

“So brief I don’t want to decide what to keep”: Archiving scholarly tweets

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Abstract: Twitter, which was established in 2006 as a way to communicate in 140 characters or less, is an extremely popular micro-blogging and social networking service used by a variety of people and entities for many purposes, including academics posting about their research and teaching activities. Users can follow or be followed on Twitter; when a user logs in to the site, it displays the 20 most recent “tweets” from the people they follow.

We have conducted 28 interviews with academics on Twitter in order to determine whether they think their tweets or the tweets of the academics that they follow should be saved. Our research also addresses the question of who is responsible for carrying out the activities of selecting the tweets of academics and making them available for future use.

We began interviewing participants on April 8, 2010. On April 14, 2010, after half of the interviews were complete, the Library of Congress announced that they would be archiving all public tweets. Our unique data set has allowed us to uncover shifts in thought regarding archiving Twitter after the announcement was made. The data gathered in this research is analyzed in light of traditional methods for selection and appraisal, particularly Jenkinson and Schellenberg’s models; macro-appraisal and functional analysis; and documentation strategy.

Our findings have implications for a wide variety of future research, including informing best practices for selection and appraisal; building tools and systems for the curation of web-based interactive materials; and understanding communication and collaboration among academics.

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