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# Social Media Data Preservation in an API-driven World

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# What is this talk about?

1. Some problems with preserving social media data
  2. What do APIs mean for archival preservation?
  3. Some current examples of social media data archives
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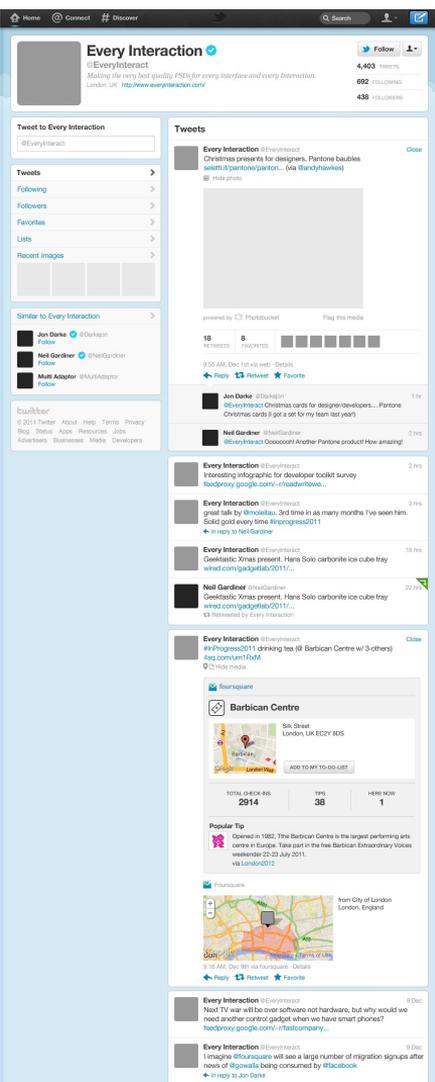
# Goals for the audience

APIs are becoming a mark of our digital culture: as access points, they enable data brokers, data infrastructures, and new markets

How does rapid software development and developers' terms of service from social media **platforms** problematize current approaches to digital preservation?

Should we be documenting the APIs themselves?

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# Social media data: Activity streams

Social media platforms enable users to creation and share a variety of digital objects, many user actions are **locked-in** to platforms

World Wide Web Consortium (W3C) maintains an “Activity Streams” standard defining and describing a JSON-based method for describing a range of user actions from social media

An Activity Stream is a type of metadata associated with digital environments that allows platforms to more consistently manage user data, APIs provide access to these activity streams

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*Generic Twitter activity stream wireframe.*

# — social media as a record

Social media data is an *assemblage* of images, text, metadata, linked content, and engagement data

Shawn Walker @ ASU  
“ephemerality of social media data”

Anne Helmond @ University of  
Amsterdam “platform  
historiography”

Libby Hemphill @ UMSI + ICPSR  
Federated collection building with  
metadata enhancements

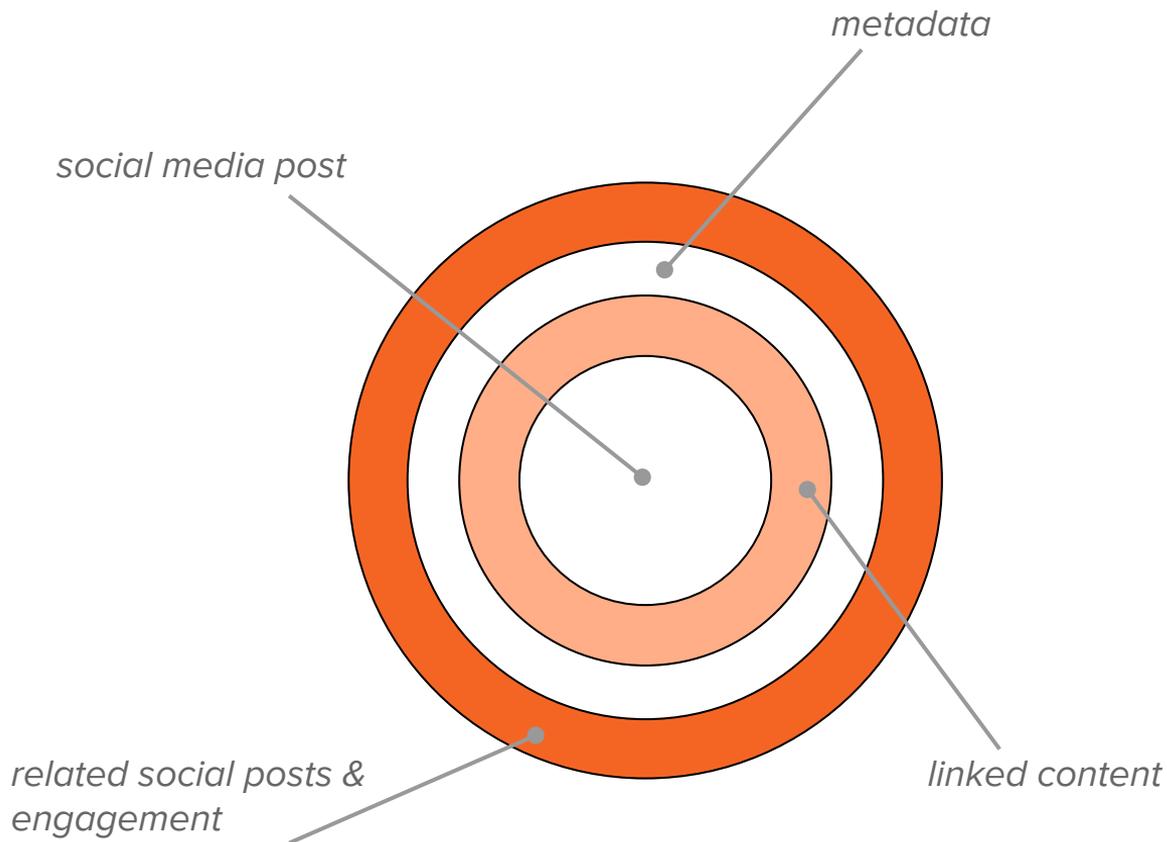


Figure from Shawn Walker (2018) [The Ephemerality of Social Media](#).

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# What's an API?

Application Programming Interface (APIs) are software that specify rules by which software talk to each other

They allow “developers” (users) to articulate queries, limit frequencies and results that are returned

Different APIs allow for purpose driven access and extraction.

Tinder uses Facebook API to match dates

Yelp uses Google Maps API to recommend restaurants

Government Agency uses Twitter API to gather tweets with reports about disasters

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# Why do APIs matter?

Since the early 2000s, platform APIs have become a source of value and data capital for social media companies, insurance companies, hedge funds, advertising and e-commerce platforms

APIs shape our archival collections, possibilities for access

This API access model assumes data will always be created by users to be collected by platforms to be (re)used as a resource, for-profit motivations

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# Existing models

# DocNow

Tool suite: Tweet Catalog, Hydrator, Twarc

Collaborative effort

Web archives, social media tools

Prioritizes and leads in setting norms for ethical social media data collection, “*commitment extends to Twitter's notion of honoring user intent and the rights of content creators.*”

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<https://www.docnow.io/>

# Social Feed Manager

Web app that harvests social media  
data from Twitter, Tumblr, Flickr, and  
Sina Weibo

University research library

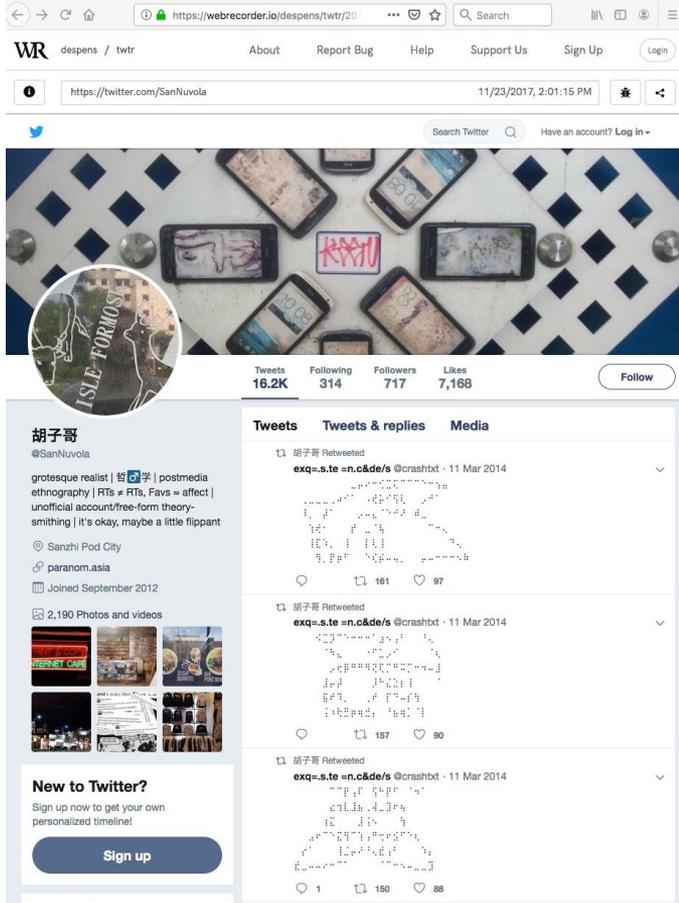
Tool has research, appraisal, and  
preservation concepts 'baked in'

*"Because of the difficulty of getting  
clarity from Twitter, the ambiguity of  
Twitter's policies, and our desire to do  
our work, most of us performing research  
and archiving with Twitter data make our  
own private interpretation."*

*(Littman, 2019)*

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<https://gwu-libraries.github.io/sfm-ui/>  
<https://t.co/ndVr2dWJUY>



# Webrecorder

Interactive recordings of web resources

Captures **contexts** of user production

Samples of user interface (internal and external) contexts

The need for multiple perspectives on platforms: user experience, developer's documentation, platform's commercial decisions

<https://webrecorder.io/>

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## Take-aways for the audience

APIs are becoming artifacts of our digital culture

Social media platforms' **terms of service** for developers challenge current approaches to extraction-based digital preservation

How should we preserve APIs?

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# thanks!

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