Curation through Use: Understanding the Personal Value of Social Media

Xuan Zhao[1, 2] and Siân Lindley[1]

[1]Microsoft Research
21 Station Road, Cambridge, CB1 2FB, UK

[2]University of Michigan
105 South State St., Ann Arbor, MI 48109, USA

xuanzhao@umich.edu; sianl@microsoft.com

ABSTRACT

Content generation on social network sites has been considered mainly from the perspective of individuals interacting with social network contacts. Yet research has also pointed to the potential for social media to become a meaningful personal archive over time. The aim of this paper is to consider how social media, over time and across sites, forms part of the wider digital archiving space for individuals. Our findings, from a qualitative study of 14 social media users, highlight how although some sites are more associated with 'keepable' social media than others, even those are not seen as archives in the usual sense of the word. We show how this perception is bound up with five contradictions, which center on social media as *curated*, as a *reliable* repository of *meaningful* content, as readily *encountered* and as having the potential to present content as a compelling *narrative*. We conclude by highlighting opportunities for design relating to curation through use and what this implies for personal digital archives, which are known to present difficulties in terms of curation and re-finding.

Author Keywords
Personal information management; archive; exhibition.

ACM Classification Keywords
H.5.m. Information interfaces and presentation (e.g., HCI): Miscellaneous.

INTRODUCTION

Content generation on social network sites has been considered mainly from the perspective of networking, with researchers emphasizing interaction via social media as a performance of identity and a means of maintaining relationships. Site features such as newsfeeds and notifications, along with emerging social conventions that emphasize 'nowness' [11] result in an environment in which users focus on the 'present' [23] and avoid posting old content, which will surface 'out of time' [11]. Yet this content does, of

course, persist, and because of this social network sites accumulate content including status updates, pictures and videos. Thus, social network sites have also been positioned as hosting 'virtual possessions' [22], which become more personally meaningful over time [32], and which form part of a wider space in which online content in itself can be considered an archive [17].

However, the fact that social media persists by default (there is no option to 'keep' social media – it is simply *there*) poses challenges to maintaining a collection that is meaningful and that can be held in what is, after all, a public space. Hogan [12] positions social media as an enduring 'exhibition' of personal data, and recent work around deletion [e.g. 28, 29] highlights the problem of keeping social media on display. Content that does not fit the way one wishes to present oneself must be removed. This concern with audience and self-presentation contrasts with the curation work that underpins more personal archives. For example, material possessions can be hidden away in 'deep storage' [15], and virtual possessions become buried in nested folders on laptops and hard drives [26]. These possessions are rarely encountered by their owners, let alone by others, and so the curation work that underpins them can entail a focus on what one wants to keep rather than what one wishes to share.

In this paper, we explore whether social media has archival value, given that it is curated as an exhibition rather than as something to be kept in the long-term. We consider whether new opportunities for design open up if social network sites are positioned as comprising an archive of sorts, rather than content that is ephemeral [11] and trivial [17]. As pointed out by Good, research is needed to identify "social media users' self-archiving habits, desires, abilities and awareness online" [8, p. 570].

To explore this further, we undertook a qualitative study in which 14 participants were asked to create digital keepsakes using their social media content. While participants did not typically view social media sites as repositories in the usual sense of word, their practices nevertheless resonate with certain aspects of personal information management. Social media generated for particular audiences results in a landscape of content across social media sites, with some (especially Facebook) hosting content viewed as personally meaningful. Our findings indicate that social media is *curated* and is considered a *reliable* place to store *meaningful* content. Furthermore, it is easily *encountered* and has the potential to present

content as a compelling *narrative*. We draw implications for design relating to the notion of curation through use, and the bridging of online and offline archival spaces. We build on this to consider what opportunities lie in drawing together social media and personal digital archives.

RELATED WORK

Before describing the study in more depth, we provide an overview of related research. We focus on prior work in which social media is positioned firstly, as a means of connecting with others, and secondly, as a virtual possession.

Research on why people use social network sites, and what they get out of them, often highlights values such as social connection and social surveillance [13, 3, 14]. In this network-centric view, social media is conceptualized as a tool to facilitate tailored and purposeful identity performance [e.g. 5, 16], in which user activities are shaped by different audiences present in online [1, 18] and faceted [6] networks.

This concern for audience, however, is dynamic. Recognizing that social media sites do not only facilitate interaction in the moment, but also present an aggregated history of interactions (e.g. via the Facebook Timeline), recent research suggests that identity performance in social media should no longer be considered simply as a snapshot in time, but something to be revisited, re-evaluated, and that is subject to changes in audience and relationships that unfold in the long-term. For example, Hogan [12] points out that social media, once generated, become an exhibit that is encountered by different audiences and in different contexts. Performance of self is not an ephemeral act, but an enduring act. He emphasizes the system's role as 'curator' of this exhibition; algorithms mediate the audience's experience of social media. However, it is clear that users also play a role in curating these exhibitions. For example, recent research on deletion of social media highlights users' on-going curation work, work that is triggered especially due to changing circumstances, such as relationship breakdowns, and which can occur long after the moment of upload [28, 29, 32].

This conceptualization of social media as enduring exhibition highlights a form of curation work that is quite different to that underpinning personal archives, but this is not to say that social media does not have personal archival value. Research has shown that social network sites are host to meaningful content that might be considered a form of 'virtual possession' [22], which can support reminiscing [24] and reflection [30, 33]. In line with this view, recent work by Zhao *et al*. [32] shows that as social media content becomes older, its value to the user shifts from supporting the performance of identity to something that is more personal. Their participants were less concerned with whether content would be viewed by others after a certain point, focusing instead on whether the content would have personal value. Lindley *et al*. [17] have also suggested that online repositories such as Flickr, together with social media sites, blogs and webmail accounts, work in concert to form an online archive of sorts,

although in this account the potential for social media to comprise a good deal of trivial content is also highlighted.

The above suggests that social media could have archival value for the self, but also highlights the complexity here. Social media has been described as both meaningful and trivial, being generated for the maintenance of a social network, but also potentially accruing personal value over time. Furthermore, it is well known that people already struggle with the task of managing their digital content. Digital archiving is subject to many difficulties: special content is mixed in with the mundane; digital content in general is sorted, organised and encountered only infrequently [26]; and users find it surprisingly difficult to locate even their favourite photos [31] or other cherished digital mementos [27]. It is possible that positioning social media as another form of personal digital archive may only add to this melee. In this paper, we begin to explore opportunities for design in this space. Can social media, which is principally curated as an exhibition and means of sharing, be re-considered as a meaningful personal archive? And if social media, and the web more generally, can be considered an online archive of sorts [17], what does this suggest for archives that are located more privately, but that may suffer from problems of organization, curation and a lack of revisitation?

RESEARCH AIMS

The aim of this study is to consider more carefully whether social media has value as an archive, both in itself, within and across sites, and as part of a wider array of virtual possessions. We do this through an activity designed to encourage participants to reflect more closely on the value of content hosted on various social network sites, by making a 'keepsake' out of social media. This positions social media as something that one might wish to keep rather than share. We interpret our findings in the context of digital archiving.

METHOD

Participants

14 participants completed the study. They were 9 women and 5 men, with an age range of 20-53 years (M=29, SD=8.83). Most were in their 20s, however, we deliberately included two people in their forties and fifties as we expected they might show different attitudes towards and practices in using social media. All participants were living in and around a city in the south-east of England, although eight nationalities were represented. The social media tools participants frequently used include Facebook, Twitter, Instagram, Snapchat, Pinterest, Vine and LinkedIn. Participants were given a £30 gift voucher to thank them for their participation.

We recruited social media users through university email lists and Facebook posts. Participants were screened via a survey, through which we collected demographic information and details of frequently used social media tools. In order to have a diverse sample of people who use different social media platforms, but also share some common experiences, we sought to recruit Facebook users who were also active users of other social media sites.
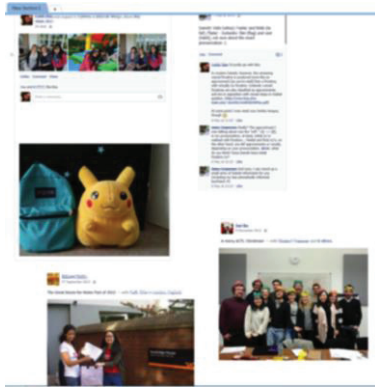
Figure 1. Anonymized example of a digital 'keepsake' produced by a participant.

Interviews and Activity

Participants were invited to our research lab for a 60-minute in-depth interview about their experiences with different social media tools, and how they perceive the social media that is produced through these platforms. The first 15 minutes of the interview focused on reasons for using different social media tools, the nature of social media that persists on these platforms, and how social media archives are perceived as different or similar to personal archives stored either online or on personal devices. Following this, participants were asked to browse content from their various social media profiles and make a digital 'keepsake', by capturing online content (for example, pictures, status updates, comments, etc.) that they would like to keep. They organized this content in a way that was meaningful to them using OneNote 2013, a free-form screen clipping and note taking tool (see Figure 1 for an example). The activity was designed as a way of encouraging participants to react to and reflect upon their social media archives, with a particular focus on the value of the social media that persists there, and was inspired by a study be Petrelli *et al*. [25], in which participants captured 'future memories' by making time capsules. Participants spent 15 minutes alone to focus on making their keepsakes before continuing the activity with the researcher present. The keepsakes as well as the social network sites that were used in their making grounded the remainder of the interview.

Analysis

The interviews were audio- and video-recorded, and screen-grabs were taken of the keepsakes produced by the participants. Our analysis focuses on the interviews rather than the keepsakes, as these were primarily intended to serve as prompts for discussion. Interviews were fully transcribed and analyzed for emergent themes using grounded theory techniques [7]. In initial data analyses, open codes were developed and assigned; these were then iterated and the relationships between them explored through axial coding. Axial codes include: management strategies for different social media tools; the nature of social media; and sentiment around losing content. Five high-level themes were then identified; these are curation, meaningfulness, encounterability, reliability, and narrative. The first author developed the coding

scheme. Both authors read all transcripts and discussed and reached consensus with regard to coding at each iteration of the analysis.

FINDINGS

We introduce our findings by describing firstly, how participants responded to the activity of making a keepsake, and secondly, how they viewed the value of social media across different sites. We then present the five overarching themes that emerged in the analysis.

Making a Digital Keepsake

The process of making a digital keepsake out of social media led participants to reflect on both the experience of making and the value of the social media they came across. We focus on the latter in more depth in the following section, as it is nuanced, but reactions to the activity in general were positive. The process was described as similar to *"a story you are writing"* (P2) or to the curation of an old photo album, and was engaged in as a meaningful activity:

"It's brilliant. I definitely haven't been down this bit of my Facebook for a long time. There were loads of comments and stuff that I didn't know were on there as well, which is good… it just makes me laugh." (P10)

Participants tended to organize their keepsakes either around major life events (e.g. having a baby, getting engaged, moving to a new location, getting a new job) or around significant relationships (e.g. family, close friends, romantic relationships), and selected content accordingly:

"I think it would still be centered largely on big events… Other than that, I guess, more mundane parts of life, I probably wouldn't [include them]." (P1)

"My idea is to create my multiple identities, academic life, me as a friend, my life as a wife probably, and my life as a daughter." (P14)

Photos formed a substantial part of the keepsakes, in line with more traditional ideas of photo albums, collages and scrapbooks. They were described as "*the best thing you can do to try to recall a memory*" (P1). Yet other content was also included, such as status updates, conversations, and even URLs that had been posted. The social metadata (e.g. comments and likes) that accompanied such content online was also typically included in the snipped version; indeed, some participants described that the value of such content was to be found in the conversations that augmented it:

"Because I really liked this link, I liked the conversation that I had with my friends, I liked what I've said and I don't often do this, you see I don't often share links but… I like the story that was relevant to the link that was one of my memories about something." (P5)

Even though Facebook was only one amongst a range of social media sites used by our participants, and we encouraged them to reflect on content spread across different platforms when building their keepsakes, Facebook was in most cases

the go-to site during the activity. Next, we consider why this was so.

The Value of Social Media across Sites
Facebook was often the first port of call when building a keepsake, despite it being only one of many social media sites used by the participants. The predominance of photos used by participants may partly account for this, as most had photos hosted on Facebook. However, participants also described the existence of a 'higher bar' for posting content to Facebook, which made it more probable that social media worth keeping would be found there. This seemed bound up with two properties of social media: its expected audience and its expiry rate. These are not mutually exclusive, but together influence expectations around the value of social media and how this is maintained over time.

Expected audience
Consistent with work that explores social media as a means of maintaining relationships, we found different social network sites were associated with different audiences. For example, for our participants, Twitter was mostly associated with peers and people with shared interests but who are not real-life contacts, whereas tools like Snapchat were mainly used with small and specific groups of friends. Facebook tended to be associated with the most diverse audiences, mainly family and friends, but also contacts from different spheres of life. This broad audience encompasses parents, extended family and ex-boyfriends, and was often described as having built up over time as the Facebook network had expanded. The diversification of network composition, from an initial group of *"college friends"*, meant that participants perceived a need to be more careful in posting content on Facebook:

"On Twitter it's about a TV show or it's about where I am going, whereas on Facebook I don't like to update it so often but [only for] something I want a lot of people to know about…like graduation." (P3)

In addition to writing fewer silly and mundane updates, the nature of interactions via Facebook had also changed. Wall conversations were noted as having declined, with the emphasis now being on the sharing of personal content:

"*When I got Facebook originally like when it was still for university only… you had a much smaller number of friends, you know, it was more of a personal thing, like you could just write on somebody's wall…It's funny as time progressed I found it became less of a 'I'm going to write on this person's wall' or whatever, and it became more of this push-out model, like publishing your own content."* (P4)

However, this is not to say that such interactions no longer exist. Instead, they had shifted to sites like Twitter and Snapchat:

"I have become more selective of what I post (on Facebook) as I get older, and that might be because of the introduction of Twitter. All the stuff that I used to post on Facebook when

I was younger, like going out tonight duh duh duh, I do that on Twitter now." (P3)

Content expiry rate
As noted in prior research [11, 32], content on social network sites falls out of currency fairly rapidly, after which commenting on or otherwise interacting with it becomes unexpected and goes against social conventions. Participants in this study noted how this rate of expiry differs across sites:

"It expires. I mean you tweet and like 20 minutes later it's not on your feed, anyone's feed anymore… Whereas on Facebook, it's like one week or so… It kind of sticks on your profile on Facebook…" (P6)

This 'stickiness' is sociotechnical. The *"deluge of information"* (P4) on Twitter meant that tweets were perceived as expiring more quickly, and of course this is self-reinforcing. *"Less meaningful discussions or … more meaningless things"* (P4) could be posted to Twitter, whereas the higher bar for posting to Facebook meant that less content was there, and so it expired more slowly. Tools like Snapchat, whereby expiry is built in, inevitably facilitated the generation of playful content.

Bound up with this are the ways in which different social media sites offer ways of encountering content that is due to, or has already, expired. Facebook especially was felt to offer more scope for looking back at content, through the Timeline on the profile page but also via photo albums and features such as 'See Friendship', which filter content by relationship. Nevertheless, it was not considered typical to look back at the Facebook Timeline, unless in the context of making a new Facebook 'friend'.

As shown, the combination of a diverse audience and a relatively slow expiry rate (when compared with other social media) led participants to perceive a higher threshold for posting content to Facebook in particular. Indeed, some participants selectively synched content to the site from other social networks, such as Instagram and Twitter. For these participants, Facebook became a kind of *"hub"* (P1), representing the *"best"* and *"most selective"* of their social media content. However, Facebook was not necessarily interpreted as a repository of meaningful content, nor as something to be kept in the long-term. In the following section, we consider why this was so, through five contradictions in our participants' attitudes to social media.

Social Network Sites as Personal Archives?
Consistent with much prior work on social media and identity management, participants described the primary purpose of social media as to support interactions with others at the moment of posting. Social network sites were seen as a tool to support communication in the moment, rather than a place for storing data. Of course, this emphasis on content being

for consumption by others meant that participants self-censored and avoided topics that might be considered controversial by their network:

"I don't know, I quite often try and put myself into other people's shoes and think okay if I was them and I saw that I had posted this on Facebook what would I think?" (P8)

This audience-centered perception of social media contrasts with a typical understand of archives, which are usually thought to be places to *"put stuff there just for me"* (P10).

"[I post the photo] just to share it with my friends… if I just want to keep it I can just keep it on my phone then people wouldn't see it… " (P3)

However, social network sites were used in ways that could be considered as similar to archives. They were *curated* repositories of *meaningful* content, and were noted as *reliable* data stores (sometimes more so than personal devices). Furthermore, they were said to be *encountered* more frequently, and to provide a better *narrative* of the past, than archives held on personal devices. Thus, our findings comprise quite nuanced views with regards to how our participants viewed the long-term value of social media. In the following, we look to these five factors.

Social media is beyond curation / social media is curated

The first theme explores the notion of curation. Social media sites were not generally seen as curated repositories of content. Indeed, some participants commented that social network sites were simply *"beyond curation"*; they contained content generated by too many people, they contained too much trivial content, and they went too far back in time to be manageable.

However, participants did also recognize that simply through using the sites, they were undertaking a form of curation. As noted above, Facebook was a site with a surprisingly high bar for posting content, and participants who used Instagram highlighted that it too resulted in a collection of images that had been carefully selected and edited. These sites comprised a collection that offered an alternative archive to that stored on computers and phones. Indeed, offline archives did not receive the same level of attention as their online counterparts, the motivation to curate being highlighted as social:

"Why do you put photos in a [printed] photo album, because that takes time and effort doesn't it? And that [sharing on Facebook] is for sharing with an audience." (P3)

Thus, participants spent time when presenting photos online, selecting a subset of *"the best"* photos to upload to Facebook, creating albums (something that was often not done with photos stored on laptops and phones), *"adding interesting captions"* (P13), and on Instagram, *"adding filters to make it prettier"* (P6). This was done with a view to presenting content that others would appreciate, whilst also avoiding overloading them with content:

"There's obviously a lot of stuff that isn't on there from that age, but it must've been my favorite bits from when I was at that age." (P12)

Furthermore, these sites used in combination were interpreted as offering different ways of looking at content, each with unique advantages. P5 describes how Instagram provided a nicer view of her year than Facebook, where holidays were over-represented because photo albums were made to represent them. On Instagram, a quick overview of her year, featuring few duplicates, could be found:

"Because [on Instagram] they are single pictures and it's like a single picture that represents a moment or a single picture from a certain week or a holiday, rather than a whole album, like visually you can see a kind of mosaic, a collage of time of just one photo, you don't have to go into each album." (P5)

She goes on to describe how these different social media collections work together, demonstrating how sites work in concert with offline archives in enabling her to manage and revisit her photo collection:

"There is the collection of absolutely everything which is on my computer, there is the collection of everything which is the best of everything on Facebook, and then there is an even smaller one [on Instagram], which is this nice grid view."

For a minority, social media sites were explicitly curated after posting, as a means of changing the view of the past presented. For example, one participant curated the Facebook Timeline following the breakdown of a relationship, saying that he didn't wish to come across content associated with it in the future, and another edited what was shown on the Timeline when it was first introduced, as it made visible too much content she did not wish to be so easily accessible on her profile page. This part of our findings corresponds well with previous deletion studies that highlight the tension between present and past self-presentation needs [cf. 29, 32]. However, for others, curation was a systematic and ongoing pursuit, aimed at removing content deemed to be no longer 'current' or 'relevant', such as links, conversations or status updates that had expired. This activity was bound up with self-presentation and personal branding:

"Because it was just something I wanted to share with my friends… after a time period I decided to delete it because it is not the actual thing, it is not a current thing (any more)." (P2)

Therefore, although social media is posted in line with a particular expectation of what an audience would be interested in, with its initial value being *social*, the curated collection has *personal* value. As P5 summarizes, *"I'm curating for the public, but I am also curating for the self"*.

Social media is trivial / social media is worth keeping

The second theme deals with where participants perceived value in their social media. This was complex; some social

media had evident personal value, some was seen as obviously trivial, but even trivial content could be reinterpreted as meaningful after a period of time.

Nevertheless, most of our participants agreed that the value of social media was often compromised by the fact that it encompasses a breadth of content, ranging from favorite photos and records of important events, to comments and URLs of little relevance, to content that not only had been forgotten about, but that triggered no memories when encountered. This aggregation of large amounts of content made it difficult to find that which is meaningful and of interest, and this was confounded further by the presence of other people's content, mixed in with one's own:

"I think the thing is that Facebook is full of a lot of crap as well… so you look at it and say if somebody's not very good at curating their Facebook they'll post like a million photos of you and some of them are rubbish." (P5)

Yet, amongst the trivia lies content about key events. For some participants social media was seen as part of their history; for example P8 had been using the site since she was 14 years old, and P2 noted how the main events in her life were detailed on the site:

"All the big parts (of my life), you know, something I want to share with all my family and friends are on Facebook. Something that's huge for me, like I don't know, my degree or something like that. Not every day life really." (P2)

Often these key events would be represented by a photo (*"If it was really important, I would have a picture [on Facebook]"* – P5), although other types of content, such as comments, were also noted as having value by some:

"I haven't got a very close family… a lot of them I don't have their phone numbers but I have them on Facebook. When I got my degree and stuff like that they had congratulations on there, and I would be quite upset if I lost that…" (P6)

However, photos were highlighted as the media type most likely to be of value. Participants generally felt that the "*things that are important to me is pictures, photography, just pictures*" (P9). Comments were generally seen as *"of secondary importance to the photo"* (P5) and conversations on the wall, despite being unique to the site, were often deemed trivial, perhaps because they are closest to the 'tool-like' and ephemeral aspects of social media use: *"I guess most of the conversations with people [on the site] could be lost"* (P6).

On the other hand, even trivial social media could become valued later: *"… Something will happen to me, like you meet somebody whether it's whatever a significant other or like just a good friend or something, you're not going to know whether that first meeting, like the first picture that you had*

with them was like actually going to mean something to you in a while or not." (P4)

In summary, social media comprises a record of key events that are of personal value, which is compromised by the presence of trivial exchanges and other people's poorly curated content. However, even small communications can become valuable over time.

Social media is a duplicate/ social media is the go-to place
The third theme relates to how personal content is encountered. Participants often compared the archival value of social media in relation to other archives, especially those on laptops and mobile phones. Most participants believed that the content most important to them comprised photos that were also held elsewhere, for example on the phones or cameras they had used to take the photos (see also [17]). Thus, social media sites were seen as comprising lower resolution duplicates of content held in other archives:

"I've never taken a picture directly from the Facebook [app]. No. It's just because Facebook is the base for my communication, so it is ALSO there." (P9)

Because of this, social media sites did not host as much content as these other repositories and were not considered as *"complete"* (P9) archives. However, some participants did think that Facebook in particular gave a fair representation of occasions they would like to remember:

"It's definitely not a biography, maybe not 100%, but it could be, why not? In the end I have all important events there, when my friends come and visit me, when I was doing something somewhere, when I visited China… they are all very important to me and they are all here since 2008." (P12)

The fact that social media sites contained less content was even beneficial in some sense. As already noted, Facebook was seen as a *"curated exhibition"* (P14), and consequently as more selective than other, private, archives. This had the result that the site was, for some, a *"go-to album"* used over and above other repositories:

"When you take photos, there are too many photos and we just select the best to put on Facebook… I don't even look back my computer, for photos, but just look at the albums on Facebook." (P13)

"Because it's ordered, it's been selected, and it's been updated in a way that it has meanings and you may want to go back again and look at it. It has more opportunities to be looked at again." (P14)

However, despite the finding that social media produced an archive that was more frequently encountered, participants were resistant to the idea of disposing of the complete offline collection. They preferred to keep everything, even if this would produce difficulties in managing and revisiting content:

"It's probably gonna be enough with only the information on Facebook… and I'm not gonna look at 5000 pictures in my computer ever again – but you feel if I lose all the pictures it would be really horrible." (P12)

This resonates with previous work on digital archiving [31], but it raises an important question that we shall return to in the discussion: as increasing amounts of social media are generated, how can we help users navigate these spaces, as well as their personal digital archives, if they are uncomfortable with the notion of deletion [9, 19]?

Social media is insecure / social media is safe

The fourth theme relates to the perceived reliability of social media sites. This highlights another set of contradictions, in that participants perceived social media sites as both more insecure and more powerful and safe than offline archives. On the one hand, social media sites were seen as transitory, unlikely to withstand the face of technological innovation:

"I see Facebook as very ephemeral. I don't see it as a repository… It's just a tool. I mean have you ever seen the old floppy disks?" (P7)

Furthermore, and in line with prior research [21], content on social media sites was associated with a weak sense of control:

"I think the [offline] digital content allows you to hold on to the idea that you own this stuff and it's yours and you have control over it […] this gives you a sense of ownership that Facebook doesn't give." (P14)

Yet this attitude was transformed in the circumstance of data loss, and for some participants (the younger ones especially) this seemed to be developing into a more general shift. Some participants deleted content from their phones after posting it to Facebook, as a means of freeing up memory on their own devices, and others stored hidden files on their timeline, re-appropriating the site as a means of reliable cloud storage. And of course, social media also offers a way to build shared albums, functionality seen as supporting file-sharing. Most surprisingly though, some participants expressed the view that Facebook was more reliable than personal devices such as laptops and phones. Again, this opinion was expressed by the younger participants in the study, who had experienced sufficient problems with losing devices or having them fail to see social media as comparatively safe:

"…Because I cannot store a lot of photos on my phone and my laptop is pretty dead, so to be able to like store them and then look back at them [on Facebook]… they are always going to be there." (P3)

Social media tells a story / an inauthentic history

The final theme relates to narrative, and how social media supports the creation of stories but also can inhibit this through content that is inauthentic to the past. Facebook in particular offered compelling ways of revisiting past content:

"I guess it's the way it's presented, you know? Like when you graduate, it's like a big banner and she's graduated. She's got a new job." (P6)

Some features, such as See Friendship, provide a way of pulling together disjointed social media when revisiting it, creating a narrative from a number of smaller pieces.

"At some point I looked at the friendship between my husband and I, it was very cool because I was able to see pictures and comments and status we have shared since 2009, that's why I look at it in a story-telling way… not only I can see our pictures at the honeymoon or our wedding, but I can read the comments he used to put up on my wall when we were dating." (P14)

However, participants noted that some features of social media sites produced a version of the past that was not authentic. Lists of friends and profile pages were both highlighted as comprising content that could not really be revisited as they had been at a particular moment in time, and changes to profile pictures which were propagated through the site also had the result that content was not preserved accurately:

"Well it's not… because the profile picture has changed. That has changed. So it's not what exactly as I put it up… and how I put it up [when I look back]. I mean that's probably why I wouldn't see it as a repository." (P7)

A final observation here relates to how participants attempted to preserve aspects of the past when revisiting it, rather than altering old content through new interactions. As noted, prior work points to social norms that deem it inappropriate to surface social media 'out of time' [11]. Here we see that doing so may be permitted so long as the content is reinterpreted in relation to the present, while the original artifact is preserved. P12 described how she and her friends capture screengrabs of old content to discuss on Facebook. This allows them to shift the discussion from the original photo to the photo plus its metadata. Furthermore, the re-definition of the artifact under discussion means that the original object is kept intact, and social norms are maintained:

"[Taking a screenshot of a Facebook content] is like separating it from the original, so taking a picture of what we were before and attach a whole new message to it would make it – so like when you are in a museum kind of thing like you have old documents and stuff that you keep, so it would just make it like a different joke if you see what I mean?" (P12)

This final theme highlights how additional sense-making around significant relationships, major life events or even 'expired' content plus its metadata can alter perceptions of social media from the seemingly trivial to meaningful stories. This type of behavior was also evident when making the

keepsake, where content that is relevant to a story becomes valued through its aggregation.

DISCUSSION

Our aims for this study were to explore whether social media has value as an archive, given that it is principally understood as an exhibition [12], and to consider whether it can support personal archiving more generally, given the complexities of managing digital content. Our findings suggest that, while social media sites are not really viewed as repositories of valued content, they nevertheless form an archive of sorts, one that is different to but could complement more traditional notions of file stores such as folders of photos and the camera rolls on mobile phones. The content found online is not the 'complete' collection that is found on one's computer, but it does represent a medley that is more selective, easier to browse, and encountered more often.

In this discussion, we develop these ideas further. We firstly consider what the use of social media in concert with other file stores suggests for the design of digital archives, and whether the curation work done in exhibiting social media to an audience can be translated to a personal, offline, archive. We then consider what implications our findings have for the creation of narratives on social network sites themselves.

Design for Digital Archives
Curation through use
In line with previous work [17], participants in this study used different social media sites for different purposes, and so understood them to host different types of content, some about friendship and family, some about the user's professional life, some about beautiful photography, and so on. These sites, alongside personal archives stored on their own devices, form a complex repository that suggests different implications for the design of archiving tools to prior work. Our findings demonstrate that the organization and management of personal content is integrated with its generation for different sites and audiences: in this sense, *curation is inherent to use*. Selective uploading, the formation of photo albums, and the addition of annotation and filters is often simply part of the process of using a social network site.

These findings emphasize that users as well as systems [cf. 12] are curators of social media, as conceptualized as an enduring exhibition. But they also resonate with Kirk and Sellen's [15] analysis of home archiving. Kirk and Sellen's focus on cherished objects leads them to highlight three types of storage in the home: objects on display; objects stored for functional use; and objects placed in deep storage. These different types of storage support different values, for example, objects on display support ready reminiscence; objects in functional storage enable the honoring of others through their use; and objects in deep storage support 'forgetting', in that one may wish to avoid encountering something, but feel uncomfortable getting rid of it. If we consider a photo album

uploaded to Facebook to be on display, and photos on an external hard drive to be in deep storage, we can begin to unpack how these different digital spaces support different values in the same way that different places in the home do.

Like physical objects, photos on display, or that have been exhibited in an online space, seem to support ready reminiscence. Our findings suggest that Facebook and Instagram photos in particular were more frequently encountered than those saved offline, and this is in line with research that suggests photos archives are rarely revisited [31]. Furthermore, the fact that these sites are associated with different audiences, and with different thresholds for posting, means that users have a sense of where to look to re-find meaningful content. Again, this is something that users are known to struggle with when dealing with digital archives [26]. The notion of curation through use, at a time when digital photos are abundant and frequently cited as becoming unmanageable, is a value that should not be underestimated.

Safekeeping and forgetting
A finding that was somewhat unexpected, however, was that users would view social media sites to be reliable repositories. Of course this was not the case for all of our participants, and issues relating to a lack of sense of ownership arose here as they have done in prior work [21]. However, some of our participants were beginning to see social media sites as the locale where their content was most likely to persist, and this was especially the case for younger users. This obviously raises challenges, notwithstanding what would happen in the face of data loss or accounts being shut down. Returning to Kirk and Sellen's [15] storage types, social media cannot be put into deep storage, an action that is necessary if an archival space is to be multi-faceted and persist over time. We saw clear examples of this limitation in our data, whereby deletion of online content would be done for a range of reasons, from hiding from an audience to hiding from oneself, or 'forgetting', as Kirk and Sellen describe it. If one wishes to forget, there is only one option on a social media site, and that is to delete. The feature 'to hide' on Facebook means hiding from others, not hiding from oneself. Yet it is quite possible that the participant who had broken up with his girlfriend would have preferred some other option to the rather blunt 'delete' to deal with content relating to her (see also [28]). If social media sites represent 'objects on display', being able to take objects 'off' display and selectively download them or make them invisible to oneself, whilst supporting safekeeping, seems desirable.

This suggests the value of a design space around bridging online and offline spaces, and being able to translate the curation work done in exhibiting content online to an offline, private space. For example, if users find it difficult to manage their digital photo collections, but undertake a form of curation when they choose which photos to upload to the internet,

it may be worth reflecting this in offline collections as well. If an operating system could indicate which photos are on Facebook and the tags associated with it, this could support users in navigating offline, higher resolution, versions of those same photos in an offline (and private) space. Further, it could indicate which photos the user might want to back up elsewhere, and may even support 'forgetting'. For example, photos that are deleted from Facebook could also be suppressed offline, by being hidden in features such as the random slideshows of photos that run on personal devices.

Of course, it is important to acknowledge that, while there may be benefits in reflecting the curation work done through using social media sites offline, the translation is unlikely to be perfect. Curation for exhibition is different to curation for archiving, and while the former may provide a starting point for the latter, it cannot provide a complete solution. It is worth noting also that both repositories have their limitations. Just as is the case with personal digital archives, users of social media sites can struggle to marshal out important and meaningful things in the increasing volume of content. The abundance of social media meant that participants encountered difficulties when looking back and making sense of it. Supporting users in filtering this content, or transforming it into a more compelling narrative, is the final point we wish to explore in this discussion.

Building Personal Narratives from Social Media

Bamberg and Georgakopoulou [2] argue that 'small stories', including tellings of on-going, future, hypothetical, and shared events, are used by people in everyday, mundane situations to create a sense of who they are. While their focus is on synchronous conversation, social media content, as captured through individuals' day-to-day interactions with their network, can similarly be considered instances of the talked-about that have a role to play in identity work. Page [23] has argued that social network users are adept at creating narratives out of the small stories they post on social network sites, and in this study we see how certain site features, such as See Friendship, as well as the activity of building a keepsake in itself, can be used to produce larger narratives. However, in order to make these narratives compelling, small stories need further selection, filtering, and sense-making.

It was notable that support for this sense-making was largely lacking on social network sites. See Friendship was the exception here, but features such as the Facebook Timeline, which are intended to produce 'the story of your life', tended to comprise too much trivial and mixed content to live up to this claim. It has been argued that time is 'configured' rather than simply reproduced in the formation of narratives about the past; the past is drawn on selectively when forming life stories [e.g. 4]. We suggest that social media sites could offer a greater range of actions that could be used in the formation of these narratives. One possibility would be to give users the option to privately 'favorite' photos; actions such as download or print that indicate preference might also be capitalized upon here. These favorites could be used as anchors to

other related content, supporting sense-making and the creation of a framework for browsing when revisiting past content. Finally, and returning to the observation that users seem more motivated to 'curate' their content if reaching out to an audience than if simply keeping it for themselves, we suggest the possibility of supporting the formation of new narratives through interaction and sharing with others. For example, this could be accomplished by shifting the 'unit' in social media sites from a single piece of content to content plus metadata, or even to a collage of multiple pieces of content. This could encourage users to draw social media together in meaningful ways, and to potentially resurface it 'out of time', without breaking social norms, as one of our participants did through the use of screengrabs. If social media sites could capitalize on connections between old and new conversations about the same content, this could also facilitate the browsing and formation of new narratives.

CONCLUSION

Findings from our qualitative study suggest that, while social media sites are not explicitly viewed as archives, they nevertheless form a repository that could complement personal file stores. Social media is curated through use, and thus comprises a collection that is selective, organized, and annotated. It is more encountered than content in private archives, and so supports ready reminiscing. And it can be more reliable than private archives; for those who have had the experience of losing their own devices or have had them fail, social media can become the back-up. However, the concept of social media sites as archival is limited by the presence of data considered trivial and tensions over ownership and authenticity. We conclude by highlighting the possibilities for bridging social media and personal archives as a potential way forward. Personal archives could benefit from being imbued with some of the curation that is inherent to social media use; reflecting which content has been uploaded, and to where, could offer a novel way of filtering the higher-resolution photos stored on a personal computer. Conversely, social media sites could benefit from a richer grammar of action [cf. 10], allowing users to place content in deep storage or otherwise 'keep' it. Identifying meaningful social media through such actions, for example by picking up on what has been printed or downloaded, could offer a more natural way of structuring reflective sense-making on social network sites. In conclusion, unpacking the personal value of social media may mean pulling online and offline archives together, so that actions in one are echoed across the other.

ACKNOWLEDGMENTS

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