

Making Connections: A Survey of Special Collections' Social Media Outreach

Sean Heyliger, Juli McLoone, and Nikki Lynn Thomas

ABSTRACT

The increasing emphasis on attracting new users and the development of new technologies has created both opportunities and pressures for outreach within special collections. This study describes the results of a spring 2012 survey of social media outreach by repositories in the United States and Canada. The survey sought a broad understanding of social media adoption, management, content, and audiences, and looks at how effectively special collections use blogs, Facebook, and Twitter to connect with users. Survey findings indicate that social media use varies widely by platform and institution type, that a large majority of respondents believe that social media is an effective tool for outreach, and that self-reported numerical data cautiously supports that perception of success.

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KEY WORDS

Public Programs, Public Services, Management

While the aims of collecting, preserving, and providing access to materials of enduring value are central to special collections, the meaning and scope of each objective have evolved over time. In particular, ideas about appropriate access have broadened over the past few decades, with many repositories now welcoming undergraduates, conducting hands-on instruction sessions, and reaching out to the general public. The development of twenty-first-century social media technologies has created new opportunities to engage potential users. This study seeks to establish baseline data on special collections' use of social media as part of their outreach efforts. The authors' goal was to gain a better understanding of the profession's expectations for social media and the extent to which those expectations have and have not been met, as well as to provide data that will be useful for future research.

Social media, broadly defined, consist of "a group of Internet-based applications that build on the ideological and technological foundations of Web 2.0, and that allow the creation and exchange of user-generated content."¹ Examples of specific platforms include blogs, Facebook, Twitter, Flickr, YouTube, and Pinterest. According to a 2012 report from the Pew Research Center and a 2011 Ipsos survey, half of adults in the United States and Canada and over three-quarters of teenagers use social networking sites.² In light of these numbers, advocates of social media present them as cost-effective ways to reach new audiences.³

Social media are by no means cost free, and their merits should be evaluated in terms of a repository's priorities and available resources. However, it is clear that social media are no longer limited to a few early adopters indulging in experimentation. The study presented in this article found that almost one-fifth of repositories in the United States and Canada use at least one of the three major social media platforms—blogs, Facebook, or Twitter. While specific platforms will come and go, social media as outreach tools are here to stay, and repositories can expect to include them as integral parts of their outreach programs.

This study seeks a better understanding of how special collections repositories manage social media. The authors conducted a survey of repositories in the United States and Canada, asking questions regarding adoption, management, content, and audience. The survey looked at repositories using at least one of three popular social media platforms: blogs, Facebook, or Twitter. Following a brief literature review and explanation of methodology, survey results and discussion are presented in five sections: 1) respondent demographics, 2) adoption, 3) managing and creating content, 4) audiences, and 5) goals and accomplishments.

Literature Review

Though academic literature regarding social media in libraries is profuse, relatively little of it specifically addresses social media use by special collections repositories. One of the first academic studies of social media adoption by archives was Mary Samouelian's 2009 article, "Embracing Web 2.0: Archives and the Newest Generation of Web Applications."⁴ Samouelian analyzed 213 websites to determine the prevalence of Web 2.0 tools among archival digitization projects. Of the institutions identified as having digital collections, 45% were utilizing a Web 2.0 application, primarily in the form of social bookmarking tools and blogs. This high percentage at an early date suggests that repositories invested in digitization projects were more likely to be early adopters of social media.

Three other key surveys have been conducted related to social media use by archives. Beth Whittaker and Lynne Thomas's 2009 *Special Collections 2.0: New Technologies for Rare Books, Manuscripts, and Archival Collections* presented the results of a broad survey measuring the use of social media among individual cultural resource professionals.⁵ Most respondents indicated that they read blogs and used social media frequently, but relatively few did so in a professional context. Three-quarters read blogs either personally or professionally, and half indicated that they had a personal social networking account. In contrast, a quarter of respondents' institutions had social networking accounts, with only 3% blogging as part of their professional activities. These survey results indicate that in 2009 social media and networking were primarily used in a personal, not professional, context.

Adam Crymble's "An Analysis of Twitter and Facebook Use by the Archival Community" examined the use and linking patterns of Twitter and Facebook accounts of 195 archival institutions and personnel over a 32-day period in 2009.⁶ In all, 104 archival institutions used Facebook and 64 used Twitter, while 27 archivists had personal Twitter accounts. Most outbound links on institutional pages were content created by the archives, while archivists' personal Twitter accounts overwhelmingly linked to content created by others.

In 2012, OCLC published *Social Metadata for Libraries, Archives, and Museums*, an analysis of 76 sites that support user-created metadata, such as tagging, comments, and reviews, and a survey of site managers.⁷ The site survey found that comments or annotations are the most popular contributions, followed by tags, and that less moderated sites with a multi-institutional scope tend to be more active. Survey results indicated that comments, tagging, and RSS feeds are the most common features offered, and that, in most cases, these social media features had been added within the past two years, with the aim of increasing traffic and building user communities. Although the study focused on metadata,

not social media themselves, *Social Metadata for Libraries, Archives, and Museums: Executive Summary* noted that social media tools are a necessary foundation for gathering social metadata.

As the number of archival institutions using departmental blogs and other social media has grown dramatically in the last few years, literature regarding social media use has increasingly focused on “how-to” guides and case studies.⁸ As an example of the former, Kate Theimer’s *Web 2.0 Tools and Strategies for Archives and Local History Collections* offered a practical how-to guide for archivists beginning a social media program.⁹ Theimer outlined the various types of social media and offered archivists strategies on how to plan, implement, and evaluate social media. In 2009, the Society of American Archivists published *The Interactive Archivist*, which featured 13 case studies demonstrating how to set up a blog, Facebook page, and Twitter account, as well as explaining the advantages and disadvantages of their implementation.¹⁰ Most case studies focused on the institutional experiences and uses of archival blogs. The case study approach to understanding social media was continued in the Society of American Archivists’ 2011 publication *A Different Kind of Web: New Connections between Archives and Our Users*, which expanded the format of *The Interactive Archivist* to include introductory essays along with case studies of other types of social media such as Facebook, *Wikipedia*, and Flickr.¹¹

This survey differs from previous studies by exploring broad trends in the field. Responses were solicited from a range of primary source repositories of all sizes and from all types of institutions. Additionally, this study is limited to social media rather than the larger body of Web 2.0 technologies.

Methodology

The goal of this study was to gather data on primary source repositories currently utilizing social media and networking tools. Repositories were included in the survey if they used at least one of the following three forms of social media: blogs, Facebook, or Twitter.¹² Potential repositories for this survey were identified using Terry Abraham’s *Repositories of Primary Sources*.¹³ If smaller units within larger repositories maintained separate social media presences, the individual units were contacted separately. Likewise, if multiple repositories contributed to a single social media presence, each participating repository was contacted separately. Of the 2,850 repositories included in *Repositories of Primary Sources*, 522 repositories were identified as using at least one of the three social media platforms. This indicates overall social media use by primary source repositories at 18%, which is significantly lower than 25%–49% reported in a 2010 OCLC survey. This disparity reflects the fact that Abraham’s comprehensive list includes repositories of all types and sizes, while the OCLC survey looked at

a narrower population, specifically, “275 institutions, which encompassed the membership of each of these five overlapping academic and research library organizations in the United States and Canada.”¹⁴

A multiple choice questionnaire collected information on social media use and repository demographics.¹⁵ Questions addressed content, authors, goals, audiences, posting frequency, and followers. The questionnaire concluded with demographic questions on repository location, metropolitan size, type of institution, staffing, measurement of holdings, and other forms of outreach. A link to the questionnaire was provided to 524 separate repositories, departments, units, and individuals, with 212 respondents completing the survey for a 40.5% response rate. An open-ended follow-up survey was also sent to 86 volunteers from the initial questionnaire with a return rate of 45%.

A separate site analysis gathered data regarding blog host, number of posts, and proximity of the blog to the main department and institution web pages, as well as information about the three most recent blog posts. A hundred blogs were selected using a random number generator. An additional analysis gathered adoption dates of both Facebook and Twitter respondents, as well as total number of Tweets and followers.

General Respondent Demographics

Geographically,¹⁶ U.S. repositories in *Repositories of Primary Sources* that use social media are skewed toward the Northeast and the South.¹⁷ Survey respondents’ locations line up closely with the overall geographic distribution of institutions using social media, indicating that a reasonable sample of institutions completed the questionnaire. Just over half of respondents maintain more than one social media account, with 6% maintaining four or more accounts.

The distribution of respondents for individual platforms closely mirrors the geographic distribution of repositories using social media as a whole, likely reflecting the disproportionate number of repositories located in cities along the East Coast. Canadian repositories represent slightly more than 6% of survey respondents with similar representation among Twitter users, but less for blogs and Facebook.

College or university libraries make up a little more than half of all respondents (52.6%), followed by research centers in colleges or universities (11.3%), government repositories (10.8%), museums/historical societies (9.9%), public libraries (8.0%), and independent research centers (3.8%). Religious organizations and K–12 libraries both represent less than 1% of respondents. Numerically, college or university libraries make up a vastly larger share of respondents than other categories, and the number of responses in all other categories is relatively small. This means that statistical significance tests tend to be misleading,

irrelevant, or impossible due to small sample size. For that reason, the authors chose instead to analyze and present data in terms of general numerical trends, with the hope that future research targeted at specific areas or categories may be able to paint a more detailed and definitive picture.

Fifty-five percent of respondents and 57% of individual instances of social media were from metropolitan areas of more than 300,000, indicating a slight increase in multiple accounts for repositories in larger metropolitan areas. Blog and Facebook responses show similar results, while larger metropolitan areas even more heavily dominate Twitter, with almost 67% of repositories using Twitter serving metropolitan areas larger than 300,000. Respondents were categorized according to the collection-size matrix shown in Figure 1, with the bulk of repositories reporting small to midsize collections of volumes of books and linear feet of manuscripts.

	<10k volumes	10-25k volumes	25-50k volumes	50-100k volumes	100-200k volumes	>200k volumes
<500 linear feet	2	3	4	5	6	7
1-2.5k linear feet	3	4	5	6	7	8
2.5-5k linear feet	4	5	6	7	8	9
5-10k linear feet	5	6	7	8	9	10
10-25k linear feet	6	7	8	9	10	11
>25k linear feet	7	8	9	10	11	12

FIGURE 1. Collection-Size Matrix.

The mean number of professional staff for all respondents and platform-specific respondents is between 5 and 6.1, with Twitter generating the high number and overall survey respondents the lowest.¹⁸ Professional staff size increases when considering individual instances of social media, indicating higher professional staff for repositories with multiple social media accounts.

Adoption: When Did Repositories Begin Using Social Media?

For all three major social media platforms—blogs, Facebook, and Twitter—2009 was the watershed year for adoption. All platforms had a few early adopters, but 2009 was the year that significant numbers of repositories embraced social media.

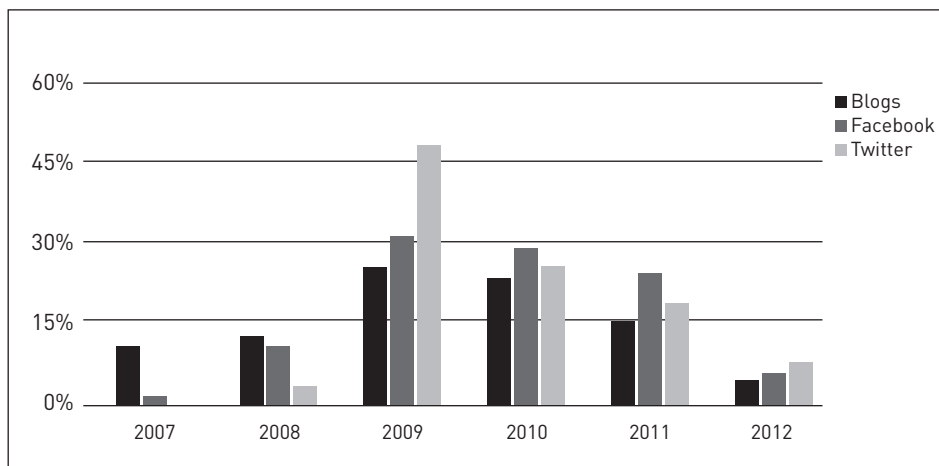


FIGURE 2. Adoption by Year, 2007–2012.

One respondent reported blogging as early as 1996. However, most special collections blogs lagged behind mainstream adoption. As shown in Figure 2, significant numbers of respondents began blogging in 2007 and 2008, but the peak year was 2009 when 25% of all reported blogs were established. The strongest variable affecting blog adoption is institutional category. Public libraries adopted blogs earlier than other institution types with 46% of public library repository blogs established in 2007. Government repository blogs, on the other hand, did not become widespread until 2010 and peaked in 2011.¹⁹

Institutional adoption of Facebook closely mirrors the timeline for blogs. The first institutional Facebook page was established in 2007, with a moderate increase in the number of adopters in 2008. The watershed year was 2009, accounting for 31% of respondents. After 2009, the number of new Facebook accounts began to decrease slightly each year. Repositories' adoption of Facebook roughly followed the general public's adoption of Facebook, which also peaked in 2009 with a 16% increase in new users, followed by 12% in 2010, and 5% in 2011.²⁰ Unlike blogs and Twitter, research centers at colleges and universities and independent research centers had the highest rate of early adopters with 49% of their Facebook accounts established prior to 2010. Repositories in college and university libraries had the highest percentage of late adopters of Facebook, with 28% established in 2011–2012.

As with blogs and Facebook, 2009 was the watershed year for Twitter adoption, nearly two years after the platform was established.²¹ The bulk of survey respondents (47%) began using Twitter in 2009, a jump of 44% from the previous year.²² Growth of new Twitter accounts was already declining by the end of 2009, a pattern that continued in subsequent years.²³ Museums/historical societies adopted Twitter earlier than other institution types with 66% of respondents

establishing Twitter accounts in 2008–2009. This contrasts dramatically with the earlier adopters of blogs—public libraries—which reported just 37% with Twitter accounts established during the same period.

Managing and Creating Content

WHAT KINDS OF CONTENT DO REPOSITORIES POST?

Survey respondents were asked to select the types of content they posted to social media from the following list: department news, event announcements, new acquisitions, local history, university history, featured researchers, digitized items/collections, in-depth item/collection highlights, and content reproduced from collections. Survey results show that repositories generally tailor their posts to each platform, though the types of content posted to Facebook and Twitter overlap somewhat. As shown in Figure 3, digitized materials and event announcements are among the top three post types regardless of platform, but they are much more common among Facebook and Twitter respondents.

Generally speaking, content is closely linked to the repository's mission, which is determined by an institution's type. Unsurprisingly, government repositories and museums/historical societies are more likely to post about local history, while university-related repositories are more likely to post about university history. Public libraries, with their focus on a broader community,

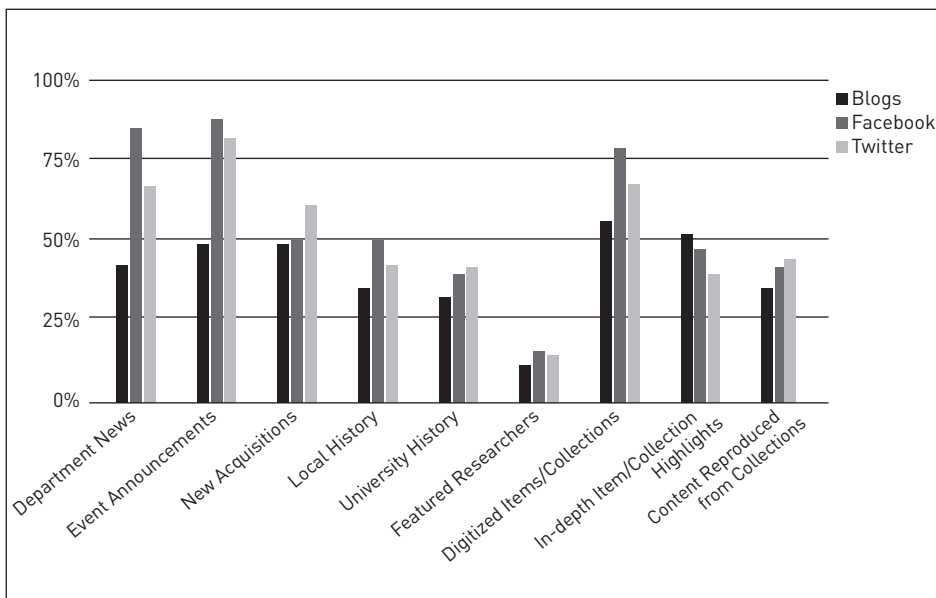


FIGURE 3. Content Types Posted to All Platforms.

comprise the institution type most likely to post event announcements to all platforms. Variation is also seen in the tailoring of content to specific platforms. Public libraries and research centers in colleges and universities heavily use all three social media platforms for event announcements, while college and university libraries, independent research centers, government repositories, and museums/historical societies use their blogs for more detailed posts, including in-depth collection highlights and digitized items and collections. These institutions relegate event announcements and department news to their Facebook and Twitter feeds.

University history posts are most popular in metropolitan areas of less than 20,000 among blog and Facebook respondents and in metropolitan areas of 20,001 to 100,000 among Twitter respondents. University history is also linked with lower professional staff counts for all platforms. This may indicate that smaller communities are more likely to have a college or university library than other types of repositories, such as large museums or independent research centers, which tend to be located in larger cities, and in turn, these repositories may be more likely to operate with fewer professional staff. Local history, on the other hand, is posted most frequently in midsize metropolitan areas by repositories with higher than average professional staff counts. Repositories in larger metropolitan areas (300,000+) more frequently post in-depth collection highlights to all platforms, blog about digitized items or collections, and use Facebook and Twitter to share new acquisitions.

Users of all three platforms reported using content recycled from other outreach outlets as well as unique content, but Facebook and Twitter respondents reported recycled content at much higher rates. Blog respondents reported unique content at a 43% higher rate than recycled content, but that rate drops to 11% for Facebook and to just 2% for Twitter.²⁴ A surprising number of institutions reported using Facebook for presenting unique or new content, reflecting the large number of repositories that use their Facebook page as though it were a blog, posting much more in-depth content than one would generally expect on a Facebook feed. Comments from Facebook respondents echo the importance of linking to other online sources and also indicate that they often use Facebook pages to direct traffic to blogs, websites, or digital collections. This supports the idea that respondents perceive Facebook as having a different audience than their blogs, especially institutions at colleges and universities that use Facebook primarily to reach out to students.

For blog respondents, the percentage of recycled content increases with collection size, moving from 16% in collection size 2–4 upward to 53% in collection size 11–12. This correlation, combined with higher numbers of professional staff among blog respondents that recycle content, reflects a tendency

for institutions with larger collections and more professional staff to use multiple print and digital communication outlets, which provide more sources for content. Although it is not as strong as among blog respondents, Facebook and Twitter respondents also reported a positive relationship between collection size and the quantity of recycled content, but interestingly, they reported fewer professional staff for repositories recycling content. Repositories with smaller collections are the least likely to post recycled content to their Facebook pages, which may indicate that smaller repositories rely on Facebook as their primary means for distributing information and content. These same small repositories also post less unique content to their Twitter feeds, likely due to fewer resources and staff necessary to recycle content.

Platform and institution type are the primary factors in determining content type. In-depth items/collection highlights are a common post type for blogging repositories, but are much less common for Facebook and Twitter, possibly due to the required conciseness of Twitter and the common brevity of Facebook. The latter platforms, however, are well suited for department news updates, which are less frequently posted to blogs. Recycled content is also less likely on blogs than on Facebook and Twitter, confirming the popular wisdom that blogs are destination sites, while Facebook and Twitter feeds are often used to drive traffic elsewhere.

WHO WRITES REPOSITORIES' CONTENT?

Though there is great disparity in formality or informality of interaction with readers, almost all institutions perceive social media management as a professional task across all platforms (71% for blogs, 94% for Facebook, and 97% for Twitter). The question of who writes blog posts is most affected by an institution's number of professional staff.²⁵ Repositories that rely upon auxiliary writers to blog tend to have smaller professional staffs, suggesting that repositories that lack professional staff to write content generally use auxiliary writers. Those using volunteers to generate content tend to have the lowest professional staff counts, with means of fewer than three for all platforms.

The percentages and types of nonprofessional staff authoring blog and Facebook posts vary among institution types. However, student workers and support staff are most likely to act as secondary authors in academic settings. In the case of blogs, 30% of repositories in college and university libraries reported support staff authors and 25% student workers. Only 6% of blog respondents in college and university libraries reported volunteers and external staff/faculty. Facebook respondents reported similar numbers: 36% support staff, 23% student workers, and just 4% volunteers and external staff/faculty. In contrast,

interns and volunteers fill the role of secondary authors in museums/historical societies, with 23% of museum/historical society blog respondents reporting intern authors and 18% volunteers, as well as 19% reporting volunteer authors for Facebook.

Close to 97% of respondents reported using professional staff to post to Twitter, which is significantly greater than blogs (71%) and slightly greater than Facebook (94%). With the exception of support staff at 21%, all other author types contribute Twitter content at a rate below 8%.²⁶ Outside of departmental staff, institutions vary widely as to which type of auxiliary staff tweet. Government repositories are twice as likely as any other institution type to utilize interns, and all institution types using interns have a higher average number of professional staff than the average tweeting institution.²⁷ Museums (18%) are the only institution type besides college and university libraries (4%) that make use of volunteers to post to social media. Institutions using volunteers to tweet employ a lower than average number of professional staff (1.4).

The widespread reliance on professional staff to tweet may be due to the fact that only a user name and password are needed to publish. Most blog platforms allow authors to be assigned a range of permissions, giving professional staff a chance to review posts before they are made public. Though our survey did not directly address why repositories primarily use professional staff to author social media content, this reliance may ensure that the institution's social media presence maintains a consistent tone. This is especially true in regard to Facebook and Twitter as these platforms' informal posting process makes it more important to maintain direct oversight of content.

HOW OFTEN DO REPOSITORIES POST CONTENT?

The authors assumed that institutions would model their blogs on print publications like department newsletters and post on a regular, periodic basis, but survey results suggest otherwise. We also assumed that repositories with larger collection sizes would post more frequently, due to larger staffs, greater resources, and more available content, but that also is not always the case.

Among blog respondents, weekly posts (31%) are slightly more common than monthly posts (27%), but "other" posting schedules (38%) exceed both. Repositories that selected "other" do not always post less often, just not at scheduled intervals. Some "other" frequencies include "episodic," "several times per month," "bi-weekly," and "as time permits." Data from the site analysis indicates that having a direct link to the blog on the department's main page also positively relates to posting frequency.²⁸ Museums and historical societies blog most frequently, with half of respondents blogging daily or weekly.

Like blog respondents, the bulk of Facebook respondents update on a weekly basis (42%), but unlike blogs, the second most common update frequency for Facebook is daily (32%). Data supports the common notion that Facebook is used intermittently, somewhere between the longer, slightly less frequent format of blogs, and the shorter, more frequent format of Twitter. Independent research centers (75%) and museums and historical societies (56%) reported the highest percentage of daily posting, which is not surprising since they both reported posting departmental news and event announcements on Facebook more frequently and are more likely to engage the general public regularly.

As expected, post frequency for Twitter respondents is higher than that reported for Facebook and blogs. Daily use is most common, followed by “other,” “weekly,” and “monthly.” Approximately a quarter of respondents indicated a frequency of “other.” Categorizing the “other” responses, which range from “multiple times per day” to “whenever we have something to say,” indicates that 44% of repositories tweet at least once a day, and 53% tweet more frequently than weekly.

Although post frequency varies significantly among the users of the three platforms, there are commonalities, especially in the way that number of professional staff impacts post frequency. As shown in Figure 4, post frequency is positively related to professional staff counts, with daily posters for each platform reporting one or more additional professional staff than average for the platform. It is unsurprising that departments with more staff are able to post more content to social media platforms, but it is somewhat unexpected to find that for blog respondents, higher professional staff counts are associated with any regular schedule, whether daily, weekly, or monthly.²⁹

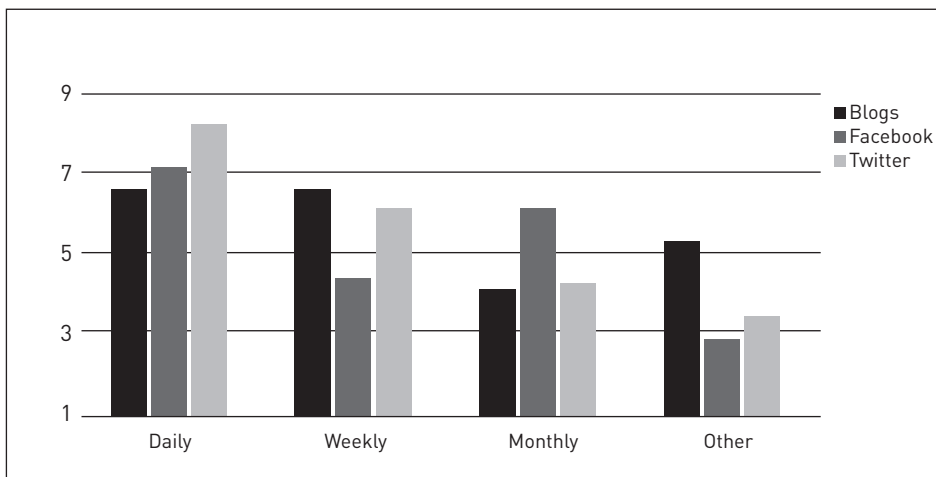


FIGURE 4. Average Professional Staff by Post Frequency.

To recap, post frequency is a distinguishing characteristic among social media platforms. Longer-form platforms are posted to much less often than shorter-form platforms. This may be because the amount of research and preparation that goes into blogs can vary greatly. The same number of staff hours may be used for four brief weekly posts at one institution as are devoted to a single, in-depth monthly post at another. The usual brevity of Facebook and Twitter make this less likely to occur on those platforms.

Audience: Who and Where Do Repositories Expect Their Readers to Be?

Given the shift in the past few decades from focusing outreach on specialized researchers to students and the general public,³⁰ the authors anticipated that repositories would target a number of different populations. Survey data do indeed show that special collections are casting their social media nets broadly. Approximately 40% of respondents for each platform selected “other” as one of their targeted audiences, and many of these respondents described “other” in terms such as “researchers in general” or “anyone interested.” While this approach could be a positive response to calls for repositories to be more welcoming and approachable, it also raises the question of whether such broadly targeted efforts are as effective as those with a tighter focus.

When it comes to specific populations, undergraduate and graduate students are the most commonly targeted audience across all platforms,³¹ particularly for Facebook and Twitter (see Figure 5). Faculty is the second most popular

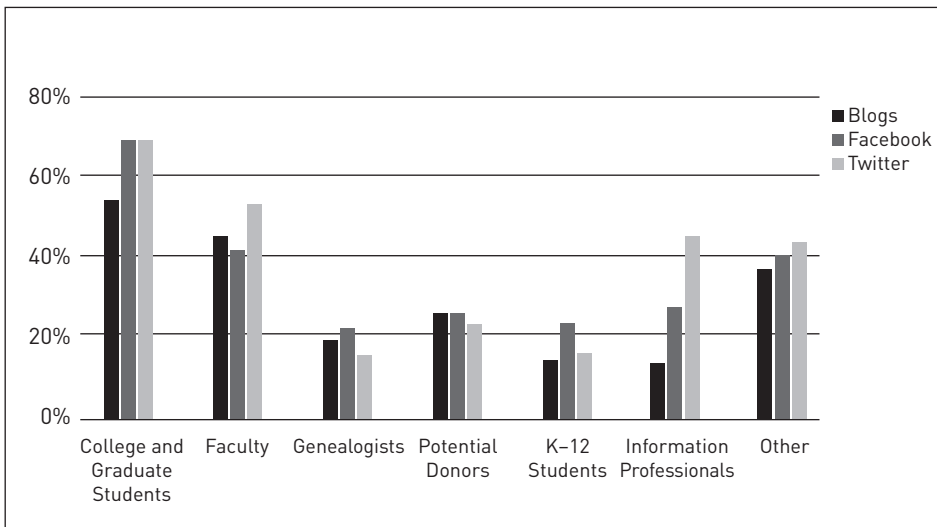


FIGURE 5. Intended Audience Types.

audience across all platforms, especially among Twitter respondents. Most other audience categories received similar selection rates for all platforms, with the exception that repositories targeting information professionals use Twitter much more frequently—almost 20% more than Facebook and 30% more than blogs. This may indicate that Twitter has found a niche as a way to connect with likeminded professionals and not necessarily with users.

Mean staff size drives some of the variation in audience selection. On all three platforms, respondents with above average professional staff sizes are more likely to target genealogists, while repositories with below average professional staff sizes are more likely to target potential donors. This could reflect the opportunity social media present to network with the community when insufficient staff is available for curators to be able to spend time off site networking in person. Another outlier occurs with respect to Twitter, where repositories with information professionals posting tweets have mean professional staffs almost 10 employees greater than the average, likely reflecting the fact that only well-staffed repositories can afford to devote extensive time to outreach within their own profession.

The most significant differences in targeted audience occur between institution types. Repositories in college and university libraries are much more likely than other institution types to target students and faculty. In contrast, public and government repositories are more likely to write for genealogists and a K-12 audience. While on the macro level relatively little differentiation exists between platforms, on the micro level, platforms are differentiated by target audience within institution types. Specifically, repositories in college and university libraries (see Figure 6) are twice as likely to target potential donors

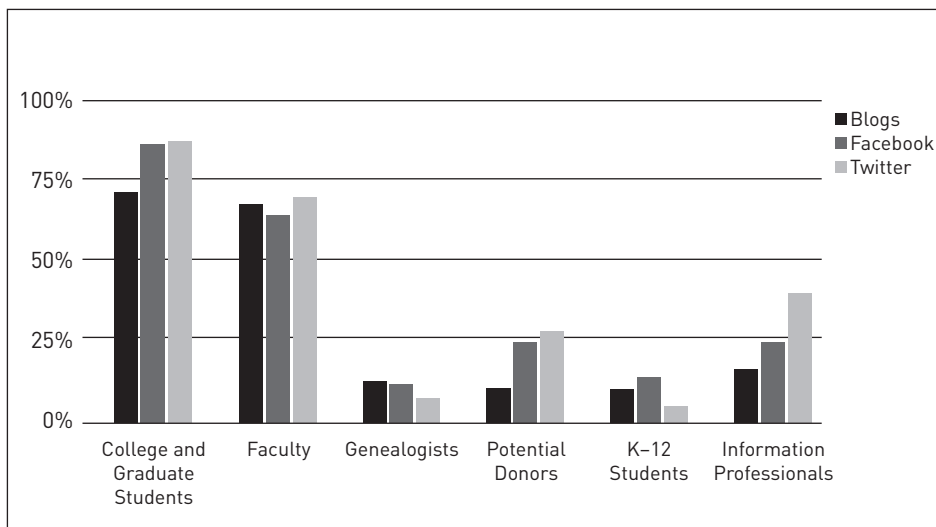


FIGURE 6. Intended Audience Types of College and University Libraries.

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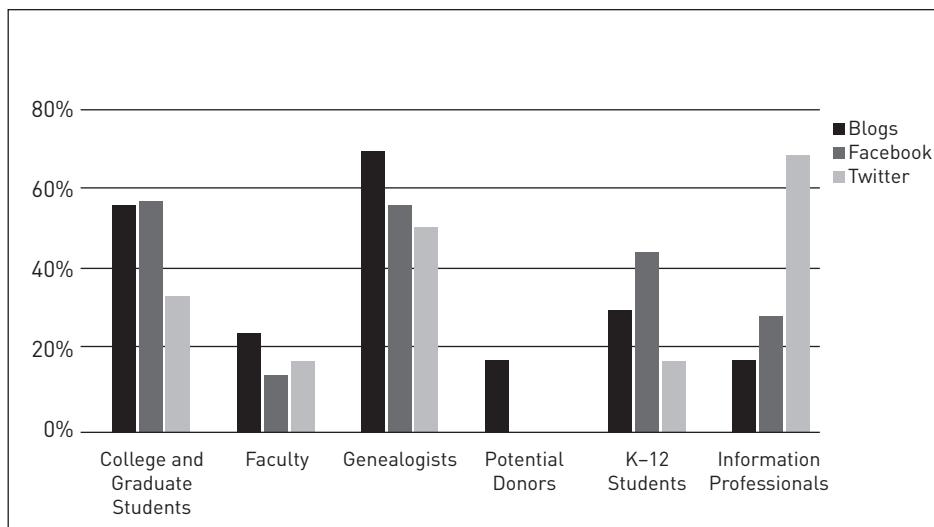


FIGURE 7. Intended Audience Types of Public Libraries.

through Facebook than through blogs. On the other hand, Figure 7 shows that no public libraries selected “potential donors” as an audience for Facebook, but 17% included donors as an audience for blogs. Additionally, public libraries target K–12 students and teachers almost 15% more often on Facebook than they do through blogs.

In terms of geography, audience selection is fairly evenly distributed among institutional, metropolitan, state/province, and national audiences for all platforms (approximately 50% to 60% for Facebook and Twitter, and 40% to 50% for blogs), with somewhat lower percentages selecting an international audience. In the case of blog and Facebook respondents, institutional audiences are selected most frequently (48% of blog and 62% Facebook of respondents), while Twitter respondents are slightly more likely to select metropolitan audiences (60% metropolitan versus 56% institutional). Twitter respondents are also slightly more likely to select international audiences (35% of Twitter, in contrast to 25% of Facebook and 28% of blog respondents), suggesting that repositories using Twitter are disposed to “dream big.” This may relate back to the fact that Twitter is more likely than other platforms to target faculty and information professionals, many of whom may reside outside a repository’s local vicinity.

As with audience type, institutional affiliation also appears to play a role in the selection of a geographic audience. As shown in Figure 8, college and university libraries focus on audiences within their institutions (68% for blogs, 79% for Twitter, and 86% for Facebook). Public libraries most frequently select metropolitan or state/provincial audiences on all platforms, but particularly favor metropolitan audiences for blogs, while leaning toward state/provincial

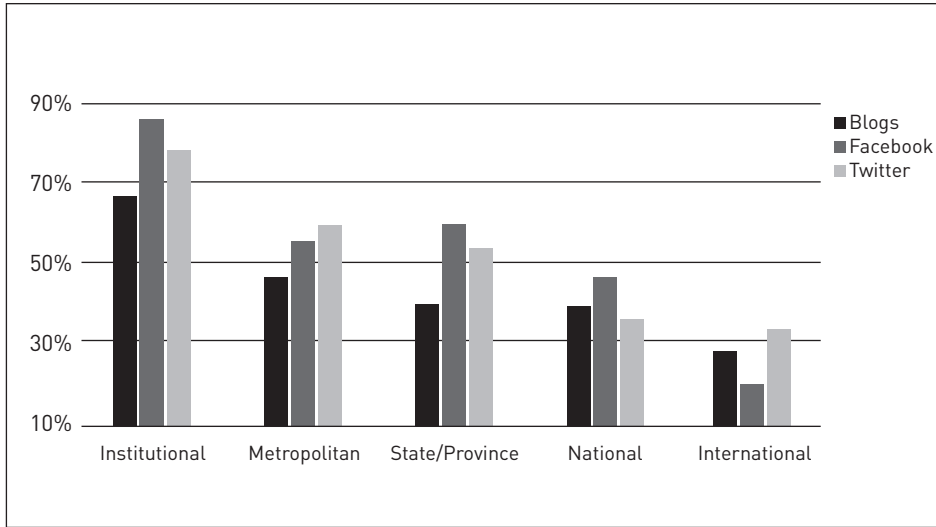


FIGURE 8. Intended Geographic Audience of College and University Libraries.

audiences for Facebook and Twitter (see Figure 9). Government repositories also target metropolitan audiences, but focus even more frequently on state/provincial and national audiences on all platforms (see Figure 10).

All social media platforms are used primarily as broad-spectrum outreach tools. However, to the extent that specific audiences are targeted, students and faculty top the list, particularly among college and university libraries, though both public and government repositories favor genealogists and K-12 audiences. Intended audiences are often located in traditional service areas: the

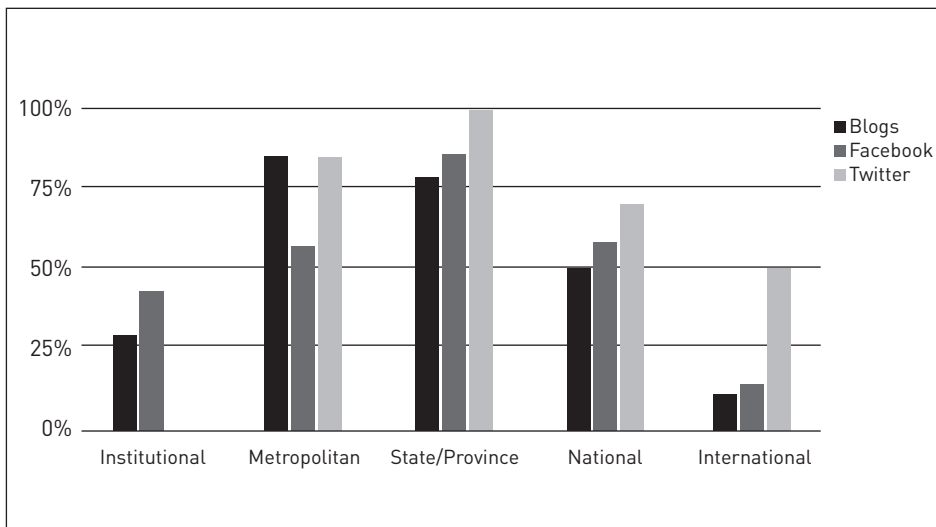


FIGURE 9. Intended Geographic Audience of Public Libraries.

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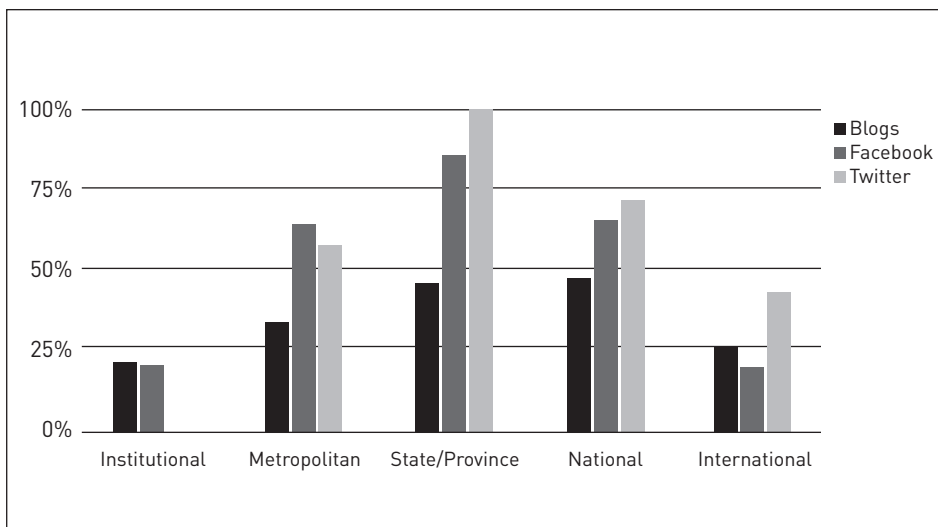


FIGURE 10. Intended Geographic Audience of Government Repositories.

educational institution for colleges and universities, the metropolitan area for public libraries, and the state or province for government repositories. These divisions follow logically from the historical user populations of these institution types, suggesting that repositories use social media more to make contact with larger numbers of users in existing target populations and less to attract entirely new user groups.

Goals and Accomplishments

WHY DO REPOSITORIES USE SOCIAL MEDIA?

Across all platforms, repositories place great emphasis on increasing awareness of collections (64% for blogs, 83% for Facebook, and 82% for Twitter) and highlighting materials from particular collections (64% for blogs, 81% for Facebook, and 82% for Twitter).³² In the case of Facebook, increasing visibility of events ties with highlighting materials as the second most common goal at 81%, while among Twitter respondents, it is a close third at 78%. In contrast, blog respondents selected increasing visibility of events only 56% of the time—8% less often than the two leading goals. Instead, illustrating behind-the-scenes activities takes third place with 61% of blog respondents selecting that goal.

Figure 11 shows that a high degree of consistency in prioritization of goals also exists across platforms. Increasing awareness of collections is the highest priority for all respondents. Highlighting materials from specific collections and increasing visibility of events follow second and third, though the order of importance for those two goals reverses in the case of Facebook.

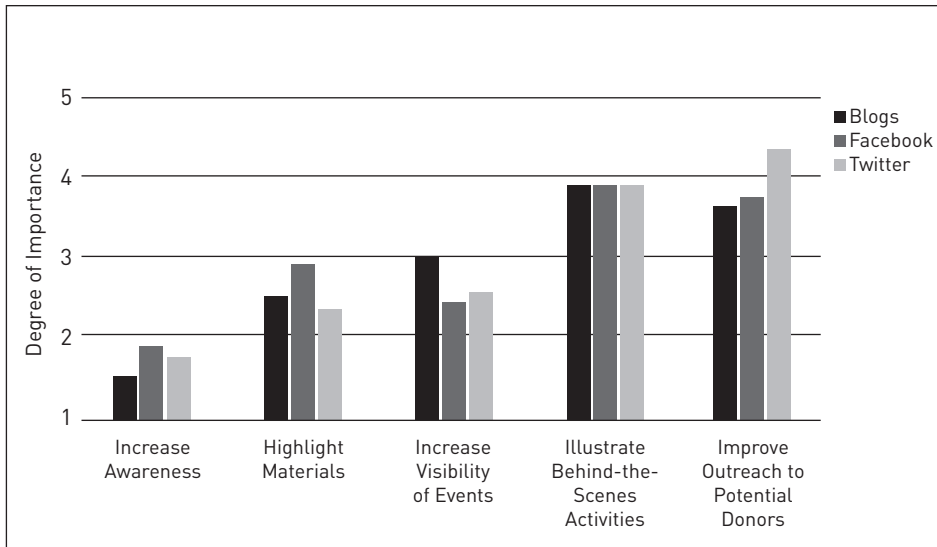


FIGURE 11. Ranking of Goals. The most significant goal is ranked number 1.

As with content, which is closely related to goals, institution type is a key variable, but the specific impact of institution type varies by platform. Increasing visibility of events was most likely to be ranked as the top priority by Facebook respondents from government repositories and museums/historical societies. The same institution types, however, reported a different top priority for their other social media—increasing awareness of collections. Along the same lines, Twitter respondents from public libraries and independent research centers were most likely to rank highlighting materials from collections as their top priority, while Facebook and blog respondents from those institution types both ranked increasing awareness of collections as their top priority by more than .5 of a point in mean rank. This may suggest that despite the overall similarities in goal patterns, at the institutional level, some repositories do establish distinct goals for different platforms.

This idea is further reflected in the open-ended comments about each platform, which reveal that one of the primary purposes of Facebook is for repositories to be able to reach out to audiences with whom they have a difficult time connecting. For college and university archives, comments indicate that Facebook is one of the primary venues used to connect with students and to make archives “not scary and make us much more approachable.” One follow-up respondent commenting on his blog and Twitter accounts noted that “Twitter allows for the most patron interaction and is targeted specifically to promote the university archives to our . . . student/staff/alumni community. . . [t]he blog is our news and events portal, used to announce new collections and events, changes to hours of operation, and to highlight interesting collection

finds or the work of our students and interns.” Blogs are also seen as a means of recordkeeping, since, as one respondent commented, they “document our other more ephemeral outreach activities in a secure manner that can then be used for reporting purposes.”

Repositories share similar goals for their social media programs, though with minor differences between platforms. Certain institution types utilize specific platforms for distinct goals, but the limited scope of this survey’s inquiry did not gather sufficient qualitative data to tease out exactly how that specialization occurs. Additionally, responses to open-ended questions indicate that some repositories have established more specific goals for their social media programs, beyond the options presented in this study’s questionnaire.

ARE SOCIAL MEDIA PERCEIVED AS EFFECTIVE?

While this survey did not attempt to answer directly the question of whether social media are effective means of outreach for repositories, it did ask respondents to rank how effective they believed they were at accomplishing their goals. Survey results therefore reflect how repositories perceive social media’s success as an outreach tool.

Respondents across all three platforms indicated that social media are very successful at accomplishing their two most important goals—highlighting specific materials and increasing general awareness of their repositories (see Figure 12). Comments received from the survey and from follow-up questions reinforce the idea that social media, and especially blogs, are successful at increasing the visibility of repositories, collections, and events. Some repositories measure this

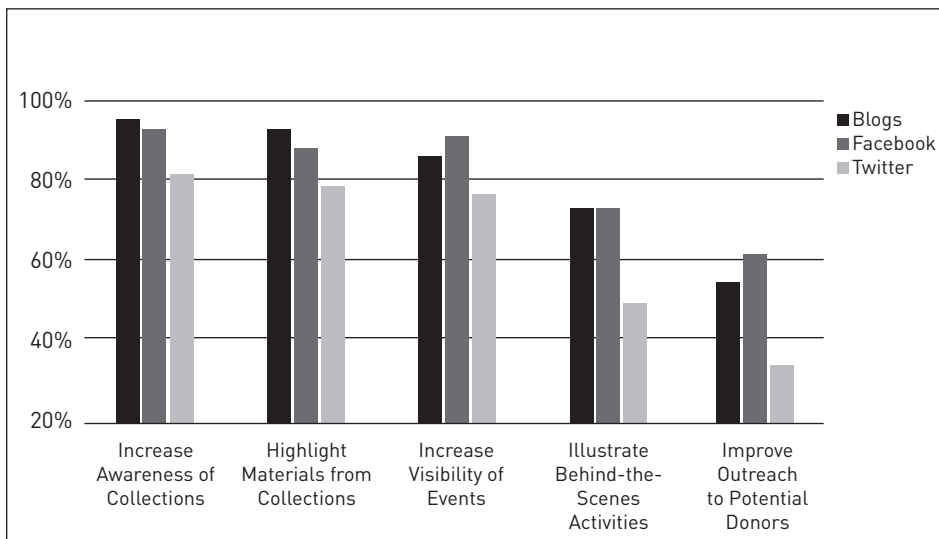


FIGURE 12. Perceived Success of Goals.

increase in terms of virtual use, “[t]he traffic numbers have climbed each month for 18 months on our blog” and “Tweets are re-Tweeted weekly,” while others have received not only increasing views, but comments from readers, “[p]eople talk to me about my blog, in the library, in grocery stores and at conferences without knowing I write it.”

Respondents are generally less optimistic about the other goals of social media. For all three platforms, repositories perceive social media to be less effective as an outreach tool to donors or to illustrate behind-the-scenes activities.³³ This may be due to repositories' perception that these are less significant goals for social media, and therefore they do not attempt to use social media to achieve them.³⁴ Even though respondents agree that social media are successful at achieving their primary goals, comments also reveal shared ambivalence and anxiety, especially related to blogs: “[n]ot enough staff,” “sustainability . . . is a significant issue,” “as much as I have tried to engage with our audiences, we have been fairly unsuccessful at getting comments on blog posts.” This apprehension about the usefulness of blogging may be because blogs require significant amounts of time, often by a small number of staff, and the return on investment can be difficult to measure against the resources required.

Across respondents from all three platforms, smaller institutions and those located in smaller metropolitan areas perceive social media as less successful than do larger repositories or repositories in larger metropolitan areas. Blogging and Facebook respondents in metropolitan areas with populations below 20,000 reported significantly lower percentages of success than other institutions in all categories. While Twitter respondents in the same population range generally perceive their accounts as successful, it is only “moderately” so. These findings may indicate that a minimum metropolitan threshold is required for repositories to adopt blogs and Facebook as successful social media tools.³⁵

There is a consensus among all repositories that social media are successful at promoting events, collections, and general awareness of an institution's presence, though there needs to be more study of whether this belief is merely perceived or can be objectively measured.

ARE SOCIAL MEDIA EFFECTIVE FOR SPECIAL COLLECTIONS?

For outreach of any kind, one of the greatest challenges is measuring impact, both quantitatively in terms of number of people reached and qualitatively in terms of the lasting effect on patrons. When it comes to social media outreach, a plethora of quantitative tools are available,³⁶ but interpreting the significance of those numbers is challenging.³⁷ A Twitter account may have 100 followers, but how many log in and read tweets? A Facebook page may have 200 fans, but how many respond to posts? How can readers who receive blogs

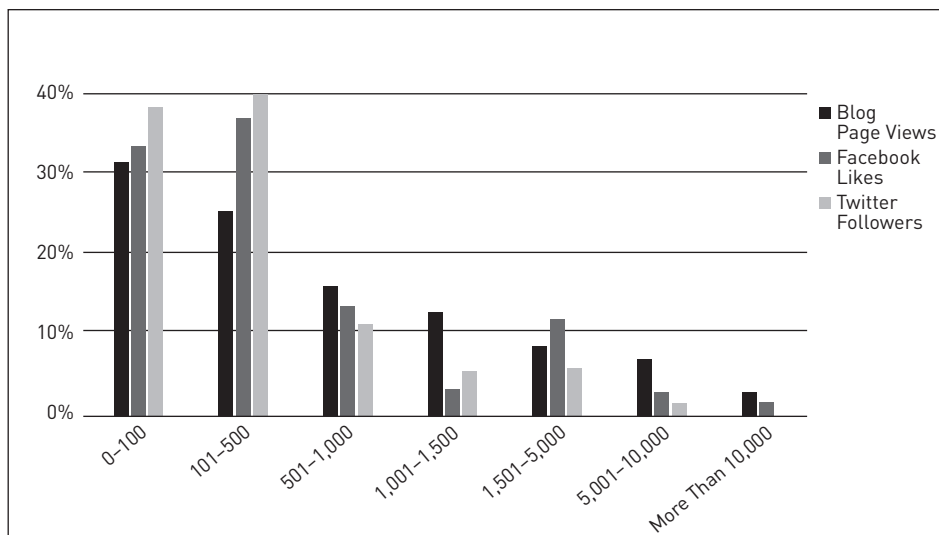


FIGURE 13. Page Views, Likes, and Followers by Platform.

through RSS feeds or email be accounted for? Seeking to gather data from a large number of organizations that likely use a wide variety of internal metrics magnifies these difficulties.

While recognizing these inherent problems and limitations, the authors nonetheless chose to ask respondents for basic user statistics to establish an approximation of special collections' social media readership: blog page views per month, number of Facebook likes, and number of Twitter followers (see Figure 13).³⁸ More than 70% of Facebook and Twitter respondents reported fewer than 500 followers, and about 15% of respondents for both platforms reported between 501 and 1,000 followers. An additional 15% of Facebook respondents reported between 1,001 and 5,000 followers, while only about 10% of Twitter respondents reported numbers in that range. For both platforms, the percentage reporting more than 5,000 followers is almost negligible. Are these numbers high or low? A recent survey by the Pew Research Center found that the average individual Facebook user has 245 friends,³⁹ and M+R Strategic Services and the Nonprofit Technology Network's 2012 study of nonprofit social media listed the average nonprofit Facebook page as having approximately 103 Facebook fans and 29 Twitter followers for every 1,000 members of an email list.⁴⁰ While this still does not translate directly into an expected fan count for repository Facebook pages, it does suggest that for smaller institutions, which may see no more than 1,000 to 2,000 in-person visits in a year, 100 to 200 Facebook likes could be considered numerically successful.

While there is no consensus on the average number of followers for a Twitter feed, most estimates put the average number for individual feeds well

below the 500 mark. In fact, the highest number calculated is from 2009 with an average 126 followers,⁴¹ and numbers drop from there to fewer than 30 in 2010.⁴² The aforementioned Nonprofit Benchmarks Study found that nonprofit Twitter feeds have about 29 followers for every 1,000 members of an email list. Thus, even numbers well under 100 might reflect a reasonable number of followers for many repositories' Twitter feeds.⁴³

As with most dimensions of this study, institution type is clearly related to number of Facebook fans and Twitter followers. On both platforms, repositories in college and university libraries are especially likely to report fewer than 500 fans or followers, and this is particularly accentuated among Facebook respondents, where almost 80% of college and university respondents reported fewer than 500 likes. These repositories are particularly apt to target institutional and student audiences, making it unlikely that their potential pool of fans would exceed 50,000. Thus, following M+R's approximation of 10% of a nonprofit's potential base connecting with it through social media, it would be surprising if many repositories in college and university libraries did attract more than 500 fans. By a similar logic, it follows that a larger-than-average percentage of government repositories and museums/historical societies, which tend to have a broader potential audience, reported more than 500 Facebook fans and Twitter followers.

In general, as repository size increases, the percentage of repositories reporting more than 500 followers also increases. The same trend occurs with regard to metropolitan size. Earlier, we observed that repositories usually write for what they perceive to be their local communities. The fact that repositories in larger metropolitan areas (which are more likely to write for their metropolitan communities) do, in fact, receive more followers, offers a promising suggestion that repositories are reaching the audiences for whom they are writing.

Blog page views, unlike Facebook fans or Twitter followers, reflect individual loads of pages, not individual readers. Even so, more than half of blog respondents reporting page views receive 500 or fewer page views per month (see Figure 14).⁴⁴ The variables of institution type and audience most affect page view numbers reported by blog respondents.⁴⁵ Every institutional category included at least one blog that receives more than 1,500 page views per month, so it appears possible from this data for any blog to gather a large audience. However, repositories in museums/historical societies tend to experience the largest percentage of low readership, while government repositories receive a disproportionately high number of page views. This is surprising given that government blogs were generally established later than those from other categories. These results may relate to target audience. If a blog is aimed at an institutional or metropolitan community, the benchmark for "enough" page views is much lower than for a blog aimed at a state, national, or international

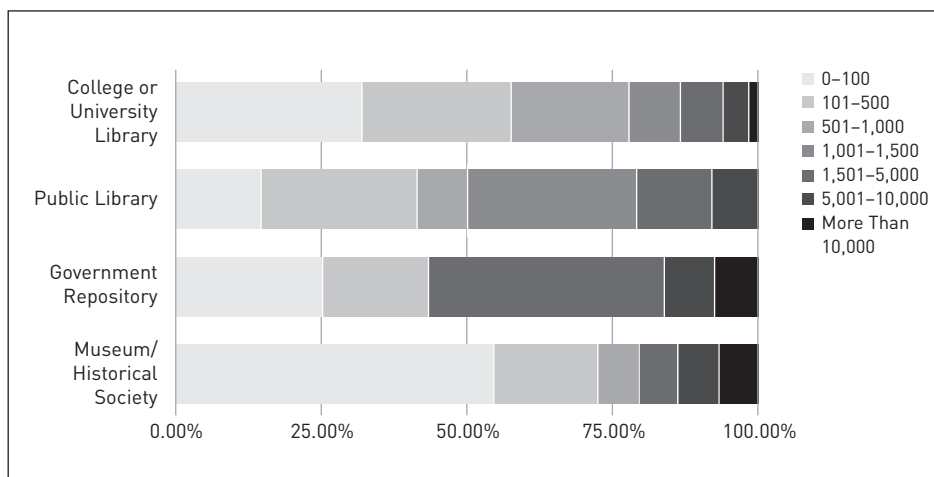


FIGURE 14. Percentage of Monthly Blog Page Views by Institution Type.

audience. Government repositories also tend to be well known by name, which likely results in more media coverage and thus more opportunities to promote their social media.

Finally, a regular posting schedule appears to increase readership. Almost half of blogs that maintain any regular schedule receive more than 500 page views per month—12% more than blogs with an “other” frequency achieve. This pattern is accentuated among blogs with average or below average professional staff sizes. Half of regularly scheduled blogs by repositories with full-time equivalent professional staff means of 5.5 or lower receive more than 500 page views per month—17% more than blogs with an “other” frequency receive. Maintaining a regular schedule seems especially worthwhile for repositories with small staffs, even though limited staff time makes this difficult.

The relatively low numbers of followers, fans, and page views received by most special collections’ social media outlets should not necessarily be discouraging. Given the M+R 10% of potential audience guideline, the numbers may, in fact, not even be “low.” The most effective blogs, Facebook pages, and Twitter feeds use social media to generate engaged users-readers who return repeatedly, tag, leave comments, retweet, and share. Comments received from the follow-up questionnaire reveal that engaging readers is a particular challenge for special collections repositories. However, to truly take advantage of social media for outreach, it is important to focus on qualitative engagement as well as quantitative reach, difficult as it is.

Conclusion

This study sought to explore and quantify the use and management of social media outreach across all sizes and types of special collections repositories. Survey findings indicate that the use of social media technologies by special collections repositories follows broader societal trends, either matching or lagging slightly behind widespread adoption of each platform by the general populace. The survey reveals that previous estimates of social media adoption for special collections were heavily skewed toward larger academic institutions. Only about one-fifth of repositories in our survey are using social media for outreach, well below previous surveys that put the percentage of adopters among academic institutions as high as 50%.⁴⁶ This disparity in adoption rates between institution types suggests that there may be a growing divide between some academic and government repositories that have the staff, resources, and expertise to use social media as outreach tools and the many other primary source repositories that do not. This divide has the potential to have a lasting impact on both institutions and the profession as a whole.

Special collections' use of social media platforms closely follows the conventional format and usage of each: short, frequent tweets on Twitter; somewhat less frequent, slightly longer updates on Facebook; and infrequent, semiregular, lengthy posts on blogs. One exception to technological determinism is the use of Facebook for longer, content-rich posts by a small number of repositories, which suggests that Facebook may be the most versatile social media platform. Repositories with larger collections are more likely to have the resources to devote to in-depth posts and to recycle content among communication outlets, and those with more staff are able to post more frequently.

Platform and institution type are the most significant variables in determining authorship and audience for social media outreach. Authorship on Facebook and Twitter is partly platform driven, reserved as a professional task because those platforms lack options allowing prepublication oversight. Authorship of blogs, which offer mechanisms for managerial oversight, is driven by the association of certain types of auxiliary staff with particular types of institutions and sometimes by institutional mission, particularly in the case of university-based repositories that allow students and interns to post as a way of documenting and exploring their experiences in special collections.

As with outreach in the nonvirtual world, an institution's mission drives audience selection. University-based repositories focus heavily on institutional students and faculty, while more publicly oriented repositories, such as those in public and government archives, tend to have a broader focus.

Goals for social media tend to focus on the broad, basic aim of increasing special collections' visibility as a resource. While accurately measuring success

in reaching such goals is challenging, survey respondents—who should be in a position to judge their own experiences—seem largely satisfied with their results. The basic quantitative data reinforce the idea that numerically, special collections' social media garner an appropriate share of readers, while qualitative comments indicate that transforming readers into active commenters and interactive participants remains an ongoing challenge.

Social media outreach by special collections repositories is essentially conservative in nature—output and audiences in the virtual and traditional spheres are similar. Repositories with more staff and collections are at an advantage in the world of social media, just as they are in the world of events and exhibitions, and repositories with traditionally larger audiences—such as state and national government repositories—retain those advantages as well. Thus, it is not accurate to suggest that social media are equal-entry, equal-opportunity outreach tools. But this disadvantage should not dissuade smaller institutions from adopting them, especially smaller repositories in larger metropolitan areas. Findings from this survey suggest that physical proximity to potential users may matter more than other factors in attracting a social media audience.

Nothing is revolutionary or groundbreaking about special collections using social media. However, as they rapidly become the primary tools for outreach, it will make sense for more and more repositories to connect with their users using social media. While the purpose of this survey was to describe social media use in the archival profession, rather than to provide a prescriptive template for adoption, a few findings may assist repositories planning on adopting social media for their institution. Rather than simply jumping on the social media bandwagon, repositories need to consider each platform carefully, its strengths and weaknesses, and how to create benchmarks for determining success. Institutions in our survey that garner the largest audiences and report the highest degree of success are able to devote staff time to managing social media, post on a regular and frequent basis, and identify their targeted audiences.

This survey was unable to answer a number of questions about social media. In particular, for repositories to use social media more effectively and efficiently as outreach tools, the profession must gain a deeper understanding of its audiences. In a future study, the authors hope to understand the demographics, interests, and reasoning of special collections' social media users. Such knowledge will become crucial to future outreach, as it will help repositories evaluate the appropriateness of their goals and provide guidance on how better to appeal to special collections' potential audiences.

Appendix A

Survey Instrument

Blog Questions

1. Does your department have one or more blogs or contribute regularly to an institutional blog?
 - a. Yes
 - b. No
2. In what year was your blog established?
[text entry]
3. What types of content are posted to your blog? Please check all that apply.
 - a. Department news
 - b. Event announcements
 - c. New acquisitions
 - d. Local history
 - e. University history
 - f. Featured researchers
 - g. Digitized items/collections
 - h. In-depth item/collection highlights
 - i. Content reproduced from collections
 - j. Other (please specify) [text entry]
4. How frequently are new posts published?
 - a. Daily
 - b. Monthly
 - c. Weekly
 - d. Other (please specify) [text entry]
5. Who contributes posts to your blog? Please check all that apply.
 - a. Professional staff
 - b. Support staff
 - c. Staff or faculty outside the department
 - d. Volunteers
 - e. Interns
 - f. Student workers
 - g. Other (please specify) [text entry]
6. What are the goals of your blog? Rank your choices from 1 to 5. (1 = most important. 5 = least important.)
 - Increase awareness of collections
 - Highlight materials from particular collections
 - Increase visibility of events
 - Illustrate behind-the-scenes activities

- Improve outreach to potential donors
 - Other (please describe below) [text entry]
7. How successfully does your blog meet these goals? Indicate the degree of success for each of the following.
- Increase awareness of collections
 - Highlight materials from particular collections
 - Increase visibility of events
 - Illustrate behind-the-scenes activities
 - Improve outreach to potential donors
 - Other (please describe below) [text entry]
- Choices for each goal were:*
- *Not at all successful*
 - *Not particularly successful*
 - *Moderately successful*
 - *Successful*
 - *Very successful*
 - *Not applicable*
8. Which of the following best describes your intended audience? Please select and rank your top three choices (1 = most important or significant audience).
- a. K–12 students and teachers
 - b. College and graduate students
 - c. Faculty
 - d. Genealogists
 - e. Other information professionals
 - f. Potential donors
 - g. Other [text entry]
9. Which of the following best describes your intended audience geographically? Please select and rank your top three choices (1 = most important or significant audience).
- a. Institutional community
 - b. Metropolitan area
 - c. State or province
 - d. Nation
 - e. International audience
 - f. Other [text entry]
10. Approximately how many page views does your blog receive per month?
- a. 0–100
 - b. 101–500
 - c. 501–1,500

- d. 1,501–5,000
 - e. 5,001–10,000
 - f. More than 10,000
11. Which of the following best describes how your blog relates to your department's other outreach efforts. Please check all that apply.
- a. Presents unique or new content
 - b. Recycles content from other outreach outlets
 - c. Links to other social media outlets
 - d. Links to other online resources
 - e. Other (please specify) [text entry]
12. Do you have a second blog you'd like to report?
- a. Yes
 - b. No

Respondents had the option of reporting up to six blogs by repeating questions 2–12.

Facebook Questions

1. Does your department have one or more Facebook Pages?
 - a. Yes
 - b. No
2. What types of content are posted to your Facebook Page?
Please check all that apply.
 - a. Department news
 - b. Event announcements
 - c. New acquisitions
 - d. Local history
 - e. University history
 - f. Featured researchers
 - g. Digitized items/collections
 - h. In-depth item/collection highlights
 - i. Content reproduced from collections
 - j. Other (please specify) [text entry]
3. How frequently is your Facebook Page updated?
 - a. Daily
 - b. Monthly
 - c. Weekly
 - d. Other (please specify) [text entry]
4. Who contributes content to your Facebook Page? Please check all that apply.
 - a. Professional staff
 - b. Support staff
 - c. Staff or faculty outside the department
 - d. Volunteers
 - e. Interns
 - f. Student workers
 - g. Other (please specify) [text entry]
5. What are the goals of your Facebook Page? Rank your choices from 1 to 5 (1 = most important. 5 = least important.).
 - a. Increase awareness of collections
 - b. Highlight materials from particular collections
 - c. Increase visibility of events
 - d. Illustrate behind-the-scenes activities
 - e. Improve outreach to potential donors
 - f. Other (please describe below) [text entry]

6. How successfully does your Facebook Page meet these goals? Indicate the degree of success for each of the following.
- Increase awareness of collections
 - Highlight materials from particular collections
 - Increase visibility of events
 - Illustrate behind-the-scenes activities
 - Improve outreach to potential donors
 - Other (please describe below) [text entry]
- Choices for each goal were:*
- Not at all successful*
 - Not particularly successful*
 - Moderately successful*
 - Successful*
 - Very successful*
 - Not applicable*
7. Which of the following best describes your intended audience? Please select and rank your top three choices (1 = most important or significant audience).
- K–12 students and teachers
 - College and graduate students
 - Faculty
 - Genealogists
 - Other information professionals
 - Potential donors
 - Other [text entry]
8. Which of the following best describes your intended audience geographically? Please select and rank your top three choices (1 = most important or significant audience).
- Institutional community
 - Metropolitan area
 - State or province
 - Nation
 - International audience
 - Other [text entry]
9. Approximately how many “likes” does your Facebook Page have?
- 0–100
 - 101–500
 - 501–1,500
 - 1,501–5,000
 - 5,001–10,000
 - More than 10,000

10. Which of the following best describes how your Facebook Page relates to your department's other outreach efforts. Please check all that apply.
 - a. Presents unique or new content
 - b. Recycles content from other outreach outlets
 - c. Links to other social media outlets
 - d. Links to other online resources
 - e. Other (please specify) [text entry]
11. Do you have a second Facebook Page you'd like to report?
 - a. Yes
 - b. No

Respondents had the option of reporting up to six Facebook Pages by repeating questions 2–11.

Twitter Questions

1. Does your department have one or more Twitter Feeds?
 - a. Yes
 - b. No
2. What types of content are posted to your Twitter Feed? Please check all that apply.
 - a. Department news
 - b. Event announcements
 - c. New acquisitions
 - d. Local history
 - e. University history
 - f. Featured researchers
 - g. Digitized items/collections
 - h. In-depth item/collection highlights
 - i. Content reproduced from collections
 - j. Other (please specify) [text entry]
3. How frequently is your Twitter Feed updated?
 - a. Daily
 - b. Monthly
 - c. Weekly
 - d. Other (please specify) [text entry]
4. Who contributes content to your Twitter Feed? Please check all that apply.
 - a. Professional staff
 - b. Support staff
 - c. Staff or faculty outside the department
 - d. Volunteers
 - e. Interns
 - f. Student workers
 - g. Other (please specify) [text entry]
5. What are the goals of your Twitter Feed? Rank your choices from 1 to 5 (1 = most important. 5 = least important.).
 - a. Increase awareness of collections
 - b. Highlight materials from particular collections
 - c. Increase visibility of events
 - d. Illustrate behind-the-scenes activities
 - e. Improve outreach to potential donors
 - f. Other (please describe below) [text entry]

6. How successfully does your Twitter Feed meet these goals? Indicate the degree of success for each of the following.
- Increase awareness of collections
 - Highlight materials from particular collections
 - Increase visibility of events
 - Illustrate behind-the-scenes activities
 - Improve outreach to potential donors
 - Other (please describe below) [text entry]
- Choices for each goal were:*
- Not at all successful*
 - Not particularly successful*
 - Moderately successful*
 - Successful*
 - Very successful*
 - Not applicable.*
7. Which of the following best describes your intended audience? Please select and rank your top three choices (1 = most important or significant audience).
- K–12 students and teachers
 - College and graduate students
 - Faculty
 - Genealogists
 - Other information professionals
 - Potential donors
 - Other [text entry]
8. Which of the following best describes your intended audience geographically? Please select and rank your top three choices (1 = most important or significant audience).
- Institutional community
 - Metropolitan area
 - State or province
 - Nation
 - International audience
 - Other [text entry]
9. Approximately how many followers does your Twitter Feed have?
- 0–100
 - 101–500
 - 501–1,500
 - 1,501–5,000
 - 5,001–10,000
 - More than 10,000

10. Which of the following best describes how your Twitter Feed relates to your department's other outreach efforts? Please check all that apply.
 - a. Presents unique or new content
 - b. Recycles content from other outreach outlets
 - c. Links to other social media outlets
 - d. Links to other online resources
 - e. Other (please specify) [text entry]
11. Do you have a second Twitter Feed you'd like to report?
 - a. Yes
 - b. No

Respondents had the option of reporting up to six Twitter Feeds by repeating questions 2–11.

Demographic Questions

1. In what state, province, or territory is your institution located?
[text entry]
2. Which of the following best describes your institution?
 - a. College or university library
 - b. Research center in a college or university
 - c. Independent research center
 - d. Government library or archive
 - e. Museum or historical society
 - f. Public library
3. What is the approximate size of the metropolitan area you serve?
 - a. 1,000–20,000
 - b. 20,001–100,000
 - c. 100,001–300,000
 - d. 300,001–1 million
 - e. More than 1 million
4. Approximately how many linear feet of manuscripts and records are held by your department?
 - a. 0–500 linear feet
 - b. 501–1,000 linear feet
 - c. 1,001–2,500 linear feet
 - d. 2,501–5,000 linear feet
 - e. 5,001–10,000 linear feet
 - f. 10,001–25,000 linear feet
 - g. More than 25,000 linear feet
5. Approximately how many print volumes are held by your department?
 - a. 0–10,000 volumes
 - b. 10,001–25,000 volumes
 - c. 25,001–50,000 volumes
 - d. 50,001–100,000 volumes
 - e. 100,001–200,000 volumes
 - f. More than 200,000 volumes
6. How many individuals staff your department in each of the following categories?
 - a. Full-time professional staff [numeric entry]
 - b. Part-time professional staff [numeric entry]
 - c. Full-time support staff [numeric entry]
 - d. Part-time support staff [numeric entry]
 - e. Student workers, interns, and volunteers [numeric entry]
 - f. Other

7. What forms of communication does your department use for outreach? Please check all that apply.
 - a. Blogs
 - b. Facebook
 - c. Twitter
 - d. Podcasts
 - e. E-newsletters
 - f. Print newsletters
 - g. University publications
 - h. Local media (newspapers, radio, television)
 - i. Other (please specify) [text entry]
8. Is there any additional information you would like to share about your special collections' or archives' social media outreach efforts? [text entry]
9. If you are interested in responding to follow-up questions, please enter your contact information below.
 - a. Name [text entry]
 - b. Title [text entry]
 - c. Email [text entry]
 - d. Phone [text entry]

Follow-up Questions

The following questions were distributed via email for text-entry responses.

1. Why does your department use one social media platform rather than another? If you use two platforms, but not the third, why?
2. If you use Facebook, in what year did you establish your Page?
3. If you use Twitter, in what year did you establish your Feed?
4. What are your guidelines to determine the types of content that are posted to your blog, Facebook Page, or Twitter Feed? Likewise, what is the general job function of the person(s) who post social media content (example: public services, reference, curator, etc.)?
5. How has your blog, Facebook Page, or Twitter Feed been successful?
6. How has your blog, Facebook Page, or Twitter Feed been unsuccessful or challenging?
7. How has social media changed the perception of your special collections?
8. How do you expect the role of social media in your department to change over the next five years?

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- ¹⁰ J. Gordon Daines III and Cory L. Nimer, "Web 2.0 and Archives," *The Interactive Archivist* (May 18, 2009), <http://interactivearchivist.archivists.org>.
- ¹¹ Kate Theimer, *A Different Kind of Web: New Connections between Archives and Our Users* (Chicago: Society of American Archivists, 2011).
- ¹² Of the 2,850 repositories surveyed, blogs, Facebook, and Twitter are the most commonly used. As no predominant blogging software was identified, all blogs were considered, whether hosted on a variety of platforms or self-hosted. Facebook and Twitter are examples of social networking and microblogging tools, but are, by far, the predominant services in their respective categories, with few other social networking or microblogging sites used by the repositories surveyed. Other forms of social media, such as Pinterest and Flickr, are used too infrequently to justify a separate survey group. Repositories incorporating "Facebook like" and "Tweet this" buttons, but not using the services themselves, were not counted, as the focus of the survey was repositories using social media to publish and disseminate content directly.
- ¹³ Terry Abraham, "Repositories of Primary Sources," last modified August 2012, <http://www.uidaho.edu/special-collections/Other.Repositories.html>. Authors browsed repository websites to find instances of social media use.
- ¹⁴ Jackie M. Dooley and Katherine Luce, *Taking Our Pulse: The OCLC Research Survey of Special Collections and Archives* (Dublin, Ohio: OCLC Research, 2010), <http://www.oclc.org/research/publications/library/2010/2010-11.pdf>.
- ¹⁵ See Appendix A for complete survey instrument. Emails with a link to the Survey Monkey questionnaire were sent out March 20, 2012, with a reminder email sent out April 10, 2012.
- ¹⁶ The United States Census Bureau's regional designations were used for geographic analysis. United States Census Bureau, *Census Regions and Divisions of the United States*, http://www.census.gov/econ/census07/www/geography/regions_and_divisions.html. Northeast: Connecticut, Maine, Massachusetts, New Hampshire, New Jersey, New York, Pennsylvania, Rhode Island, and Vermont; Midwest: Illinois, Indiana, Iowa, Kansas, Michigan, Minnesota, Missouri, Nebraska, North Dakota, Ohio, South Dakota, and Wisconsin; South: Alabama, Arkansas, Delaware, District of Columbia, Florida, Georgia, Kentucky, Louisiana, Maryland, Mississippi, North Carolina, Oklahoma, South Carolina, Tennessee, Texas, Virginia, and West Virginia; West: Alaska, Arizona, California, Colorado, Hawaii, Idaho, Montana, Nevada, New Mexico, Oregon, Utah, Washington, and Wyoming.
- ¹⁷ Counts for each Canadian province were not calculated, due to the small percentage of Canadian repositories overall identified as using social media (11.5%).
- ¹⁸ Each full-time professional staff counts as one, each part-time professional staff counts as one-half.
- ¹⁹ This study only included blogs established prior to February 2012. However, given their trajectory, government repository blogs likely continued to grow throughout 2012.
- ²⁰ "Facebook Shows Strong Growth Over Past Five Years" (February 1, 2012), comScore Data Mine, <http://www.comscoredata.com/2012/02/facebook-shows-strong-growth-over-past-five-years>.
- ²¹ Richard Waters and Chris Nuttall, "Mini-blog Is the Talk of Silicon Valley" (March 25, 2007), FT.com, "U.S. and Canada" <http://www.ft.com/cms/s/2/d0ccbc46-daf7-11db-ba4d-000b5df10621.html#axzz2584HsYa2>. Although Twitter was launched nine months prior, the March 2007 South by Southwest Interactive Conference was the national tipping point for general users with the number of daily tweets tripling shortly after the conference.
- ²² Kevin Weil, "Measuring Tweets," *Twitter Blog* (February 22, 2010), <http://blog.twitter.com/2010/02/measuring-tweets.html>.
- ²³ Frederic Lardinois, "Twitter's Growth Slows Dramatically" (January 18, 2010), ReadWriteWeb, http://www.readwriteweb.com/archives/twitters_growth_slows_down_dramatically.php.
- ²⁴ While repositories report tweeting all types of content, it is unlikely that in-depth item/collection highlights fit within Twitter's 140 character limit. It is more likely that repositories are indicating that they use their Twitter feed to link followers to the full content available elsewhere on a department website, digital repository, or other social media outlet.
- ²⁵ The mean size of professional staff in relation to auxiliary staff writers is as follows: volunteers (2.7), students (4.9), and interns (5.3). The last is skewed artificially high by an outlier. The medians are: volunteers (2), students (3.5), and interns (2.7).

- ²⁶ Independent research centers are the only institution type with less than 96% of respondents utilizing professional staff to tweet (67%), which skews the average.
- ²⁷ Government archives (14%) have on average 1.5 more staff.
- ²⁸ The mean number of posts in 12 months by blogs with a direct link from a department website is almost four times greater than for blogs without one (47.5 vs. 12.6). Additionally, a much larger proportion of blogs with direct links are “high-activity,” with at least 25 posts in 12 months (52% vs. 15%).
- ²⁹ The mean professional staff size at repositories with daily (6.8) and weekly (6.9) blogs is more than one full staff person greater than that of repositories with monthly (4.3) or other (5.2) blogs.
- ³⁰ The beginning of this shift might be dated from the 1975 establishment of the Society of American Archivists’ Committee on the Wider Use of Archives, intended to encourage activities and programs. A survey conducted by the committee in 1976 found that one-third of respondents from public archives and universities, and over half of respondents from private libraries, reported that they had no outreach programs. Of those that reported outreach programs, 38% consisted of either publications or exhibits. Ann E. Pederson, “Archival Outreach, SAA’s 1976 Survey,” *The American Archivist* 41, no. 2 (1978): 157, <http://archivists.metapress.com/content/l2070166pt18j487/fulltext.pdf>. For an argument articulating outreach as an essential function of archives, see Timothy L. Ericson, “‘Preoccupied with Our Own Gardens’: Outreach and Archivists,” *Archivaria* 31 (1990): 114–22, <http://journals.sfu.ca/archivar/index.php/archivaria/article/view/11724/12673>.
- ³¹ This may be partially due to the disproportionate number of responses received from university-based repositories.
- ³² To determine the primary goals of repositories’ social media use, the survey asked respondents to rank the importance of six goals on a sliding 5-point scale with 1 indicating the goal was very successful and 5 indicating the goal was very unsuccessful. The six social media goals were 1) increasing awareness of collections, 2) highlighting materials from collections, 3) increasing visibility of events, 5) illustrating behind-the-scenes activities, and 6) outreach to potential donors.
- ³³ Highlighting specific materials, increasing general awareness, and increasing visibility of events all received a mean rank between 2.2 and 2.5. Outreach to potential donors received a mean rank of 3.3 on a scale of 1–5.
- ³⁴ For example, outreach to potential donors—a generally less successful goal—received the highest percentage of success ratings among repositories in college and university libraries (51%) and both university-based (50%) and independent (57%) research centers. Outreach also received a better mean importance rank from both repositories in college and university libraries (3.5) and from university-based research centers (3.4) than from respondents as a whole (3.9). Event promotion, on the other hand, is most widely deemed successful by repositories in public libraries (100%), where it also received a mean importance rank of 2.6, significantly better than its overall rank of 3.0. Illustrating behind-the-scenes activities is most widely deemed successful by repositories in government libraries (79%) and in museums or historical societies (75%), which assigned a mean importance rank of 3.5 and 3.1, respectively, both somewhat better than the overall mean of 3.9.
- ³⁵ Institutions using Facebook in metro areas with a population greater than 20,000 report a 4% lower rate of success in increasing awareness to collections, a 15% lower rate in increasing visibility of departmental events, a 28% lower rate of highlighting materials from collections, a 33% lower rate of illustrating behind the scenes, and a 18% lower rate for outreach to potential donors.
- ³⁶ Twitter accounts display a count of followers and institutional Facebook pages display a count of likes. Hosted WordPress.com blogs automatically provide basic statistical tracking, and Blogger Stats can easily be added to Blogger.com blogs. More extensive free and subscription statistical applications, such as Google Analytics, StatCounter, Quantcast, and many others, can be used internally to gather more detailed information, such as reader demographics. Tracking use across organizations is complicated by the fact that different applications may use slightly varying methods of counting, and thus statistics may not be directly comparable.
- ³⁷ Smith-Yoshimura, *Social Metadata for Libraries, Archives, and Museums*.
- ³⁸ Because a parallel comparison cannot be made between blog page views and Facebook page likes or Twitter followers, they are discussed separately.
- ³⁹ Hampton et al., *Why Most Facebook Users Get More than They Give*.

- ⁴⁰ M+R Strategic Services and the Nonprofit Technology Network, *Nonprofit Benchmarks Study* (2012), 2, eNonprofit Benchmarks, <http://www.e-benchmarksstudy.com/#archive>. This study also lists the average nonprofit Facebook user count (defined as people who “like” an organization’s page) as over 31,000. By that measure, special collections repositories’ numbers appear dismal. However, it is important to note that this report looks primarily at extremely large organizations. Hence, it is more useful to consider the proportional averages it offers. The 2013 study is now available at <http://www.e-benchmarksstudy.com/>, showing somewhat increased averages: 149 Facebook fans and 53 Twitter followers for every 1,000 email subscribers. However, as the survey discussed in this article was conducted in the spring of 2012, the 2012 eNonprofit Benchmarks remains the more suitable comparison for this data. Although not confirmed, it seems likely that special collections social media experienced a corresponding increase between 2012 and 2013.
- ⁴¹ Abel Avrem, “Twitter, An Evolving Architecture” (June 26, 2009), InfoQ, <http://www.infoq.com/news/2009/06/Twitter-Architecture>; Alex Cheng and Mark Evans, “An In-Depth Look Inside the Twitter World” (June 2009), Sysomos Resource Library, “Inside Twitter” <http://www.sysomos.com/insidetwitter>.
- ⁴² Jake Stein, “New Data on Twitter’s Users and Engagement” (January 26, 2010), *RJMetrics*, <http://blog.rjmetrics.com/new-data-on-twitters-users-and-engagement/>.
- ⁴³ When basing strategic decisions on social media statistics, it is important to consider not just the raw numbers, but the probable demographics of each platform. The Pew Internet and American Life Reports include numerous publications that discuss age ranges in relation to platforms, and in the case of Twitter, also discuss racial and ethnic demographics in relation to adoption. See Aaron Smith, *Twitter Update 2011* (June 1, 2011), Pew Internet and American Life Project, <http://www.pewinternet.org/Reports/2011/Twitter-Update-2011/Main-Report.aspx>. Also see Keith Hampton, Lauren Sessions Goulet, Lee Rainie, and Kristen Purcell, *Social Networking Sites and Our Lives: Summary of Findings* (June 16, 2011), Pew Internet and American Life Project, <http://www.pewinternet.org/Reports/2011/Technology-and-social-networks/Summary.aspx>.
- ⁴⁴ At 57%, the percentage of all blogs reporting fewer than 500 page views per month is 15% lower than that of respondents reporting fewer than 500 Facebook likes and 22% lower than that of Twitter respondents reporting fewer than 500 followers.
- ⁴⁵ Somewhat surprisingly, no clear correlation exists between age of blog and number of page views reported per month.
- ⁴⁶ For example, Dooley and Luce, *Taking Our Pulse*.

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