



## UvA-DARE (Digital Academic Repository)

### Platform and app histories

*Assessing source availability in web archives and app repositories*

Helmond, A.; van der Vlist, F.

#### DOI

[10.5281/zenodo.4058013](https://doi.org/10.5281/zenodo.4058013)

#### Publication date

2020

#### Document Version

Final published version

#### License

CC BY

[Link to publication](#)

### Citation for published version (APA):

Helmond, A., & van der Vlist, F. (2020). *Platform and app histories: Assessing source availability in web archives and app repositories*. 63–64. Abstract from *Engaging with Web Archives*, Maynooth, Ireland. <https://doi.org/10.5281/zenodo.4058013>

### General rights

It is not permitted to download or to forward/distribute the text or part of it without the consent of the author(s) and/or copyright holder(s), other than for strictly personal, individual use, unless the work is under an open content license (like Creative Commons).

### Disclaimer/Complaints regulations

If you believe that digital publication of certain material infringes any of your rights or (privacy) interests, please let the Library know, stating your reasons. In case of a legitimate complaint, the Library will make the material inaccessible and/or remove it from the website. Please Ask the Library: <https://uba.uva.nl/en/contact>, or a letter to: Library of the University of Amsterdam, Secretariat, P.O. Box 19185, 1000 GD Amsterdam, The Netherlands. You will be contacted as soon as possible.

404

Page Not Found

OOPS

BOOK OF ABSTRACTS  
#EWAVirtual 2020

**Engaging with Web Archives**  
'Opportunities, Challenges and Potentialities'  
(#EWAVirtual)

-----  
21-22 September 2020

Maynooth University, Arts and Humanities Institute  
Co. Kildare, Ireland



**Maynooth  
University**  
National University  
of Ireland Maynooth

**Arts and  
Humanities  
Institute**



**Published by:**

#EWAVirtual Conference Organisers, Maynooth University Arts and Humanities Institute

**Edited by**

Sharon Healy, Michael Kurzmeier, Helena La Pina and Patricia Duffe

**DOI:** <http://doi.org/10.5281/zenodo.4058013>

This work is licensed under a  
Creative Commons Attribution 4.0 International License  
<https://creativecommons.org/licenses/by/4.0/>



**Program Committee:**

*Co-Chairs*

Sharon Healy, PhD Candidate and IRC Scholar in Digital Humanities, Maynooth University  
Michael Kurzmeier, PhD Candidate and IRC Scholar in Digital Humanities/Media Studies,  
Maynooth University

*#EWAVirtual Coordinators*

Rebecca O'Neill, MA Historical Archives, Maynooth University  
Helena La Pina, MA Historical Archives, Maynooth University

*Programme Coordinator*

Maria Ryan, Web archivist at the National Library of Ireland (NLI Web Archive)

*Treasurer*

Dr Joseph Timoney, Head of Department of Computer Science, Maynooth University

*PR/Outreach*

Julian Carr, MA Geography (Urban Studies), Maynooth University

*Committee*

Dr Martin Maguire, History/Digital Humanities, Dundalk Institute of Technology.  
Dr Thomas Lysaght, Deputy Head of Department of Computer Science, Maynooth University  
Gavin MacAllister, Historian in Residence, Irish Military War Museum.  
Bernadette McKevitt, MA International Peace Studies, Trinity College Dublin.

## Session 13: Source Code and App Histories

### **Platform and app histories: Assessing source availability in web archives and app repositories**

**Dr. Anne Helmond**  
(University of Amsterdam)

**Fernando van der Vlist**  
(Utrecht University)

**Keywords:** platforms, apps, web historiography, web archiving, app archiving

#### **ABSTRACT**

In this presentation, we discuss the research opportunities for historical studies of apps and platforms by focusing on their distinctive characteristics and material traces. We demonstrate the value and explore the utility and breadth of web archives and software repositories for building corpora of archived platform and app sources. Platforms and apps notoriously resist archiving due to their ephemerality and continuous updates. As a result of rapid release cycles that enable developers to develop and deploy their code very quickly, large web platforms such as Facebook and YouTube change continuously, overwriting their material presence with each new deployment. Similarly, the pace of mobile app development and deployment is only growing, with each new software update overwriting the previous version. As a consequence, their histories are being overwritten with each update, rather than written and preserved. In this presentation, we consider how one might write the histories of these new digital objects, despite such challenges.

When thinking of how platforms and apps are archived today, we contend that we need to consider their specific materiality. With the term materiality, we refer to the material form of those digital objects themselves as well as the material circumstances of those objects that leave material traces behind, including developer resources and reference documentation, business tools and product pages, and help and support pages. We understand these contextual materials as important primary sources through which digital objects such as platforms and apps write their own histories with web archives and software repositories.

We present a method to assess the availability of these archived web materials for social media platforms and apps across the leading web archives and app repositories. Additionally, we conduct a comparative source set availability analysis to establish how, and how well, various source sets

are represented across web archives. Our preliminary results indicate that despite the challenges of social media and app archiving, many material traces of platforms and apps are in fact well preserved. The method is not just useful for building corpora of historical platform or app sources but also potentially valuable for determining significant omissions in web archives and for guiding future archiving practices. We showcase how researchers can use web archives and repositories to reconstruct platform and app histories, and narrate the drama of changes, updates, and versions.

**Biographies:**

Anne Helmond is an assistant professor of New Media and Digital Culture at the University of Amsterdam. Her research interests include software studies, platform studies, app studies, digital methods, and web history.

Fernando van der Vlist is a PhD candidate at Utrecht University and a research associate with the Collaborative Research Centre “Media of Cooperation” at the University of Siegen. His research interests include software studies, digital methods, social media and platform studies, app studies, and critical data studies.

---