

# Social Media and Art Museums: Measuring Success

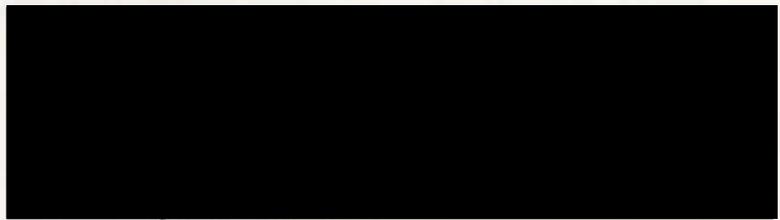
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Terminal Research Project: June 2013  
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Many thanks to my whole cohort. Looks like we made it. I couldn't have made it without you. All my love to all Cinema Pacific staff for keeping me sane.

Jeremy, (Dr.) Emily, Jaymond, and my family: For all your support. Always.

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**Abstract**

The purpose of this study is to understand the evaluation methods put in place by art museums in Los Angeles to measure the success of their online social media programs. Through case studies at three institutions in Los Angeles knowledge of their program evaluation will be come clear. This body of knowledge can then be used to improve evaluation procedures and in turn, increase the success levels of social media programs to help make these programs more engaging to museum audiences and community.

**Keywords**

Participation, Engagement, Social Media, Evaluation/Metrics, Network, Community

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CHAPTER ONE: INTRODUCTION

**Definitions**

Participation—the act of taking part. The act of sharing, creating, connecting with other people (other participants) and/or with an event or program (Simon, 2010)

Engagement—the extent to which audience and community members are involved in and participate with programs and institutions. The goals of engagement include “educat[ing] and enlighten[ing] audiences,” “enhance[ing] the experience for the audience,” and “build[ing] community and connection.” (Dance/USA, 2011, p. 6).

Social Media—online media that transmit social interactions and communications with a large, wide-ranging audience and connect people through a social network

Evaluation—the process of assessing the level of success of programs in order “to provide meaningful information from which decisions about [those] programs...can be made” (Fleischer & Christie, 2009, p. 158).

Network—a system by which people are connected through mutual interests or circumstances and “build relationships through community” (socialmediatoday, 2010)

Community—a group of people with common bonds often based on physical location, but may grow beyond physical boundaries with the onset of the Internet

## **Problem Statement**

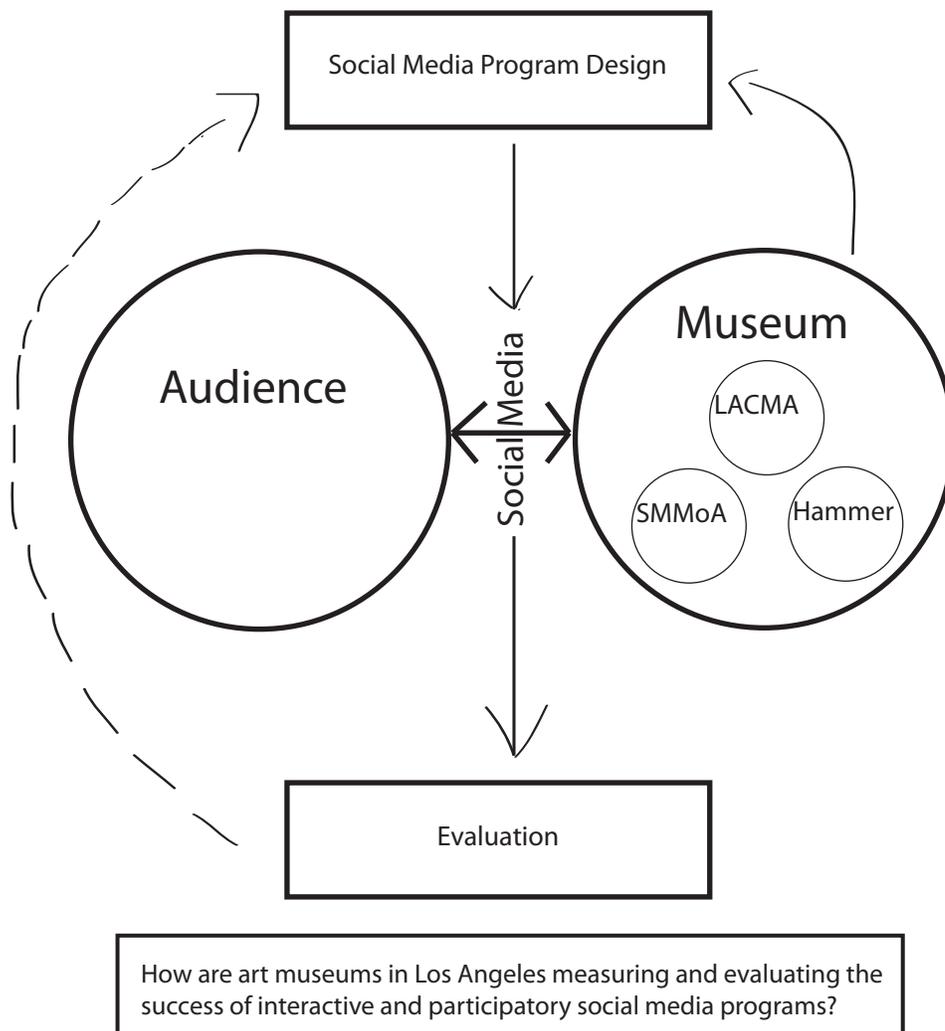
As museums are investing more time, employees, and money into their participatory online programs—such as a high profile social media presence—one wonders if the museum staff design these programs in such a way that evaluation processes figure prominently. Is the work and time that museums spend on these programs accounted for in a meaningful way? Social media is growing rapidly and no longer only encompasses the Millennial Generation. As of December 2012, Facebook alone had “more than one billion monthly active users” (Facebook, 2013), up more than 150 million users since December 2011 (Facebook, 2012). Thus it’s hard to be surprised when baby boomers and even their parents’ generation are connecting with organizations and each other through the Internet and social media. “[This] and similar trends represent[s] a significant shift in the way we interact with others and in the way we understand the nature of those interactions” (New Media Consortium, p. 2). It is interactional shifts like this that matter and change how museums must address their communities. Additionally, as technology and new media opportunities continue to change and improve, the art museum participatory methods and programs must evolve, as well. Museum audiences are able to use these new social media tools, both on and offsite, to learn in new and different ways, including interacting with exhibitions, each other, and museum staff in increasingly social and participatory ways. However, do these programs that museums implement actually have the desired effect? Are they getting a return on their investment in these programs and are the programs themselves successful and achieving their goals?

This topic is especially interesting, meaningful, and timely, because cultural institutions like art museums (not to mention for-profit corporations) are constantly faced with questions of how best to create, manage, and promote their online presence. How can and should art museums use the new tools this technology offers to develop the most effective programming for their audiences and community? It is important, because online social networking is not going away and is only becoming a larger part of our everyday lives. As Mark Deuze (2009) describes this shift, our lives are “lived *in*, rather than *with*, media—a media life” (p. 468). Our media lives are more and more connected to technology and social media and art museums are no different. Even though social media is important and will not be disappearing, these programs’ effectiveness in furthering museum goals is still a relevant question. How do these art museums determine and measure that effectiveness? Can virtual programs such as social media programs be held to the same measures of success as physical programs?

### **Conceptual Framework**

Over the last decade, online social media has become more and more popular and has achieved a prominent and visible place in museum audience engagement strategies. Because it has the ability to quickly, easily, and inexpensively connect large groups of people to each other and to institutions, it has also become increasingly important to the marketing of nearly every kind of product including arts organizations and their programming and exhibitions. Social media marketing programs may seem especially attractive to nonprofit organizations since they have few overhead costs and can reach so many people. However, they do require a somewhat substantial amount of staff time,

especially in program design and in the day-to-day implementation. When time is money, it is necessary to ask whether or not this time is being well spent and if cultural institutions (specifically art museums in this case) are taking appropriate steps to determine an answer to this question through their program evaluations. Evaluation can lead to improved program design by clarifying what aspects of the program and social media strategy work best and which aspects need to be revised or removed.



## **Purpose statement**

The purpose of this study was to explore and understand the methods used by three Los Angeles art museums (the Los Angeles County Museum of Art, the Hammer Museum, and the Santa Monica Museum of Art) when evaluating the social media programs they have put in place as part of their audience engagement strategies. The study sought to understand how these institutions create these programs and what they deem most important in art museum social media. Ultimately this study wanted to comprehend how these art museums measure the success of their social media programs and if they are seeing a return on their investment. The main research question was designed to address this purpose:

**Research Question:** How are art museums in Los Angeles measuring and evaluating the success of their participatory social media programs?

In addition to and in support of this main research question, this study was also designed to address the following sub questions:

- How do virtual or online participatory activities encourage audiences to engage with the physical museum space?
- What constitutes success of these programs? Failure?
- Can virtual social media programs be held to same measures of success as physical programs?

## **Methodological Paradigm**

When doing research, there are certainly a number of methods that one can use to find useful data and information. Because I was interested in getting numerous different

perspectives on the role of virtual and social media communities in attracting and engaging art museum audiences and how museums are evaluating those programs, my research depended primarily on qualitative methods. As O’Leary (2010) explains, a qualitative approach “argues the value of depth over quantity and works at delving into social complexities in order to truly explore and understand the interactions, processes, lived experiences, and belief systems that are a part of individuals, institutions, cultural groups...” (p. 113-114).

The lens through which I approached this research is interpretivist and constructivist. As Creswell (2009) describes, a constructivist worldview is one in which “the researcher [looks] for the complexity of views” and “rely[s] as much as possible on the participants’ views of the situation being studied.” (p. 8). With case studies, I based much of what I learned on the variety of views held by my participants and interviewees in addition to the wide swath of sentiments held by the other researchers as referenced my literature review.

## **Delimitations**

I made certain delimitations for the study. For example, I completed case studies for only three art museums in Los Angeles, though there are significantly more art institutions throughout the city. These three institutions provided an overview of art museums in Los Angeles, but cannot account for all of them. All museums in the study were in Los Angeles County and feature some audience crossover. While it may be interesting to study and document the kind of work being done nationally or even globally, geographic limitations had to be placed for the sake of feasibility. (The geographic constraints also are a factor of time, finances, and logistics.) Ultimately,

however, I chose Los Angeles because I am interested in museums in large urban centers and my existing knowledge of the Los Angeles art scene was useful when dealing with institutional access limitations. Finally, perhaps one of the most significant delimitations for this study was the fact that I spoke only with *staff* of the museums I outlined, not their audiences as well. Certainly, talking to the public would have been an interesting and meaningful angle to take on this research and theirs would be a valuable perspective. This too, however, is function of time and an attempt to keep the study as manageable as possible and the data gathered from museum staff members was sufficient enough to discuss my research topic at length and provide interesting answers.

### **Limitations**

There were certainly limitations that I came across as these case studies were underway. These included limited access to the files and information I was interested in. While there was no problem accessing more public documents and data like the institutions' missions and values, accessing strategic plans was more complicated. Though I did speak with key informants, they could not offer me all the documents I requested due to security issues. In some instances, the requested documents did not exist at all. The rapport I did have with museum staff did enable me to get many of the documents I had hoped for. Other limitations, though, included the idea of generalizability. While the information gained from this study will hopefully offer some useful learning for other organizations, it cannot apply exactly to all. Finally, there were also longitudinal constraints. As interesting as it may have been to continue to study these

institutions for a much longer time, my status as a Master's degree student hindered my ability to increase the time frame.

### **Benefits of the Study**

This study looked at the current evaluation standards of social media programs for three specific Los Angeles art institutions: the Los Angeles County Museum of Art, the Hammer Museum, and the Santa Monica Museum of Art. Because social media programs are so ubiquitous now, this research will benefit not only the organizations that are part of the case study, but also other similar institutions that utilize social media programs and hope to use them engage with their communities in the most successful way possible. For the institutions in this case study, it gives them the opportunity to reflect on the evaluation processes they currently have in place and the chance to see what other Los Angeles institutions are doing in that realm. This will hopefully lead to stronger, more complete evaluation methods and, in turn, to better, more engaging and successful programming. Better programming is beneficial to both the field in general and the population at large. Communities gain from successful audience engagement programs by becoming more closely connected to the arts institutions.

### **Strategy of Inquiry**

This project's purpose was to ascertain the methods that art museums in Los Angeles are using to evaluate the success of their social media programs. Because I was specifically interested in what art museums are actually doing, a case study of purposively selected institutions was an important method to utilize. Case studies "allow for the building of holistic understandings through prolonged engagement and the

development of a rapport and trust within a clearly defined and highly relevant context” (O’Leary, 2010, p. 174). Attaining a holistic knowledge base about specific institutions allowed for a broader understanding of how other museum programs and the museum’s organizational culture affect and create a basis for participatory social media programs. It also gave a better impression of how the museum has evaluated their other programs. With that in mind, one of the main goals of the case studies was to understand whether the online social media programs of each case study museum have been successful and what type of evaluation methods are used to measure that success (or lack thereof).

### **Research Design**

In order to understand how Los Angeles art museums are evaluating their social media programs, case studies were conducted at the three aforementioned Los Angeles art museums. These three art museums were chosen for not only their size (one large, one mid-sized, one small) and their location (within Los Angeles County), but also because they currently have robust online participatory and social media programming. Their missions, goals, and values were investigated in order to get a sense of what is important to each institution. Internal documents like strategic plans, tax information, notes related to social media planning, and social media plans also provided greater insight into the museums as a whole upon analysis. I also conducted key informant interviews to get direct information from specific institutions. In this case, I was able to gather “rich, in-depth qualitative data” (O’Leary, p. 196) in a flexible format and could speak to a variety of museum professionals. I interviewed mostly Communications department staff, but also staff that deals with public programs. Each key informant was recruited via

recruitment email (Appendix D) and then interviewed in a semi-structured manner for about an hour at their place of work. I audio recorded these interviews with participant authorization (except for one interview, which was done over the phone and not in person, so was not recorded) and took written notes. Interviewing Communications and Public Programs staff was most beneficial to the research because these departments have the most say in how their social media programs are run, designed, and evaluated.

In addition to doing key informant interviews and document analysis for each institution, I also investigated the online programs that the case study museums have in place to see how their audiences are engaging with these programs and how the museum staffs interact back with their audiences. This meant noting how often the institution updated their social media, how frequently they reply back to their audience, how many followers they have, and how frequently that audience shared and commented on the institutions' material. This is important to evaluation since these are the actual programs that are in process.

CHAPTER TWO: LITERATURE REVIEW

## Introduction

Throughout the last one hundred years, but especially over the last few decades, there have been many major changes in how American museums, especially art museums, are run and how they understand, interact with, and engage their audiences and communities. As Newman, et al. (2005) explains, “new museology” was a shift in which museums began to “focus upon people rather than the object” (p. 43). This audience and community centered system has continued to grow and evolve to form art museums that serve the art *and* the community. In fact, as Harris (1999) discusses, “American museums today...claim new and unprecedented levels of support as well as increased attendance and a great number of user-friendly programs” (p.38). This desire museums have to generate and appeal to new kinds of audience groups has continued to evolve and various kinds of interactive and participatory programs and events have become quite significant in this quest. And this makes sense, especially when seeing a museum and its public as “partners in giving a meaningful voice to those objects which, according to a previous generation of museum practitioners, were once said to speak for themselves.” (Weil, 1997, p. 270). Giving these museum objects a voice and sharing that between the museum and the public means the community is able to help tell the stories of art objects and relate them to their own experiences. Sharing ideas and experiences with the public is one of the major benefits that social media can offer an organization. As Russo, Watkins, and Groundwater-Smith (2009) describe:

Museums are a meeting ground for both official versions of the past, their histories offered through exhibitions, and the individual or collective accounts of reflective personal experience known as memories. Social media can enable

informal ways of drawing together this knowledge by providing tools for participatory engagement which have the potential to distribute new forms of learning. (p. 161)

As museums begin to recognize the power and potential of social media for audience engagement, marketing, public relations, and more, it has moved more front and center in museum communications. Importantly though, as with anything that requires a budget and dedicated staff time, evaluation systems and the ability to measure success and define what success means when considering social media programs is paramount.

## **History**

Social media, which, according to Wong (2011) is acknowledged as “the current cultural phenomenon in which people throughout the world are adapting to the networked digital media and its capacity to affect society by changing how and when we communicate,” (p. 99) has experienced major growth over the last decade. As Fletcher and Lee (2012) describe it, social media is “a type of media dispersed through online social interactions and takes on a variety of forms including social networking sites, blogs, wikis, podcasts, photo and video sharing, social bookmarking, and virtual environments” (p. 505). From that perspective, one can see that, especially “over the last three years, Web 2.0 sites, from blogs to YouTube to Wikipedia, have transformed the ways the web users interact with content and with each other on the web.” (Simon, 2007, p. 257). This is not at all surprising considering just how many users various social media platforms have. For example, Facebook has “more than one billion monthly active users as of December 2012” (Facebook, 2013). Social media platforms such as Facebook,

Twitter, YouTube, Pinterest, Tumblr, and Instagram have become quite significant to how museums interact with their communities. Social media allow art museums to have much more immediate contact with their audiences and create a space for back-and-forth conversation and dialogue about art and the museum between the museum and the community as well as within the community itself. As Wong (2011) explains, “the hierarchy of author-to-audience long maintained by traditional broadcasting is still evident but is challenged by intensive information exchange across decentralized and lateral networks.” (p. 99). It is no longer just organizations expelling information for their publics to digest, but rather a conversation can emerge through social media.

Additionally, as social media become more and more prevalent and necessary within museums as a communication tool it “is motivating the professionalization of ‘social media’ in museum work.” (p. 97). Clearly, for a program to run smoothly and effectively, dedicated staff time is required. As social media become more useful and powerful in the museum setting, the necessity of having trained staff to manage and maintain these social media programs also develops.

Because the primary function of social media is so rooted in the idea of spreading information and the fact that it has the capacity to reach a huge number of people, it has especially affected the Communications departments of museums, which often encompass marketing and public relations. As described by Weil (1999), “museums almost everywhere have, in essence, shifted from a ‘selling’ mode to a ‘marketing’ one...In the marketing mode, their starting point instead is the public’s own needs and interests, and their efforts are concentrated on first trying to discover and then attempting to satisfy those public needs and interests.” (p. 232-233). Public relations, too,

experiences a shift since “practitioners can, through the net, communicate directly with their public with transparency, frankness and democracy.” (Kirit, 2007, p. 167). The move away from the use of paper and sending out physical mailings to the magnitude it was done before the Internet means not only can museums directly communicate with their public, but they can do it with an immediacy that would not have been possible in the past.

### **Current Trends in Social Media**

One of the most current studies on the use of social media and the Internet in American arts organizations was completed by the Pew Research Center with the results published in January 2013. From this expansive survey, Thomson, Purcell, and Rainie (2013) discovered that:

Technology use permeates these organizations, their marketing and education efforts, and even their performance offerings. Moreover, many organizations are using the internet and social media to expand the number of online performances and exhibits, grow their audience, sell tickets, and raise funds online, while allowing patrons to share content, leave comments, and even post their own content on organizations’ sites. (p. 2)

As social media become more ubiquitous in the world at large, it also becomes more and more necessary for art museums to keep up with social media trends and it is clear from this study that social media and digital technologies are a priority for arts organizations. For example, “81% of the organizations in [the] survey say the internet and digital technologies are “very important” for promoting the arts,” “78% say these

technologies are “very important” for increasing audience engagement,” and 92% “agree with statements that technology and social media have made art a more participatory experience” (p. 2). In fact, these days it is nearly impossible to find a museum without a website or a Facebook page and Twitter presences are almost as common. The ability to be found on the Internet is seemingly paramount to the ability to be physically found in real life, as well.

A social media presence in museums also “[has] the potential to enhance collection knowledge and create communities of interest which support and extend cultural participation” (Russo, et al., 2009, p. 163). It can give audiences an entry point to a museum’s collection as well as a new way to for them to take part in the arts.

Additionally, according to Thomson et al. (2013), “there is also strong support for the notion that social media helps organizations reach new, broader audiences, and that it helps audiences feel more invested in arts organizations” (p. 3). The idea and hope for greater audience participation and engagement is at the heart of the social media undertaking for museums. Ultimately the goal is to get audiences, both new and old, more involved in the museum and their collections in new and varied ways. Social media allows audiences to interact with museum and their collections in new, but also very immediate ways.

### **Audience/Participation**

That same immediacy of communication and dialogue that is born from social media programs also has an effect on the way audiences can engage with museums.

Russo, et al. (2009) “argue that social media open new opportunities for museums. They

provide a real possibility to lead audience engagement and interaction with collections by providing the infrastructure and training to enable digitally literate cultural audiences to engage with knowledge in meaningful ways.” (p. 160). Creating new ways to interact with, discuss, and understand the art in museums means that potentially new audiences can be reached and people who lacked an access point to the museum and its collection now have a new type of entry. It is also significant that these new forms of access gained through social media can create the opportunity to “give participants an measure of control” (Newman et al., 2005, p. 51) over their experience and the ability to make museums and exhibitions seem like they were “for them” (p. 52). The idea of a cultural institution being “not for” someone is an especially interesting issue to overcome and emphasizes the need to create spaces (both physical and digital) that are not only accessible, but friendly, open, and welcoming to a variety of constituents. Social media have the potential to bridge the gap for audiences that may be comfortable with the Internet and digital spaces, but not yet prepared to make the leap to a physical museum experience.

Rodriguez (1997), too, points to the concept of audience inclusiveness in museums and notes for art museums, the importance of “the construction of personal meaning” and the possibility for people to see “themselves and their lives reflected in” the museum collection and programming (p. 27-28). Audience participation in cultural institutions, including art museums, is encouraged by the ability of a particular organization to respond to that audience’s sense of personal representation. It is with that in mind, that museums need to be sure they are developing public programs and “activities that engage audiences and motivate them to see museums as unique places for

learning” especially with regard to “nontraditional museum audiences” (p. 27). Social media programs are, in fact, an example of a museum program that can help create a sense of personal representation for a museum’s audience and community and inspire them to actively engage with the museum. “Social media technologies have broadened learning options, shifting the focus from individual/institutional custodianship to participatory relationships where those involved in the learning process are seeking and sharing new knowledge” (Russo, et al., 2009, p. 156).

Based on the information in the literature, it is clear that museums and cultural institutions are interested and ready to take further steps to improve how they connect with their current and potential audiences and communities. It is also clear that museums have begun to try new kinds of programming to attract and generate a new audience base, but there is certainly more that can be done in the future and surely other institutions have similarly interesting events that can be models for the future. The use of social media, while also utilized strongly for marketing museum programs and exhibitions, is an important new tool for museum audience engagement. According to Russo et al. (2009), “social media have the potential to encourage participation in a sector of learning which as historically been uni-directional; shifting from knowledge transmission to audience engagement and participation” (p. 160). Audiences have the opportunity to take part in a dialogue with the museum, but importantly also have the ability to direct the conversation towards what is most important to them and their experiences with the museum’s collection and museum itself.

**Marketing/Public Relations**

Of course, while the audience does have the chance to direct their own experiences through social media, much of social media programming in art museums is also geared towards marketing museum exhibitions, public programs, and fundraising events and opportunities. In fact, according to Kidd (2011), “the use-value of social media for the museum is perhaps most easily (and least imaginatively) understood through the frame of marketing activity” (p. 67). But useful it is because social media can speak to so many people at once. “According to the American Marketing Association, marketing is the process of planning and executing the conception, pricing, promotion, and distribution of ideas, goods, and services to create exchanges that satisfy individual and organizational goals” (McNichol, 2005, p. 241), though, more interestingly, Godin (2008) explains marketing as “the act of telling stories about the things we make—stories that sell and stories that spread” (p. 15). Clearly, getting information about the museum’s offerings out to their audiences and potential participants is necessary and social media represent a way to highlight this information quickly, frequently, and without the major expense that, for example, expansive mailings require. Social media allow institutions to tell and spread their stories in a way that hopefully inspires attendance. Additionally, “the World Wide Web is considered to be the first public relations mass medium allowing direct communications between organizations and their publics without going through news media gatekeeping and journalists and editors filtering” (Kirit, 2007, p. 167), so clearly social media is a boon (as well as a significant change) to Communications departments, both from a marketing and public relations standpoint.

Marketing programs do not necessarily fit neatly into the anticipated and expected altruistic, educational, and nonprofit aims of art museums. They are exceedingly necessary though. Pierroux and Skjulstad (2011) describe that ideologically, “the museum’s use of social media for architectural feedback supports principles of democratization, dialogue, and participation, [but] this social media use is grounded at least as much in the economic context of branding.” (p. 209). People need to come to the museum in order to keep the museum running and marketing helps bring audiences in and new audiences, as well.

### **Evaluation**

Clearly social media programs have found a home in art museums and are used in a variety of ways to achieve the goals of the museum. However, just because programs are in place does not automatically imply that they are being used in the most ideal way or, in fact, even achieving what they are assumed to be achieving. “‘Museum 2.0’ can provoke significantly greater repeat visitation, more personalized, meaningful visitor engagement with content, and perhaps most importantly, the opportunity for communication and sharing among visitors” (Simon, 2007, p. 259). Is it actually working like that and realizing these ideals? It is through evaluation programs and metrics that the level of programmatic success can be determined. “This ability for social media to encourage participation from strategic publics can foster and strengthen relationships when used effectively. However, effective use of social media requires time and commitment” (Fletcher & Lee, 2012, p. 505). Part of that commitment to both

effectiveness and excellence depends on strong and relevant evaluation and the ability for programs to be changed and improved based on the evaluation's findings.

Importantly, evaluation programs for social media do not need to be drastically different from those used for other types of programs. As Fleischer and Christie (2009) describe it, "primary objective of evaluation is to provide meaningful information from which decisions about programs and related policies can be made. The intent is that the decision makers use the information provided by evaluations to inform their decision making" (p. 158). Using the information learned in evaluation is the basis for doing the evaluation in the first place. Once it is determined what works best, what works, and what does not work, important alterations can be made to programs that have undergone evaluation that can make those programs even more successful in their revised form. For social media programs, because they are comparatively new and institutions and individuals are still in the process of understanding how they can best be used, evaluation is especially important. Evaluation begins, according to Fletcher and Lee (2012), by "first the setting of definable goals and the selection of criteria by which to measure progress toward those goals" (p. 509). This demands a good understanding of not only the institution's goals, but also knowledge of how social media can work and what possibilities and limits can be expected from them. And of course, there are differing types of metrics that evaluations can use, especially regarding social media. As Watson (2012) explains, "frequency, reach and tonality of media references are still widely-demanded practices in measurement and evaluation, although social media brings new challenges for practitioners and the measurement services companies" (p. 396). Most, if not all, social media have simple metrics built into them. This is how many "likes," "followers," "fans,"

views, comments, and beyond a user has. These types of metrics are easy to see and follow, but may not tell the entire story of a social media program success or the kinds of improvement that could be made. If institutional goals for social media interactions depend upon more conversation and engagement (beyond “liking” a post or not), these kinds of interactions need to be considered in the evaluation process, as well. “Web 2.0 services and applications make possible more dynamic interactions... and ultimately more direct, interactive and participative user-to-user interactions than heretofore experienced on the web” (Harrison & Barthel, 2009, p. 157), so those two are the kinds of experience that require evaluation and metrics.

Ultimately, social media programs, especially in museums, are a new, though up-and-coming, source of audience engagement and questions about best practices are still forming and just beginning to be answered. Understanding how a variety of institutions are dealing with these questions can help create better programming in the future.

## **Conclusion**

The uses and benefits of social media programs in general, but specifically those in use at art museums, are certainly numerous. From marketing and public relations to new and interesting types of audience engagement and dialogue creation, social media are offering museums alternative ways of talking to the public. To fully understand what aspects are most useful and best received, however, evaluation is a key aspect that should be integrated into social media planning. There are, of course, numerous challenges involved in both the implementation of social media programs (regardless of how

effective they ultimately are) and in the creation of appropriate evaluation methods for these programs.

CHAPTER THREE: CASE STUDY DATA

**Case Study Selection**

In order to complete this study, I searched for Los Angeles area art museums that have clearly placed the use of social media at the forefront of their audience engagement and development strategies, promotion, and community building. I wanted organizations that not only had robust social media programs in place, but programs that had had the opportunity to grow and evolve over time. Organizations with longer standing programs are more likely to have had the chance to put evaluation measure in place. I focused specifically on three art institutions of varying sizes across Los Angeles. Depending on the museum's budget, number of staff members, usual audience, and type and magnitude of other public programs, etc., the kinds of social media programs in place can vary. The goals of social media programs can vary by institution and institution size. The objective of conducting these case studies was to discover how these different institutions plan, implement, and ultimately evaluate and measure the success of their programs. By using three art museums across the city, I was able to compare and contrast each of their methods and gain a broader understanding of what is important to art institutions when it comes to social media and the evaluation thereof.

## **Case Study One: The Los Angeles County Museum of Art, Los Angeles, CA**

### History and Overview

The Los Angeles County Museum of Art (LACMA) sits in the Mid-City neighborhood of Los Angeles and is the largest museum of Museum Row of the Miracle Mile, the stretch of Wilshire Boulevard between Fairfax Avenue and La Brea Avenue. It has been situated there since it opened to the public in 1965. Originally, however the museum was a part of the Los Angeles Museum of History, Science and Art, which was founded in 1910.

Home to a collection of more than 100,000 art objects that span immense geographic and time frames, LACMA is the largest art museum west of the Mississippi River (Los Angeles County Museum of Art, 2013b). The museum's collections are vast and "encompass the geographic world and virtually the entire history of art" (Los Angeles County Museum of Art, 2013b). Having gone through numerous campus expansions and building projects, the museum currently encompasses seven buildings on twenty acres. Clearly the largest of all the case studies, LACMA employs a staff of nearly 500 employees and requires an operating budget of over \$100 million. The museum puts on many large exhibitions each year and has added two large-scale outdoor public artworks in the last five years (Chris Burden's *Urban Light* in 2008 and Michael Heizer's *Levitated Mass* in 2012).

Additionally, LACMA also features many educational and public programs both on and off-site, which include classes, film and music programs, lectures, symposia, and more. Affecting a variety of audiences and types of communities, these programs expand the museum's already large reach on Los Angeles and Southern California as a whole.

LACMA is an ever-growing arts institution that is a well-funded, well-connected leader within the Los Angeles art scene.

### Mission

As described on LACMA's website (Los Angeles County Museum of Art, 2013b), the museum's mission is:

To serve the public through the collection, conservation, exhibition, and interpretation of significant works of art from a broad range of cultures and historical periods, and through the translation of these collections into meaningful educational, aesthetic, intellectual, and cultural experiences for the widest array of audiences.

Because LACMA is a huge museum with a broad collection and a constituency that spans the whole of Los Angeles county and beyond, its mission must relate to serving such a large and diverse community and that is reflected both in its collection and public programming.

### Audience Engagement and Public Programs

Since LACMA is such a large museum and caters to an immense and wide-ranging audience, it also houses a vast array of educational and public programs that work towards community and audience engagement. This includes programs for children and families, schools, teachers, and adults. There are tours, lectures, symposia, concerts, films, art classes, camps, touring school programs, and an outreach program that allows all children under 18 to become members of the museum for free, among many others.

Boasting a very large Education and Public Programs department, as well as a Music department and a Film department, all of which work to create and implement public programs, LACMA's calendar of events is always full. Because there is such a wide range of programs, there are many points of entry for the large community they serve and plenty of ways for different kinds of people with varying interests to engage with the museum and their collection.

One example of an educational program that helps an audience engage with a specific part of LACMA's collection is the long running Evenings for Educators. Designed specifically for K-12 teachers, this professional development program aims to help these educators connect with art through conversation, looking, and creating, so they can use these methods with their own students. Each event, focusing on a different area of the collection or special exhibition, "presents strategies to incorporate the visual arts into the classroom with activities that explore the artistic process, approach works of art as primary sources, and emphasize the parallels between the visual arts and core content areas" (Los Angeles County Museum of Art, 2013a). By allowing a large group of educational professionals from around Southern California the opportunity to not only engage with LACMA's collection, but also learn effective ways to teach others to engage with art, Evenings for Educators is a successful example of a program that seeks to not only speak to one audience (teachers, in this case), but also hopes to pass that new learning along to students.

Another example of a more public program at LACMA that works to involve and engage a wide swath of the museum's community is Andell Family Sundays. This free weekly program gives families especially the opportunity to connect with specific parts

of LACMA's collection through bilingual, family-friendly gallery tours, art-making workshops led by teaching artists, and more, depending on the monthly focus. By giving families a chance to relate to art in a friendly, open environment, Family Sundays allows visitors the chance to explore the museum (hopefully) with the understanding that it is a place they can be comfortable in and belong at. Accommodating visitors of varying backgrounds is also an important focus of Family Sundays and Spanish-speaking staff is always present and Korean-speaking staff is generally available, as well (Spanish and Korean-speakers, after English-speakers, make up a much of the community surrounding the museum). Family Sundays give visitors many kinds of ways to connect with art at LACMA—looking, listening, discussing, and creating—so that each person can choose the best entry point to the art for himself or herself.

These two programs offer just a glimpse of the wide range of public and educational programs that exist at this very large institution. Highlighting these programs specifically emphasizes a few of the many communities that are connected to the museum and its collection.

## **Case Study Two: The Hammer Museum, Westwood, CA**

### History and Overview

The Hammer Museum is positioned in Westwood, CA, down the street from the University of California, Los Angeles, which is also a partner to the museum and is in charge of management and operations of the museum. The Hammer opened in 1990 and “endeavors to be a vibrant intellectual forum for the exploration of cultural, political, and social issues” (Hammer Museum, 2008a). Named for the founder, Dr. Armand Hammer, the museum still houses his collection, which features European Old Masters paintings and French Impressionism works, among others. Additionally, because of the Hammer’s partnership with UCLA, the museum also houses the University’s collections (and staff) from the Wight Art Gallery and the Grunwald Center for the Graphic Arts (Hammer Museum, 2008b).

With an operating budget approaching \$20 million and a wide variety of art in its collections, spanning from the Renaissance to 19<sup>th</sup> century French masters to an ever growing contemporary art collection and more, the Hammer supports a wide-ranging audience. It is also considered an artist’s museum and caters to the large contemporary art-making population of Los Angeles (S. Stifler, personal communication, February 1, 2013). The museum also has access to the strong Art Department of UCLA, which is home to professors/professional artists such as Catherine Opie, Barbara Kruger, Charles Ray, Lari Pittman, and more (UCLA, 2013).

### Mission

According to the Hammer’s website (Hammer Museum, 2008a), their mission is:

The Hammer Museum explores the capacity of art to impact and illuminate our lives. Through its collections, exhibitions and programs, the Hammer examines the depth and diversity of artistic expression through the centuries with a special emphasis on art of our time. At the core of the Hammer's mission is the recognition that artists play a crucial role in all aspects of human experience. The Hammer advances UCLA's mission by contributing to the intellectual life of the University and the world beyond.

The Hammer Museum is certainly an institution that creates exhibitions that are daring and “cutting-edge...[and] connect the classics and the contemporary” (Hammer Museum, 2008a). As Ann Philbin, the Director, explains in her welcome, the museum also sees it as their “mission to pursue the margins, explore unknown territory, rediscover the familiar, and take risks” (Hammer Museum, 2008a).

#### Audience Engagement and Public Programs

The Hammer Museum has a comprehensive calendar of programs and events and “all of the Museum's exhibitions are accompanied by extensive public programs” (Hammer Museum, 2008d). These include talks and lectures, film screenings, tours, a book club, events for children, families, and students, and more. Because public programs and events accompany every exhibition, the opportunities for the community to engage with both the museum itself and the art are abundant. Museum programming allows the public many new and different ways to access and understand the art and exhibitions.

For example, one of the current exhibitions at the Hammer is *Llyn Foulkes* (February 3, 2013-May 19, 2013). This retrospective about the painter and musician delves into his “diverse body of work—including impeccably painted landscapes, mixed-media constructions, deeply disturbing portraits, and narrative tableaux” (Hammer Museum, 2008c). Contemporary art, especially can be challenging to any audience and an interesting and influential, but under-recognized contemporary artist like Foulkes does not necessarily create the easiest work for the general audience to understand. The Hammer, however, has a wide variety of programs aimed at exploring this show and this artist more deeply. In addition to the six planned “Lunchtime Art Talks” focused on Foulkes, there is also an Exhibition Walkthrough with artist, Evan Holloway, as well as a performance by Llyn Foulkes himself, and a free audio guide. Varying in length, style, and time, etcetera, these programs offer the public different options for connecting with Foulkes’s work.

Each exhibition at the Hammer Museum features numerous programming opportunities for the public to learn more about the featured works of art and artists. The museum’s public engagement endeavors are expansive and seek “to create a new kind of interactive museum: an artist-driven visitor engagement program that encourages contact among visitors, artists, and Museum staff, and activates spaces in imaginative ways” (Hammer Museum, 2008d).

### **Case Study Three: The Santa Monica Museum of Art, Santa Monica, CA**

#### History and Overview

The Santa Monica Museum of Art (SMMoA) was founded in 1984 and officially opened to the public in 1988. Originally located on Main Street near the ocean in Santa Monica, SMMoA moved to its current location, still in Santa Monica, in the Bergamot Station Arts Center in 1998. Bergamot Station houses a range of arts institutions, ranging from this museum, to a large number of art galleries, and even a space dedicated to writers, Writers Boot Camp. While originally a stop for the now nonexistent Los Angeles Red Line trolley, Bergamot Station is currently partially under construction as it becomes a stop for a new Los Angeles public transit, the Expo Line, that will ultimately run from Downtown to Santa Monica, surely benefitting all the art spaces held within Bergamot Station Arts Center (Bergamot Station, 2013).

A small, non-collection museum, SMMoA focuses on contemporary artwork and “presents exhibitions and programs that reveal the vibrant, untold stories and pivotal moments in the history of contemporary art and culture” (Santa Monica Museum of Art, 2013). These exhibitions and programs all result from the work of a very small staff of ten people (E. Pezza, personal communication, January 28, 2013) and an ever-changing group of interns. Because SMMoA’s focus is on contemporary art and many of the artists they show are living, the museum is able to connect its audience with the art, but also often with the artists themselves.

## Mission

As stated on SMMoA's website (Santa Monica Museum of Art, 2013a), the museum's mission is:

Through its exhibitions, education, and outreach programs, the Santa Monica Museum of Art fosters diversity, innovation, and discovery in contemporary art—local, national, and international.

Significantly, the SMMoA mission describes its goals first at the local level and expands out from there. A small institution, this museum focuses first on the city of Santa Monica and its people, especially those already interested and invested in experiencing and learning about the arts.

## Audience Engagement and Public Programs

Similar to the very local emphasis that the SMMoA mission begins with, their audience and community engagement and public programs are also very based in the surrounding community. These programs range from lectures and conversations to tours, workshops, classes, a book club, and various school programs, all benefitting a wide audience. Their small size and attention to their local community means the museum can focus primarily on intimate community-based programs.

One example of SMMoA's engaging community programs is Cause for Creativity: Tour da Arts. This “annual event underscores the creative side of bike culture and takes you on a ride filled with music, dance, and art” (Santa Monica Museum of Art, 2013b). Participants in the event biked all over Santa Monica, starting at the museum where they toured the current exhibition, took part in bike-related art-making workshops, learned about bike advocacy and more. From there, they stopped at the Santa Monica Bay

Woman's Club for a performance of and participation in "old-time string trio Triple Chicken Foot with Square Dancing". The third stop was at the John Adams Middle School Auditorium for Laura Heit's performance of The Matchbox Puppet Shows. Finally, the group returned to SMMoA to see "Popwagon's mobile art and theater space performance by Dirt Bird, a folk-meets-classical music duo" (Santa Monica Museum of Art, 2013b). This day of biking, art, music, dance, and theater was able to bring together a wide audience to share a museum experience, but also numerous art experiences, in a wide variety of ways.

Programs like this one give the community so many different ways to access the museum. For example, a cycling group may hear about Tour Da Arts and originally be excited by the bike advocacy aspect and the opportunity to ride with like-minded individuals. In that process, though, they may also learn something new about art and the art community of Santa Monica. The reverse is true as well for the community interested first in the art aspects of the program, but who can also learn more about Santa Monica bike culture. By tapping into the interests of different kinds of groups (like bikers and art-lovers, etc.) new connections can be formed throughout the community.

**Conclusion**

What is so important and necessary about community engagement and public programs in art museums is that fact that these events offer innovative ways for audiences to connect with the institutions and their collections. In addition to the well-rounded and numerous programs and community engagement opportunities that these three museums offer, they have, in recent years, all adopted strong and robust social media programs, as well, to engage with their audiences. These new forms of engagement have been growing rapidly over the last decade and are now an important part of many organizations' engagement strategies. The following chapter looks specifically at what LACMA, the Hammer, and SMMoA are doing with social media and how they use these programs to strengthen the goals of each institution.

CHAPTER FOUR: FINDINGS AND ANALYSIS

## **Introduction**

In order to understand and analyze what art museums (and specifically LACMA, the Hammer, and SMMoA) are doing to evaluate their social media programs, it is necessary to gain an understanding of what those programs entail. These three museums in particular have embraced social media as a way to engage with their audience and community and market their programs and exhibitions. As these online endeavors are much newer than more traditional programs and museum professionals have only recently begun to understand and embrace their value, the best ways to evaluate them and measure their success is not yet fully clear. I argue that this lack of evaluation stems not only from the nascent stage these types of programs are currently in, but also in part because of the immediacy of social media and the seemingly fleeting quality of it as a medium. Good and strategic evaluation plans have yet to emerge, especially in nonprofit arts institutions where resources are scarce. Social media reaches a very wide, though also rather anonymous audience, and finding the best structures not only measure hard numbers (like the amount of comments or “likes” a post gets or the number of “followers” a certain account has), but also more interesting and ultimately more telling information about how well and to what end audiences are engaging with the museum through social media.

## **Social Media Use: LACMA**

As the largest of the case study institutions, LACMA employs a wide array of social media platforms including Facebook, Twitter, Instagram, Tumblr, Pinterest, YouTube, and the LACMA blog, *Unframed*. This has expanded dramatically from five

years ago when the blog launched and was later followed up with Facebook and Twitter. (B. Fruchtman, personal communication, January 14, 2013). The museum also features the greatest number of staff members currently working on their social media programs. Staff members working on social media come from a variety of departments around the institution, as well. Departments represented in this engagement endeavor are Public Engagement, Marketing and Communications, Education and Public Programs, and Technology and Digital Media. All of these departments have staff members that regularly contribute to the success of LACMA's social media programs in various capacities.

Because there are so many different people with different backgrounds working on the museum's social media, the goals and what LACMA hopes to achieve through social media is important to consider. According to Scott Tennent, LACMA's Director of Executive Communications and the lead on many social media initiatives, the goals of LACMA's social media are "as extension of the mission of the museum: to educate, share the collection, reach out to as diverse of an as audience as possible" as well as a way to market the museum's events and exhibitions (personal communication, January 17, 2013). Additionally, building audience is an important goal of LACMA's (2009) most recent strategic plan and part of this initiative recognizes the power of electronic communication for museums today. This includes "enhanc[ing] LACMA's web presence to expand access to the collection and market [their] programs to the public" (p. 25).

As a large and important arts institution in Los Angeles, LACMA does have a certain commitment to the surrounding community and Southern California in general, though they do have a wide international social media audience, as well. Through events

like the transportation of the huge Michael Heizer megalith to be placed in his outdoor sculpture, *Levitated Mass*<sup>1</sup>, LACMA used the power of social media to a level they had not reached previously. Because the rock was actually transported over ground from Riverside, CA to LACMA and took over a week to make the trip, Tennent relied heavily on Twitter to let the Southern California community know where the boulder was so they could come see it in person. This included his Twitter updates from the truck that was transporting the boulder. According to Jenny Miyazaki, associate editor for LACMA, this event really grew the Twitter followers in a big way and “people began to talk to each other” and create dialogue around this experience (personal communication, January 30, 2013). Not only that, but Tennent’s use of Twitter to inform the public about the artwork’s trek to the museum also created a better understanding of social media and its potential internally for LACMA. The staff could see the power of social media and their ability to engage all kinds of people around the art (personal communication, January 17, 2013).

That power of social media to speak to disparate audiences in an immediate and hopefully engaging way is what those staff members involved in social media are attempting to harness. With Facebook posts like this one (fig. 2) from March 14, 2013 about the museum’s new collections website garnered 61 likes, 23 shares, and had eight people talking about it, as well as many more people who probably clicked the available link to explore the new site (LACMA, 2013). Is that the kind of engagement that matters in social media and makes a difference to the museum? Sharing information, especially,

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<sup>1</sup> *Levitated Mass* is a large, outdoor construct created by the artist, Michael Heizer in 2012. The most prominent feature of the artwork is a 340-ton granite boulder held above a walkway for the viewer to walk underneath (LACMA, 2011). The rock itself was slowly transported from a quarry many miles outside of Los Angeles.

continues to put the museum out in the public eye. Sharing is also significant because it implies that people other than museum staff are taking an interest in what LACMA is doing. Seeing a friend or relative share and promote an event, exhibition, or even the basic idea of the museum itself is more likely to have an effect on others. A friend's recommendation matters and affects the way new audiences especially understand the museum and its programs.

Because social media is still fairly new (in existence as well as in its use as a part of museum communications), there are still plenty of ways its can expand. Even with the current social media platforms, there are more avenues museums can explore to connect and engage with their audiences. One direction that LACMA is interested in pursuing, but has not yet created a coherent plan for is the notion of microfunding. Tennent describes these future possibilities and “the next step for [LACMA] [as]...getting into fundraising and revenue and figuring out how social media can leverage into that” and also whether or not the current audience is ready or interested in supporting the museum in that way (personal communication, January 17, 2013).

Aside from specified future goals like fundraising, there is also the constant attempt and hope to be able to “more deeply engage with the audience” as well as being “more responsive...to [the audience's] online engagement with us and translating that into them coming to the museum” (B. Fruchtman, personal communication, January 14, 2013). While the idea of “deeply engaging” can have a variety of meanings and ultimately, realizations, the fact that more of the staff is beginning to take LACMA's social media programs more seriously will probably have (and already has to some degree) a positive affect on the future of these programs at LACMA.

**Social Media Use: The Hammer Museum**

An arts institution strongly devoted to meaningful audience engagement programs and events, it is no surprise that the Hammer also maintains a healthy social media presence. The mid-sized museum uses numerous social media platforms including Facebook, Twitter, Instagram, Tumblr, Pinterest, YouTube, and the Hammer Museum blog. Unlike the great majority of art museums, the Hammer Museum does have a devoted staff person working on all of their social media endeavors, the Communications Fellow, Miriam Newcomer. Importantly, most of her job is to organize and add content to the Hammer's social media sites.

The Hammer museum has a number of goals that they hope to achieve through their social media programs: these include education, audience engagement, audience building, and promotion. Importantly, too, since the Hammer often features “exhibits [that] are hard to digest for the non-art crowd...[social media] gives them a point of entry, an access point for them to get into [the complex exhibitions] (M. Newcomer, personal communication, February 5, 2013). Directly explaining different exhibitions also relates back to the idea of using social media to get the online audience in the doors of the museum. But for the Hammer, according to Sarah Stifler, the museum's Director of Communications, social media is also about “trying to create a conversation” and, in an even larger sense, “help[ing] to expand and create an online community” (personal communication, February 1, 2013).

Social media programs can let audiences and communities get acquainted with the museum and be more of a part of it in a virtual, online way that hopefully leads to more

physical engagement. These goals can change slightly, though, from one social media platform to another. What works on Twitter may not be as engaging on Instagram or Pinterest, for example. A lot of figuring out what works in general and from platform to platform is the notion of play. Newcomer describes how they “play a lot. I don’t know how things are going to work, and how our audience will respond, but let’s test it, let’s see how well this works” (personal communication, February 5, 2013). With so many types of social media platforms available and so many ways to utilize them, playing around in order to see what gets results is valid. It also speaks to the fact that discovering best practices for a type of program demands experimentation and an environment that values and is open to that experimentation may have an advantage over those that do not.

The Hammer Museum responds to and engages with a number of different communities, but different from either LACMA or SMMoA, both Stifler and Newcomer describe the Hammer as “an artist’s museum,” meaning that one of their primary audiences are artists. Surely their close proximity and relation with UCLA (who’s Art Department counts among their faculty artists Catherine Opie, Barbara Kruger, Charles Ray, Lari Pittman, and more) plays a role in this (UCLA, 2013). In addition to speaking to the artist community, the Hammer utilizes social media to engage with a wide range of audience types in order to become “a digital extension of the museum” (M. Newcomer, personal communication, February 5, 2013). In this sense, there are posts aimed very broadly, like the Facebook post from April 15, 2013 featuring the Vincent Van Gogh quote, “I would rather die of passion than of boredom” (Hammer Museum, 2013). Shared 81 times and “liked” by 149 different people, this was a comparatively popular post. Newcomer discussed the general popularity of quotes either by artists or about art and

their wide, crossover appeal, even though the majority of the museum's followers may not engage with these posts directly. More specified posts relate to specific works of art or smaller programs or internship opportunities for students and generally garnered lower engagement numbers, though the engagement itself may have been stronger. Especially in the case of the April 8, 2013 Facebook post about available summer internships, those who shared and clicked through that link probably had a deeper interest in this specific activity than those who liked a quote by and artist (Hammer Museum, 2013).

Heading into the future, there are a number of things the Hammer has slated to do with their social media. The impending overhaul and redesign of the museum website will be a big part of this. According to Stifler, the plans are to incorporate social media into the website in a much more rigorous way (personal communication, February 1, 2013). The goal is that this will increase social media visibility and make it much easier to access these also web-based programs directly from the website. Newcomer looks forward to a larger social media presence everywhere, both on and offline, including signage in the physical museum so that people are aware of the Hammer's social media programs and allow them to more easily share their experiences there (personal communication, February 5, 2013).

### **Social Media Use: SMMoA**

Despite its small staff size, SMMoA supports an impressive social media presence. Their social media platform usage includes Facebook, Twitter, Instagram, Pinterest, and YouTube. Essentially, the bulk of SMMoA's social media presence is managed by Elizabeth Pezza, the Director of Marketing for the museum. In fact, that is an

issue that she cites. “For us, our biggest challenge is staff resources. I’m a department of one person” (personal communication, January 28, 2013).

With only one person working extensively on the museum’s social media programs, it does make it easier for goals to be streamlined and focused on, since there is not a wide variety of staff members each bringing in their own ideas about what social media programs should contribute to the wider museum goals. For SMMoA, the primary, overarching goal of the social media is to align with the museum’s mission of “foster[ing] diversity, innovation, and discovery in contemporary art—local, national, and international” (Santa Monica Museum of Art, 2012, p. 2). This means connecting the public to contemporary art and artists, but also to the range of ideas and new perspectives that art can create. It means “continu[ing]... to promote diversity [and] innovation in contemporary art” (E. Pezza, personal communication, January 28, 2013) and also, on a more practical level, to support and promote SMMoA’s exhibitions and public and educational programs.

As a small, very local art museum, SMMoA does cater first to their immediate Santa Monica and West Los Angeles community. They share not only information about their own direct happenings and exhibitions, but also events and occurrences that affect their community. An example of this local connection is the recent (and continuing) expansion and construction of the Expo Line, a new addition to the Los Angeles light rail system that will soon include a stop at Bergamot Station, the arts center where SMMoA is housed. The museum’s involvement has moved past simply being affected by the project and into being a voice informing the public of the project’s progress. As Pezza describes:

There haven't been a lot of official statements coming from the city or from [the Metro Transportation Authority] saying what's happening to Bergamot Station Art Center and so the museum has really stepped up as the voice and representative...to build excitement and inform the public about what's happening here on a regular basis through social media (personal communication, January 28, 2013).

The L.A. Metro project is one example of the museum connecting to their audience in a new way. As a result of the Metro expansion, SMMoA is using social media to meet the community where they already are by exploring projects that the community is already curious about. There are certainly more strongly museum-related social media posts that SMMoA constructs, as well. For example, this Instagram post (fig. 3) is a behind-the-scenes look at a museum employee (Brian Briggs, the Registrar) as he "processes the hundreds of INCOGNITO<sup>2</sup> artworks as they arrive" (SMMoA, 2013). One of the museum's most "liked" posts on Instagram, this image of the registrar offers both an insider look at SMMoA, as well as important information on a major upcoming event.

As SMMoA moves forward with their social media programs, they have mechanisms in place that demonstrate their interest in and commitment to this form of communication. The only case study museum that had a written down social media plan (if not a recorded method for evaluation), SMMoA has done enough in-depth planning for the future that there is a protocol for what to do with museum pages for social media platforms that have gone out of style and are not used any longer (a surprisingly

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<sup>2</sup> INCOGNITO is SMMoA's major fundraising event of the year, in which hundreds of contemporary artists create small original works that are sold at the event. Those who come to buy the work do not know which artists have created which pieces, hence "incognito" (Santa Monica Museum of Art, 2013c).

important concept in such a fast moving, ever-changing field). They are also expanding the ways they tell on-site visitors about their social media by integrating signage into their exhibitions that says “Share and Connect at SMMoA” (E. Pezza, personal communication, January 28, 2013). Signs like these not only bring the online and offline worlds together, but also remind visitors that they can share their experiences at the museum. People really want “to capture these moments and to share them with their friends and...we’re really able to take advantage of that” (personal communication, January 28, 2013). Sharing moments with friends and acquaintances is a major aspect of social media, whether it is a picture someone takes themselves (in a museum or otherwise), an event they are interested in attending, or beyond. It is that idea of and desire to share and create connections that all the case study museums want to take advantage of.

### **Evaluation**

Despite all of the increased use and growth of social media in these three museums over the last half a decade, evaluation of these programs continues to be insubstantial at best, or at least not well documented. In fact, all the museum professionals working on these social media programs at the case study institutions are thinking about evaluation on a daily basis. LACMA’s associate editor, Miyazaki explains that she “evaluate[s] every day...[and thinks about] what works and what doesn’t” (personal communication, January 30, 2013). This is the norm for staff members that spend their time on a daily basis trying to create posts and share ideas about art that get their audiences interested. It is not just what they say that gets considered, but also *how* it

is said. Tone is “equally important to the actual content...because if you have the wrong tone then everybody stops listening” (S. Tennent, personal communication, January 17, 2013). This matters, since talking to audiences the way they expect and want to be talked to affects if and how well they listen, as well as helping them understand how best to engage and respond back. Though much of this understanding involves a learning curve and “anticipating” what an audience wants or likes (A. Vogl Saenz, personal communication, January 14, 2013).

Other examples of day-to-day evaluation include the use of various monitoring programs and analytics (like Museum Analytics, Google Analytics, or Facebook Insights). Newcomer finds these kinds of tools to be most useful in combination with each other, though still finds “that most of [the Hammer’s] analytical programs just confirm what [she] already know[s] from spending so much time” with social media (personal communication, February 5, 2013). The hard numbers that most analytics programs record are easy to understand and quickly make a judgment from regarding program success. As a result, all the museum professionals interviewed use them to an extent. At SMMoA Pezza watches “how many posts [SMMoA] post a week, how many new followers or fans [the museum] get[s] in that week, at how many likes we get or favorites or retweets” (personal communication, January 30, 2013). Similarly, LACMA’s staff looks at what posts “got shared the most and what got retweeted or what got liked,” (Tennent, personal communication, January 17, 2013) especially in terms of what kinds of posts (video, free event listing, pictures, etc.) are most engaging and inspire the most participation by the audience. Because these kinds of quantifiable data can be tracked and charted easily, this is the sort of information about social media success that executives at

the museums are most interested in receiving. At LACMA, according to Fruchtman, they are also looking at what their audience is sharing. “We do want to think about our audience as our ambassadors, so are we giving them opportunities and content to share?” (personal communication, January 14, 2013).

Regardless of all the consideration that goes into social media about how to best engage audiences, there is also the understanding that “social media is an of the moment thing” (M. Newcomer, personal communication, February 5, 2013) While the Hammer does plan larger, complex campaigns, they must often respond quickly or change the plan based on what is happening in the moment. Planning out every single post ahead of time or having to get approval for each tweet or Facebook comment means losing some of what social media is so well-suited for—its ability to respond in an instant, its immediacy. Pezza describes exactly that idea as “the beautiful thing about social media. It can be very immediate and spontaneous and so a lot of my ideas happen right in the moment” (personal communication, January 28, 2013). Does the off-the-cuff nature of social media hinder the ability to evaluate it in a meaningful way beyond hard numbers? According to Miyazaki, that is what makes evaluation so challenging. “It’s so immediate. Your success is just for that moment. It’s so fleeting and so ethereal. It’s great to evaluate trends, but [for] the microposts it’s not really that helpful” (personal communication, January 30, 2013). Looking at trends makes sense in regards to the kinds of information Facebook Analytics (for example) offers. Through that metrics service, one can see not only how many times a post has been retweeted, but how many people have theoretically seen it (see fig. 4). However, just because evaluation of social media is challenging and success feels so momentary does not mean it is not important to pursue. Perhaps this

feeling stems from the fact that, in general, evaluation can be difficult. At its core, evaluation suggests that the project or program one has devised may have flaws or may need to be improved or even canceled. One failed post on Facebook may not matter too much, but evaluating what does work and why can make a difference for the entire program.

CHAPTER FIVE: CONCLUSION

## **Introduction**

Art museums staff members in Communications, Marketing, Education, Public Programs, Public Engagement, Technology and Digital Media, as well as other departments have expressed interest in and the desire to utilize social media in ways that further their museum's goals and interests. This means a range of things, but most frequently implies increasing audience engagement, building their current audience, and promoting the museum's programs, events, and exhibitions. Implementing new kinds of programs, especially those that require the use of new kinds of instruments like the technologically advanced tools of social media, requires planning in order to proceed in the most effective and efficient manner. While the three art museums used as case studies in this research project (LACMA, the Hammer, and SMMoA) have all delved into social media programs and are all using them in potentially effective and successful ways, the lack of evaluation built into these programs means that it is hard to be certain of the extent of their effectiveness. More importantly even, that lack of assessment makes it difficult to know how and in what specific ways these programs should be redesigned and improved.

## **Difficulty of Evaluation**

While perhaps the lack of strong, formal evaluation procedures at the three case study institutions (as well as at many other organizations, arts or otherwise) is somewhat disappointing and cause for concern for the speed at which they can achieve the most success in the future for their social media programs, this lack is also not surprising. Evaluation is difficult. "Evaluation entails risks" (Arts Extension Service, 2007, p. 399). Evaluation demands that a program have goals and that it achieve those goals and if it

does not, it has failed at least in part and must be changed. Not every program will prove to be successful, or at least completely successful. “Although [public relations] practitioners expressed the desire to evaluate, the reality was that they lacked the knowledge, time and budget to undertake the task...” 393 Watson (2012). And this is not new. Recognizing the difficulty inherent in evaluation (and thus, avoiding it altogether) is an issue that Watson (2012) has documented from as early as the 1930s.

There are numerous key aspects to planning programs and evaluation is not necessarily one of the most exciting steps. Additionally, evaluation itself is a three-step process. First, a plan needs to be made, then executed, and finally, there must be a follow up when the evaluation is finished and any necessary changes discovered during the evaluation need to be implemented. All of these steps happen at different times during the life of a program and “[t]he best evaluations are done while the program is in progress” (Arts Extension Service, 2007, p. 400), not after the fact. So even when ways and methods of evaluating are discovered and verified, “[a]s Watson (1994) and Wright, Gaunt, Leggetter, & Zerfass (2009), amongst other researchers, have found, practitioners still talk more about evaluation than actually practice it.” (Watson, 2013, p. 396).

When it comes to evaluating social media programs at museums, there are also a few specific challenges. Primarily, funding within nonprofit organizations is always an issue and money matters, even in terms of social media programs where many aspects of it (like account creation) are free. Evaluation takes planning and staff time, though, which cost money. Another challenge inherent in social media programs, planning, and evaluation is the necessity of convincing museum executives that social media programs are worthwhile endeavors in the first place. Without the backing of the museum executive

staff and without their understanding of social media's benefits, the additional time needed to complete evaluations may be lost. Ironically, evaluation is also what is often needed to convince executives of a particular program's significance and utility.

### **Importance of Evaluation**

Despite its difficulties, evaluation is a vital aspect of program planning and though programming can occur without that step, evaluation matters for making improvements and ultimately for greater success. As Solis (2010) explains in his book *Engage*, “engaging without analysis is akin to driving aimlessly, without direction or purpose. Measurement is the key relevance and future success” (p. 323). In addition to keeping focused on a specific goal or purpose to ensure success, evaluation is also motivated by the need to be accountable. Evaluation information can provide valuable evidence of the results of a particular program (Arts Extension Service, 2007, p. 399). While it may or may not prove complete success, being able to demonstrate and prove results is a boon to the programs progress and effectiveness. “If evaluation shows that your programs are not having the impact you intended, the evidence gives information to help fix what is not working” (Arts Extension Service, 2007, p. 409). Evaluation can help define an organization's programmatic goals and ensure that those goals are being strived for in the most efficient and appropriate manner. The Smithsonian Institution (2009), for example, in their Web and New Media Strategy, lists a page full of goals they have set for their social media and web-based programs, addressing their mission, collection, audience, and more (p. 25).

Not only does evaluation “provide meaningful information from which decisions about programs and related policies can be made” (Fleischer & Christie, 2009, p.158) and create a positive effect on the program’s performance, but evaluation may also be required in order to qualify for certain grants. Applying for and winning grant funding often demands that the program that needs the funding have a clear system for assessment and proof of success. Evaluation is often necessary to find money to pay for the programs themselves.

Essentially, as social media programs within the museum setting become more valued and understood and more money is budgeted for their continued existence, evaluation systems will likely be demanded more regularly.

### **For-Profit Sector Lessons**

Art museums and other nonprofit institutions are not only kinds of organizations struggling with how best to make use of and then evaluate the success of social media. Compared with other forms of marketing, public relations, and customer service, social media are new to for profit businesses, as well. According to Naylor (2012), “By 2011, approximately 83% of *Fortune* 500 companies were using some form of social media to connect with consumers...However, best practices regarding the use of social media to bolster brand evaluations in such situations remain undefined” (p. 105). Despite the fact that for-profits are also struggling with evaluation and that their overall goals may be different, there are some overarching ideas that could also work for nonprofit arts institutions like museums. According to Brian Solis (2013a), an author interested in “the effects of social media” and “a principle analyst at Altimeter Group, a research firm focused on disruptive technology,”

The formula for success in social media begins with first defining what success is and how it will be measured. This is one of the most important steps in any social media strategy, yet it is the first step that many businesses miss (Solis, 2013b). Perhaps the idea of making a concrete plan for evaluation and being able to concretely explain what success looks like seems obvious, but it is clearly a step that is avoided or missed.

In addition to defining what success looks like, it is also important to define what certain metrics are. Social media programs (as well as other public and educational programs within museums) frequently speak in terms of “engagement” and “conversation”, but it is necessary to know what these mean in order to use these terms for evaluation. As this is an issue for many kinds of organizations dealing with how to assess social media, “A cross-disciplinary coalition of marketing and communications associations...[created] several initial standards for social media measurement” (Paine, 2012). The Coalition for Public Relation Research Standards not only defines these terms, but also explains how they should be measured. For example, “Engagement counts such actions as: likes, comments, shares, votes, +1s, links, retweets, video views, content embeds, etc...[and] should be measured by the total number of interactions within and/or across channels; the percentage of your audience engaged by day/week/month; and the percentage of engagement for each item of content your organization publishes” (p.2). This differs from the definition of conversation, which “counts such items as blog posts, comments, tweets, Facebook posts/comments, video posts, replies, etc...[and] should be measured by the total number of “items” that mention the brand, organization or issue” (p.2).

While specific nonprofits may choose to define terms in slightly different ways, the key is still to define them in the first place and define what counts as engagement or conversation so there is a consistent measurement plan.

### **Looking Forward**

With all of that in mind, what are some ways that art museums (and perhaps nonprofits in general) can proceed to improve the potential for success of their social media ventures and find ways to effectively evaluate that success? It is important to note that evaluation planning is certainly not a one-size-fits-all endeavor. Institutions and the programs themselves can vary dramatically and thus evaluation plans should be tailored to each specific situation. Planning is the first key step, however. According to the *Fundamentals of Arts Management* (2007), there are six main steps to begin the evaluation planning process:

1. State goals
2. Write outcomes (tangible and intangible)
3. Write indicators (define kinds of indicators and refine)
4. Assemble the evaluation plan
5. Define evaluation questions
6. Assign evaluation tasks (Arts Extension Service, 2007, p. 401).

While each of the case study institutions were able to explain their goals for their social media programs, the rest of the plan needs to be put in place and explicitly stated.

All three of the case study institutions found it important and useful to experiment with their social media to find out what works best. Evaluation does not disallow this

kind of experimenting; it just makes stronger demands of it. Evaluation simply requires planning for this kind of experimentation and documenting it so others can learn for the future. Evaluation requires that programs be allowed to change and allowed (occasionally) to fail, so that the next iteration of that program can be much improved.

## **Conclusion**

As a former employee, intern, and volunteer at a variety of Los Angeles museums and a continuing visitor, audience member, constituent, etc., it has been quite interesting to investigate what these same museums are doing regarding social media in a more in depth way than simply following them. Social media are still quite new as communication forms go and there is a lot left to learn to best navigate their use. Experimenting and having the freedom to experiment marks the first challenge for Social media is not only something museums, nonprofits, and other organizations must learn to navigate, but the general population must, as well.

I have learned, through this project, that there is still a long way to go before social media programs are evaluated at the same rate and at the same rigor as other museum public, educational, and communication programs. Evaluation is not often the most anticipated part of program planning or implementation, but can make programs run more smoothly and be more successful and efficient in the long run. Ultimately, these case study art museums have not yet put formal evaluation measures in place, but they are thinking about what makes for good social media program, what works, and what does not. All are certainly capable of taking these ideas to the next level and fully planning out evaluation methods and procedures. With the added support of executive

staff and the growing understanding of the benefits of social media, evaluation of these programs will probably become more common and more expected in the future in the same way the assessment of physical museum programs are currently called for.

APPENDICES

**Appendix A:  
Interview Protocol for Museum Communications Staff**

Case Study Site:

Subject Name, Title:

Data ID:

Date:

Interview Location:

Key Points:

Consent:

Oral

Written

Audio Record

OK to

Quote

Coding	Observation	Notes

Semi-Structured Interview Questions:

1. What are the goals of your social media programs?
2. How have the programs grown or changed in your tenure?
3. What do you think works best about the use of social media for museums in general?
4. What do you think is least effective about the use of social media for museums? What are its limitations?
5. Who would you like to see coming into the museum that you see already or don't see much?
6. What type of audience do you think your social media programs reach? Leave out?
7. How do you tie your virtual programs to programs inside the museum?
8. How did you originally design the social media program you are using?

9. Did you include evaluation measures in the original design?
10. What do you think is important to measure when trying to define program success?
11. How do you see the success of virtual programs differently than that for physical/onsite programs?
12. Have you conducted past evaluations of these programs? If so, have they inspired changes in the current design?

**Appendix B:  
Data Collection Sheet for Document Analysis**

Study Site:

Date ID:      Date:      Document Location:

Active Media:  Evaluation Material       Strategic Plan  
 Programming Plan       Communication Plan  
 Meeting Notes       Other:

Key Descriptor:

Citation:

Coding	Observation	Notes

**Appendix C:  
Data Collection Sheet for External Observation**

Study Site:

Date ID:      Date:      Online Location:  
 Active Media:  Blog       Facebook       Youtube  
                    Twitter       Instagram       Pinterest  
                    Tumblr       Other:

Key Descriptor:

Details:

Coding	Observation	Notes

**Appendix D:  
Participant Recruitment Email**

Dear <POTENTIAL INTERVIEWEE>:

My name is Meghan Adamovic and I am an Arts Administration graduate student at the University of Oregon. I would like to invite you to participate in my research project titled *Social Media and Art Museums: Measuring Success*. The purpose of this study is to explore and understand the methods Los Angeles art museums use to evaluate their social media programs.

You were selected to participate in this study because of your leadership position with <NAME OF ORGANIZATION>. If you decide to take part in this research project, you will be asked to provide relevant organizational materials and participate in an in-person interview, lasting approximately one hour, during winter 2012. If you wish, interview questions will be provided beforehand for your consideration. Interviews will take place at <NAME OF ORGANIZATION>, at a more conveniently located site. Interviews will be scheduled at your convenience. In addition to taking handwritten notes, with your permission, I will also use an audio recorder for transcription and validation purposes. You may also be asked to provide follow-up information through phone calls or email.

If you have questions, feel free to contact me at (213) 840-6067 or at [adamovic@uoregon.edu](mailto:adamovic@uoregon.edu). You may also contact my advisor, Dr. John Fenn at (541) 346-1774 or [jfenn@uoregon.edu](mailto:jfenn@uoregon.edu). Any questions regarding your rights as a research participant should be directed to the Office for the Protection of Human Subjects, University of Oregon, Eugene, OR 97403, (541) 346-2510.

Thank you in advance for your interest and consideration. I will contact you shortly to speak about your potential involvement in this study.

Sincerely,  
Meghan Adamovic  
Arts Administration Master's Candidate  
University of Oregon  
[adamovic@uoregon.edu](mailto:adamovic@uoregon.edu)  
(213) 840-6067

**Appendix E:  
Consent Form****Social Media and Art Museums: Measuring Success**

Meghan Adamovic, Principal Investigator  
University of Oregon Arts Administration Program

You are invited to participate in a research project titled *Social Media and Art Museums: Measuring Success*, conducted by Meghan Adamovic from the University of Oregon's Arts Administration Program. The purpose of this study is to explore and understand the methods Los Angeles art museums use to evaluate their social media programs.

You were selected to participate in this study because of your leadership position with Hammer Museum. If you decide to take part in this research project, you will be asked to provide relevant organizational materials and participate in an in-person interview, lasting approximately one hour, during winter 2012. If you wish, interview questions will be provided beforehand for your consideration. Interviews will take place at Hammer Museum or at a more conveniently located site. Interviews will be scheduled at your convenience. In addition to taking handwritten notes, with your permission, I will also use an audio recorder for transcription and validation purposes. You may also be asked to provide follow-up information through phone calls or email.

Any information that is obtained in connection with this study will be carefully and securely maintained. It may be advisable to obtain permission to participate in this interview to avoid potential social or economic risks related to speaking as a representative of your institution. Your participation is voluntary. If you decide to participate, you are free to withdraw your consent and discontinue participation at any time without penalty. Any information that is obtained in connection with this study and that can be identified with you will remain confidential and will be disclosed only with your permission.

Please note that this study may subject participants to the potential risk of loss of privacy. In order to alleviate this risk as much as possible, participants will be given the option of reviewing and revising their comments and information provided prior to the final version of any publications that result from this study.

I anticipate that the results of this research project will be of value to the museum sector as a whole, especially in Los Angeles. However, I cannot guarantee that you personally will receive and benefits from this research.

If you have questions, feel free to contact me at (213) 840-6067 or at [adamovic@uoregon.edu](mailto:adamovic@uoregon.edu). You may also contact my advisor, Dr. John Fenn at (541) 346-1774 or [jfenn@uoregon.edu](mailto:jfenn@uoregon.edu). Any questions regarding your rights as a research participant should be directed to the Office for the Protection of Human Subjects, University of Oregon, Eugene, OR 97403, (541) 346-2510.

Please read and choose yes or no for each of the following statements to indicate your consent:

YES / NO I consent to the use of audio recording and note taking during my interview.

YES / NO I consent to my identification as a participant in this study.

YES / NO I consent to the potential use of quotations from the interview.

YES / NO I consent to the use of information I provide regarding the organization with which I am associated.

YES / NO I wish to have the opportunity to review and possibly revise my comments and the information that I provide prior to these data appearing in the final version of any publications that may result from this study.

Your signature indicates that you have read and understand the information provided above, that you willingly agree to participate, that you may withdraw your consent at any time and discontinue participation without penalty, that you have received a copy of this form, and that you are not waiving any legal claims, rights or remedies. You have been given a copy of this letter to keep.

Print Name: \_\_\_\_\_

Signature: \_\_\_\_\_

Date: \_\_\_\_\_

Thank you for your interest and participation in this study.

Sincerely,

Meghan Adamovic  
Arts Administration Master's Candidate  
University of Oregon  
[adamovic@uoregon.edu](mailto:adamovic@uoregon.edu)  
(213) 840-6067

## **Appendix F: Research Timeline**

December 2012:	Contact participants Begin external observations of case study social media programs (Facebook, Twitter, Tumblr, Instagram, YouTube, Pinterest, blogs)
January 2013:	Begin key informant interviews, first at case study institutions Request organizational documents from key informants for analysis  Finish external observations of social media programs Start analysis and coding of external observations
February 2013:	Continue interviews and being any necessary follow-up Continue organizational document analysis Finish all key informant interviews by the end of February 2013 (hopefully all interviews will be in person, over the phone or via  Skype, if necessary)
March 2013:	Finish document analysis Continue to any interviewee follow-ups via phone or email Analysis and coding of interviews and organizational documents
April 2013:	Continued analysis and coding Begin writing draft of final paper Contact interviewees with any follow-ups or verifications Have a completed draft (by the end of April, 2013) Begin member checks with key informants
May 2013:	Advisor feedback on the draft of research document Incorporate any changes due to member checks May 10 <sup>th</sup> : research presentations Finalize research document
June 2013:	Complete final research document (early June)

**Appendix G:  
Data Collection Schematic**

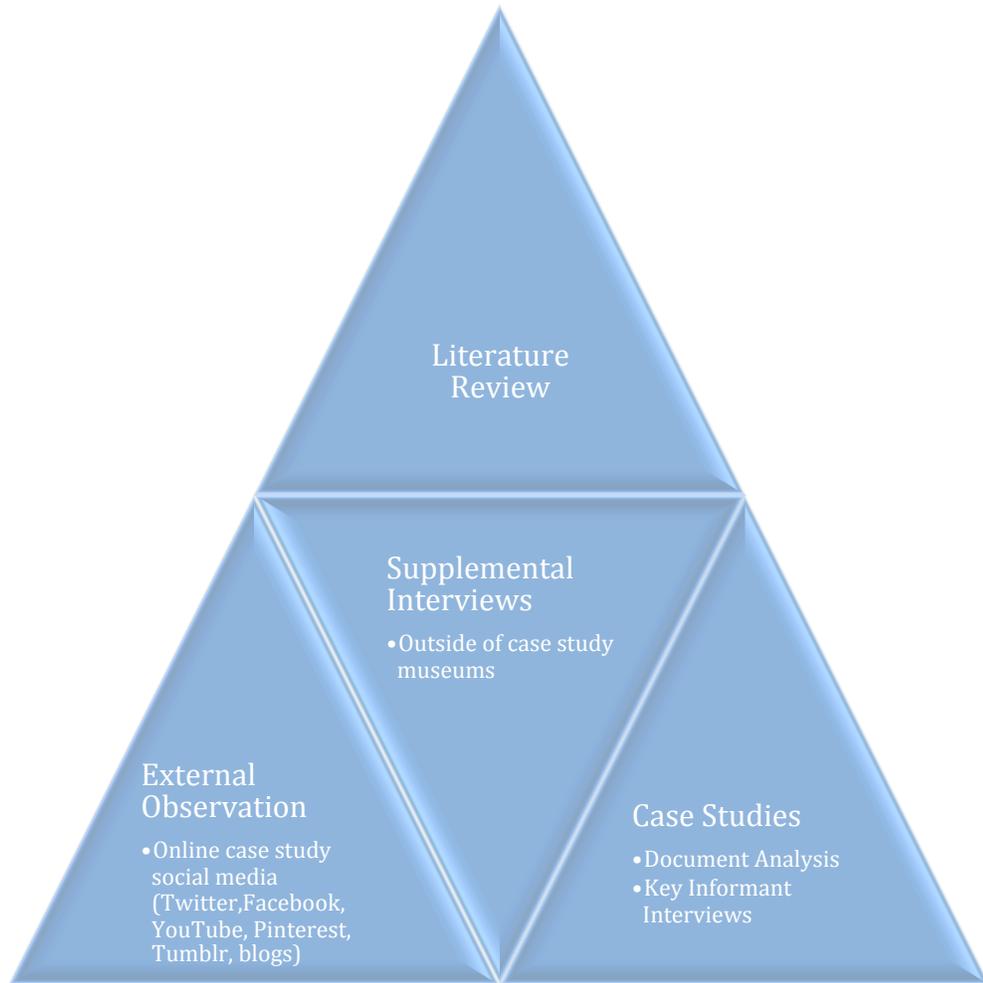


Figure 1

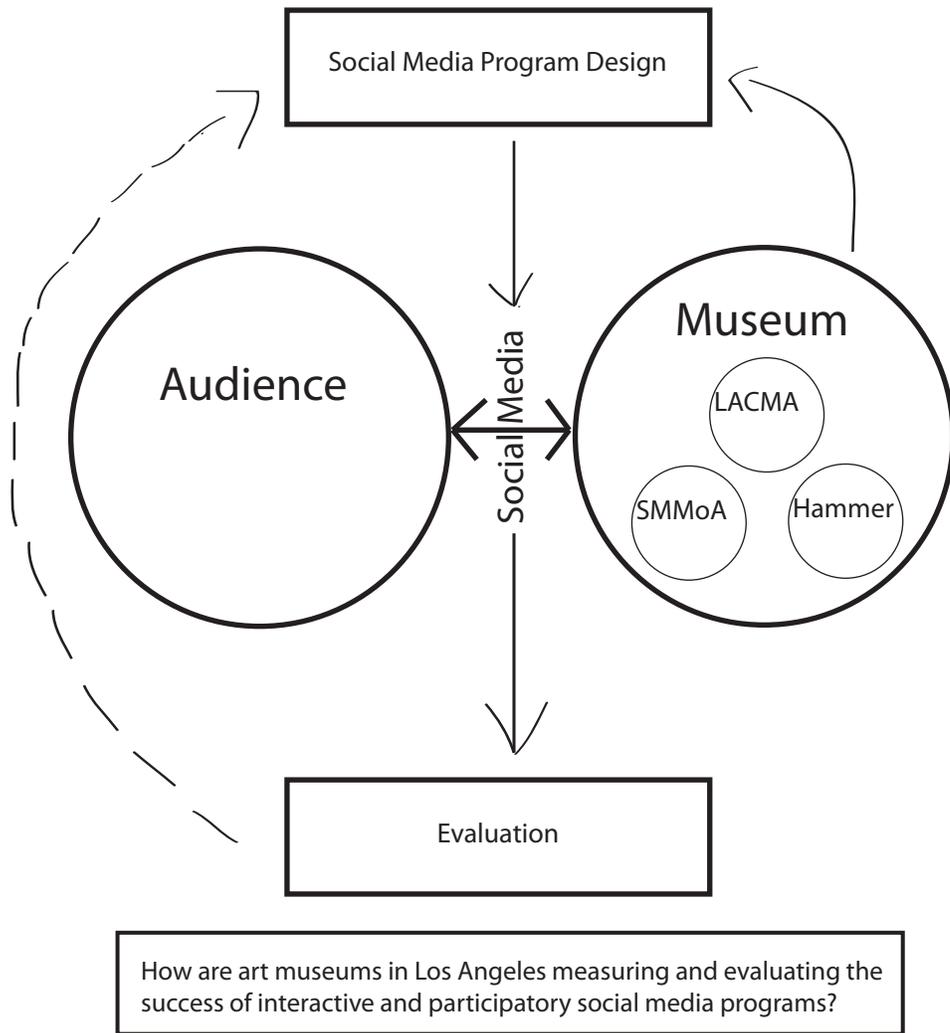


Figure 2: LACMA Facebook post, 03/14/2013

**LACMA Los Angeles County Museum of Art** shared a link.  
March 14

Check out our totally revamped collections website! Now it's easier to search, share, and know what's on view at any time. Oh yeah, and we've made 20,000 high-resolution images available for download. 20,000!

**What Do Cats Have to Do With It? Welcome to Our New Collections Website**  
lacma.wordpress.com

Two years ago, we launched an experiment: an online image library

Like · Comment · Share      61   8   23

Figure 3: SMMoA Instagram Post, 3/27/2013

**smmoa**  
Santa Monica Museum of Art

18 Like

kagmiller1 gsebooks jenny\_thats\_me jackflora hubbyco  
lotusgallerybkk lousesarobuck sunprosolar palgeyaa  
adriennemwhite > VIEW ALL

1 Comments

hotelangeleno about a n  
The best time of the year!

Not yet IG user? add a comment with Facebook

Add a comment...

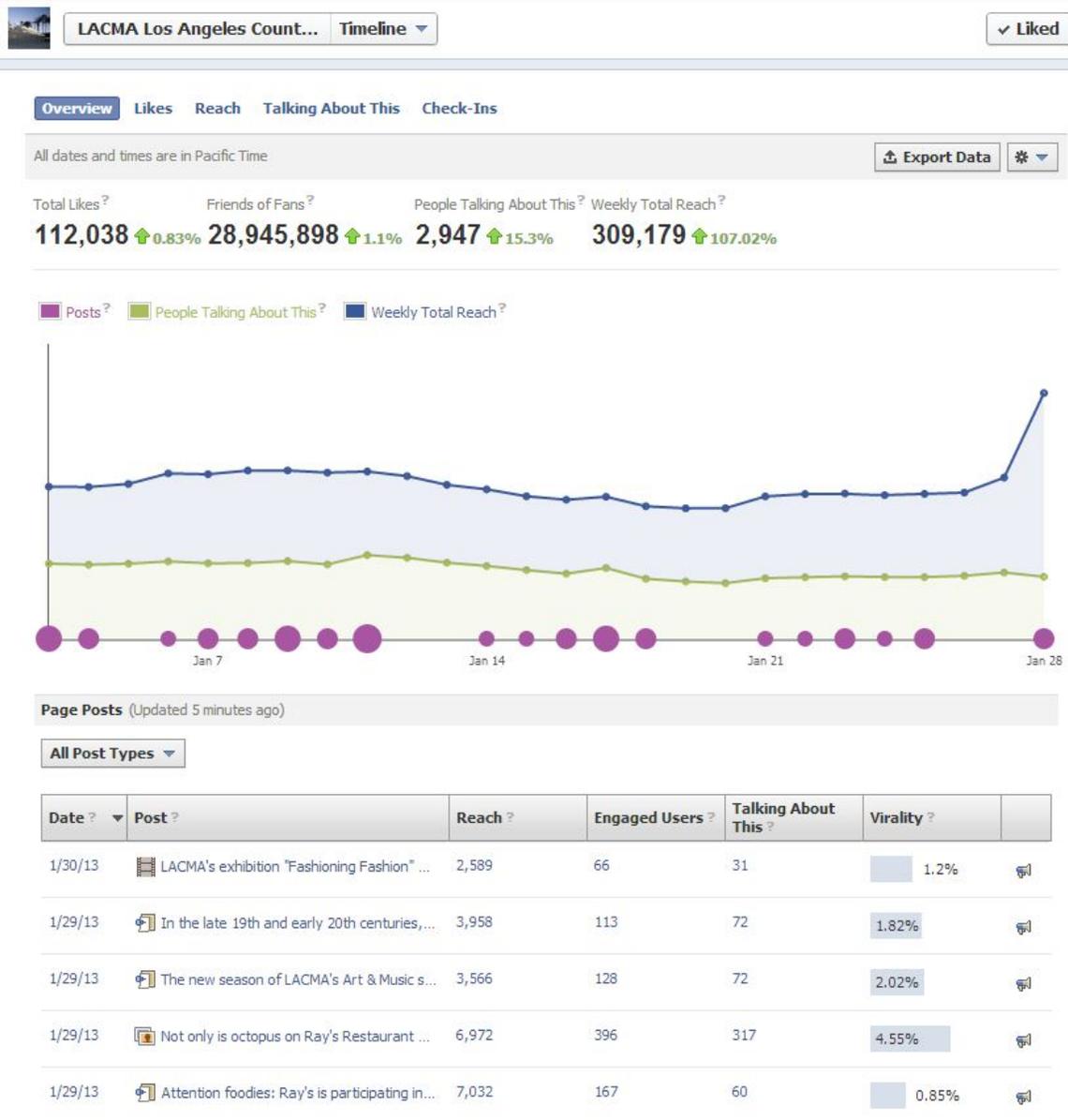
Post to Facebook Posting as Meghan Adamovic (Change) **Comment**

Facebook social plugin

@SMMoA's Registrar Brian is all smiles as he processes the hundreds of INCOGNITO artworks that have arrived. Who are the artists behind these incredible works? That is for you to discover! Trust Your Instincts at the INCOGNITO Exhibition and Benefit Art Sale on May 11! Tix @ <http://SMMOA.org/incognito>

3:14 pm 3/27/2013 X-Pro II

Figure 4: LACMA Facebook Analytics, 1/30/2013



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