Libraries and Tumblr: A quantitative analysis

Introduction

The microblogging tool Tumblr has been described as a “forgotten” social network (arXiv, 2014) due to the lack of research and formal studies that focus on this unique social media platform. While most academic research on social networking focuses on Twitter and Facebook, few look specifically at Tumblr’s unique platform which is a combination of a blog-like publishing platform and social network. With over 204 million blogs (https://www.tumblr.com/about), Tumblr has not been forgotten by internet users, nor has it been overlooked by libraries and librarians.

This study is a quantitative analysis of Tumblr statistics to determine how this platform is currently being used by libraries and special collections/archives in the United States. Data were collected in September 2013, April 2014 and September 2014 and included: library type, start date, age, number of posts, average posts per day, type of post, and peak posting per day, as well as other descriptive information such as whether questions and submissions were enabled and how much identifying information regarding the organization and maintenance of the Tumblr was available. Results of this survey should prove useful for both libraries and special collections already using Tumblr as well as those interested in starting a presence on Tumblr. The results will assist librarians in determining if this is a social media tool that is useful and valuable, as well as providing observations on best practices.

In January 2013 an article on Forbes.com (“Why…”, 2013) identified Tumblr as the social network to get serious about in the coming year. In a guest post written by Hayes Davis,
the CEO of Union Metrics, which provides Twitter and Tumblr analytics, makes a strong case for learning more about this social network. Davis (“Why…”, 2013) observes that “consumers in the critical 18-34 year old demographic are hooked on Tumblr”, making Tumblr a platform that marketers cannot afford to ignore. Additional reasons for libraries to pay attention to this social network are its rate of growth, the appeal of the visual experience, the ability to reach outside the Tumblr community since it is indexed in search engines, and its unique design as both publishing platform and social network. Libraries have been listening to this advice, and in many cases were ahead of the brand names and marketers in adopting this platform for creating robust on-line communities centered around their services and collections. This study looks at how different types of libraries and archives are using the social network Tumblr and how their Tumblr presence has grown during the year. This study also provides examples and best practices based on the results.

**Microblogging on Tumblr**

Tumblr is defined as a microblogging service. Microblogging consists of brief messages, sometimes with size or space constraints which are frequently shared. Twitter, which restricts the messages to 140 characters, is a well-known example of a popular microblogging service. Unlike other microblogging platforms however, Tumblr does not limit the size or space of a post. Tumblr is more of a mix of a traditional blogging platform with the reciprocal elements of a social network. The traditional blogging platform element allows a user to post text without limits, links, quotes, chat, photos, videos, and audio. Readers of the post on Tumblr can respond through comments, just as with the comments section of traditional blogging platforms. Depending on the options that are enabled, readers may also ask questions and submit posts. The
platform for posting is user-friendly and intuitive. Once the type of post is selected, Tumblr prompts the user for the essential elements, taking much of the guesswork out of posting. For example, choosing to post a link provides the user with prompts for the URL, title and description. The post can be scheduled for a later date and time, and it can also be easily shared across multiple platforms such as Facebook and Twitter. The social networking element of the platform is what makes Tumblr an excellent place for community building and connecting. Similar to Twitter, users can choose what other users to follow. The content posted by those who are followed appears in the user’s dashboard in a scrolling content feed. Content is seen in this way, but it can also be discovered by searching for keywords or hashtags. As with many social media sites, suggestions on whom to follow are also provided to users based on that user’s interaction with selected content and their follower list. Users can choose to interact with the content they see by liking it (heart icon), commenting (quote box), or sharing it; sharing is known as reblogging. It is this reblogging functionality that distinguishes Tumblr from many other social media sites. The act of reblogging shares the content with a user’s followers, but keeps all of the information from the original post, thus avoiding some questions of copyright and ownership that plague other sharing mechanisms. Tumblr provides apps for mobile devices that retain, and in some ways, improve on the desktop site’s simplicity and user-friendly design.

**History of Tumblr**

Tumblr was created by David Karp who began his career as a web developer and entrepreneur while he was a homeschooled teenager (Walker, 2012). He was twenty-one years old when the first live version of Tumblr appeared in Feb 2007 (Kenney, 2013). Karp wanted the experience to be simple and modern. To accomplish this, he created simple buttons and icons
in the design. The coding was simple as well, allowing the platform to be easily hacked, or customized by its fans and users. “Creativity and customization were easy as the creators were responsive to the users and encouraged this type of modification” (Kenney 2013, p. 2). The site’s design, along with the interaction of users with its creators also contributed to the unique nature and provided an incubator for communities, both large and small. Tumblr was purchased by Yahoo in 2013 for 1.1 billion dollars. Concerns among Tumblr’s most loyal users were immediate, with fears that Tumblr’s “Wild-West” feel and its foundation of individual and community autonomy would be compromised. The CEO of Yahoo, in a Tumblr post of her own promised “not to screw it up” (Mayer, 2013) and noted in a press release that Tumblr would continue to operate independently as a separate business with “the same Tumblr irreverence, wit and commitment to empower creators” (Bigman, 2013).

Who is Using Tumblr?

As of September 2014, Tumblr has 92 billion posts on 204.4 million blogs (https://www.tumblr.com/about). In May 2013, when Tumblr was acquired by Yahoo, comScore, an internet analytics company reported 47.49 million unique users of Tumblr (Bercovici, 2014). Despite suggestions that Tumblr was losing users and shrinking after the merger, later reports suggest the user base has remained stable, even if it had plateaued (Bercovici 2014, Edwards 2013). A report in August 2014, actually shows a steady increase in the number of users, with eMarketer, an independent market research company whose clients include many Fortune 500 companies, reporting a 28.4% increase in 2014 and projected growth through 2018 (Bercovici, 2014a). Edwards (2013) points out that the comScore numbers only measure desktop users and do not account for mobile users. This is an important point; Tumblr’s mobile app includes all of
the functionality of the desktop version and comScore (2014) reports an increase in the use of mobile platforms by internet users stating that “smartphones have quickly emerged as the primary content channel for internet consumption, overtaking time spent on desktop computers in 2013” (p.14). In fact, in April 2014, Business Insider reports that Yahoo CEO Melissa Mayer noted a 122% increase in mobile engagement on Tumblr (Edwards, 2014). In the Digital Future in Focus whitepaper 2014, comScore (2014) states that “consumers are engaging with digital media across an increasing number of platforms, with mobile being the single most significant change in this landscape since the invention of the internet” (comScore, 2014). The report adds that although desktop usage of social networks has remained flat over the past year, mobile usage continues to surge, with major social networks seeing more traffic from mobile users than from desktop ones.

While number of users tends to be the industry norm for assessing success of social media, it is not the only means of assessment. One individual can create multiple Tumblr blogs, thus, the number of posts and blogs increases faster than the number of users. Another important measurement is the amount of time spent on a page by visitors. In a telling interview, David Karp claims that Tumblr averaged 14 minutes per visit, which is higher than both Facebook and Twitter (Van Grove, 2013).

Who are these users who are creating millions of posts and spending more time to read them? A 2013 report from the Pew Research Center’s Internet and American Life Project (pewinternet.org) shows that Tumblr appeals especially to adults ages 18-29. (Duggan, 2013). A summary of a report from Business Insider describes the population of Tumblr as younger and dominated by teens, only 8% of users on Tumblr having incomes of over $75,000 (Creedon, 2013). Referencing this same report Smith (2013) states that “nearly half, or 46%, of these
users were between the ages of 16 and 24 (always a difficult-to-reach demographic).” And Zain (2013) states that “Tumblr does indeed attract a large proportion of its audience from the younger set, with 15-24 year olds comprising 40 percent of its audience in April 2013”.

**Literature Review**

While much has been much written in recent years addressing social media in libraries, most of this discussion talks generally of social media and microblogging or addresses specific sites, predominately Facebook and Twitter. General articles on microblogging and libraries do include mentions of Tumblr, but none focus specifically on how libraries are using Tumblr. The articles that do address Tumblr and libraries lean toward the practical and descriptive – they are more “how-to” than analytical. Tumblr’s definition as a microblogging social network necessitates a broader look at the literature to include discussions of microblogging and blogs. Literature focusing on Tumblr outside of librarianship is also limited. *MIT Technology Review* highlights one resource specifically addressing Tumblr, but that resource has not yet been reviewed or published. The announcement of this resource, “The Anatomy of a Forgotten Social Network”, notes that Tumblr has been “more or less ignored by researchers” (arXiv, 2014). The lack of scholarly literature addressing Tumblr specifically supports this contention. References to Tumblr do exist in popular and trade magazines that address technology, communication, and marketing.

The descriptive and practical articles noted above provide excellent descriptions of this unique social network along with some tips and best practices. Greenwalt (2013, p.14) notes that “Tumblr takes all of the elements [from other social media], mixes them up, and doles them out in one endless stream of new content;” he likens it to an “all-you-can-eat sushi restaurant where
delicacies come to you via conveyor belt”. Cohen (2013, p.20) gives insight into his use of Tumblr and notes that it can function as a way to save and share links, described as a “linkblog”, allowing him to post lists of links without needing text or description. Matteson (2011, p.54) says that Tumblr offers “an unmatched ease of use”, is “inherently participatory” and proposes ways to harness it for use in school. Library Journal (McCardle, 2013) introduces those outside the Tumblr community to the concept of a “Tumblarian” i.e., a librarian who uses Tumblr. “Tumblarian 101”, a starter kit, was posted on Library Journal’s Tumblr (Library Journal 2013). Keyser (2013, p. 10) chose Tumblr to highlight the Oregon Historical Society’s collection for its “user-friendly interface, customizability and visual appeal.” Welch (2014, p.7) notes that “Although Tumblr has not gained extensive popularity in the academic world, there is a strong presentation on Tumblr of academic librarians, and there is a growing public and academic library presence on Tumblr.”

Within the scholarship on libraries and social networking, Tumblr is mentioned in several microblogging discussions. Murphy (2008) includes Tumblr in his discussion of best practices for microblogging for science and technology libraries. Hricko (2010) uses Tumblr as an example of a microblogging application, as she provides an overview of issues to consider when using microblogs as library tools. Defebbo et al. (2009) focus primarily on Twitter in their article addressing microblogging for medical libraries and librarians but also mention Tumblr as a form of microblogging. Foley (2013) explores the use of social networking accounts among future medical students in Ireland and found that Tumblr was used less commonly than Facebook and Twitter. DeVoe (2009) lists Tumblr in her discussion on microblogging and its usefulness in building communities, promoting awareness and discovery and engaging integration. In a discussion on how Twitter and Facebook can open doors to collaboration, Huwe (2012) lists
Tumblr as one of many popular tools for digital librarians to embrace. Mao’s (2014) study on the affordances for social media by high school students finds that Tumblr is the third most popular platform among survey respondents. Mao’s study also provides an excellent literature review of relevant articles on social media’s use in educational settings beyond libraries.

While not directly addressing Tumblr, articles exploring the use of social media, specifically microblogging and libraries also contribute to the scholarship. However, due to its “newness,” Tumblr is not included in the majority of these. The studies and observations surrounding blogs and other microblogging tools such as Twitter in libraries can be applied to the study and practice of using Tumblr in libraries. Taurili et al. (2013) explore the use of social media and microblogging in providing a reader’s advisory service. Kim et al. (2014) find in their study on undergraduates’ use of social media as information sources that blogs and microblogs were rarely used for gaining information. They discover a higher rate of information seeking taking place on social networking sites, user reviews on sites and video sharing sites. Dickson (2010) examines the use of the major social networking tools in academic libraries in the USA, which includes a discussion on microblogging and Twitter. The research, descriptions and observations on blogs provided by Mandal (2011), Adams (2012) and Yang and Chang (2012) can be applied to Tumblr blogs. Aharony (2013) attempts to understand microblogging patterns, analyzing tweets from public and academic libraries, while Lovejoy and Saxton (2012) analyze tweets from non-profit organizations. Although this article does not attempt to analyze the content of the Tumblr posts, further research on Tumblr could adopt similar models of categorizing posts, looking at number of posts, linguistic differences and content. Other articles addressing Twitter and its use in libraries (Matthews 2007, Milstein 2009, Stuart 2010, Del
Bosque et al., 2012, Barnes 2014) are seen as relevant to this discussion, given the microblogging label assigned to Tumblr, as well as some of its similarities with Twitter.

The article, “The Anatomy of a Forgotten Social Network,” (arXiv, 2014) contends that network scientists have been focusing so much on Twitter that they have forgotten Tumblr. In looking at the literature, it appears to be true. In an introduction to a special issue on the Journal of Interactive Marketing (Hoffman, 2012) that searches for a deeper understanding of social media, Tumblr is noted as being a “rapidly growing social blogging platform,” but none of the articles in the special issue focus on Tumblr.

Chang et al. (2014) provide the only available statistical overview of Tumblr and is one of only two scholarly resources identified in this literature review. The other scholarly resource is from a conference proceedings and attempts to characterize behavior patterns of Tumblr (Xu, 2014). Xu notes that “despite its success, little has been studied on the human behavior and interaction on this platform”. The author describes his work as the first attempt to carry out a large-scale measurement-driven analysis on Tumblr.

Chang et al. (2014) is authored by researchers at Yahoo! Labs and addresses what makes Tumblr unique as a social network. In this statistical overview and comparison of Tumblr the authors note that “Tumblr has more rich content than other microblogging platforms, and it contains hybrid characteristics of social networking, traditional blogosphere and social media.” They conclude that the high quality of Tumblr’s content along with the multimedia platform makes Tumblr particularly attractive to younger audiences. This pre-print provides a wealth of information on Tumblr that has not been previously available, however the reader should keep in mind the authors are employed by the company that owns Tumblr. Looking beyond the limited scholarly literature, discussion of Tumblr can be found in marketing and media trade
publications, as well as in popular magazines. A majority of the articles addressing Tumblr in both scholarly and popular literature address its status among social networks and its popularity; they do not study or analyze the network and its users.

Methodology

Library and library related Tumblr blogs located in the United States were identified using a list (http://thelifeguardlibrarian.tumblr.com/tumblarians). This is a resource maintained by Kate Tkacik, who posts on Tumblr as thelifeguardlibrarian. This is a continuously growing list of librarians and libraries that have a presence on Tumblr. While it provides information, it does not claim to be comprehensive. Many people and places are added through self-identification. In order to capture more libraries with a presence on the Tumblr the author utilized the search function of Tumblr. More library Tumblr blogs were identified through the followers of the author’s library’s Tumblr. Library archives Tumblr blogs were identified using the list of archivists and archives that is maintained by Rebecca Hopman on the Tumblr ex-tabulis, (http://ex-tabulis.tumblr.com/archivists).

Data were entered into a Google form created by the author. Data were collected via two methods. The first method was to pull up the Tumblr blog in order to enter the name, description, type of library and also to determine authorship, and whether answers or submissions were enabled. The second method was to use the website (tumblrstats.com) that provides statistics on the individual Tumblr blog. The data collected from tumblrstats.com were: name of Tumblr blog, description, start date, last (most recent) post date, total number of posts, age of blog, number of posts made per day, peak posting, peak posting per day and type of post. For type of post,
numbers were given for regular posts, links, quotes, photo posts, conversations, video posts and audio posts.

Another website providing statistics was identified (http://www.studiomoh.com/fun/tumblrstats/), but it was determined by the author to be inaccurate after comparison with tumblrstats.com and the Tumblr API (application programming interface). The author used the Tumblr API in order to confirm that tumblrstats.com was providing accurate information on the blogs. Further research on this topic would benefit from the creation of a program that could provide more robust statistics, such as the number of reblogs using the Tumblr API. The Tumblr names were entered into tumblrstats.com and a screen shot was created. The data were then entered from the screenshot at a later time. The screenshots were all collected on one day, thus normalizing the age and number of posts for all entries. The first set of data collection was taken in September 2013. A second set was gathered in April 2014 and this set included newer and newly discovered blogs. A final set was collected in September 2014 in order to provide a year overview of Tumblr presence for libraries and archives.

The Tumblr blogs were categorized into the following; academic library; academic special collections/digital library; public library; public library- teen; public library- children, library organization; and other library/archive. The categories were determined through indicators such as the description, name or link to a website. In some cases, it was not easy to determine the type of library due to a lack of identifiable details on the blog. Further research was conducted using descriptors and other websites in order to determine the library category.

Items coded as “academic library” included blogs from libraries affiliated with educational institutions, primarily colleges and universities. There was only one high school media center, and that was included in this same category. Items were assigned this category if
they were representative of a general academic library, as opposed to being focused on a specific collection. Blogs affiliated with colleges and universities that focused on a specific special or digital collection were assigned the category “academic special collections/digital library”.

Public library blogs were coded based on their target audience. “Public library” includes all public library blogs that were not focused on teens or children. Thus, “public library- teen” and “public library- children” were coded based on their description and audience. Blogs for library advocacy, consortiums, friends of the library, and library-school related organizations were given the overall classification of “library organization.” The blogs categorized as “other library/archive” were not affiliated with either a public or academic library. This category includes government organizations, independent research libraries, historical societies, private collections and other non-profit organizations. Blogs from for profit publications such as periodicals (Newsweek) and newspapers (Detroit News), while archival in nature, were not included in the results, as the primary focus was libraries and library related non-profits. Only Tumblr blogs from the United States were included in the results, though some representation from Canada, Nova Scotia, Scotland and the United Kingdom were included in the initial data gathering.

Results

Upon completion of the data gathering in September 2013, ninety-three Tumblr blogs made up the first data set (Appendix 1). In April 2014, information on 171 blogs was collected; data were collected in September 2014 on those same 171 blogs (Appendix 2). The difference between September 2013 and April 2014 (78 blogs) reflects twenty new blogs that had not been created when the September data were collected. The remaining fifty-eight blogs were newly
discovered Tumblr blogs during the second round of data collection. Many of these additional blogs are categorized as other library/archives and include public archives, a category that was not taken into account during the initial data collection. All but one of the blogs from the September 2013 data collection are included in the later sets, this blog no longer existed as of the April 2014 collection.

During the time between the data set collections, both the library list (http://thelifeguardlibrarian.tumblr.com/tumblarians) and the archive list (http://ex-tabulis.tumblr.com/archivists) were updated several times, thus bringing more blogs to the attention of the researcher for inclusion into the second data set. After data were collected in September 2014 for the 171 blogs, nineteen new blogs were identified. Of these nineteen blogs, fourteen were created after the April 2014, and thus did not exist during the April 2014 data collection. These newly identified and created blogs are not included in the final results as data were not collected for them. A list of these appears in Appendix 3. This continued discovery and creation of Tumblr blogs, while presenting a challenge to the research project demonstrates the growth of the use of Tumblr by libraries and archives.

Each data set provides a snapshot of how libraries and archives were using Tumblr at the time of collection. This research project spanning a year can provide data for comparison through time, by library type and against the general Tumblr population. The results show how libraries, library advocates and archives are using this social media platform to share content, provide outreach and connect to communities. The posting practices of public libraries, academic libraries, academic special collections, library advocates and public archives can be examined and compared. The results also provide insight into possible best practices and a means to assess the success of this social media platform.
For the purposes of providing the most current snapshot of the state of libraries and Tumblr, the most recent data from September 2014 data is presented first. These results are represented by Figures 1 through Figure 7 and Table 1. After presenting the most current details of the use of Tumblr by libraries, the results will show a comparison of the data over time, represented by Tables 2 through 5.

**Current Snapshot**

Figure 1 shows the distribution of library type among the 171 examined blogs. Public libraries represent the greatest percentage of Tumblr blogs (30%), with academic special collections/digital library collections making up the next largest percentage (21%).

The average age of each library type indicates those types that were early adopters and also demonstrates how long these library types have been using the social media site. Other
library/archives and academic libraries have the greatest average age. The oldest blog in the data set is the blog for the Chicago Public Library, which was established in 2009. Figure 2 shows that all of the library types average between 1.6 and 2.5 years, indicating that the presence of libraries on Tumblr is not a recent phenomenon ("recent" in relative terms to the often accelerated cycle of creation and demise of social media).

The presence of all library types on Tumblr is further analyzed by looking at the number of posts by each library type during its lifetime. The number of posts shows how active a library is and indicates possible posting patterns for the diverse audiences. The average number of posts by public libraries whose target audience is teens (public library-teen), exceeded those of all the other library types. Figure 3 compares the average number of posts across all library types.

![Figure 2. Average age of Tumblr blogs in years by library type](image-url)
The average number of posts per day by library type may also be useful in measuring how different library types are using Tumblr and what kind of time commitment may be needed for creation and maintenance of a blog. Figure 4 details the average post per day which ranges from .7 for the category of other library/archive and 1.9 for the public-teen category.
Posts can be further analyzed by looking at the type of posts that different library types are sharing and determining how libraries are using the platform; outreach, promotion, reader’s advisory, etc. In all library types, photo posts made up the greatest percentage of post type. Audio posts and conversations represent less than 1% for each library type as well as overall. Table 1 shows the percentage of post type by library type.
Table 1. Percentage of type of post by library type

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Library Type</th>
<th>Type of Post</th>
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</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Regular</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Public Library</td>
<td>11%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Academic Library</td>
<td>7%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Academic Special Collections/Digital Library</td>
<td>4%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Library Organization</td>
<td>6%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Other Library/Archive</td>
<td>9%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Public Library-Children</td>
<td>13%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Public Library-Teen</td>
<td>7%</td>
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</tbody>
</table>

The percentages overall are similar to those of the individual library types with photo posts being the greatest represented post type and conversation and audio falling at less than 1% of the total posts. Figure 5 shows the distribution. These results are consistent with the analysis of Tumblr by Chang et al (2014) which found that the majority of blog posts were made up of photos and texts with few audio and video posts. In the results of this study, 76% of all posts were photo images, mirroring the findings of Chang (2014) which indicates that more than 70% of Tumblr posts are images.
A limitation of the data collected on posts is that there was no way to determine how many posts were original content and how many were reblogs. Further research on Tumblr and libraries would benefit from being able to determine whether the content is original or reblogged. Chang’s analysis finds that there is a “strong bias toward recency, and information propagation on Tumblr is fast.

A distinct characteristic of any social media site is the potential for engagement and the ease of communication among the users. Creating a Tumblr blog demonstrates the desire for connection and sharing and there are options within the Tumblr to further increase the potential for engagement. Blog owners may enable an “Ask” feature that allows anyone to ask questions. When the feature is enabled, an ask button appears on the main page of the blog. Questions by other Tumblr users can be answered publicly as a blog post, or privately, appearing in the user’s inbox. Anonymous questions are all answered publicly. This feature is obviously very useful for
libraries, providing users yet another place to ask questions. Figure 6 shows the percent of blogs by library type that has enabled this feature. On average, 70% of the total blogs had this feature enabled, and over half of all of the Tumblr blogs allowed users to ask questions.

Another option that can be activated in Tumblr allows others to submit material for the blog. When this feature is enabled, a submit button appears on the blog. Users can compose a post and submit it for publishing consideration. The administrator of the blog determines whether the submission will be posted. As with the ask feature, the submit feature is another useful tool for libraries to engage with their users, soliciting feedback and contributions to the blog. Figure 7 shows the percent of library blogs by type that have the submit feature enabled. A smaller percentage of the total blogs (23%) have the submit feature enabled. The library type that has the most blogs enabled for submit is public library-teen with 48% of the blogs accepting submission.
This snapshot provides insight into how libraries are using Tumblr as of September 2014. The data for this project began in September 2013, so a comparison is also helpful to see patterns or growth through time. The percentage of type of library shown in Table 2 remains fairly consistent from 2013 to 2014 with public libraries making up the greatest percentage of library type at both times. The discrepancy in the other library/archive can be explained by the fact that some archives included in September 2014 were not included in the initial data collection. This shows that the distribution of library type has remained fairly consistent through the year of data collection.

Comparison 2013-2014

Table 2. Percent of blogs by library type 2013-2014
<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Library Type</th>
<th>Sep-13</th>
<th>Apr-14</th>
<th>Sep-14</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Public Library</td>
<td>33%</td>
<td>30%</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Academic Library</td>
<td>12%</td>
<td>11%</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Academic Special Collections/Digital Library</td>
<td>24%</td>
<td>21%</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Library Organization</td>
<td>6%</td>
<td>5%</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Other Library/Archive</td>
<td>6%</td>
<td>18%</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Public Library-Children</td>
<td>3%</td>
<td>2%</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Public Library-Teen</td>
<td>16%</td>
<td>13%</td>
<td></td>
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</table>

A comparison of the average number of posts per day for each of the data sets yields interesting results. Table 3 shows the average posts per day all decreasing from September 2013 to April 2014, followed by some library types showing a further decrease but others showing an increase in September 2014. Further research on these results might look at fluctuations in the average posts per day based on the time of year. That research could reveal information on whether academic libraries post more during the start of semesters and whether public teen libraries post more often during the summer months for example.

### Table 3. Average posts per day by library type 2013-2014

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Library Type</th>
<th>Sep-13</th>
<th>Apr-14</th>
<th>Sep-14</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Public Library</td>
<td>1.6</td>
<td>0.9</td>
<td>1.5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Academic Library</td>
<td>1.8</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
From September 2013 to September 2014 there were increases in the number of Tumblr blogs with ask activated (Table 4) and decreases in those allowing submission (Table 5). In September 2013, 63% of the blogs had ask enabled and in September 2014, 70% had activated this feature. September 2013 showed 23% of the blogs soliciting submissions with 20% activating the submit feature in September of 2014. Between April 2014 and September 2014, one other library/archive and one academic special collections/digital library enabled questions. There were no changes in the activation of the submit feature during this time.

### Table 4. Percent of blogs with ask enabled 2013-2014

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Library Type</th>
<th>Sep-13</th>
<th>Sep-14</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Public Library</td>
<td>65%</td>
<td>74%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Academic Library</td>
<td>45%</td>
<td>58%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Academic Special Collections/Digital Library</td>
<td>77%</td>
<td>72%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Library Organization</td>
<td>60%</td>
<td>56%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Other Library/Archive</td>
<td>33%</td>
<td>63%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Public Library-Children</td>
<td>33%</td>
<td>75%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Public Library-Teen</td>
<td>73%</td>
<td>83%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>TOTAL</td>
<td>63%</td>
<td>70%</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

### Table 5. Percent of blogs with submit enabled 2013-2014

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Library Type</th>
<th>Sep-13</th>
<th>Sep-14</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Academic Special Collections/Digital Library</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Library Organization</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Other Library/Archive</td>
<td></td>
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<tr>
<td>Public Library-Children</td>
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<td>Public Library-Teen</td>
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<tr>
<td>TOTAL</td>
<td></td>
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</tr>
<tr>
<td>Library Type</td>
<td>April 2014</td>
<td>September 2014</td>
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<td>------------------------------------------</td>
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<tr>
<td>Public Library</td>
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</tr>
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<td>9%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Academic Special Collections/Digital Library</td>
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<td>18%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
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<tr>
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<td>17%</td>
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<tr>
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<td>40%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>TOTAL</strong></td>
<td><strong>23%</strong></td>
<td><strong>20%</strong></td>
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These comparisons show the need for more ongoing data collection in order to continue to monitor trends and changes in Tumblr blog use and posting behavior. The number of blogs is a constantly moving target and difficult to pin down. There are most certainly library blogs that exist that are not part of any of the data sets, unidentified by the various techniques that were employed for library blog discovery. In order to establish a consistent data set for comparison between April 2014 and September 2014, newer blogs and even previously existing blogs were excluded from these results.

**Discussion**

The results show that a variety of library types have established a presence on Tumblr. While each individual library has its own target audience and own goals and guidelines, the overall presence of libraries on Tumblr shows a desire by all library types to connect with current audiences, expand to new audiences and promote all things library related.

Along with the data presented, the process of collecting the data also has provided considerations for best practices. While collecting the data, the author found that at times it was difficult to determine some of the information needed for the project. The ease with which a Tumblr can be created combined with the fertile minds creating them sometimes leads to detailed
self-descriptions of the blogs being neglected. The names of the Tumblr blogs did not always include the name of the library. Without the name of the library, it was difficult to determine the library type. Some Tumblr blogs only included the name of the library without geographic indicators, also making determinations difficult. Based on a review of 171 library blogs, a suggested strategy emerges when creating a blog on Tumblr and determining the name and what details to include. The administrator should consider how an audience will discover the Tumblr, how the Tumblr will be promoted and what to include in the description. Tumblr itself embraces minimalism with its design, but that ability to stay minimal is not always an advantage for the promotion and use of a library Tumblr blog.

While 70% percent of the identified blogs have questions enabled, it was surprising to find any library sites without this feature turned on since responding to questions is an essential library service. The reason for this feature not being available could be due to a number of factors: the creator of the blog may not realize this feature exists, there may be worry about how these questions would be answered or perhaps there has been a negative experience with this feature. It is promising to see an increase in the activation of this feature from September 2013 to September 2014 and it is highly suggested that administrators of the blogs spend some time considering the implementation of this feature, as it provides another venue for libraries to connect directly with their users. The Tumblr of the University of Iowa Special Collections and University Archives is an excellent example of a Tumblr blog with a detailed description and purpose as well as encouraging engagement through Ask and Submit (Figure 8).

Figure 8. Tumblr of the University of Iowa Special Collections and University Archives (uispeccool.tumblr.com)
Conclusion

The current state of libraries and Tumblr shows adoption of the social media platform by multiple library types. Beginning as early as 2009 and continuing to the present, libraries have been creating Tumblr blogs in order to connect with their current audiences and expand those audiences as well. Libraries have increased their presence on and adjusted their use of Tumblr between September 2013 and September 2014. These results presented provide an overview of how different types of libraries are using Tumblr to engage with those audiences, which in turn can assist libraries in deciding if and how to implement Tumblr as part of their social media program. Libraries that are currently using Tumblr, or considering the creation of a Tumblr blog, can see how others in their category are using it; are questions enabled? can users submit? how
often are posts being created, what types of posts are being shared? The results and discussion of this research can be used to determine best practices based on current Tumblr activity by other libraries. This research project is unique in that not only does it provide an overview of the current state of libraries and Tumblr that has not previously existed, but it also brings to light any changes of that use within the past year. Further research on the topic should also look to compare original content versus the reblogging of the content; it would be interesting and helpful to see what library types are creating the most original content and which ones rely more heavily on the ease of sharing. New Tumblr blogs are being created on a regular basis, and it would also be useful to continue to monitor the state of libraries and Tumblr, then at a later date assess for either increase or decrease of presence on this unique and “forgotten” social media platform.

These results attempt to provide a snapshot of the presence of libraries on Tumblr. They do not even begin to address the content of the posts and for what purposes the different library types are using Tumblr. In gathering the data, anecdotal evidence shows that Tumblr is being used for outreach, promotion of events, highlights of collections, contest, reader’s advisory, entertainment, information sharing and many of the other core values of all types of libraries. If Tumblr continues to be embraced by the age 18-34 target audience and libraries increasingly adopt this method of connection and communication, it will be important to use this research as a starting point towards a better understanding of how libraries are using this social media platform.

Reference List


