

Survey Results

Abstract

In chapter 2 of Library Technology Reports (vol. 50, no. 7), “Social Media Curation,” the authors describe the results of an informal digital curation survey conducted between September 2013 and March 2014. Respondents discussed what digital curation is; whether they do it, and if so, how and why; challenges in curation; guidelines and tools; and the impact of curation efforts.

Our informal digital curation survey, conducted between September 2013 and March 2014, was shared via library e-mail lists, Twitter hashtags, and blogs. The thirty-two-question survey generated 195 responses, offering a snapshot of digital curation practice, revealing how this particular sample of library professionals define and engage in social media curation. We understand that this self-selected sample likely opted to participate because of their own interests in curation. Thus, our results are not meant to be generalized across the larger population of librarians.

A taxonomy of practice emerged from our data. Free curation tools have strong support, as does the commercial tool LibGuides, as the preferred platforms for curation work, while the academic community mentioned the use of a variety of open-source content management systems. The survey confirmed that although digital curation is on the rise and the value of curation is increasingly recognized by stakeholders, the role of the social media curator is not yet clearly defined in many libraries.

Who Took the Survey?

Of the 195 responses, 57 percent were from school librarians, 16 percent were from academics, and 6

percent were from public librarians. Of the respondents, 68 percent served children or young adult populations in schools or public libraries; 4 percent served adults; 12 percent served university students and faculty; and 13 percent served other types of populations in businesses, institutions like museums and archives, or medical or legal professions.

Overwhelmingly, survey participants were female (91 percent) and held MS or MLIS degrees (68 percent).

While 69 percent of respondents considered themselves to be digital curators, another 30 percent noted that they were either unsure or did not consider themselves to be digital curators (see figure 2.1). This percentage may reflect the relative novelty of digital curation as a common task performed by some librarians, with uncertainty stemming from continually shifting responsibilities in libraries, or it may reflect the fact that digital curation definitions and corresponding roles have yet to become recognized.

The Work of Curation

How Did the Respondents Define Curation?

Respondents described digital curation in the following ways:

- “Organizing digital materials, photos, or videos for the purposes of serving a certain population.”
- “Collecting digital format materials.”
- “Adding services to digital preservation.”
- “Collecting content on a relevant/useful subject and commenting/summarizing for storage or re-sharing to a select audience or publicly.”
- “A way of both collecting and presenting knowledge and sources in a logically organized way.”
- “Gathering e-content (user-generated or other)

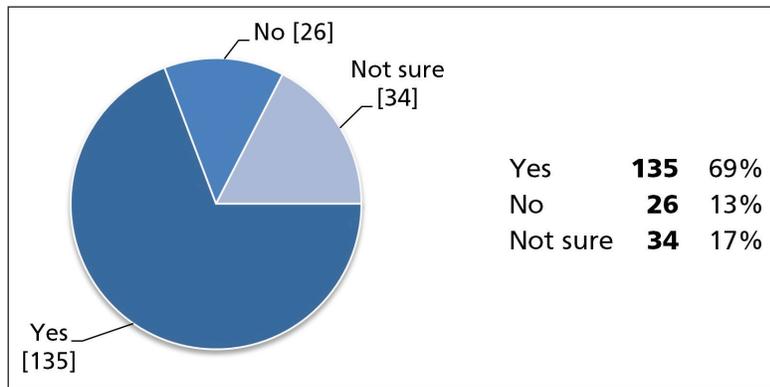


Figure 2.1
Responses to the question “Do you consider yourself a digital curator?”

into a virtual space for sharing with a community.”

- “Taking a lifecycle approach . . . libraries have usually been about access, but curation is also about planning, selection, data management, preservation actions, description.”
- “I feel I do the work described in this survey but do not call it digital curation.”
- “Identification, selection, annotation, tagging and management of resources (not necessarily digital) on a topic or issue . . . published in a digital format.”
- “Locating, selecting, collating and ethically adding value to digital information to enhance the learning experience of others.”
- “Bringing together items both digitally born and made digital to meet the information needs of a specific population.”
- “I prefer ‘digital stewardship’ or ‘digital preservation’ to mean essentially the same thing.”
- “‘Curation’ is a term that has been hijacked by popular culture to an extent that it’s a struggle to apply it in its original context.”

A taxonomy of digital curation emerged from the definition responses (see figure 2.2). Gathering, collecting, and preserving content formed the foundation of definitions; in other words, managing “stuff.” The most common theme among responses concerned connecting: gathering, collecting, and preserving content for ease of use and access. A third level of definitions highlighted focused activities that added a curatorial voice and analytical context to the focused gathering. A smaller portion of responses pointed to an even greater good for the community. This level of definitions saw curation efforts as contributions to community growth and learning. Other elements pointed to the more personal value that accompanied these professional activities. This collateral value included the building of professional or institutional brand and social capital within the community.

Although respondents reported that they spent significant time during their workday engaged in content

curation, 54 percent shared that curation is not a specifically assigned job task (figure 2.3). Forty-eight percent spent more than 10 percent of their workday on curation (figure 2.4). Fifty-one percent reported spending at least four hours of personal time per week curating (figure 2.5). In fact, when asked about the biggest challenge in curation efforts, 27 percent named time devoted solely to curation and 14 percent noted time for training as challenges. Interestingly, 68 percent of respondents reported no protocols for curation, and 67 percent reported that no policies, guidelines, or rubrics existed.

Why Do Librarians Curate?

Librarians named a variety of reasons for curating. Top among these were to present communication and research tools, topic-specific guides, and new books and media, followed by for promotion of current awareness and for personal knowledge management. One respondent shared, “Top priority is my own research as an information professional on how to gather best information for education in participatory global culture.” Others described a kind of in-box or staging area function: “To keep my own personal information organized and to allow me quickly find, sort and re-organize information I want to share.” The next tier of curation reasons included marketing services and resources, creating entry points to collections, and sharing community news. These selections demonstrate how librarians of various types are increasingly leveraging digital means to meet user, patron, or learner needs as well as to manage their own materials and learning. One participant answered in bold: “IT’S ALL ABOUT THE USER GETTING TO THE GOOD STUFF EASILY, BABY!”

Challenges to Curation

Time to devote solely to curation was the biggest challenge named, followed by time for training, disseminating curation efforts to stakeholders, and costs of commercial curation tools (figure 2.6).

This aligns to the relative difficulty 30 percent of respondents expressed in deciding whether they consider themselves to be curators in the first place. It again reflects the fact that curation is not widely understood or recognized as a routine professional responsibility.

Is Curation an Individual or Collaborative Activity?

Librarians surveyed appear to see value in collaborating

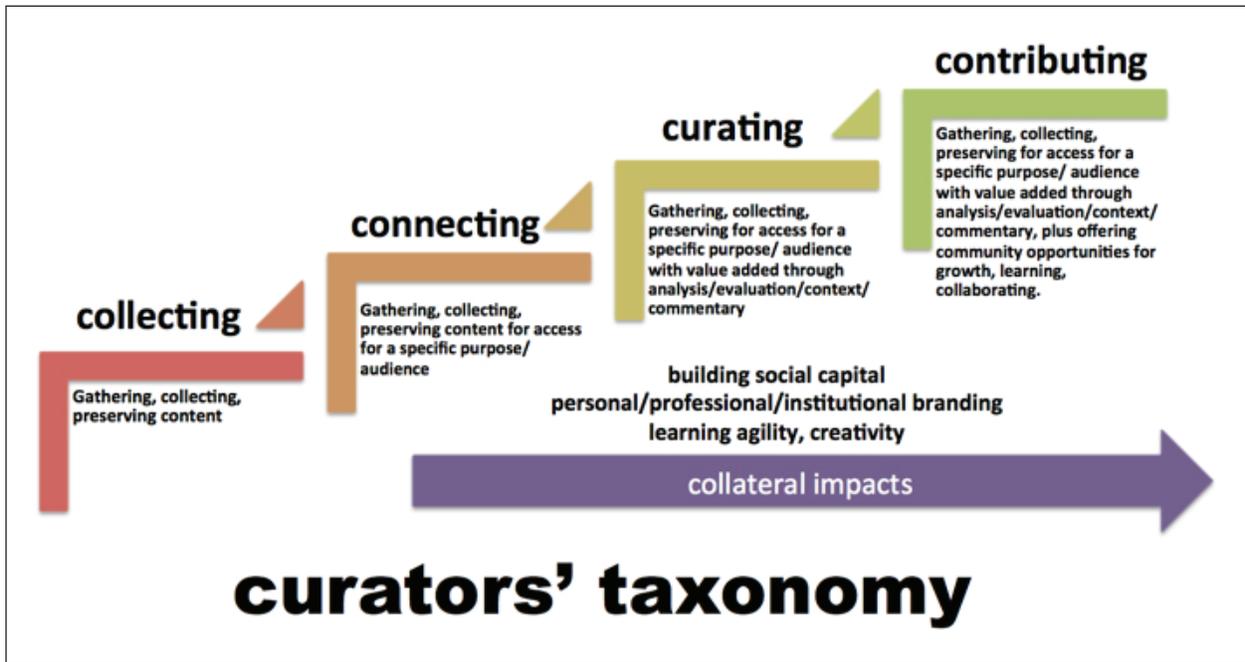


Figure 2.2
Taxonomy of digital curation reflected in respondents' definitions (Valenza and Boyer, 2014).

with others in their curation efforts (figure 2.7). Sixty-eight percent responded that they do collaborate with faculty or other staff to curate content. Sixty-seven percent work with three or more collaborators. Because most of our participants came from school settings, they described collaborations among subject area departments. Collaborators were fairly evenly split between humanities (55 percent) and STEM-related fields (45 percent). English, history, and other social sciences provide the largest number of collaborators, followed by general sciences. Collaborative efforts described by participants included working closely with department heads to curate resources specific to course needs and working with administrators (principals and curriculum integration specialists) and technology integrationists to gather and vet Common Core resources. These types of collaborations suggest that the necessity and value of digital curation are recognized by stakeholders.

How Do You Curate? What Guidelines Do You Use?

When asked about formal curation protocols, selection guidelines, or policies in place at their institutions, 68 percent of respondents reported that none of these were in place (figure 2.8). Among these practitioners, 28 percent have forged ahead and established their

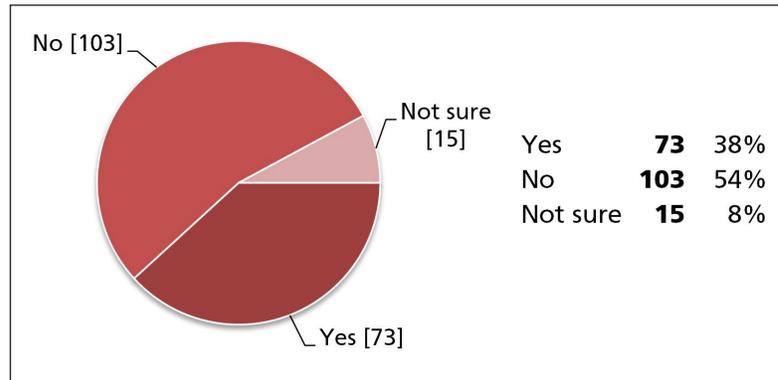


Figure 2.3
Responses to the question "Is digital curation a specified job task for you or others in your library?"

own protocols, rubrics, or guidelines to use for this work (figure 2.9). Fifteen percent do have formal guidance for their curation work and stated that the librarian was instrumental in this development.

How Do You Curate? What Tools Do You Use?

When respondents were asked what their favorite tools are for curation, the top eight tools were LibGuides, Pinterest, Twitter, Scoop.it, Facebook, Evernote, Diigo, and Symbaloo. Among the major determinants for tool selection were audience needs, nature of the task, visual appeal, and personal comfort or learning curve, followed by the nature of the tool, its synchronicity

across devices and platforms, and its financial cost. Another preferred feature was the presence of existing communities on the network to facilitate collaboration and discovery using relevant tags. Our respondents were clearly fans of free platforms: “They do everything I need, so why pay?” Some noted that they simply have no budget to purchase commercial platforms. Others were ardent supporters of open source. University folks mentioned open-source management systems like Omeka, Drupal, and ArchivesSpace.

Those who favored commercial tools noted that they valued security, privacy, and sustainability. In the commercial camp, LibGuides fans devotedly described the platform’s quality, reliability, stability, and support; its function as a network; and its value as a teaching tool: “Will those free tools disappear? I prefer commercial tools because you have more control over the terms of use. You get what you pay for in ‘free,’ which can also mean ads or loss of data.”

Among reasons listed for specific tool selection were ease of use, visual appeal, features and support, popularity among users, and flexibility. School librarians specifically noted their search for curation tools not blocked by school filters.

Representative quotes included

- “Symbaloo because it’s visual and students relate to the app look.”

- “Being able to add a button to my browsers to create resources on the fly.”

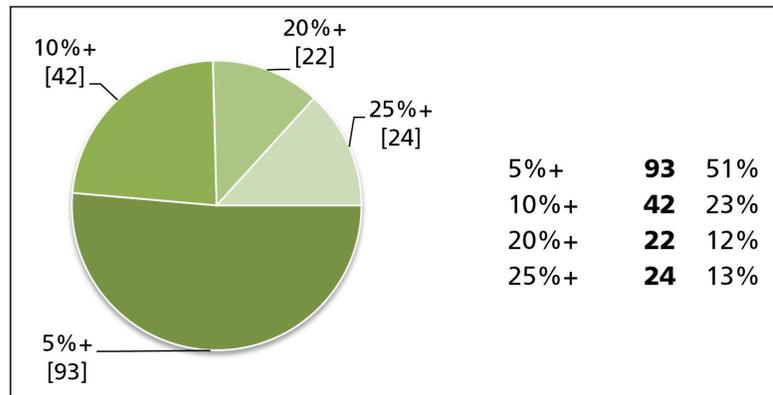


Figure 2.4
Responses to the question “What percentage of your workday involves engagement in digital content curation?”

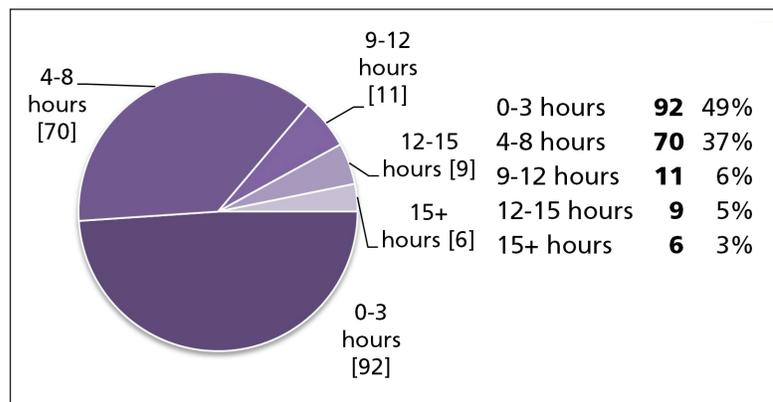
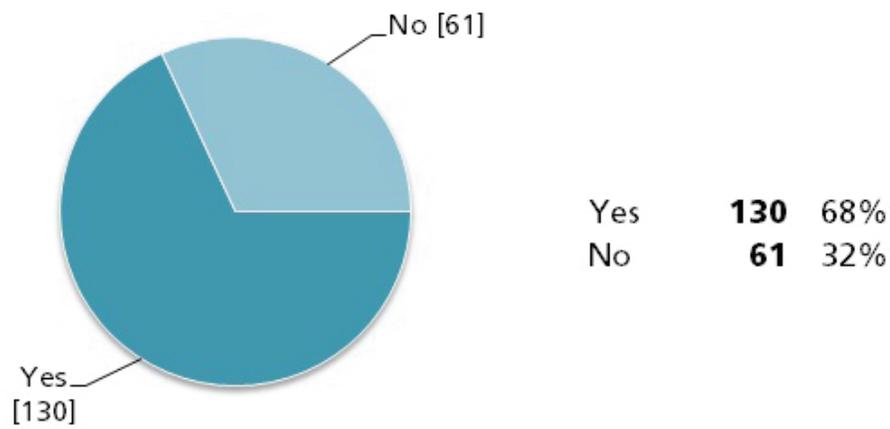


Figure 2.5
Responses to the question “How much time would you estimate that you engage in voluntary digital content curation per week outside of work hours?”

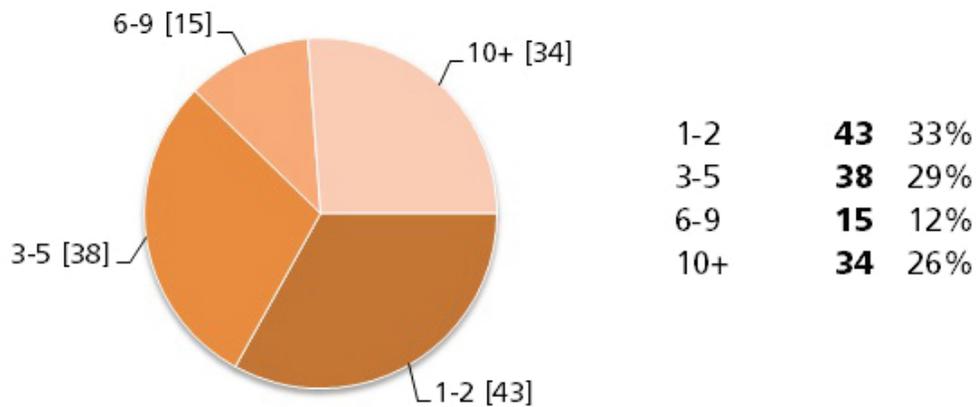


Figure 2.6
Responses to the question “What are the biggest challenges you or your institution face regarding digital curation?”

14. Do you collaborate with other faculty or staff to curate content?



15. If answering yes, how many collaborators do you work with in the course of the year?



16. Do you invite your patrons/users/members/students to participate in curation activities?

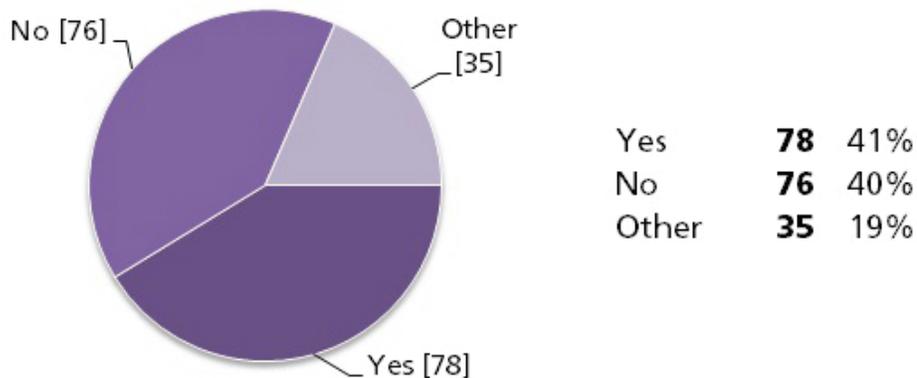


Figure 2.7
Responses to questions about collaboration in digital curation

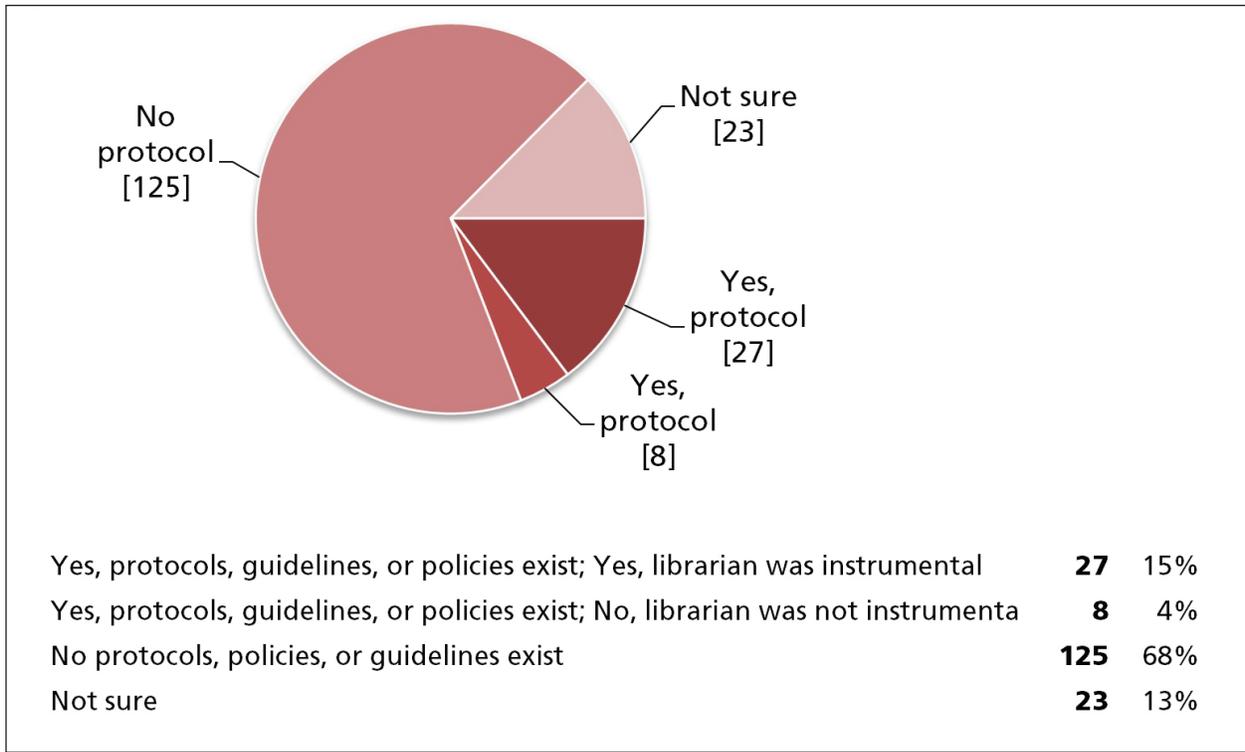


Figure 2.8 Responses to the questions “Have any protocols or selection guidelines or policies been established at your institution for digital curation? If yes, were you (the librarian) instrumental in their writing?”

- “LibGuides because of its great help desk.”
- “Drupal for its powerful framework and open source community.”
- “Pinterest is easy to use FUN and appeals visually to patrons.”
- “A picture is often better to receive than a long descriptive narrative.”

Librarians noted such additional reasons for tool choice as flexible design and organization features, ease of updating and revision, ability to tag, access to support, ability to share, an existing network of curated information, a platform that was device-agnostic, privacy options, searchability, and the platform’s support of pedagogy.

The proliferation of options is an issue. One librarian shared this frustration: “I simply don’t have time to sit down and explore. I wish I knew three tools I should really focus on. The barrage is just so confusing, mind-numbing and depressing.”

Another remarked, “From a preservation perspective, consistency in processing is more efficient in the long term. The use of many different tools on the same material types may lead to complex preservation actions being required in the future.”

How did these library curators make their content

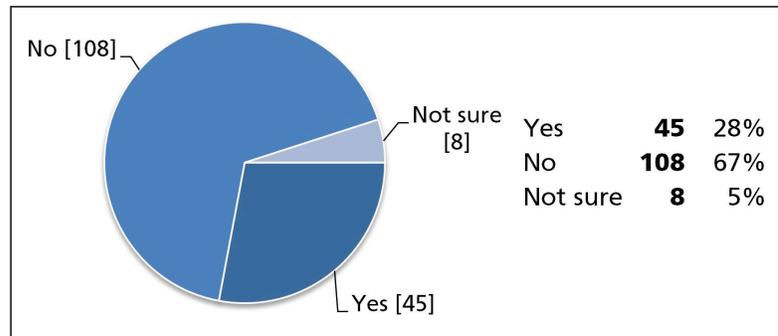


Figure 2.9 Responses to the question “If no formal guidelines or policies exist, have you established some sort of protocol, rubric, or guidelines to follow for your curation?”

discoveries? Among the go-to sources, the top tool listed was Twitter, followed by Pinterest, LibGuides, Scoop.it, and Diigo. In terms of generic types of sources, respondents listed blogs and e-mail lists.

What Do You Curate?

As suspected, librarians are curating a vast array of materials across multiple formats. Asked “What do you curate?” one librarian quipped, “Anything I see!” The word cloud in figure 2.10 represents the frequency of the types of material curated.

