Personal Documentation at a Social Networking Service

DONGHEE SINN

Abstract: Social networking on the Web has become very popular in recent years. Facebook, one of the most popular social network services, has provided a useful tool for communication and networking to more than 750 million people around the world. One interesting aspect of this service is that users can converse through various contents and formats, including their own posts, photos, web links, music, video clips, etc. This phenomenon implies an important question to information professionals about personal documentation on the web. As many Web users use Facebook to network with their friends through their contents in various nature, this service can also play a role as a personal repository to document their lives day by day whether or not users perceive it this way.

There have been a great amount of studies regarding Facebook in various fields. However, in the information science field, there is only limited literature available, those mainly regarding the usage of Facebook in relation to online information sharing. This study intends to look at how Facebook is used in terms of personal documentation: how users record their everyday lives on Facebook; what are the activities they perform in regard to preserving such contents; whether they perceive these activities as their personal documentation; and what are the factors that influence their activities of personal documentation. An online survey was conducted to ask these questions to Facebook users. Interesting findings identified in this study include Facebook users' lack of perception about their activities as personal documentation. Also, some generally assumed factors such as privacy did not influence much on the activeness of personal documentation behaviors on Facebook. From the understanding about the Facebook users' activities and demands, I discuss the current status of personal archiving on a social networking site and the role of information professionals, especially archivists.

About the author:

Donghee Sinn is an assistant professor in the Department of Information Studies, University at Albany (State University of New York). She specializes in Archives and Records Management, and her research interests focus particularly on the archival research in relation to digital archives, archival use/user studies, personal digital archiving in the web environment, and archival memory and documentary heritage. She is very interested in building bridges among several disciplines including archival studies, digital archiving of cultural artifacts, and East Asian culture and heritages. She has a Ph.D. from the University of Pittsburgh. Previously she worked at the National Archives of Korea.