

BESOCIAL - Towards a sustainable strategy for archiving and preserving social media in Belgium

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The amount of digital data we produce every day is mind-boggling. The content produced on social media fuels the flood of data. However, social media content is very ephemeral and is often not archived by universities or heritage institutional stakeholders, creating serious challenges for (digital) scholars who want to use the content of archived social media as a source. Also, the absence of social media in national web archiving initiatives raises great challenges of preserving our digital heritage and supporting the understanding of contemporary society and its future.

This poster abstract introduces [BESOCIAL \(2020-2022\)](#) – launched by KBR and financed by BELSPO¹ -, a cross-university collaborative and interdisciplinary project with a goal to develop a sustainable strategy for archiving and preserving social media in Belgium.

This project builds on the [PROMISE research project \(2017-2019\)](#), which developed a strategy for archiving Belgian websites. Together with an **interdisciplinary team** - [CRIDS](#)², [CENTAL](#)³, [IDLab](#)⁴, [GhentCDH](#)⁵, and [MICT](#)⁶ -, a Belgian opening in the social media archiving landscape is made. The goal is to create a strategy for analyzing social media expressions from a linguistic, cultural, historical, ... perspective. In this way, this “new” form of born digital data will be preserved and searchable as part of our cultural heritage.

To execute this research program, the various interdisciplinary teams involved in solving digital challenges in libraries share their knowledge with the goal of making social media archiving easily accessible. The first focus goes to reviewing existing initiatives in Belgium and abroad to learn from experiences in the field. Then, the pilot project will be prepared by selecting the selection methodology and user requirements. Additional mini-pilots will be set-up to check the feasibility at different levels (tools, look and feel, and access). Finally, the pilot will be started and in a further stage access-providing challenges will be tackled.

Through merging the knowledge from various research sectors, the results of BESOCIAL will form a first step towards the implementation of a long-term social media archiving strategy for Belgium. The results

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³ Centre de traitement automatique du langage, affiliated to UCLouvain

⁴ Internet Technology & Data Science Lab, affiliated to UGent

⁵ Ghent Centre for Digital Humanities, affiliated to UGent

⁶ Research Group for Media, Innovation and Communication Technologies, affiliated to the UGent

will also be incorporated into recommendations (and a helpdesk for legal enquiries) for sustainable social media archiving in Belgium.

In June at the DH Benelux conference in Leiden, we would like to introduce our project from a Digital Humanities point of view, explain our methods, the already achieved results, and highlight the opportunities and the challenges the interdisciplinary approach has encountered along the way.