

US Library of Congress backtracks on complete Twitter archive

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The US Library of Congress has scaled back plans to archive every message ever sent on Twitter, sparking debate on the importance of social media in historical records.

The library, which is believed to be the largest in the world with a mission of preserving important national and global cultural records, announced this week it would stop collecting the entire Twittersphere's tweets from January 2018.

"Effective January 1, 2018, the Library will acquire tweets on a selective basis—similar to our collections of web sites," the library's communications director Gayle Osterberg said in a blog post.

"The Library regularly reviews its collections practices to account for environmental shifts, diversity of collections and topics, cost effectiveness, use of collections and other factors. This change results from such a review."

Officials cited several reasons for the decision: the volume of the [tweet](#) database is much bigger than it was a few years ago and the library lacks the capacity to deal with images and items other than text.

The library in 2010 began its tweet archive after receiving a "gift" from Twitter of the full database of public tweets dating from the first tweet in 2006, but has not determined when or how to make this public.

The archive "will remain embargoed until access issues can be resolved in a cost-effective and sustainable manner," Osterberg said.

A statement said the library from 2018 "will continue to acquire tweets but will do so on a very selective basis" adding that the collection will likely be "thematic and event- based, including events such as elections, or themes of ongoing national interest, e.g. public policy."

Still, it added that the 12-year archive of tweets already collected "may prove to be one of this generation's most significant legacies to future generations."

The move prompted considerable reaction—including on Twitter.

"Not good," tweeted CNBC news associate Mariam Amin.

"I want every tweet to be archived. In 40 years, I want to take my granddaughter to the Library of Congress and show her the madness I dealt with as a journalist...make every tweet count."

How to choose?

Others questioned how the institution would determine which tweets are historically important.

The library "now needs to decide which of all our tweets are a valuable record of events in public life," tweeted the consumer activist group Public Knowledge.

But the news site PoliticusUSA appeared to welcome the decision, tweeting that the library "would be no longer be wasting its resources by trying to archive every single public post published on Twitter."

Some Twitter users lamented the quality of the messaging platform and the impact of prolific tweeter Donald Trump.

"Trump has managed to lower the value of Twitter," one user wrote.

"Now the Library of Congress won't archive every Tweet. #sorrytwitter. That must be because most of his tweets are embarrassing to the rest of the nation."

Jennifer Grygiel, communications professor at Syracuse University, said the move was disappointing from an institution "which is perceived to be the greatest library and [archive](#) in our country."

"This could lead to increased rhetoric about how there is too much user-generated social media content for companies to effectively manage or moderate," Grygiel told AFP

"Social media is not 'too big to moderate;' it takes time, money, and resources to effectively manage [social media](#) content."

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