

THE GOOD, THE BAD AND THE UGLY: SOCIAL MEDIA PROSPECTS AND PERILS FOR RECORDS MANAGEMENT

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Abstract

Records and information professionals have in recent years, seen themselves grappling with new technologies in order to ensure that records generated in the process are captured and preserved for business requirements. It has been evident that the availability of information and communication technologies (ICTs) and their associated benefits have resulted in an increased number of organisations adopting and using social media to reach out to customers and clients. With social media issues like security, privacy, service agreements and standards are continually added and can change instantly. These frequent changes and unreliable environments call for organisations adopting social media initiatives to be aware of the risks and opportunities involved, thereby ensuring that resultant records are controlled, monitored and preserved accordingly or stand the risk of losing their digital information. This conceptual study used documentary reviews to collect data in the analysis of opportunities and risks brought by social media in the records management field and explore alternatives for records management. This study found that social media presents a volatile environment with both the good and the bad. Therefore, this study recommends that organisations that adopt and use social media platforms should put measures in place for the management of social media records to meet legal and business requirements.

Keywords: social media content; records; preservation; records management

Introduction and background

Social media is an online environment where content is created, consumed, promoted, distributed, discovered or shared for purposes that are primarily related

to communities and social activities rather than to functional, task-oriented objectives whereby media represents an environment characterised by storage and transmission, while “social” describes the distinct way these messages propagate in a one-to-many or many-to-many fashion (Gartner 2018). Although Edosomwan, Prakasan, Kouame, Watson & Seymour 2011:2) allude to the fact that there are many ideas about the first occurrence of social media. Evans, Franks and Chen (2018:21) posit that the genesis of social media platforms can be traced back to the 1970s as well as the early days of the internet, when computer scientists dialling into central systems found ways to communicate, share files and post messages through bulletin board systems, CompuServe and America Online discussion forums. The year 2000 witnessed a boost of many social networking sites springing up which transformed the interaction of individuals and organisations who share common interest (Edosomwan et al 2011:2). According to Bret (2009), social media rose to popularity and became widely known and acceptable throughout the globe with the advent of Facebook in 2004. Although the emergence of social networking sites has seen many organisations utilising these platforms to collaborate and to communicate with citizens, stakeholders and customers, in most cases issues of records management have been left behind in these efforts (Franks 2010, Iron Mountain 2012, Evans et al 2018). By analysing literature on social media, this study seeks to achieve two things; firstly, to explore the opportunities presented by social media use, and secondly, to unravel the risks that may be brought by social media to the field of archives and records management. The present literature on social media, especially in Africa, is limited in terms of exploring issues of social media records (Mosweu & Ngoepe 2019). What has been unfortunate about social media technologies is that its rapid development makes it challenging to keep up with the constantly evolving threats deployed against them and raises the risks associated with organisation’s participation in such technologies (United States Government Accountability Office 2011:10).

Conceptual framework

A conceptual framework shows the relationship between concepts and their impact on the phenomenon being investigated (Ngulube, Mathipa & Gumbo 2015). It is an argument that the concepts chosen for investigation, and any anticipated relationships among them, will be appropriate and useful given the research problem under investigation (Lester 2005:460). In view of that, the concepts chosen for this study are social media platforms, risks and opportunities of social media platforms as well as records management. Ngulube (2020:29) presents five ways of formulating a conceptual framework of a study as:

1. Putting together various concepts from different theories
2. Aspects of a theory

3. Incorporating aspects of a theory or theories, concepts from the literature, personal experiences, knowledge of the context and models
4. Integrating all the concepts from more than one theory
5. Combining concepts from the extant literature

This study has adopted the fifth way of formulating a conceptual framework which is combining concepts from extant literature to come up with a conceptual framework for this study. Figure 1 shows the conceptual framework for this study.



Figure 1: Conceptual framework

Social media platforms can be grouped into broad categories such as web publishing (e.g. Twitter), social networking (e.g. Facebook, LinkedIn), file sharing and storage (e.g. YouTube, Vimeo) (NARA 2010). The interaction of communication by organisations and individuals in these platforms results in content being generated that needs to be managed for business requirements. In the case of a government office, the Public Records Office Victoria (2013) explains this further by stating that social media posts created or received by a public officer in the course of their duties, are evidence of government business, as they document the actions taken by public officers and should be retained for reasons of accountability and transparency. Information communication technologies (ICTs) have been changing traditional concepts of records management in such a way that handwritten documents, that were the hallmark of written communication for centuries, gave way to electronic bulletin boards, email and social media (Rogers & Duranti 2017). Fondren and McCune (2018) elaborate this further by arguing that although it is the traditional understanding that information can be captured and preserved for future access as evidence, in the digital age most of content is produced, consumed and privately stored online where often it does not end up represented in the archives of national institutions.

Rogers (2009:2) argues that in the digital environment, the definition of records as defined by archival theory has been broadened to include documents, data, and digital objects of all types. Although there is little literature on managing social media records in the developed countries, the same cannot be said about developing

countries such as those in Africa. This may be attributed to what Sebina (2007) calls information asymmetry, which is a state that arises in the governance process when those elected to govern have access to a whole body of information and knowledge while citizens have restricted access to it. Sebina (2017:2-3) argues that the governance process in Africa is characterised by high levels of secrecy emanating from the independence constitutions which encouraged secrecy of the governance process where access to information through guarantees on freedom of expression was implied. These constitutional guarantees encouraged secrecy in the sense that access to information was only associated with free expression and the process was not considered a right in itself.

Franks (2010:15) posits that, in the United States of America, the issuance of a memorandum by the then president, President Obama in 2009, that instructed executive departments and agencies to use “innovative tools, methods, and systems to cooperate among themselves, across all levels of Government, and with non-profit organizations, businesses, and individuals in the private sector” prompted major federal agencies to adopt the use of the social media platform even though it became apparent that records management considerations were not included in many of the initial projects. The question that may arise then is what is a social media record? Franks and Smallwood (2014:253) are of the view that any content that meet the organisation’s definition of a record must be retained in accordance with the organisation’s records retention and disposition policy. Iron Mountain (2012:1) observes that many organisations take a sweeping approach when it comes to records management whereby instead of determining whether social media communication has value, they simply save everything or nothing at all.

The NARA Bulletin of 2014, *Guidance on managing social media records*, provide guidance to agencies to determine the record status of social media content through the following no exhaustive questions:

- Does it contain evidence of an agency's policies, business, or mission?
- Is the information only available on the social media site?
- Does the agency use the tool to convey official agency information?
- Is there a business need for the information? (NARA 2014:2).

NARA (2013) advises that if the answers to any of the above questions are in the affirmative, the content is likely to be a state record. Moreover, social media content may be a state record when the use of social media provides added functionality, such as enhanced searchability, opportunities for public comment, or other collaboration. In addition, a complete federal record must have content, context, and structure along with associated metadata (e.g., author, date of creation). The complete record must be maintained to ensure reliability and authenticity. A

research project titled *Social Media and Trust in Government* under the research agenda of InterPARES Trust (InterPARES 2016) which explored the types of social media initiatives undertaken by government organisations in the United States and Canada to determine how they utilise social media to engage citizens and provide customer service, as well as how the public reacts to those initiatives, found out that while the cities' social media posts were clearly subject to state public records laws, and all seven cities in some way indicated that social media qualified as records, there were very few procedures in place to guide their management. The cities made little effort to collect their social media feeds or develop formal procedures for collecting posts and threads of a possible legal nature (InterPARES 2016:6). Organisations may use digital diplomatics, based on a foundation of traditional diplomatic principles to help them identify digital records through their metadata and determine what metadata needs to be captured, managed and preserved (Rogers 2015:6).

Evans et al (2018) posit that in archives, initial research around social media platforms focused on archives' and archivists' use of social media and indicated that social media was primarily dedicated to promoting archival holdings. The authors caution that although social media platforms allowed individuals, communities and institutions new opportunities to document their activities, these proprietary platforms also controlled features such as access and use whereby the data created using the platform could not easily be exported to the archives' technical environment. A study done by Evans et al (2018:22-23) amongst 20 local governments in Canada and the USA to find out how they operationalised the government–citizen trust relationship through the administration of social media found that out of those 20 departments, only two cities had dedicated procedures in place for managing social media as records while for the rest, social media results were measured sporadically on an ad hoc basis for operational purposes. According to Evans et al (2018:23), standards of practice for managing social media as records have been published, as exemplified by a report on federal agencies from the IBM Center for Government in 2010 and a white paper from the National Archives and Records Administration (NARA 2013) extended by other publications relating to open data, with researchers proposing requirements, examining practice and identifying new opportunities. Fondren and McCune (2018) conclude that since institutional memory is increasingly being shaped by the content and discussions that take place on social media networking sites, it is only logical that institutions reach out to collect modern forms of expression

Problem statement

Although social media has become a primary conversational environment and a growing means of communicating for individuals and organisations (Streck 2011; Phillips 2015). The interaction of organisations, especially by government through

social media with the public or customers have introduced new challenges relating to privacy, security, data management, accessibility, social inclusion, governance and other information policy issues (Bertot, Jaeger & Hansen 2012; Begum 2015). Research has shown that some organisations do not view social media as generating any records worth governing or preserving as Iron Mountain (2012:1) revealed that even though 76 per cent of businesses regarded communications by social media as formal business records in the United States, 46 per cent had no idea that they carry legal responsibility for their content through social media platforms while, a third of the businesses surveyed described their management of social media as “unmanaged and chaotic”. Franks and Smallwood (2014:253) also state that in many cases social media content is not managed to ensure the preservation of business records. The literature reviewed for this study did not reveal much evidence of social media content being managed as records by organisation in Africa while most that do were found in developed countries. In Africa for example, governments tend to block or restrict interactions by citizens on social media through legislation such as the cybercrime and computer-related acts. Iron Mountain (2012:1) warns that if organisations do not understand the potential implications of using social media, they face the risks and a slew of records management considerations. It is therefore the aim of this study to investigate the risks and opportunities associated with the use of social media by organisations and recommendation for the management of social media records.

Research questions

- What opportunities are brought by the advent of social media for records management?
- What are the risks associated with social media use to records management?
- What recommendations are there for the management of social media records?

Literature review

Social media records management opportunities

Social media as a communication tool has enabled organisations to reach out to their customers and provide them with services and products. Although Sajithra and Rajindra (2013) are of the view that social media is just an extension and explosion of traditional word of mouth networks of disseminating information, the National Archives and Records Administration (2010) posits that social media enables organisations to connect people to the government and to share information to support business processes that both create and manage content

through online publishing, social networking and file sharing and storage which are discussed below.

Online publishing

Online publishing, which also known as web publishing is the process of publishing original content on the internet which includes building and uploading websites, updating the associated webpages, and posting content to these webpages online. The content meant for web publishing can include text, videos, digital images, artwork, and other forms of media (Techopedia 2018). Examples include platforms such as microblogging (Twitter, Plurk), blogs (WordPress, Blogger), wikis (Wikispaces, PBWiki) and mashups (Google Maps, popurls) which allow users to create, publish, and reuse content to reach a large audience and gain feedback (NARA 2010). Twitter, for example, is a real-time information network used by millions of individuals, organisations and businesses to share information, commentary, descriptions of events, and highlight online and social media content (United States of America Center for Disease Control and Prevention 2012). The same source in its social media guidelines requires its employees to set-up a system to keep track of their Twitter posts, @replies, re-tweets and mentions to comply with Federal Guidelines for records management and archiving.

Social networking

Social networking platforms like Facebook are used to provide interactions and collaboration among users. Boyd and Ellison (2007) define social network sites as web-based services that allow individuals to construct a public or semi-public profile within a bounded system, to articulate a list of other users with whom they share a connection, and to view and traverse their list of connections and those made by others within the system. The National Archives and Records Administration (2013:22) *White Paper on Best Practices for the Capture of Social Media Records* advises government agencies to use the export capabilities that certain platforms have built into their native systems such as the social networking platform Yammer which converts content into CSV files and make the files available for downloading. Social media affords archival institutions to invite users' contributions and participation in many archival functions such as enabling users to add their own descriptions of archival resources, share their knowledge with other users, select material for digitisation, rate or rank the usefulness of material, and add their own content to archives' websites (Theimer:2011). This interaction is viewed with scepticism by Duff, Johnson and Cherry (2013:80) who question whether archives will ever be able to relinquish their control over user-contributed content in order to make archives more open and interactive through social media and digital resources.

File sharing and storage

Social media platforms such as YouTube, Google docs and SharePoint are used to share files and host content. According to Ngoepe (2017: 38), cloud storage has become an increasingly viable storage option for archives that are unable to afford or maintain in-house, private digital infrastructure suitable for long-term preservation of digital holdings although a reliable cloud archive that meets the requirements and expectations of a trustworthy virtual repository is still not well developed. In a study conducted by Duff et al (2013) to investigate aspects of archives' use of social media in Canada, when participants were asked to rank archival online services by indicating the four most important ones, they selected full-text searchable documents, scanned images of documents, finding aids created by archivists, and online reference services as the most important while social media applications such as YouTube videos, user-contributed finding aids, archives blogs, and tagging services were ranked lower with only two or three people including tagging, wikis, Twitter, or Flickr in the top four services. The researchers concluded that at least at the time of the research the participants, were not particularly interested in whether archives offered social media applications but were very interested in archives improving access to digital documents.

Promotion and outreach

The advent of social media affords archival institutions to be widely known as they can effortlessly interact with their customers. Records and archives field have not yet fully utilised the benefits that came with social media as Sinclair (2012:1) argues that in the early work of archives the main focus was on the functions of appraisal, arrangement and description with little attention to the outreach function. Getting more people interested in the archives requires public archival institutions to be more creative and innovative (Saurombe & Ngulube: 2015:31). A research survey done by Bountouria and Giannakopoulou (2014) amongst archival services in order to see how they were using these platforms revealed that 88% of them believe that social networking has provided them with greater visibility for their organisation and more direct contact with their users. As social media has transformed the interaction and communication of individuals throughout the world (Edosomwan et al 2011:2), it has a potential and impact in strengthening relationships with the user community and with other institutions, creating new access points and increasing the visibility of collections, promoting the reputation of the institution or department, and advocating for the value of the archives' resources and services (Mason 2014:158; Garaba 2012:26; Edosomwan et al 2011:8; Bountouria & Giannakopoulou 2014:511). Moreover, in Africa, there is a need for

greater collaborative work between archivists, records managers and other information profession providers such as librarians and computer scientists on issues relating to information collection, processing storage and dissemination (Mnjama 2005:469)

Social media records management risks

The literature reviewed indicated that the use of social media which Franks and Smallwood (2014:2537) called “the Wild West of collaboration and communication” brings risks such as privacy, security of information, governance and policy issues (Franks 2010:32; CIO Council 2009:6; Bortot et al 2012: 133; Begum 2015:I; United States Government Accountability Office 2011; Duranti & Rogers 2014:9). The Wild West from the American history portrays a situation characterised by chaos and where rules do not apply but there is something to learn from this chaotic environment. The decision to embrace social media technology is a risk-based decision, not a technology-based decision (CIO Council 2009:6). This has also been found by the United States Government Accountability Office (2011) report which revealed that the use of social media brings challenges in managing and identifying records, protecting personal information, and ensuring the security of information and systems by government.

Privacy

As much as the digital world has brought about increased access to information through platforms such as social media, Duranti and Rogers (2014:1) argue that the right to know comes at a rising cost to our privacy and anonymity, due to a complex web of data collection and surveillance. Ngoepe, Mokoena and Ngulube (2010:42) argue that in an electronic records management environment, privacy is a concern as personal data is constantly being collected, stored and often distributed easily without the owner’s knowledge or consent. Recently, Mark Zuckerberg, the Chairman and Chief Executive Officer of Facebook gave a testimony over the company’s handling of user privacy at a hearing before the United States House of Representatives Committee on Energy and Commerce after the scandal of Cambridge Analytica where a Cambridge University researcher named Aleksandr Kogan was able to access and collect some information about tens of millions of people which was later shared without their consent (Zuckerberg 2018). Even though Facebook promised to tighten its privacy policies, ensuring total privacy online has always proved to be difficult to achieve. This therefore calls for organisations to control access to records generated online, as records contain personal and operational information that should be protected against unauthorised access (Ngoepe, Mokoena & Ngulube 2010:47).

Security

In electronic environments, records can be altered, manipulated, overwritten or destroyed, resulting in an unauthentic and unreliable record or, worse, no record at all (IRMT 2009:34). Security of social media records maybe compromised as in most cases organisations do not have control of where their information is stored. A study done by Yakobi (2016) to investigated the impact made by social media on teams in the banking sector found that social media adoption came with risks such as fraud, hacking of information and so forth. These impacts were identified which could violate policies and procedures of financial institutions. The study concluded that commercial bank branch managers should formulate and develop policies to guide employees on the use of social media. This calls for organisations to put up strict security measures in place to safeguard their records even though Franks and Smallwood (2014:264-256) caution that implementing tight security on these types of mass networks would likely slow response time and inhibit user experience. The US Government Accountability Office (2011) provides examples of security threats organisations face when using commercially provided social media services and social media threat as follows:

- *Spear phishing*- An attack targeting a specific user or group of users that attempts to deceive the user into performing an action, such as opening a document or clicking a link that can lead to a compromise of the user's system by installing malicious software.
- *Social engineering*- An attack using personal information to build trust with a user in order to gain unauthorised access to sensitive information, systems, and networks or to engage in identity fraud, among other things.
- *Web application attack*- An attack utilising custom web applications embedded within social media sites, which can lead to installation of malicious code onto organisations' computers to be used to gain unauthorised access.

Legality

Questions of authenticity and reliability of computer-generated records would always arise unless there are legal mechanisms put in place to ensure that the records are created, used, maintained and disposed of in a controlled manner (Mosweu 2012:25). Research has shown that preservation of records generated in a cloud environment such as social media has been a difficult task (Bertoit et al 2012; Begum 2015; Evans et al 2018). Organisations who adopt and use social media platforms should take a conscious decision to archive the data generated or face legal risks

since from a records management perspective as social media posts may serve the legal and compliance purposes as they include metadata and hyperlinks to content that must be preserved and produced during e-discovery (Franks & Smallwood 2014:264-254; Madhava 2011:33). In the digital environment, research agendas in the information management communities focus on authenticity as an integral value that must be protected over time and across technological change through digital preservation (Rogers 2015:2).

Recommendations for the management of social media records

The reviewed literature has highlighted the opportunities and risks associated with managing social media records. Iron Mountain (2012:3) argues that the reality is that all records within the organisation whether they are in hard copy or in digital format should be part of the same processes and policies, including social media. The following are recommended procedures for managing social media records:

- Classified according to their value
- Tabbed and indexed so they can be located and retrieved in a timely manner
- Backed up, replicated and/or archived according to company policy
- Managed throughout their life cycle to account for compliance and eDiscovery requirements (Iron Mountain 2012:3)

It is the contention of this study that social media platforms are with us in this age and era whereby organisations that do not manage the generated records as a result, would find it difficult to fulfil some of the legal requirements. It is therefore recommended that social media records be captured and preserved as all other formats and issues of privacy and security be extended to social media records governance.

Records capture and preservation

Although NARA (2013:9) indicates that social media content capture is an emerging topic that has not been consolidated around standards for capture, Iron Mountain (2012:2) argues for the management of social media records as they are growing rapidly in volume and intensity where failure to take action quickly will result in records management challenges and increase in organisational costs. The United States of America Centre for Disease Control is one organisation which has social media policies for Twitter and Facebook that demands the establishment of a records management system to be set-up to keep track of their Twitter and Facebook activities to comply with Federal guidelines for records management and archiving (United States of America Center for Disease Control and Prevention

2012). The Public Records Office Victoria (2013) outlines the type of social media posts that has to be captured to include:

- The original post from the social media site
- Responses, if any are received, to the original post
- Relevant posts identified when monitoring social media sites
- Content republished by the agency when the content has come from elsewhere (take note of copyright).

Despite the fact that the form of a digital object may be neither fixed nor stable in the traditional sense as they exist in a fluid horizontal network where authorship and/or ownership may be difficult or impossible to determine and the diverse range of textual, visual and auditory data, may or may not conform to the definition of “record”, they still need to be maintained and preserved with their authenticity and reliability protected (Rogers 2014:8). Acknowledging the difficulty in preserving social media records, Madhava (2011:34) advises organisations to use their existing knowledge about preserving electronic records as a base to build a strategy for preserving social media records. The issue of the preservation of authentic digital records has been dealt by the InterPARES Project which developed knowledge essential to the long-term preservation of authentic records created and/or maintained in digital form, and provided the basis for standards, policies, strategies and plans of action capable of ensuring the longevity of such material and the ability of its users to trust its authenticity (Rogers 2009:37).

Privacy and security

To manage social media records, there is a need to extend best practices for privacy and security that employed the overall records management programme. This includes establishing written policies and guidelines regarding what information can and cannot be shared, who is authorised to speak on behalf of your organisation and what social media tools can be used (Iron Mountain 2012). In terms of security of records in cloud environments, measures such as access control, monitoring, agent validation and authorised destruction should be implemented to prevent unauthorised access, alteration, concealment or destruction of records. Information about the controls that were applied to a record and when they were applied should be recorded in the record's process metadata (ISO 15489-1 2016).

Policy requirements

The literature reviewed indicated that most countries have lagged behind to amend the relevant policies and legislation to accommodate governance of social media records, although most developed countries have policies and guidelines in place

for the management of digital and social media records (Ngoepe 2017; Parer 2002; Jaeger et al 2012; Goh et al 2012; Franks & Smallwood 2014). It is recommended that organisations embarking on using social media to have social media policies and amend relevant regulation to accommodate the management and preservation of social media records. Franks and Smallwood (2014) agree that, if content-posting guidelines are not clear, then the informal nature of social media posting potentially can be damaging to an organisation. As an example, the United States of America Center for Disease Control and Prevention (2012:1) has social media guidelines which has a specific section on records management stating that “Facebook page administrators must establish a system to collect all Facebook posts, comments, fan posts, events, and hidden posts (spam) to comply with Federal guidelines for records management and archiving”. National archival institutions in any country should be seen to direct the agenda for the management of social media records as pointed out by Mnjama (2005:464) that archival legislation plays a crucial role as it provides the legal framework for the management of public sector records.

Training

Continuous training becomes necessary in the digital era as software and hardware changes almost every day. This has been espoused by Franks (2010:7) who argues that records management training to mitigate the risks, such as posting incorrect or confidential information on social media sites, associated with emerging technology, should be developed or incorporated into existing training programs. Ngoepe (2017:39) reports that in Africa, with the acknowledgement that African educators lack expertise and are ill-equipped to train others in digital records preservation, the International Council on Archives has developed an African strategy which focuses on archival advocacy and training of trainers in digital records management. The International Council of Archives Africa (ICA) Strategy has a strategic aim of advocacy with the emphasis on practical training in digital records management and preservation. This was meant to expand the scope and coverage of training to archivists and records managers across the continent with the long-term goal being to enable digital records management and preservation to be taught in a practical way in universities across Africa (Lowry 2015:3). If implemented as desired, this will augment the skills by African archivists and records management in digital records management and preservation.

Conclusion

Social media presents opportunities to the field of archives and records management with its ability to connect people, share and manage content but this comes with challenges to the field as issues of security, privacy and legal issues are not easy to deal with on cloud environments. Trying to put controls on these pains has also proved to defeat the whole idea of social media use and interaction. Duff

et al (2013:81) concluded that research studies that have investigated how archives utilise social media applications indicate that although social media applications hold great promise, they have had limited impact on archival practice. This study concludes that although social media presents a world of chaos, it also has its good side and therefore organisations embarking in the use of social media initiatives should put measures in place for social media records management to meet business requirements.

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