Chapter 1
Scholars in the Digital Age:
Social Scholarship and Practices

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ABSTRACT

This chapter will begin by redefining the concept of scholarship in the digital era. The authors will describe and summarize the conceptualization of social scholarship (Greenhow & Gleason, 2015, 2014) and the practices scholars, using social media, typically perform in different contexts. These practices include but are not limited to disseminating information, promoting academic publications and scholarly ideas, and collaborating and connecting with other scholars. Subsequently, the authors provide findings from their research about scholars' social media practice in academic conferences to illustrate the concept of social scholarship. The conclusions synthesize affordances and challenges that social scholars currently face and suggest implications for future directions.

INTRODUCTION

Now, in the middle of the second decade of the 21st century, scholarly inquiry is more social than ever before. Other eras had their salons, their sherry hours, their Socratic seminars. All of these were social vehicles for scholarly conversation and, often, for the collaborative evolution of ideas, but these old-fashioned gatherings of intellectuals were bounded by the constraints of place and time. Today, the same socially lubricated interchange of scholarly ideas is taking place in digital places that hum with activity 24/7, engaging thinkers from around the world.

Never before has a scholar's online identity been so important. Never before has data been so open. Indeed, U.S. President Barack Obama in 2013 signed an Executive Order declaring that the default for government information will be open and machine-readable. This precedent-setting initiative aimed to encourage transparency, participation and collaboration in government processes. This attitude reflects a cultural zeitgeist that is changing the way scholars interact with each other, ushering in a new era of more open, fluid scholarship.

The increasing popularity of social media in professional contexts, including academia, is spurring this democratization of knowledge. It marks a revolutionary change in the way society shares and curates information, similar in scale to the change that occurred when the printing press was invented. The advent of printed books moved knowledge from the hands of a few scribes and their book-owning patrons to a far greater number of potential readers. Correspondingly, the advent of the Internet and associated social media have taken this popularization of knowledge a giant step further. Less than a generation ago, only people who owned a printing press or broadcast station could share information widely and quickly. Now, anyone with a smart phone has this capability. For scholars, this means that traditional journal publishers are no longer the only ones who can disseminate research findings. Journal-designated reviewers are not the only readers who can give helpful feedback on a study draft. Collaboration and a continuous discussion of academic questions are increasingly common characteristics of scholarly life.

This chapter explores the evolving practice of scholarship and social scholarship in the digital age. First, the chapter defines the concept of *social scholarship* and provides a theoretical foundation for this idea. Second, it describes practices that social scholars typically perform in the discovery and teaching dimensions of academic work, including but not limited to disseminating information, promoting academic publications and scholarly ideas, and collaborating and connecting with other scholars. Examples are given to demonstrate how scholars are using digital tools to change the very nature of academic life. In addition, this chapter provides findings from the authors' research about scholars' social media practice in academic conferences to illustrate social scholarship in practice. Finally, the chapter concludes with a synthesis of the affordances and challenges associated with social scholarship, including its implications for the university and suggested future directions for research on this growing trend.

SOCIAL SCHOLARSHIP IN THE DIGITAL ERA

Understanding how to use social media in a professional manner is an asset in most work environments, including academia. Search committee members would be remiss if they did not consider candidates' digital identities as part of the evaluation process. Among the digital skills increasingly prized in scholarly communities and elsewhere are fluency in diverse communication media that include visual and auditory elements, the ability to disseminate information in a way that is both professional and attention-getting, and an understanding of how memes and crowds behave. All of these skills contribute to a scholar's ability to connect his or her scholarship to public discourse, typically playing out over traditional and social media channels. These abilities often are acquired through experiential learning outside of formal classroom settings. They are the skills of social scholars.

Social Scholarship was conceptualized by Greenhow and Gleason (2014) as a reframing of Boyer's (1990) multidimensional framework for scholarship. Social scholarship is operationalized as an evolving set of scholarly practices linked to social media. For instance, one increasingly normative social scholarship practice is creating a digital identity as a scholar, either through personal websites and social media

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