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The Use of Social Media in Archives

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Abstract

In this paper, we explore the use of Social Media in Archives. The last five years the archival services worldwide have started using Social Media for various purposes, such as content delivery and promotion of their work. Based on this fact, we created an online survey that was sent to various archival services in order to see how they are using these platforms and aiming to present comparative results between them (Greek and non-Greek archival services). The results of our research revealed, among others, that there is an extended use of Facebook, YouTube and blogs by the archival services, while the comparison between Greek and non-Greek services revealed a “gap” between the two cases.

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1. Introduction

Technological advances have affected and still affect the area of cultural heritage institutions (archives, libraries and museums). Given the fact that these institutions possess a wealth of information, these advances are highly implemented by them (Giannakopoulos, 2008; Giannakopoulos and Koumantakis, 2014). Social Media are a tool that has been widely used the last years by the cultural heritage institutions.

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Our research explores the use of Social Media in archival services, since many of them have started using lately Social Media platform at international level. However, in Greece, only a few services use Social Media platforms. Based on this fact, our research focused mainly on observing and examining the use of Social Media at international level (including Greece) and on presenting comparative results (Greek and non-Greek archival services).

This research took place in the Department of Library and Information Sciences (Technological Educational Institute of Athens) during 2012-2013. Part of the research results were presented in (Milasenko, 2013).

2. Literature review

The latest years, Social Media have been widely used in Libraries and Museums in order to disseminate a variety of information to the wider public (Rogers, 2009; Whelan, 2011). Nonetheless, the use of Social Media is a relatively new phenomenon in the archival services, as presented in (Milasenko, 2013).

Many researchers believe that Social Media can be used to promote the public image and the communication strategy of the archival services. In (Garaba, 2012), the author mentions that public programming can be enhanced through the use of Social Media technologies, especially in countries that do not have the financial means to spend on their communication strategy.

This trend “pushed” various professionals and researchers to deal with this issue and conduct surveys in order to explore the use of Social Media platforms in archival services. More analytically, in (Vajcner, 2011) the author presents the results of a short questionnaire sent to the ARCAN-L (a Canadian Archivists scientific forum). The results showed that archival services are less connected to Social Media than Museums and Libraries; however, they are slowly and steadily trying to integrate the use of Social Media in their daily professional routine. According to the author, the use of Social Media among archival services and archivists is growing and he believes that it is easy for these services and their staff to establish a Social Media presence, although he concludes that most institutions are too small for a formal or semi-formal Social Media maintenance structure. Note that the author strengthens the importance of having a Social Media Strategy.

A survey conducted in 2012 (Hopman, 2012) was targeted to explore the types of Social Media used in archives and special collections and how and why they use these platforms. The results of this survey shown that 54% of the respondents do not use the Social Media because of lack of time and 51% because of lack of staff. Another set of answers revealed that only 32% of the archival services have Social Media policies and/or guidelines. Finally, this survey concluded that the most widely used Social Media platforms by the respondents are Facebook (83%) and Twitter (54%).

Even though the aforementioned surveys are closely related to ours, we believe that there is a need to examine the use of Social Media in Greek archival services and compare their Social Media presence to archival services in other countries.

3. A study on the Social Media use in archival services

As already mentioned in Section 1, our research took place in the Department of Library and Information Sciences of the Technological Educational Institute of Athens during 2012-2013. The main goals of this research were a) to present the Social Media most widely used by the archival services, b) to examine how these services manage their Social Media accounts, c) to present the benefits of their use, and d) to compare the use of Social Media between Greek and non-Greek archival services.

3.1. Methodology

The research was based on a small sample of archival services (20), in order to keep a balance between the number of the Greek and non-Greek respondents (only a few services in Greece have a Social Media presence). The archival services selected fall mostly within the category of National Archives. The main choice criterion for the target group of the survey was the use of at least one Social Media platform by each service.

The methodological steps followed in order to acquire all the necessary information were the following:

- *Web visit and examination of the Social Media account(s).* During this step, we observed the Social Media behavior of every archival service by noticing how many and which accounts they have, and based on this fact, we chose the target group of the survey.
- *Design & dissemination of the survey.* After the observation of the Social Media account(s), many questions have arisen in terms of the policy followed by the archival services in order to manage these tools. For example, which is the specialization of the employees that manage and update the Social Media accounts?, and How often do they update their content?

The survey was electronically designed and disseminated since our target group (archival services' staff) is usually familiar with IT use. The use of a specific online survey tool (SurveyMonkey) allowed us to send the questionnaire and collect the results in a quicker and more effective manner. We decided to keep the anonymity in the presentation of the survey results given that some archival services (especially in Greece) were hesitating sending us and publishing their answers.

The survey consists of six questions; five of them were open-ended and one was close-ended, since open-ended questions give the chance to the respondents to freely express their views, without limitations posed by the survey designers. The survey included the following questions:

- Please name the social media you are using. Note the starting date of use for each account.
- How often do you update your accounts?
- What kind of information do you prefer to share online?
- How many employees are responsible for these accounts?
- What is their field of expertise?
- Which are the benefits gained from the use of social media for your Service? (choice between the following: a) direct contact with the Archives' users, b) improvement of the Service's public image, c) bigger attendance at various events, and d) other (please specify).

3.2. Results

As it presented in this Section, some of the respondents have negatively replied in the survey's questions, mostly because they were unwilling to share their Social Media policy. Note that even though these archival services have Social Media accounts, which they are using and updating, they provided us with answers such as "we do not publish anything, because we are not interested in social networking". This is a factor that affects the results presented below.

According to Table 1, the majority of the archival services use Facebook (78%), YouTube (45%) and blogs (45%). Twitter and Wikis are used by 34% of the services. Flickr is used by 23% of them, while Tumblr (11%) and Foursquare follow (11%). Note that the Greek archival services are only using Facebook, while the other archival services are using a wide variety of Social Media platforms (one of the National Archives chosen to participate in this research uses eighteen different platforms).

Table 1. Social Media in use by archival services

Social Media	Percentage
Facebook	78%
YouTube	45%
Blogs	45%
Twitter	34%
Wikis	34%

Flickr	23%
Tumblr	11%
Foursquare	11%

The answers to the second part of the first question (“Note the starting date of use for each account”) gave us the following results:

- Facebook: archival services have started using Facebook in 2008 (14%); however, most of them have started using it in 2010 (28%) and 2011 (28%).
- Twitter: most of the Twitter accounts were created in 2008 (33%), 2010 (33%) and 2011 (33%), while none was created in 2009 and 2012.
- Wikis: 33% of the services have started using You Wikis in 2009, 33% in 2010, 33% in 2011, none in 2008 and 2012.
- YouTube: 25% of the services have started using YouTube in 2008, 25% in 2009, 25% in 2010, none in 2011, and 25% in 2012.
- Flickr: 50% of the services have started using this tool in 2008, while the other 50% started in 2009.
- Tumblr: 100% of the services have started using this tool in 2011.
- Foursquare: 100% of the services have started using this tool in 2011.
- Blogs: archival services have started using blogs in 2009. 25% of the services have started using them in 2009, 25% in 2010, 25% in 2011, and 25% in 2012.

In the second question (“How often do you update your accounts?”), the services were asked to state how often they update their Social Media profiles. The answers to this question represent the perception of each service to this new tool of marketing and promotion. We grouped the answers to this question as follows: daily, weekly, every three months, annually, and rarely.

The answers showed us that 100% of the services that use Twitter update their accounts on a daily basis, while the same applies for 43% of the services that use Facebook. Wikis and YouTube are most likely updated on an annual basis (66% and 75% resp.). 50% of the Flickr accounts are updated on a monthly basis, while the remaining 50% are updated rarely. 100% of the services update their Tumblr accounts on a monthly basis, while 100% are updating their Foursquare account rarely. The frequency of publication of new material in blogs varies, since 25% of services update their profiles on a weekly basis, while the 75% deal with them on a monthly basis.

The third question (“What kind of information do you prefer to share online?”) is related to the information the services are sharing with the users through their Social Media accounts (see Figure 1). The majority of services (66%) publish information about the service (dates of establishment, size and types of the material, information access policy, opening hours, etc.), and their daily news. Besides, 66% of them disseminate archival material, which is considered to be interesting for the users. 55% of services also prefer to disseminate information on various events organized, while 44% of the services publish their activity reports. Also, it seems that 44% of the services disseminate material related to information literacy of the public. Finally, 11% responded negatively and they mentioned that they do not publish any information on their Social Media accounts, because they are not interested in social networking.

The answers to the fourth question (“How many employees are responsible for these accounts?”) provided the following results: 45% of the services engage two or three employees with the duty of updating their Social Media accounts. Note that some of them mentioned that these employees spend 80-90% of their daily working time on this task. A small number of services (11%) mentioned that more than ten employees are managing these profiles (however, in most of the cases, they mentioned that this is not their main professional duty). Moreover, 33% of the services responded that all their employees are engaged in the social networking service, but again this is not their main duty. 11% of the services replied that none of their employees manages their Social Media accounts.

The fifth question of the survey (“Which is their field of expertise?”) is related to the previous, since it tries to define the professional qualification of the employees that manage the Social Media accounts (see Figure 2). While

analyzing the results, we concluded that 60% of the employees come from various disciplines and educational backgrounds (such as teachers, computer scientists, public relations officers, etc). On the other, 40% of the employees that manage the accounts are archivists.

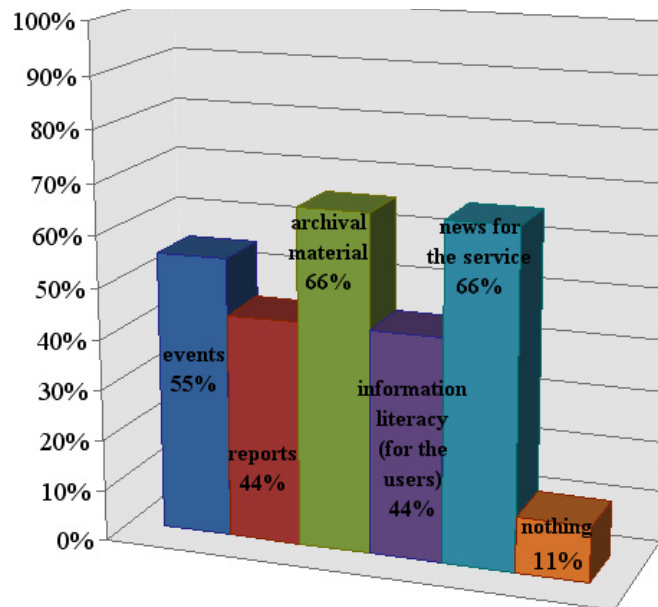


Fig. 1 Information shared in the Social Media profiles of archival services

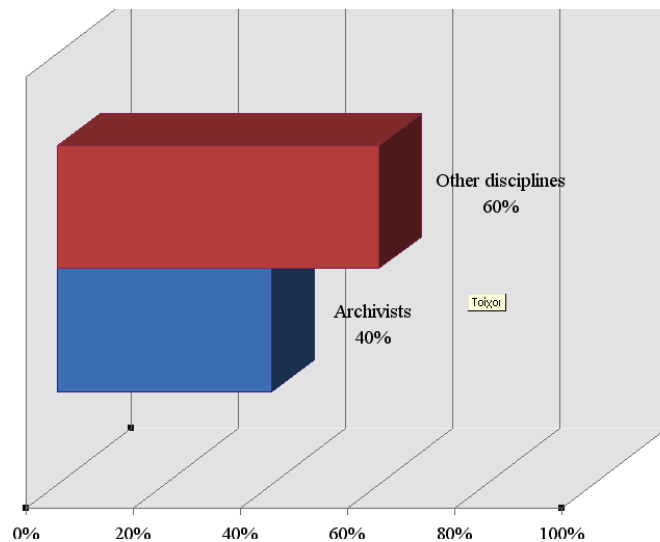


Fig. 2 Field of expertise of the employees who manage the Social Media profiles

Finally, the sixth question (“Which are the benefits gained from the use of social media for your Service?”) was the only question of the survey that combined open ended and close ended questions. According to Table 2, 88% of the services believed that through the Social Media platforms they are gaining a more direct and open contact with their users; the same number of services also believed that their Social Media profiles helped them to improve their public image. 55% of the services believed that their Social Media presence increased the users’ attendance of the various events they organize. Lastly, 44% of the services chose the answer “other (please specify)”. In this answer, most of the services responded that their Social Media presence helps them to improve the services offered to the users, thanks to the interaction with them and the easy dissemination of the users’ comments and recommendations.

Table 2. The benefits of using Social Media

Benefits of using Social Media	Percentage
direct contact with the archival services users	88%
improvement of the Service’s public image	88%
bigger attendance of various events	55%
other (please specify)	44%

3.3. Discussion

Regarding the results of this survey, it is worth noting that we met serious difficulties in collecting the responses. Few of the archival services responded without delay, while we had to send reminders to many of them. Based on this fact, we concluded that even though the archival services are willing to be open to the public and follow an extroverted policy, some of them continue to have a closed policy and are not willing to share information related to their policies and strategies.

As far as the results of the survey are concerned, we came up to the following conclusions. To start with, it seems that Facebook is the most common and widely used Social Media platform (78% services have a Facebook profile). The next two most commonly used platforms are YouTube and blogs (45% each). The Greek archival services are using only one Social Media platform (Facebook). This phenomenon occurs due to the lack of staff (as it is mentioned in the answers we received), since many Greek national archival services are operating with one or a few employees.

The Social Media platforms emerged in 2004; nevertheless, their use by the archival services started much later. As presented in the results of the second part of the first question (“Note the starting date of use for each account”), some of the services have created a Social Media account from 2008 onwards. This fact, however, is reasonable, as the massive use of Social Media started in 2008. This question was posed to the archival services aiming at seeing how rapidly they responded to the new trend of Social Media.

As far as the updating of the Social Media accounts is concerned, we concluded that the services update their accounts according to the nature and type of each Social Media. For example, accounts on Facebook and Twitter seem to be frequently updated with new material, which makes sense since users visit these platforms on a regular basis. The Greek archival services are rarely updating their profiles, mostly because of lack of time and employees and not because they do not perceive the benefits of the Social Media use. Greek archival services could not easily use Social Media platforms that “require” regular updating, such as Twitter. More specifically, one of the archival services mentioned that they rarely update their Facebook account due to lack of time, while another Greek service reported that their updating frequency is every four months. 43% of the survey’s respondents replied that they are updating their Facebook accounts on a weekly basis (mostly non-Greek archival services). This result shows the difference in the Social Media strategy followed by Greek and non-Greek archival services. Although, we believe that the updating frequency shows the importance each archival service is giving to its Social Media presence, practical reasons are forcing the Greek archival services to update their accounts less frequently.

To continue with, the results showed that most of the archival services prefer to disseminate through their Social Media accounts information and news regarding the service (66%) and archival material which may be of interest to the users (66%). Particular emphasis is given to the fact that many archival services use the Social Media in order to promote the information literacy of their users (44%). Greek archival services prefer to disseminate archival material, news and events, and annual reports. Usually, they do not promote the interaction with the users through their Social Media accounts. For instance, non-Greek archival services are implementing information literacy programs through their Social Media accounts. Again, this is reasonable, since the Greek archival services we reached through our survey continuously reported to us that they are facing serious difficulties in terms of financial and human resources. Hence, we conclude that the archival services are exploiting the Social Media tools in various ways and not only for the promotion and advertising of their work. Moreover, we conclude that some services take really seriously their promotion through Social Media, given that they have designated as responsible for this duty, employees that have a public relations background.

As a final point, we should mention that 88% of the services believe that social networking has provided them with greater visibility for their organization and more direct contact with their users. This is perhaps the main reason why every organization should use Social Media, to achieve familiarisation with the users. Communicating with users through these tools is certainly a direct way of communication, while, at the same time, the archival services can better comprehend the needs of their users.

4. Conclusion and future work

In summary, Social Media are a new and remarkable trend of the Internet, with many benefits both for persons and corporate bodies. For corporate bodies - among which are archival services – the use of Social Media can promote their image to the public and, hence, improve their public relations. It is important to note that archival services have realized the benefits of social networking and try to follow the trends of the society. Regarding Greek archival services, although there are some remarkable efforts, the big image is that due to lack of financial and human resources these services cannot effectively exploit the benefits of social networking. Note that in Greece 77,29% of the internet users have an account in Facebook (Fraidaki & Pramataris, 2012). As a result, this tendency could be effectively exploited by the archival services.

To finish, our future work will try to respond to the questions that have arisen from the survey presented in this paper:

- Is there any Social Media platform more adequate and usable for the archival services?
- Do the archival services follow a specific Social Media policy or strategy? During web research, the authors concluded that some of the archival services are following a formally written and publicly expressed Social Media policy/strategy, while others do not. It is important to examine the factors that influence the definition and implementation of this policy/strategy in the archival services, since this examination could produce a set of guidelines for the archival services that do not have a Social Media policy/strategy.

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