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Enhancement of digital heritage through digital social networks

Abstract

This article questions the role of digital social networks in heritage mediation. It is based on a cross-analysis of semi-structured interviews and on the Facebook pages of two libraries (French National Library in Paris & Inter-university Health Library). Using a discursive-semiotic analysis and sociological interviews, it highlights how the use of digital social networks responds to a set of communication and mediation objectives while building a "mediation of proximity".

Since the mid-1990s, libraries have been digitizing their written and iconographic heritage and publishing it on their websites, portals or databases. Through online publications, library heritage is being transformed into images or texts that are easily reproducible, transmitted and reusable, thus continuing the process of “trivialization” of heritage in new ways (Jeanneret 2008). Since the advent of the social web in 2004, some libraries have begun to promote this digitized heritage on social networks. Initially developed for individual and entertainment use and as a communication device for utilitarian purposes by institutions and companies (Mlaiki et al. 2012), Facebook is the main social network chosen by libraries eager to increase their audience (Chevry and Slouma 2016).

In this paper, we will investigate the links between libraries and digital social networks based on the specific example of Facebook and its use by two libraries; firstly, the BnF (National Library of France in Paris), which today holds two Facebook accounts, one institutional and the other dedicated to its "Gallica" digital library, and secondly, the BIU Santé (Inter-university Health Library), which brings together three thematic clusters: history, medicine and pharmacy. This research is based on semi-structured interviews we conducted with Facebook account managers and discursive-semiotic analyzes of the three accounts between 01/09/2017 and 31/12/2017. The simultaneous use of these two approaches allows us to compare the communication and mediation ambitions of libraries with what is displayed on the screen, while answering a set of questions such as: How do libraries put digitized heritage into circulation through digital social networks (DNS)? What is the role of published images and texts on DNS? Does the choice of images and texts reflect a segmentation of audiences?

Animation strategies of the Gallica and BIU Santé communities

The analysis presented in this first part is based on two semi-structured interviews conducted with professionals in charge of digital communication on Gallica and BIU
Santé’s social networks. Gallica’s communication with its 350 French and foreign partners differs from the BnF’s institutional communication on social media. Nevertheless, they cooperate actively on reciprocal interaction days, during which a game is played across these two digital accounts, contributing to the impression of complicity between the BnF and its digital library and overall coherence. This communication is managed by a team of professionals across the various sites of the BnF, who in turn moderate the digital social networks and communicate with each other via chat.

Gallica’s communication through Facebook, Twitter, Pinterest and Instagram has two main objectives: first, to publicize and enhance Gallica’s 4 million digitized documents; second, to stay in close contact with the large community of ‘Gallicanauts’ (users of Gallica who actively participate in the dissemination of their documents on the Web). Very responsive, always in attendance and authentic, the community of Gallicanauts is a strength for Gallica and goes so far as to promote the mediation by spotting treasure or unexpected items in the digital library, thus highlighting digital heritage. Their work can be seen through seven videos entitled "Gallica and me: when the Gallicanauts talk about their digital library". In these videos, they share their rich and diverse uses of Gallica. These users propagate Gallica's heritage in blogs, personal, associative or institutional websites as well as on Youtube channels.

Gallica’s editorial line emphasizes links with its scanned documents. This mediation on digital social networks is a major tool for increasing attendance on Gallica, an objective determined by the tutelage of the Ministry of Culture and Communication. The tone of the publications is humorous and denotes a particular proximity with the Gallicanauts. High-quality statistical monitoring promotes a good knowledge of the public of each media. The public who follows Gallica on digital social networks is not necessarily the Gallicanauts. It is composed of French-speaking international internet users, 54% of whom are women, the majority being between 25 and 34 years old. Targets vary from one medium to another. On Facebook, there is no specifically defined target. On the contrary, on Twitter, it is more possible to reach people who do not know Gallica but are interested in these topics. On Instagram, opened in 2018, young people are targeted.

As for BIU Santé’s communication on digital social networks, it has four main objectives: first, to follow the movement by insisting that BIU Santé has contemporary documentation; second, to multiply the channels of communication and interaction with the library’s readers and to help a new public discover the library; third, to improve referencing and visibility; lastly, to share monitoring of (external and internal) information, especially on Twitter.

1 Interview n. 1 on 25/01/2018 with the web project manager of BIU Santé; interview n. 2 on 02/02/2018 with the general coordinator of Gallica’s digital mediation within the cooperation department.
Wishing to unite the clusters of medicine, pharmacy and history in a single establishment while balancing these three areas, it was decided in 2012 to create a single account on each social medium. The basis of digital social network communication is the blog, whose posts are subsequently rebroadcast on Facebook, Twitter, Google+, Periscope, LinkedIn and Viadeo. While Twitter functions as a relay for all blog posts (700 posts in 2012), Pinterest is the place of publication for all images picked-up and shared. The content of the information differs depending on the media used. The tone remains neutral, slightly eccentric, especially on Facebook and Twitter and without mention of the name. Images are used in an offbeat way and opinion statements are encouraged when they are sustained by arguments.

The user is brought into the picture through content that promotes interaction and commitment. For example, games are organized every year. The game “Pharmacies of the world”, for instance, encourages the user to send the most beautiful pictures of pharmacies encountered during his travels. In this case, the target audience is individuals who are familiar with the library. Coordinated by the web project manager, a team of 15 people is involved in digital communication on different levels. Publications are grouped in a shared Excel file. At each publication, the information is written in the file. The project manager decides what should happen and at what time. While only two or three colleagues with administrator status write blog posts and moderate them, dozens of colleagues intervene in various ways. Some simply relay the information without producing content. There is no communication service.

In short, both Gallica and BIU Santé have a clearly defined social media policy. The choice of objectives, the editorial line and the target audience contribute to building the identity of the institution. This is the case of BIU Santé when it decides to present the three clusters in a unified manner by choosing a single account on each media platform. This is also the case with Gallica, which has decided to represent itself publicly with its partners.

According to the specialists interviewed, digital networking makes heritage more visible, it democratizes it and increases awareness among the public (interview n. 1). However, they report two difficulties. First of all, the institutions surveyed mention the change in the Facebook algorithm which has led to a drop-in visibility of posts. They feel heavily dependent on the changes instituted by the Facebook company (interview n. 2) and deplore the difficulty of having institutional pages visible on Facebook without payment (interview n. 1). In addition, many users share poor quality images from the BIU Santé on Pinterest without specifying their origin. In order to avoid this re-use of digital heritage out of context, which decreases its value, BIU Santé has chosen the open license Etalab2. It allows the re-use of content provided its origin is

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2 As part of the government's policy to bring public information into the open ("Open Data"), Etalab has designed the "Open License". This license facilitates and encourages the re-use of public data made available free of charge.
given. The BIU Santé also signed an agreement with Wikimedia France\(^3\) in order to place some of its digitized images in Wikimedia commons\(^4\).

**The importance of the “text image” in the construction of heritage**

A discursive-semiotic analysis of Facebook publications between September 1\(^{st}\) and December 31\(^{st}\) 2017 provides an overview of the strategies deployed by the two institutions. In this second part of the presentation of our research results, we return consecutively to the specificities of the digital communication of these two organizations. We will show that "text image" (Souchier 1998) plays an essential role in the manufacture of heritage.

**Facebook at the BIU Santé: how daily communications naturalize the role of heritage as a communicative object**

Although the institution does not publish on Facebook on a daily basis, this network is the subject of a significant investment with a multi-weekly publication (64 publications between 01/09/17 and 31/12/17). The "information" conveyed reveals a somewhat traditional typology for a place open to the public: it provides mostly news about the library (opening times, closures, new subscriptions, events) and promotes events organized by partners. In addition to these publications, the library's Facebook page is punctuated by the monthly publication of a calendar, featuring heritage objects. The publications always consist of a short text and one or more image(s) associated with a hypertext link either to a Facebook post or to the website of the BIU Santé. Within this framework, the homepage of the website contains a set of go-between signs (Candel and Gomez-Mejía 2017), embedded almost exclusively in written texts. They signify hypertext links leading to other pages of the site, principally to headings of the "search" section on the site biusante.parisdescartes.fr: "Our catalog", "Online journals","Other Articles and Databases","Electronic Books","Theses","Other Catalogs and Libraries"; or to sections of the site dedicated to "quick search": "Online Journals", "Medico-Dental Theses", "Medic @", "PubMed", "Sudoc". The mediation of heritage takes place through an archetypal and traditional set of forms and documentary and librarian formats.

On the Facebook page, heritage is often perceptible through the images that make up the publications, regardless of their informational objectives. For example, the promotion of European Heritage Days allows for the recognition and enhancement of old works exhibited at the BIU. In the same manner, the monthly calendar gives access to news from the site Medic @. The anniversary of the BIU also enables the institution to turn a painting of the first curator of the BIU into a “gobetween sign” linked to one

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\(^3\) Association approved by the Ministry of National Education. It aims to promote the free sharing of knowledge.
\(^4\) Wikimedia Commons is a multilingual online media library launched in 2004, which aims to provide a central directory of free content (images, sounds, videos, audio, etc.) that can be easily used by all Wikimedia projects.
of his speeches, etc. On the other hand, on the BIU website, notices coexist with images to which they often give access. A tension is thus established between image and text, the nature of their relation depending on the type of media support: on Facebook, the image is the point of entry in terms of mediation. On the other hand, on the website, the image coexists with lists (notices), more readily favoring a classificatory logic.

All these publications, by being anchored in the daily life of the BIU Santé, enable it to highlight its collections and to put them in circulation. Several rationales are intertwined: a mediation logic (mediating contents by making them visible and accessible - for example by diverting them into a monthly calendar), a communication logic (institutional communication, also through links to other institutions such as BnF and its Gallica platform), and a technical logic (referrals to the site contribute to its natural referencing function).

Facebook at the BnF: between an institutional profile and a page dedicated to numerical heritage, a pedagogical and entertaining discourse on heritage.

The BnF invests greatly in digital social networks, especially Facebook. It has two pages: an institutional page "BnF - National Library of France" and a page dedicated to its digital library entitled "Gallica" (with 202 and 138 publications, respectively, between 01/09/17 and 31/12/17). The first is more consistent with the logic of promoting all events related to the life of the library such as opening hours or communication related to temporary exhibitions. The second, on the other hand, is entirely dedicated to the digital library and promotes and circulates the different collections. Cross-analysis of the two Facebook pages reveals similar ways of enhancing heritage. It is often mediated through posts articulating mediation (explanation of an element of heritage, presentation of a collection, etc.), images (of the mentioned heritage) and hypertext links. This triad is found specifically on the homepage of Gallica, and is especially relevant to understand how digital social networks can contribute to enhance libraries’ heritage. This triad unfolds around a set of information combinations:

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Text</th>
<th>Image</th>
<th>Hypertext link</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Catchy phrase such as: « Do you know (...)?»</td>
<td>Page(s) of a book, manuscript, etc.</td>
<td>Viewing the page on the Gallica platform</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Presentation of a new collection</td>
<td>Images presenting the collection</td>
<td>Dedicated data bank (documentary portal)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Presentation of a type of object, from a collection</td>
<td>Image of medals, for example</td>
<td>Search page (search with set parameters) on Gallica</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Mention of a current event, put in perspective with its preceding avatar (JO 2024 / JO 1924)</td>
<td>Images of this event in the past (no current pictures)</td>
<td>Search page (search with set parameters) on Gallica</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
In addition to these informational schemes, series can also be found. One of them is "the Friday Enigma" that invites the public to dive into the collection to seek "various facts from Gallica", which enables the institution to enhance digital heritage through the Gallica blog. The Gallica page is thus marked by several essential elements: an entertaining tone (both in the texts and in the proposal of a weekly puzzle punctuating the library’s publications); a reflection on temporality, through games on dates (for example, the date of December 14th inspires Gallica to project us into an old epic: "December 14, 1782, the date on which the Montgolfier brothers succeeded for the first time to fly a balloon inflated with hot air [...]”); an economy of information and mediation always referring to the Gallica platform and to the digitized object.

These two examples demonstrate how heritage is written (Tardy 2009) and continues to be written through hypertext links between media devices (website / digital social networks). Unlike the term “link”, which assumes the obvious function of establishing a relationship (Davallon and Jeanneret 2004), mediation strategies are deployed in different ways but display a set of invariables: the strong relation between image and text and the introduction of a publication rhythm, which is not limited to publishing regularly but also consists of creating opportunities for linking (a monthly calendar for the BIU Santé, daily puzzles for the BnF). The pace and extent of communication seems to be associated with libraries’ regulations, strategies and means. On both types of social networks, heritage exists through highlighting its "places" of storage. These are archetypal forms of knowledge mediation, whether documentary forms ("Image bank") or media forms specific to digital mediation (use of PDF, display of scanned page in a software, etc.).

Digital social networks reinvest and enhance forms belonging to the mediation of knowledge through software and structures specific to the digital realm. Thus, a process of "standardization" of heritage, through which it appears to merge into ordinary communication, is at stake in this use of social networks. Heritage becomes a digital object like any other, an artifact subject to the mass media economy in which visibility is crucial. If there is indeed a mediation logic specific to knowledge institutions, there is also a logic of media coverage. The communication of BIU Santé and BnF oscillate between two rationales: communication and mediation.

Digital social networks: between a strategic investment and the renewal of a knowledge mediation ideal

The "digital presence" of libraries denotes both a strategy of institutional communication – in which communication is intrinsically instrumentalized – and a desire for libraries to renew the way they enhance heritage, that is, an interest in mediation. This last section will explore these dynamics.

From a strategic point of view, the presence of libraries on digital social networks is an investment: it garners a team of dedicated people and indirectly mobilizes people
(15 people in total at BIU Santé) to respond to a directive. Indeed, it seems essential today for such organizations to be present on digital social networks. Libraries also choose to invest in them to meet another requirement: visibility. Considered here as an "instrument" of communication, Facebook allows libraries "to exist" in a more global context; a framework in which they can use social networks to engage in information monitoring, publicize this monitoring and thereby position themselves in a specific social, semiotic and technical framework.

The presence of libraries on social networks also responds to a set of communication, organization and mediation objectives. From an organizational perspective, BIU Santé encourages the unification of three main clusters: medicine, pharmacy and history. At the BnF, the Gallica page connects the library with a set of partners. Thus, these two pages allow two plural institutions to speak with a single voice, responding to the institutional imperative of incarnation (Rondot 2015). In this way, the Facebook page, besides being a strategic tool used to render the library visible, contributes to building the institution, giving it a voice. The institution exceeds the organizational limits of a cluster, a library or a university; it is the result of a process of networking of places sharing similar goals.

From a communication point of view, the two Facebook pages give visibility to the organization but also to its various communication devices: they open up libraries to digital social networks, and thus to their users, and simultaneously satisfy a referencing need. The two pages refer first and foremost to libraries’ other communication devices: their website and blog. These are privileged tools because they are considered as storage places for editorialized content and digitized objects.

From a mediation standpoint, these two Facebook pages enhance the patrimonial approach of the two institutions: digitized heritage is omnipresent on Gallica and referrals to catalogs or data banks are very common on the BIU Santé. Therefore, beyond providing information on places (whether digital or not), the two libraries’ Facebook pages are gateways to specialized content, thus operating a form of "popularization" by re-contextualizing heritage in an everyday space, more related to its users’ daily practices.

Hence, this re-contextualization of heritage on Facebook engages in the process of bringing digitized heritage into mediation. The use of the term "bringing into mediation" rather than mediation, is meant to highlight the strategic dimension of the investment of digital social networks by libraries: it is not only a question of following a ruling, but rather of proposing a genuine editorial policy consisting of increasing the value of heritage and mediating it on social networks. In this context, the use of Facebook, and social networks more generally, reflects a desire for renewal on the part of library institutions. Mobilizing community imagination and the networking capabilities offered by this network, they construct a "mediation of proximity"
composed of an entertaining tone, a "community of Gallicanauts" and a weekly “enigma” at the BnF, as well as a monthly calendar at BIU Santé. While this process is less pronounced at the BIU Santé, the BnF constitutes a particularly interesting case of deploying a global mediation policy on all these communication devices, at times almost becoming a transmedia logic.

References