

Bye Bye Birdie: Losing Library Twitter and What Comes NeXt

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Abstract

This case study examines the viability of digital social platforms for library workers to connect as individuals and professionals. Inspired by the recent decline of Library Twitter, the once de-facto site of conversation adopted widely by information institutions, we seek to address the ramifications of cultural and infrastructural changes brought on by the takeover of Elon Musk. Rebranding the site to X, the “everything website”, the tech billionaire has drastically changed site affordances, pushing users away through predatory monetization and through ongoing failure to address rising dis and misinformation. Through a combined methodology of literature review, platform analysis, community discussion, and the adaptation of a poster presentation given by the authors on the same topic, this paper explores the information behaviour and migration trends of Library Twitter users, offers an assessment of alternative platforms, and presents key considerations for the future of library community networks. Anxieties about where to go next and the increasing evidence that all platforms are susceptible to “enshittification” (Doctorow 2024, 2023a, 2023b) create a valid sense of urgency, however, we offer this moment as a rare opportunity to build new digital spaces with care and intention, calling for others to build on our findings.

Keywords: Twitter, digital communities, social media, platforms, enshittification, digital preservation, resource sharing, library communications

Prior to 2023, Twitter embodied many characteristics of an ideal digital Third Space: a bridging venue between the domestic sphere (first space) and the worksite (second space) first articulated by Oldenberg (1989) as physical, neutral, and accessible sites for conversation. In 2016, McArthur and White translated this framework to characterize interest-based “chats” on Twitter, where users leveraged site affordances like hashtags to organize themselves into amorphous but vibrant digital communities. Growing from an initial gimmick of quick thoughts expressed in 140

characters or less to a major social network frequented by celebrities, journalists, and brands, Twitter has continued to collapse traditional boundaries between the personal, professional and public, resulting in kinds of interaction and performance unique to the social network (Miller, 2017). As libraries often serve a similar role as bridging places, librarians and library workers likely recognized the emergent possibilities of forming a “Library Twitter” that allowed us to express professional frustrations and excitements while expanding networks with library users and fellow practitioners (DeWitt, 2019; Xie & Stevenson, 2019).

However, following Twitter’s acquisition by Elon Musk, new structural changes have tanked reach and usership numbers that threaten the site’s long-term viability (Jeong et al., 2023). Being terminally online information workers, the authors of this case study saw the need to contextualize and re-examine the governance, use and fragility of digital social platforms in light of Musk’s relentless quest to remake Twitter into X, his “everything” website (Peters, 2023a). Seeing questions arise in our networks about what to do, if and where to migrate, we also draw out the professional dilemmas, potential solutions, and extant scholarship that may help us make decisions about the present and future of our digital gathering spaces.

Stemming from a poster presentation given on the same topic at the Ontario Library Association 2024 Super Conference, we enfold additional research and analysis to evaluate alternative sites, identify viable strategies for continued online outreach and scholarly communication, and preserve evidence of a library community that was defined more so by its collegial conversations than the job titles or institutional power of the people involved (Jay et al., 2023).

Problem Statement

By contrasting the current state of X to the legacy of Twitter, we do not mean to represent Twitter as a bastion of truth and justice, nor do we mean that all Twitter users were part of an unproblematic information meritocracy. Rather, as library workers intimately familiar with the ways corporate actors turn knowledge into money and power, we understand that all digital spaces are built on visible and invisible negotiations of inequality (Noble, 2018). Yet, the changeover has heightened our awareness of new, unexpected threats to our library outreach and professional values online.

The most noticeable of these is Twitter/X's dispensation of previously core site affordances, such as the paywalling of APIs which locks out both developers and users of popular utilities like Tweetdeck (Peters, 2023; Stokel-Walker, 2023). Activity feeds that used to favour active conversations from followed accounts switched to a "for you" algorithm pushing engagement above all else (Clark, 2023; Perrigo, 2023). Even the process of finding users with shared interests has been reworked as a top-down "communities" system (Hutchinson, 2023) that undercuts the centrality of trending topics and hashtags to viral site-wide discourse. These shifts ultimately remove our infrastructural permission to collaborate and iterate with each other through the platform, and inconsistent functionality from day to day makes the site an unpredictable individual user experience. For instance, once public threads were briefly locked behind registration-promoting login screens, though the decision was reversed in a matter of days (Mehta, 2023).

The worsening user experience likewise subtends predatory 'pay to play' monetization practices. For \$3-16 dollars a month, users receive a verification checkmark, greater visibility to non-followers, and a range of quality of life features unavailable to free accounts (X Help Center, n.d.). Though checkmarks began as a vetting tool to help prevent impersonation of companies, celebrities, and other popular users, Musk recognized that some saw them as a path to instant clout and promised profit-sharing incentives to encourage buy-in (Pequeño, 2023). There are now constant reminders throughout the interface about the premium experiences a free user might be missing. Another tactic to advertise paid plans has been the reintroduction of free premium benefits for popular accounts entirely contingent on their number of "verified" followers (Khalid, 2024).

Finally, we are particularly worried by the proliferation of unintentional misinformation and purposeful disinformation on Twitter/X. Musk not only gutted staff responsible for site maintenance and moderation in sweeping layoffs (Alba & Wagner, 2023) but removed reporting mechanisms (Binder, 2023a) after reinstating the accounts of conspiracists like Alex Jones (Conger, 2022). A European study on social media in Spain, Poland and Slovakia has reported Twitter/X to contain the highest ratio and discoverability of false information of six sites surveyed (Trustlab, 2023). Crowdsourced

“community notes” are doing little to quell the flow (Binder, 2023b), with Musk himself currently being sued for amplifying a thread falsely implicating a user in a neo-nazi altercation (Murdock, 2024). Musk had originally tagged the community notes account in his replies, implying that his belief could be swayed by fact checking (Elon Musk [@elonmusk], 2023) but no correction emerged. The user, who is in fact Jewish, now seeks damages from Musk for alleged harassment and doxing, arguing that the owner’s participation, whether credulous or not, brought greater attention and credence to the conspiracy (Murdock, 2024). As fascinating as it has been disheartening to witness, we now reflect on the implications of these shifts for our communities of practice.

Methods

Our goal was to balance conversation and usage-informed observation with press coverage and scholarship, both within the LIS field and outside of it. Venturing into related disciplines such as media, labour, and technology, we studied existing literature and started our own conversations about what might be lost with the death of Library Twitter, as well as what opportunities may lie in new directions.

To help limit our scope, we focused on the experiences of librarians and library workers as individuals and networks, rather than acting on the behalf of information institutions.

Literature Review

During our initial exploration of the scholarship, we discovered that there is very little research on Library Twitter or the role that social media platforms play in the professional identities and connections of librarians. The focus of most work in this area is instead on institutional efforts to communicate with end users for outreach, engagement, and information dissemination about library services (Al-Daihani and AlAwadhi, 2015; Choi and Harper, 2019; Ribaric, 2023; VanScoy et al., 2018; Xie and Stevenson, 2019). This is not entirely surprising since we began this project in the months immediately following Twitter’s transition to X, understanding the slow timeline of peer-reviewed research.

In order to gather data, map trends, and attempt to understand the information behaviour behind decisions to stay or migrate platforms, we looked to adjacent fields

where similar conversations were happening and where scholarship in this area had already emerged.

Looking to labour studies allowed us to explore the impact of Twitter/X and other social platforms in occasionally precarious work environments. In the absence of designated workplace or professional industry communication channels to connect workers, social media platforms provide workers with a medium for information sharing, networking, collaboration, and advocacy. Maffie (2020) writes that “gig workers use online communities in a way that is conducive to developing a collective identity” (p.140), just as library workers have historically congregated in online spaces like Twitter/X to engage with one another, connecting through a shared experience of merging personal interest and professional identity. Similarly, Young and Rossmann (2015) draw on digital dualism to argue that “communities built through social media do not reside in a separate ‘online’ space, but rather are one element of a much more significant and valuable form of connectedness” (p.22). In facilitating the merging of professional and personal identity through online discussion outside of institution-based outlets, Library Twitter offered library workers a space to connect with colleagues as an extension of their professional practice without being restricted by the formalities of official workplace channels.

Media and technology studies provided data on user migration from Twitter/X to alternative platforms like Bluesky, Threads, and Mastodon. In the absence of (thus far) concrete metrics of similar migration patterns for librarians, these broader studies provide useful context when paired with observational data, as well as comments and discussion with colleagues during the initial poster presentation. In a recent study (Jeong et al., 2023) involving data from 14,000 users who transitioned from Twitter/X to Mastodon, Bluesky, and/or Threads within the first eight weeks of the launch of Threads, platform preference is assessed based on user activity. Jeong et al. (2023) note that “the main drivers for this migration include push factors, such as low quality of service and bad experiences in social interactions, and pull factors, such as the presence of attractive new features and highly influential users on another platform” (p.2). However, comparative data analysis revealed that “despite the rhetoric to the contrary, migrants have a strong inertia for Twitter over other platforms” (p.2). The

exception to this observation is Mastodon, where limited user overlap suggests those who migrated to Mastodon did not continue to use Twitter/X (p.5). These differences in user migration patterns, activity, and reaction to the “strong inertia” of Twitter/X are informative for our assessment of priorities in future platforms, as they demonstrate that the pull of other platforms is not necessarily about mimicking Twitter/X’s structure or affordances, but rather about network effects - where the people would want to engage with are situated.

Similarly, research in platform studies prompted us to explore Algorithmic Gossip, a concept used to discuss YouTube as one of the first sites where users became aware of how code assumed the value and reach of user-generated content (Bishop, 2019). Walker, Mercea, and Bastos (2019) discuss how the transfer of community governance for social platforms from users to algorithms “removed a key basis for mutual trust, opening the way for large-scale disinformation campaigns that conspicuously plagued election cycles, ethnic relations, and civic mobilization from 2016 onwards” (p.1535). Similarly, Bishop (2019) argues, “breakdowns in trust often cause participants’ attention to be directed towards unpicking how the system works” (p.4). Algorithmic Gossip functions as a collective resource for knowledge production among platform users. With changes to Twitter/X’s algorithm and the popularity of Mastodon as an alternative platform in the library community, we are now seeing a desire for the return of governance to users, moving away from algorithmic trends like “For You” and “Explore” pages. In practice, then, we can use algorithmic gossip as a resource, response, and methodology in our decision-making as we trial different platforms and build new community spaces.

Finally, we looked to Science Twitter: a designated community similarly invested in research and information sharing. Jarvis (2022) writes that many scientists have left Twitter/X to establish new homes on Post (another social network) or Mastodon, but the split across platforms has resulted in both options feeling “half-baked”. A challenge with platform migration is that it often takes years to gain new followers and build networks (Valero, 2023). Communities are not formed overnight - they “take time to develop, but they also need the right format to flourish” (Jarvis, 2022, para. 9). Moving platforms means having to track down new and existing connections, distinguish between

username changes, inactive accounts, and faulty search features. Swogger (2023) argues that Twitter/X's "greatest strength as a community tool is its size and audience" (p.31). As this large audience moves in different directions with no clear consensus on where to go, Jarvis fears that "the lack of a viable alternative likely means the community will splinter" (2022, para.10). As individuals from pre-existing - but now splintered - communities, like Science and Library Twitter, struggle to rebuild their networks over time, we also risk losing two of the primary benefits of social media for community interaction and information dissemination: immediacy and reach.

Assessing Alternative Platforms

As personal users of social media who also have administered institutional outreach accounts, we wanted to offer a comparison of Twitter/X's alternatives from a library perspective. Several new sites such as Bluesky, Mastodon and Meta's Threads have emerged to replace Twitter/X and scoop up its defectors. Meanwhile, short-form video on TikTok (and Instagram) have become massive new markets for digital outreach and community building for libraries specifically (Alley & Hanshew, 2022). We also did not want to neglect the reliability of "older" technologies like LIST-SERVs, newsletters, and blogs, or ignore the established communities that can be reached through Facebook, tumblr and Reddit.

	Mastodon	Bluesky	Meta Facebook, Instagram, Threads	Tumblr	TikTok	Newsletters LIST-SERVS BLOGS	Reddit	Discord
FORMAT	Visually similar UI to Twitter/X; decentralized; open source; federated server-based; ActivityPub Protocol; no algorithm.	Visually identical UI to Twitter/X; made by former Twitter CEO Jack Dorsey; built on federated, AT Protocol; Algorithmic choice.	Different focus for each platform (Instagram is primarily visual, Threads is text-based, etc.); very corporate friendly with tools for marketing & promotion.	Multimedia microblogging- merges the format and organization features (e.g. tags) of traditional weblogs with social sharing features.	Short form looping video with integrated editing capabilities. Strong algorithmic involvement for serving users content.	Text-based; email format; can include visuals and links etc.	Forum style discussion; communities into self-moderated 'subreddits' with individual threads posted by users to generate topical conversation.	The gamer version of Slack; instant messaging, voice calling and screen mirroring organized into 'community-created servers'. Servers are usually subdivided into topical 'channels'.
USERSHIP	Over 10.04 million registered users since March (Statista, 2023)	App downloaded over 1 million times since July (Statista, 2023); sign ups remain invite only.	Facebook: 3.030 million active monthly Instagram: 2,000 million active monthly (Statista, Oct. 2023) Threads: projected 23.7 million active monthly (Roth 2023)	519 million cumulative total blogs (Showale, 2023) "one account can host multiple blogs"	1,218 million active monthly (Statista, Oct. 2023)	N/A- individual newsletter, LIST-SERV or blog subscriber numbers vary.	31k members of the librarians subreddit; 915 million active monthly users as of 2022 (Statista, August 2023).	154 million active users monthly (Statista, January 2023); individual server membership varies.
INTER. ACTIVITY	Can connect with & follow users from any server federated with their own. Comments, likes, reposts, tags; post embedding on other platforms; compatibility with RSS.	Comments, likes, shares; discover page; blocking is limited to promote public discourse; compatibility with RSS.	Collaborative posting; tags, likes, comments, shares; groups; DMs; "close friends" lists; explore/recommends pages; post embedding on other platforms.	Shared blogs with multiple moderators; social tagging and personalized 'folksonomy' tagging (though tags often serve as another site of commentary); replies, likes, DMs; private reblogs; compatibility with RSS.	Shares, likes, comments, DMs; can be embedded on other platforms; stitching (splitscreen additions), often reposted or recontextualized in longer form content (e.g. reaction videos)	Reply vs reply-all function for emails; comment section for blog or Substack-style newsletters; wide-reaching with a designated community network.	Comments, upvotes, downvotes, shares; filtering; 'karma' system helps verify authenticity of users; some paid features such as awards are used to recognize valuable contributions; compatibility with RSS.	Servers are moderated and operated by users, thus vary in organization and interactivity options. Participation hinges on invitation or approval to join.
ANONYMITY	LOW Account generally tied to personal (and often professional) identity.	LOW Account generally tied to personal (and often professional) identity.	DEPENDS Facebook requires personal details whereas other meta apps allow users to choose their level of disclosure.	HIGH Rare for blogs to be contingent on or easily traceable to their creator's personal or professional identity.	LOW It is expected that users will include their information and likenesses in content, though not necessary to participate.	LOW Though burner emails can be used, anything that involves an inbox is usually tied to an account we check frequently and/or use for work.	HIGH Reddit moderation fosters a culture of anonymity where users obscure identifying information or use 'throwaway' accounts.	DEPENDS Accounts are tied to an email and your username stays consistent in all servers unless you pay for premium (unlocks "server profiles").
LIMITATIONS	Low search functionality - difficult to find other users; character limit.	No hashing functionality (yet); currently only accessible to new users by invite code; character limit.	Very difficult to keep up with the algorithm (in the context of librarianship) - need to post very frequently; data scraping; advertising.	Low searchability; does not support files greater than 10MB, often tries (and fails) to adopt successful features of other sites; opaque and inconsistent moderation.	"HumanizingFun" (Alley & Hanslow 2023) content dominates over timely, informative videos about library services; the algorithm is highly obscure.	Email overload - easy to get lost in the inbox, forced interaction with reply-all function; web 1.0 vs web 2.0 re: engagement.	Subreddit moderation and level of activity is variable, community can be in conflict with site ownership.	Aggressive monetization reducing free functionality; new drastic UI changes; low discoverability for servers.
PRESERV. ABILITY	MODERATE Data export options; visible to public; has an "Automated Post Deletion" feature which could hinder public preservation & archiving initiatives.	HIGH All Bluesky profiles are public (for viewing); posts, likes, and blocks are all public, though content can be deleted.	MODERATE Most content is publicly visible, with exceptions like closed Facebook groups. Link between Instagram & Threads accounts means that users cannot delete Threads account without also deleting associated Instagram account.	MODERATE Individual blogs can be archived using existing tools and posts from deleted accounts remain in circulation. Some blogs may be toggled to viewable on desktop or mobile exclusively and/or excluded from search indexing.	COMMUNITY PRESERVATION EFFORTS Community preservation efforts such as https://tik.fail/ have created tools for downloading and storing content otherwise only viewable in-app. Reposting outside of the app is also common.	HIGH Numerous options for email archiving software (EPADD etc.). LIST-SERVS associated with institutions may have mandates about library content preservation.	HIGH Workarounds exist to access 'deleted' content; format works well with existing web archiving tools like the Wayback Machine. Main concern is disassociation of externally hosted images.	LOW Content locked behind conditional membership; no infrastructure for long term file hosting or conversation archiving.

Figure 1: Chart assessing alternate platforms for the library community in a post-Library Twitter world. Note: this chart is from the initial poster presentation in January 2024 and therefore some information may no longer be up to date.

While our chart (Figure 1) cannot account for every possible option, we focused on qualitative evaluation criteria that sought to address professional values and community concerns as much as explain site mechanics. It was, for instance, a conscious choice to exclude LinkedIn due to its primary focus on professional development, while YouTube was omitted due to its main use as a streaming media repository with social features, rather than a dedicated social network.

We first summarize the ‘format’ or the way that content is delivered over each platform. Corporations often seek to corner the market on particular modes of communication, while account visibility and growth depends on users’ co-creation of site culture and participation in trends. Still, many sites overlap in the kinds of formats or post-types they offer and are distinguished by other features of their culture or userbases.

Secondly, we attempted to gauge ‘usership metrics’ using Statista and other similar third-party data analysis publications. We focused on Monthly Active Users to indicate popularity, but where this statistic was not available, we opted for cumulative user numbers, with the caveat that these may not reflect how active these sites are. We highlight that popularity does not necessarily equate to the best platform choice; on an individual level, it may even be preferable to join a less popular platform to curate intimate conversations more easily.

The ‘interactivity’ row examines the methods available to users for interacting with posts and other users, which greatly contribute to the character of a platform. We did not consider in-built content filtering of “muted” or “blocked” topics and users as features worth noting every time, since they tend to be available on every platform.

‘Anonymity’ is another category where we expect personal preference to drive choice. Sites like Facebook normalized the connection of one’s personal identity to online discussion, a trend which was adopted on Twitter/X where many individuals participated as netizens as well as librarians. However, anonymity - or at least the ability to have a low profile - is a key component of an effective Third Space (McArthur & White, 2016, p. 3, 6), so it may be a determining factor for those who want to protect their personal information or who may be more likely to experience identity-based harassment.

The following row covers “limitations” of each platform. These are only a sampling of the issues that emerge with long term platform use, but our chosen issues relate to site governance or infrastructure more so than interpersonal dynamics or user interfaces.

Lastly, with an eye towards documentation for the public record, we give a basic feasibility assessment for the “preservability” of each given site. All social networks legally must let users query and download their data, but individual account contents do not illustrate how central relationships and site affordances are to shaping what conversations are had. The medium, after all, is the message.

Community Engagement

Beyond the exercise of comparing digital sites for the library community, our initial poster was essentially a pretext to hold discussions with fellow library workers at the Ontario Library Association 2024 Super Conference. Roughly 50 attendees expressed their interest and support by RSVPing to our session, while the poster, an audio-version of our presentation, and an asynchronous question and answer feature were available online for those not able to attend in-person.

In addition to walking colleagues through our findings, we also invited conversation through open-ended questions such as:

- Are you still on Twitter/X? Why or why not?
- Have you noticed differences in Twitter/X?
- What other social sites do you or your library use?
- Are there any platforms that you’re interested in joining?
- What would make you leave a platform? What would make you stay?
- Have you discussed migrating to another platform with your workplace or friends?

We did not collect formal data in order to be present and actively listen to our community but consider 50 a good estimation of the number of people we engaged with. The following section of this paper explores the common sentiments from our interactions with these attendees.

Findings & Discussion

Reworking this topic as a case study has allowed reflection on major themes that emerged from the literature and our presentation. Each of these themes could be a starting point for research in its own right, prompting us to call on our colleagues to help diversify the angles from which to explore networked library communities. We hope that this project can be an early contribution to an expanding body of research in the area of library communications and collaborations, especially with the novel focus on librarians as a subclass of platform users, rather than as administrators of institutional accounts.

Community Feedback

The recurring points of discussion from our presentation audience were fatigue and burnout, deciding between two competing platforms, a kind of identity crisis, and the desire for something else - though it was not clear what.

The desire to be free from the grip of social media was a common feeling amongst colleagues. Multiple library workers expressed frustrations with Twitter/X, told us about their decision to abandon it, and their intention to join a new platform. However, many indicated they experienced burnout from digital spaces as additional sites of professional performance. Though we may joke about the healing benefits of 'touching grass' several attendees directly stated they were enjoying the break from the onslaught of information and discussion online.

Nevertheless, many of these attendees who stepped back from Twitter/X also said they felt disconnected from colleagues. For some, these feelings contributed to a kind of identity crisis. Taking a break from online interaction was restful, but it was also isolating. As a conference for all librarians and library workers in Ontario, many attendees hailed from smaller systems or were solo librarians at rural institutions, making online communities even more crucial for feeling connected to professional conversations and current events.

Those who had joined a new platform as a result of leaving Twitter/X tended to fall into two camps, with some overlap: Mastodon users and/or Bluesky users. It is worth noting that at the time of this presentation, Bluesky was still in an invite code only

access stage, with one of the conference attendees even offering access codes to us or anyone interested in testing the site. These testimonies we received align with the survey data gathered and analyzed by Jeong et al. (2023). Those who had not yet joined a new platform but were thinking about it were curious which alternative platform was most popular and had the largest library community so they could migrate accordingly when they felt ready.

Critical Reflections

Enshittification – A Bluebird in a Coal Mine

Elon Musk's takeover of Twitter unfolded at the same time that information scholar Cory Doctorow articulated his theory of "enshittification": a process of decline and collapse to which all platforms are susceptible (Doctorow, 2023a). We initially neglected to include this perspective since it is not yet being discussed in peer-reviewed sources, but we recognize its popularity and applicability to this case. Doctorow breaks down the enshittification process thusly: "[h]ere is how platforms die: first, they are good to their users; then they abuse their users to make things better for their business customers; finally, they abuse those business customers to claw back all the value for themselves. Then, they die." (Doctorow, 2023a para.1)

After being forced to honour an inflated purchase price of 44 billion USD and taking Twitter/X private (O'Sullivan & Dufy, 2022), Musk was not just afforded impunity to run the company based on his ideological whims, but the incentive to recoup operation costs and capital losses by any means necessary (Maurer, 2022). In the process, he seems to have accidentally treated the stages of enshittification as a checklist. Even so, enshittification is now moving beyond digital venues and Doctorow has turned to advocating for competition, self-help, regulation and workers' rights as ways to resist and refuse (Doctorow, 2024).

Competition has been addressed in this case study by our analysis of Twitter/X alternatives. On one hand, the proliferation of options can make migration daunting. On the other, having multiple alternatives enables greater freedom of movement to build digital affinity groups with intention. The next section of this paper centers the exciting

opportunity to cultivate new working spaces, start worthwhile conversations, and in the process revive a less centralized but more diverse internet.

Doctorow's self-help strategy also provides librarians and library workers specifically with the opportunity to leverage our professional skills, since our work already involves teaching users to empower themselves through the fulfillment of information needs. Doctorow's call to "seize the means of computation" (Doctorow, 2023b) has been answered by many libraries' divestment from major vendors and adoption of open source, community-developed Integrated Library Systems, such as Koha (*Official Website of Koha Library Software*, n.d.). As Twitter/X's locking of APIs shows, platform owners feel threatened when we start customizing our own digital experiences in ways they cannot control.

As for regulation, a new Digital Services Act is currently being tested in the EU with cooperation from major platforms to enshrine greater transparency and consumer protection (European Commission, 2023). However, a Stateside bill forcing a ban on TikTok if it does not sell to a US-friendly proprietor (Maheshwari & Holpuch, 2024) demonstrates how regulation might also be wielded as a tool for censorship. In a profession where our services are targeted by twisted regulatory threats like book banning campaigns (American Library Association, 2024), we must seek to hold corporations accountable without sacrificing fundamental rights to expression.

Lastly, there is the matter of workers' rights. Doctorow himself is a strong advocate of Fobazi Ettarh's theory of "vocational awe" (Ettarh, 2018) which identifies how moral virtues underpinning the library profession have created conditions of exploitation. Doctorow widens its application to other affectively motivated fields like tech work (Doctorow, 2024, para.32), suggesting opportunities to build coalitions over similar labour challenges. We must further recognize the serious labour involved in professional online presence, whether on the clock or for our own love of posting. Content creator burnout is very real, and visibility equally invites harassment, contributing to beloved TikTok librarian Mychal Threats' recent decision to go offline (Jones, 2024). Thus, if we choose to continue to use social media professionally, we may need greater institutional support, or at least retain the right to log off and recharge

as voluntary users, even if our digital professional networks benefit from our time and involvement.

Community Creation and Advocacy – If You Build It, They Will Come

To speak more on that time and involvement, there are potential positives of platform death to highlight. This is a rare opportunity to recalibrate how and where we show up online, to avoid the impulse to wait and see which platform everyone will join, and refuse to let platforms constrain what we create within their walls. Instead, we might reinvest our energy in developing the spaces we want to exist with the intent to ask and answer burning professional questions, over amassing the largest critical mass of users possible.

“Fragmentation”, as Jarvis (2022) calls it, is not inherently or entirely negative. Part of our collective assessment of alternative platforms is the reality that with more options available to us, different platforms will appeal to different users based on a diverse set of priorities and preferences in an online experience. Users who previously enjoyed the user experience of Twitter/X may be more inclined to join Bluesky due to the nearly identical user interface. Users who are more familiar with open-source technologies and decentralized models may be more inclined to use Mastodon as their platform of choice moving forward. The split across platforms can contribute to a broader resistance to ‘locking in’ to the same major gathering places, reversing a consolidation of corporate power achieved through platformization- a process in which Twitter/X acted as a major catalyst. Creation of less unified spaces, but ones customized to our needs, interests and positionalities may ultimately serve the community better than trying to replicate in exact detail an experience we have already tried, lost, and begun to move away from.

Just because sites are fragmented does not mean that our user experience or attention will have to be divided, either. For example, both authors find great value in one-way broadcasts like library-related podcasts, which are available through commercial and open-source applications alike. RSS feeds, which are crucial to distributing podcasts, can be used as aggregation tools for compatible websites, curating centralized dashboards of multiple feeds. There may be solutions yet to be

discovered by remaining platform agnostic, creating countertrends of ‘old tech’ solutions, or learning DIY skills like programming to make our own simple websites over which we have full ownership and control.

Preservation of Digital Content – The Internet is Forever

A significant challenge posed by platform death and community splintering is how preservation of digital content will shift. At a base level, we can continue preservation actions on the data that we have access to. Social media sites must allow users to query their data, making it possible to preserve this data on an individual level. However, this then begs the question: “then what?” Digital preservation tools can help us document online discussions and advocacy that have already taken place, but with barriers like restricted access to Twitter/X’s API (Murphy, 2023) not only is community access inhibited, “research on misinformation, disaster responses and social dynamics on the Internet has been halted or hampered” (Valero, 2023, para. 21).

Several alternate platforms included in the chart (figure 1) employ a closed-access, membership-based model: LIST-SERVs, Facebook groups, Slack channels and Discord servers. Communities of Practice and project working groups often collaborate through these channels, which replicate many of the values, priorities, and features that Library Twitter offered. Within these channels, members can contribute ideas, seek advice, promote job listings, express frustration and excitement, and share publications and pet photos simultaneously. These spaces are extremely valuable and existed long before Twitter/X began its sharp decline. The issue with these models as a replacement for Library Twitter is that as closed or invite-only spaces, they do not offer the same readily documented public record that Twitter/X once did.

This raises questions about our desires and priorities for the platforms we use moving forward. Do we prefer spaces that are less public and more regulated? What are our primary use cases for community discussions platforms with or without the possibility of a public audience? Conversely, is there a desire for decentralized platforms and communications, in which case how do we collectively share the

responsibility for maintenance and documentation? These are all questions that we have yet to answer, but that we must actively seek answers for as we move forward.

Conclusion

Through this study, we have demonstrated how Twitter's transformation into X encompasses a number of themes and issues relevant to library work and workers. Platforms will inevitably rise and fall in popularity with changing trend cycles, and it is not an efficient use of personal or professional resources to join them all. After witnessing the fragility of a platform once presumed indomitable, it is reasonable to question the longevity or sustainability of new trending social sites.

We must remember that any privately-owned, centralized platform is subject to monetization and changes to user interface, functionality, and culture that are beyond users' control. Equally, federated, decentralized platforms may pose challenges akin to the "splinter[ing]" effect highlighted by Jarvis (2022). There is no one perfect solution, but as information professionals we have a responsibility to use this period of transition as an opportunity to reassess our values, needs, and priorities in community platforms in order to rebuild in a meaningful and sustainable way. This must be a community effort, not only built through conversation but scholarship, assessment and care.

Regardless of what platforms win out, our conversations with colleagues and research findings outlined in this paper do indicate that there is still a strong desire and motivation for the connection and collaboration that lay at the core of Library Twitter. We in fact hold a significant amount of power in the equation: no platform can succeed without users to populate it with content. Even as we take time to figure out what shape these future spaces will take, the professional library community may splinter or branch, but it is not fractured.

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