

Curation Tool Analysis: Pinterest

Introduction: Uh Oh, What Do I Do?

As I began this project, I was admittedly torn between two tools, Pinterest and ProQuest Flow. Should I rely on a curation tool that I have utilized both at work and personally but struggled to see an academic connection, or should I push the definition of a curation tool towards a much more academic tool? I actually curated an entire collection of social media research for academic libraries in ProQuest Flow and built a Haiku Deck presentation (linked in my blog) explaining how to utilize the “Save to Flow” functionality. Success!

Sadly, that success was short-lived. I realized upon investigation that while anyone in my “community” (UNC Asheville) could view my Flow library, I could not export it in a form other than a simple bibliography or link to the materials for anyone outside of the aforementioned community. The words “panic” and “defeat” do not reside within my vocabulary; I decided to take the advice of the latest ALA Report on Social Media and explore the possibilities of Pinterest as an academic research tool. The following is a detailed analysis of my experience building a Pinterest board on learning Korean, intended for a beginning-language college student who wishes to practice outside of the classroom.

Capabilities, Drawbacks, and Suggested Improvements

Pinterest is a fantastic tool for collecting and curating a variety of online media, from webpages to videos to possible purchases on shopping websites. The functionality is simple; you can “pin” materials using a bookmarked link or an application (app) on a multitude of mobile operating systems, or “pin” materials from someone else’s “board”. Given my background in floral design, I view a Pinterest board’s function as an “idea board” or a “wish board” for fleshing out ideas and acting as a repository of handy links one can access from nigh-on everywhere.

For the purposes of this assignment, Pinterest worked almost flawlessly. I was able to add many of my go-to resources on learning Korean (as I am teaching myself the language) to my intended board easily using the “Pin to Board” widget I installed on Chrome. Said widget would detect if there was any “pinnable” material on the page (e.g. video content, images) and allow me to type in annotations before pinning to the board. I tried a variety of sources, including images, videos, audio, and products, to test the flexibility of pinning.

The issue I ran into as I was pinning away, however, concerned the lack of “pinnable” material on some websites. For example, I wanted to add a “pin” from a largely Flash-based website offered through the Korean Broadcasting System, or KBS. Because the script associated with Pinterest could not detect any images or videos on the page, it would not add the page to my board. I could anticipate this would be an issue with my students; what if the pages they are attempting to pin are entirely text? Yes, granted, you can use the upload functionality built into the website to upload a screenshot of a page and add the web address. However, I see this as more of a hindrance, and that a typical user would not go to those lengths to “pin” that sort of information to their board.

Potential Uses in an Academic Library

Pinterest has the potential to be a successful tool for academic librarians and their patrons, even outside of sharing exhibit information or curating a fantastic collection of recipes. Given the ease of sharing and the community-based nature of Pinterest, I anticipate that, for example, professors could build a Pinterest board of oral history resources to share with their class and ask students to share “pins” for homework assignments. Pinterest could further foster community among academics and provide a repository of links for research projects. And, as I explored, Pinterest can provide a place to collect materials to foster learning outside a formal classroom. I look forward to exploring the functionality of Pinterest further with my students soon!