

Archiving scholarly tweets

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why?

Twitter is a rapidly-growing service that lets people communicate in online messages of 140 characters or less.

Scholars are flocking to Twitter¹ to cite peer-reviewed articles,² to get feedback from other scholars, and to "live tweet" conference notes:³

@dalziel: *Scientometrics 2.0: New metrics of scholarly impact on the social Web* <http://tinyurl.com/3xwsth1> 2010 aug. 2

@dancohen: *Tweeps: I'm crowdsourcing the title of my next book, which is about the way common web tech/methods should influence academia...* (1/5) 2010 aug. 4

@geomblog: *things you don't expect to hear at an applied conference: "... has a special interest in working with real data"* #kdd2010 2010 july 25

Our interviewees tended to see Twitter as an organic part of their scholarly lives. Clayton said that he tweets when "I am doing my regular sort of academic work and I see something that might be of interest to other academics."

Most of our participants supported saving some or all scholarly tweets, suggesting that these tweets capture a unique picture of scholarship in the digital age. Further research should examine the applicability of extant appraisal models to tweets, adapting them where necessary.

methods

To contact a diverse group of scholars on Twitter, we used a snowball sampling method: each new interviewee tweeted our recruitment message to her followers, gradually increasing the size of our potential sample.

We conducted 30- to 45-minute, semi-structured interviews with 28 participants to address whether they thought their tweets should be archived, and, if so, who should be responsible for archiving them.

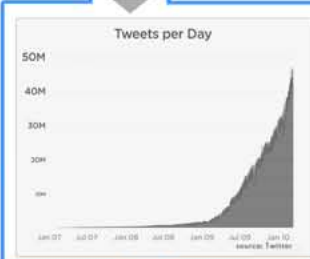
references

1. Young, J. (2009, December 17). 10 High Fliers on Twitter. *The Chronicle of Higher Education*.

2. Priem, J. & Costello, K. (in press). How and why scholars cite on Twitter. *Proceedings of the ASIS&T 2010 Annual Meeting, Pittsburgh, PA, Oct. 22-27*.

3. Letierce, J., Passant, A., Decker, S., & Breslin, J. (2010). Understanding how Twitter is used to spread scientific messages. Presented at the Web Science Conference 2010, Raleigh, NC.

4. @librarycongress (2010, Apr. 14). "Library to acquire ENTIRE Twitter archive -- ALL public tweets, ever, since March 2006! Details to follow."



what to save?



all

Frank: We have to save as many as possible. But I'm just recognizing the difficulty of future PhD students 200 years from now, sifting through, trying to find the diamonds in the haystack.



some

Brent: I don't know if I would want to save all of it.

Sofia: I wouldn't necessarily save tweets about what people are eating or recipes they are thinking about using.



none

Tameka: But as far as I'm concerned, from a utility point of view I don't see much value in saving old tweets anybody's old tweets.

Carmella: I feel nice that there is something that people can let go of. [Twitter] doesn't have to last forever.

appraisal strategies

macroappraisal

Clayton: I use Twitter for a class that I am teaching right now and I am cataloging all of the tweets from the class to have a sense of what [my students] did over the semester.

documentation strategy

Jordan: You could imagine... having people who are being more selective and developing sort of special collections of tweets that are on particular topics that are more useful to scholars because they have been curated in that way, a selection has happened.

who should archive?

not home institution

Armando: This comes to be an issue of academic freedom. My tweeting is done by me professionally, but it is not done by me as representative of my institution.

Twitter

Ben: I assume Twitter wants to save them... that's the business model. The more information they have about anybody on their client list, the more money they can make.

creator

Tyrone: Twitter is a private company, so someday they may decide to just erase all tweets. I am very concerned about that. So that is why sometimes I try to use a third party [to archive my own tweets].

government

Elaine: It seems safer to think about a government agency, like a bureaucracy that is not partisan; it is not elected, and is not as influenced by politics as perhaps other branches. Having the Library of Congress archive -- that seems like a good idea.

before and after LoC announcement

On Apr. 14, in the midst of our interviews, the Library of Congress announced that it would be archiving all public tweets.⁴ We noticed a distinct shift in participants' feelings after the announcement; they tended to view a complete archive more favorably, as shown on the timeline below.

- Generally in favor of saving all tweets
- ◐ Preferred saving a subset of tweets
- Against saving any tweets at all

