

President's Message

Twitter Nodes to Networks: Thoughts on the #litaforum

Rachel Vacek

One thing that never ceases to amaze me is the technological talent and creativity of my library colleagues. The LITA Forum is a gathering of intelligent, fun, and passionate people who want to talk about technology and learn from one another. I suppose many conferences have lots of opportunities to network, but the size and friendliness of the Forum makes it feel more like a comfortable place among friends. However, the utilization of technology always inspires me, and the networking and reconnect with friends is rejuvenating.

So many more people are sharing their research and their presentations through Twitter, and it's fantastic in so many ways. So no matter what concurrent session you were in, or if you couldn't even make it to Albuquerque this year, you can still view most of the presentations, listen to the keynotes, see pictures of attendees, follow the backchannel, and engage with everyone on Twitter. With libraries having more tight budgets, it's extremely important that we continue to learn virtually. There are plenty of online workshops and webinars, but often they still cost money, don't usually encourage much communication between attendees, and "attending" the LITA Forum only through Twitter is not only free, but the learning and sharing is more organic. You have the opportunity to engage with attendees, observers, and even the presenters themselves. Structured workshops have their place for focused, more in-depth learning on a particular topic, and they are definitely still needed and very popular. I enjoy our LITA educational programs and highly recommend them. However, interacting with Twitter throughout the Forum was like a giant social playground for me, and I could engage as much as or as little as I liked. It's a different user experience than so many other more traditional learning environments.

Twitter was born in mid 2006 and the paradigm shift started happening a few years later, but the ways people are socially engaging with one another through Twitter has changed drastically since then.¹ People aren't just regurgitating what the presenters are saying, but are responding to speakers and others in the physical and virtual audience. People are talking more in depth about what they are learning and supplementing talks with links to sites, videos, images, and reports that might have been mentioned. They are coding and sharing their code while at the conference. They are blogging about their experiences and sharing those links. They are extending their networks.

The conference theme this year was "From Node to Network" and reflecting on my own conference experience and reviewing all the Twitter data, I don't think the 2014 LITA Forum

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Planning Committee, led by Ken Varnum from the University of Michigan, could have chosen a better theme.

As previously mentioned, the ways in which we are using Twitter have been significantly changing the way we learn and interact. When combing through the #litaform tweets for the gems, I found many links to tools that analyze and visually display unique information about tweets from the Forum. The love of data is not uncommon in libraries, and neither is the analysis of that data.

The TAGSArchive² contains lots of Twitter data from the Forum. As you can see in Image 1, between November 1, 2013, and November 17, 2014, (the same tag for the Forum was used for the 2013 Forum) there were 5,454 tweets, 4,390 of which were unique, not just retweets. There were 1,394 links within those tweets, demonstrating that we aren't just repeating what the speakers are saying; we are enriching our networks with more easily accessible information.

Archive of #litaforum tweets via TAGS - v5.1									
Dashboard		Summary	Archive	Readme/Settings					
Filter	Top Tweeters	No.	@'s	% RT	Twitter Activity				
Link	cm_harlow	881	269	19%	Number of links		1394		
Link	dinadina619	229	33	16%	Number of RTs		1901 <-estimate based on occurrence of RT		
Link	NimbleLibrarian	190	85	28%	Number of Tweets		5454		
Link	LITAForum	187	262	48%	Unique tweets		4390 <-used to monitor quality of archive		
Link	varnum	174	166	1%	First Tweet in Archive		01/11/2013 22:08:31 GMT		
Link	shinylib	158	74	22%	Last Tweet in Archive		17/11/2014 05:04:50 GMT		
Link	makerbridge	146	56	43%	In Reply Ids		217		
Link	web_kunoichi	123	70	37%	In Reply @s		254		
Link	Margaret_Heller	112	135	22%	Tweet rate (tw/min)		0.1 Tweets/min (from last archive 10mins)		
Link	TheStacksCat	110	12	90%	Tweets/Person Average		10.25		
Link	findthepatternz	107	32	46%	Tweets/Person Median		2		
Link	kayiwa	105	54	11%	Public web views		TAGS Explorer <- conversation explorer TAGS Archive <- searchable archive		
Link	phette23	99	122	22%	Note		Grey = calculated fields Blue = Require File > Published to the web		
Link	beatricepulliam	96	43	20%					
Link	tawataoc	91	25	46%					
Link	bohyunkim	85	82	27%					
Link	sparkymonster	66	30	23%					
Link	linguomancer	63	13	51%					
Link	tammi_owens	62	34	31%					
Link	AnyaNArnold	57	16	9%					
Link	ranti	57	23	26%					
Link	vacekrae	54	33	31%					
Link	jolietjosh	52	27	10%					

Image 1. Archive of #litaforum tweets through TAGS

The data also tells stories. For example, @cm_harlow by far tweeted more than everyone else with 881 tweets, @TheStacksCat had the highest retweet rate at 90%, and @varnum with the lowest

retweet rate at 1%. I was able to look at every single tweet in a Google spreadsheet, complete with timestamps and links to user profiles. All this is rich data and quite informative, but TAGExplorer, developed by @mhawksey, is also quite an impressive data visualization tool that shows connections between the Twitter handles. (See Image 2.)

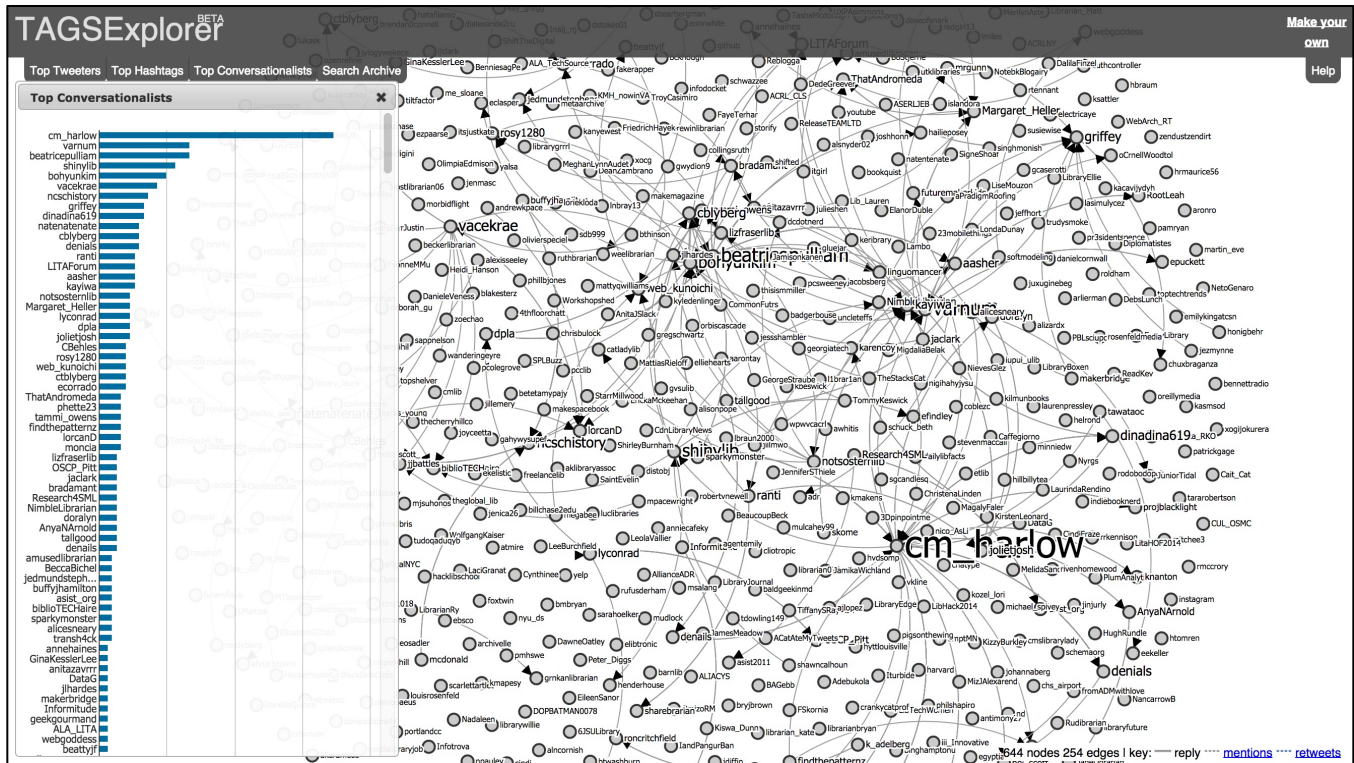


Image 2. TAGExplorer data visualization and top conversationalists

Additionally, you can see whom you retweeted and who retweeted you,³ again demonstrating the power of rich, structured data. (See Image 3.) All of these tools improve our ability to share, reflect, archive, and network within LITA and beyond our typical, often comfortable library boundaries.

Tweets also don't last forever on the web, but they do when they are archived.⁴ One conference attendee, @kayiwa, used a tool called twarc (<https://github.com/edsu/twarc>), a command-line tool for archiving JSON Twitter search results before they disappear. Looking through the tweets, you will learn that a great number of attendees experienced altitude sickness due to Albuquerque's elevation, which is around 5,000 feet above sea level. The most popular and desired food to were enchiladas with green chili. Many were impressed with the scenery, mountains, and endless blue skies of the city, as evidenced by the number of images of outdoor landscapes and sky shots.

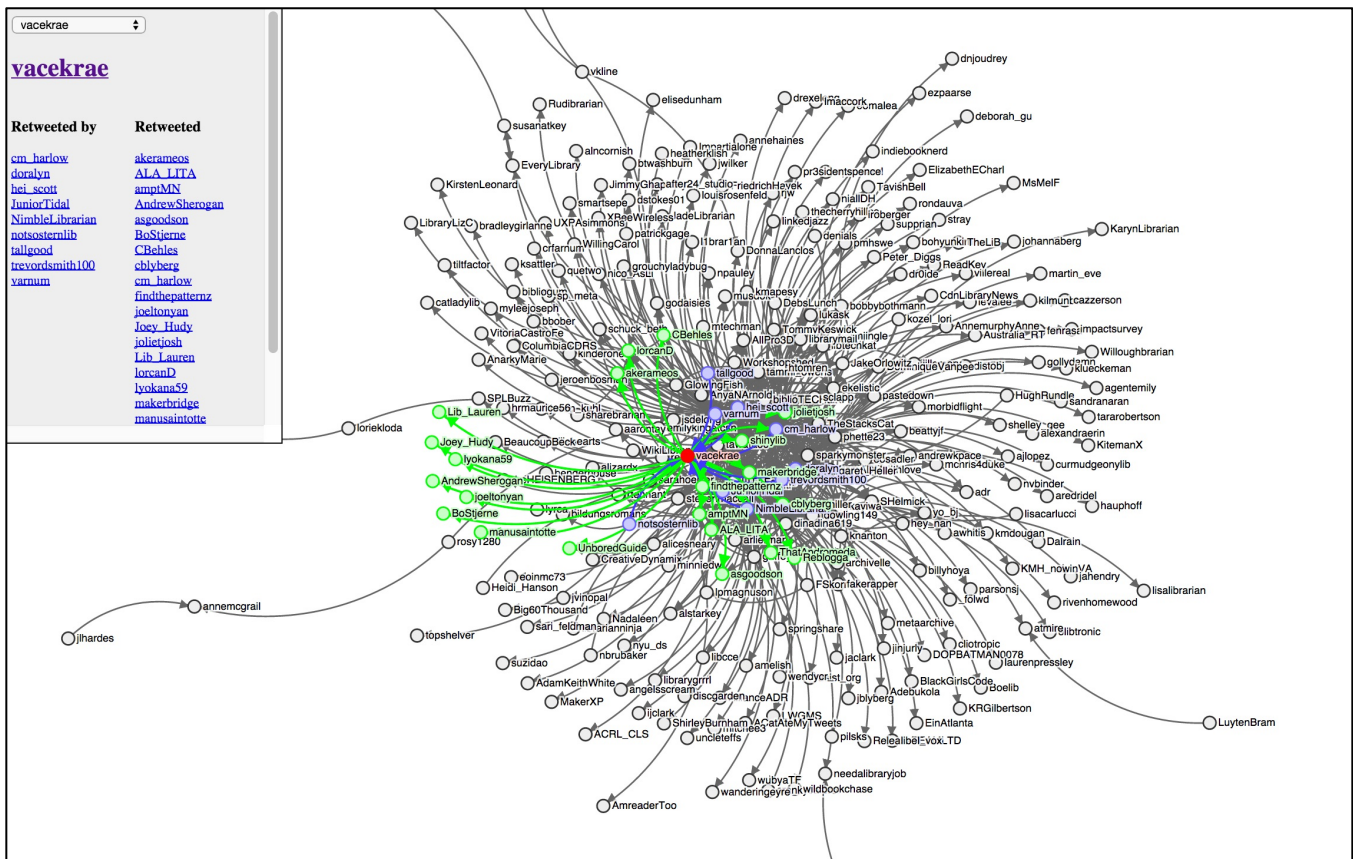


Image 3. Connections between @vacekrae’s retweets and who she was retweeted by

There were two packed pre-conferences at the LITA Forum. Dean Krafft and Jon Corson-Rikert from Cornell University Library taught attendees about a very hot topic: linked data and “how libraries can make use of Linked Open Data to share information about library resources and to improve discovery, access, and understanding for library users.” The hashtag #linkeddata was used 382 times across all the Forum’s tweets – clearly conversation went beyond the workshop. Also, Francis Kayiwa, of Kayiwa Consulting, and Eric Phetteplace from the California College of Arts, helped attendees “Learn Python by Playing with Library Data” in the second, equally as popular pre-conference. (See Image 4.)

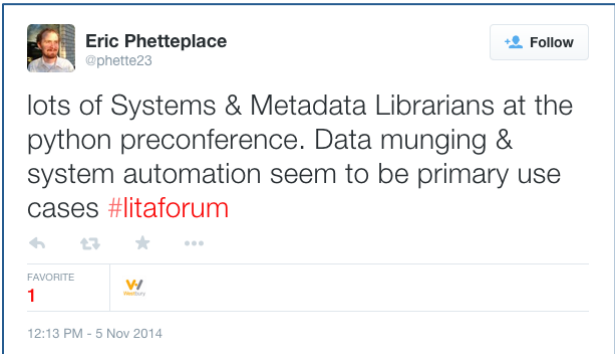


Image 4

The Forum this year also had three exceptional keynote speakers. AnnMarie Thomas, @amptMN, an engineering professor from the University of St. Thomas in Minnesota, kicked off the Forum and shared her enthusiasm and passion for Makerspaces, squishy circuits, and how to engage kids in engineering and science in incredibly creative ways. I was truly inspired by her passion for making and sharing with others. She reminded us that all children are makers, and as adults we need to remember to be curious, explore, and play. There are 129 tweets that capture not only her fun presentation but also her vision for making in the future. (See image 5.)



Image 5

The second keynote speaker was Lorcan Dempsey, @lorcand, the Vice President, OCLC Research and Chief Strategist. He's known primarily for the research he presents through his weblog, <http://orweblog.oclc.org>, where he makes observations on the way users interact with technology and the discoverability of all that libraries have to offer, from collections to services to expertise. He wants to make library data more usable. In his talk, he explained how some technologies such as mobile devices and IRs are having huge effects on user behaviors. "The network reshapes society and society reshapes the network." What was nice also is that Lorcan's talk complimented AnnMarie's talk about making and sharing. Users are going from consumption to creation, and we, as libraries, need to be offering our services and content in the users' workflows. We need to share our resources, make them more discoverable. Why? "Discovery often happens elsewhere." Check out the 123 posts on the Twitter archive, which includes links to his presentation. (See Image 6.)



Image 6









Kortney Ryan Ziegler, @fakerapper, is the Founder Trans*h4ck and the closing keynote speaker. His work focuses on supporting trans-created technology, trans entrepreneurs, and trans-led startups. He’s led hackathons and helped create safe spaces for the trans community. His work is so important and many of the apps help to address the social inequalities that the trans community still faces. For example, he mentioned that it’s still legal in 36 states to be fired for being trans. But there are 174 tweets captured at the Forum that give examples of the web tools created, and ideas about how libraries can be inclusive and more supportive of the trans community. (See Image 7.)



Image 7

The sessions themselves were excellent, and many sparked conversations long after the presentation. Lightning talks were engaging, fast, and fun. Posters were both beautiful and informative. Overarching terms that I heard repeatedly and saw among the tweets were: Open Graph, OpenRefine, social media, Makerspaces, BIBFRAME, library labs, leadership, support, community, analytics, assessment, engagement, inclusivity, diversity, agile development, open access, linked data, VIVO, DataONE, discovery systems, discoverability, LibraryBox, Islandora, and institutional repositories. Below are some highlights:



 <p>Lauren Magnuson lpmagnuson</p> <p>Learn how to cite your code and get a DOI for it with @github and Zenodo https://t.co/ahMy2np0do #litaforum</p> <p>3 Retweets Fri Nov 07 19:20:24 +0000 2014</p>	 <p>Julia sparkymonster</p> <p>Take risks & call them pilot projects. Think big. Work with people who have different skill sets, in different libraries #litaforum</p> <p>3 Retweets Fri Nov 07 19:17:30 +0000 2014</p>
 <p>Ken Varnum varnum</p> <p>@mrgunn Perhaps one great leap to modernity is good; but following agile practices for constant evolution also good. #litaforum @tallgood</p> <p>0 Retweets Mon Nov 10 17:50:09 +0000 2014</p>	 <p>Christine Tawatao tawataoc</p> <p>Don't be in a position where you know a system sucks for your users and you can't do anything about it. #learntocode #litaforum</p> <p>1 Retweets Fri Nov 07 19:07:42 +0000 2014</p>
 <p>Christina Harlow cm_harlow</p> <p>Now, how do you get involved with dataONE? http://t.co/LbUlcRe7wT - look under resources and librarian outreach kit #litaforum</p> <p>0 Retweets Fri Nov 07 21:31:42 +0000 2014</p>	 <p>Scott W. H. Young hei_scott</p> <p>Plenty of OpenRefine talk at #litaforum. I remember reading recently that librarians are most common OR users—because our data is so messy.</p> <p>1 Retweets Fri Nov 07 23:08:14 +0000 2014</p>
 <p>Whitni Watkins NimbleLibrarian</p> <p>RunMyCode enables scientists to openly share the code and data that underlie their research publications. http://t.co/x8SkTAKlss #litaforum</p> <p>1 Retweets Fri Nov 07 19:26:44 +0000 2014</p>	 <p>Heidi Hanson Heidi_Hanson</p> <p>Believe anyone can make innovation happen. Thought-provoking and engaging session #librarylab #litaforum</p> <p>1 Retweets Fri Nov 07 23:11:05 +0000 2014</p>

There were so many opportunities to network at sessions, on breaks, at the networking dinners, and even at game night. I see networking as a huge benefit of a small conference, and networking can lead to some pretty amazing things. For example, Whitney Watkins, @NimbleLibrarian and one of LITA's invaluable volunteers for the Forum, was so inspired by a conversation on OpenRefine that she created a list where people could sign up to learn more and get some hands-on playing time with the tool. On her blog,⁵ Whitney says, "...most if not all of those who came left with a bit

REFERENCES

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2. <https://docs.google.com/spreadsheet/pub?key=0AsyivMoYhk87dFNFX196V1E2M2ZQTVlhQ2JVS2FsdEE&output=html>
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