report of Australia Council for the Arts these important points have been determined as follows (Australia Council for the Arts, 2011, p.19):

- Talking to experts
- Plan the archives
- Select the content
- Prepare and preserve the content
- Manage the archive and
- Deliver the content

There are also some precautions to be taken with digital archives have been determined in the same report. These precautions have been given under “Manage the archive” topic. These are as follows (Australia Council for the Arts, 2011, p. 21)

- Managing the physical items, digitised materials as well as born-digital materials
- Manage files to ensure they are accessible in the future, (due to file formats, software or hardware being superseded), for example by exporting to open source formats, migrating to new formats (when standards become available) or preserving the necessary software and hardware to access the files in the future.

- Backing-up the content, metadata and other archive infrastructure regularly.
- Regular quality assurance checks on existing content in the archive as well as new content being added to the archive.
- Managing the content via a content management system that suits the organisation.
- Updating systems, hardware and software, ensuring that there is no adverse affect on the collection.
- Migrating files to new formats when new standards become available.
- Ensuring that standards have been complied with and ideally have been tested and found suitable by other (larger) organisations.
- Checking storage quality and quantity, including observing any changes to contracts and agreements with hosting environments.
- Undertaking various other “preservation actions” to ensure that the archived content continues to be in an accessible format (and where necessary, an access copy can be generated).

Hansen and Sundqvist (2012, pp.207-208) discuss the advantages of digitization in archives in the following words:

‘Archives, libraries, museums, and other organizations are making more of their information resources available online. Two overlapping initial motivations to digitize archival materials have often been identified: to preserve a frail or frequently-used original by providing users with digital copies of the records or to enhance access and reach a larger and more diverse user population by providing increased access with a wider dissemination of digitized records.’

Lyons (2002, pp. 31-32) expresses an important point about online access in the following words:

‘Digital access complements, but cannot fully replace, direct physical access to records. The convenience of online media and potential power of tools, such as EAD [Encoded Archival Description], must be weighed against the realities that many people still have little or no access to the internet and that some document features, both tangible and intangible, cannot be conveyed on a computer screen.’

Online Access: A Challenge for Archives, Archivists and Archival Material?

Peterson and Peterson (1985, p. 39) discuss the concept of access to archival material as a challenge in the following words:

“Access as an archival term means the authority to obtain information from or to perform research in archival materials. While the purpose of an archives is to preserve and make available historical materials, access policy serves as a major brake to full and free availability. Archivists are committed to the principle that everything in their holdings will eventually be available for reference use, but archivists cling equally tenaciously to the idea that a balance must be struck between the public’s right to know and the need for confidentiality.

The result of this balancing may be to close some research materials to public access for some period of time. It is the tension between these two ideas - to provide access to research materials and to protect confidentiality that creates the frustration archivists feel when confronted with access problems.”

The management of archival material is at the centre of archival practice. Archival material has evidential and informational value in particular, as well as managerial, financial, legal and historical values; as a result archival material consists of unique items that should be kept continuously or for a long time. At this point, it is strategically important to determine the potential disadvantages of processes directly related to archival material, in particular access. It is also important to make improvements and changes according to the potential challenges of processes.

One of the most important aims for almost every archive today is to digitize their material and provide online access to users. Because online access has a great deal of advantages, like increasing usage of archival material, increasing provision of user services, reducing the workload of archivist, increasing reputational prestige, economy of money and economy of time. On the other hand, it is very important to determine the potential challenges of this advantageous process and take precautions. At this point the elements that are affected by online access as a challenge are shown in Figure 1.



(Figure 1): Online Access as a Challenge

Online Access as a Challenge for Archives

Online access has become an essential function for archives. Users expect to be able to reach material online without having to come to the archives. Nowadays archives provide online access service via their institutional web sites and/or with smart phone applications. Thus, they can serve more users and also increase their reputational prestige. However, in some ways online access can be a challenge for archives.

First of all, online access can *cause expense*. Online access is a comprehensive process with digitization and system setup; as a result, organizations must invest serious amounts of money in this process.

Secondly, it results in *archives being erased from the memory*. As stated before, online access does away with the requirement of going to archives for the material. This causes archives

to be erased from the memory. In addition to the second challenge, by not visiting the archives and not examining the original material, the awareness of archives by national archives users, in particular, could be reduced.

Online Access as a Challenge for Archivists

Online access requires a serious technological infrastructure. Every process, such as preparation and setup, requires technological information. Moreover, the equipment used in this process, as well as the preparation of material for this process and security of the images of digitized materials are important points in the process. Thus, it can be seen that online access is an important challenge for archivists. In particular, *it requires additional technological specialism* and *brings additional responsibilities for archivists*. In addition to these, online access poses *a threat for the future of the reference archivist*, because using online access, users can reach materials without going to the archives.

Online Access as a Challenge for Archival Material

Archival material is the most important thing that has been affected by online access. The most important issues about online access are as follows:

- *Copyright*
- *Deterioration*
- *Security*

Akmon (2010, p. 46) describes the issue of copyright in digital access as: ‘While the transfer of materials to archival repositories usually involves a formal deed of gift that specifies access to the collection and whether or not the donor retains copyright, the donor frequently does not have the legal right to specify copyright terms for the entire collection. She might have owned the physical collection, but if it contains documents authored by third parties she does not hold the copyrights to those items unless the third party authors or publishers transferred those rights. As a result, the archival repository might not have the right to duplicate and distribute those materials online without permission from each copyright holder represented in the collection.’

While digital materials may seem ubiquitous today, they are actually quite fragile. Without proper archiving and ongoing management, they may become inaccessible only a few years after being created. They are rarely considered “stand-alone”, and often require devices and tools for the user to access the content itself. As devices and file formats are rapidly outdated, digital materials are at risk of being lost unless appropriately archived and continuously managed. On the whole, digital materials demand a greater degree of management than other physical materials (Australia Council for the Arts, 2011, p. 15).

Conway (2014, pp. 3-4) states that;

“Digital surrogates produced through high-volume copy-making contain traces of the circumstances of their creation. The notion that the “trace” is capable of simultaneously

providing evidence and highlighting absence or loss is a powerful metaphor that resonates with interdisciplinary scholars who grapple with the archive as a place of remembering and forgetting.”

The second issue is deterioration. Archival material is unique and it is the ultimate aim of archivists to protect it. Digital archiving is about working with different technological equipment. Throughout the process of online access there is a serious probability of deterioration of the material.

The third issue is security of the material parallel to copyright. All technological measures should be taken to protect the digitized material. At this point digital preservation is very important. Digital preservation is an essential and necessary component of digital archiving ensuring longevity of an electronic object. Digital preservation covers the processes and operations involved in ensuring the technical and intellectual survival of authentic electronic records over time (Queensland State Archives, 2010, p. 10)

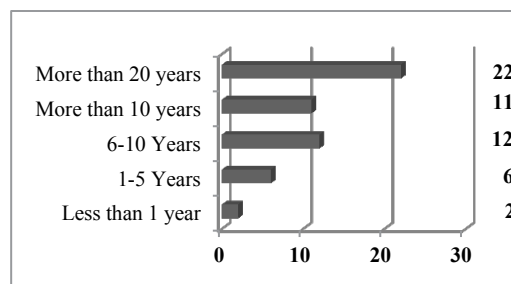
Survey Analysis

A survey analysis about the challenges of online access has been carried out and presented as part of this study.

Aim of the Analysis

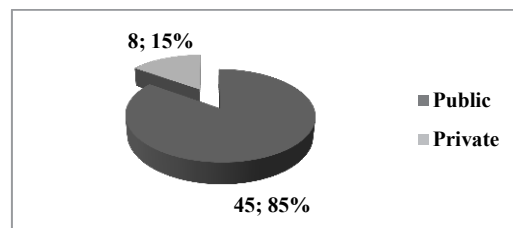
The aim of the analysis was to learn the opinions and thoughts of the archivists working in the public and private sector about these challenges. During the analysis process, a special sampling technique was not employed, as the aim of the analysis was not to measure a factor, but rather to present a situation analysis. In this context answers have been provided from 53 archivists working as ‘Archivist’ in the public and private sector.

The questions and answers of the surveys are as follows:



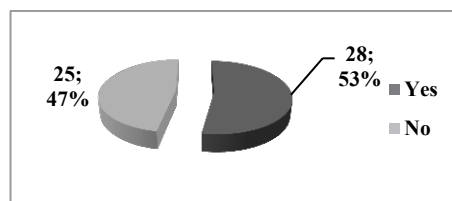
(Figure 2): How many years have you been working as an archivist?

The majority of archivists involved in analysis have been working as archivists for over 20 years. This situation regarding online access is important, as it means there is a particular experience and knowledge-formation.



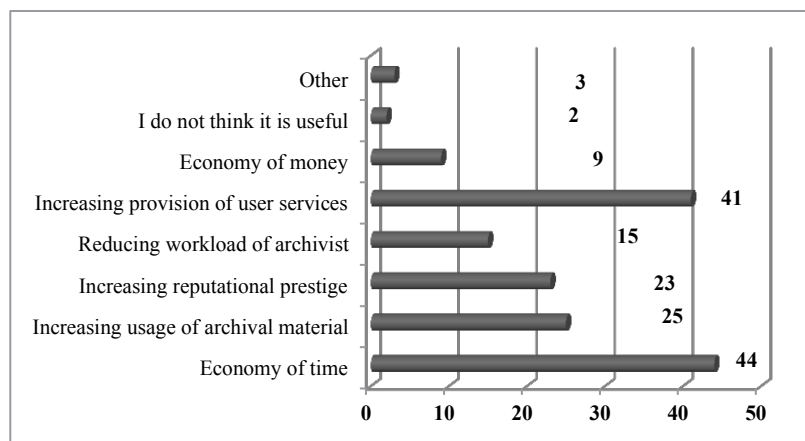
(Figure 3): In which sector does your archival institution serve?

The majority of archivists involved in analysis work in the public sector. This situation is important for users coming from different groups, as they will have different needs and demands.



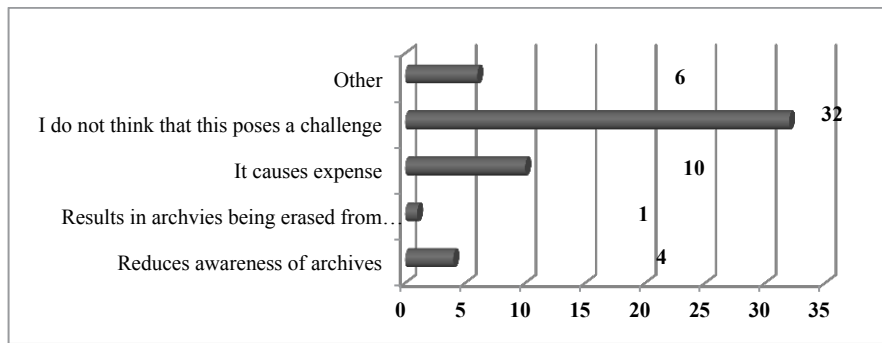
(Figure 4): Is there an online access system in your archives?

The majority of the institutions in which the archivists work have an online archives system. This situation means that the majority of archivists are aware of the system and are able to use the system practically.



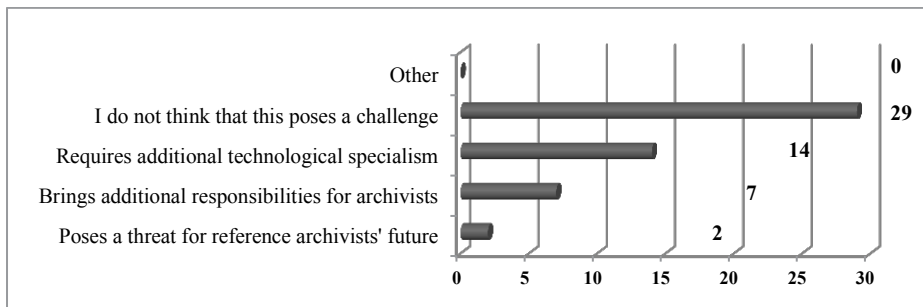
(Figure 5): The advantages of online access

The majority of the archivists determined the most important advantages of online access as economy of time, increasing provision of user services and increasing usage of archival material. The remarkable detail in this part of the survey was that two archivists considered online access to be not useful.



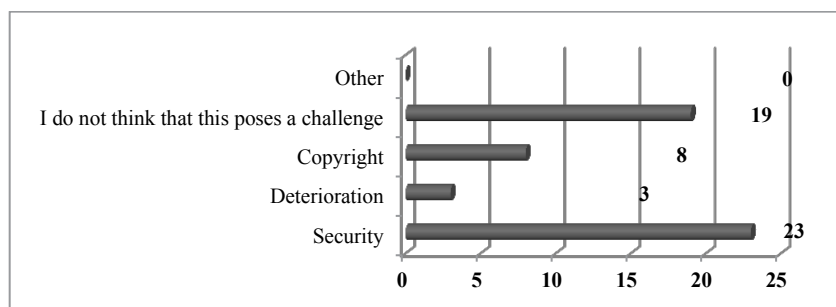
(Figure 6): Online Access as a challenge for archival institution

The majority of the archivists have the opinion that that online access does not pose a challenge for the archival institution. Apart from this the most important challenge was determined as causing expense.



(Figure 7): Online Access as a challenge for archivist

A significant proportion, but not a majority of the archivists were of the opinion that online access does not pose a threat for archivists. Apart from this, the most important challenges were determined to be the additional technologically specialism required, and that it brings additional responsibilities for archivists.



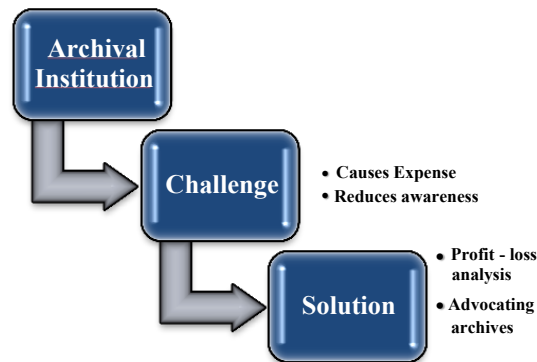
(Figure 8): Online Access as a challenge for archival material

The majority of archivists have the opinion that online access poses a challenge for the archival material. According to the answers of archivists all the challenges (copyright, deterioration, security) presented in the study were determined as problems.

An important result from the last three questions of the survey show that the majority of archivists are of the opinion that online access does not pose a challenge for archival institution

and archivists. However, for the majority of archivists it is a challenge for archivists. At this point, it is obvious that the values of archival material have impact on online access.

The prominent challenges and suggested solutions for archival institutions, archivists and archival material, particularly according to the answers attained from the survey analysis, are as follows:



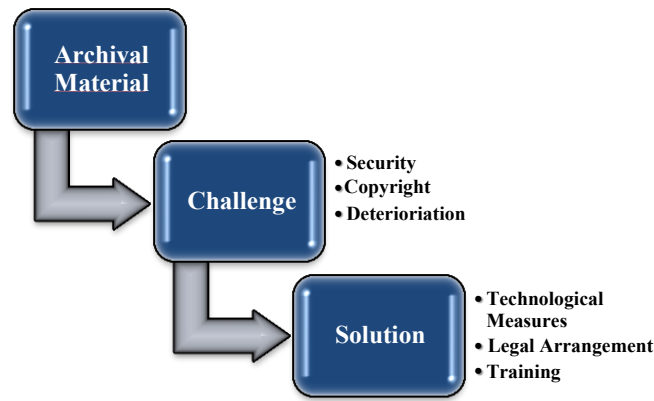
(Figure 9): Online Access and Archival Institution

As shown in Figure 2, the most important challenge point of online access for archival institution is the expense incurred. At this point, an important precaution archival institutions can take before building an online access system is to make a profit-loss analysis. Thus, the advantages and disadvantages of online access to archival institutions can be analyzed and the right decision will be taken. The second important challenge is that online access reduces awareness. Thus, it becomes important to plan and conduct advocating facilities.



(Figure 10): Online Access and Archivist

As shown in Figure 3, online access is a challenge for archivists because it requires additional technological specialism and brings additional responsibilities. In order to prevent these challenges, training and certificate programs should be created for archivists.



(Figure 11): Online Access and Archival Material

As shown in Figure 4, online access is a challenge for archival material because of the issues of security, copyright and deterioration. In order to prevent these kinds of problems for the material, technological measures can be taken, legal arrangements and training programs can be provided.

Conclusion

Online access is one of the most important archival tools in the information age. This is an inescapable fact of the 21st century. It is obvious that the advantages of online access far outweigh the disadvantages and challenges of online access. However, the challenges that appear with online access should not be ignored. In particular, negative situations which have different dimensions for archivists should be countered and neutralized.

In this study the main challenges of online access appeared to be about the archivists and archival material. As stated before as a technological process, online access needs especially practical information about the technological process. Archival material is unique and important and it is the ultimate aim of archiving to protect the material. At this point online access is one of the important challenges for the material. Its security and copyright are the main issues in this context. Archivists should plan the online access process very carefully. Resource and situation analysis can be the first things to do. Another important strategy in this preparation process can be to take advice from the archivists who are expert on online access.

In conclusion, “Archival Trust” and “Archival Quality” should lie behind the archival practice. At this point, all the challenges coming up from firstly online access and then other practices should be taken into account and act accordingly.

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Summary

The management of archival material is at the centre of archival practice. Archival material has evidential and informational value in particular, as well as managerial, financial, legal and historical values; as a result archival material consists of unique items that should be kept continuously or for a long time. At this point, it is strategically important to determine the potential disadvantages of processes directly related to archival material, in particular access. It is also important to make improvements and changes according to the potential challenges of processes.

Access is one of the important missions of archivists and archives that provide information services. In the 21st century, known as the Information Age, rapid and continuous access to information is a minimum requirement. At this point, online access becomes essential for archival organizations. As stated before, one of the most important aims for almost every archive today is to digitize their material and provide online access to users. Because online access has a great deal of advantages, like increasing usage of archival material, increasing provision of user services, reducing the workload of archivist, increasing reputational prestige, economy of money and economy of time. On the other hand, it is very important to determine the potential challenges of this advantageous process and take precautions.

This study examines online access in archives as a challenge and it addresses the following questions:

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“Archival Trust” and “Archival Quality” should lie behind the archival practice. At this point, all the challenges coming up from firstly online access and then other practices should be taken into account and act accordingly.