

January 2015

Research Trends & Emerging Technologies for Genealogists

Catherine Lucy

San Jose State University, catherinelucy9@gmail.com

Follow this and additional works at: <https://scholarworks.sjsu.edu/ischoolsrj>



Part of the [Information Literacy Commons](#), [Scholarly Communication Commons](#), and the [Scholarly Publishing Commons](#)

Acknowledgements

Thank you Dr. Scott Walter for your guidance and inspiration; thank you James Brancato, Karen Moffat, Jane Theissen, and Ruth Ann Yorg for your feedback and support during the early stages of my research; and thank you Teresa Sweeney, for your editorial expertise. Finally, I would like to thank my husband David, and my children Matthew, Mary, and Miranda, for their encouragement and love each and every day.

Recommended Citation

Lucy, C. (2016). Research Trends & Emerging Technologies for Genealogists. *School of Information Student Research Journal*, 5(2). <https://doi.org/10.31979/2575-2499.050204> Retrieved from <https://scholarworks.sjsu.edu/ischoolsrj/vol5/iss2/4>

This article is brought to you by the open access Journals at SJSU ScholarWorks. It has been accepted for inclusion in School of Information Student Research Journal by an authorized administrator of SJSU ScholarWorks. For more information, please contact scholarworks@sjsu.edu.

Research Trends & Emerging Technologies for Genealogists

Abstract

This study examines current research methods utilized by genealogists, and seeks to discover the impact of emerging tools and technologies on their information seeking needs and behaviors. When it became clear that there is a shortage of scholarly studies identifying the use of newer technologies (i.e. blogs, social media, and apps), an original survey for genealogists was created. Over four hundred genealogists were surveyed regarding their use of both traditional research methods (methods that have existed for many decades) and Internet/electronic resources, in order to demonstrate which new trends are emerging. The data from the survey might lessen the gap in current scholarly research. Technology is constantly changing, and the findings show which trends are currently being utilized the most by genealogists. The results indicate that genealogists are definitely using more technology to research their family trees. In fact, they adapt fairly quickly to new methods, relying heavily on technology and the Internet to conduct research and share information. Due to the ease of using technology, fewer and fewer genealogists rely on in-house visits to repositories to access original documents. The research concludes with a discussion on where the use of technology for genealogical research is headed, and what genealogists hope to accomplish by using new tools and technologies.

Keywords

Genealogy, Genealogists

Acknowledgements

Thank you Dr. Scott Walter for your guidance and inspiration; thank you James Brancato, Karen Moffat, Jane Theissen, and Ruth Ann Yorg for your feedback and support during the early stages of my research; and thank you Teresa Sweeney, for your editorial expertise. Finally, I would like to thank my husband David, and my children Matthew, Mary, and Miranda, for their encouragement and love each and every day.

About Author

Catherine Lucy is a MLIS candidate at the San Jose State University iSchool. She resides in St. Louis, MO, and is currently employed at Fontbonne University's Jack C. Taylor Library in the dual position of Technical Services Manager and Archivist.

INTRODUCTION

Genealogy, or the study of ancestry, is generally considered a hobby that is rapidly growing in popularity world-wide, especially in the United States, which experienced a large influx of immigrants between 1870 and 1930. What once was a nobleman's pastime of studying his pedigree soon evolved into a leisure hobby that knows no boundaries of wealth, class, or origin. Everyone has a family tree, and anyone can be a family historian. From writing down one's ancestors on a family tree chart to discovering their vital records (i.e. birth, marriage or military), the 20th century genealogist was a researcher of their own ancestry.

In the 20th century, most genealogists conducted their research by interviewing relatives and visiting repositories to inquire about their ancestors. Travel to these sites was almost a necessity, but genealogists were often hindered by the geographic (and sometimes political) boundaries in which they lived. Travel out of their region was also cost prohibitive.

When they could access original documents, they relied on vital records, city/county directories, and church/cemetery records to reveal new information or provide a clue to a new individual or branch of their family tree. Old newspapers and periodicals could also reveal the socio-economic reasons of an era for migration to, and around, the United States. Additionally, books and journals would inform a genealogist on how to research their roots and organize the data.

Then came the information age with computers and the Internet. By the late 1990s, home computers and Internet access were rising in popularity. Genealogy software and websites appeared, providing more means to facilitate research. By the early 21 century, portable electronic devices became common place, allowing for research and information sharing anywhere, any time. Hence, the modern day genealogist is born, but constantly evolving. Longtime genealogist and librarian Jane Theissen (personal communication, March 3, 2015) noted that "there is a wealth of information available to genealogists today [and] it is becoming easier to find, be it online or physically. One has to be careful not to become overwhelmed!" Yet, very few recently published scholarly works address the rise in use of these technologies.

Greenwood (2000) published a scholarly book that included a list of the latest technologies at that time, including word processing, electronic mailing lists, newsgroups, and Internet chat sessions. This guide to genealogy is now fifteen years old. Greenwood, also aware of how quickly technology can evolve, concluded that "greater and more wondrous changes are yet to come" (p. 159).

Two years later, a study by Southwell found that a large number of visitors to the website for the Western History Collections at the University of Oklahoma were directed there by search engines such as Yahoo and Google: "The statistical reports indicate that the WHC Web pages are typically found through key-word

and subject-phrase searches, as opposed to direct searches for an institution's pages" (2002, p. 99). This shows that users are using the Internet for genealogical research, and they are more likely to conduct keyword searches than seek out a specific collection online. Users might know what they want, but not how to find it.

As Internet usage increased, social networking websites were formed. Smith wrote about social networking, describing it as "a way of using online resources and services to create and maintain a community of individuals who share common interest" (2009, p. 7). He also touched upon blogs, wikis, photo sharing, and podcasts. Genealogists are still discovering technologies, and how they can use them for research purposes. They are not necessarily a consumer anymore, but instead a producer of the information. They intend to share their knowledge with others for the greater good of the community, and new tools of the trade allow them to do this effortlessly.

In this age of all these emerging technologies, genealogists' information seeking behaviors and needs are evolving and adapting at a greater speed than ever before. Genealogists can locate information relevant to their family search with just a few clicks on a website. They can download and/or purchase digital images of documents such as birth records, cemetery records, and census records. The number of online resources can be overwhelming, and care must be taken to ensure the provenance and authenticity of the information they discover.

The research concentrates on the current needs and information seeking behaviors of early 21st century American genealogists. America is the metaphorical melting pot of the world, where people from all over come to live and seek a better life. Modern day genealogists are using new tools and technologies of the information age to research their ancestors' origins and to track their migration around the United States. Geographic and political boundaries fade as records are digitized, and anyone can click on a peripheral or swipe a screen to access these records.

Particular areas of focus in this study include traditional tools and methods utilized by genealogists while engaging in family history research, and an analysis of emerging research trends and technologies that are popular with today's genealogy community. The latter topic is of importance because libraries, archives, repositories, and other keepers of records and information need to understand how genealogists search and what methods they rely on in the first part of the 21st century. This data is needed to better serve the community of genealogists.

LITERATURE REVIEW

There are several significant scholarly studies regarding the information seeking behaviors and needs of genealogists and, on a broader scale, historians. Many of these studies were conducted in the last fifteen years, and are primarily scholarly journal articles written by university professors who work in the field of information science. These professors not only evaluate the work of other professionals, but they themselves conduct relevant research in their field. Their methodologies consist of interviews and surveys of groups that varied in size from ten people (Duff & Johnson, 2002) to 258 people (Tibbo, 2003), although most studies focused on groups of 24-30 people.

This literature review also includes some professional (as opposed to scholarly) articles and reference books, mostly by librarians and historians who have significant knowledge of genealogical research. Their writings often provide insight into the hobby, its history, and relevant search techniques, but might not offer any new ideas or original research studies.

Null (1985) writes that a genealogist's main goal is to trace their family roots. Written genealogies (lists of related persons) can be found in the Old and New Testaments of the Bible. Prior to modern day record keeping (Molto, 2009), usually only the rich and noble kept documentation of their ancestry as proof of their pedigree. Archivists and historians did not look highly upon genealogists in the 1800s and early 1900s, "regarding them as people who contribute little or nothing to our knowledge of [a] country's past" (Rubincam, 1949, p. 333).

Around 1930, genealogy began to emerge as a "scientific" field of study (Molto, 2009, p. 1916) and increased in popularity in the United States, possibly brought on by the Great Depression at a time when Americans felt a "loss of purpose" in life (Null, 1985, p. 30). There was another surge in the number of genealogists after the 1976 telecast of *Roots*, which inspired new interest in one's ancestry. In 2004, the BBC series *Who Do You Think You Are?* debuted, followed by the American version in 2010. As a result of these shows, "history becomes real, living and relevant" (Barratt, 2008, p. 6). By 2005, 73% of Americans had developed an interest in genealogy and their family history (Herskovitz, 2012). Academics, historians, archivists and librarians begin to take genealogists and their research seriously.

Since the dawn of the digital age, many studies have emerged on the information seeking behaviors of genealogists. In a study of historians in general, Duff and Johnson (2002) concluded that researchers rely heavily upon primary sources, indexes, and bibliographies. Genealogists usually begin their search with a name, so that strategy is extremely important. They took this a step further in 2003 when they published the very first study that focused solely on genealogists' information behaviors and needs. They interviewed ten experienced genealogists,

and found that they preferred to search for information in the following order: names, dates, places, subjects, and events. They also suggested three steps in gathering information: gather names, collect further details, and learn about the society and time period of the individual. The steps were not linear, as genealogists often move from one individual to another on their family tree. Duff and Johnson found that genealogists are confident using finding aids and Internet resources, but they also rely on colleagues and social networks for information seeking.

Genealogists may feel that the relevancy of their research is being questioned by librarians/archivists, and therefore, they draw on their own experiences (or colleagues' experiences) to conduct their research (Darby and Clough, 2013). McKay (2002) concluded that "many archivists would profit from cultivating and respecting [genealogists] and collaborating with them to preserve our cultural heritage" (p. 31).

Duff and Johnson's study influenced others to conduct research on the behaviors of genealogists. Yakel (2004) interviewed 29 genealogists about their information gathering practices and management. Her study illustrates that the process of research is related to seeking meaning in the data. Yakel refers to Duff and Johnson's stages of research, but she also explores the idea that genealogists transform from information seeking users to creators of meaning (i.e. they find meaning and satisfaction in their research). The article breaks down the role of a genealogist into three groups: seeking information, seeking connections, and seeking meaning. Yakel is often cited by others for examining how genealogists seek meaning in their research and then manage the information that they collect.

Newer studies often refer to the groundbreaking ideas first expressed by Duff and Johnson (2003) and Yakel (2004), but they also develop their own schools of thought. Yakel and Torres (2007) detail how genealogists change their information seeking behavior to fit their needs. Fulton (2009) found similarities in the way genealogists acquire information, and concluded that "information sharing is an important feature... [which supports] learning as well as achievement in locating one's ancestors" (p. 753). Studies by Skinner (2010) and Darby and Clough (2013) refer to Marcia Bates' concept of berrypicking, and their research enforces the notion that genealogists do in fact pick and choose which resources to utilize. Darby and Clough formulated an eight phase model of the research process and found that the phases were not linear, just as Duff and Johnson (2003) did in their study. Genealogists jump around from stage to stage.

Now that we have looked at the information seeking behaviors of genealogists, what are their information seeking needs? A genealogist's greatest need is access to information, whether it be in the form of paper manuscripts, microfilm or online resources. In this digital age, a great many genealogists will begin their search on a family history website such as Ancestry.com or FamilySearch.org. They will type in a name and see if they can locate common

ancestors. However, many resources are not available online, and genealogists still rely heavily on library/archival finding aids, primary resources, vital records, and even creating their own systems and networks to fill their needs. This need for access existed long before the digital age. Nearly 70 years ago, Rubincam (1949) called for the centralization of records amongst “state archival agencies, local historical societies, and country court houses” (p. 336). Years later, Yakel and Torres (2007) still felt that access to records was an issue, and Duff and Johnson (2003) felt that archival systems needed improvement to better assist genealogists in their research.

There are also some weaknesses, biases, or gaps in the literature. Studies by Yakel (2002) and Tibbo (2003) both state that user education in archives and libraries needs improvement. Yakel notes that librarians should teach users more about primary resources, and Tibbo suggests that repositories should market their electronic finding aids and databases as a main tool of research to better serve genealogist’s needs. Another issue is the lack of current (i.e. post-2012) user studies on genealogists, as technology continues to evolve, especially with materials available on the Internet (Molto, 2009). There is a need for more studies on whether or not a genealogist’s information seeking behaviors and needs are changing along with the technology.

Additionally, some researchers feel a definite need to reformulate their surveys. In her survey of manuscript users at the University of Oklahoma, Southwell (2002) indicated that future surveys at her institution should have “fewer, tightly focused questions with sub-questions that help clarify responses” (p. 103). She felt that her survey highlighted how much there is still to learn about user needs and behaviors. In the future, Skinner (2010) would conduct surveys for a longer time period, and spend more time actively recruiting participants. Darby and Clough (2013) felt that future research would validate their eight phase model of research activity, but that further exploration was needed of the “causative factors” behind user behaviors that might link together the phases (p. 83).

METHODOLOGY

Since there is a lack of current studies regarding emerging technologies and tools for genealogical research, an original survey was created to address this issue. Preliminary interviews were conducted with four genealogists, generating a short list of current technological trends. Then a thorough questionnaire was created to address both traditional and new research methods. Many of the websites cited in the survey were inspired by Molto’s (2009) exhaustive list of online genealogical resources. Since this new survey had an intended audience of genealogists of all research levels and degrees of experience, a select number of Internet sources were

chosen for inclusion in the survey. The resulting list was a combination of Internet sources recommended in the informal interview process, this author's own knowledge of genealogy websites, and some of the resources listed by Molto.

The twenty-eight question survey was created on the website SurveyPlanet (see the Appendix). The link to the survey was shared via email and Facebook. For email distribution, the survey was sent the following ways: directly to a handful of known genealogists, via the Autocat listserv (an electronic discussion list for library catalogers), and via the Libsup listserv (an electronic discussion list for library support staff). The survey was also shared on this author's personal Facebook page, the Ancestry.com Facebook page, and the following closed Facebook group pages: ALA Think Tank and U.S. Midwest Genealogy Research Community. All recipients were encouraged to share the link, so the total number of methods used to share the survey are unknown.

The survey included an introductory paragraph outlining its purpose. Users were notified that they must be at least eighteen years old to participate, and that while the survey focused on American genealogists researching their roots, the survey was open to those living outside the United States.

Four hundred and twenty-five people responded to the survey within a six day time frame. A few basic demographic questions were included. Other preliminary questions asked the genealogists to describe their level of knowledge and to identify how long they have been researching. The survey moved forward with simple yes or no questions, asking the respondent about different sources and tools they might own and/use in their research. The second half of the survey mainly included detailed multiple choice questions regarding specific genealogy websites, software, apps, and other emerging trends, as identified in the four initial informal interviews. The last question was left open for additional comments. SurveyPlanet tabulated the results and generated a color-coded pie chart for the results of each question.

The number of participants (425 total) was astounding, considering that many of the published studies analyzed earlier in this paper had a much smaller pool. To alleviate the issue of having to omit surveys due to users skipping questions, the survey was set-up so that each question was required. Respondents were forced to answer each question (though many of the answers included "none" or "other" responses) in order to complete the survey.

DISCUSSION

The purpose of the survey was to identify the research trends and emerging technologies that genealogists are using in the year 2015. Since the survey itself was created on an Internet platform (the website SurveyPlanet) and shared via

technologies such as email, electronic discussion lists, and Facebook, the participants were expected to have some knowledge of new technologies.

RESULTS

The largest age group of respondents was 55-68 (44.2%), followed by 31-54 (37.4%), 69+ (12.5%), and 18-30 (5.9%). This corresponds with data collected by Sinko & Peters (1983), Yakel (2004), Yakel & Torres (2007), and Fulton (2009), and indicates that it is generally those over the age of 47 who engage in genealogical research. However, the widespread use of the Internet does make it more appealing for younger adults.

The majority of respondents currently live in the United States (95.8%). When asked to describe their level of knowledge as a genealogical researcher, 9.9% identified as a beginner, 48% as intermediate level, 30.8% as advanced, and 11.3% as professional/expert. Almost half of the respondents (48.5%) have been involved in genealogical research for more than fifteen years, indicating that many seasoned and experienced genealogists had taken part in the survey.

The following five questions required simple yes or no answers, and were used to determine a mix of traditional and more technologically advanced sources that a genealogist might use. A majority of respondents indicated that they own print copies of genealogy books (78.8%), subscribe to print journals, periodicals or newsletters (52.9%), use genealogy software on their computers (79.5%), and belong to genealogical societies and other clubs/organizations (67.8%). Surprisingly, a little less than half (49.6%) use genealogy-related apps on their smart phones and tablets, but this number is sure to rise as the sale of these electronic devices steadily increases.

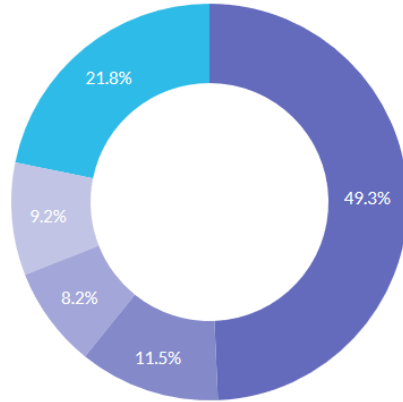
The survey continues with several questions that include detailed answers. These questions determine which specific websites, products, and other technologies genealogists utilize in their research. The majority of respondents use Ancestry's Family Tree Maker software to manage their family tree electronically (see Figure 1). Ancestry was also the favorite amongst paid subscription-based Internet sites (see Figure 2). For the question "Which genealogy websites are your favorite for free content?" the answers were split between nine websites and the "other" option. Find A Grave's website was the most popular at 22.9%, with a narrow lead over the Family Search website at 22.8% (Figure 3).

Figure 1

Q11

Please indicate which genealogy software you use to organize your family tree (choose all that apply):

Multiple Choice



Choices

Totals

● Family Tree Maker (Ancestry.com)

258

● RootsMagic

60

● Legacy Family Tree

43

● None

48

● Other

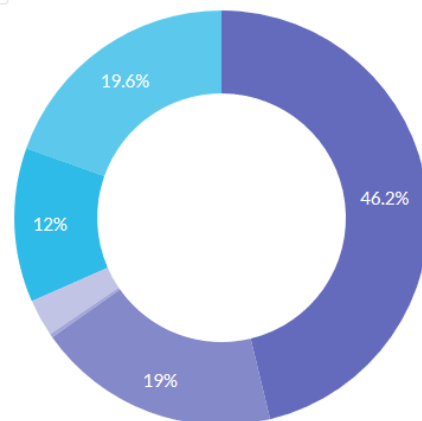
114

Figure 2

Q12

Please indicate any paid subscription-based Internet sites you subscribe to (choose all that apply):

Multiple Choice



Choices

Totals

● Ancestry

319

● Fold3

131

● One Great Family

2

● World Vital Records

20

● None

83

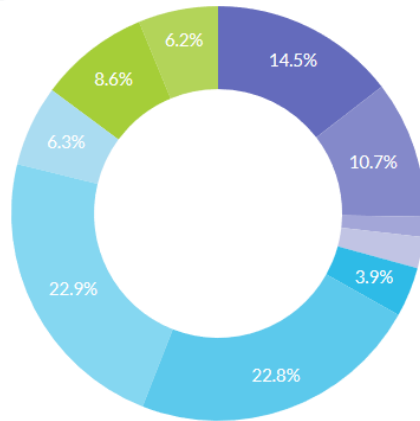
● Other

135

Figure 3

Q13

Which genealogy websites are your favorites for free content? (choose all that apply)
Multiple Choice



Choices

Totals

● Ancestry	221
● National Archives (US)	163
● National Archives (UK)	24
● My Heritage	37
● Genealogy.com	59
● Family Search	347
● Find A Grave	348
● Ellis Island	96
● Cyndi's List	131
● Other	95

To gauge whether or not the respondents were active participants of online forums (and not simply viewers of information), they were asked if they had ever posted a comment or replied to an inquiry via an online discussion forum. 78.1% replied yes.

One of the newest emerging trends in genealogical research is DNA testing. Barratt called it a “major growth area in family history research techniques” (2008, p. 1026). These tests allow a person to trace their lineage to a particular ethnicity, even “mapping human population movements across the globe” (p. 1026). Ancestry.com recently launched their own DNA testing kit and analysis. Ancestry.com CEO Tim Sullivan explained why the company had launched its kit:

As we see it, there are two markets for this sort of thing, one is the people who already love genealogy and the other is those who are simply saying, "Tell me who I am," says Sullivan. "Family history is never really done. With every generation you go back, you have that much more context for your own story. (as cited in Della Cava, April 2, 2015, para. 4)

In the survey, 57.1% of genealogists reported buying a DNA testing kit online. Ancestry’s service was the most popular (24.1%), followed by Family Tree DNA (19%), and 23andMe (8.5%). 5.5% reported using a different online service

for DNA testing, while a minority of 42.9% had not tried DNA testing as of the time of the survey.

Genealogists were further surveyed on the tools and technologies they used. When asked if they use newsgroups, listservs, both or neither, the majority used neither (52.9%), but a combination of both was the second most popular answer (21.4%). Users were also surveyed about blogs they read on a regular basis. 55.9% of respondents replied they regularly read blogs. Eastman's Online Genealogy Newsletter was the most popular (23.8%), followed by Armchair Genealogist (6.1%), Everton Publishers Genealogy Blog (4.3%), and Hidden Genealogy (1.8%). 19.9% followed other blogs.

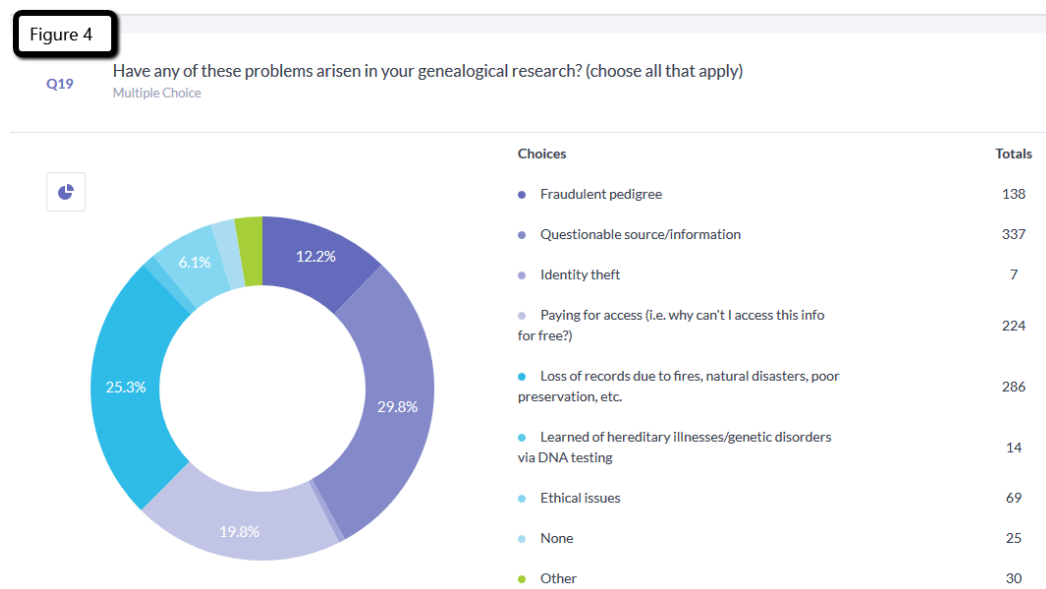
To follow-up on the question regarding whether or not genealogists used apps on their electronic devices, users were asked to select the ones they use from a list. Surprisingly, 72.3% responded that they use a specific app (or one not listed on the survey), when earlier, in the yes or no question, only 49.6% replied that they used genealogy-related apps. The discrepancy in figures can most likely be explained by the fact that the follow-up question listed apps that might not be considered strictly genealogy related. Or perhaps the user did not think of one until given a list of choices.

The most popular app was Ancestry (26.7%), followed by Find A Grave (15.2%) and Everyone or One Note (13.3%). Four choices amounted to a mere 9.5% (My Heritage, RootsMagic, Trello (or other list making apps), and SmartDoc (or other image capturing apps). Zero respondents used Interviewy (a dictaphone-like app for voice recording) and WDYTYA Forum (an app that allows users to directly access the Who Do You Think You Are? online forum). Both of these products originated in the United Kingdom, which might be the reason why the respondents of this American-based genealogy survey did not utilize these apps.

Inspired by the lectures and writings of Milton Rubincam, a leading genealogical researcher of the 20th century, the next question asked genealogists to identify any problems that have arisen in their research. The purpose of this question was to ascertain what issues or road blocks genealogists are currently facing as a community. When Rubincam published a book of research related difficulties, he wanted to "help the beginning genealogist avoid the pitfalls into which we all have fallen—and some of us still do, if we are not careful" (1987, preface). Some of the main issues he addressed were similar/identical surnames, issues with dates, and fraudulent pedigrees. According to the genealogists surveyed, the current top three pitfalls are questionable source/information (29.8%), loss of records due to fires, natural disasters, preservation issues, etc. (25.3%), and paying for access (19.8%). Verification of names and dates were not addressed in the survey until question #26, but fraudulent pedigrees were a part of this question, and ranked 4th with 12.2% (see Figure 4).

Many have written about the top traditional sources for genealogical research. Tibbo's (2003) list of primary sources identified newspapers, unpublished correspondence, published pamphlets, and unpublished diaries/journals as the most important and most often used materials in libraries and archives. Molto (2009) organized sources by categories into five exhaustive, all-inclusive tables. Rubincam's (1960) collected essays from members of The American Society of Genealogists divided resources into five parts: family records, public records, institutional records, manuscripts and printed materials.

In this survey, respondents were asked three questions regarding primary and secondary sources to identify which resources they utilize the most. The first

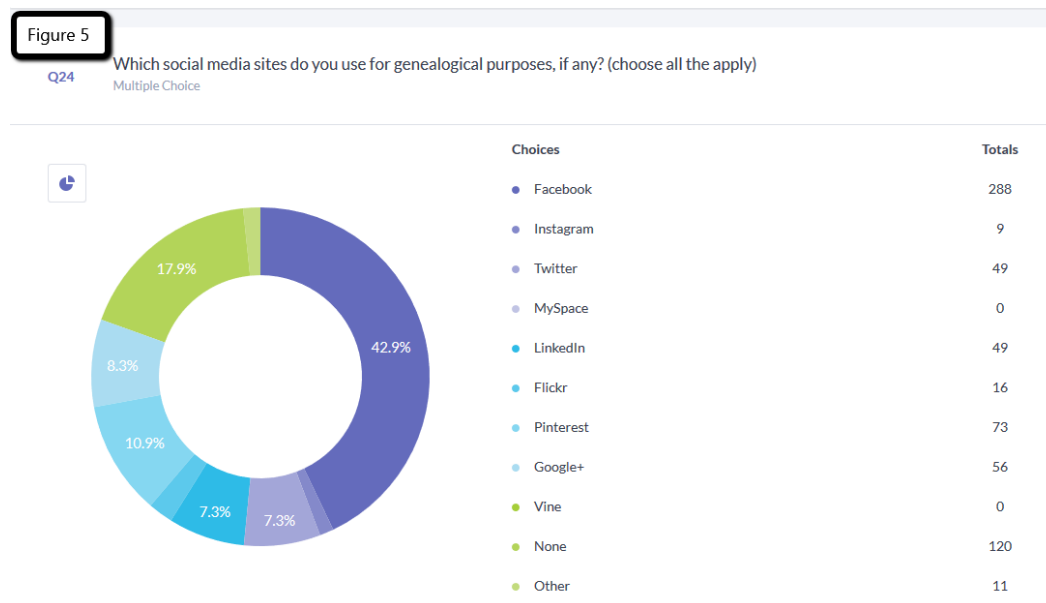


asked them to select all the traditional documents they utilize. The answers were split fairly evenly, but government documents (including census, vital & military records) had the strongest usage (16%), followed by cemetery records (15.8%), and newspapers (15.5%). The next question asked them to indicate how often they visit a library, archive or repository in person for research purposes. 52.9% visited sometimes, 24.7% visited regularly, 13.2% were high frequency visitors, and only 9.2% replied never, indicating that the majority of genealogists seek information that is not available online, and are willing to travel, if only locally, to access the information. Lastly in this series of questions, they were asked if they had ever used a finding for a library, archive or repository for genealogical research. 68.7% have used one, both in person and online. 11.5% had used an online finding aid

only. 6.6% had used a finding aid in person. 13.2% (the second largest percentage) had used neither.

Next, the survey attempted to determine if genealogists are using social media to follow genealogical topics. When asked if they did, 69% answered yes. When given a list of specific social media sites to choose from, the rate increased to 82.1%, indicating that perhaps some of the respondents did not realize that some sites they utilize are indeed considered social media. The most frequently used social media site for genealogy was Facebook at 42.9% (see Figure 5).

In order to gauge how a genealogist of the early 21st century would begin researching a newly discovered ancestor, they were asked to indicate their initial research strategy. An overwhelming majority (77.1%) replied they would visit a website such as Ancestry or Family Search and type an individual's name into a search box. 10% would ask a family member about the ancestor, 7.7% would look at published records, and 5.1% would choose another method. These numbers reaffirm suspicions that genealogists are depending more and more on online sources to conduct their research.



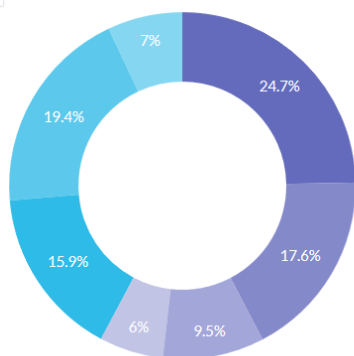
The final two questions of the survey listed many detailed answers to choose from. When asked what their biggest obstacle has been in researching their ancestry, the majority of respondents (24.7%) indicated loss of records due to fires, disasters, preservation issues, etc. The other responses were split between six other

options (see Figure 6). They were then asked if there are conditions in which it is acceptable to pay for information. 19.4% indicated that paying for access/information was problematic; 48.9% indicated that a monthly or annual membership fee for access was acceptable; 20.9% indicated that there should only be a charge when requesting a copy of a document either in paper form or via electronic delivery. It is interesting to note that many respondents later commented that this particular question did not allow for multiple answers to be chosen. This is an unfortunate oversight in the survey’s design. See Figure 7 for a breakdown of answers, bearing in mind that the results might be skewed, since users could not select multiple options or choose “other.”

Figure 6

Q26
Multiple Choice

What are your greatest obstacles in researching your ancestry? (choose all that apply)



Choices

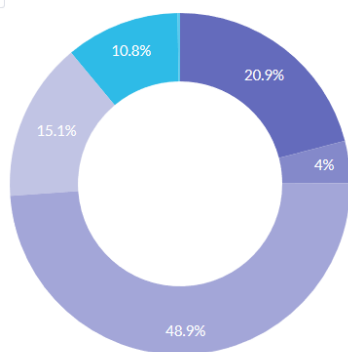
- Loss of records (due to fires, natural disasters, lack of preservation, etc.)
- Little or no access to records outside your geographic area (including international)
- Language barrier
- Relatives who won't cooperate
- Can't verify names/dates
- Paying for access/information
- Other

Totals

- 240
- 171
- 92
- 58
- 154
- 188
- 68

Figure 7

Q27 When is it acceptable to pay for information?
Multiple Choice



Choices

- Only when requesting a copy of a document (paper or electronic delivery)
- Never--there should be free access across the board
- Monthly/Annual membership fees for access are acceptable
- I should be able to find a document online and access it just once, for a small, one-time charge (no subscription necessary)
- Only when hiring a professional genealogist
- Only when accessing records held outside the United States

Totals

89
17
208
64
46
1

OVERALL FINDINGS

The survey results show that genealogists are definitely using newer technologies and tools, such as software, websites (both free and paid subscription), blogs, social media, and apps. But they are still using traditional sources, such as books and journals, and a majority of respondents belonged to genealogical societies and other clubs/organizations. They are utilizing some non-Internet sources to keep informed about topics of interest to their community, too.

There are a large number of respondents who rely on cemetery records, with Find A Grave's website and app averaging 22.9% and 15.2% users, respectively. Out of all traditional sources listed in the survey, cemetery records (which can be obtained either in person at a cemetery's office or via its website) accounted for 15.8% of record type usage, the highest percentage among choices for that particular question.

Digitization of records is an important cause for genealogists. Since so many records have been lost to fires and lack of proper preservation, they worry about the state of existing records that have not been digitized. Longtime genealogist James Brancato (personal communication, March 1, 2015) reflected: "It is so important to digitize the remaining records we have--for the preservation of their historical significance--before they are lost to us."

SURVEY WEAKNESSES AND SUGGESTIONS FOR FUTURE STUDIES

It is not particularly clear from this survey if genealogists' needs are being met since they were not asked outright, but it seems likely that their needs are indeed being met, and that these newer technologies of the information age are helping them meet their needs faster, and providing many more platforms on which to conduct research. One survey respondent said, "Using technology has allowed me to find out more information in a few years than the previous family genealogist did in a lifetime." It would be helpful to formulate one or more meaningful questions regarding their needs being met, in order to further investigate the issue.

Two simple questions regarding whether or not the respondents used social media, and which social media sites they use, were accidentally omitted from the survey upon release, resulting in five people not answering those two questions. However, since the first responders were those solicited on Facebook, it is safe to assume that yes, they use social media to follow genealogical topics. It might not be clear which sites they utilize besides Facebook, but 5 out of 425 respondents missing two questions is not significant enough to skew the data.

In hindsight, there should have been a question regarding whether or not they use podcasts, and which ones are their favorites. There could also have been a more detailed question regarding which Facebook pages or groups they utilize for genealogical research. Since 42.9% of respondents use Facebook, it would be useful to compile a list of top Facebook pages/groups so that those reviewing the survey results might discover some pages/groups that they had not heard of and could now access. One respondent commented that "I did not know that some of the resources that you mentioned in this survey existed. I will be looking into some of these."

For the question regarding obstacles in research, respondents suggested additional choices for individuals who were adopted and cannot trace their blood line, and the number of records that are not made available until a certain number of years have passed. The last question regarding situations in which it is acceptable to pay for information garnered the most critical comments. Respondents requested either the ability to select multiple answers or choose "other." One final criticism of the survey noted the lack of questions regarding data storage and back-up copies.

For future studies, researchers should take these suggestions and critiques into consideration. Also, it would be interesting to find out how each respondent learned of the survey, since many genealogists shared or forwarded the link to others. If this information were provided, one would know for sure which method resulted in the most survey users.

CONCLUSION

Genealogy is no longer just a hobby. Genealogy is a process of discovering, interpreting, and sharing information. Genealogists come together as a community of information users with their own specific needs and searching behaviors. They have a wide range of skills (Skinner, 2010). They usually prefer to search for information in the following order: names, dates, places, subjects, and, finally, events (Duff & Johnson, 2003). Many researchers have conducted surveys and interviews with genealogists to learn about their information seeking needs and behaviors. Genealogists often share search strategies and use common finding aids/tools that are tailored to their specific needs. They have not been known to seek significant help from a librarian or archivist (Rubincam, 1949), and current technological advances lead to even less direct contact. Genealogists like to pick and choose their resources and methods (i.e. berrypicking). They are great at adapting to the resources at hand, whether it be print or Internet resources, or social networking with fellow genealogists.

As one of the most popular activities in the world, genealogy is not going away anytime soon. A positive affect is generated when a person partakes in a leisure hobby or other past time of significant value in their life. Users receive pleasure from their research, and therefore, become more engaged in their learning activity (Fulton, 2009), and engaged with each other. User satisfaction also increases as more resources become available (Skinner, 2010). In this day and age, genealogists want those resources to be available electronically, and they are often willing to pay for that access.

For years, researchers have known that genealogists are a distinct community with their own needs. Yakel & Torres (2007) noted that genealogists create their own social groups and networks in order to conduct research outside the confines of libraries and archives. Internet forums, blogs, and apps are bringing the community together more now than ever. These technologies, along with the increased digitization and access to documents online, are facilitating the sharing of information amongst the community.

Technology will continue to guide genealogical research, especially as researchers become aware of, and attuned to using, the latest technologies available. By using new mechanisms, genealogists will expect faster searching and more records available online and through the use of their devices. The world can be quite literally at their fingertips. Even those who do not own a computer can often find a local public library that provides free access to paid genealogy websites like Ancestry.com. The average person no longer has to wonder where they come from or what might have been a part of their lineage. With the vast amount of resources now available with the click of a button, anyone can become a researcher of family history.

REFERENCES

- Barratt, N. (2008). *"Who do you think you are?" encyclopedia of genealogy: The definitive reference guide to tracing your family history*. [iBook]. Retrieved from iTunes.
- Darby, P., & Clough, P. (2013). Investigating the information-seeking behavior of genealogists and family historians. *Journal of Information Science*, 39(1), 73-84. doi:10.1177/0165551512469765
- Della Cava, M. (2015, April 2). Ancestry.com uses spit to find your long-lost relatives. *USA Today*. Retrieved from <http://www.usatoday.com/story/tech/2015/04/02/ancestrycom-spit-ancestor-discovering/70797850/>
- Duff, W. M., & Johnson, C. A. (2002). Accidentally found on purpose: Information-seeking behavior of historians in archives. *The Library Quarterly: Information, Community, Policy*, 72(4), 472-496. Retrieved from JSTOR database.
- Duff, W. M., & Johnson, C. A. (2003). Where is the list of names? Information-seeking behavior of genealogists. *The American Archivist*, 66(1), 79-95. Retrieved from JSTOR database.
- Fulton, C. (2009). The pleasure principle: The power of positive affect in information seeking. *Aslib Proceedings*, 61(3), 245-261. Retrieved from LISTA database.
- Greenwood, V. D. (2000). *The researcher's guide to American genealogy* (3rd ed.). Baltimore, MD: Genealogical Publishing Co., Inc.
- Herskovitz, A. (2012). A suggested taxonomy of genealogy as a multidisciplinary academic research field. *Journal of Multidisciplinary Research*, 4(3), 5-21. Retrieved from Academic Search Complete database.
- McKay, A. C. (2002). Genealogists and records: Preservation, advocacy, and politics. *Archival Issues*, 27(1), 23-33. Retrieved from JSTOR database.
- Molto, M. B. (2009). Genealogical literature and its users. In M. J. Bates & M. N. Maack (Eds.), *Encyclopedia of Library and Information Sciences* (3rd ed.). Retrieved from <http://www.tandfonline.com/doi/book/10.1081/E-ELIS3>
- Null, D. G. (1985). Genealogy and family history in the academic library. *The Journal of Academic Librarianship*, 11(1), 29-33. Retrieved from Academic Search Complete database.
- Rubincam, M. (Ed.). (1960). *Genealogical research methods and sources*. Washington, D.C.: American Society of Genealogists.
- Rubincam, M. (1987). *Pitfalls in genealogical research*. Salt Lake City, UT: Ancestry Publishing.

- Rubincam, M. (1949). What the genealogist expects of an archival agency or historical society. *The American Archivist*, 12(4), 333-338. Retrieved from JSTOR database.
- Sinko, P. T., & Peters, S. N. (1983, Summer). A Survey of genealogists at The Newberry Library. *Library Trends*, 97-109. Retrieved from https://www.ideals.illinois.edu/bitstream/handle/2142/7305/librarytrendsv32i1i_opt.pdf?sequence=1
- Skinner, J. (2010, March). Does greater specialization imply greater satisfaction? Amateur genealogists and resource use at the State Historical Society of Iowa Libraries. *Libri*, 60, 27-37. doi:10.1515/libr.2010.003
- Smith, D. (2009). *Social networking for genealogists*. Baltimore: Genealogical Publishing Company.
- Southwell, K. L. (2002). How researchers learn of the manuscript resources at the Western History Collections. *Archival Issues*, 26(2), 91-105. Retrieved from JSTOR database.
- Tibbo, H. R. (2003). Primarily history in America: How U.S. historians search for primary materials at the dawn of the digital age. *The American Archivist*, 66(1), 9-50. Retrieved from JSTOR database.
- Yakel, E. (2002). Listening to users. *Archival Issues*, 26(2), 111-127. Retrieved from JSTOR database.
- Yakel, E. (2004). Seeking information, seeking connections, seeking meaning: Genealogists and family historians. *Information Research*, 10(1). Retrieved from <http://InformationR.net/ir/10-1/paper205.html>
- Yakel, E., & Torres, D. A. (2007). Genealogists as a “community of records.” *The American Archivist*, 70(1), 93-113. Retrieved from JSTOR database.

APPENDIX

Research Trends & Emerging Technologies for Genealogists Survey

1. Age group
 - a. 18-30
 - b. 31-54
 - c. 55-68
 - d. 69+
2. Where do you currently reside?
 - a. USA
 - b. Canada
 - c. Other North American country
 - d. Other
3. How would you describe your level of knowledge as a genealogical researcher?
 - a. Beginner
 - b. Intermediate
 - c. Advanced
 - d. Professional/expert
4. How long have you been involved in genealogy?
 - a. Less than a year
 - b. 1-5 years
 - c. 6-15 years
 - d. More than 15 years
5. Do you own any genealogy books (actual print copies)?
 - a. Yes
 - b. No
6. Do you subscribe to any paper journals, periodicals or newsletters?
 - a. Yes
 - b. No
7. Do you have any genealogy software on your computer?
 - a. Yes
 - b. No
8. Do you belong to any genealogical societies or other clubs/organizations?
 - a. Yes
 - b. No
9. Do you have any genealogy-related apps on your smart phone or tablet?

- a. Yes
 - b. No
10. Do you prefer researching and handling records in person or online?
- a. In person
 - b. Online
 - c. Both
11. Please indicate which genealogy software you use to organize your family tree (choose all that apply):
- a. Family Tree Maker (Ancestry.com)
 - b. RootsMagic
 - c. Legacy Family Tree
 - d. None
 - e. Other
12. Please indicate any paid subscription-based Internet sites you subscribe to (choose all that apply):
- a. Ancestry
 - b. Fold3
 - c. One Great Family
 - d. World Vital Records
 - e. None
 - f. Other
13. Which genealogy websites are your favorites for free content? (choose all that apply)
- a. Ancestry
 - b. National Archives (U.S.)
 - c. National Archives (U.K.)
 - d. My Heritage
 - e. Genealogy.com
 - f. Family Search
 - g. Find a Grave
 - h. Ellis Island
 - i. Cyndi's List
 - j. Other
14. Have you ever posted a comment or replied to a inquiry on the community forum of one of these websites?
- a. Yes
 - b. No

15. Have you tried DNA testing from a website, and if so, which service did you use? (choose all that apply)
- 23andMe
 - Ancestry
 - Family Tree DNA
 - None
 - Other
16. Do you subscribe to any genealogy listservs or newsgroups?
- Newsgroups only
 - Listservs only
 - Both newsgroups and listservs
 - Neither
17. Which of these genealogy blogs do you read regularly? (choose all that apply)
- Eastman's Online Genealogy Newsletter
 - The Armchair Genealogist
 - Hidden Genealogy
 - Everton Publishers Genealogy Blog (www.genealogyblog.com)
 - I do not follow genealogy bloggers
 - Other
18. Which apps do you use on your smart phone or tablet? (choose all that apply)
- My Heritage
 - Ancestry
 - RootsMagic
 - Interviewy
 - WDYTYA Forum
 - Find a Grave
 - Trello (or other list making apps)
 - Evernote or One Note
 - SmartDoc (or other image capturing apps)
 - I don't use apps
 - Other
19. Have any of these problems arisen in your genealogical research? (choose all that apply)
- Fraudulent pedigree
 - Questionable source/information
 - Identify Theft

- d. Paying for access
 - e. Loss of records due to fires, natural disasters, preservation, etc.
 - f. Learned of hereditary illnesses/genetic disorders via DNA testing
 - g. Ethical issues
 - h. None
 - i. Other
20. Which traditional records do you utilize when possible or applicable?
(choose all that apply)
- a. Newspapers
 - b. Periodicals or journals
 - c. Unpublished correspondence, manuscripts, diaries or journals
 - d. Government documents (including census, vital, and military records, etc.)
 - e. Cemetery records
 - f. Church records
 - g. City/county directories
 - h. None
 - i. Other
21. How often do you visit a library, archive or repository in person for research purposes?
- a. Never
 - b. Sometimes
 - c. Regularly
 - d. High frequency
22. Have you ever used a finding aid for a library, archive or repository (for genealogical research), either in person at the facility or via their website?
(examples: index, catalog, bibliography, inventory or directory)
- a. Yes, in person only
 - b. Yes, online only
 - c. Yes, both in person and online
 - d. No
23. Do you use social media to follow genealogy topics?
- a. Yes
 - b. No
24. Which social media sites do you use for genealogical purposes, if any?
(choose all that apply)
- a. Facebook
 - b. Instagram

- c. Twitter
 - d. MySpace
 - e. LinkedIn
 - f. Flickr
 - g. Pinterest
 - h. Google+
 - i. Vine
 - j. None
 - k. Other
25. If you were to discover a new ancestor on your family tree, where would you start your research?
- a. Ask a family member
 - b. Visit a website such as Ancestry, Family Search, etc.
 - c. Published records
 - d. Other
26. What has been your biggest obstacle in researching your ancestry?
(choose all that apply)
- a. Loss of records (due to fires, disasters, preservation issues etc.)
 - b. Little or no access to records outside of your geographic region (including international records)
 - c. Language barrier
 - d. Relatives who won't cooperate
 - e. Can't verify names/dates
 - f. Paying for access/information
 - g. Other
27. When is it acceptable to pay for information?
- a. Only when requesting a copy of a document (paper or electronic delivery)
 - b. Never—there should be free access across the board
 - c. Monthly/annual membership fees for access are acceptable
 - d. I should be able to find a document online and access it just once, for a small, one-time charge (no subscription necessary)
 - e. Only when hiring a professional genealogist
 - f. Only when accessing records held outside the U.S.
28. Additional comments: