



Volume 1 · Issue 2 · 2026 · pp. 1-10

The Politics of Digital Memory: Social Media as a New Historical Archive

Sebin Michael^{1,*}¹ University of Kerala, India* Corresponding author: sebinmichael.me@gmail.com

ARTICLE INFO

Article history:

Received: 11-08-2026

Received in revised form: 16-08-2026

Accepted: 12-09-2026

Available online: 13-09-2026

Keywords:

Archival Theory
Digital Humanities
Digital Memory
Historical Archive
Social Media

ABSTRACT

Social media platforms now host a volume of human experience that formal archives were never positioned to capture. This paper treats those platforms as an emergent historical archive and examines the political stakes of their existence, curation, and possible disappearance. Drawing on archival theory, memory studies, platform studies, and digital humanities, it argues that social media is a contested archive shaped by corporate interests, algorithmic ranking, and uneven access. Content moderation and data deletion are archival operations. Losses such as the MySpace music files and the closure of Vine show how fragile that record is under private custodianship. The archive skews toward the literate, the connected, and the English-speaking; its democratising effect is real but partial. The paper calls for preservation duties on platforms, institutional collecting capacity, and support for community-led archives.

1. INTRODUCTION

Somewhere in the Kerala State Archives in Thiruvananthapuram, there is a file that records a land dispute from the 1880s. The handwriting is faded, the paper stiff, but it is still there. The archive kept it, which means someone decided it was worth keeping, and that decision required power and authority. This is what historians rarely say simply: the archive is not a neutral storehouse. It has never been one. What survives into the record is what someone, at some point, chose to let survive it.

Over the past two decades, social media platforms have accumulated a record of human experience that dwarfs anything previously held by formal archival institutions. Protests have been live-streamed, political upheavals have unfolded across timelines in real time. Testimonies that would once have been spoken into the air and elapsed have been typed out, shared, and preserved, at least provisionally, on servers owned by private corporations. Yet the scholarly literature has been slower to examine social media not simply as a source for historians but as an archive in its own institutional, political, and ethical dimensions. Studies of digital history have grown significantly, and archival theory has engaged with the challenges of digital preservation. Guldi and Armitage have argued that digital scale changes the kinds of historical questions that can be asked [1, 2, 3].

This paper addresses that gap. Existing scholarship tends either to celebrate the democratising politics of digital memory or to elevate technical concerns about data preservation without holding both questions together with the seriousness they deserve. This study draws on archival theory, memory studies, and digital humanities scholarship to examine social media as a contested archive, one shaped not only by who posts but by who moderates, what algorithms amplify, which companies survive, and what regulatory frameworks do or do not require to be preserved. The central objective is to map the political dimensions of this archive and to identify what a critically engaged response from historians, archivists, and policymakers might look like.

1.1 Methodology and Scope

This paper proceeds through critical synthesis and analytical argumentation rather than primary data collection. The method is one of theoretical integration, bringing together scholarship from archival science, memory studies, platform studies, and digital humanities to construct an interpretive framework for understanding social media as a form of archival power. Case studies of Vine, MySpace, and GeoCities are used as illustrative instances of structural problems rather than as data points for statistical generalisation. The paper acknowledges at the outset that its primary limitation is scope: a comprehensive empirical treatment of digital memory loss or a systematic comparative analysis of platform moderation policies would each require dedicated study. What this paper offers is an analytical architecture that could support such studies.

2. LITERATURE REVIEW

2.1 Archival Theory and the Politics of the Archive

The foundational claim of this paper, that archives are political rather than neutral, has been developed over several decades of critical archival scholarship, beginning most influentially with Jacques Derrida's *Archive Fever*, delivered as a lecture in 1994 and published in English in 1996 [4]. What Derrida argued, beneath the Freudian framework he deployed, was that the archive is a structure of power. The Greek *arkhon*, the magistrate who held authority over public documents, kept those documents in his house. The archive and the seat of authority were, literally, the same location. Derrida's contribution was to show that this founding condition, that archive-keeping is a form of jurisdiction, has never fundamentally changed. Someone always holds the keys, and holding the keys means deciding what enters the record, what remains in it, and what disappears.

Michel Foucault offered a related but distinct account. In *The Archaeology of Knowledge*, the archive is less a building than a system, a set of rules, mostly unspoken and largely invisible, that govern which statements can be made and which will be recognised as legitimate knowledge in a given historical moment [5]. What enters the archive is not simply a matter of who holds power in an obvious sense. It is also a matter of what a particular society can recognise as worth recording. Some experiences and some forms of knowledge fall outside the frame of the apparatus of collection not because anyone specifically decided to exclude them but because the apparatus was never designed to see them. This insight is directly relevant to social media: the populations who participate in social media platforms, and the kinds of expression those platforms are designed to accommodate, are not neutral or representative. These theoretical contributions were absorbed into professional archival practice through the work of scholars such as Cook and Schwartz, who argued that archives are not passive repositories but active agents in the construction of social memory [6]. The shift from a custodial model, in which archivists preserve what is handed to them, to a postcustodial model, in which archivists acknowledge their own interpretive and political role, reshaped professional thinking significantly. Terry Cook's broader body of work on macroappraisal developed a systematic approach to how archivists should make selection decisions [7]. Macroappraisal focuses on the functions and activities that generate records rather than on the content of individual records, asking which social functions are sufficiently important that their documentary traces should be preserved. Applied to social media, the question becomes: which platforms, which types of content, and which communities generate records that archival institutions have a responsibility to collect? The current absence of any systematic answer is itself a problem. Michelle Caswell's work on community archives adds a further dimension [8]. Caswell argues that formal archival institutions have historically failed communities at the margins, and that community-led archival practices represent both a corrective and an alternative model. For social media, this argument suggests that the communities most likely to be poorly served by corporate platform custodianship are precisely those who might most benefit from autonomous archival practices.

2.2 Memory Studies and the Digital Turn

The memory studies tradition provides another essential theoretical layer. Maurice Halbwachs established the foundational premise of the field: memory is not an individual faculty but a social one, shaped by the groups in which people participate and the frameworks those groups provide [9]. Individual recollection is always already mediated by collective frameworks of interpretation, and when those frameworks shift, so does what people remember and how they remember it. Jan Assmann developed this social theory of memory by introducing a distinction that has become central to the field: between communicative memory

and cultural memory [10]. Communicative memory refers to the living, informal, and largely oral memory of personal experience that circulates within a generation or two, roughly eighty to a hundred years. Cultural memory refers to the formalised, institutionalised, and durably maintained record that a society constructs of its deeper past. The archive, in its traditional forms, belongs squarely to the latter category. What social media has done is to collapse this distinction in ways that are genuinely without precedent. Communicative memory is now produced at scale, in forms that are simultaneously ephemeral and potentially permanent, circulated instantly and sometimes preserved indefinitely. The distance between personal testimony and historical record, which used to be measured in decades and institutional gatekeeping, has shrunk to almost nothing. Andrew Hoskins has described this condition as the memory of the multitude, in which the collective frameworks that once organised social memory have fragmented into a vast and largely uncoordinated digital archive [11].

Whether this constitutes democratisation or a new and subtler form of distortion is the central tension that memory studies must now address. Pierre Nora's concept of *lieux de memoire*, or sites of memory, has also found renewed relevance in digital contexts [12]. Nora argued that as living memory fades, societies construct artificial sites where memory is crystallised and preserved. Social media platforms are, in certain respects, *lieux de memoire* of an entirely new kind: sites where memory is produced, contested, and archived in real time, with minimal institutional mediation and enormous potential scale. But they are sites governed by commercial logics rather than memorial ones, which makes them structurally different from anything Nora's framework was designed to describe.

2.3 Platform Studies and Digital Preservation

The field of platform studies has developed analytical tools specifically designed to examine how the technical architecture of digital platforms shapes what can be done on them and who can do it [13]. Jose van Dijck's work on the culture of connectivity argues that platforms are not neutral conduits for social interaction but active agents that shape, constrain, and monetise that interaction according to their own commercial logics [14]. This argument is directly relevant to archival questions: if platforms shape what is posted and what circulates, they are also shaping the historical record that future researchers will inherit.

Tarleton Gillespie's analysis of content moderation makes the archival implications even more explicit [15]. Gillespie demonstrates that the decisions platforms make about what content to allow, remove, or algorithmically suppress are not neutral technical operations. They are political judgements, made under conditions of enormous commercial pressure, minimal public accountability, and no particular obligation to consider historical preservation. These judgements have archival consequences that are largely invisible to the researchers and historians who will later rely on the record those judgements have shaped. The digital preservation literature has documented the scale of the problem. Studies by Brugger and Milligan have traced the history of web archiving and its persistent inadequacy relative to the scale of what exists and disappears [1]. The Internet Archive, the most ambitious general-purpose web preservation project, acknowledges that it captures only a fraction of the web and that social media presents particular challenges because of platform restrictions on automated crawling [16]. The Wayback Machine's coverage of social media content is fragmentary and inconsistent, and the major platforms have generally declined to facilitate systematic archiving of their content.

2.4 The Ethics of Digital Memory

The ethical dimensions of social media archiving have received growing attention, though they remain undertheorised relative to the technical and political dimensions. Helen Nissenbaum's framework of contextual integrity provides one of the most useful starting points [17]. Nissenbaum argues that privacy violations occur not simply when information is made public but when information flows in ways that violate the norms of the context in which it was originally shared. A tweet posted for a community of followers occupies a different contextual norm from a document deposited in a public archive, and the gap between those norms is ethically significant even when the content is technically in the public domain. Safiya Umoja Noble's research on algorithmic bias demonstrates that the ethical problems of social media extend beyond archiving to the systems that shape what is visible in the first place [18]. Noble shows that recommendation and search algorithms encode racial and gender biases, which means that the social media record available for archival collection is already filtered through systems that systematically marginalise certain communities and forms of expression. An archive built on this filtered record inherits its biases. The broader debate on the moral responsibilities of online service providers, surveyed by Taddeo and Floridi, has moved slowly toward greater acknowledgement of platform obligations, but the specific question of archival responsibility remains largely absent from that debate [19]. Platforms are increasingly

regulated with respect to hate speech, misinformation, and privacy, but there is no significant regulatory framework anywhere that treats their custodianship of historically significant content as a public responsibility.

3. FROM INSTITUTIONAL ARCHIVES TO PLATFORM CUSTODY

The frameworks reviewed in Section 2.1 were developed for state and professional archives. The question they now have to answer is different. What happens when the holder of the keys is not a magistrate or a national archive but a private platform operating under commercial terms of service? Appraisal is already running as content moderation. Arrangement is already running as ranking. Destruction is already running as deletion, shutdown, and the withdrawal of research access. Those operations instantiate the politics that Derrida, Foucault, and Cook described; they do not require the etymology of the *arkhon* to be rehearsed again [4, 5, 6].

Cook and Schwartz's postcustodial turn asks archivists to be reflexive about selection [6]. On a platform, selection has already occurred before any archivist arrives. Assmann's distinction between communicative and cultural memory remains useful because social media collapses it: the same feed hosts living testimony and what later researchers will treat as a historical record [10]. The useful extension is not that archives have always been political. It is that the politics have moved into terms of service, ranking objectives, and the absence of statutory deposit. Theoretical tools built for civic institutions remain necessary, but they have to be stretched to account for a custodian whose mandate is commercial rather than public.

4. SOCIAL MEDIA AS CONTESTED ARCHIVE

4.1 Content Moderation as Archival Appraisal

Content moderation, stripped of the language that platforms use to describe it, is appraisal. It is the process by which someone, or increasingly something, decides what enters the record and what does not. Traditional archival appraisal is deliberate, documented, and guided by professionally established principles. Content moderation on major platforms operates at a speed and scale that makes deliberation essentially impossible, and it proceeds largely through automated systems whose decision logic is proprietary and whose errors are not systematically tracked [15].

The political consequences became unusually visible during the Arab Spring. Syrian activists were using Facebook to document military atrocities, uploading material that constituted, in archival terms, primary sources of extraordinary historical significance. Platforms were simultaneously receiving governmental pressure to remove content that violated various national laws and internal pressure from moderation systems flagging graphic content for removal [20]. The decisions made under those conditions were archival decisions. They determined, sometimes irreversibly, which version of events would be available to future inquiry. The companies making those decisions had no archival mandate, no public accountability, and no particular reason to prioritise historical preservation over commercial or legal risk management. The decisions were also inconsistent. Content that documented atrocities was removed for violating graphic content policies, while content that spread inflammatory misinformation sometimes remained because it generated high engagement. From an archival standpoint, both kinds of decisions are appraisal decisions, and both are made without any of the deliberative frameworks that professional archival appraisal is supposed to require. The scale of moderation activity compounds the problem: platforms remove millions of pieces of content each month, and there is no mechanism for systematically reviewing those removals from an archival perspective.

Figure 1 sets out the paper's governing claim as three linked operations rather than as a metaphor. Moderation is appraisal, ranking is arrangement, and access or deletion is custody.

Platform operations as archival functions



Figure 1. Platform operations as archival functions: moderation as appraisal, ranking as arrangement, and access or deletion as custody.

4.2 Algorithmic Curation and the Shaping of the Record

Social media feeds are not neutral conduits. They are shaped by recommendation systems built to maximise engagement, and engagement, as platforms measure it, correlates poorly with historical significance. Content that provokes strong immediate reactions, content that aligns with what users have already demonstrated interest in, and content from accounts that already have large followings are what algorithms amplify [18]. Content that is significant but unspectacular, content from unfamiliar sources, and content that requires context to interpret are what algorithms suppress. The same commercial architecture that drives social-media commerce also decides which traces become visible enough to be collected later [28].

The social media archive that future historians will work with is therefore not simply a record of what was posted. It is a record of what algorithms chose to amplify. A post that was algorithmically suppressed on the day it appeared may have reached only a handful of accounts, even if it was technically public. Its presence in the archive will be misleading if researchers treat apparent visibility as a proxy for significance, or absence from trending feeds as evidence of marginal importance. This has consequences for historical methodology. The tools of source criticism that historians developed for printed and manuscript sources need to be substantially extended to account for the algorithmic mediation of social media content. A tweet from 2013 cannot be read straightforwardly as evidence of what a broad population was thinking, any more than a pamphlet can be read as representative of an entire population's views. But the particular distortions introduced by algorithmic curation are different in kind from the distortions of print, and historians need frameworks specifically suited to analysing them [21].

4.3 Uneven Access and Structural Bias

The populations most visible in the social media record are not the populations that are most historically significant by any independent measure. English-language content dominates overwhelmingly. Urban, educated, and digitally connected users are overrepresented. The Global South, rural communities, older populations, and people without reliable internet access are present in the record at nothing close to their actual demographic or historical weight [22]. In one sense, this is a familiar problem. Traditional archives have always overrepresented the literate, the powerful, and those with access to institutions capable of preserving their records. The peasant, the migrant, the illiterate, and the marginalised have always been harder to find in the archive than their numbers would suggest they should be. What is different about social media is that the platform presents itself as a democratic medium. The ideology of openness and user-generated content can make its structural biases harder to see and easier to mistake for neutrality. The appearance of democracy can, paradoxically, obscure more structural inequality than a frankly elitist institution would. Safiya Umoja Noble has shown that these biases are not incidental features that better design might eliminate [18]. They are consequences of the commercial logic that governs platform development. Platforms are built to capture the attention and spending power of the most commercially valuable demographics, and those demographics are not the most historically marginalised ones. The structural bias of the social media archive is therefore not a technical problem awaiting a technical solution. It is a commercial problem that reflects the political economy of digital platforms.

5. THE FRAGILITY OF DIGITAL MEMORY

5.1 Platform Shutdowns and Data Loss

In 2016, Twitter announced that it was shutting down Vine. The platform had operated for three years and had developed a genuinely distinct creative culture. The six-second loop format generated an aesthetic native to the platform, and the community of creators who used it had produced work that was, by any reasonable measure, culturally significant. When the decision was made to close Vine, most of that work became inaccessible. The Archive Team, a group of volunteers dedicated to preserving at-risk digital content, mounted a rescue operation and managed to save a substantial portion of Vine's public archive before the shutdown [23]. The effort was improvised, underfunded, and incomplete. There was no institutional mechanism to ensure preservation and no legal requirement for Twitter to facilitate it.

MySpace represents the more catastrophic case. In 2019, it emerged that a server migration error had resulted in the loss of approximately fifty million songs uploaded to the platform by independent artists between 2003 and 2015 [24]. For many of those artists, MySpace had been their primary or only distribution channel, and the files stored there were the only surviving copies of their work. The loss was total and irreversible. No institution had been collecting this material. No regulation required MySpace to maintain it. It was simply gone. GeoCities, the early web hosting service shut down by Yahoo in 2009, represents an earlier instance of the same structural problem. GeoCities had hosted hundreds of thousands of amateur websites created during the 1990s, pages that constituted a remarkable record of what the early web looked like and what people were using it for [25]. The Internet Archive managed to preserve a significant portion of this content before the shutdown, but coverage was uneven and considerable material was lost permanently. What these three cases share is not bad luck or poor management. They share a structural condition in which historically significant digital content exists entirely at the discretion of private companies with no archival mandate and no legal obligation to preserve it.

Figure 2 places those losses on a single line with two institutional failures that later sections discuss: the Library of Congress Twitter archive and the 2023 withdrawal of academic access to the X (Twitter) API.

Documented losses and failed institutional custody

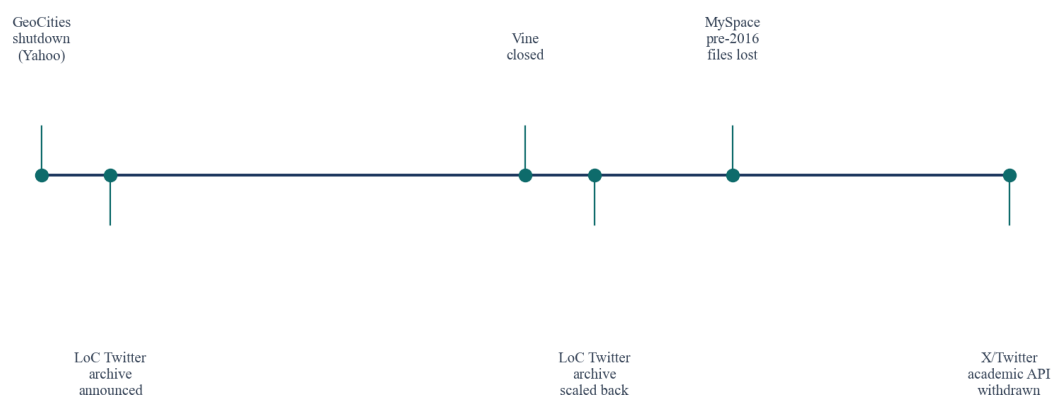


Figure 2. Timeline of documented platform losses and failed institutional custody of social-media records.

5.2 Legal Frameworks and Inadequacy

The legal framework makes the structural problem considerably worse. In virtually every jurisdiction, the terms of service agreements through which users post content to social media platforms give companies extensive rights over that content while offering users minimal protections [19]. The regulations that govern traditional archives, statutory deposit requirements, public interest obligations, and professional preservation standards, simply do not extend to private social media companies. Some jurisdictions have moved toward greater platform regulation in areas such as hate speech, data privacy, and algorithmic transparency, but the specific question of archival preservation has attracted almost no legislative attention. The European Union's Digital Services Act imposes due-diligence and risk-assessment duties on very large platforms, yet it does not create a statutory deposit obligation for historically significant user content [29]. India's Information Technology (Intermediary Guidelines and Digital Media Ethics Code) Rules,

2021, likewise tighten intermediary due diligence and takedown timelines without requiring preservation of the public record those takedowns remove [30]. There is no equivalent for social media of the legal deposit requirements that oblige publishers to deposit copies of printed works with national libraries. There is no regulatory body with the mandate or the resources to monitor what platforms are retaining and what they are destroying. The governance of algorithmic systems more generally has begun to treat opacity and automated decision-making as questions of justice rather than of mere product design [31]. The governance gap around archival custody is structural, not accidental, and closing it would require a significant shift in how regulators understand the public interest dimensions of private platform custodianship.

5.3 The Internet Archive and ITS Limitations

The Internet Archive, founded in 1996, represents the most ambitious general-purpose effort to preserve the web, including social media content. Its Wayback Machine has crawled and preserved billions of web pages, and its collections include substantial social media content [16]. But the Internet Archive operates under significant constraints. It lacks the resources to crawl comprehensively. Major platforms have implemented technical measures that restrict automated access to their content, partly for commercial reasons and partly in response to regulatory pressure around data privacy. The result is that the Wayback Machine's coverage of social media is fragmentary, inconsistent, and heavily biased toward English-language content from commercially significant platforms. The Library of Congress's 2010 announcement that it would archive the complete public Twitter record represented a more ambitious institutional effort [26]. The retreat from that commitment in 2017 was essentially an acknowledgement that the technical and logistical challenges were beyond what the library could manage with available resources. The archive that the Library of Congress retained is selective and its future accessibility is uncertain. The 2023 withdrawal of academic API access to X (formerly Twitter) repeated the pattern in another register: a privately held record that researchers had treated as a public source was closed by a commercial decision, with documented disruption to more than a hundred research projects [32]. The lesson is not that institutional archiving of social media is impossible but that it requires resources, technical infrastructure, and legal frameworks that do not yet exist at the necessary scale.

6. IMPLICATIONS FOR HISTORIANS AND ARCHIVISTS

6.1 Source Criticism in the Digital Age

Reading a social media post as a historical source requires critical habits that most historians were not trained to develop. Source criticism applies here as much as anywhere, but it takes different forms. A tweet is not a private letter. It is a performance, calibrated for a platform and an audience, shaped by the conventions of that platform and the social dynamics of the moment in which it appeared. The metadata associated with a post (timestamps, geolocation data, engagement metrics, and the network of accounts that shared or replied to it) can be as historically significant as the text itself, and historians need sufficient technical literacy to work with that kind of data [21].

Provenance presents particular challenges. Traditional archival practice treats the chain of custody for a document as foundational to its evidential value. Social media content is routinely decontextualised and recirculated in ways that make provenance extremely difficult to establish. A photograph presented as documentation of a current atrocity may have been taken in a different country a decade earlier. A statement attributed to a public figure may have been fabricated and screenshotted to resemble an authentic post [27]. These are not hypothetical concerns. They have generated specific, well-documented cases of historical misinformation that researchers working with social media sources must account for systematically.

6.2 Institutional Responses

The institutional response from archival bodies has been patchy and generally inadequate to the scale of the problem. Most national archives are not attempting social media collection at scale. What has developed instead is a patchwork of targeted collection efforts, with some institutions collecting social media related to specific events, such as elections, disasters, or political crises, rather than building comprehensive ongoing collections [3]. Community archives have emerged as another approach, particularly in communities that have historically been underserved by formal institutions [8]. These community-led efforts have genuine strengths: they are often better positioned to collect in languages and

from communities that formal institutions neglect, and they may have stronger relationships of trust with the communities whose records they are collecting. The challenge facing community archives is sustainability. They typically operate with minimal funding, depend heavily on volunteer labour, and lack the technical infrastructure to maintain collections over the long term. The relationship between community archives and formal institutions is still being negotiated, and there are real risks that community-generated collections will themselves be lost if the organisations that maintain them dissolve or lose funding.

6.3 Ethical Considerations

The ethics of collecting social media content has received less sustained attention than the technical and institutional dimensions. Nissenbaum's framework of contextual integrity provides an important starting point [17]. Information flows appropriately, on this account, when the norms governing its movement match the norms of the context in which it was originally shared. A tweet posted for a community of followers occupies a different contextual norm from a document deposited in a public archive, and the gap between those norms is ethically significant even when the content is technically public. This matters practically. Researchers who collect and analyse social media content in ways that the original posters did not anticipate or consent to may be causing real harm, even when the content is publicly accessible. The communities most likely to be harmed by ethically careless social media research are, again, those already most marginalised: communities that use social media precisely because formal institutions have failed them, and who may not be in a position to monitor or contest how their content is being used. Developing ethical frameworks adequate to these challenges requires collaboration between archivists, researchers, platform developers, and the communities whose records are at stake. It is a task that professional bodies in both archival science and digital humanities have begun to engage with but have not yet resolved.

7. CONCLUSION

Social media has produced a historical archive of unprecedented scale and diversity. It includes voices, perspectives, and forms of experience that traditional archival institutions were never designed to capture, and the apparent democratisation of the historical record that it enables is real. It matters for how history is researched and written, and it has already changed the evidentiary basis available to historians working on events of the last two decades. That same archive is, however, partial, contested, and acutely fragile. Its contents have been shaped by corporate moderation decisions that were never made with historical preservation in mind, by algorithmic systems that amplify engagement over significance, and by structural inequalities that determine who participates in digital communication and whose participation leaves accessible traces. It exists under the custodianship of private companies with no statutory obligation to preserve it, no professional archival mandate, and strong commercial incentives to delete, restructure, or monetise it in ways that may destroy its evidential value. The cases of Vine, MySpace, and GeoCities are not anomalies or accidents attributable to poor corporate governance. They are expressions of a structural condition in which private companies hold archival custody over historically significant material without any of the legal obligations, professional standards, or institutional accountabilities that govern public archives. Every major social media platform operating today is a potential site of future archival catastrophe, and the mechanisms that might prevent such losses remain underdeveloped relative to the urgency and scale of the problem.

This paper has argued for a critically engaged approach to social media as a historical archive, one that takes its archival possibilities seriously while remaining attentive to its biases, its vulnerabilities, and the power relations that determine what gets preserved and what disappears. Three concrete directions follow from this analysis. First, governments and regulatory bodies should develop legal frameworks that establish meaningful preservation obligations for social media platforms, analogous to the statutory deposit requirements that already apply to print publishers in many jurisdictions. Second, archival institutions should invest significantly in the technical and institutional infrastructure required for systematic social media collection, taking seriously the lesson of the Library of Congress experience, which demonstrated both the ambition required and the scale of resources needed. Third, community-led archival initiatives should be supported with sustainable funding and technical assistance, on the grounds that they possess capacities and community relationships that formal institutions cannot replicate. The question of what gets remembered and who controls that memory has never been settled. Every generation of archival practice has renegotiated it in light of new technologies, new political conditions, and new understandings of whose experiences deserve preservation. Social media has not settled the question. It has reopened it at a scale

and with a complexity that demands a proportionate scholarly and institutional response. The historical record being accumulated on private servers today will be the primary source base for researchers of the future. Whether that record survives, and in what form, depends on decisions being made now, mostly by people with no particular interest in making them well.

ACKNOWLEDGEMENT

The author thanks the Department of History, University College, Thiruvananthapuram, for institutional support during the preparation of this work.

REFERENCES

- [1] Brugger, N., & Milligan, I. (Eds.). (2019). *The SAGE handbook of web history*. SAGE Publications. <https://doi.org/10.4135/9781526470546>
- [2] Guldi, J., & Armitage, D. (2014). *The history manifesto*. Cambridge University Press. <https://doi.org/10.1017/9781139923880>
- [3] Caswell, M., Cifor, M., & Ramirez, M. H. (2016). To suddenly discover yourself existing: Uncovering the impact of community archives. *American Archivist*, 79(1), 56–81. <https://doi.org/10.17723/0360-9081.79.1.56>
- [4] Derrida, J. (1996). *Archive fever: A Freudian impression* (E. Prenowitz, Trans.). University of Chicago Press.
- [5] Foucault, M. (1972). *The archaeology of knowledge* (A. M. Sheridan Smith, Trans.). Pantheon Books.
- [6] Cook, T., & Schwartz, J. M. (2002). Archives, records, and power: From (postmodern) theory to (archival) performance. *Archival Science*, 2(3–4), 171–185. <https://doi.org/10.1007/BF02435620>
- [7] Cook, T. (2011). We are what we keep; we keep what we are: Archival appraisal past, present and future. *Journal of the Society of Archivists*, 32(2), 173–189. <https://doi.org/10.1080/00379816.2011.619688>
- [8] Caswell, M. (2014). *Archiving the unspeakable: Silence, memory, and the photographic record in Cambodia*. University of Wisconsin Press. <https://doi.org/10.3368/uwp.9780299302245>
- [9] Halbwachs, M. (1992). *On collective memory* (L. A. Coser, Ed. & Trans.). University of Chicago Press.
- [10] Assmann, J. (1995). Collective memory and cultural identity. *New German Critique*, 65, 125–133. <https://doi.org/10.2307/488538>
- [11] Hoskins, A. (2018). Memory of the multitude: The end of collective memory. In A. Hoskins (Ed.), *Digital memory studies: Media pasts in transition* (pp. 85–109). Routledge. <https://doi.org/10.4324/9781315473772>
- [12] Nora, P. (1989). Between memory and history: Les lieux de memoire. *Representations*, 26, 7–24. <https://doi.org/10.2307/2928520>
- [13] Bogost, I., & Montfort, N. (2009). Platform studies: Frequently questioned answers. *Digital Arts and Culture Conference Proceedings*. UC Irvine.
- [14] van Dijck, J. (2013). *The culture of connectivity: A critical history of social media*. Oxford University Press. <https://doi.org/10.1093/acprof:oso/9780199970773.001.0001>
- [15] Gillespie, T. (2018). *Custodians of the internet: Platforms, content moderation, and the hidden decisions that shape social media*. Yale University Press. <https://doi.org/10.12987/9780300235029>
- [16] Lepore, J. (2015, January 26). The cobweb: Can the internet be archived? *The New Yorker*. <https://www.newyorker.com/magazine/2015/01/26/cobweb>
- [17] Nissenbaum, H. (2010). *Privacy in context: Technology, policy, and the integrity of social life*. Stanford University Press.
- [18] Noble, S. U. (2018). *Algorithms of oppression: How search engines reinforce racism*. New York University Press. <https://doi.org/10.2307/j.ctt1pwt9w5>
- [19] Taddeo, M., & Floridi, L. (2016). The debate on the moral responsibilities of online service providers. *Science and Engineering Ethics*, 22(6), 1575–1603. <https://doi.org/10.1007/s11948-015-9734-1>
- [20] Howard, P. N., & Hussain, M. M. (2013). *Democracy's fourth wave? Digital media and the Arab Spring*. Oxford University Press. <https://doi.org/10.1093/acprof:oso/9780199936953.001.0001>
- [21] Murthy, D. (2018). *Twitter: Social communication in the Twitter age* (2nd ed.). Polity Press.
- [22] van Dijck, J. (2020). *The digital divide*. Polity Press.
- [23] Rosenthal, D. S. H. (2017). Bit rot. *Stanford University Libraries Blog*. <https://blog.dshr.org/2017/02/rot.html>
- [24] Hern, A. (2019, March 18). MySpace loses all content uploaded before 2016. *The Guardian*. <https://www.theguardian.com/technology/2019/mar/18/myspace-loses-all-content-uploaded-before-2016>

- [25] Ankerson, M. S. (2012). Writing web histories with an eye on the analog past. *New Media & Society*, 14(3), 384–400. <https://doi.org/10.1177/1461444811414834>
- [26] Library of Congress. (2017). Update on the Twitter archive at the Library of Congress. <https://blogs.loc.gov/loc/2017/12/update-on-the-twitter-archive-at-the-library-of-congress-2/>
- [27] Wardle, C., & Derakhshan, H. (2017). *Information disorder: Toward an interdisciplinary framework for research and policy making* (Council of Europe Report DGI(2017)09). Council of Europe.
- [28] Shukla, S. S., Bajpai, S., Veeraiah, V., O, T. K., Pandey, J. K., & Nayudu, M. Y. (2024). Social media-driven e-commerce growth through advanced technologies. In *2024 IEEE 11th Uttar Pradesh Section International Conference on Electrical, Electronics and Computer Engineering (UPCON)* (pp. 1–6). IEEE. <https://doi.org/10.1109/UPCON62832.2024.10983796>
- [29] European Union. (2022). Regulation (EU) 2022/2065 of the European Parliament and of the Council of 19 October 2022 on a Single Market For Digital Services and amending Directive 2000/31/EC (Digital Services Act). *Official Journal of the European Union*, L 277, 1–102. <http://data.europa.eu/eli/reg/2022/2065/oj>
- [30] Ministry of Electronics and Information Technology. (2021). Information Technology (Intermediary Guidelines and Digital Media Ethics Code) Rules, 2021. *Gazette of India*.
- [31] Pandey, J. K., & Kumar, R. (2025). Governing the algorithmic agent: Confronting overt and covert challenges to justice and the future of work. *International Journal of Law Management & Humanities*, 8(4), 1974–1984. <https://doi.org/10.1000/IJLMH.1110648>
- [32] Murtfeldt, R., Paik, S., Alterman, N., Kahveci, I., & West, J. D. (2024). RIP Twitter API: A eulogy to its vast research contributions. *arXiv*. <https://doi.org/10.48550/arXiv.2404.07340>