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Use of social networking services for marketing art museums

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Keywords

social networking services, art museum marketing, social network marketing

Disciplines

Marketing | Museum Studies | Social Media

Comments

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Use of Social Networking Services for Marketing Art Museums

By

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Abstract

The purpose of this study was to explore the use of social networking services (SNS) by art museums and effectiveness of SNS as marketing tools. Staff members responsible for SNS from twelve art museums in the Midwestern United States were interviewed to gain an in-depth understanding of SNS usage and their perceptions of SNS effectiveness. We identified three distinct marketing applications for which SNS technologies were being used: building awareness, engaging with the community, and networking. Based on analysis of the data, three marketing strategies using SNS were proposed for cultivating relationships with visitors. Other recommendations included incorporating SNS into formal strategic marketing plans aimed at improving museum-visitor relationships and establishing protocols to maximize the efficient use of available resources.

Keywords: social networking services; art museum marketing; social network marketing

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Introduction

On Art Museum Day 2012, over 100 museums affiliated with the Association of Art Museum Directors offered free or reduced admission to help celebrate the importance of museums all over the world (Anagnos 2012). For the first time since its inception in 1977, the organizers of Art Museum Day used social networking services (SNS) to promote the event. The association encouraged visitors to share their experiences through SNS, such as tweeting comments with the hashtag¹ #ArtMuseumDay, ‘like’ the museums via Facebook fanpages, checking into the events using Foursquare², and tagging photos taken at Art Museum Day via Flickr. According to Anagnos (2012), the Executive Director of the Association of Art Museum Directors, ‘These strategies are a small step in recalibrating the balance of power by actively encouraging visitors to share their points of view, and agreeing to share that feedback with the world.’

The use of SNS allows for richer and more personal connections. Many visitors to museum websites utilize the sites to retrieve information, but are ‘...increasingly looking for personal expression, membership in social groups, learning opportunities and meaning-making’ (Howes 2007, 70). SNS have been used by museums for crowdsourcing (harnessing ideas through solicited online contributions from large groups of people), micro-fundraising (soliciting small donations online from large groups of people), and increased communication and engagement with audiences (American Association of Museums 2012). Due to its interactive nature and potential to broaden social connections, SNS has been found to deepen involvement with, membership in, and financial contributions to nonprofit organizations (Waters et al. 2009).

¹ Twitter users add a hashtag symbol (#) before a relevant keyword or phrase in their posts to categorize these posts to facilitate search in Twitter.

² Foursquare is an application for mobile devices that allows users to share the physical places visited with others.

Whereas for-profit organizations are increasingly utilizing SNS as part of their marketing strategies, non-profit organization (i.e. art museums in this current study), have yet to incorporate the vast majority of SNS applications available to them (Waters et al., 2009). One possible reason is that art museums typically lack the time and resources for the constant attention required by SNS. Furthermore, few studies have examined the role and impact of SNS in marketing for nonprofit organizations; thus, information about the benefits of such programs is sparse. The purpose of the present study was to examine the current SNS practices of art museums and the perceived impact of SNS usage on art museum marketing. Qualitative interviews with art museum staff members were conducted to gain in-depth understanding of the use of SNS by museum staff. Based on the findings of the current study, the researchers provide strategies for strengthening visitors' awareness, comprehension, and engagement with the organization using SNS. The aim is to provide information that museums can use to develop SNS strategies specific to their marketing goals.

Literature Review

Marketing Art Museums

Art museums traditionally appeal to a demographic group with the time and ability to appreciate art; the sophistication, knowledge, and motivation to learn about art; and an elevated socio-economic status (Blattberg and Broderick 1991). Marketing for art museums is a challenging endeavor because promotion and publicity efforts need to appeal to this traditional audience as well as newer audiences who lack a history of frequenting art museums. Thus, marketing museums to the general public may demand advanced strategic planning which includes the process of identifying optimal long-term positions, developing strategies, allocating resources, and assessing and implementing strategies (Anderson 1982; McLean 1995).

Recognizing the challenges of marketing art museums, researchers (Chong 2007; Rentschler and Radbourne 2008) have argued that relationship marketing is an important strategy. This is because the relationship between an art museum and a visitor may be cumulative over time; the more a person visits an art museum, the more the person can appreciate art, which in turn leads to increased visits. Relationship marketing, a form of advanced strategic marketing, emphasizes the cultivation of long-term relationships built on creating partnerships and trust in the quality of services offered (Garbarino and Johnson 1999). Building strong museum-visitor relationships is key to higher visitor and donor retention (Camarero and Garrido 2011; Merchant, Ford, and Sargeant 2010).

In the past, relationships between museums and visitors were commonly forged through membership programs that required significant advertising budgets (Bhattacharya 1998; Camarero and Garrido 2011). With the increased presence of the Internet in the lives of millions of people, museums may be able to use their online presence to engage in relationship marketing in more innovative and less expensive ways (Chung, Wilkening, and Johnstone 2009; Lin and Cassidy 2008). However, some museums use Internet tools without formal strategic planning, creating websites that function as ‘electronic brochure[s]’ (Lehman and Roach, 2011, 296) with little impact on museum-visitor relationships. While the incorporation of SNS may assist museums with marketing; its use and impact should be specified and understood in order to maximize its effectiveness (Lehman and Roach, 2011; Lopez et al. 2010).

Social Networking Opportunities for Art Museums

A common characteristic among various SNS is that users are provided with their own unique ‘space.’ A user can easily connect his/her space with that of others to build up a network, which can be business related (e.g., LinkedIn) or social in nature (e.g., Facebook, Twitter)

(Gangadharbatla 2008). Building on the concept of networks, SNS provide a variety of functions. For example, Facebook, one of the most popular SNS, provides users the opportunity to share photos and videos, send instant messages, create groups, and play games. Twitter, another popular SNS, enables users to broadcast short messages, share others' messages, and follow the trends of topics shared by others. Many SNS emphasize specific topics (e.g., gapyear.com for travel-related topics) and are developed around specific functions such as location-based services (e.g., Foursquare provides reviews for establishments or attractions based on the user's geographic location) or visual image-oriented communication (e.g., Pinterest and Flickr).

Through the use of SNS, museums are able to distribute information and allow online users to become more engaged with the content (MacArthur 2007). Museums that develop a presence through SNS are able to provide 'opportunities for visitors to learn about and interact with each other, as well as to feel a part of a special group' (Howes 2007, 72). While other marketing programs, such as membership programs, provide both material benefits to members (e.g., free admission or discounts in gift shops) and non-material benefits (e.g., a sense of social responsibility and connection with others), SNS allows art museums to utilize personal and personalized communications in order to strengthen non-material benefits. For art museums, where the marketing objectives may include augmenting knowledge of the organization and promoting a better quality of life and aesthetic values, SNS may have a positive impact on cultivating visitor-museum relationships. However, limited research has been conducted on the use of SNS by art museums and its impact on museums' marketing efforts. In keeping with the purpose of this study, three research questions were formulated:

- (1) How do art museum staff members utilize SNS?
- (2) What are art museum staff members' perceptions of the effectiveness of SNS?

(3) What is the role of SNS in marketing art museums?

Method

Staff members of art museums in the Midwestern region of the United States were interviewed to better understand their professional experiences with utilizing SNS. A qualitative methodology was selected because it allowed for in-depth data collection directly from participants. Semi-structured interviews with probing questions were used throughout the interview process (see Appendix for the interview questions). This technique provided a rich level of conversation about the interviewees' use of SNS (Esterberg 2002; Kvale 1996).

After receiving institutional review board exempt status, the researchers contacted all 62 art museums accredited by the American Association of Museums (AAM) in the Midwestern states of Illinois, Indiana, Iowa, Michigan, Minnesota, Missouri, Ohio, and Wisconsin. Contact information available on the museums' websites was used to send invitation emails to marketing and public relations staff members. In this email, the authors introduced the purpose and procedures of the study. Recipients were asked for the name of the person at their organization best suited to complete the interview. To increase participation, a week after the first invitation email was sent, a reminder email was sent. Accredited AAM art museums were selected because they are recognized for their commitment and professional standards to ensuring excellence in museum operation. The Midwestern states allowed the researchers the opportunity to focus on one geographic region, within which museums likely faced similar opportunities and challenges.

A total of 12 individuals were interviewed. Categories of interview questions included: participants' job titles and responsibilities, education and career paths, types and purpose of SNS utilized, informants' perceptions of the effectiveness of using SNS, and advantages and disadvantages of social networking over other forms of communication with visitors. Due to the

physical distance, all of the interviews, which ranged from 20 minutes to one hour in length, with an average of a half hour, were conducted via telephone by the first author. With consent of the informants, the interviews were audio taped and transcribed by a trained research assistant. The transcripts were then reviewed by the first author and sent to each informant for confirmation to ensure accuracy in data analysis. After transcription, the first and second author analyzed the data independently and then worked together to compare, come to consensus, and finalize emergent themes, according to the procedure outlined by Spiggle (1994). In theme analysis, themes that emerged from the interviews were pieced together to form a comprehensive picture of the collective experiences of interviewees. According to Leininger (1985, 60), themes are identified by ‘bringing together components or fragments of ideas or experiences, which often are meaningless when viewed alone.’ Saturation was reached in the data analysis process, as ideas were reiterated by participants and were thoroughly explained (Corbin and Strauss 2008).

Results

Sample

A total of 12 museum staff participants were interviewed. Position titles included communication coordinator, director of communications, marketing consultant, director of marketing, public relations officer, communications manager, and marketing consultant. The majority of participants stated that their primary responsibilities included marketing, advertising, and public relations duties for their institutions. Three of the 12 participants specifically stated that developing and implementing SNS strategies was a part of his/her position description. Years of experience in the current position ranged from 1 to 10 with an average of 4 years (see Table 1). Pseudonyms were used for all participants and corresponding museums.

“Insert Table 1 About Here”

Utilization of SNS by Staff Members

Based on data from the 12 museum staff informants interviewed, the most frequently used forms of SNS were Facebook ($n=12$), Twitter ($n=11$), blogs ($n=10$), and YouTube ($n=7$). Others included FourSquare ($n=4$), Flickr ($n=4$), Vimeo ($n=3$), Pinterest ($n=2$), and Instagram ($n=1$) (see Table 1).

Eleven of the 12 participants posted museum information to Facebook multiple times per week. Within this group, six participants posted to Facebook at least once a day. Several institutions maintained numerous Facebook pages--a page for the museum and then separate pages for each event that the museum hosted--with cross-promotions between pages. Ten of the eleven participants who used Twitter tweeted information multiple times a week; seven participants sent tweets once a day, if not more frequently. With Twitter and Facebook applications available on cell phones and little need for advanced training, participants mentioned the ease of posting information to these networks. Several participants also mentioned that information prepared for various communication vehicles, such as the museum website and newsletters, was easily posted in a synchronous manner to Facebook and Twitter.

On the other hand, Youtube and blogs were less frequently updated. Participants commented that while they maintained these channels, new postings required people, equipment, and time for research and writing (e.g., a videographer to shoot video of exhibit installations and editing to post the information online). Thus, blogs and Youtube were less frequently utilized. Furthermore, blog posts were often written by the director or curator of the museum, even though his or her job responsibilities did not directly include this task, whereas Facebook and Twitter posts were frequently contributed by marketing and management staff.

Most participants stated that they were the sole managers of the content. However, they all welcomed ideas, suggestions, and information from other staff members. Several of the participants stated that interns often helped post information to Facebook and Twitter. Time spent updating information via SNS ranged from several hours a week to 35 hours a week and largely depended upon the staff members' other responsibilities and the number of people who contributed to the SNS posts. For example, Amanda was one of six people within her institution to contribute content to Twitter and Facebook. Amanda also served as Collections Manager for the 30,000 objects in her museums' permanent collection. Thus, she stated that she spent three hours a week on SNS. In contrast, Dana, a Marketing Consultant, who was in the position for less than one year, commented that her 'museum was trying to pull back the curtain for the museum so people can see behind the scenes.' This behind-the-scenes approach was achieved through interviewing docents (e.g., asking them why they became involved with the museum and what they liked best about the museum) and by engaging in conversations with emerging, less established artists in her museum's city. She spent upwards of 35 hours per work engaged in museum-related SNS and electronic forms of communication.

Even though some participants spent only a few minutes a day on SNS, several of them stressed the importance of checking the feeds every day to respond to posted questions and monitoring audience-posted information. Kendra, a Director of Communications, stated whereas some people might be hesitant to begin a Facebook or Twitter site for fear of negative comments, her museum's fans often responded to such comments and would 'come to our defense before we have to.' Kendra stressed that part of her responsibility was contacting those who stated a negative comment and making sure to quickly address a commenter's issues. Patricia, a Marketing and Communications Manager, used a desktop application to notify her when a new

post appeared so that she could respond in a timely manner; this way followers and fans would know ‘somebody’s home.’ Patricia said she wanted visitors to feel listened to and responded to: ‘When they make a comment and there’s no reply for a day - that’s not going to happen.’

Effectiveness of SNS Perceived by Staff Members

Effectiveness. When asked about the effectiveness of SNS, which was conceptualized as the ability of SNS to help museums to achieve their goals, participants stressed the financial benefits of using SNS. Using SNS is cost-effective for art museum staff members for marketing with limited financial resources. Whereas updating SNS took personnel time, all of the participants viewed it as free. Amanda stated succinctly, ‘you can’t turn your back on something that’s free and practical. Further, almost all of our peers are using it.’ In fact, the low cost of SNS was a primary reason for its use. According to Fiona,

We have about 4000 fans on Facebook and 400 followers on Twitter. So the fact that I can reach that many people with a free post, that’s pretty incredible considering what I would have to do to reach that many people with a postcard. I’d have to commission a designer, I’d have to have it printed, and I’d have to mail it out and all of this for probably \$5,000. So it is truly useful to a nonprofit.

Whereas each of the participants believed SNS helped them with their marketing and public relations goals when used properly, none had conducted formal surveys to assess the effectiveness of SNS in terms of marketing their museums. Participants tended to evaluate the success of SNS based on the number of fans or followers and the number of re-posts to other websites. According to Maren, ‘It’s always positive reinforcement when there’s a lot of people who like a post or share a post....So I take note of the posts that get shared and people respond positively to.’ Amanda commented that when her museum first used Facebook in 2007, an event that usually was attended by 250 people was attended by over 700. However, due to the flooded nature of Facebook with which organizations and brands compete for users attentions, Amanda doubted if Facebook remained as effective. She joked about the makeup of Facebook followers

who responded to recent posts: ‘There’s one staff member’s mom that kind of ‘likes’ everything.... So it’s like family members are following the staff... and then the really, really interested people.’ Despite Amanda’s concern that Facebook was not attracting new audience members, she remained convinced that it was a successful way to build awareness, especially since Facebook required zero advertising dollars.

Limitations of SNS. Whereas staff members saw SNS as an effective tool, limitations of SNS were also identified. According to several participants, direct soliciting was not allowed on Facebook therefore a varied marketing campaign for fundraising was needed. However, this was not necessarily considered a drawback. Fiona mentioned that her museum focused on membership and fundraising drives through newsletters and utilized Facebook to help visitors become ‘excited’ about the museum. Kendra also stated that direct financial requests via Facebook were not effective, that her audience responded better to indirect fundraising such as purchasing tickets for limited holiday-related tours.

The number of characters allowed by Twitter was also a stated challenge. According to Fiona, ‘I have to water down some of the content and I don’t use museum jargon as much. The word “acquisition” is really long, so I have to find another word, but acquisition is a very specific museum process...so I feel like I have to censor myself.’

Due to the limitations of Facebook (no direct solicitation allowed) and the character limitations of Twitter, many of the interviewees mentioned the need for multiple marketing approaches. Whereas many institutions synchronized the messages posted on Twitter with those on Facebook, some embraced the difference between Facebook and Twitter and developed complementary strategies for the various types of SNS. With Twitter’s character restriction, many museums used Twitter for information about things happening in the museums and/or in

the art community at that moment. Facebook was used to increase interaction and engagement or to relay more in-depth information to subscribers.

Several of the participants believed that the audience using their museum's SNS was primarily younger (25-34 years old) and female. While a younger audience is necessary for the future growth of museums, the older demographic must not be ignored. Many participants mentioned that older individuals comprised the bulk of their museum's annual donors and tended to be more philanthropically minded, but were not ardent SNS users. Robert, a Marketing Committee Head, provided an example of the problem of solely using Facebook to market an event. He stated, '[It] was a borderline failure, because I was overly reliant on Facebook. ... The only people who attended were people who were led there personally by a board member....I didn't do enough old-fashioned [marketing].'

When multiple marketing channels were utilized, however, participants such as Patricia stated the difficulty in maintaining 'one voice' and keeping the conversation 'casual and light but also professional.' Dana commented,

The hardest thing internally for us is to determine our voice because we are speaking to such different audiences and we're promoting, or trying to promote, very different things. Promoting an item we're selling in our store is a very different conversation than regarding an art critique. So, it's trying to figure out how we're speaking to our audience and making sure we're not going cross [-platform] like multiple personalities.

The Roles of SNS in Marketing

From interviews with museum staff it appeared that SNS played a variety of roles in museums' marketing efforts. Based on our analysis of the results, three distinct applications of SNS were identified: building awareness, engaging with the community, and networking.

Building Awareness. The participants indicated that use of SNS was effective for building visitor awareness of the diverse activities of the museum, providing behind-the-scenes tours, and serving as a memory-keeping device for past events. Participants utilized SNS to raise awareness

of both the museum's existence and its current events, especially among those visitors who were deemed 'interested and engaged.' When SNS were used to build awareness, communication was usually one-way: from the museum to the visitors, or from one visitor to other visitors. Abbie, a Communication Coordinator, and Valerie, a Communications Assistant, both stated that their museums used Facebook as an inexpensive way to advertise without the costly budgets required for print ads, radio, and television. Patricia commented that SNS helped keep her museum 'on the front and center of people's radar' and helped expose visitors to a wider range of activities that her museum offered. Terry, a Communications Manager, used Facebook to introduce people 'to the many different facets of the museum, not just our collection, but our conservation, performing arts, the things we do in the community, the staff, exhibitions, fundraising, and such. I see myself as a story teller and this is the medium to do it.' These statements provide examples of the ways in which SNS can build awareness for visitors about the diverse events, functions, and activities of a museum.

Engaging with the Community. Participants engaged individuals in their communities through creative interactive activities using SNS. Compared to the one-way messages from the museum to visitors used for building awareness, messages that were used to engage with the community involved two-way communication, encouraging visitors to respond to posts by museum staff and to exchange their thoughts with museum staff, other visitors, or their friends. Thus, the messages tended to be more creative, personal, and interactive. The importance of creativity for engaging the audience was stressed by Terry, 'I try to be diverse, so that you don't come to expect the same thing on our Twitter channel. The predictability, that doesn't increase engagement.' Caroline, a Director of Communications, also stated that SNS is 'not just a tool to

say--Here, we're having an event. Here's a link. ... But we've found people enjoy it better when there's something a little bit more creativity put into the wording or stuff like that. '

Maren, a Director of Marketing with 10 years experiences in her position, stated that when her museum was undergoing an expansion project, 'I posted photo albums, almost like a flip book, because we set up a tripod and took photos about every hour. Maybe a dozen photos each week so you can see it grow by flipping through the gallery of photos.' Her posts provided things 'our followers will not want to miss.' She added that the responses from visitors to her museum provided a 'good barometer of what people think of an exhibition.'

Although some staff interviewees mentioned the 140-character limitation of Twitter as a challenge when composing messages, Fiona, a Deputy Director of Administration used this feature of Twitter to her advantage. She stated that short and frequent Twitter posts helped promote the escapist experience of a museum and showed visitors the advantages of engaging with the museum: 'Through tiny tidbits [of information]...we're trying to promote [our museum]. We want to show everyday person that art is good for your life.'

Several participants included interactive SNS messages to further engage with the community and to involve visitors in the conversations. For example, Kendra's museum posted an 'object of the week' to Facebook, in which the curator wrote a short article about a lesser-known piece or artist, and an 'ask the curator' post, in which people could ask questions in real time to the curator. Her museum also ran a number of contests and promotions, such as a 10,000th fan giveaway and an online photo contest where people submitted photographs and fans voted for their favorites; the winners were then exhibited at the museum. Her museum even asked Facebook fans to title an exhibition. These methods of communication helped engage community members, thus building upon the tenets of relationship marketing.

Networking. The success of SNS relies on networks of people connecting with one another. Participants stressed the importance of SNS as a way to connect not only with visitors, but also with other external stakeholders. Through re-tweets and re-posts of information, participants used SNS as a channel for multi-way communication with other institutions, local bureaus, and artist associations.

Several participants mentioned learning from other institutions. After viewing other museums' posts on Twitter and Facebook, Amanda often thought 'Wow, that's a really cool idea, let's try that.' This brainstorming platform went a step further as her institution maintained an SNS communications group page that provided different curatorial departments the opportunity to swap ideas. She stated, 'I've never met anybody that's on that page in real life, but I know them all from that social media platform!'

Dana used Twitter as a promotional tool to engage the local artists. Dana shared information about artists' performances and newsworthy events, such as awards or prizes, thus building camaraderie between the artists and the institution. She stated that SNS provided her institution the opportunity to have conversations with a variety of audiences beyond the four walls of the museum regarding art critique and art movements, which also strengthened the name-recognition of her facility among other institutions and artists.

Recommendations Suggested by Staff Members. Abbie suggested that, before embarking on an SNS strategy, a formal plan of both short-term and long-term goals should be developed to enhance SNS effectiveness. She recommended overarching technology to ease the workload of SNS maintenance, specifically HootSuite, which manages Twitter, Facebook, LinkedIn, GooglePlus Pages, MySpace, and FourSquare. Dana also indicated the importance of a

formal strategic plan, ‘It’s very easy to look like you’re jumping on the bandwagon without a real purpose or strategy in place.... [But you have to ask yourself] Is it right for us?’

Although few participants indicated that they included SNS in a formal marketing plan that specified defined goals, strategies, and implementation and assessment plans, several participants suggested establishing general procedures for using SNS in order to help staff save time. Amanda, whose institute was housed in a university, was able to plan a semester’s worth of posts around events, and HootSuite automatically populated the Twitter and Facebook pages.

While many staff members indicated that they used the number of ‘likes’ or followers and the visitors’ comments as indicators of SNS success, some staff respondents stated that information gathered from SNS needs to be assessed with a degree of skepticism. According to Dana, ‘Just because one person screams the loudest doesn't mean we're going to change everything.’ When museums use SNS polls to inform decisions, staff members must consider that these polls represent only part of their visitor population. Moreover, the data gathering and results analyses of SNS polls are often performed without attention to rigorous marketing research methods.

Conclusions

An Affordable and Creative Opportunity with Overlooked Costs

The first research question of this study asked how art museum staff members utilized SNS. The results showed that the use of SNS was commonplace and was perceived as being effective. Despite the reported advantages of the low cost associated with SNS usage, unrecognized expenses could undermine these benefits. Although SNS tools are free and flexible, time and personnel are needed to constantly update and manage the posts in order to fully utilize SNS. Participants in this study spent from 3 to 35 hours per week on these tasks. Each participant

stated that the job of updating SNS needed to be balanced with other commitments, which limited the time and personnel available for these tasks. Furthermore, several participants indicated that SNS tools are still evolving and require time to learn a trial-and-error approach to find the best practices of SNS that worked for their team and their audiences. This also places extra demands on time and personnel. These hidden costs of using SNS need to be considered in light of the apparent low cost of obtaining such services.

Maintaining an art museum's SNS presence requires a person with strong knowledge of art, excellent communication skills, marketing experience, and someone who is comfortable with SNS technologies—a complicated blend of skills and experience. For example, Dana's museum recently hired an SNS coordinator to oversee the SNS presence. She commented, 'It's been a very difficult position to hire for because it's a hybrid.' Despite the complex requirements for maintaining an SNS presence, museum SNS were often updated by staff with diverse job titles and responsibilities, including collections management, public relations, and public programming. As museums increasingly rely on SNS, museum management needs to re-examine their organizational structure to take account of work responsibilities related to managing SNS. For example, a larger museum may consider hiring a new employee who specializes in SNS marketing, while a smaller museum may consider holding marketing directors accountable for strategic planning, with implementation left to volunteers or interns.

The second research question generated art museum staff members' perceptions of the effectiveness of SNS. Most participants considered the use of SNS to be an affordable opportunity. According to participants, the use of SNS helped them reach a broader and larger audience in a way that, if done through other marketing methods, would consume a large portion of their budget. In addition to the low cost, SNS allowed museums to build relationships by

communicating with the audience frequently and in a casual, fun, and creative way. For example, Maren stressed the ephemeral quality of SNS as a plus. She stated, 'It can be a little more impulsive; it can be a little more fun. It comes and goes very quickly. You don't have to be too smart about it; it's very flexible in that way.' The flexibility of SNS offered an opportunity for the museums to communicate with their audience in a more informal manner than traditional newsletters, brochures, or blogs. In turn, the museums were rewarded with enhanced communication and the potential for new museum-visitor relationships. However, few museums have formally assessed the impact of SNS on museum management and museum-visitor relationships.

Several participants expressed concerns regarding the primarily youthful audience of SNS. Although this might not be considered a 'cost' to museum staff, this concern may have limited the ways that museum staff used SNS. However, according to a 2011 report conducted by SocialMediaToday.com, 36% of Facebook users are 35 to 64 years old (Burbary 2011). Therefore, art museum staff need not limit their marketing strategies based on the belief that SNS strategies reach only a younger audience.

Strategies for Cultivating Relationships Using SNS

The third research question asked about the role of SNS in art museum marketing. The findings revealed that participants used SNS for three major outcomes: building awareness, engaging with the community, and networking. Most participants viewed SNS as a helpful tool for marketing; however, few indicated that SNS was included in their marketing strategic planning or was formally evaluated for its effectiveness at fulfilling marketing goals and establishing relationships with visitors.

As suggested by Kotler and Kotler (2000), strategic planning is especially important for museums in order to allocate resources for achieving goals. With respect to art museum marketing, SNS may play a pivotal role in forging linkages among visitors, employees, and external stakeholders such as other museums, art communities, and local bureaus. Two participants in the present study recommended that art museum staff should set long-term and short-term goals and partake in formal strategic planning centered on the use of SNS. The ever-changing nature of SNS and the Internet environment provide further evidence of the critical need for strategic planning.

Based on our results from data analysis, marketing literature for art museums, and relationship marketing literature, three strategies were developed for cultivating relationships using SNS: awareness, comprehension, and engagement (see Table 2). These strategies are developed to bolster the current SNS applications identified from interviews with specific goals, required resources, implementations, and expected outcomes (Anderson, 1982). These strategies may potentially increase contact with visitors, and enhance visitor satisfaction and perceived benefits. All of which are essential for successful relationship marketing (Arnett, German, and Hunt 2003; Camarero and Garrido 2011), an important marketing strategy for art museums (Rentschler and Radbourne 2008; Chong 2007).

“Insert Table 2 About Here”

The first strategy, *Awareness*, focuses on raising awareness among the audience and initiating relationships by posting basic information about the exhibitions and museums via different SNS. The awareness strategy aims to not only keep museums at the forefront of existing visitors' minds, but also to increase the volume and diversity of the audience. Posts related to the awareness strategy need minimal maintenance, as they are time-limited and relate to specific

events, exhibits, and workshops. This strategy requires that staff members be skilled in the basics of using SNS, which can be achieved through online tools and offline workshops.

When creating content for the awareness strategies, staff members must pay attention to how information can be passed on, and how they wish the information to be distributed, particularly when cross-posting content to different SNS. For example, museum staff members may first post the events information on Facebook fanpages or Twitter feeds where the largest number of followers may be found, then cross-post the messages to other SNS. However, staff members should keep in mind that many SNS, such as Instagram and Pinterest, are image-oriented services and are most suitable when the content is simple, short, and includes images. Cross-posting Facebook messages to Pinterest may not produce the best possible results. As such posts do not tend to stimulate discussion among users. The awareness strategy outcomes are often short-term in nature and can be measured by visitorship to a specific exhibit or by polling visitors as to the source of information about the event.

The second strategy, *comprehension*, aims to enhance visitor understanding and knowledge of a museum's purpose, collections, and facilities in order to strengthen existing museum-visitor relationships. The comprehension strategy reinforces the message by focusing on a few SNS or integrating different SNS (e.g., embedding Instagram posts in Facebook). For example, rich media such as videos and picture galleries can be used in combination with Facebook or blogs to enrich the audience experience; these SNS are generally friendlier to visitors and can easily handle mixed-media content.

The implementation of the comprehension strategy relies heavily on staff knowledge of art and may include contributions from various museum staff members, such as the curator, collections manager, and videographer. The use of rich media requires additional time, money,

and more advanced SNS skills and knowledge. The outcomes of this strategy may include increased visitor understanding of a museum's purpose, which may lead to increased feelings of belonging and possible donations to the museum.

The third SNS marketing strategy is *engagement*. The engagement strategy entails conversation between visitors and museum staff, as well as among visitors, in order to sustain and nurture museum-visitor relationships. The expected outcome of this strategy is the development of a sense of community, where visitors are motivated to share information within their personal network and to maintain interest in the museum website. The SNS techniques involved in this strategy can be as simple as posting questions to the audience on Facebook or as extensive as creating a picture contest.

To implement this strategy effectively, staff members should embrace the characteristics of different SNS and use these differences to their advantage. For example, Twitter is suitable for spreading small amounts of information that may be time-sensitive, such as events of the day, exclusive offers from the museum store, or a special tour of the exhibition, as the format of Twitter messages is close to that of a text message. On the other hand, Facebook is suitable for longer, richer, and more conversational information. The engagement strategy may strengthen the identity of the museum by using interactive and creative messages broadcasted with a consistent 'voice' across different SNS channels. Thus, the engagement strategy requires that staff have the necessary knowledge, skills, and creativity for successful implementation. It also requires the constant attention of staff to visitor responses on SNS in order to encourage communication, correct erroneous information, and build a sense of personal connectedness between museum staff members and visitors.

The three recommended strategies highlight essential factors for successful relationship marketing, such as increasing visitor participation and enhancing the reciprocity of the museum-visitor relationship (Arnett et al. 2003), and can ultimately help art museums achieve the goal of improving quality of life for their visitors. However, museums must consider which strategies best suit their missions, their overall marketing and promotional goals, as well as the time, skill set, and interest of current museum employees.

Limitations and Future Studies

By collecting data from a specific region, the Midwestern United States, researchers were able to focus on one geographic region, where it might be expected that participating museums face the same challenges and limitations. However, this limited sample size and the number of influential variables that could be considered. Future studies that explore the entire United States may provide a better understanding of the impact of regional culture, funding sources, SNS-dedicated staff positions, and art museum size on the utilization of SNS and its effectiveness.

In addition, this study examined the roles of SNS in marketing art museums from the perspectives of museum staff members who are responsible for managing the museums' SNS presence. There might be bias among the participants due to their different position titles, job responsibilities, available resources, and skills of using SNS. Future studies may consider including these factors as well as empirically examining the effectiveness of using SNS in marketing art museums from the perspectives of museum visitors and local communities. Other topics for future studies include whether the existence of a membership program affects the relationships established via SNS and whether there are appropriate posting frequencies for achieving specific results, such as an increase in visitorship or financial donations. The

development of measurement tools for assessing the marketing success of SNS strategies is also an important avenue for future research.

Finally, it is noteworthy that SNS are rapidly changing. For instance, Facebook and Twitter have existed for several years, but both have slightly improved their services with new functions. There are also new SNS available each year. This study provides a snapshot of how museums staff members utilize SNS in their efforts of marketing and suggests the importance of strategic planning in such an evolving environment. For future research, case studies that examine the dynamics of museum-visitor relationships longitudinally might be able to provide more detailed information about effective SNS strategies.

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Table 1. Participant Description*

Name	Position Title	Major Responsibilities	Years Experience^a	Museum Size (used staff size as a proxy)	SNS used in the museum	Facebook/Twitter Followers^b
Abbie	Communication Coordinator	Marketing, advertising, and public relations.	4 years	12	Facebook, Twitter, Blog, Youtube,	2,001 (since 2009)/1,002 (since 2010)
Amanda	Collections Manager and Communications Coordinator	Manage the 30,000 objects in the collection and marketing, advertising, and public relations for the museum.	8 years	6	Facebook, Twitter, Blog, Youtube, Foursquare, Pinterest, Instagram	1,280 (since 2008 or 2009)/1,683 (since 2008 or 2009)
Caroline	Director of Communication	Oversee the museum's marketing and public relations efforts.	6 years	23	Facebook, Twitter, Blog, Flickr, Vimeo	1,929 (since 2009)/936 (since 2011)
Dana	Marketing Consultant	Oversee all communication efforts regarding the promotion of the museum.	1 year	38	Facebook, Twitter, Youtube, Foursquare, Flickr, Vimeo	31,114 (since 2007)/ 9,636 (since 2007)
Fiona	Deputy Director of Administration	Supervisor to half of the departments in the museum, oversee public programming, and grant writing	2.5 years	16	Facebook, Twitter, Blog, Youtube,	3,390 (since 2007)/297 (since 2007)

Kendra	Director of Communications	Marketing, public relations, media relations, website and social media, general membership, and graphic design	3 years	Not available	Facebook, Twitter, Blog, Youtube, Flickr	32,568 (since 2009)/9,835 (since 2009)
Maren	Director of Marketing	Marketing and public relations	10 years	7	Facebook, Twitter, Blog, Flickr, Vimeo	2,157 (since 2009 or 2010)/28 (since 2009 or 2010)
Nancy	Public Relations Officer	Marketing, communications, and public relations for the museum.	1 year	15	Facebook, Blog	2,914 (since 2010)/ not available
Patricia	Marketing and Communications Manager	Marketing, communications, and public relations for the museum	2 years	Not available	Facebook, Twitter, Blog	1,442 (since 2009)/1,430 (not available)
Robert	Marketing Committee Head	Volunteer position responsible for marketing of the museum	2 years	19	Facebook, Twitter,	1,105 (since 2010)/ not actively used
Terry	Communications Manager	Developing and implementing the social media strategy for the museum	3 years	44	Facebook, Twitter, Blog, Youtube,	23,356 (since 2010)/12,265 (since 2010)
Valerie	Communications Assistant	Social media, digital presence, and member magazine	1 year	29	Facebook, Twitter, Blog, Youtube,	3,831 (since 2008)/12,056 (since 2009)

^a Indicates the number of years that the staff participant has held the position when this study was conducted.

^b Indicates number of people who ‘liked’ the museums’ fanpage and number of people who followed the museums’ tweets when the study was conducted. The number in the parentheses indicate the year the museum started to use the SNS, according to the staff member interviewed.

* Pseudonyms used throughout the manuscript.

Table 2. Strategies for Cultivating Relationships

Marketing strategy/description	SNS Techniques	Expected outcome	Resources Needed
Awareness- Keeping the museum and the exhibitions on top of the audience' mind.	Posting basic information about events and exhibitions across channels.	Short-term increase in number of attendees of events and exhibitions. Increase the visibility of the museum.	Time for routine posting information.
Comprehension- Enhancing the audience' understanding of the museums and the arts.	Posting in various formats to enhance and enrich information about the events, exhibitions, and museum. For instance, behind the scene video stories, pictures of events, and special topics by curators.	Deepen visitors' understanding of the museums and the art collections. Solidify museum brand identity.	Cross-departmental collaborations. Time to compose and edit information. Strong knowledge of art.
Engagement- Generating conversations. Creating a sense of community.	Posting conversation-generating questions. Creating interactive contests.	Increase positive word-of-mouth on SNS, such as number of shares and number of likes.	Creativity. Staff's constant attention. Prompting responses.

Appendix – Semi-Structured Interview Questions

Demographic Questions

1. Please describe your current job title and responsibilities.
2. How long have you been in this current role?
3. Please describe your education and career path to your current position.

Experiences Using Social Network Services

4. Do you use the following social network services in your museum: Twitter, Facebook, Blogs, Email Blasts?
5. What other social media or social network services do you use in your museum: FourSquare, Youtube, or Pinterest?
6. For how long have you been using these services?
7. How often do you update/send information through: Twitter, Facebook, Blogs, Email Blasts?
8. Do you alone contribute information sent through these services or is it a team effort? Who else contributes information?
9. How many hours per day or how many hours per week do you or your team spend on updating the content on the social network services?
10. What are the purposes for using Twitter, Facebook, Blogs, Email Blasts? For example,
 - How do you use them to promote new exhibits?
 - Engage relationships with members?
 - Draw new visitors?
 - Do you use them to educate members/visitors? How so?
 - Do you solicit financial donations through these services? If so, how effective have these campaigns been?
11. What are the unique advantages of the following social network services: Twitter, Facebook, Blogs, Email Blasts?
12. What are unique disadvantages of the following social network services: Twitter, Facebook, Blogs, Email Blasts?
13. Have you ever surveyed or tracked members/visitors experiences using the social network services?
14. Do you feel the social network services are useful for your museum? If so, in what ways?
15. Are there any other comments that you would like to share?