Do You Follow: Impacts and Implications of Social Media in Museums

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IN MUSEUMS

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Abstract

As cultural institutions once founded on privacy, protocol and practice, museums must now choose how best to navigate the transparency presented by social media including Facebook, YouTube, Flickr and Twitter. When the Ontario based organization Archives and Museum Informatics held its first "Museums and the Web" conference in 1997, nascent concerns emphasized the frame rather than the function of social media - who will use the Internet rather than how. Over the last twelve years, major museums such as New York's Museum of Modern Art have evolved from a static web presence to the cultivation of a participatory museum culture through the skillful implementation of social media. The Australian Museum is conducting an online blog experiment to determine if they are able to engage their audience in exhibition development. Social media is a participatory platform fortified by freedom of expression. This platform can alternate between pedestal and soapbox as users are given a public forum for personal ideologies. Though public in nature, museums are notoriously private in practice. Logic suggests that such a lack of transparency leads easily to a disconnect from constituents and hinders the development of a community base. Engagement in social media revives the original conception of museum as forum. This research project examines the issues surrounding the shifting discourse between museum and patron and the impact of social media on the development of a museum community.

Keywords

Museums, social media, networking, community, democracy, participation, marketing

Acknowledgments

I am thinking of this project as a wedding cake. With my own wedding just months away, I can now tell the difference between fondant and buttercream. My point being though, that this is the finished product. What you are now reading is buffed, polished... and ringed in icing rosettes. What isn't visible here is the bedrock of patience, encouragement and empathy provided to me so graciously by others. I am deeply indebted to all the friends, family and faculty who have joined me (by choice or chance) in this process.

In brief:

I owe many thanks to my advisor, Dr. John Fenn who said "well, if you can run a marathon, this project should be manageable." His insight and enthusiasm for my topic and its various avenues led to the near collapse of my desk from supplementary reading materials.

Friends and family, kudos to bearing with my scarcity and buoying me with humor, phone calls and YouTube distraction.

Aaron, I love you more than banana pancakes. Thanks for returning the favour.

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EDUCATION

MS, Arts Management, Museum Studies Concentration, University of Oregon, Eugene. 2009.
Master's Research: *Do You Follow: Impacts and Implications of Social Media in Museums*
Graduate Study, Photography, Parsons School of Design, New York City. 2004 - 2005.
BFA, Photography, Alberta College of Art and Design, Calgary, AB. 2002.

SUMMARY OF SKILLS

Knowledgeable of the issues and opportunities for arts organizations in today's technology-enabled but resource-limited environment, my skills include communications, planning, project management, research, budget tracking, and photography. Software skills include Adobe Creative Suite, Dreamweaver, HTML, Excel, Word, Powerpoint.

PROFESSIONAL POSITIONS

- ◇ *Design Coordinator, A&AA External Relations and Communications*. University of Oregon. 2008-2009. Created postcards, invitations and programs for school and alumni events. Facilitated pre-press workflow.

- ◇ *Assistant to the Department Head, Department of Art*. University of Oregon. 2005 - 2008. Managed the Visiting Artist lecture program. Managed artist contracts. Booked travel and hotel. Produced department publications including an annual MFA catalog (20,000 budget) Implemented website upgrades. Managed quarterly class scheduling. Participated in tenure review and accreditation process. Supervised student designers.

- ◇ *Administrative/Sales Assistant, Quebecor World West Printing*. Calgary, AB. 2003 - 2004. Produced sales reports and presentations. Coordinated meetings and events. Generated sales leads. Arranged travel and hospitality.

VOLUNTEER EXPERIENCE

Public Art Intern, City of Eugene. 2009. Analyzed City public art policy in preparation for the development of a Public Art master plan. Participated in Public Art Committee meetings.

Operations Intern, Portland Institute for Contemporary Art. Portland. Summer 2008. Assisted with marketing, planning, and exhibit installation leading to the 2008 Time Based Art festival.

Photographer, Designer Showcase in Support of Kids Help Phone. Calgary, AB. Spring 2002.

Teacher's Aide First Grade Introduction to Computer, Boylston Elementary School. Boylston, MA. Fall 2002.

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CHAPTER 1: INTRODUCTION

Statement of the Problem

While virtually no museum is without an Internet presence and many major institutions have expanded into the sphere of social networking sites, very few are working to create an open dialogue between audience and institution. Clearly there are a number of issues surrounding such democratic communication.

At the intersection of social technology and museum philosophy is a struggle for control. The museum is conceptually hardwired with a certain sense of decorum. In a recent *New York Times* article, "Killer Statue – Psyched About the Site" Dan Fost (2008) wrote that

> ...the social-media world has a different language than more august institutions. In Flickr's Commons project, for instance, the site invites people to label or comment on the Library of Congress's photos and adds, "This is for the good of humanity, dude!!" (New York Times Online)

As an institution, a museum is commonly steeped in tradition and language particular to the profession. To invite democratic input and participation from the community – on or offline – asks that these traditions be reconsidered. As Bearman and Trant (2008) note, "the "open culture" that might make museums work better in the Web environment is part promise, part threat"(Introduction, technologies like museums, are social, ¶ 20).

Conceptual Framework

The principle foundation for the conceptual framework of this project is museum philosophy and social media (see Figure 1.1) - the museum and the web being the over arching thread. Formally accepted theories of practice instituted within accredited museums present a challenge to the fluid, often unmonitored medium of the web. However, the ease with which social technology such as Facebook or Flickr creates a sense of community warrants further investigation as to potential avenues for marketing and communication strategy. The Internet also provides an excellent venue

for discussion amongst patrons - as media scholar Henry Jenkins (2004) notes " there is more information on any given topic than anyone can store in their head, there is added incentive for us to talk among ourselves about the media we consume"(p. 4).

This opportunity for expanded communications does not come without detractors – care must clearly be taken with any museum to ensure that it is presented foremost as a cultural experience rather than a commodity. Strauss (2008) asks "Has democracy increased with the growth of the Internet? No: it has diminished significantly, because the desire for public, democratic participation has been displaced onto consumer good and services and dispersed in isolated individual speech"(p. 20).

Figure 1.1 Conceptual Framework
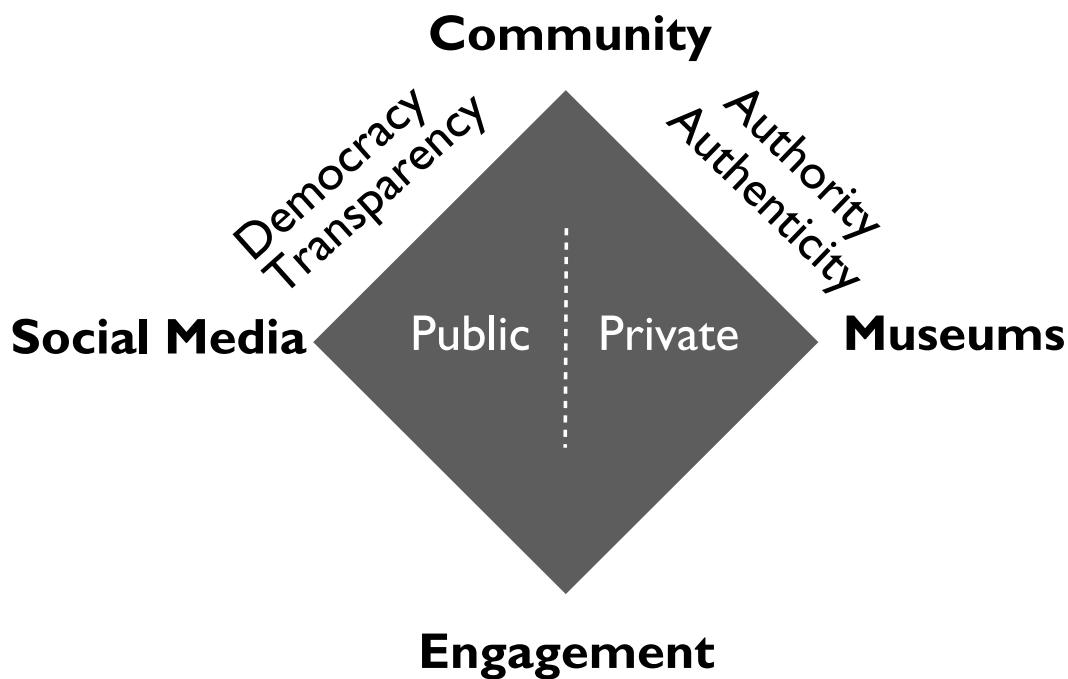
Research Methodology
Methodological Paradigm

The purpose of this study is to examine the issues surrounding the implementation of social technology in contemporary museum practice. The lens from which I will approach my research is both Interpretivist and Constructivist. I am comfortable within the Interpretivist paradigm because I believe strongly that it is crucial to acknowledge researcher bias. I agree with Orlikowski and Baroudi (1991) when they write that "social process is not captured in hypothetical deductions, co-variances and degrees of freedom." Rather, the study of social phenomena is best undertaken from within the real time context of a subject.

I also identify with the Contructivist paradigm as it appears significant in the examination of social behaviors such as those exhibited in the development of online communities. In regard to the Constructivist paradigm, Harnard (1982) notes that "it is the individual's processing of stimuli from the environment and the resulting cognitive structures, that produce adaptive behavior, rather than the stimuli themselves" (p.1-11) Further, a qualitative approach allowed for a flexible research design open to adjustment based on unforeseen events – particularly useful in consideration of new or evolving technologies and philosophies.

Main Research Question

How are museums engaging with social media?

Sub Questions

What barriers must a museum over come in order to establish a community through the utilization of social technology?

How can a museum maintain institutional interests while engaging in an open audience dialogue?

Where does democracy fit within a museum structure?

How can social technology translate online interest into physical patrons?

Definitions

Art Museums: for the sake of this study, the use of the term 'museum' will include formal institutions classified as art centers in which the display of art in a non-profit gallery setting is a major programming facet.

Social Technology: in the broadest sense, any web based technology that establishes a sense of connectedness to another individual or organization through the implementation of groups or on-line collectives. Current examples include web sites, blogs, Facebook, Twitter and MySpace. Also termed "social media."

Web 2.0: "refers to what was perceived as a second generation of web development and web design. It is characterized as facilitating communication, information sharing, interoperability, and collaboration on the World Wide Web. It has led to the development and evolution of web-based communities, hosted services, and web applications. Examples include social-networking sites, video-sharing sites, wikis, blogs and folksonomies." (Wikipedia)

Social Network: an online group in which the individual is a member of a larger collective linked by mutual interest i.e. friends, an organization, a band et cetera.

Delimitations

The scope of this study is narrowed to a three part sample of university campus based art institutions. Site selections hinged on proximity, receptivity of the institution to inquiry and a cursory evaluation of their existent approach to social technology. The three selected sites vary in their levels of engagement with social media, ranging from active to passive. These cases contrast these variances with the relationship of the museum to the campus and local community.

Limitations

Institutional approaches to the web can vary widely. There is a risk of generalization in findings whereas an institution may categorize web presence as "good" without determining the breadth of benefit. There is currently a lack of existing studies

surrounding the generation of museum community by way of social technology groups such as Facebook, Twitter or MySpace.

Benefits of the Study

This study will explore links between the use of informal, democratic, technology, the formal, structured institution of the museum and the implications for the development of a museum community. At present, this topic lacks extensive exploration on account of the fledgling state of social media.

Research Design
Strategy of Inquiry

The purpose of this project is to determine the role of social technology in the development of museum communities. The proposed main strategy of inquiry for this project is the case study. Given an underlying focus on the convergence of established practice and developing technologies within the museum sphere will, the piecing method of bricolage will certainly assist the process.

The qualitative case study is innately malleable and may be tweaked suitably as the problem evolves. While this can lead to criticisms of unreliability, the case study is an effective method for research centered on social concerns. As Scholz and Tietje (2002) note:

> In many disciplines, the phrase "case study" is considered a label for bad research or for studies without design. However, a closer look reveals that specific use of case studies in various disciplines is extremely dependent on the type of problem treated and on the discipline. The more complex and contextualized the objects of research, the more valuable the case study approach is and the degree to which the every day environment is being evaluated (p.4)

Pertinent to this project, it is hoped that the case study will reveal the philosophies surrounding the use of social technology within an art museum or art center. Sholz and Tietje (2002) remark that "most of the time, the case study approach is chosen in

research where the biographic, authentic, and historic dynamics and perspectives of real social or natural systems are considered"(p. 4).

Determining the appropriate use of the case study requires contextualization of the problem at hand. Often, the case study defies a linear trajectory, sometimes beginning with an amassment of data prior to the development of a research problem. Yin (2002) states that "the exploratory case study has perhaps given all of case study research its most notorious reputation. In this type of case study, fieldwork and data collection are undertaken prior to the final definition of study questions and hypotheses. Research may follow intuitive paths, often perceived by others as sloppy"(p. 6). Being that intuition is non-quantifiable, it lends itself to the qualitative paradigm.

The employment of multiple strategies is highly beneficial in qualitative social research. However, it is also clear that the case study is not a catch-all solution but rather a strategy which integrates concept and context:

> You should be able to identify some situations in which all research strategies
> might be relevant (such as exploratory research) and other situations in which two
> strategies might be considered equally attractive. ... but you should also be able
> to identify some situations in which a specific strategy has a distinct advantage.
> For a case study, this is when a "how" or "why" question is being asked about a
> contemporary set of events, over which the investigator has little or no control...
> (Yin, 2003, p. 9)

The case study is well suited to the subject of social technology as it escapes singular definition – non linear concepts ranging from fine art to the social structure of an office space fit the multi blossomed approach. This makes the case study an excellent choice for the examination of multi-faceted museum philosophy. Slate (1995) demonstrates the application of the case study in relation to the human interpretation of the natural world, noting "verification that the sun bends the earthbound light of a star does not remove the human interpretation of sun, light, and star. How case study researchers

should contribute to reader experience depends on their notions of knowledge and reality" (p. 99). The case study is then ultimately a human interpretation of human experience.
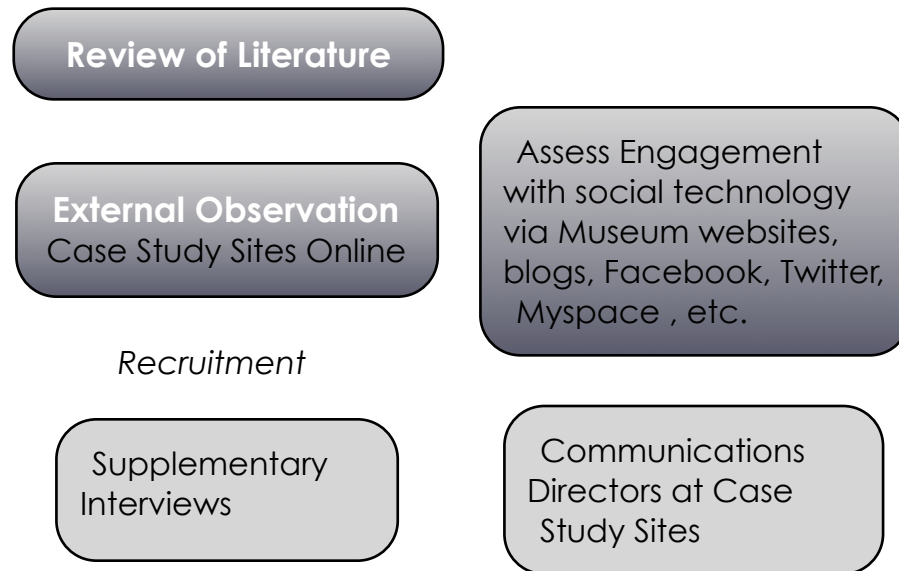
In order to evaluate the use of social technology in the museum environment, this project centralizes on three case studies of museum presence on the web. The sites selected for research purposes include the Eugene based Jordan Schnitzer Museum of Art, UCLA's Hammer Museum, and the Wexner Center for the Arts at Ohio University. The chosen institutions provide a sampling of variously sized university campus based art centers. Further, they provide perspective on museum administration within an academic setting.

Interviews were conducted in supplement to the primary data source of online field observation. When possible, interview subjects included Communication Directors responsible for the development and oversight of the institution's social media strategy. Subjects were introduced to the study via email and followed up with via telephone. Research began in February 2009 and culminates with the submission of this finished document in June, 2009.

This study posed minimal risk to participants. Social technology is not innately controversial but rather depends on the content published. The manner in which it is utilized does hold the potential to risk reputation. In light of the public nature of museums on the web and its associated technologies, transparent disclosure was encountered. As anticipated, interview participants were willing to discuss their organization's approach to social technology but were unable to provide quantitative user statistics in correlation with the museum's presence on a given social media platform.

Data Collection and Analysis Procedures

Figure 2.1 Data Collection Schematic

Review of Literature

External Observation
Case Study Sites Online

Assess Engagement with social technology via Museum websites, blogs, Facebook, Twitter, Myspace , etc.

Recruitment

Supplementary Interviews

Communications Directors at Case Study Sites

Overview

Data was collected in the form of field notes, collected documents and interview transcripts. Non-participant - external - observation of online, public domain social groups belonging to museums and art centers took place within the scope of this study.

Three main research instruments will be utilized:

· Data Collection Sheet for External Observation (Appendix A)

· Data Collection Sheet for Document Analysis (Appendix B)

· Interview Protocol for Online Museum Media Directors (Appendix C)

Participants were introduced to the study via a recruitment letter (Appendix D) detailed in the attached Appendices. This letter outlines the nature of the study and elaborates on the criteria for selection of the participant in question. Upon agreement to participate, the interviewees were asked to sign and return a consent form (Appendix E) either online or by mail (see Appendices). This form details their rights as a research participant, including the option to retract their willingness to participate if desired.

Data Collection and Disposition Procedures

Data was obtained through an extensive literature review, case study and personal interview. Data was recorded predominantly through computer entry and hand written field notes. Confidentiality will be maintained through secure storage of data and open pre-publication interviewee access to research as requested.

Research Data and Records - Paper: data, files, notes, and related documents created during this research project will be appraised after 5 years. If deemed to retain further research value, they will be retained in researcher's permanent file collection. If they are no longer appraised as valuable (pertinent to further inquiry), they will be destroyed.

Research Data and Records - Electronic: data and related information created during research projects will be appraised after 5 years. If not appraised as permanent i.e. having pertinence to further inquiry or conference presentation, they will be destroyed.

Preliminary Coding and Analysis Procedures

As expected, coding and analysis of the data did not follow a sequential pattern given the qualitative nature of this research. Rather, coding evolved with the progression of the research as significant themes or threads appeared in the data. A rudimentary example pertinent to this study would be "web positive" , "web neutral", "web negative."

Strategies for Validating Findings

In order to establish credibility, this study will employ several techniques including persistent observation, as defined here by Lincoln and Guba:

If the purpose of prolonged engagement is to render the inquirer open to the multiple influences - the mutual shapers and contextual factors - that impinge upon the phenomenon being studied, the purpose of persistent observation is to identify those characteristics and elements in the situation that are most relevant to the problem or issue being pursued and focusing on them in detail. If prolonged engagement provides

scope, persistent observation provides depth (Lincoln & Guba, 1985, p. 304).

While the four-month time frame of this study offered a limited opportunity for prolonged engagement, persistent observation, as Lincoln and Guba (1984) suggest, provided depth to the project. The use of triangulation synthesized research findings within the context of the varied research methods (literature review, case study, interview) employed in this study.

CHAPTER 2: REVIEW OF LITERATURE

Introduction

An attempt to synthesize a large body of literature is by any means a daunting task. Any synthesis relative to the Internet automatically expands at an infinitely exponential rate. This particular attempt was characterized by a thread that continues throughout: to acknowledge the pervasiveness of technology is simply to acknowledge the tip of the ice berg. Submerged beneath the assumption that our understanding of the Information society is couched in the same simplicity that technology purports to add to our every day is a vast expanse of social, political and institutional ramifications. The impact of social technologies on the modern museum environs is here placed in context with an abridged institutional history. A principle shift in museum thinking surrounds the reconstitution of both authority and authenticity in light of digital media. Simultaneously, the audience is being reoriented from receptor to participant. Lastly, the growing settlements of online communities reconsiders the significance of the individual within a networked democracy. This review examines these theoretical and practical implications surrounding the integration of social media and museums.

A Brief History

As recently as 1982, museum technology was firmly centered around the physical. The tome *Handbook of Museum Technology* (Research and Education Association, 1982) is an explicit how to guide for everything from cataloging collections to the killing and preservation of arachnids, centipedes, millipedes, crustaceans, annelids. In December of 1996, 630 international museums were counted in the online Virtual Library of Museums, by 1997 this number had reached 1200 (Keene, 1997). As of the last update to the library in 2006, 888 museums were listed in Japan, 1507 museums were listed in the United States alone. Digitization of collections initially raised concerns as to the potential corrosion of scholarly and curatorial authority. Owning a digital file or photograph was equivocated with the ownership of an idea. Howard Besser (1997) refers to this concept as "substitute physicality" (p. 117) inferring that the digitization of

artworks will transfer ownership not to the individual who hangs the work on the wall but to the person with an informational disk in hand.

While blurring the lines of "authorship", interaction with images in personal ways does open the audience to experience works privatized by scholarship. This promotion of interactivity advocates for a decrease in empty consumption. Ideologically speaking, engagement with an artwork prevents its transformation to commodity. The ease with which digitized materials can be altered surfaces an unprecedented complication with ownership in that the owner of a piece also assumes artistic license. To this effect, Besser (1997) wonders whether art will be "reduced to its common denominator, like music in elevators" (p. 119).

At the entrance to her 18th century salon style galleries, Catherine the Great posted a code of conduct titled "Rules for the Behaviour of All Those Entering These Doors." Though superficially amusing, the following excerpts remain in principle exemplary of modern museum conduct:

> Be merry, but neither spoil nor break anything, nor indeed gnaw at anything... Argue without anger or passion... If any shall infringe the above, on the evidence of two witnesses, for any crime each guilty party shall drink a glass of cold water, ladies not excepted, and read a page from the Telemachida out loud.

While the recourse for misconduct in modern museums is a security escort from the premises, decorum in museums continues to perpetuate stereotypes of propriety and restraint, the pursuit of serious things. Social media on the other hand, ascribes to a liberated user policy hinged upon open discourse and freedom of expression. The Commons public photography archive launched by Flickr in partnership with the Library of Congress illuminates this key variance between the voice of a formal institution and that of social-media proprietors. The fine print addendum to the site's inclusive user policy reads : "If you're a dork about it, shame on you. This is for the good of humanity, dude!!" (Flickr Commons). Similarly, the steve.museum social

tagging project currently examines the potential of user generated subject terms or tags to increase public access to museum content. Some information architects suggest that these uninformed indexes will undermine scholarly efforts (MacArthur, 2007). Folksonomy advocates argue that tagging forms collective interest groups around "shared semantics" (Weinberger, 2006).

A false dichotomy of technophiles and technophobes is often created in discussion of the object based museum institution and the vast virtual landscape of the Internet (Anderson, 1997). The discussion no longer surrounds 'if' but 'how' we use technology. The amorphous Internet originally caused many museum professionals to develop a binary relationship between the virtual and the real. At a 1999 museum symposium held in Manhattan, Pierre Rosenberg, President-Director of the Musee du Louvre in Paris, exhibited a scholarly bias when he noted that he was "less than optimistic about its [the Internet] potential... nothing replaces the eye of the scholar" (M.L. 2000). Simultaneously, Philip de Montebello, then Director of the Metropolitan Museum of Art maintained "I don't feel beleaguered by technology for I am confident that the object will always win" (M.L. 2000).

Nonetheless an accepted belief lingers amongst museum professionals that "new" is synonymous with the disposal of, rather than the adjustment to existing practice – a discussion heightened in regard to the issue of fore-grounding collections. Gurian (1999) writes that "the old fundamental elements of museums – collections, preservation, contemplation and excellence " should not be traded for governance by band wagon (p. 35). Bennett sympathizes with Gurian in his own contention that collections are the "foundation of all great museums" (as cited in Macdonald, 1999). Bennett (1999) further supposes that interactive exhibit components (be they virtual or real) may more readily correlate to simple diversion rather than to meaningful experience. However, this desire to maintain 'old fundamental elements' may encounter competition according to a recent Getty report on leisure trends in which a conference participant pointed to

statistics showing a slipping preference by audiences for the 'real thing' and predicted " between 2015 and 2018, a well-crafted simulation may well be perceived as higher in quality than its tangible counterpart (p. 3).

Formerly sparse information hierarchies have given way to robust interactivity centers. The Met's earliest web effort was found incompatible with the museum's larger vision - the rebuild of the site then utilized an "extended commerce model" (Mand, 1999). In February 2009, the Met introduced the "It's Time We Met" campaign that invites visitors to submit photographs of their museum experience to a Flickr stream. The *New York Times* quoted Met director Thomas P. Campbell on the impact of technology on the physical museum experience: "In the 19th century people would make a sketch in the galleries. Now they take pictures and upload them" (Vogel, 2009). The Brooklyn Museum of Art also launched 1stFans, a social media based membership initiative in December 2008. The Smithsonian museum has developed a "citizen curator" effort that invites public input on exhibit replacements for traveling artworks.

While these are exemplary Internet based efforts, many museums continue to struggle not with technology but with administration (Parvaneh, 2009). Hertzum (1999) addressed this issue with the contention that web initiatives can be hindered by a philosophical incongruity between information and administration specialists. A Museum International editorial called this the "thorny problem of balancing the potential of new media with the time-honored role of the museum"(M.L., 2000).

The Internet evolves so rapidly it is difficult to pace. Preparations for such evolutions are best made laterally - a mode contrary to the hierarchal modes of thinking currently in place within the majority of museum institutions. Networks allow these rigid structures to escape the wrecking ball of redesign through a discovery of pliability – the goal being not to abolish but reconstitute established structures. For most museums, embracing social media requires in depth self-examination. Adapting to the transparency of such technologies effectively requires an assessment of current

approaches to the public at large.

Authenticity

Art museums have struggled more readily with media centered issues of authenticity than science or natural history museums. Virtual works of art are often displayed in science centers but not in museums that own the original works, for fear that the proximity of a copy might detract from the value of the original. Levenson (1998) affirms this bias with the note that "the National Gallery... has a policy against displaying reproductions in its exhibitions" (p. 100). Further to this effect, art museums frequently ignore the Paleolithic era because pertinent original works of art are not available - opportunity for virtual reconstruction is sacrificed for authenticity (Levenson, 1998). Digitization of photographs specifically invites question as to the constitution of ownership. Besser (1997) references Walter Benjamin with the added query as to whether "This easy path to satiation [might] further distance one from what Benjamin calls the 'aura' or specialness of the object, and lead the viewer to treat it like just another commodity" (p. 118).

Does the display of an image on the Internet decrease the value of the physical object? This concern appears frequently in discussions of value dilution via mass exposure. An alternate concern posed by Besser (1997) is that the abundance of copies may potentially lead in the limitation of access to originals, proximity to these physical objects being reserved for scholars alone.

Authority

Museum professionals are in consensus that as institutions they must become agents of their own informatics potential (Johnston, 1997). However, these same professionals are off put by the side-by-side juxtaposition of amateur content and scholarly efforts. In discussion of user generated contributions to an established body of knowledge, Director of New Media at the Smithsonian's National Museum of American History, Mathew MacArthur (2007) remarks that "the idea of deliberately diluting

our intellectual content with substantive input from users - allowing their material to appear in connection with our trusted "brand" makes us extremely uncomfortable" (p. 60). The beneficiaries of open museum archives are many but particular emphasis is placed on their boon to education. The Web should nonetheless be understood as a scholarly resource that "promotes collaboration and interactivity" (Johnston, 1997, p. 106). MacArthur (2007) further argues that museum supervision of online archives combats against "unverified data" that otherwise diminishes both the quality of the Web as resource and the museum's expertise (p. 60).

Participation

Folksonomy - a user generated system of lateral classification through meta data or tags - is proving influential in the museum sphere. Those who favor a user generated system cite the appeal as a rejection of authoritarian "expert opinion." Said experts who speak against the system say it simple provides an unverified index which is "idiosyncratic, inconsistent, irrelevant or simply incorrect" (MacArthur, p. 58). The regimentation of the museum institution was based on their conception in tribute to the power of a single individual, as Gurian (2006) comments "museums often began as physical expressions of personal authority" (p. 4). To invite democratic input and participation from the community – on or offline – asks that this authority be reconsidered. In this respect, the open quality of the Internet is both benefit and challenge to museums (Mcintyre et al, 2008).

Trust

Trust is a word tangential to authority. Parents trust their children to behave in school, museums trust their visitors not to steal the paintings on the wall. However, this trust is guided by the looming presence of authority. The term "radical trust" has been defined by Darlene Fichter (2006) as the basis for an emergent system of information sharing that "allows and encourages participants to shape and sculpt and be co-creators" (Web 2.0, Library 2.0 and Radical Trust: A First Take, ¶ 4). The "radical" component of

Fichter's take on trust is ultimately a faith in the predominance of peaceful community participants as opposed to malicious vandals. The subjectivity of the term "appropriate" is brought to light by Trant's contention that "assessments of trust require a history of an individual's actions - linking their trace with a distinct identity ... Individuals build trust by behaving appropriately over time" (as cited in MacArthur, 2007, p. 63).

Economy

It has been argued that museums have evolved in tandem with the ages of society, from industrial to informational (Macdonald, 1998). Accordingly, whereas the industrial economy rested on material emphasis, the modern economy is founded on information (Macdonald, 1998; Pink, 2005). Others contend that the Internet is now "thinking with the right side of its brain" and pushing towards a conceptual rather than informational orientation directly in line with the educational mission of many museums (Seid Howes, 2007, p. 67). This the economy within which museums and cultural institutions must remain relevant. A visit to a museum is taken away more strongly in memory instead of a shopping bag. Several conceptual theories of economy warrant further examination with relevance to the museum scope. Bataille's (1967) festival economy contends

> ...that [in a capitalist economy] human value is a function of productivity; in the second, it is linked to the more beautiful outlets of art, poetry, the full bloom of human life. In the first case, we care only about the time to come, subordinating the present time to the future; in the second, it is only the present instant that counts (p. 37).

An attempt to embrace a 'festival economy' lends itself to the creation of a dialogue that addresses both economic and intrinsic value. In order for this to occur, administrators, educators and the artists themselves must endeavor to preserve the communicative quality of art. In *The Future of Luxury* Enzensberger (1998) envisions a world in which "luxury would relinquish its role as representation... and its privatization would be complete" (p. 238). The future that Enzensberger describes lists time,

attention, space, quiet, security and the environment as "things that matter that will not be sold in any Duty Free shop" (p. 239). Further shifts in societal value are illustrated by Richard Barbrook (2005) with his reflections on the *High-tech Gift Economy*:

> This ideological inconsistency has hidden the social impact of the hi-tech gift economy. Allowing people to download your photos for free from Flickr doesn't seem very radical. Putting up your latest tunes on-line can't really be a threat to the music moguls... Yet, when large numbers of people are engaged in these activities, commercial self-interest is checked by social altruism within the mixed economy of the Net. Before buying information, every sensible person checks whether you can download it for free. (Barbrook, 2005)

The physical experience of the modern museum is one of restraint. The 18th century cabinets of curiosity from which modern museums descend were full sensory engagements (Zimmer & Jefferies, 2007). The means by which interactive technologies can be utilized to provide a more intimate introduction to otherwise off limits material objects warrants further examination. This complex technology has immense potential for the realization of a fully virtual museum – a museum in which the patron could experience a piece of sculpture through simulated touch. Digital technologies are poised to create a more intimate museum experience.

Museums are social by trade but tend in practice towards individualism and isolation (Zimmer & Jefferies, 2007). Artist Thomas Struth's photographic studies specifically address this phenomenon of isolation in social space. Throughout this body of work, Struth observes and photographs visitors in the Louvre as they stand before historically significant artworks and in so doing elevates the museum visitor to pedestal object (Frohne, 1999). Accessibility remains both a philosophical and physical issue on numerous levels. The J. Paul Getty museum has been lauded for the provision of accessible collections to both physical and virtual visitors but this accolade is fettered by the contention that technology is only as good as its founding idea (Frohne,1999).

The assignation of value is a key institutional concern. Stephen Weil (2004) warns "That museums were once described as "temples of the human spirit" is no guarantee that they will be forever considered sacred. Nor is the fact that they have been well supported in the past a guarantee that they will always be thought to have such an entitlement" (p. 347) Correspondingly, the museum must not lose track of its constituency. Weil (1999) further supports this contention with the premise of his essay "From Being About Something to Being For Somebody."

Theory

"A museum without walls" is a phrase that describes and drives many public art initiatives. While the domain of public art is segmented from the museum world, its principles of collection and display are shared with private institutions. Comparisons are drawn between the dual nature of these entities: "There is a burgeoning interest now among private museums and publicly funded art institutions to display self-designated public art" (Hein, 2002, p. 441). This turn of events questions the stand alone territory of public art – that this once public sphere is being folded back into the private sanctum. Public art has followed the trajectory of art history from classicism to modernity, in so doing has become "more explicitly communitarian. The audience no longer figure[s] as passive onlooker but as participant, actively implicated in the constitution of the work of art" (Hein, 2002, p. 439). Hein (2002) further argues that while autonomous in conception and individual in appreciation, art introduced to the public sphere automatically negates the individual artist in favor of the communal whole. The implication here being that creativity is reflective of a shared human interest. Hyde (1983) discusses the value of creativity within the framework of a gift economy wherein the object itself is not as valuable as the realization of the unique process by which the object came to be and the contribution made to the communal fabric. He further addresses the perpetual motion of ideas as the ideal mode of cultural exchange with the contention that communal access to creative works ensures that no one person

(or institution) receives greater benefit from its existence than another:

> But so long as the gift passes out of sight, it cannot be manipulated by one man or one pair of gift partners. When the gift moves in a circle, its motion is beyond the control of the personal ego (Hyde, 1983, p.16).

Social media is constantly in flux. As blogs refresh and links are passed to second, third and two thousandth parties, information moves in a kaleidoscope pattern. The paradox of media is that it is public in design but largely private in consumption. The introduction of new technology, a shift in medium as that from print to telephone to television to world wide web is likened by McCluhan to the fable of the Emperor's new clothes: "we can always see the Emperor's old clothes, but not his new ones"(as quoted in Hartley, 1992). Echoing technology's apparent predilection for glass wall construction is Maxwell Anderson's (1998) comment that "we are all potentially on display" (p. 31). Participatory engagement with social media further blurs the line between the private and the public self and the constitution of both in a public forum (Jenkins, 2004).

The promise of participatory engagement in a museum environment is the development of the visitor self. Though the audience sometimes "just wants to watch", active participation stands to strengthen the connection between the patron and the institution in question (Jenkins, 2006). It has been argued that art and science are interdisciplinary in their shared quest to inform (Barry, 1998). This notion aligns with Oppenheimer's contention that the Exploratorium extol first and foremost "democratic empowerment" (as cited in Barry, 1998, p. 103). According to Hein (2002) "interactive pedagogic technique contains a key to empowerment that could transform education on a broad scale and make an avenue of general self determination" (p. 443). She further elaborates on the transitive properties of art as social discourse:

> I suggest that it is private, not public art that evokes contradiction. Exceeding even the error of aesthetic enshrinement is the political world of negating art's publicity as a site of multiple meaning and communicative exchange. But art is escaping its

confinement to private sensibility. It's descending to the streets once more (Hein,

2002, p. 442)

The freedom to assign value and power is central to any democratic argument. Liberal government is positioned not to direct or dictate but to enable the agency of its citizens (Rose, 1993 as cited in Barry, 1998) The museum public is distanced from the administration of the institution. As such they are limited in their understanding of its structure. The conviction that barriers are requisite to the integrity of societal structure is typically perpetrated by those unwilling to confront change (Lummis, 1996). Lummis(1996) further expands on "radical democracy" with the differentiation between fact and value, stating "that all power is generated by the people is an assertion of fact ... The value assertion is that the people who generate the power ought also to have it" (p. 40). Museums are thus positioned to amend for the privatization of public value.

Conclusion

In sum, while not wholly fractured between the object and the idea, the museum continues to wrestle with issues of authority and authenticity. Given the relative newness of the medium, the longevity of the Internet as an institutional change agent is as yet unproven. While a handful of museums are exploring the participatory potential of social media, the majority continue to operate within institutionally-limited structures. Jenkins (2006) illuminates this concept with the contention that

participation ... is shaped by ... cultural and social protocols. So, for example, the

amount of conversation possible in a movie theater is determined more by the

tolerance of audiences in different subcultures or national contexts than by any

innate property of cinema itself (p. 133).

Twenty first century museums have positioned themselves as a means to community enrichment and cultural awareness (Gurian, 2004; MacArthur, 2007; Macdonald, 1997; Seid Howes, 2007) but the inherent democracy of the Internet is administered to the institution in measured doses.

CHAPTER 3: DATA ANALYSIS

Framework of Analysis

For the purpose of this study, I will analyze social media through the lens of communication, museum practice, and various theories of digital democracy. Threaded throughout this discussion is an examination of selectivity relative to technological engagement by museums. In each of the case studies to follow, consideration is given to the implications of information content and the reflection of the institution in the utilization of a given platform. This study is shaped with respect to McLuhan's contention that "the medium is the message" and emphasizes that a digital identity is crafted in equal parts what and how (as cited by Durham & Kellner, p. 107). The expediency of technology-based communications is accompanied by the risk of unexamined meaning in either the message or the medium. Reply-all is not a response to be undertaken without consideration of the audience or the impact.

It has been my experience that technology is easily dismissed by those born into it. For those persons presently between the ages of ten and younger, there is no life without the Internet. Cell phones are so ubiquitous that airline security agents ask seven year olds for the devices (and find them on occasion). Any analysis of present day social media warrants note that at one point the land-line telephone was a new museum technology. While the Internet slides into its teens, social networks, blogs (so recently as 2004 referred to as weblogs) and YouTube are the equal of digital toddlers. As such, just what they will amount to as they age is difficult to determine with much precision.

The band wagon syndrome that accompanied the rise of the Internet spills over into the implementation of any new technology. Further, and as attested to by several interview subjects, a means to accurately evaluate the impact of these new technologies has yet to emerge beyond the anecdotal. The ease with which social networks are established is subversively encumbered by a heavy caretaker load. Like Seymour Krelborn's[1] man-eating plant, social media requires a constant influx of new information to stave off starvation. The analogy between social media and misbegotten pets may

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1   *Little Shop of Horrors*, 1986 sci-fi movie musical by Frank Oz featuring a man eating plant

be further expanded to the the alligator in the sewer fable - what begins as a cute little idea soon outgrows the existing capacity for care. The questions of responsibility and involvement - by the individual, department or organization as a whole - can factor into the success or abandonment of social media programming.

Sustainability is a persistent challenge of established social networks. Just as every communication can be interpreted to great variation, each public action sends a message to the audiences. A neglected website presents an empty house or a broken storefront. The establishment of a social media presence creates the expectation of content and ideally, engagement. The degree to which a museum chooses to engage the media effectively reflects (intentionally or otherwise) attitudes towards its public. Frequency of update, voice (first person, third person) and cultivation of user content invite deeper analysis. Examined closely, communication choices belie institutional attitudes towards transparency and dialogue.

CASE STUDY 1: Jordan Schnitzer Museum of Art, UO

The Jordan Schnitzer Museum of Art (JSMA) is a Depression era subsidiary of the University of Oregon. Created in response to the 1920's bequeathment of the Murray Warner Collection of Oriental Art, the museum first opened to the public in 1932. Then- University president Prince Lucien Campbell advocated for the construction of the museum on the belief that "a university has the major responsibility of becoming a center for culture for the region it serves" (JSMA website). As a university affiliate, the museum is positioned to cultivate both campus and municipal audiences. At present, the nonprofit museum is most readily accessible by on-campus visitors.

Between 1930 and 2000, the collection quadrupled in size. At present the collection holds nearly 14,000 pieces. The 32,000 square feet allotted for the original Bass Warner collection was insufficient but options for additional funding were swallowed by the Depression era economy. The move to modernize and standardize the art museum by university leaders, museum board members and administrators culminated with the successful completion of a 14.2 million dollar capital campaign in 2002. The renovated museum doubled in size and feature a greater percentage of its collections while expanding its educational capacity. Subsequent to the renovation, the museum re-opened as the Jordan Schnitzer Museum of Art, commemorating Schnitzer's multi-million dollar contribution to the project.

The JSMA positions itself with an emphasis on local and geographic community. Supplemented by over 1,600 art works and related archival materials on influential Pacific Northwest painter David McCosh (1903-1981), the museum's American art collection further emphasizes significant regional works in painting, print, drawing, sculpture and ceramics. Under the heading "Join Us", the museum website proffers:

This is a museum for the community, a gathering place where art from international historic periods will be shown with contemporary art of the Northwest, and audiences from all backgrounds will be presented with significant objects and ideas

to further the discussion about the arts. We invite you to join us and be a part of the new Jordan Schnitzer Museum of Art! (JSMA, Join Us)

The JSMA offers free admission to university students, staff and faculty. The zero expense for the campus community eliminates cost as a non-attendance factor. On Wednesday nights, the MusEvenings! program offers low to no-cost attendance to the general public with a "pay as you wish" admission model and extended operating hours from 5 - 8 p.m. These special evening hours typically coincide with lectures, musical performances and gallery talks.

The JSMA has endured a somewhat embattled history on the University of Oregon campus. Closed in 2002 for renovation, the doors remained shut until 2005. While the renovation addressed a tremendous space deficit internally, the external issue of absent parking is unresolved. As such, visits to the museum are most convenient for those already on campus or in combination with a multi-destination campus visit. As Eugene is notoriously bike and pedestrian friendly, this could be seen as an overture to the "green" community but would seem to neglect the greater civic concern of choice.

While the issue of accessibility is certainly significant to a physical analysis of space, it is equally relevant to the virtual sphere, if not more so. To this effect, while the museum was closed to the public, its only representation was virtual, making the web presence of the organization the only door to the museum. Prior to the dedication and subsequent renaming of the new space, the museum was called the University of Oregon Museum of Art. A web search for "uoma.uoregon" uncovers cached pages that reflect details of the pending construction project but no means to address the waiting public. Where technology might have been employed to construct a sense of community, perhaps through virtual documentation of the ongoing project, instead the museum appeared closed on all communication fronts.

The JSMA is no stranger to internal unrest. In late 2006, the Pappas Consulting group was tapped to conduct a strategic assessment of the museum on an administrative

level. Then-museum director David Turner returned to teaching in early 2007 following the release of the report. Among less contentious revelations, the report attributed a lack of centrality in the museum's communications to a foggy mission statement. The report highlighted an inability to reach staff without immediate transition to voicemail as a prominent source of board member frustration, creating the impression that outside interests were of less precedence. While going incommunicado may be written off as batten-the-hatches response to inner turmoil, it begs the question as to whether silence is ever a preferable strategy for a public institution.

Though celebrating its 75th anniversary in 2009, the massive renovation and subsequent closure has introduced issues and opportunities typically attributed to a brand new institution. Foremost to the interests of this case study, the museum is positioned favorably to assume transparency as an operational paradigm. Though the Pappas report was less than flattering, the museum made the results accessible to the public via the JSMA web site. This good faith move on the part of the JSMA rejected the presupposition that a museum is a complete, finished product. At the time of my study, the report is no longer featured on the website but can be sourced via Google.

Some of the physical newness has worn off over the last four years, but the JSMA continues administrative renovation. The museum's current director, Jill Hartz, took her position in September, 2008. Communications director Erick Hoffman was hired on a year prior to Hartz's arrival. Hoffman's background in performance arts marketing with Washington D.C.'s Kennedy Center lends perspective to the differences in approach to audience tracking between arts disciplines. Whereas performing arts organizations typically employ elaborate (and expensive) patron database systems capable of crunching and cataloging attendance numbers, much of the JSMA's patron database is incomplete. As of April 2009, the Museum is eager to identify a manageable means of analyzing audience trends.

Without this established system of analysis, an assessment of the museum's social

media efforts is anecdotal at best. Hoffman (personal communication, April 7, 2009) contends that physical museum attendance has gained ground over the last year, jumping from thirty seven thousand to over fifty one thousand. There are numerous possibilities for this uptick in attendance, including increased advertising efforts, expanded demographic targets and the presence of the JSMA on Facebook. Virtual and physical visitors share similar tendencies either to repeat an experience or never to return. Deciphering how a visitor engages with an online platform requires more involvement than a head count of online members. While the paying visitor counts automatically towards the Museum's fiscal success, the value of the virtual patron is less immediately evident as it may be days, or months (if ever) the online user walks through the museum doors. This delay between implementation and evaluation of tangible fiscal impact is a hard truth for understaffed museums.

The implementation of new technology is best undertaken in a strategic fashion. This is particularly true in regards to small museums with limited staff resources. Though a small museum by many standards, the JSMA holds over fourteen thousand objects in its collection. The entire museum salaries a modest staff of twenty-six - including security and facilities management. The museum's communication staff is a two-person operation. That being said, the rapid growth of social technologies easily outpaces the staff capacity available to handle (or even begin to assess) the challenge.

In speaking with Hoffman, he emphasized the importance of sustainable involvement, citing the example of organizational blogs that start with a flourish and then stagnate when staff are under time constraints (personal communication, April 7, 2009). The JSMA is accordingly minimalist in its engagement with social media - the Museum does not maintain a blog, Twitter, YouTube or Flickr feeds. JSMA appears sporadically throughout Flickr by way of unaffiliated community tags. Facebook is the only social media platform that the JSMA has presently elected to engage with.

Part of the Museum's hesitancy to expand their social media presence can be traced

to the middle-aged demographic that comprises the majority of the JSMA audience. The 'Gen X' cohort receives speculative uncertainty regarding their willingness to engage with new technologies. Hoffman raised some concern that the JSMA's core forty-five plus constituency is less inclined to connect with the Museum through social media outlets (personal communication, April 7, 2009). Nielsen's (March, 2009) *Global Faces And Networked Places* report suggests otherwise, noting

> While social networks started out among the younger audience, they've become more mainstream with the passage of time. Not surprisingly the audience has become broader and older. This shift has primarily been driven by Facebook whose greatest growth has come from people aged 35-49 years of age (+24.1 million). From December 2007 through December 2008, Facebook added almost twice as many 50-64 year old visitors (+13.6 million) than it has added under 18 year old visitors (+7.3 million) (Nielsen, 2009).

In light of the Nielsen numbers, Facebook is definitely a logical platform for JSMA audience engagement. However, the Museum's website does not link to its Facebook page, creating the impression that a disparate message exists between the mediums. The JSMA Facebook page is "fan" rather than "member" oriented. Essentially, the fan page removes the presence of an accountable authority - there are no links to JSMA staff or content creators. Without these links, there is no direct way to contact the museum from the Facebook platform.

In the context of our interview, Hoffman indicated that direct feedback from the Museum's patrons is a goal (personal communication, April 7, 2009). While the JSMA Facebook page includes a meager two post discussion board, the generic nature of the Museum's subject queries (i.e. Tell us about your experience! and What is your favorite part of the museum?) ask more of the user than they give back in return. These survey style questions (as yet unanswered more than a year after their March, 2008 posting) illustrate a formal approach to an informal technology. Social media is predicated on

user interests, as such it is a great opportunity to let the audience ask the questions.

The JSMA case study has provided perspective on social media engagement within a small campus based art museum, revealing the challenges of limited staff resources and an uncertain sense of patron response to technology. Next, I will examine the variance in engagement by a contemporary campus art museum against the much larger urban backdrop of Los Angeles.

CASE STUDY 2: The Armand Hammer Museum of Art and Culture Center (AHMACC), UCLA

The Armand Hammer Museum of Art and Culture Center (AHMACC or more simply the Hammer) is inseparable from its Los Angeles, California setting. As such, the organization has the unmistakable gloss of celebrity and an 'of the minute' attitude towards technology. This technological orientation is first evidenced by their web site design and extends to their predilection for social technologies. The development of the Museum's multi-tiered website (launched in November, 2008) was made possible through David Bohnett, the Rosalinde and Arthur Gilbert Foundation, and the James Irvine Foundation. The site is also a recent honoree of the 2009 Webby awards, chosen by members of the International Academy of Arts and Sciences. This honor credits the designers more than the Museum but illustrates the savvy of the administration in maintaining currency in the kaleidoscopic web world. Acting Communications Director Sarah Stifler is quick to emphasize the contemporary in both the museum's collection and its constituents (personal communication, April 8, 2009).

Though partially unfinished, the Hammer opened to the public in 1990. Founded by former chairman of Occidental Petroleum, Dr. Armand Hammer, the galleries featured his assorted personal collection of Old Masters paintings and works on paper by Honore Daumier. Controversially funded by Occidental dollars, the original museum was built adjacent to the company's headquarters in Westwood, California. However, following Dr. Hammer's death soon after the opening, construction was permanently halted leaving much of the space incomplete. Culminating two years of negotiations, the Hammer relocated to the UCLA campus in 1994 where it is presently sited in the lower portion of the Grunwald Center for the Graphic Arts building.

Dr. Hammer's predilection for the traditional gave way to the forward-looking mandates of both the museum and the university:

UCLA's mandate of pursuing cutting-edge research within the sciences and the humanities is reflected in the Hammer Museum's renowned exhibitions and

programs. We approach the arts with the same quest for knowledge, discovery, and understanding that guides the scientist, engineer, or anthropologist. We see it as our mission to pursue the margins, explore unknown territory, rediscover the familiar, and take risks. (Hammer: About)

The educational emphasis surfaces in the real time accessibility of the museum's staff. Despite the museum's prestige, Communication Director was quick to personally respond to student inquiry. The institution's educational ethos re-emerges in the sheer volume of information available on the website. The site is densely multi-media, featuring a video archive of artist talks as well as a blog written by visiting artists and curators alike. The length of blog postings reach essay proportion at times, which is both a positive and a negative attribute. On one hand, the author reflects a detailed interest in a given topic, distinct from a standard press oriented public relations blurb. The audience is then invited to engage on an intellectual rather than coercive sales level. The flip side is the requisite investment of time on the part of the reader. Granted that many newspapers have shifted to digital formats, it might seem logical to increase text based content on the web. Nonetheless, both design and media research dispute this impulse (Carr, 2008; Carusone, 2009). Online readers do not approach web text the same way they respond to printed page - due primarily to the distraction factor of the Internet. As technology writer Nicholas Carr (2008) points out, whether the medium is news or distilled personal rhetoric, attention spans just aren't what they used to be. Like many of its online counterparts, the Hammer faces a challenge in striking the right balance between verbosity and accessibility.

Though personal computers are fully portable, continuous access to wireless Internet has yet to crystallize. As such, the manner and environment in which an audience chooses to experience online content remains limited. To this effect, consideration must also be given to how blog content might be interpreted for the smaller screens of the personal data assistant such as an iPhone or a Blackberry. Unless the delivery

mechanism alters towards the absolutely riveting – say Princess Leia popping out

to monologue the headlines in hologram – many online articles end with the sonic

punctuation of a new e-mail or text alert. At the time of this study, the Hammer's blog

is updated on a semi-regular basis. The infrequency of these updates coupled with

the multi-paragraph length defeats the immediacy of the blog. While loyal fans may

follow consistently, the casual browser may move on in search of a less time consuming

investment.

The Hammer functions as a careful and cohesive brand. Throughout their Myspace,

Facebook and Twitter pages, the Museum's identity is quite literally plastered across

backgrounds via photographs of the museum entry way. The museum's logo is a

replication of the exterior signage. Clean and uncluttered, the public identity of the

Hammer is thoroughly modern. Communications Director Stifler contends that the

constituents of the museum follow suit as a triumvirate result of location, contemporary

orientation and academic directive (personal communication, April 9, 2009). In this

sense, the Museum prides itself on synchronization with its audience – understanding

who their constituency is and how the Museum as an institution integrates with

the surrounding community. As previously mentioned, it is difficult (and perhaps

unnecessary) to distill the Hammer from its Los Angeles locale. As Executive Director

Anne Philbin's welcome states:

> The Museum is positioned—both physically and metaphorically—at the gateway
>
> between the city of Los Angeles and the University of California, Los Angeles
>
> (UCLA). The Museum is the entry through which the general public can gain access
>
> to the diverse riches of the University community. (Hammer: About)

By virtue of proximity to the Hollywood landscape, the museum attracts numerous

celebrity guests to their annual Gala in the Garden event and keeps a lecture roster

laden with high profile artists, actors and writers. The equalizer in the latter component

is that all public programs at the Hammer are free, eliminating cost as deterrent from

attendance. In the early months of 2009, Stifler noted an elevation in public program attendance but attributes that as much to a "desire to be around other people in a public place given the state of the economy" as to any specific efforts on the Museum's part.

The Hammer's Facebook page continues the museum-as-celebrity motif through its focus on "fans" (similar to Twitter's followers) rather than a collective group. Since it is a fan page, the reader is not able to see who administers content. Fans are able to comment at will but are not given an outlet to begin a larger linked discussion thread. As such, the potential for discourse amongst online patrons is limited to wall posts. Further, the Museum's representatives are neither accountable nor available for engagement via the Facebook fan page.

As with any fan grouping, the potential exists for the development of a community based on mutual interest. Media scholar Henry Jenkins notes that "fans are the most active segment of the media audience, one that refuses to simply accept what they are given, but rather insists on the right to become full participants"(p. 131). In this regard, fans - enthusiastic, interested and engaged - are a desirable Museum constituency. This level of interest is precisely what museums have aspired towards since their days as cabinets of mysterious curios. However, museums have also shifted their missions from entertainment to education. Without a forum for open discussion, the Hammer becomes an object rather than a subject to be engaged with.

Call them fans, members or friends, the more significant issue is the opportunity for dialogue between audience and institution. A museum is best measured by the breadth of its community rather than its collections. The Hammer has capitalized on its physical location, establishing a strong link with the surrounding campus and Los Angeles locale through free public programs and a cutting edge directive. In the realm of social media, however, the Museum leans conservative, prioritizing branding over audience participation.

Columbus, Ohio is a far cry in distance and concept from the urban mecca of Los

Angeles. However, Ohio State University is using social media to bridge the gap from here to there to wherever you may be reading this from. The following case study examines the open approach to social media taken by the Wexner Center for the Arts.

CASE STUDY 3: The Wexner Center for the Arts, Ohio State University

The Wexner will celebrate its twentieth anniversary in November of 2009. Over the last two decades, the center has fostered contemporary work and supported multi-media artist residencies, conceiving of itself as a "research laboratory for all the arts" (Wexner Center for the Arts: About Us). The Center began in devotion strictly to the visual arts, expanding to include performing and media arts as distinct programming concentrations in 1990 at the University's behest. As such, the Wexner places heavy emphasis on the multi-disciplinary and interdisciplinary aspects of its programming. In an essay written to commemorate the Center's tenth anniversary, Ann Bremner, publications editor, reflected on the issues based programming that has featured prominently over the years:

Could one teach a course on the trends of the decade in terms of the artists and works we've presented? It might produce a rather idiosyncratic syllabus but many major themes - among them freedom of expression, body metaphors, and the AIDS crisis - would absolutely be there. A prime issue for many artists has been the interaction of individuality and identity as a member of a community (Bremner, 1999).

Located on the campus of Ohio State University, the Wexner is supported by the Wexner Center Foundation, "a private, non profit partner of the Ohio State University Board of Trustees (Wexner Center for the Arts: About Us: Governance and Support, 2009)." The Wexner has a finite rather than growing visual art collection, but does maintain and exhibit the existing university collection, and has established a solid reputation as a source for of the moment art, performance and media. "Expect the unexpected" seems an appropriate though unwritten motto, and summarizes the underlying theme of visitor commentary sprinkled throughout the web site.

The Wexner is creating a digital forum by way of cultivated audience responses. Communications director Jerry Dannemiller recently posted an online audience review

of the Interactive Builders Association performance, *Continuous City*, from Columbus blogger Jeff Johnson and includes the brief comments "We'll take a theater review like this over a review in old growth media anytime. Nice stuff" (Wexblog , 2009). It is difficult to provide an accurate print capture of the enthusiasm in Johnson's video remarks (http://urbaninfill.wordpress.com/2009/04/17/continuous-city/) filmed in a moving car by way of his built in laptop camera. He appears to have hopped in the car and started his laptop in eagerness to share his experience with a long distance loved one. The review itself is brief but particularly apt. Of the exhibition, Johnson (2009) remarks "it's about how we're connected all the time but never really there." The accompanying post on Johnson's own blog (Urban In-fill, 2009) details the personal resonance of the piece through a consideration of his own human connections:

> ...Perry's cousin Tom who lived in Germany knew my friend, Kabir, who grew up in Afghanistan. They'd met in Kenya. Kabir now resides in Canada. My close friend Steve resides in rural Ontario in a town with a population of 700. There I met an artist whose partner works in Toronto. He knows my friend Kabir. They used to work in the same industry. (Johnson, 2009)

"Continuous City" and its associations with the location/dislocation phenomena by way of communication technologies is also an excellent metaphor for the Center's approach to online media. The Wexner web site was created to supplement the physical museum visit - while ideally every web patron becomes an on site patron, this remains unrealistic, no matter how deep the desire to hop a plane to Paris, Toronto or Columbus for that matter. The site features a personal welcome message from Center director Sherri Geldin, a message that expresses the purpose of the site while addressing current events at the Center. This page clearly receives regular attention from the Center's administration, a point made plain by the statement that "we're constantly enhancing our web presence to make your virtual forays a vibrant complement to your in-person visits (Wexner Center for the Arts - About Us, 2009). Geldin appears adjacent to the

welcome message, not in a studio style head-and-shoulders portrait but in an editorial

snapshot with a former artist in residence at the Center. The decision to publish

this image of the Center's director suggests a willingness to integrate senior level

administration with public programming and community concerns. While the portrait is

a very minor component of the larger web presence, it is a major step towards enabling

the public to begin construction of an accurate institutional identity - a necessity in the

establishment of trust required before open dialogue can begin.

Self-identity is one of the strongest points of the Wexner's web presence. Museums

tend to have a high participatory watermark (Gurian, 2006). Despite hundreds of years

and countless efforts to institutionalize accessibility, museums continue to intimidate

a generous portion of the non-academic population. This intimidation even extends

to non-arts oriented academics. The impression created through anonymity of intent

and administration is that the few and the privileged are encouraged to connect with

the institution. While it is unrealistic to expect a museum's executive administration to

mingle with day-to-day patrons, there is no reason (except perhaps witness protection)

that prevents the public from getting to know administrative personnel at the

institution on a very basic level. Providing a name-to-face connection is a key step in the

establishment of a trusting constituent to institution relationship - imagine the shaky

confidence experienced by voters if politicians appeared publicly only in backlit profile.

The Wexner rounds out its institutional identity with conceivably personal details.

The Wex blog (http://wexarts.org/wexblog) for example, along with numerous links to

local Ohio media sites, offers an assorted web link list which includes twenty something

lifestyle blogs like DailyCandy, Apartment Therapy and Make. Through the inclusion of

these links, the Wexner creates an institutional access point based on external mutual

interests. The decision to examine mutual interests is evocative of philosopher Martin

Buber's (1958) title contention that humans relate to the world in two ways: I-Thou or

I-It, either by subject-subject relation or subject-object relation. Considering the innate

subject-object orientation of a physical museum space, the online sphere creates an opportunity for the museum to address its audience on a personal level. At the very least, giving humanizing characteristics to a brick and mortar institution changes the trajectory of evaluation to include its human administrators.

In the essay of the same title, Kotler and Kotler (2004) pose and answer the following question: "Can a museum be all things to all people? Not easily or productively…" (p. 185). Kotler and Kotler (2004) resolve that while human and financial resources do not always parallel institutional desires, "museums can develop a fuller relationship with their constituencies" (p. 185). Their contention that successful museums have a clear sense of their audience has been taken to heart by the Wexner. Rather than position itself as a supplement to or standalone from Ohio State, the Wexner's website is integrated (at least virtually) with the campus community. The site provides a hospitality suite of links aimed towards students, staff and out of town visitors alike. A comprehensive list under the heading "Visit" offers directions, parking, hotel connections and a link to the menu of an in-house cafe. These are simple yet effective mechanisms to lower the participation barrier, or what Elaine Heumann Gurian (2006) refers to as a "threshold fear" (p. 115).

Social media creates opportunities for genres, communities and interests to collide and converge in a virtual space. It is up to the museum to extend these opportunities into the real world but the online environment is an easy access point. The Wexner is an active user of Facebook, MySpace, Twitter and Flickr, along with live video streaming, archived videos and podcasts. In short, the Center engages with multiple interdisciplinary, multimedia social technologies. Primary differences between the Wexner and many other institutions is the consistency of their updates and a fuller implementation of their digital presence; the Wexner's Flickr site, for example, is detailed with easily searchable titles and dates.

Until recently, the Wexner was an administrator of a Facebook group rather than

a Facebook page. The superficial difference is that the page is set up in anticipation of more dynamic content and offers a tabbed design similar to a web site. A Facebook group is simpler in appearance and functions largely as a virtual forum for group members to voice opinions and instigate discussions. The conceptual difference is precisely this: a group cultivates "members" while a page invites "fans." As mentioned previously, the primary difference between the two is active (participating) versus passive (admiring). Further, the fan page design erases connections to the content creators, posting material anonymously. A group provides name, Facebook contact information and individual accountability for each post. The Wexner's group page is still in existence at the time of this study but an April 28th post to Twitter (http://twitter. com/wexarts) indicates that the Center was "transitioning to a page." A follow up email notice from Wexner web editor Robert Duffy details the shift as resultant of Facebook's inattention to further development of the group interface:

> Facebook has continued to update the functionality of "Facebook Pages" while "Facebook Groups" remain static. Because of this, beginning today all new Wexner Center updates and information will be sent to our new Facebook page instead of the group. We think this will be a more effective way for you to keep up with what's going on with the Wexner Center via Facebook. (personal communication, May 5, 2009).

Using the Facebook freeze on group developments as an example, the primary caveat of free technology is the absence of structural control. The efficacy of a given platform is reliant on a periodic evaluation of its new developments (or lack there of) relative to the needs of the institution. As illustrated by the Wexner's shift in their approach to Facebook, effective social media use requires that the user remain alert to any developmental shifts incongruent with institutional needs. Such vigilance is easily accomplished by a dedicated web staff but is not an unthinkable interdepartmental mission. The beauty of social media platforms like Facebook and Twitter is that users don't need a special degree to provide insight into a platform's success or failure - all

they have to do is use it and reflect.

To this effect, museums might begin an analysis of social media through staff experimentation with the technology, bridging the gap between public and private user through personal insight. West Coast to no coast, Paleolithic or Contemporary, small museum to large - it is not a matter of size, collections concentration or budget but an address of human engagement with technology.

CHAPTER 4: FINDINGS AND OPPORTUNITIES

Social media is the digital manifestation of free speech and the right to assemble. Wikipedia hosts an expansive "list of of Internet phenomena" defined as "specific to the Internet, such as popular themes and catch-phrases, viral videos, amateur celebrities and more. Such fads and sensations grow rapidly on the Internet because its instant communication facilitates word of mouth" ([Wikipedia, List of Internet phenomena](#)). Between <u>Rickrolling</u> and <u>lolcats</u>, the message in the medium can get a little muddled. Want to find a museum that inadvertently caters to hang overs? There's an app for that. Or at least there's a web directory that will provide you with that information (ilikemuseums.com).

Do busy, professional people have time for this? I would argue that as advocates for the arts, we don't have time not to. As communicators, as advocates and institutions, accessibility has never been so attainable. There are so many different ways to connect, the question that needs to be evaluated is not how many/how much - but how carefully, how intentioned. We need to examine our reasons for plugging in. Selectivity particularly in the realm of the free and the immediate, is a virtue. Choice is not synonymous with value. "We have more" has never been a sound argument for quality.

Monitoring the progress of early social media developments is a lot like stargazing. Despite the fact that there always seems to be something going on, the pace is relatively slow. Social media is still in its infancy. I was recently reminded that it took nearly ten years from the onset of the popular Internet before even having a web domain was standard practice for museums. We're not there yet. Facebook, Myspace and Twitter were all born somewhere in the neighborhood of 2004, giving us another 5 years before we can make an accurate evaluation of still standing media platforms.

Just as MySpace reached its zenith, Facebook appeared, followed by Twitter and now hounded by Ningg - a do it yourself social network with potential limited only by the users' imagination. I recently stumbled upon (without the help of link-love network StumbleUpon) a mockumentary from online media purveyor Slate V that follows the

imaginary rise of a nano blogging technology called "Flutter" designed to abridge the longwinded Twitter feed. Exaggeration aside, the point stands that the landscape of social media has shifted in the time it has taken to complete this study and altered further in the time it will take any one to read these words. In the time it has taken me to type this 138 character sentence, no less than four more technology updates have burbled into my news feed. Technology is peripatetic, teaching as it wanders, ever changing. Media continues to evolve, each change propelled by developments in technology and the manner in which we incorporate these changes into our communicative vocabulary.

Given the fledgling state of social media, I find myself with more questions than answers. Does a museum have a personality? Does it like broccoli? What do I need to know to know a museum? Is a museum's identity a composite of the people who work there? Does this transference of identity undermine a move towards a greater sense of shared value? Can we as a whole be represented by the few? Democracy would argue in favor … but where is the democracy in the public institution?

The New York Times recently published an Op Ed piece from Columbia professor Mark Taylor (2009) titled "End the University as We Know It," in which he decried the state of modern universities. Amongst many suggested reforms, he called for the end of the ivory tower. The end of singular esoteric focus. The end of cultivated minutiae, breeding exoticism over practicality. While many of his contentions edged towards flippancy, the underlying thread provides an easy analogy to museums. This isn't to say that the unique and the exotic must be stamped out but its value must be placed within the greater scope of humanity. Who is touched by it? What do they think about it? A museum matters only as long as it matters to somebody. A museum is not a public institution in spite of its public but because of it.

Jennifer Trant , Archives and Museum Informatics consultant, cautioned that trust was the greatest and most necessary equalizer before a meaningful, digital museum

patron relationship can be established (as cited in MacArthur, 2007, p. 63). The Internet remains a hall of mirrors in which it is as easy to distance oneself from the truth as the truth is easy to misrepresent. If this is the case, how can online communities become the audience museums so desperately need? The larger question (to answer a question) it seems is whether museums are willing to maintain virtual relationships. By necessity, the online museum patron dynamic is quite often of the long distance variety. I can't afford to fly cross-country for the weekend and neither (I am safely betting) can the majority of middle class America. The value of an online museum program is not easily measured by the dollars funneled into a bank account.

The online museum then is not solely about profit. This makes it harder to justify as more than extraneous, more than a new pair of shoes. But "why" remains a plaguing question. Museums are nonprofit organizations paradoxically forced to obsess over the finances. When someone somewhere who has never been to your museum is looking to strip your funding, the online museum is suddenly invaluable. But museums struck by staffing crunches find time just as valuable as money. Social media is often accompanied by a turning out of pockets to shake loose available time for the implementation of the platform. This scrounge for spare minutes can easily culminate with a dismissal of the technology as frivolous, particularly when used in conjunction with a calculation of social media's monetary value.

The significance of social media is rooted firmly in the advance of digitized information systems. Archival methods are shifting towards the digital at a rapid pace. Scholarly publications once dedicated to the printed page are now seeking cost effective digital outlets. The expense of traditional printing makes exhibition catalogs a questionable investment as once robust foundations falter and grants dwindle. With little left in the way of portable institutional representation, the online museum becomes a critical argument for an institution's relevance. An engaged, online presence could make the difference between institutional sustainability and extinction.

This spring I participated in a workshop of Seattle-based museum professionals and museology graduate students. Passing commentary ranged from questions as to whether social technologies were simple amusements incongruent to a museum's mission to whether or not visitors were actually engaging with user generated content options. A further revelation was that while visitors were definitely interested in seeing themselves personally represented, this did not necessarily translate into an interest in other patrons opinions - in short, they wanted to fast forward to their individual star turns. In the case of a video booth that recorded visitor responses to a given subject, the thoughts of fellow patrons were perceived more as noise than as substance. This literal struggle to hear oneself think is an inherent challenge of both social media and the Internet as a whole.

Over saturation of media is a definite risk for museums and patrons alike. Speaking personally, I have stepped away from the computer multiple times in drafting this paper, too easily lured by a new email, status update or chat invitation. There just aren't as many choices to be made with a paper and a pen. Shifting the method of information delivery from single servings to bulk bins (so to speak) changes the emphasis from 'what' to 'how much'. Media scholar Howard Rheingold (2009) contends that "personal learning networks are not a numbers game. They are a quality game"(Twitter literacy, ¶ 2). At its weakest, social media becomes snack food technology, purchased and consumed without much thought to calorie or content. Social media users do not divide neatly between 'technophiles' and tehnophobes'; users divide instead between those that actively engage with the technology and those that are satisfied simply to exist in its midst.

There is a necessary distinction to be made between using a technology and using it well. Using social media effectively requires a learned skill-set (Rheingold, 2009). In response to the unique communication challenges and opportunities presented by web platforms, several venerable institutions like the Brooklyn Museum of Art and

the Metropolitan Museum of Art have established or outsourced dedicated social media staff positions. For example, the Brooklyn Museum's Manager of Information Systems administers the institution's MySpace, Facebook, Flickr, Twitter and YouTube projects (Brooklyn Museum: Community) and the occasional exhibition (Click! A Crowd Curated Exhibit). In 2008, the Museum implemented the 1stFans program, "a socially networked museum membership" that provides exclusive online content to paying members. Consequently, the institution has become a touchstone for innovative social media practice in the museum field.

Observant of such successful implementations by their much larger counterparts, smaller museums gravitate towards the affordability of free. Which brings me back to selectivity. If you are a small museum, chances are good that you don't have the Brooklyn Museum's budget for a technology coordinator. If you are a campus museum, odds are good that you are reliant on a school specific, non-dedicated web support staff. This means that your ability to implement multiple platforms like Facebook, YouTube, Flickr and Twitter, directly correlates to the available hours of your staff. If the hours are there for all of these mediums, fantastic but if not, there is no shame in doing one thing exceptionally well. This is one of the many reasons the average neurosurgeon doesn't moon light as a bartender.

With so many choices - email, Facebook, news feed, blog, repeat - and distractions - do you care that Ashton Kutcher has 850,000 Twitter followers or that Oprah is up to speed - a bespoke approach to the Internet seems to make a lot of sense. As the first instruction from Douglas Adam's *Hitchiker's Guide to the Galaxy* states: Don't panic. Tailored content does not have to be about individual users - in an ideal world, with an ideal budget, with endless hours in a day, yes - but instead reflects a confident sense of the museum's constituency - aimed at current and goal audiences. Regular evaluation of a museum's goals through the constellation of social media will reveal patterns of compatibility (and incompatibility). Just as a museum will struggle to be all things to

all people, a one size fits all prescription for social media is unlikely to produce optimal results. This is a question specific to the individual needs of the institution. A campus museum might offer a group forum for students via Ningg or Facebook and create an opportunity to open dialogue regarding "their museum." In a more resolved, real world example, the Minnesota History Center celebrated 150 years of statehood with the exhibit "MN150", created from citizen responses to the statement "Minnesota wouldn't be Minnesota without ..." This particular exhibit exemplifies successful dialogue between a museum and its constituents. Furthermore, it solidifies an understanding of the community that frames the museum.

The new emphasis on technology stands to shift interdepartmental dynamics as well. Once upon a time the IT person surfaced from the basement to reconnect a dead telephone line. Now he or she connects the institution to the entire world on a twenty-four hour basis. An evaluation of a specific technology requires a basic understanding of how that technology works. While it is safe to assume that everyone familiar with the Internet understands the difference between "online" and "offline", it is less so a safe assumption that this same constituency is comfortable with feed burners and vlogs.

The collection of online user statistics can be a complicated ordeal. Just the thought of distinguishing repeat visits by distinct users from two thousand hits by the same user or sorting Twitter posts visibly by content is daunting. But yes, there is an app for that. There are currently a number of free options that at least warrant a cursory glance by institutions. For example, a museum might employ a free online data collection tool like Google Analytics to begin a preliminary assessment of how their online technologies are being utilized. This project would involve a degree of tech savvy but is not an impossible task. Twitoaster "threads your twitter conversations like on a message board / forum, bringing you all the background and context you need" (Twitoaster: About) - a convenient solution to lengthy, hard to follow Twitter feeds.

Facts and figures aside, social media is ultimately an opportunity for dialogue. When

carefully evaluated, the decision to implement a particular platform positions a museum to interact and expand virtual and physical communities based on mutual interest. In his essay "From Being about Something to Being for Somebody" Stephen Weil (1999) quotes Maria Lourdes Horta on the growth of museums in rural Brazil:

> A museum without walls and without objects, a true virtual museum, is being born in some of those communities, which look in wonder to their own process of self-discovery and recognition.... For the moment, in my country, [museums] are being used in a new way, as tools for self-expression, self-recognition, and representation; as spaces of power negotiation among social forces; and as strategies for empowering people so that they are more able to decide their own destiny (p. 229-258).

In 1999, the virtual museum we might conceive of today was barely a hypermedia blip. The Internet was in the same infancy then as social media is today. It is Horta's (1999) use of the phrase "museum without walls" that resonates with me. What does a museum without walls look like? This is a phrase that has typically been used to describe public art initiatives but that has evolved to include the Internet - art in public places to be enjoyed and experienced by the community. Public. Community. Both concepts integral to any physical museum. Both concepts integral to social media. I will conclude here with something further to consider: the mushroom like development of new social media is not a cause for panic or struggle to define oneself or institution as "the unique", "the different, "the cool" but an opportunity to find common ground in an infinitely shared digital space. At the edge of this common ground is not a revelation of technological rapture but a reassessment of the intention behind our choices to engage or unplug.

Social Media in Museums

Data Collection Instruments
Appendix A. Data Collection Sheet for External Observation

Study Site:					
Data ID:	Date:		Online Address:		
Active Media:	Blog	Facebook	Myspace	Twitter	Website
Key Descriptor:					
Details:					

CODING	OBSERVATION	NOTES

Appendix B. Data Collection Sheet for Document Analysis

Study Site:	
Data ID:	Date: Document Location:
Active Media:	____ Report, Article, Book ____ Government Document, Public Policy ____ Arts Organizations' Written Materials ____ Online Information ____ Notes ____ Other:
Key Descriptor:	
Citation:	

CODING	OBSERVATION	NOTES

Appendix C. Interview Protocol for Online Museum Media Directors

Case Study Site:		
Subject Name, Job Title:		
Data ID:	Date:	Interview Location:
Key Points:		
Consent:	____ Oral ____ Written (form) ____ Audio Recording ____ OK to Quote	

CODING	OBSERVATION	NOTES

Semi-structured Interview Questions

How does social media impact real time attendance? i.e. do Facebook friends become ticket buying friends?

How has the significance of the virtual audience shifted with the rise of social media?

Are museums more accessible through social media and the web in general or is this an illusory impression?

How is your museum gauging the impact of social media implementation?

In your opinion, what is the biggest stumbling block to a successful social media plan?

Any unexpected results?

Biggest technology inspired revelation?

Recruitment Instruments
Appendix D. Sample recruitment letter

<DATE>

<INTERVIEWEE NAME>
<INTERVIEWEE ADDRESS>

Dear <NAME OF INTERVIEWEE>,

You are invited to participate in a research project titled *Do you follow: Impacts and Implications of Social Media in Museums*, conducted by Kate Nosen from the University of Oregon's Arts and Administration Program. The purpose of this study is to explore the potential of social technology in the development of museum communities.

Cultural institutions once founded on privacy, protocol and practice must now choose how best to navigate the transparency presented by social media including Facebook, YouTube, Flickr and Twitter. When the Ontario based organization Archives and Museum Informatics held its first "Museums and the Web" conference in 1997, nascent concerns emphasized the frame rather than the function of social media - who will use the internet rather than how. Over the last twelve years, major museums such as New York's Museum of Modern Art have evolved from a static web presence to the cultivation of a participatory museum culture through the skillful implementation of social media. The Australian Museum is conducting an online blog experiment to determine if they are able to engage their audience in exhibition development. Engagement in social media revives the original conception of museum as forum. This research project examines the shifting discourse between museum and patron and the impact of social media on the development of a museum community.

You were selected to participate in this study because of your leadership position with the <NAME OF CASE STUDY SITE HERE>. If you decide to take part in this research project, you will be asked to provide relevant organizational materials and participate in an interview in person during winter 2009. If you wish, interview questions will be provided beforehand for your consideration. Interviews will be scheduled at your convenience. You may also be asked to provide follow-up information through phone calls or email.

If you have any questions, please feel free to contact me at 541-XXX-XXXX or knosen@ uoregon.edu, or Dr. John Fenn at (541) 346-1774. 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,
Kate Nosen
1505 Orchard Street Apt 15
Eugene, OR 97403

Appendix E. Sample Consent Form

Research Protocol Number: X327-09
Do you follow: Impacts and Implications of Social Media in Museums
Kate Nosen, Principal Investigator
University of Oregon Arts and Administration Program

You are invited to participate in a research project titled *Do you follow: Impacts and Implications of Social Media in Museums*, conducted by Kate Nosen from the University of Oregon's Arts and Administration Program. The purpose of this study is to explore the potential of social technology in the development of museum communities.

Cultural institutions once founded on privacy, protocol and practice must now choose how best to navigate the transparency presented by social media including Facebook, YouTube, Flickr and Twitter. When the Ontario based organization Archives and Museum Informatics held its first "Museums and the Web" conference in 1997, nascent concerns emphasized the frame rather than the function of social media - who will use the internet rather than how. Over the last twelve years, major museums such as New York's Museum of Modern Art have evolved from a static web presence to the cultivation of a participatory museum culture through the skillful implementation of social media. The Australian Museum is conducting an online blog experiment to determine if they are able to engage their audience in exhibition development. Engagement in social media revives the original conception of museum as forum. This research project examines the shifting discourse between museum and patron and the impact of social media on the development of a museum community.

You were selected to participate in this study because of your position as Communications Director with <NAME OF CASE STUDY SITE>. 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 during spring 2009. If you wish, interview questions will be provided beforehand for your consideration. Interviews will be scheduled at your convenience. I will use handwritten notes for transcription. 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. Your consent to participate in this interview, as indicated below, demonstrates your willingness to have your name used in any resulting documents and publications and to relinquish confidentiality. If you wish, a pseudonym may be used with all identifiable data that you provide. 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. I anticipate that the results of this research project will be of value to the cultural sector as a whole, especially museum institutions. However, I cannot guarantee that you personally will receive any benefits from this research.

If you have any questions, please feel free to contact me at 541-XXX-XXXX or knosen@uoregon.edu, or Dr. John Fenn at (541) 346-1774. 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 initial each of the following statements to indicate your consent:

_____ I consent to my identification as a participant in this study.

_____ I consent to the potential use of quotations from the interview.

_____ I consent to the use of information I provide regarding the organization with which I am associated.

_____ 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,

Kate Nosen
1505 Orchard Street Apt 15
Eugene, OR 97403

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