

What, Why and How Are You Posting?
A Qualitative and Quantitative Study of Facebook and Blog Posts
of Four Art Museums

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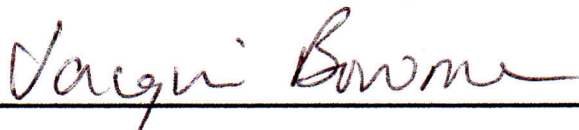
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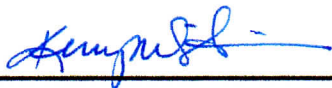
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Abstract:

How and to what purpose are non-profit institutions using social media channels? To what extent are they supporting their missions and how are they portraying themselves to their online patrons through their social media posts? This paper examines quantitative and qualitative data collected over a three-month period to create an observational profile of the social media practices of four case study museums: the Museum of Modern Art (MoMA), the Art Institute of Chicago (AIC), the Indianapolis Museum of Art (IMA), and the Seattle Art Museum (SAM). This study collected data on Facebook and blog posts' topic, authors or contributing voices, perceived purpose, engagement techniques, and interactions. This data is used in a discussion of the museums' social media practices to examine if posts might be perceived as both mission-driven and participatory over an extended period of time. From an outside perspective, each museum illustrated varying degrees of success. MoMA primarily used both their Facebook page and blog to share information on artists and their collections. AIC also primarily used their Facebook page and blog to post information on artists and their collections, however, these posts showed a strong intent of marketing to readers. This is in opposition to their blog that showed a dominant purpose of sharing information and resources. Neither MoMA nor AIC demonstrated a clear intent in either application to regularly engage with substantive comments or to answer direct questions. IMA and SAM used their Facebook pages to primarily post information on special events with the intent to market or drive attendance. However, IMA and SAM showed much higher rates of engagement with online patron comments and questions than either MoMA or AIC. Beyond the guidance of a mission statement, non-profit institutions should determine institution-specific criteria by which they measure their success in social media. However, this work suggests that in addition to self-set criteria, non-profits should take a long-term view of their use of social media that considers these applications as public relations tools through which a museum can share, educate, and hold conversations with their online patrons.

Searchable Terms: social media, Facebook, blog, art museum, non-profit

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Introduction

Social media is good and powerful. Social media is bad and useless. Neither of these statements is essentially true. Social media is what you make of it. For non-profits that have already embraced the use of blogs, Facebook, Twitter, and other forms of social media to communicate with their readers, fans, and followers the most essential questions should be how and to what purpose these communication channels are being used and how public perception of the institution, specific to the media, may be formed through these efforts. Just as there are numerous social media applications, there are numerous types of non-profit institutions. This thesis will focus specifically on four fine art museums and whether their social media communications are being used to support their missions while also taking advantage of the inherent capabilities of the media to foster discussions. At the heart of all art museums' missions is the presentation and interpretation for the public of the collections they hold in trust. Their communication practices should reflect this purpose. At the same time, the unique nature of social media presents institutions and their online patrons with the prospect of moving beyond the passive consumption of information to a more active opportunity where views can be exchanged, experiences can be shared, discussions can be fostered, and questions can be answered. Are art museums using social media to share information on their collections and exhibitions? What is the perceived intent of a post? Are they taking advantage of the inherent nature of social media to engage and interact with the public? How are the expert voices from within a museum leveraged in creating social media communications that enhance readers understanding of art-related topics? Data from a three-month qualitative and quantitative study of the Facebook and blog posts of the Museum of

Modern Art, the Art Institute of Chicago, the Indianapolis Museum of Art, and the Seattle Art Museum will assist in answering these questions. Simply put, the primary goal of this paper is to see what, why, and how the museums in this study are using their Facebook pages and blogs to communicate with their online patrons and the possible affects this may have on their followers and readers.

The existing body of scholarly research and discussions on the use of social media in non-profit institutions covers a broad range of issues. Among the topics that are often examined include the concept of authority and radical trust, practices through which institutions can engage staff in gathering content, how to build and manage projects that invite the participation of patrons in Web 2.0 projects, and profiles that group and define the different levels of digital participation. The concept of authority focuses on how social media opens the production of cultural knowledge to the uninformed and how this could be seen as a degradation of the authority of an institution as the sole producer of knowledge and research. Researchers such as Matthew MacArthur and Lynda Kelly note by ultimately dismiss this concept in their writings noting that museums can help guide and control online conversations and that although online patrons may be laymen, they should be trusted to responsibly contribute to topics they are passionate about. Beyond the theoretical concept of authority numerous conversations touch upon the practical ways in which non-profits might form an internal culture where all levels of staff and leadership contributes to and respects social media. These conversations range from broad discussions on fostering an institutional culture that considers social media as a valuable component of the larger communication strategy to ones that tackle the minutia

of making this culture a reality.¹ Moving to the consideration of the participation of online patrons, researchers such as Nina Simon discuss and study projects that both actively seek participation while also contributing to the themes and content of exhibitions and collections. Common to the majority of these valuable discussions was a short-term view of social media that used anecdotal observations that assumed non-profits were focused on not only presenting art-related, mission driven information but also that institutions were indeed responding and participating with patrons in online environments. In addition to leveraging the existing body of knowledge, this paper hopes to contribute to and expand upon the social media conversation by examining these assumptions through long-term observations as well by as taking the perspective of the online patron rather than that of the institution. Also adding to the conversation is a particular focus on the topics of social media posts and the intent of the post.

First and foremost, what is social media? Social media is a word casually used, often without a clear understanding of the definition. Understanding the characteristics of social media is key as new applications appear and evolve. For-profit media theory researchers Andreas M. Kaplan and Michael Haenlein identify the key characteristics of social media in terms of “social presence” and “media richness.” Social media can be identified and categorized by both the level that it allows a user to represent themselves and the various forms of media that are used in said representation. The lynchpin of Kaplan and Haenlein’s classification system is the possibility of exchange. Exchange represents an active circulation of information through text, images, audio, or visuals in a manner that allows other users to read, listen, view, and comment on content. Social

¹ Examples include the writings of Matthew MacArthur, Dana Allen-Greil, Susan Herring, and the various voices cited in the Museum-L listserv exchange. This will be discussed in more depth later in the paper.

media is not only a place where one can self-identify through the information one chooses to share but is also a platform that allows others to respond to this information in a conversational format. Important in this definition of social media is not only how the museums in this study self-identify but also the mechanisms that allow online patrons to respond to this content. How are museums choosing to identify themselves, by what means, and are posts active in nature with a healthy exchange of information? Determining this is key in creating quality social media communications.

A great deal of time and effort has been invested in research to determine how visitors experience the museum in-person through visitor surveys, education theory, and visitor motivation profiles with relatively little effort extended to how museums are using social media to fulfill their missions and on how online patrons interact with museums through the media. With the ubiquitous nature of certain social media applications such as Twitter, Facebook, and YouTube, a stronger focus on how and why museums are using social media seems pressing. The body of research on non-profit use of social media is ever growing but tends to lean towards short-term, anecdotal observations of single social media exchanges or research dedicated to an examination of how resources and practices can be utilized in building social media communications. Although this information is of great value, how might a study over an extended period of time, a study that focuses on content, the perceived purpose of that content, and the levels of engagement with a museum's online patrons benefit the discussion?

One of the greatest advantages of social media is the speed at which an institution can reach the public. Gone are the days in which a print campaign or a website update are the only channels by which non-profits can reach interested parties. Social media

channels offer the opportunity to communicate with unprecedented ease and speed. However, the benefit of speed and ease may be a trap that ensnares institutions that focus on an immediate need while failing to plan for a long-term strategy. When social media communications are examined over an extended period of time what is the cumulative affect of these communications on the public's perception of the institution? For example, social media administrators may be posting quick bits of information that markets events more regularly than posts that educate readers on the museum's collections without realizing the impact on readers. Building consistent, engaging, and mission driven social media communication strategies requires museums to examine their behaviors beyond the day-to-day of regular social media posts.

Social media communications and projects that are both mission driven and participatory should be the goal of any long-term social media strategy. Just as practices within a museum's walls should be driven by the mission so should the communications and projects that a museum undertakes in online environments. Brisk, last minute, or off-the-cuff social media posts may degrade the mission driven purpose of sharing and educating the public about art and artists. In discussing the evaluation of projects within a museum, The American Association of Museums states,

“[The] principle question guiding any assessment of a museum, whether by the public, media, funders, accreditation reviewers or others, is whether it is successfully meeting its mission. Since a museum has selected its own mission, it has chosen for itself the principle benchmark by which it will be evaluated.”²

² Elizabeth E. Merritt. *National Standards and Best Practices for U.S. Museums*. Washington, DC: American Association of Museums, 2008. Print.

One might easily argue that the most direct way to fulfill a mission in an online environment is to mirror in-person experiences at a museum. An in-person visit is generally focused on a museum's collections and exhibitions – although, of course, social events and activities are also a motivating factor for some patrons. Regardless, a visit to an art museum is about art in one-way or another. Onsite patrons at art museums are also online patrons interested in art and artists. Social media can be used to excite and enhance this interest. Recent debates in articles and workshops have begun to question the validity of mission statements. It is not the intention of this paper to enter this particular argument. The assumption is that the spirit of a museum's mission should guide all projects including social media posts and that an art museum's mission, at its most superficial interpretation, is associated with the presentation and dissemination of art and artist related information.

The perception of the art museum as an institution of culture and learning that is dedicated to sharing art-focused information may be a given for in-person interactions but with the mediator of a computer screen, this perception may change over time with the information a museum chooses to share. It should be strongly noted, that a museum's onsite patrons are also their online patrons using both websites and social media to inform their visits. A 2008 study by the Institute of Museum and Library Services (IMLS) found that of those surveyed 90% of online visitors are also in-person visitors and that "[r]emote visits to museums are used more than in-person visits to support or extend formal [education]".³ The IMLS findings indicate that online patrons are not only visiting museums in-person but they are also using the Internet to inform their

³ Dr. José-Marie Griffiths, and Donald W. King. *The IMLS National Study on the Use of Libraries, Museums and the Internet*. Rep. Institute of Museum and Library Services, 28 Feb. 2008. Web. 10 Mar. 2012. <<http://interconnectionsreport.org/reports/ConclusionsSummaryFinalB.pdf>>.

educational experiences pre- and post-visit. In addition, research from the PEW Internet & American Life Project indicates that 65% of American adults who use the Internet participate in social networking sites (SNS) and that, of this group, 43% visit their preferred SNS daily.⁴ When including teenagers, who are indeed an art museum's potential online patrons, the participation and frequency statistics grow even larger. Considering that patrons are using online information for educational purposes and that they have arguably more frequent contact with a museum through social networking sites versus in-person visits a close study and calibration of social media communications seems judicious.

In addition to mission driven social media communications that can enhance in-person visits to a museum, it is important to consider the purpose of a communication. How might an online patron reading, commenting, and possibly contributing to a post perceive the intent of the information that is being shared? The language used to present content should be carefully examined. Do online patrons feel that a museum is regularly attempting to influence their behavior and choices with marketing-based messages? Is the institution extending their mission by presenting and interpreting their collections on micro and macro levels? Is social media an interpretive tool, a marketing tool, or a healthy mix of both? Striking a balance between important marketing focused messages and messages that present, educate, and interpret art-focused information and resources should be sought in an attempt to manage the public perception of an art museum in social media.

⁴ "65% of Online Adults Use Social Networking Sites." PEW Internet & American Life Project, 26 Aug. 2011. Web. 10 Mar. 2012. <<http://www.pewinternet.org/Reports/2011/Social-Networking-Sites/Report/Part-1.aspx>>.

What you say and how you say it in social media should be a focus and in turn so should the level of engagement with online patrons. The ability of staff to engage with online patrons through social media applications offers an unprecedented opportunity for all departments and voices within a museum to share their knowledge and to foster a participatory atmosphere. An extended study of social media communications may help institutions to recognize the level to which they embrace the opportunity to converse with their online patrons. Are posts monitored for comments, questions and opportunities to engage with online patrons? Is the museum using social media platforms similar to more traditional online communication channels where posts are unidirectional with information pushed to readers? Would a museum ignore an onsite patron who asked a question? Would they ignore an insight made by a patron in a gallery by walking away?

There are numerous services, companies, and software packages⁵ that can supply museums and other non-profit organizations with analytics information about Impressions, Engagement Rates, Response Rates, and any number of statistics that help to quantify social media activities. Although this data is beneficial in assessing social media practices, it cannot provide museums with the a breakdown of their success in serving their mission through the type of information they choose to post, how posts may affect the public perception of the museum, and the nature of their engagement with online patrons. Beyond analytics, beyond the simple numbers of fans and comments, how are museums supporting their missions and what is the possible accumulative public perception of an institution formed through a social media post's content and purpose?

⁵ A few examples of services that provide social media analytics services are HootSuite, Tap11, SPSS Modeler, and Social Media Monitor. Facebook itself has an analytics function and blogs can be measured to some extent through GoogleAnalytics.

The goal of this study is to examine these areas from a user perspective through a 3-month profile of topic focus, contributing voices, perceived purposes, engagement techniques, and online patron comments. The purpose of examining these data points is to help museums and other non-profits to recognize the characteristics of their social media communication practices and to possibly to recalibrate their efforts if areas that might benefit from improvement are identified. cursory observations of each of the case study museums from the perspective of the online patron may vary on a day-to-day basis but how might these same patrons consider a museum when reading and participating in their posts over months or even years? Longer-term information on social media posts can only assist non-profits in on developing social media communications and practices that are both mission-focused and participatory.

Methodology: Design, Sampling, Collection, and Analysis

The museums in this study include the Museum of Modern Art (MoMA), the Indianapolis Museum of Art (IMA), the Art Institute of Chicago (AIC), and the Seattle Art Museum (SAM). These museums were chosen based on a number of factors including attendance, operating budget, collection scope, and geographic location. MoMA and AIC were chosen as two large-scale museums while IMA and SAM were chosen as the corresponding mid-size museums. MoMA and AIC were chosen as large, tourism driven institutions with large yearly attendance numbers and operating budgets. MoMA reported their 2010 attendance at 2,219,554⁶ and an operating budget of

⁶ *The Official Museum Directory 2010*. New Providence, NJ: National Register, 2009. Print.

\$153,854,000.⁷ AIC reported smaller 2010 attendance numbers of 1,395,285⁸ but had a larger operating budget of \$202,709,000.⁹ IMA and SAM were chosen as relatively smaller institutions and more focused on their local audiences. In 2010 IMA reported attendance of 462,000¹⁰ and an operating budget of \$29,069,000¹¹, while SAM estimated 2010 attendance to be 500,000¹² with the last publicly reported operating budget totaling \$18,645,283.¹³

The institutions in the study were selected for the opportunities to compare and contrast the communication profiles and tactics of each. Does more money and more staff allow a museum to better engage the various voices of expertise in crafting post content? Might additional staff allow for more consistent monitoring and engagement with online patrons? Would SAM with a smaller operating budget be less successful than MoMA? Does a museum's onsite audience profile affect its online communications? For example, does a tourism based onsite audience affect the content focus of posts? Why talk about events when your patrons are generally from out of town locations? Although each institution in this study is unique, a point of commonality between the four museums is their art-based collections. Each museum's collections, although vastly different in

⁷ The Museum of Modern Art. *Consolidated Statements of Unrestricted Revenues, Expenses and Changes in Unrestricted Net Assets*. New York, NY: The Museum of Modern Art, 2010. The Museum of Modern Art. Web. 03 Feb. 2012. <<http://www.moma.org/docs/about/MoMAFY10.pdf>>.

⁸ *The Official Museum Directory 2010*. New Providence, NJ: National Register, 2009. Print.

⁹ The Art Institute of Chicago. *Consolidated Financial Statements as of and for the Years Ended June 30, 2010 and 2009, and Independent Auditors' Report*. Chicago, IL: The Art Institute of Chicago, 2010. The Art Institute of Chicago. Web. 03 Feb. 2012 <http://www.artic.edu/aic/aboutus/fy10_fs.pdf>.

¹⁰ Ibid

¹¹ The Indianapolis Museum of Art. *Accountants' Report and Consolidated Financial Statements*. Indianapolis, IN: The Indianapolis Museum of Art, 2010. *The Indianapolis Museum of Art*. Web. 03 Feb. 2012. <<http://www.imamuseum.org/sites/default/files/IMA%20Audited%20Financials%2009-10.pdf>>.

¹² *The Official Museum Directory 2010*. New Providence, NJ: National Register, 2009. Print.

¹³ The Seattle Art Museum. *Annual Report*. Seattle, WA: The Seattle Art Museum, 2008. The Seattle Art Museum. Web. 03 Feb. 2012. <<http://www.seattleartmuseum.org/aboutus/pdfs/2008AnnualReport/FY08AnnualReport.pdf>>.

number of objects and exhibition scope are broad in nature, thereby offering each the ability to focus on a variety of art-focused communications.

This study focuses on two social media applications: Facebook Fan¹⁴ pages and museum website hosted blogs. Both Facebook and blogs allow for social presence and media richness. Facebook represents a micro-blogging atmosphere in which the length of the communication is limited by the nature of the application. Word count is limited as well as the ability to incorporate various media. Facebook is often referred to as micro-blogging, implying its relation to a blog while noting its limitations. This is in contrast to a blog where a museum can dive deeper into a topic with unlimited amounts of text, images, and videos. Each museum in the study has a presence on a number of social media and Web 2.0 applications, however this study is limited in scope to the comparable, yet different, applications of Facebook and blog posts. By focusing on Facebook and blogs a comparison of short-format and long-format posts are possible and whether the nature of each application might affect the post content and purpose.

With the museums and social media applications determined, the design of the final data collection instrument evolved over a 6-week period. Informal observation of the Facebook Fan pages and blogs of seven art museums was conducted over two weeks. In the course of this observation period, it became clear that two distinct sets of qualitative and quantitative data would need to be collected. Data would need to be collected on not only what, how, and to what purpose the museums chose to post content and reply to comments and questions (Museum Generated Content) but also information on the comments, questions, and observations of how online patrons responded to the

¹⁴ A Fan page differs from a personal account in that it represents an institution, company, or person of note. These pages aren't necessarily used to communicate with friends and families by "fans."

museum and to each other (Online Patron Comments and Interaction). A coding system was created for topics, dominant purposes, and all other qualitative data points that were recorded on a standardized data collection instrument. Definitions were created for all topics and purposes to be utilized during the data collection period to ensure reliable and consistent coding.¹⁵ All definitions and sample coding scenarios were reviewed by Anne Mannix and Jessica Novak of the Baltimore Museum of Art's (BMA) Marketing Department and improved according to their suggestions. The instrument and coding system was then used to collect information on over a four-week period on the Facebook pages and blog posts of seven art museums. This data was used to help the BMA to identify appropriate benchmarks for their own social media communications.

At the end of the 4-week project for the BMA, revisions were made to the instrument and coding system as deemed necessary. The revised instrument and coding system was then used in the data collection for the case study museums examined here. Data on the Facebook and blog posts were collected in two separate Excel files. Only minor variations exist between the two instruments to account for the nature of each application. For example, "likes" on Facebook were recorded but this is not a data point that can be collected for blog entries.

Facebook and blog posts for the museums in this case study were collected over a three-month period beginning June 1, 2011 and ending August 31, 2011. In order to record as many comments as possible, posts were coded in bulk rather than on a daily basis. Pre-testing revealed that comments from both online patrons and the museum happened over an extended period of time, days for Facebook and often several weeks for the longer lifecycle blog posts. Screen captures of each post and accompanying

¹⁵ Please see appendix for all definition lists.

comments were linked in the Excel file as a general reference and to ensure that any discrepancies in the data could be corrected during the data cleansing process.

A total of 46 data points were collected for each post. Quantitative data collected about each post generated by the museum included: the date and time of post; the author or staff mentioned in the post content; the number of hyperlinks in each post; where hyperlinks led; the number of images and their subjects included in all posts; and if the post requested a response or opinion from the museum's online patrons. Quantitative data from the perspective of the online patron include: total likes; total comments; if their post was a comment or a question; the name, time, and content of their comments; and if a fellow online patron and/or the museum responded. Qualitative data collected on posts from the museum perspective included: primary topic and dominant purpose of the post. All of the data collected will not be used; only a select amount of data will be used to profile each museum in this study,

Topics of posts were collected to determine if the museums in the study were posting art-focused, mission driven information. The dominant purpose of a post was collected to identify if the museums in the study were using their Facebook and blog posts as vehicles to market or advertise, to share information or resources, to educate with didactic information, to survey their online patrons, or if the posts took the opportunity to express their thanks for a particular reason. No one purpose is weighted with more importance than the other. In the analysis, a didactic post is not treated with more important than a marketing post. The purpose of collecting the perceived intent is to help determine if a balance is struck between using social media as a marketing tool and a

place to where knowledge and information about a museum's collections and exhibitions is conveyed to the public.

A list defining each the attributes of each topic and dominant purposes can be found in Appendix 1 and 2. A coding scenario is depicted by a June 20th Seattle Art Museum Facebook post that read: "This Wednesday get a sneak preview of SAM's summer exhibition, "Reclaimed: Nature and Place Through Contemporary Eyes" in HOTEL 1000's cozy Studio. Enjoy complimentary hors d'oeuvres and \$3 house wines (proceeds benefit SAM!)."¹⁶ This post was coded as having a primary topic of *Special Event* and a dominant purpose of *Marketing*. Although no clear call to action is included in this post, *Marketing* was determined to be the dominant purpose as the post invites online patrons to attend a paid event outside of the museum. This event is not directly related to viewing the actual works in the exhibition. The links in the post were also taken into account in the coding of the dominant purpose. The links in this SAM post led online patrons to the Hotel 1000's Facebook page and a Facebook invitation created by the Museum. Both links indicate a purpose to market the event and the venue rather than to provide information on the exhibition concept, the art, or the artists. No links to the Museum's website explaining the exhibition were provided. In contrast a MoMA Facebook post that read, "In today's Auteurist History post: Jean Renoir returns to water imagery for his finest American film, "The Southerner."¹⁷ was coded as having a primary topic of *Artist General* and a dominant purpose of *Didactic*. Again, the links in the post were taken into consideration when determining the dominant purpose. This Facebook post linked to a blog entry written by MoMA curator Charles Silver who examined the

¹⁶ The Seattle Art Museum. Web log post. *Facebook.com*. 20 June 2011. Web. 1 Sept. 2011.

¹⁷ The Museum of Modern Art. Web log post. *Facebook.com*. 2 Aug. 2011. Web. 1 Sept. 2011.

directorial approach of Jean Renoir (Artist General) through Auteurist Theory, showing a clear intention to broaden the readers understanding of the work. Linking back to the museum's blog is a tactic seen repeatedly on Facebook. This tactic allowed them to move beyond the limited amount of information that can be shared on Facebook by pairing it with the ability of blog posts to delve deeper into a subject in content length and supporting media elements such as image galleries and videos.

Due to the limitations of the study, it was not possible to collect detailed data for every comment on each blog and Facebook post, however data on select comments based on certain criteria were recorded in greater detail. A comment was always recorded if the online patron asked the museum a question of any kind, if one online patron responded to another online patron's comment, if the comment expanded upon or offered considerable insight into the posts' topics, or if a museum responded to a comment in any way be it through a return comment or by simply "liking" the online patron's comment. An example of a substantive comment selected as a type that required in-depth data collection is a July 24, 2011 response by MoMA Facebook online patron Susan Hebert to a post about a series of onsite performances by artist collective *Grand Openings*. Ms. Herbert wrote,

Sorry, MoMA, but the Mud challenge was an embarrassment to this internationally acclaimed institution. Poorly organized-the woman glopping in the mud admitted she had researched to see the ratio of cement to dirt that very morning. She didn't realize the mud would be so hard to push and lasted 3 minutes. Don't you think they would have done a practice run beforehand to have an idea of what they were doing? Plus the heavily accented English was hard to understand -- not to mention what the heck was this about? They talked about it as if we already knew. With the sound system and their accent and lack of preparedness, thought it was very amateurish. Plus, didn't really understand what the Grand Opening is--lots of events but what were they?¹⁸

¹⁸ Susan Herbert. Web log post. *Facebook.com*. 24 July 2011. Web. 13 Mar. 2012.

This comment offered the chance for the museum to not only address this online patron’s concerns over quality but also to provide all readers with more extensive details about the work and approach of the artists involved with *Grand Openings*.

Data analysis took place over a number of weeks and multiple points of reference were included to clean and confirm the data. For example, if the total number of topics identified equaled 99 and there were 100 posts in the data collection period, then one post wasn’t coded. This post was then identified using Excel’s filter feature and corrected. During analysis, 65 topics were grouped and reclassified into 15 overarching categories, shown in Table 1. The individual topics within each overarching category are shown and defined in Appendix 1. For example, the category “Artwork, Permanent Collection, and

Overarching Topic Categories
Artwork, Permanent Collection, and Exhibitions
Contest, Project, Puzzle
Education
External Events
Museum Retail & Grounds
None
Other
Resources of Interest
Special Events for Museum Patrons
Specific Artist Information
Sponsors & Fundraising
Staff & Interns
Technology
Visiting Logistics
Visitors, Members, Online Patrons

Table 1. Overarching Topic Categories

Exhibitions” contains the topic “Artwork Professional” which is defined as an individual work of art, rather than an exhibition or group of works, of any format or medium, that may or may not be part of the museum’s permanent collection, and that has been created by a professional artist as opposed to amateur works that may have been created by a patron or student in a workshop, event, or project. Individual topic data rather than the overarching categories presented in these findings, could be used in further research and analysis to gain deeper insight into content and to inform detailed communication calendars, strategies, and tactics.

Again, it should be strongly noted that data collected in this study is from an outsider's perspective and the specific goals of each museum's use of social media are not considered. All museums in the study were contacted with questions about their social media goals and analytics information for their blogs. However no museum chose to respond. Each museum was contacted on three occasions with separate inquires sent to the identified Facebook and blog administrators who were often two different individuals. The reasons behind their silence are unknown. The museums' silence might be seen as a benefit to this study rather than a fault. An outside perspective allows us to discuss how online patrons might perceive the museum rather than how a museum defines itself through the goals it feels important. This outside perspective is unaltered by information from the case study museums and allows us to impose what is arguably the most important measure of success of whether social media communications and activities are fulfilling a museum's mission and whether as an outsider we perceive the museums as pushing information or creating opportunities for conversation. With this perspective in mind, we will move to an examination of the data collected for the Facebook and blog posts of the Museum of Modern Art, the Art Institute of Chicago, the Indianapolis Museum of Art, and the Seattle Art Museum.

The Museum of Modern Art

The Museum of Modern Art in New York hosts an extensive, resource rich website as well as participates in a number of Web 2.0 and social media activities including Twitter, Foursquare, YouTube, ArtBabble, the Google Art Project, Flickr, Facebook, and a blog. The Museum's website hosts a number of online tours, a

searchable database, the ability to send free e-cards, and apps for iPhone and Android devices. The Museum offers their onsite and online patrons a number of ways to access and learn about the art in their collections. MoMA's mission statement is extremely long but is summarized by the Museum as follows:

In sum, The Museum of Modern Art seeks to create a dialogue between the established and the experimental, the past and the present, in an environment that is responsive to the issues of modern and contemporary art, while being accessible to a public that ranges from scholars to young children.¹⁹

With a mission clearly dedicated to art, education, and the stated purpose of fostering a dialogue, does the museum realize these goals in their Facebook and blog posts?

MoMA – Facebook, Museum Generated Content

Over the course of 92 days MoMA created 100 posts. Ninety percent (90%) of the posts presented content on a variety of topics that were directly related to the Museum, meaning these posts contained information on the meaning of exhibitions, artists, events, educational programming, and events that occur within the museum walls. The remaining 10% of the posts articles, artwork, and other various types of information that spoke of the larger artistic community and did not relate back to the Museum in anyway.

Presenting links to the work of artists or interesting articles that do not directly relate to the Museum is a tactic that is observed in the social media posts of all museums in the study. Although these types of posts do not directly fulfill the mission of a museum, if the post is art-related, it is educating online patrons about the local, national, and international art scene.

¹⁹ "About MoMA." *MoMA*. The Museum of Modern Art. Web. 26 Mar. 2012.
<<http://www.moma.org/about/>>.

Personal Facebook accounts allow for the “self-representation” mentioned earlier by researchers Kaplan and Haenlein, and are by no means faceless repositories of information. A single Facebook account representing the museum as a whole is a challenge of the application. A single Fan Page is a single profile. Multiple people within the institution may contribute to content but, as seen by online patrons, the page represents the institution as a whole. Providing them with direct access to the expertise, knowledge, and sense of scholarly authority of individual staff members may be challenging. MoMA attempts to overcome the somewhat faceless nature of a Facebook page by specifically mentioning members and noting the department in which they work. In 73% percent of MoMA’s posts no staff was mentioned however in the remaining 27% attempted to put a face to the information being shared. Nineteen percent (19%) mentioned a member of the curatorial staff by name, 5% mentioned a collection of authors coded as other, and 3% mentioned guest artists that were involved in creating post content. It is important to note that the 5% of “other authors” represents a variety of staff and departments that were mentioned in posts but on only one occasion. These were grouped into an “other” category for data clarity but still represent an effort on the part of the Museum to either inject personality or a feeling of access to authority for their online patrons. Every post that mentioned staff or an artist linked back to the Museum’s blog where the individual had authored a blog post.

Addressing the notion of authority in a social media and Web 2.0 context, numerous scholars²⁰ have linked the concept of allowing the public to submit and openly

²⁰ Nancy Proctor, Angela Russo, Lynda Kelly, Mathew MacArthur, Nina Simon, and many other researchers and scholars of the use of social media and Web 2.0 technologies in non-profit settings directly or indirectly focus or touch upon the idea of degrading authority as a challenge in the adoption of new technologies and applications.

discuss information about a museum's collection with the idea of degrading authority. An institution, once the primary producer of knowledge and information about objects and collections, found themselves in a new position with the advent of online communications where the public could comment and introduce new or alternative ideas on any given subject. In 2007, author Matthew MacArthur addressed the idea of degrading institutional authority in the face of Web 2.0 projects musing, "What is the proper relationship between professional experts and amateur enthusiasts?"²¹ MacArthur acknowledged the importance of online media and challenged museum professionals to find ways to marry an institution's position as the producer of knowledge with users' expectations for dialogue via online applications. When discussing online media, articles from 2007 quickly became antiquated and new voices have since entered the social media conversation. Researcher and user-generated content champion Angelina Russo has authored many articles asserting the benefits of opening the conversation to the voices of patrons – both onsite and online. Russo also believes that the participation of expert voices from within in a museum are essential in online and social media communications as museums embrace the move from the traditional one-to-many communication model to a many-to-many model. Russo asserts that social media communications should involve more than the just the marketing department and sees the role of the curator as essential in maintaining the authority and authenticity of information presented to the public. Citing social media practices in the U.S. and Australia, Russo notes specific projects in which curatorial content was an essential contribution to the quality of the campaign or communication string. She believes that if content experts remain

²¹ MacArthur, Matthew, "Can Museums Allow Online Users to Become Participants?" *The Digital Museum: A Think Guide*. Ed. Din, Herminia and Phyllis Hech. Washington DC: American Association of Museums, 2007. Print: 59.

uninvolved that less reliable sources will take the opportunity to contribute subpar information.²² Essentially, researchers and scholars of the use of social media by non-profit institutions all address the need to involve the voices of authority in the development of online communications.²³ Whether this is through mentioning staff by name, having a variety of experts author content, having the experts monitor communications for comments and opportunities for conversation, or more complex projects, an authoritative presence aids in the institutions control of accurate information. More importantly the voices of experts may be who online patrons expect to hear from – not solely a social media communication manager. MoMA’s Facebook posts, as well as the other museums in this study, evidence an attempt to involve staff however frequent or successful the attempts were.

Moving to an examination of MoMA’s Facebook post topic focus, it should again be noted that the purpose of collecting post topics is to determine what the Museum is talking about over an extended period of time. Is it talking about its collections, events, exhibitions, or is it striking a balance between directly mission related communications and other non-art related topics? Thirty-eight percent (38%) of MoMA’s posts were *Artworks, Permanent Collection, and Exhibitions*, while 28% of posts provided information that was specific to an individual artist (see fig.1). The next most frequent topic of posts was *Special Event* (7%). Although *Special Events* was the third most frequent topic, it is significantly lower in frequency than posts presenting information about artists and artwork.

²² Russo, Angelina et al. “Participatory Communication with Social Media.” *Curator: The Museum Journal*. 51. 1 (2008): 21-31. Print.

²³ Examples include the writings of Matthew MacArthur, Dana Allen-Greil, Susan Herring, and the various voices cited in the Museum-L listserv exchange.

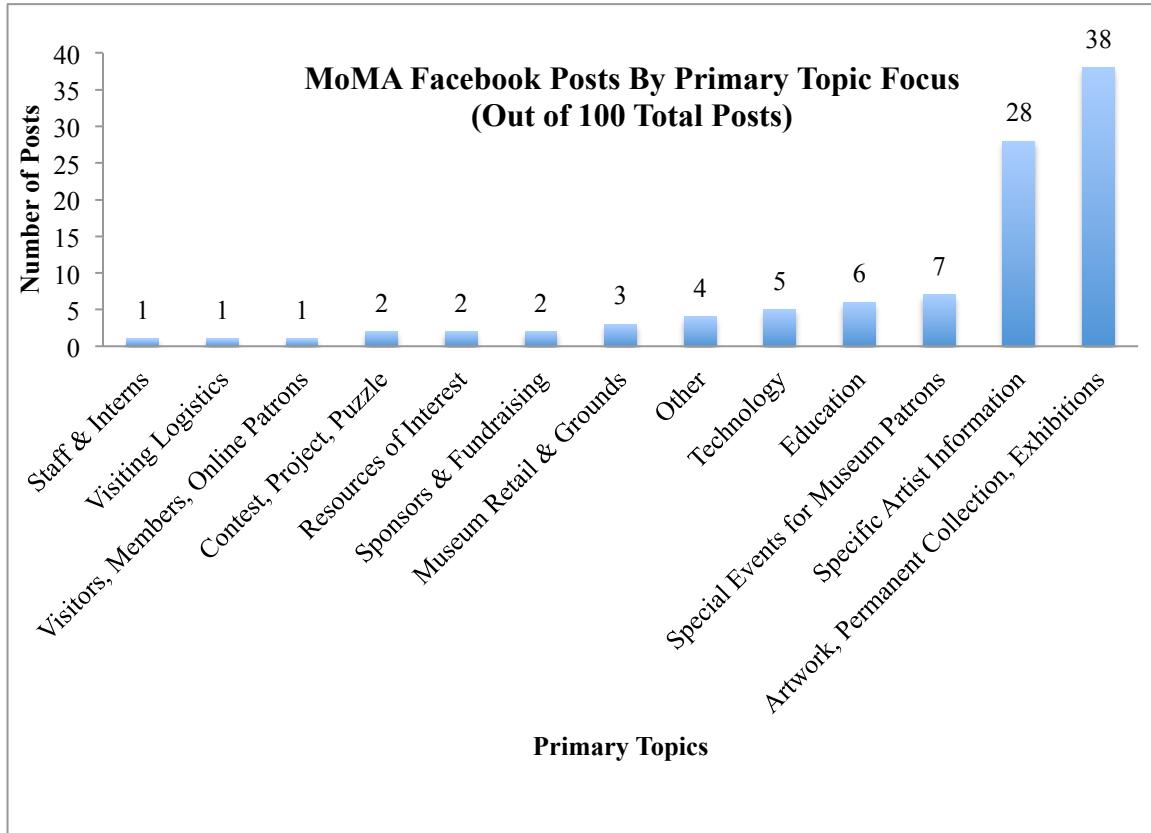


Figure 1. MoMA Facebook Posts By Primary Topic Focus

With the primary topics established, a classification of the intent of the post, the dominant purpose, was examined (see fig. 2). Primary topic data shows that MoMA is talking about art, collections, and exhibitions but, from the perspective of an online patron, how might they perceive the Museum's intent? Through the post content is MoMA marketing, educating, or merely sharing interesting information? What do online patrons see as the museum's motivation in posting this information? Fifty-two percent (52%) of MoMA's posts were classified as having the dominant purpose of *Sharing Information or Resources* with their online patrons. These posts do not evidence a clear goal of providing an object lesson, rather the posts share or direct online patrons to resources that can be found on the Museum website or during an onsite visit. The more

purposefully didactic posts introducing or educating online patrons on a specific idea, theory, or fact represented 20% of the posts. In 23% of posts, MoMA marketed to online patrons with specific calls to action or enticements to attend special. A balance seems to have been struck by MoMA. Not only are the Museum's posts dominated by art-related information but the posts also present a healthy mix of dominant purposes. The Museum is not using Facebook strictly market to their online patrons but is also using it as an educational tool, in proportion.

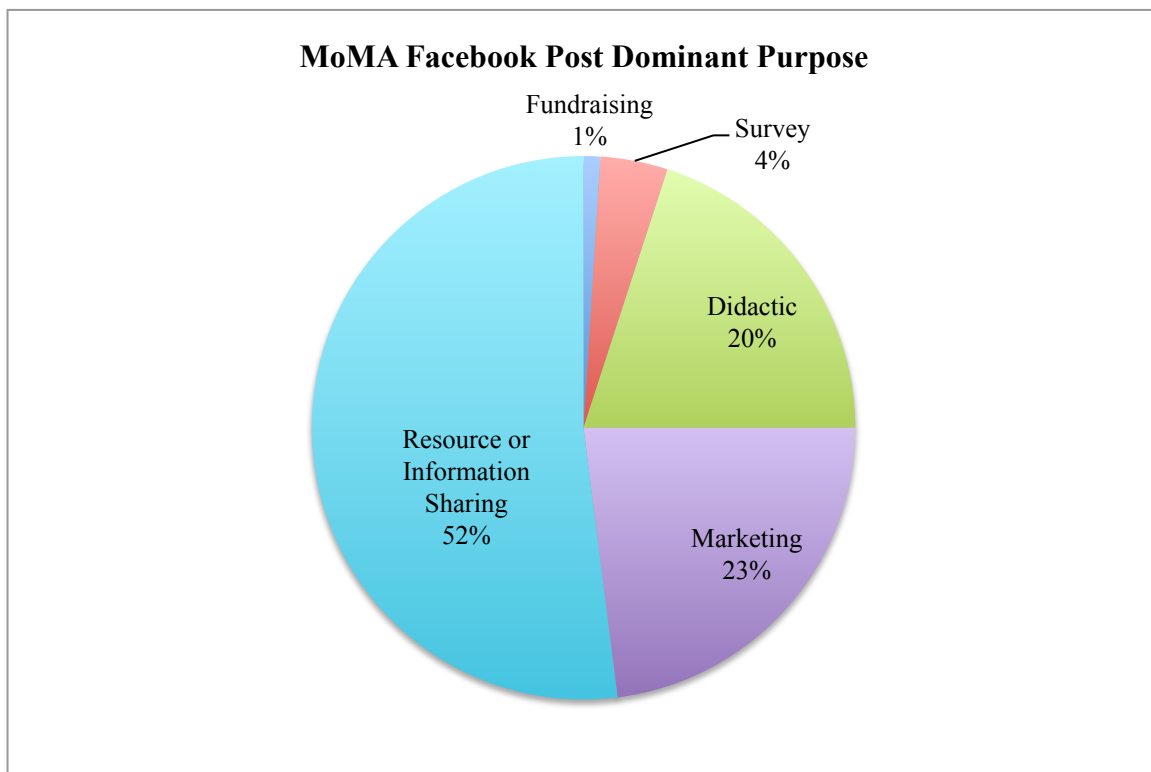


Figure 2. MoMA Facebook Post Dominant Purpose

There are a number of tactics a museum can employ in an attempt to engage their online patrons ranging from simple questions to more complex projects. This study reveals that 87% of MoMA's post do not directly request a response, 7% asked online patrons for their opinion, 3% asked an open-ended question, and 3% asked a question or

assigned a task that required the online patron to research the topic or solve a puzzle. Various incarnations of attempts at engaging patrons are evidenced in the Museums' social media posts. The vast majority of the Museum's posts are not dedicated to encouraging conversations but seem to be pushing information in a one-to-many manner.

MoMA – Facebook, Online Patron Comments and Interaction

The Museum's online patrons commented on the 100 posts 1,527 times. Comments of all types and complexity were posted by online patrons to the Museum's Facebook page from simple statements such as "Interesting post" to more complex comments or questions. Although many comments in this study were recorded in detail, it was beyond the scope of research to record every comment. It should be noted however that even simple comments may hold significance, if not to the larger community of online patrons, then for the individual that took a moment to write even the simplest response. Social technology expert and Museum 2.0 principal Nina Simon asserts that all comments in social media and social technology based museum projects are important. Simon writes,

Even inconsequential visitor comments are important to include when your goal is visitor empowerment. When people write on each other's walls on Facebook, they are often just saying hi and asserting their affinity for the other person or institution. The same is true of the people who write, "Great museum!" in comment books in the lobby. These statements are a form of self-identification, and while they may not make very compelling content for audiences, the act of expression in a public forum is important to those who contribute their thoughts, however banal.²⁴

Museums may be using social media to simply post static information, similar to a website, where comments and questions go unacknowledged. If this is the case, it must

²⁴ Nina Simon. *The Participatory Museum*. Santa Cruz, CA: Museum 2.0, 2010. Print: 224.

recognize that online patrons can and will comment or participate at varying levels of frequency and quality and that these comments are important to their followers. Even the most “banal” comments should be recognized as serving a function for online patrons that have chosen to follow a museum. What is the impact on a fan’s estimation of a museum if they see their comments and questions and those of their fellow fans go unanswered? While it is impossible to acknowledge every comment, minimal effort could be exerted in answering direct questions.

It is important to note that online patrons participate in social media at various levels of engagement. A Forrester’s North American study of 10,000 online users identified six categories of participation including: *Creator*, *Critics*, *Collectors*, *Joiners*, *Spectators*, and *Inactives*.²⁵ These categories are defined by the level at which online users chose to actively participate through comments or user-generated content. *Creators* are the most active contributors and *Inactives* the least active. These user profiles are somewhat mislabeled as a “Ladder,” as the Forrester study indicates that user categories are not fixed, rather users move between categories of participation. One type of communication may prompt an *Inactive* to be a *Creator* while another prompts a *Creator* to become a *Spectator*. This research did not delve into an examination of what communication types might prompt such behavior. It should be stressed, that despite who chooses to participate and their motivations for doing so, all participators are viewing the contributions of others and are witness to a museum’s efforts to engage with those that do contribute. Museum professionals Dana Allen-Greil and Matthew MacArthur aptly summarized the situation writing, “Sharing and collaborating on-line adds value for some

²⁵ Charlene Li and Josh Bernoff. *Groundswell: Winning in a World Transformed by Social Technologies*. Boston, MA: Harvard Business, 2008. Print: 42.

users, and we should provide means for them to do so, recognizing that the benefits extend beyond just the relative few who directly participate. Others want “just the facts, ma’am,” and we can continue to fill that need.”²⁶ Simply posting information fulfills the least active online patrons needs. For online patrons that choose to contribute comments, are their efforts recognized and rewarded by a museum through returned comments or such recognition?

The analysis of MoMA’s online patron comments indicates that the Museum is not consistently recognizing the efforts of online patrons that commented or asked questions. At the conclusion of the data collection period, the Museum’s Facebook page had 956,940 followers, or online patrons. Only 27 online patrons asked a direct question of the Museum through Facebook’s commenting system during the data collection period. The Museum answered 33% of these questions. A total of 56 comments head attributes that contributed to the content of the Museum’s posts or that provoked other online patrons to respond. Regardless if the comment held the characteristics of enhancing the content of the post, every comment that the Museum responded to was collected and included in the previously mentioned 56 comments. MoMA responded to 16% of these comments. Is the Museum’s goal of creating a “dialogue” a metaphorical conversation that occurs in their collections and exhibition choices or is it a literal activity. If their stated mission is literal, this is not realized in their Facebook activities by creating opportunities for their online patrons to respond or in their responses to questions and substantive comments.

²⁶ Allen-Greil, Dana, and Matthew MacArthur. "Small Towns and Big Cities: How Museums Foster Community On-line." *Museums and the Web 2010: Proceedings* (2010). *Archives & Museum Informatics: Museums and the Web 2010*. Web. 15 Apr. 2012.
<<http://www.museumsandtheweb.com/mw2010/papers/allen-greil/allen-greil.html>>.

MoMA – Blog, Museum Generated Content

The goal of examining blog posts was to determine if the longer format, media rich capabilities of blogs evidenced significant differences in topics focus, purposes, and frequency of conversations with online patrons. Data indicated that Facebook posts regularly linked back to a museum's blog as these two forms of social media were joined together in an institution's communication efforts. Forty-nine percent (49%) of MoMA's Facebook posts linked back to their blog *Inside/Out*, augmenting the short format limitations of Facebook with the potential of a blog to provide more detail and media that enhances and supports the subject of the post. If an online patron followed links to the Museum's blog, they are greeted with longer format posts that elaborate in detail on a number of different topics. One major difference between Facebook and blogs is a blog's ability to have multiple authors. Posts can be created by and attributed to individuals within the museum with more ease than in Facebook. Each post on *Inside/Out* begins with the author's name, title, and department. Online patrons begin their investigation of the content with a sense of the author and the type of knowledge they may have to offer. Curatorial staff authored 58% of the 65 posts created during the data collection period; a variety of single contribution authors coded as *Other* wrote 11%; staff in the education department contributed 6% of posts; the marketing department another 6%; the development office 5%; guest artist's authored 5%, and external affairs, other guest bloggers, and the archive department contributed 3% each. As compared to the Museum's Facebook account, their blog presented a wider variety of voices from within the Museum and permitted seemingly more direct access to the authoritative knowledge of the museum.

All but one of the 65 blog posts were related to information and activities within the museum. The one unrelated post was written by MoMA curator Laurence Kardish as a travelogue of his experiences at a film festival in Transylvania. Although written by a MoMA curator, the post does not relate to the Museum's film collection or initiatives but is rather a special interest piece of the curator's personal experience. The primary topic categories of the 64 remaining posts (see fig. 3) focused more often on specific details

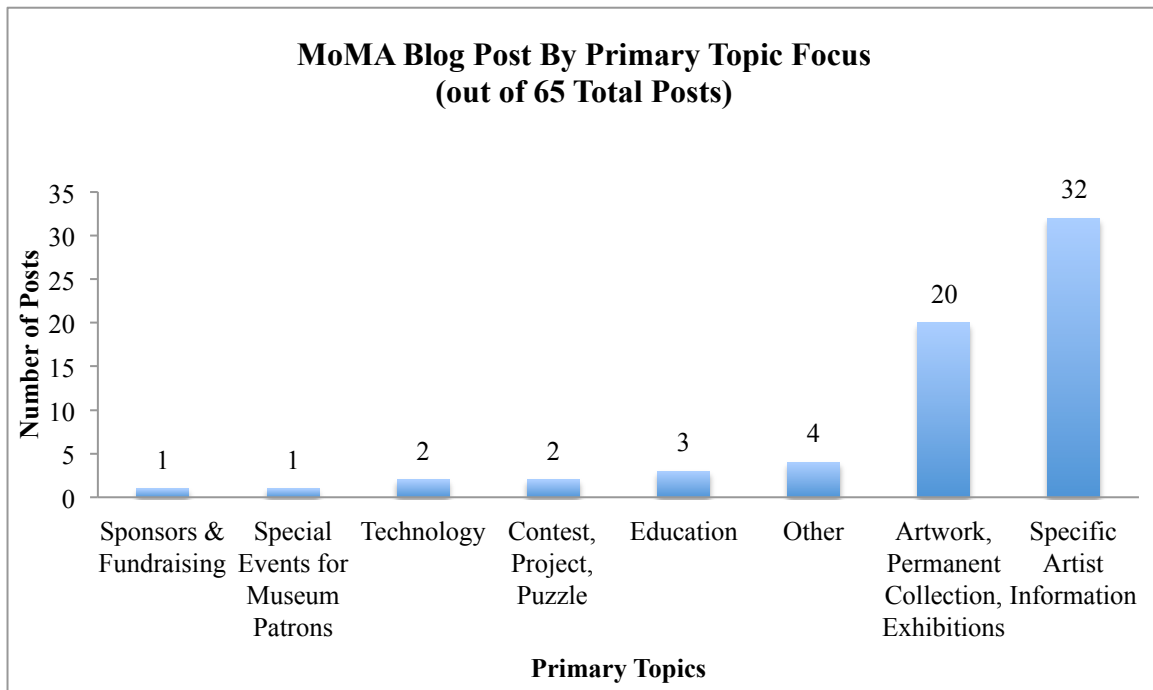


Figure 3. MoMA Blog Post By Primary Topic Focus

about individual artists represented in the Museum's collections and on the Museum's permanent collections and exhibitions. As also shown in Facebook, the Museum blog emphasized sharing art-related information with their online patrons.

The dominant purposes of the blog posts (see fig. 4) show that the majority (55%) of the posts shared information or resources with *Inside/Out* readers, 37% of posts took a

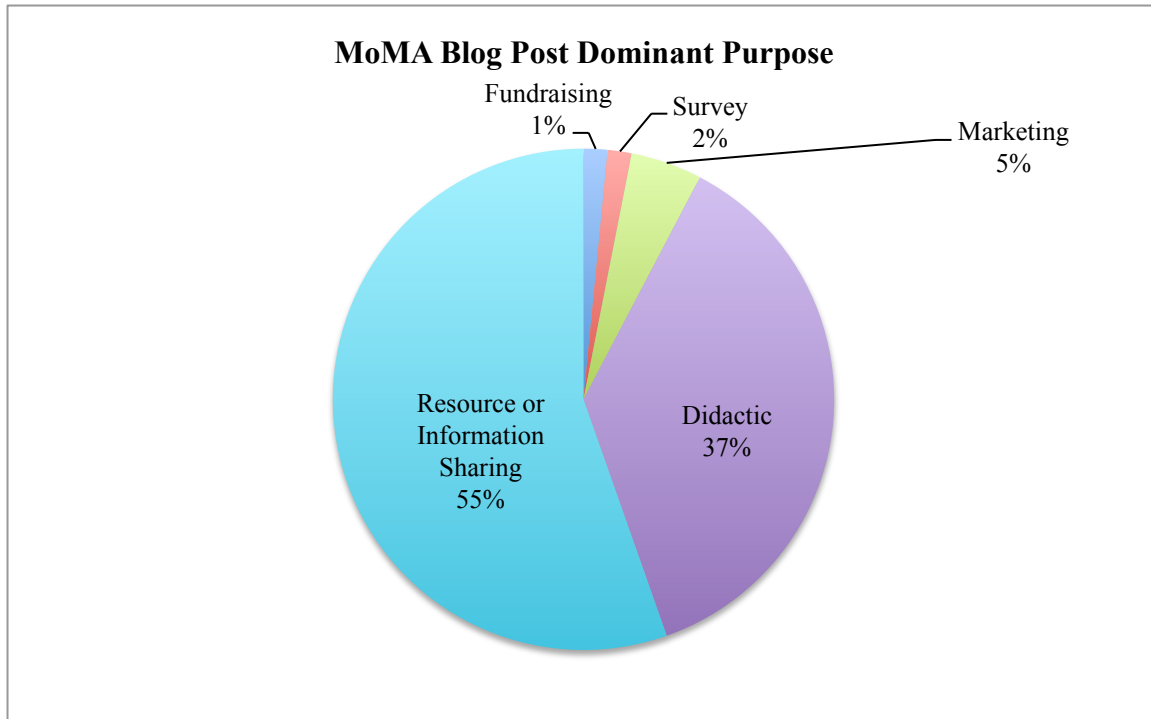


Figure 4. MoMA Blog Post Dominant Purpose

distinctly didactic approach, 5% had a marketing message, 2% asked readers to participate in a survey, and 1% solicited fundraising contributions. These numbers indicate that, as compared to the Museum's Facebook posts, blog posts featured fewer marketing messages with the majority of posts dedicated to sharing information or teaching a specific lesson to online patrons.

Twelve percent (12%) of the blog posts attempted to directly engage online patrons through open-ended questions, research based activities, and opinion-based questions. As mentioned earlier, 3% of MoMA's Facebook posts attempted to engage online patrons with a specific task. Each of these Facebook posts linked back to the blog as part of the Museum's ongoing monthly feature titled *Do You Know Your MoMA?* The

Facebook presentation of this feature is similar to the blog posts in that a short amount of text introduces the challenge along with a collage of six thumbnails of works from the Museum's collection (see fig. 5). No prize is offered for successfully identifying these works other than bragging rights. Online patrons who cannot identify the work from the thumbnail can access the Museum's online collections database to research the answer. Online patrons must wait a month until the next "Do You Know Your MoMA" feature for the answers to the

pervious month's challenge.

Over the three posts during the data collection period on both Facebook and *Inside/Out*, seven (7) Facebook fans and five (5) blog readers provided

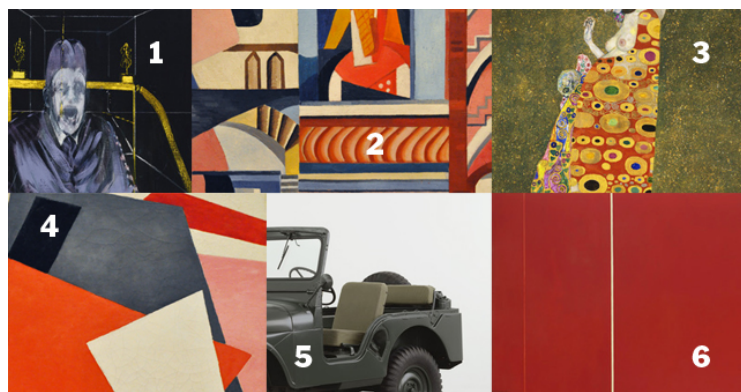


Figure 5. Image thumbnails from "Do You Know Your MoMA" blog post

answers. As a method of engagement in social media applications, this approach is extremely passive and does not attempt to directly engage online patrons with a task other than that of identification of artwork. Although it does serve to highlight the Museum's collections and may also fulfill an online patron's need to flex their visual literacy, it offers no basis for conversation and is presented as more of a test of existing knowledge than an exploration of the collection. With only 12 total responses to this feature over both social media applications, the Museum may want to consider altering its approach if the goal is to both share their collections and create a dialogue.

A Facebook and blog post that is notable for the number of responses can be found in an August 1st post asking online patrons to share their favorite summer themed

movies. The Facebook post linked to the blog where curator Laurence Kardish discusses films from the Museum's collections that feature various themes or scenes that typify the summer months. Twenty-one (21) Facebook readers provided answers directly on Facebook while 19 blog readers provided their favorite summer films directly on *Inside/Out*. Although Mr. Kardish did not respond to each comment, he did author a blog post on August 23rd that addressed the online patrons' summer film suggestions.

Whether a post successfully engages online patrons or not, the data collected on the topic and purpose of the blog posts evidences the Museum's commitment to sharing art-related information with messages. However, the vast majority of the Museum's blog posts did not regularly utilize techniques that directly requested responses and hence the possibility of having social media based conversations.

MoMA – Blog, Online Patron Comments and Interaction

Over the Museum's 65 blog posts online patrons commented a total of 136 times. Twenty-three (23) of the 136 comments were identified, based on the same criteria as Facebook comments, as having characteristics that qualified them to be recorded in detail. Eight (8) of the 23 comments asked the author a direct question while 15 comments contributed to the exploration of the topic of the post. None of the eight (8) questions were answered while three (3) of the 15 comments showed a response from the Museum. The Museum has either chosen to not respond to questions and comments on a regular basis or the blog is not being properly monitoring for these opportunities.

The Art Institute of Chicago

The Art Institute of Chicago has an extensive Web 2.0 and social media presence with accounts on FourSquare, Twitter, Facebook, YouTube, a blog, and ArtBabble in addition to a searchable and savable online collection database, a French Impressionism app, an interactive floor plan, and a number of multi-media online experiences created around their special exhibitions. The presentation and interpretation of its collections is the Museum's top priority as expressed in their mission statement:

The Art Institute of Chicago collects, preserves, and interprets works of art of the highest quality, representing the world's diverse artistic traditions, for the inspiration and education of the public and in accordance with our profession's highest ethical standards and practices.²⁷

When it comes to their social media communications, is the dedication to sharing their art and educating the public reflected? Will the Museum take advantage of the conversations that are possible through social media? Again the data here will specifically focus on topics, purpose of post, and the level of conversation as seen through three months of Facebook and blog posts.

AIC – Facebook, Museum Generated Content

Over the course of the data collection period the Art Institute of Chicago posted to their Facebook page on 84 separate occasions. Ninety-five percent (95%) of the posts were identified as having topics directly related to the Museum's collections and activities while the remaining 5% presented information on topics that had no relation to the museum or its activities. Twenty-one percent (21%) of the Museum's Facebook posts

²⁷ "The Art Institute of Chicago: About Us: Mission and History." *The Art Institute of Chicago*. The Art Institute of Chicago. Web. 26 Mar. 2012. <<http://www.artic.edu/aic/aboutus/wip/index.html>>.

linked back to their blog possibly in an attempt to both create synergy between the Museum's various online efforts and to extend the short format limitations of the medium.

The content of the Museum's Facebook posts were dominated by an unnamed voice with 85% having no staff mentioned, 7% mentioning a specific member of the curatorial staff, another 7% mentioning various staff members coded as *Other*, and the remaining 1% mentioned a guest artist. Scheduling, motivating, and engaging staff to create content for social media can be a challenge. This is a challenge that is perhaps seen in AIC's Facebook posts as they do not regularly connect online patrons with the expertise of museum staff. A recent series of email exchanges on the Museum-L email list serve illustrates the problem that many museum professionals may face in engaging staff. Ruth Lang, Interim Director of Administration and Operations at the Fresno Historical Society, initiated an exchange between museum professionals when she expressed her desire to find a system and successful approaches that would help manage and engage staff in the process of writing or contributing to social media posts. Eight industry professionals came forward with a myriad of suggestions. Heather Marie Wells, Education Technology Coordinator at the Crystal Bridges Museum, suggested using the social media management system HootSuite to schedule posts and offered the advice of taking advantage of every face-to-face encounter with staff to ask pointed questions, specifically expressing the purpose of using their suggestions in social media communications. Ms. Wells wrote of the success of her attempts stating "After three months, people started explicitly saying in their reports 'Oh Thursday I'm working on X and it might be something interesting for Twitter or Facebook. Some even started

emailing me throughout the week with suggestions.”²⁸ While Kate Lichota, Programs Manager at The Philip Johnson Glass House, suggested proving the potential of social media to staff by,

“[S]haring notable successes using social media with your staff as a motivator, i.e. retweets or mentions by notable constituents (if you are also using twitter), visitors mentioning they made a trip to your museum as a result of something they saw on social media, or a story or post that really took off among your online audience.”²⁹

If providing online patrons with access to the voices of expertise within the museum is a priority, AIC may want to examine how it approaches staff in crafting social media communications.

Primary topics data (see fig. 6) showed that 38 Facebook posts, or 45% of the total, were identified as having the primary topic of *Artwork, Permanent Collections, and Exhibitions*. The next more frequent post topic was *Special Events for Museum Patrons* however the frequency was much lower at 14 posts or 17%. The Museum’s Facebook posts are clearly dedicated to sharing information related to the Museum’s collections and art in general. While the Museum still relies on Facebook as a secondary events calendar, online patrons are regularly presented with mission-driven topics.

²⁸ Heather Marie Wells. “[MUSEUM-L] Staff Schedule for Facebook posts.” Email to Ruth Lang. 14 Feb. 2012.

²⁹ Kate Lichota. “[MUSEUM-L] Staff Schedule for Facebook posts.” Email to Ruth Lang. 15 Feb. 2012.

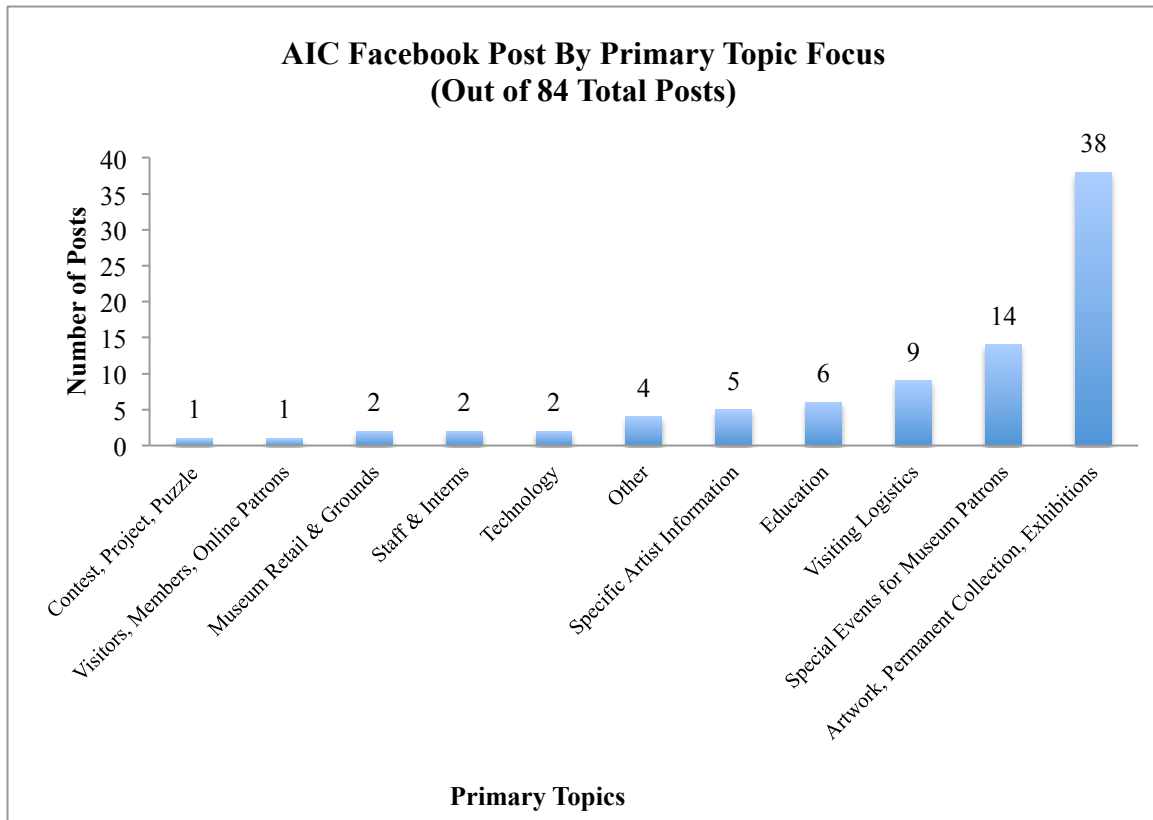


Figure 6. AIC Facebook Post By Primary Topic Focus

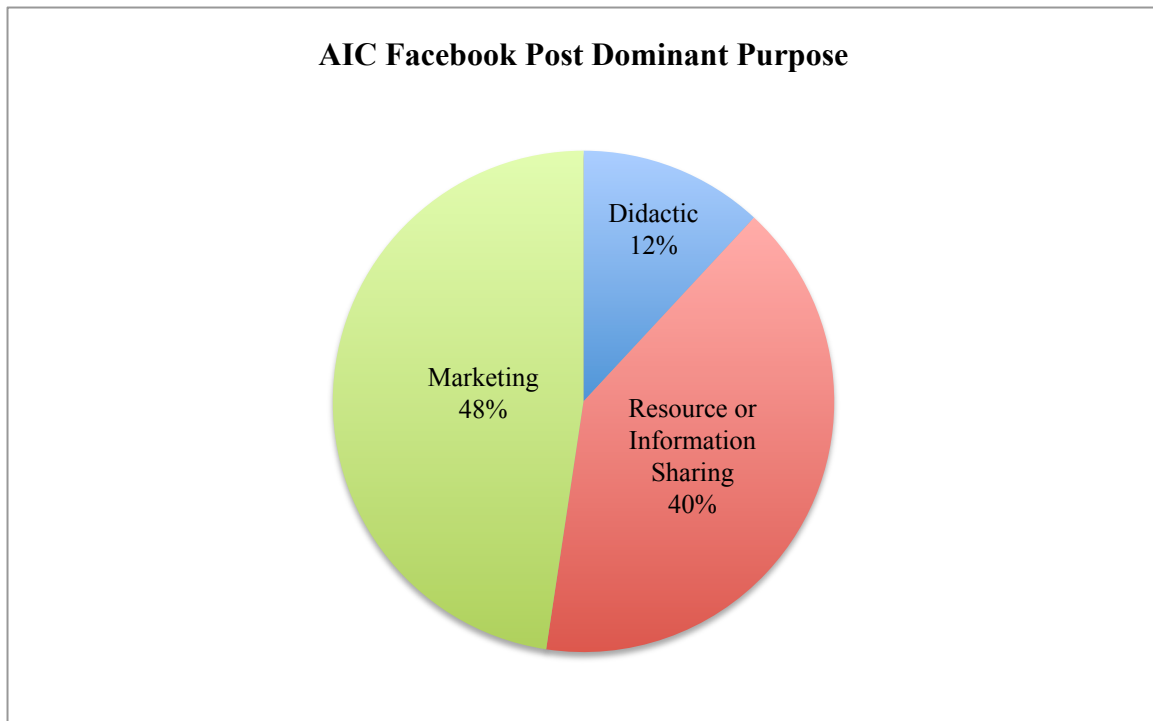


Figure 7. AIC Facebook Post Dominant Purpose

Over the 85 posts, only three dominant purposes were identified (see fig. 7). Communications with a *Didactic* intent represented 12% of the posts, *Resource or Information Sharing* represented 40%, and *Marketing* represented 48% of the posts. Although only 14 posts had the topic of *Special Event*, a topic one might assume is associated with a marketing intent, AIC often took on a marketing voice when communicating with online patrons about its collections and exhibitions. Rather than informing them about specific works of art, the goal or context of an exhibition, or information that expanded their understanding of AIC's collections, posts often encouraged attendance. For example, "Perceptions unravel! Boundaries between space and time disintegrate! See Eija-Liisa Ahtila's three-channel video installation, *The House*, opening today."³⁰ or "Uta Barth closes in just one week! See the light before it's out August 16."³¹ Each of these examples did include links to the Museum's website and the exhibition pages that provided online patrons further details. However, the text of each post did not indicate that online patrons might be able to learn more by following the link. These posts are art and exhibition related, and with simple rewording, the perception of the post could easily change from a marketing message to a message that encourages online patrons to learn more about the installation or exhibition. For example, the Museum could present the Uta Barth exhibition by leveraging text found on the exhibition's webpage with a post that reads: "Is there a difference in what we see and what the camera captures? Our latest exhibition presents the work of contemporary artist Uta Barth as she explores not what the camera is pointed at but the act of looking through the lens in the first place. Learn more about her work here: <http://bit.ly/k3GzC0> or join

³⁰ The Art Institute of Chicago. Web log post. *Facebook.com*. 24 June 2011. Web. 1 Sept. 2011.

³¹ The Art Institute of Chicago. Web log post. *Facebook.com*. 9 Aug. 2011. Web. 1 Sept. 2011.

us in the galleries.” If the language of posts is recalibrated, the long-term perception of the Museum’s Facebook communications as sharing information or educating online patrons rather than marketing may be achieved. This recalibration might result in posts that are more closely relate to the Museum’s mission. Fifty-two percent (52%) of AIC’s posts were dedicated to teaching or sharing information and resources with their online patrons but with the remaining 48% of posts utilizing language with the distinct air of simple marketing, an outsider may perceive the Museum’s Facebook page as a marketing tool rather than a tool to “educate and inspire” an interest in the Museum’s collections and exhibitions.

Eight percent (8%) of AIC’s posts attempted to directly engage online patrons through a combination of open-ended questions, close-ended questions, and research based activities. Similar to MoMA’s “Do You Know Your MoMA” blog posts, AIC asked their online patrons on their Facebook page and blog to identify 10 bands playing at Lollapalooza with 10 works from their collection. An incentive of free admission for two was offered to the first correct answer. For example, a painting of a cat with large eyes was paired with the band *Bright Eyes*. The Museum held a similar contest in conjunction with the Pitchfork music festival. Although this unique approach does call attention to the Museum’s collections and connects the Museum to the city at large, this post did not provide the names of the artists or titles of the paintings and failed to link to the Museum’s online collection database – a tactic that may have lent more profound meaning to the activity by also educating the public about the works of art rather than the bands. In turn, 10 Facebook and blog readers responded to the challenge and may have been inspired, as AIC’s mission hopes to achieve, to think about the subjects of the

artworks in a new way. Further research would directly involve museum staff to determine what their specific goals were for this post and if they felt this was a successful response rate. Analytics information for the Museum's website might help determine if readers visited other areas of the museum website such as the searchable collections page indicating that readers were lead to explore the Museum's collections online.

AIC – Facebook, Online Patron Comments and Interaction

The Museum's 95,065 Facebook followers³² commented, in various ways and in various numbers, on the 84 Facebook posts a total 503 times. The online patrons indicated their appreciation or interest in the posts with 6,176 total likes. Fourteen (14) online patrons asked direction questions of the Museum and 20 online patrons posted comments that could be characterized as contributing to the subject of the post. The Museum answered 29% of the questions and addressed 15% of the comments. Fellow online patrons commented with each other on six (6) separate occasions. Answering a direct question is seemingly easier than engaging with an online patron's comment. What the Facebook administrator does and does not choose to engage with seems capricious and subjective. An August 26th post discussed the contemporary recreation of a poster in conjunction with the Museum's *Window's on the War* exhibition of 1940's posters from the Soviet news agency TASS. Online patron Auriel Garza commented on this post writing, "This would be great contextual media for the exhibition!"³³ The Museum responded to this basic comment an hour later stating, "Hi Auriel, we don't have the video up in the exhibition, but we do have Alexis's creation process on display. Take

³² This was the number of followers at the end of the data collection period.

³³ Auriel May Garza. Web log post. *Facebook.com*. 18 Aug. 2011. Web. 15 Sept. 2011.

a look: <http://ow.ly/6e57>.”³⁴ The Museum’s Facebook administrator responded to this comment by addressing the online patron by name and providing her with a link to a blog post that contained pictures of the poster recreation process. The Museum’s response was not required per se, however it both addresses their online patron personally and provides further information about the exhibition. In contrast, on August 5th online patron Thomas Squires commented on a post about an intern’s experience as a tour guide writing, “I love the tours. The guide helps me enjoy interesting things about various works. They’re free, so I take them when I’m there. I wish there were at least one tour a couple times a day, so, whenever I find myself browsing the works of art, I would really learn something.”³⁵ Mr. Squires’ comment recognizes in glowing terms the quality of the Museum’s tours while in turn also communicates to other online patrons the availability of such resources. Unfortunately, the Museum did not respond to this comment as it did in the case of Ms. Garza’s. The Museum could have posted a link to the page on their website that details the schedules for their gallery talks, the page that details their audio guide, or could have provided the online patron with information about the Museum’s app that guides visitors through their French Impressionism collection.

Unfortunately data alone cannot explain why a Museum does or does not respond to a Facebook comment and emails to the Museum’s communications department about their social media guidelines went unanswered. By not responding to online patrons, the Museum is certainly falling short of their mission to educate and inspire as well as bucking the advice of countless for-profit social media experts that advocate the importance of listening, acknowledging, and interacting with fans and followers. If an

³⁴ The Art Institute of Chicago. Web log post. *Facebook.com*. 18 Aug. 2011. Web. 15 Sept. 2011.

³⁵ Thomas Squires. Web log post. *Facebook.com*. 5 Aug. 2011. Web. 15 Sept. 2011.

internal examination of social media communications focused on utilizing the inherent nature of social media as a conversational tool was undertaken by the Museum, this information might come to light. The institution could adjust accordingly if it values consistent, engaging conversation with its online patrons via social media applications. Certainly, it would be impossible to respond to every Facebook comment even with a dedicated staff member but a regular and consistent rate should always be a goal in fostering quality relations with online patrons. Museum's can "like" comments as a low effort response mechanism or can monitor comments and then post a blanket response to multiple patrons when trends are identified. However a museum might respond, a written policy might assist Facebook administrators in standardizing interaction practices. Analysis of data in this study did not reveal a pattern with respect to the type of comments AIC did and did not respond to. Irregular responses to comments and questions may lead online patrons to believe that the museum either does not monitor comments and questions or that it is unconcerned with the opinions and knowledge of its fans.

AIC – Blog, Museum Generated Content

The Museum posted to their blog, *ARTicle*, on 30 separate occasions during the data collection period. All posts were directly related to art and activities within the Museum (see fig. 8). Similar to the primary topics identified for the Museum's Facebook posts, the majority of blog posts featured information in the category *Artwork, Permanent Collections, and Exhibitions* representing 73% of posts.

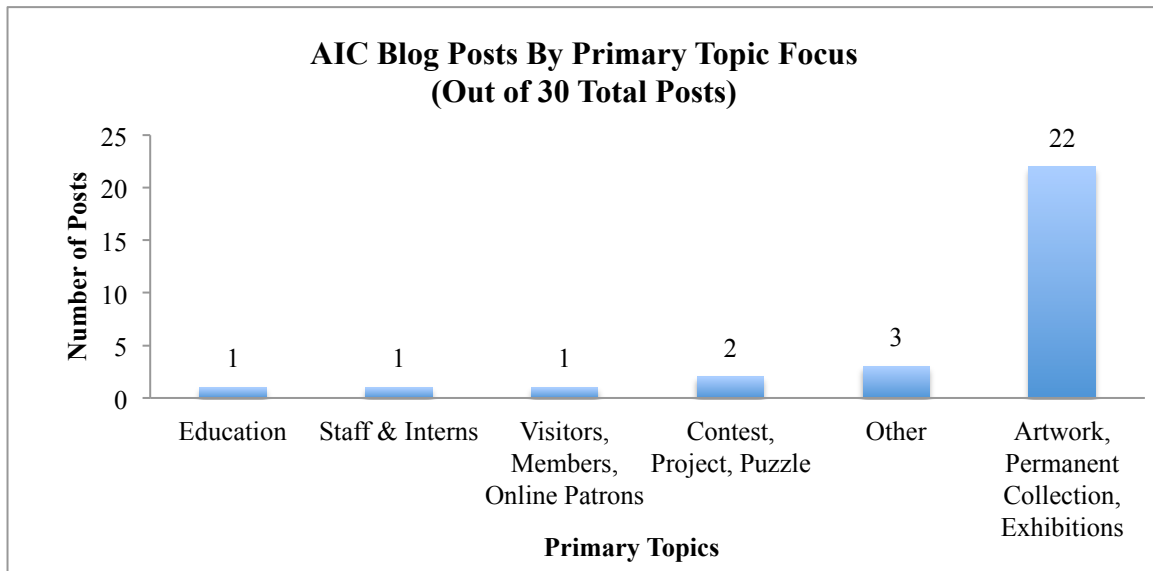


Figure 8. AIC Blog Posts By Primary Topic Focus

A characterization of the *Dominant Purpose* (see fig. 9) of the Museum's blog posts identified only three categories *Didactic*, *Resource and Information Sharing*, and *Marketing*, the same categories identified in the examination of their Facebook posts. Unlike their Facebook posts, *Resource and Information Sharing* not *Marketing* was identified as the dominant purpose totally 54% of posts. Marketing messages that actively solicited or attempted to persuade online patrons to attend the Museum were still present at 23%. Posts with a didactic intent represented an additional 23%. With 48% of Facebook posts identified as having the purpose of *Marketing* and only 23% of blog posts showing this same purpose, this data may indicate that the Museum views the purpose of each social media application in a different light. Facebook is for short-form marketing while their blog is for long-form information sharing. Or perhaps Facebook, with its ease and speed may lead social media specialists to pay less attention to word choices and tone of their communications.

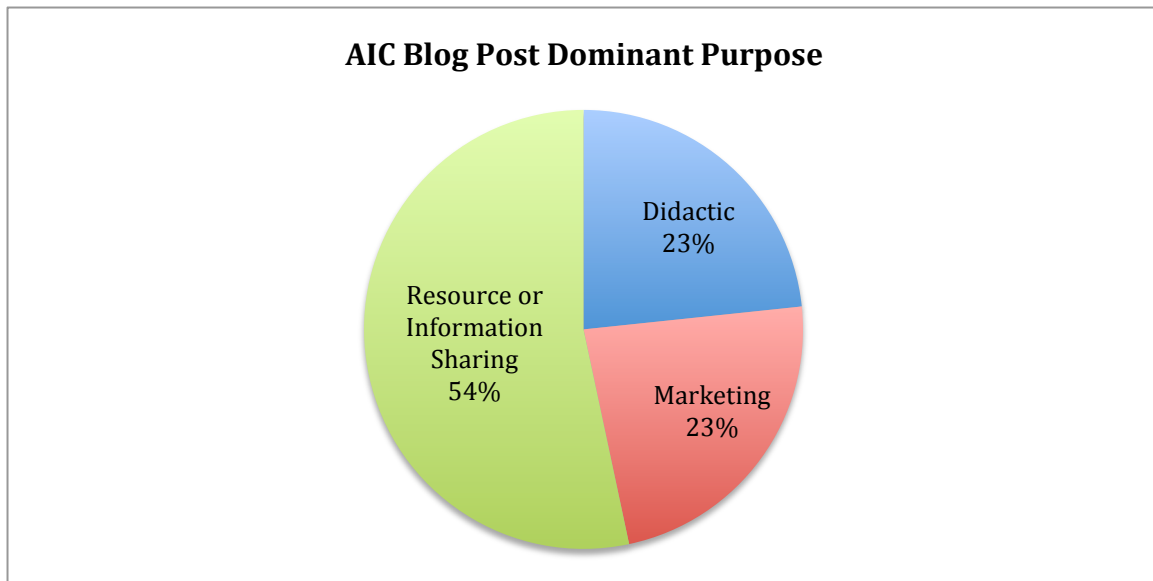


Figure 9. AIC Blog Post Dominant Purpose

The authors of the blog posts came from a number of different departments within the Museum. The marketing department was responsible for 47% of blog posts, Media and Publication authored 17%, research related staff 13%, Interns 7%, Curatorial 7%, Conservation 7%, and a variety of Other authors contributed to 3% of the posts. At the beginning of each post the author is identified by name, but not department. Each staff member had to be researched in order to make this determination. Although blogs allow museums to more directly connect online patrons with the different areas of expertise within a museum, AIC's blog did not heavily leverage the scholarly expertise of their curatorial staff. With the bulk of posts authored by the marketing department, perhaps the Museum's inability to engage all areas of the staff is illustrated. Other voices may have helped in crafting a post's content, however this is not overtly stated for the benefit of online patrons that may be seeking information from what they perceive as an authoritative source. Despite the authors' areas of expertise within the Museum, AIC's

blog posts do appear to be in line with their mission of educating and interpreting the works in their collection for readers.

AIC – Blog, Online Patron Comments and Interaction

Only two (2) of the 30 posts actively requested responses from online patrons as seen in the aforementioned Lollapalooza and Pitchfork contest. Forty-five (45) total comments were made over the Museum's 30 posts. Data on 12 comments and questions was collected. Three (3) questions were asked of the Museum and nine (9) readers made illustrative comments that were recorded in detail. The Museum answered none of the questions but responded to all of the nine comments. These nine comments were distributed between the Pitchfork and Lollapalooza related posts and would more accurately be described as answers to a puzzle rather than as contribution to the topic at hand. In all nine comments the Museum addressed the online patron by name and provided encouragement when a response was close but ultimately incorrect. Most blog applications alert the author when comments are made to their posts. If blog posts are not manually or automatically monitored, opportunities to respect the time and curiosity of readers are lost. Clearly, the Museum felt it necessary to monitor posts that directly requested answers in a contest for free admission and the same level of dedication should be afforded to posts that may spark responses or questions driven by curiosity rather than those motivated by direct reward.

The Indianapolis Museum of Art

The mission of the Indianapolis Museum of Art revolves around helping their patrons to better understand their collections, be it physical works of art or the extensive grounds that surround the Museum. Their mission statement reads:

The Indianapolis Museum of Art serves the creative interests of its communities by fostering exploration of art, design, and the natural environment. The IMA promotes these interests through the collection, presentation, interpretation and conservation of its artistic, historic, and environmental assets.³⁶

In serving this mission, the Museum offers a number of online tools to learn about and to explore their collections. The Museum's website hosts a "Dashboard" infographic of attendance numbers, financial information, and collections. Their website capabilities include a searchable collections database that permits user tagging, online "Tag Tours" curated by various staff members, an extensive collection of Museum produced videos hosted on both YouTube and the Museum's online video project Artbabble, a Flickr account, a Twitter presence, and of course a presence on both Facebook and a website-hosted blog. The Museum appears to be dedicated to developing and maintaining web-based tools that allow online patrons to explore "the art, design, and natural environment" through their own self-guided efforts as well as through more structured learning opportunities. Does this dedication to art-related, participatory communications and activities extend beyond their website capabilities and activities to their social media posts?

³⁶ "Our Mission | Indianapolis Museum of Art." *Indianapolis Museum of Art*. Indianapolis Museum of Art. Web. 26 Mar. 2012. <<http://www.imamuseum.org/about/our-mission>>.

During the data collection period, the Indianapolis Museum of Art posted to their Facebook page on 96 occasions. Ninety-four percent (94%) of the posts were directly related to the Museum while the remaining 6% focused on external events or news. An example of a non-Museum related post occurred on June 22 with a post about the release of artist Ai Weiwei from the custody of the Chinese government. The post simply states, “Artist Ai Weiwei released!”³⁷ and was linked to a Guardian article detailing the subject. The Museum did not attempt to provide a voice, or access to the authoritative sources in the Museum, in its 96 posts. Most (94%) did not mention staff. The faceless nature of their posts may be attributed to the topic focus, as no expertise was necessarily needed to create posts.

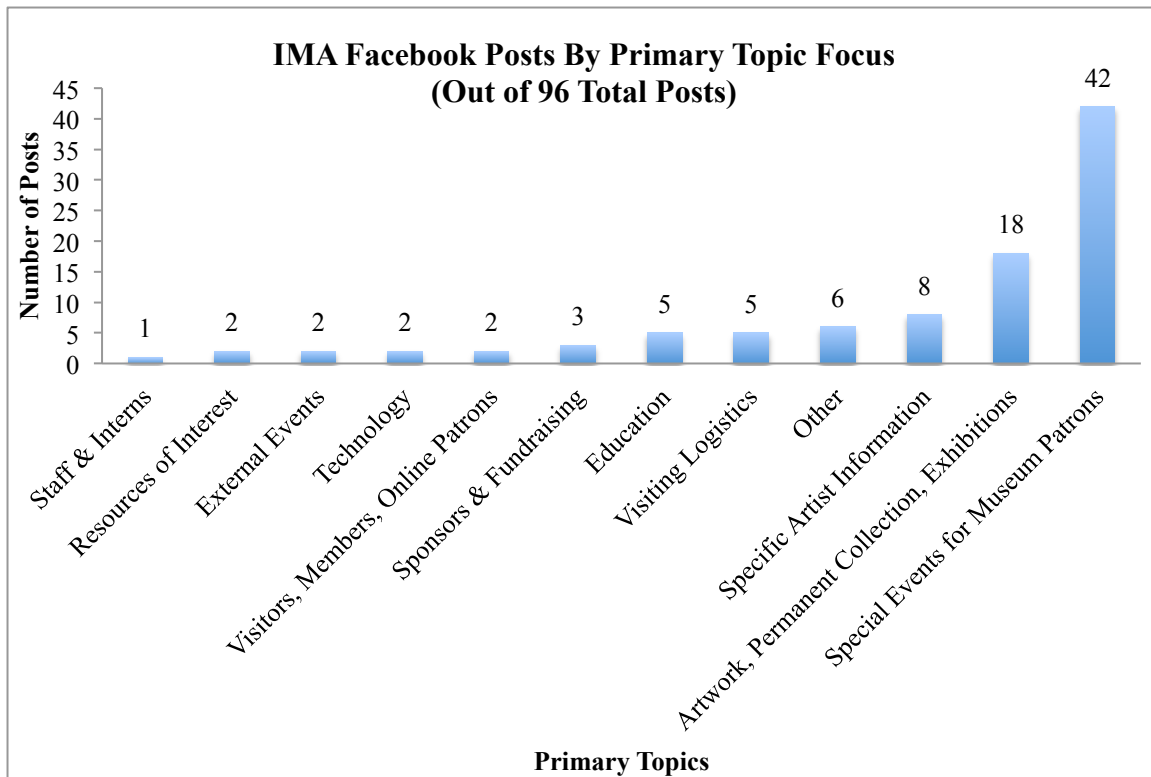


Figure 10. IMA Facebook Posts By Primary Topic Focus

³⁷ Indianapolis Museum of Art. Web log post. *Facebook.com*. 22 June. 2011. Web. 15 Sept. 2011.

In the summer months that encompassed the data collection period, the IMA utilized their Facebook page to inform online patrons about special events, mainly their outdoor film series. Special event posts accounted for 44% of the total posts (see fig. 10). In comparison, the next most frequent topic was *Artwork, Permanent Collection, and Exhibitions* accounting for 18 individual posts or 19% of the total amount. The remaining posts covered a variety of subjects. It should be noted that the film series posts categorized as *Special Events* were popular films that aren't part of the Museum's collections, including *Top Gun*, *Grease*, and *The Shining*. These types of events are in themselves evidence of significant deviation from mission and a trickle down effect is occurring in their Facebook posts. Posts marketing the Museum's special events and film series occur repeatedly and attempt to be casual and colloquial such as, "Grab your Aviators, "Top Gun" shown in the outdoor amphitheater tonight."³⁸ and "A hickie from Kenickie is like a Hallmark card, when you only care enough to send the very best!"³⁹ On multiple occasions, these kinds of posts were the only post on that day. Special events are important activities within a museum, however, rather than balancing special event posts with those that might mention collections, exhibitions, and museum grounds, the Museum does not seem to be fulfilling their mission to foster interest in art, design, and nature.

³⁸ Indianapolis Museum of Art. Web log post. *Facebook.com*. 29 July. 2011. Web. 15 Sept. 2011.

³⁹ Indianapolis Museum of Art. Web log post. *Facebook.com*. 22 Aug. 2011. Web. 15 Sept. 2011.

With a deep focus on special events the most frequent Dominant Purpose (see fig. 11) was identified as *Marketing* (53%), followed by *Resource and Information Sharing* (34%), *Didactic* (6%), *Fundraising* (3%), *Survey* (2%), and *Expressing Thanks* (2%.) AIC used Facebook to post short messages that quickly communicate to online patrons the Museum's gratitude for their participation in an event or activity. For example, on July 30, 2011 IMA used Facebook as a platform to thank the attendees of a film screening for their willingness to relocate from an outdoor venue to an indoor theater due to inclement weather. Despite the uncertainty of knowing how many online patrons were in actual attendance, the IMA felt it appropriate to use social media to show their appreciation of the event attendees' flexibility.

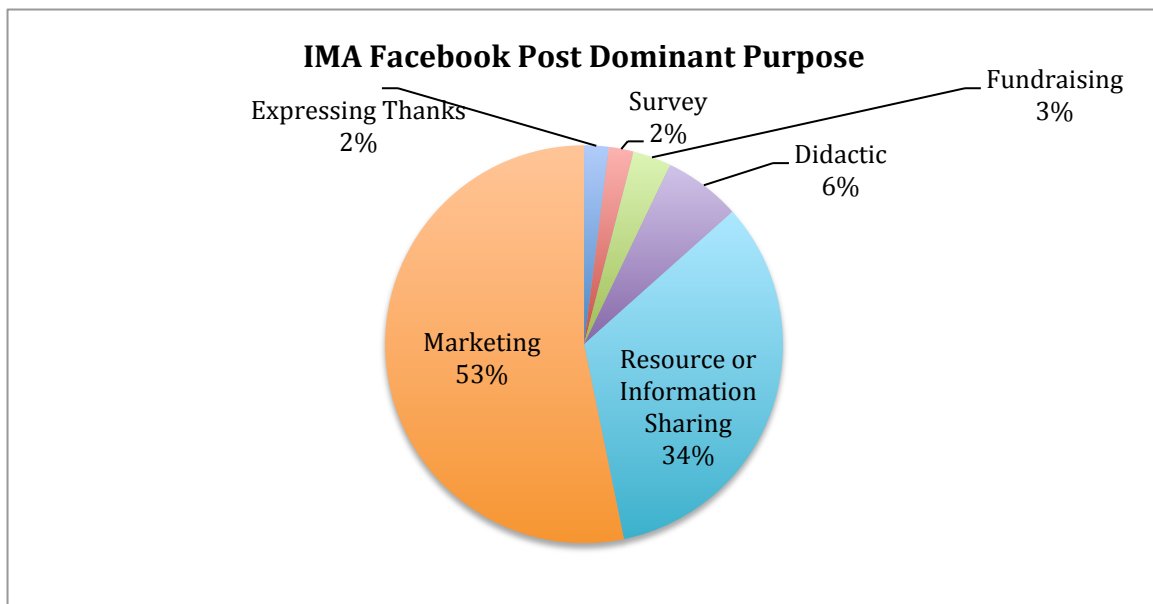


Figure 11. IMA Facebook Post Dominant Purpose

A focus on gathering content from all areas of expertise in the museum may also aid in calibrating the dominant purpose or intent of communications. Museum professionals Dana Allen-Greil, Susan Edwards, Jack Ludden, and Eric Johnson authored a paper in conjunction with the 2011 Museums and the Web conference that examined

each of their institutions unique approaches to fostering healthy, institution-wide social media efforts. Describing their respective approaches, the authors offered a glimpse at the strategies and tactics they found successful. The authors ultimately concluded that one solution does not fit all institutions and that a number of factors, unique to every museum, must be taken into consideration when forming social media policies and strategies. One point of commonality in each institution's adoption of social media was the active engagement of a variety of departments in the creation of content. The authors noted,

Our experience has been that traditional functions of staff often play out in social media. Marketing staffers may tend to use social media to promote dates and times of events and exhibitions; publication staff may highlight materials such as books written by staff; educators look for ways to engage and teach visitors; and technologists may be eager to use the coolest new online tool. This is an oversimplification, but the point remains that it is natural to transfer what we already know how to do into a new realm.⁴⁰

If the majority of content creation on Facebook lies in the communications and marketing department then the topics, purpose, and language used in the content of posts may lead online patrons to perceive that the only purpose of a museum's Facebook page is to market to fans.

The IMA attempted to directly engage their online patrons in five (5) posts, three (3) asked for an opinion, and two (2) that proposed tasks requiring research or effort on the part of the online patron. One of the three posts that requested online patron opinions utilized one of the many possible features within Facebook *Questions*. The Museum asked their online patrons, "Which work of art should be crowned world's craziest

⁴⁰ Dana Allen-Greil, et al. "Social Media and Organizational Change." *Museums and the Web 2011: Proceedings*. Ed. J. Trant and D. Bearman, Toronto: Archives & Museum Informatics, 2011. Print: 103.

basketball court? Vote below or tweet #CrazyBBall.”⁴¹ The poll pitted the Museum owned work *Free Basket* by Cuban based art collective Los Carpinteros against a work in a German collection by artist Inges Idee titled *3D2*. This is the only example of a Museum using the *Questions* feature within Facebook. Thirty-two (32) online patrons engaged in the poll. The poll, although art specific, again failed to connect online patrons to further information about the sculptures in question and provided no information on the *3D2* sculpture which may have been completely unknown to most readers. This feature has since been removed from the Museum’s page after the conversion to the timeline presentation.

Robert Stein, the Deputy Director for Research, Technology and Engagement at the IMA, gave a presentation at the 2012 Museums and the Web conference about the pitfalls of forming digital strategies. In an article detailing his presentation, Mr. Stein writes of the danger of digital planning initiatives that aren’t linked to a museum’s broader efforts and mission stating, “Creating a separate plan for technology—apart from the larger strategy of the museum—only serves to ghettoize those efforts from the truly mission-critical efforts of the museum.”⁴² Is Mr. Stein addressing the various forms that technology takes (websites, apps, interactive kiosks) rather than the content this technology makes available? Mr. Stein is quoted in numerous sources, including the New York Times, about the importance of mission informed projects. The goal of connecting technology and content with the Museum’s mission may be obtainable if the Museum undertook a long-term examination of their Facebook communications. An eye

⁴¹ Indianapolis Museum of Art. Web log post. *Facebook.com*. 30 June. 2011. Web. 15 Sept. 2011.

⁴² Stein, Robert. "Blow Up Your Digital Strategy: Changing the Conversation about Museums and Technology." *Museums and the Web 2012*. 10 Mar. 2012. Web. 17 Apr. 2012.
<http://www.museumsandtheweb.com/mw2012/papers/blow_up_your_digital_strategy_changing_the_c_1>.

towards identifying mission-inspired content, as data in this study strongly suggests is absent in Facebook, may help to better connect their online patrons with the art and natural resources that the IMA cares for and exhibits.

IMA – Facebook, Online Patron Comments and Interaction

On August 31, 2011, the IMA had 19,360 Facebook followers and a total of 1,290 “likes” distributed across the posts during the data collection period. Online patrons commented a total of 115 times across the Museum’s 96 posts with detailed information collected on 27 comments and questions. IMA responded to 50% of the 16 comments and 45% of the 11 questions. In this case, a response included the Museum “liking” comments – a behavior not seen in the Facebook efforts of MoMA or AIC. The Museum may not have responded with text but this recognition might still be encouraging to online patrons as a form of acknowledgement. As previously mentioned, researcher Nina Simon states that “likes” and simple comments such as “Good job” can still represent a conversation, if even a minor one. Questions that went unanswered range from relatively easy questions like “I'm assuming it's still outside, yes?”⁴³ to much more difficult questions such as “What did the IMA do to call attention to his situation when he was still illegally incarcerated?”⁴⁴ and “Pretty certain "Nigeria" didn't exist in ancient times.”⁴⁵ By not answering a quick question about an outdoor film screening, the Museum failed to provide information on a topic it deemed important enough to regularly communicate. When more difficult questions go unanswered such as the Museum’s efforts in advocating for artist Ai Weiwei or even the title choices of an exhibition such

⁴³ Kasey Stagg. Web log post. *Facebook.com*. 1 Aug. 2011. Web. 1 Apr. 2011.

⁴⁴ Ryan Simmons. Web log post. *Facebook.com*. 22 June 2011. Web. 1 Apr. 2011.

⁴⁵ Rick Lucas. Web log post. *Facebook.com*. 8 July 2011. Web. 1 Apr. 2011.

as with the Nigeria comment, all online patrons are witnesses to the reluctance of the Museum to address their concerns. The Facebook administrator could have answered all of these questions by contacting the events team, bringing in the expertise of a public relations manager, or by contacting a curator to address the historical accuracy of an exhibition title.

IMA – Blog, Museum Generated Content

Thirteen percent (13%) of IMA's Facebook posts provided a link to their blog. The IMA posted 35 times during the data collection period to their blog. Eighty-six percent (86%) of the posts were directly relating to the Museum and 14% related to non-museum related information. Each blog post led with the author's name however their department is not featured in this header information. Each author's name is a hyperlink that directs online patrons to a profile of the author including their job title, personal information like interests and favorite movies, and a headshot. These profiles provide a more personal picture of the author however the format require online patrons to take the extra step of clicking on the link to find this information rather than having this information accompany each post. The blog author profiles allow the Museum to present posts directly from the voices of expertise and the data shows a healthy mix of a number of different authors. Twenty-eight percent (28%) of blog posts came from a variety of authors coded as *Other*, 23% of posts were authored by the horticulture department, 14% from both the curatorial staff and interns, 9% from the media and publications department, and 6% from both the external affairs department and volunteer staff.

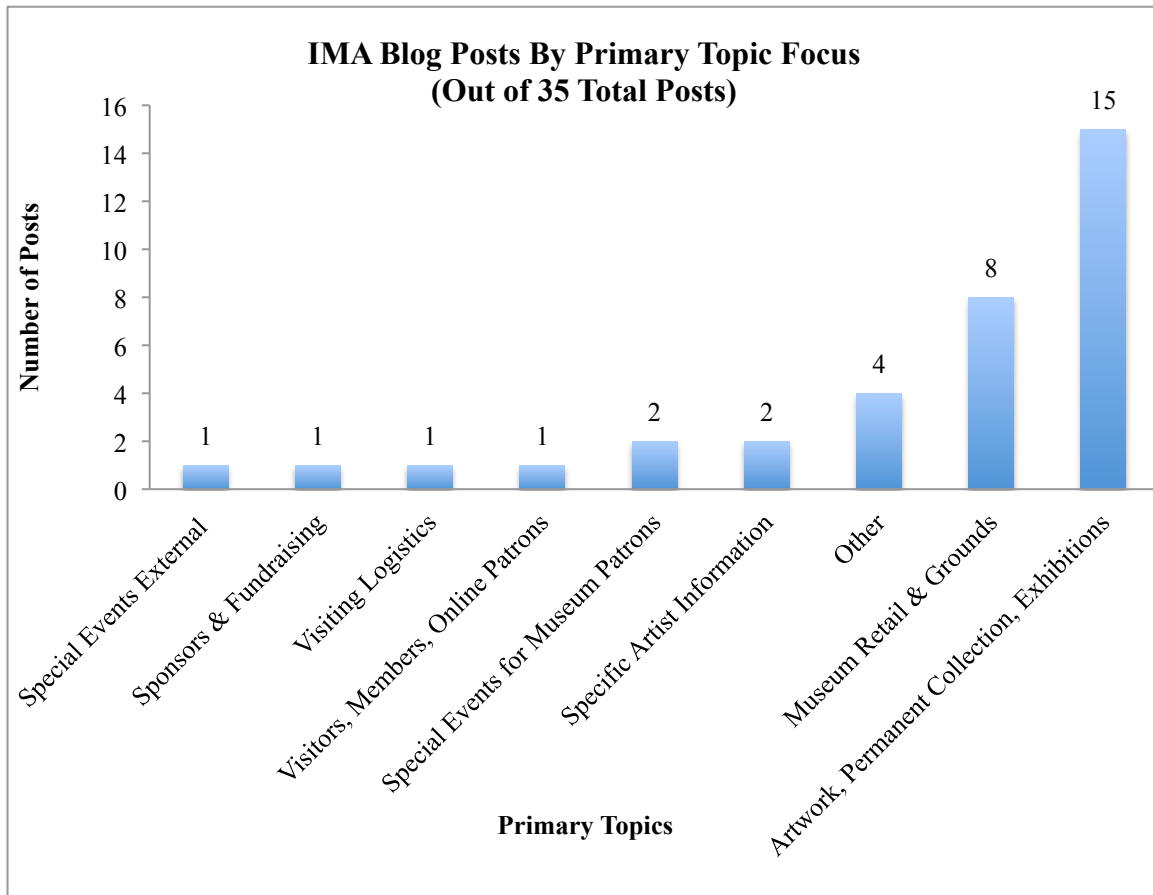


Figure 12. IMA Blog Posts By Primary Topic Focus

Unlike the Museum's Facebook posts which were dominated by information on special events, the most frequently identified Primary Topic (see fig. 12) on the blog was the *Artwork, Permanent Collection, and Exhibitions* category representing 43% of posts. The subject category *Museum Retail and Grounds* was the next most frequent subject at 23%. Unlike their Facebook page that was dominated by events information, *Special Events* accounted for only 6% of their blog posts. The IMA is the caretaker of extensive outdoor grounds and the Museum's horticultural staff contributed posts featuring information on plant care. Unlike the other museums in this study, the IMA's mission

states a desire to educate patrons about their extensive grounds, essentially bringing the total of art and mission related post topics to a combined total of 23, or 66% of blog posts.

The *Dominant Purpose* (see fig. 13) of IMA's blog posts shifts away from the 53% *Marketing* purpose shown in Facebook posts to only 8% in the blog format. *Resource and Information Sharing* as well as *Didactic* represents 66% and 23% of post purposes respectively. Again, data indicated that museums may be using blogs for more mission driven topics that share or interpret information rather than special event related topics with a marketing purpose more often seen on Facebook.

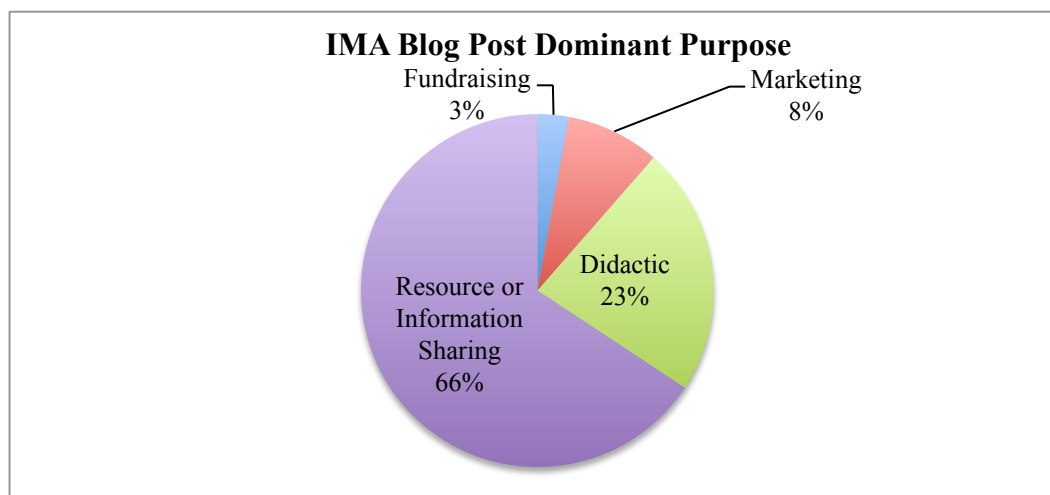


Figure 13. IMA Blog Post Dominant Purpose

IMA – Blog, Online Patron Comments and Interaction

Distributed across the 35 posts were 55 online patron comments and questions with 15 comments and questions recorded in detail. The IMA responded to 56% of the comments and 67% of the questions and– a much higher response rate than evidenced on their Facebook page. However, as the number of comments and questions rise, so does the difficulty in keeping up with your responses. There was a 109% increase between the IMA's Facebook total comments and blog total comments. Fewer comments and

questions to monitor on the blog may account for the more successful response rate. Or perhaps with individual authors monitoring their posts, the workload was more evenly distributed and the time necessary to interact with interested online patrons is distributed between multiple employees rather than a single Facebook administrator.

The Seattle Art Museum

SAM Downtown, the Olympic Sculpture Park, and the Seattle Asian Art Museum are three separate locations that comprise the Seattle Art Museum. Each of the three locations are represented through a single website, Facebook page, and blog. The SAM website features image, video, and audio based online collection tours; a searchable collection database that allows users to gather and save the art they discover; a performance dashboard similar to but less extensive than the Indianapolis Museum of Art's dashboard; a link to the Museum's Twitter and Facebook pages; and a website-hosted blog. SAM's mission focuses on its collection and the desire to make this artwork relevant to their patron's lives:

SAM Connects Art to Life: SAM provides a welcoming place for people to connect with art and to consider its relationship to their lives. SAM collects, preserves and exhibits objects from across time and across cultures, exploring the dynamic connections between past and present.⁴⁶

Compared to the other museums in the study, SAM's mission expresses a desire to relate the art in their collections with the lives of their patrons. Like the other museums in this study, SAM's mission is to share and exhibit art. Does the data from a long-term observation of their social media communications show successful, unsuccessful, or noble attempts to share their collections and exhibitions in a meaningful way?

⁴⁶ "Seattle Art Museum: SAM Governance." *Seattle Art Museum: About SAM*. The Seattle Art Museum. Web. 26 Mar. 2012. <<http://www.seattleartmuseum.org/aboutus/Governance.asp>>.

SAM – Facebook, Museum Generated Content

SAM posted on 246 occasions during the data collection period. Compared to the other museums in this study, this is significantly more frequent than the next most frequent poster, MoMA, with 100 total posts. Ninety-three percent (93%) of SAM's posts were museum related and 15% of posts linked online patrons to SAM's blog. Ninety-three percent (93%) of their posts mentioned no specific author and did not leverage the possible benefits of mentioning staff and their areas of expertise. Four percent (4%) mentioned curatorial staff with the remaining 3% distributed between single mention sources categorized as *Other*.

Like the Indianapolis Museum of Art, SAM posted more frequently about special events than any other primary topic (see fig. 14). However, their post total was also significantly higher than the museums in the study. *Special Events* accounted for 99 individual posts representing 40% of the total post amount. In turn, it should be noted that the next most frequent primary topic *Contest, Project, and Puzzles* was represented in 32 posts followed by 30 posts related to *Artwork, Permanent Collections, and Exhibitions*. The Seattle Art Museum's mission expresses a desire to connect art to patron's lives and their interpretation of this goal may include driving attendance to social events. For those unfamiliar with the Museum's desire to demonstrate a place for art in the everyday lives of their patrons, posts dominated so heavily by special event information may not be of interest to fans with a desire to learn more about the Museum's collections.

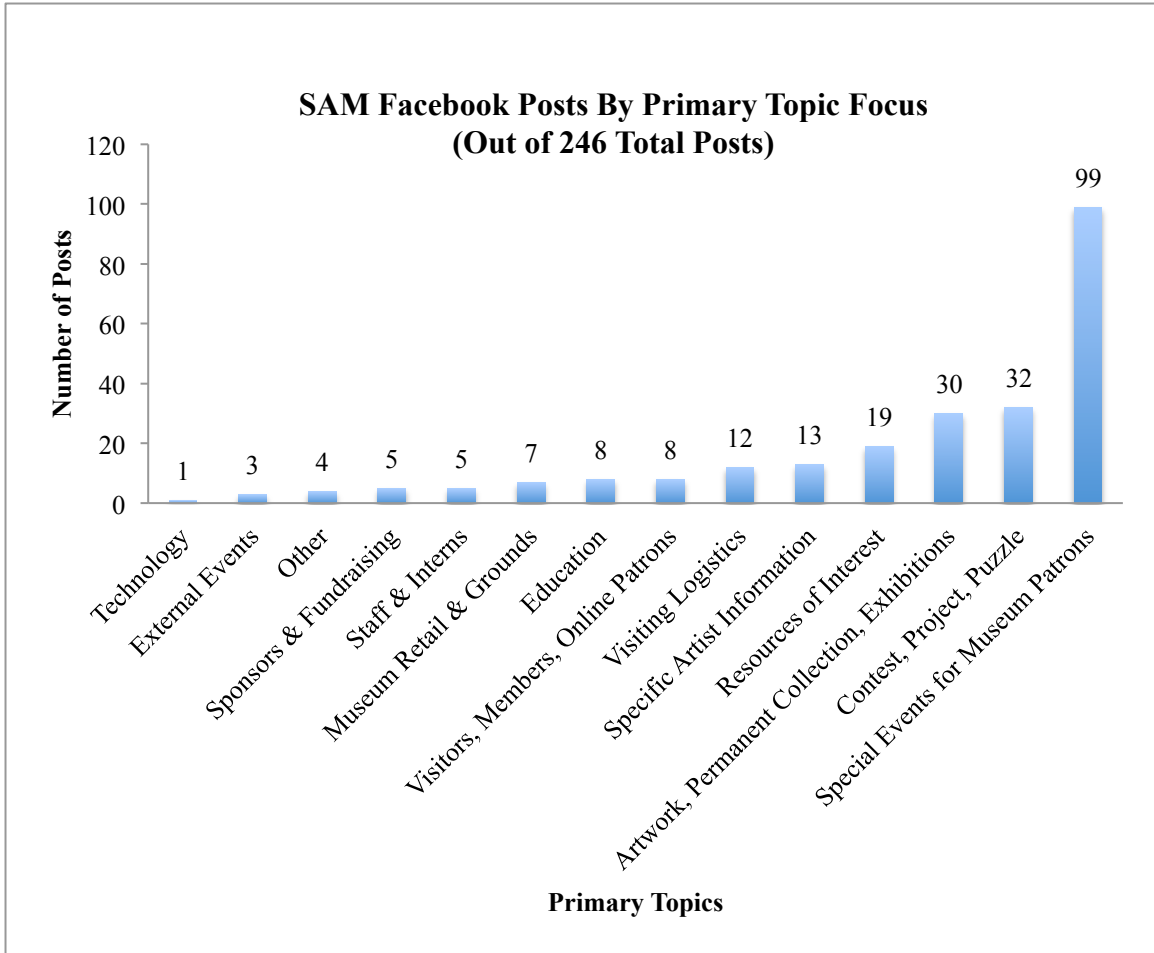


Figure 14. SAM Facebook Posts By Primary Topic Focus

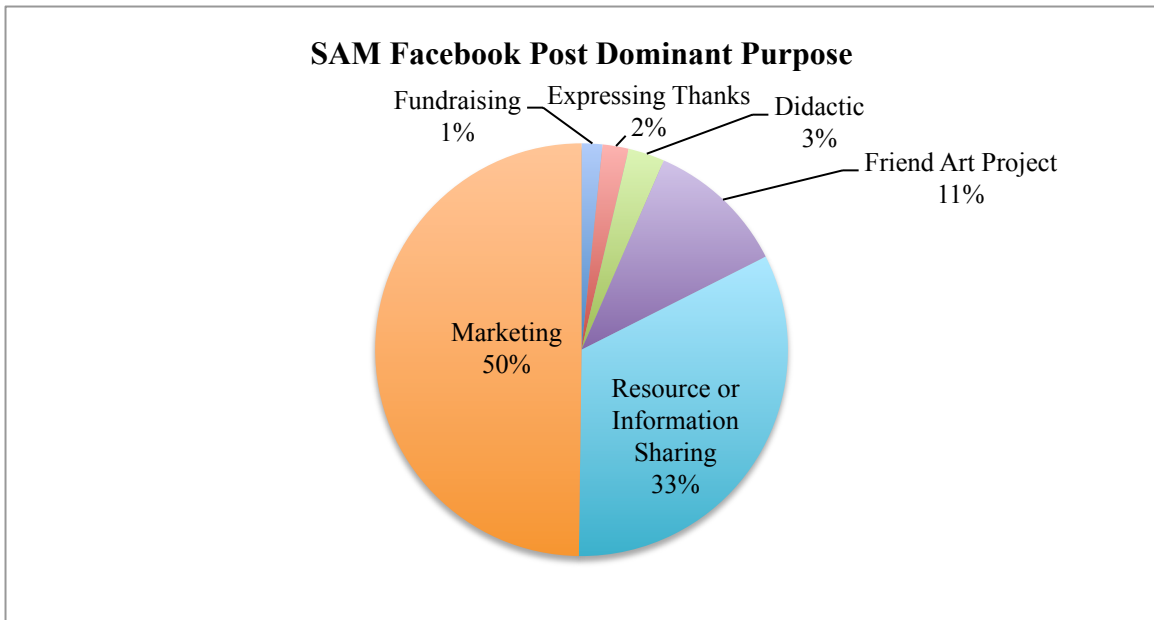


Figure 15. SAM Facebook Post Dominant Purpose

Fifty percent (50%) of SAM's Facebook posts had the Dominant Purpose of *Marketing* (see fig. 15). Thirty-three percent (33%) of posts were written with language that shows the purpose of *Resource and Information Sharing* with only 3% taking a *Didactic* approach to the presentation of information. It is safe to assume that when an institution's Facebook posts are dominated by marketing language a negative perception can form. A 2011 study by the for-profit media research firm ExactTarget found that 43% of survey respondents had unliked a brand's Facebook page when it is dominated by marketing posts.⁴⁷ If SAM's Facebook page continues to be so heavily dominated by marketing and special event related posts rather than art-related information, the interest of their online patrons may begin to wane. Online patrons might "unlike" the brand, remain a fan but stop reading the posts, or their perception of SAM may be skewed towards the belief that the Museum is more dedicated to social events and driving attendance than to caring and exhibiting the collections in their care.

A specific *Dominant Purpose* was created for a SAM Facebook project that presented online patrons with a weekly theme intended to inspire them to take photographs that expressed this theme. A close examination of this project led to the determination that a special code should be created. If these types of communications were coded as *Didactic*, the data would be skewed. The project, titled *Beauty Shot Fridays*, represents the first project seen in this study to present an ongoing Facebook-based activity to their online patrons. Outside of the data collection period the other museums in this study undertook similar projects.

⁴⁷ *The Social Breakup*. Rep. ExactTarget & CoTweet, 2011. Web. 17 June 2011. <<http://www.marketingcharts.com/direct/overposting-drives-away-facebook-fans-16055>>.

Over a 13-week period SAM posted a question on Facebook meant to express the themes of the their summer exhibitions. Online patrons took photographs inspired by the questions, submitted them via email, and SAM posted all submissions in a Facebook Gallery. The first Facebook post introducing this project read,

We're starting a fun new project called "Beauty Shot Fridays." Every week we'll be asking our Facebook Fans to send us photos related to a question that is based on the themes in our summer exhibitions "Beauty & Bounty" and "Reclaimed." This week we're asking: Where do you find beauty and bounty in your day? Send your photos (and captions) to pr@seattleartmuseum.org.⁴⁸

The response to this project was positive with a total of 222 submissions over 13 weeks and multiple online patrons praised the Museum for what they felt was an excellent opportunity to contribute their own works and to view the photographs of their fellow fans. Although this project was successful in engaging the Museum's online patrons, the project had little to do with the exhibitions *Beauty and Bounty* and *Reclaimed* – despite the stated desire to explore the themes of the exhibitions. None of the 37 total posts about this Facebook project included a link to the exhibition micro-sites or to any individual works of art in the exhibition. All submitted photos were posted to a weekly gallery however little discussion occurred. Two blog posts written by a summer intern did however discuss certain photos. Although the intern wrote eloquently about the formal elements of her favorite photos, there was no significant connection to the exhibition. It would have been difficult for those that did not participate in the project to gather any information about the exhibitions that the online patron photos were meant to inform. While this project did indeed relate back to the lives of online patrons, a goal of the Museum's mission, it completely failed to address the artwork or artists in the

⁴⁸ Seattle Museum of Art. Web log post. *Facebook.com*. 27 June. 2011. Web. 15 Sept. 2011.

exhibitions. By discussing the online patron's submissions in terms of specific works in the exhibition, or how those same works expressed the themes of the exhibition, the Museum might have easily addressed this mission disconnect.

The *Beauty Shot Friday* project directly requested photographs from online patrons in 9% of posts, 2% of posts requested an opinion from online patrons, while the remaining 89% of Facebook posts did not request a response of any kind. While the majority of SAM's posts did not attempt to directly engage online patrons, the *Beauty Shot Friday* project was a long-term, repeated opportunity for online patrons to contribute their work and the response seemed significant.

SAM – Facebook, Online Patron Comments and Interaction

At the end of the data collection period, SAM had 31,828 followers. During the data collection period their online patrons "liked" posts 1,864 times and commented on various posts a total of 410 times. Forty-nine (49) comments and (40) questions were identified as having the qualities that required detailed information to be collected. The Museum responded to 78% of the questions and 76% of the comments, a much higher response rate than any other museum in this study. The Museum's responsiveness to online patrons is impressive with comments being answered at all hours of the day. Like the IMA, SAM responded to online patron comments by "liking" them. SAM's efforts extended beyond this simple mechanism of recognizing comments to more detailed answers and comments. SAM was extremely responsive to online patrons comments and questions.

SAM – Blog, Museum Generated Content

The Seattle Art Museum posted to their blog “SOAP” 46 times during the data collection period. The name of the author of each individual post does not appear until the end of each post. Forty-one percent (41%) of the posts listed no author, summer interns authored 26%, the media and publications department authored 22%, 7% were authored by single mention sources categorized as *Other*, and 4% by the external affairs department. Similar to the Museum’s Facebook posts, online patrons are not given direct access to curatorial, conservation, or collection based voices of expertise rather blog posts were dominated by the voices within the Museum responsible for communication activities. Perhaps SAM is facing the challenge of engaging a broad range of staff in gathering and authoring post content.

SAM’s blog posts (see fig. 16) focused on *Special Events* with this topic featured

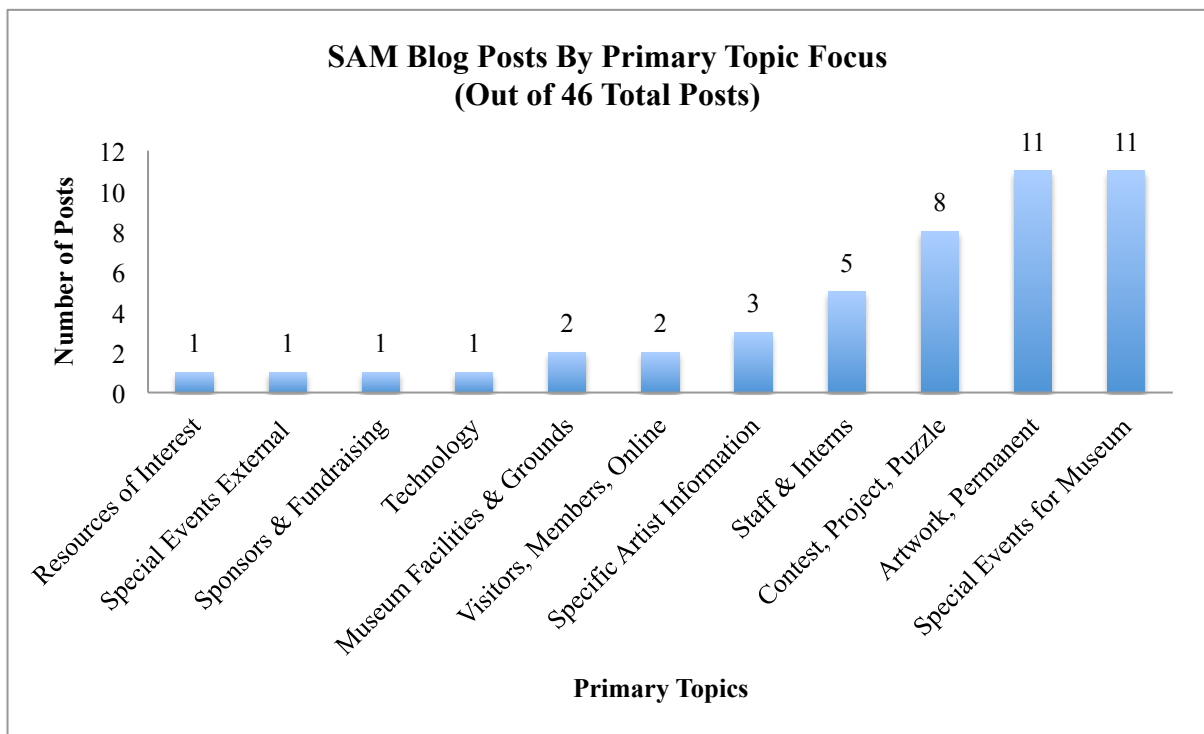


Figure 16. SAM Blog Posts By Primary Topic Focus

in 11 posts while another 11 were coded as *Artwork*, *Permanent Collections* and *Exhibitions*. SAM's *Beauty and Bounty* project was the topic of 8 posts in the category *Contest, Puzzle, Project*. Unlike the other museums in this study, SAM did not regularly use their blog as a place to delve deeper into art-related subjects as posts were usually very brief.

Resource and Information Sharing is the most frequent Dominant Purpose (see fig. 17) of SAM's *SOAP* posts accounting for 37% of posts with *Marketing* representing 31% of posts. From the perspective of an outsider that might expect a blog to provide more detailed information on the art and exhibitions, it may be discouraging to regularly find reports on the Museum's special events and posts about museum store sales and the new menu in the restaurant. The short length of posts, the lack of art related topics, and the presentation of marketing messages does not position the Museum's blog as a place to discover new art and to learn more about exhibitions. However, if special events are seen by the Museum as a method by which it can connect art to the daily lives of patrons, then the Museum could be seen as fulfilling its mission.

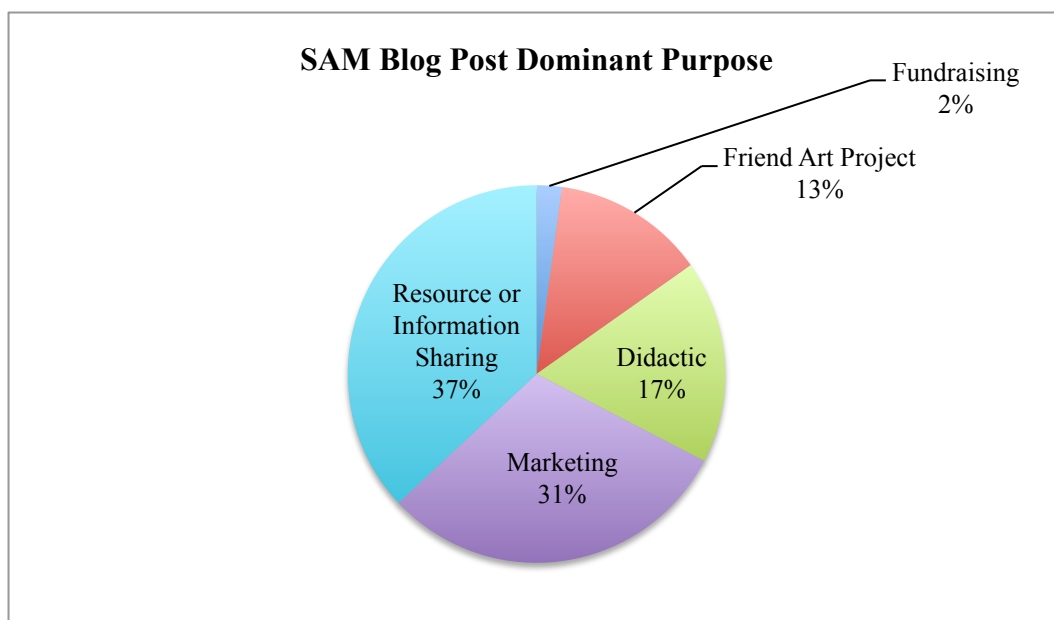


Figure 17. SAM Blog Post Dominant Purpose

SAM – Blog, Online Patron Comments and Interaction

Online patrons commented a total of 51 times over the Museum's 46 posts. Five substantive comments were recorded in detail and the Museum engaged with three (3) of those comments. The Museum answered both of the two questions posted on their blog. These numbers again support SAM's dedication to answering questions and engaging in comments, perhaps resulting in an online patron outside perspective of the Museum as an approachable, responsible source of information.

In one of the first posts on SAM's blog *SOAP*, the Museum wrote about the challenges and opportunities of the creating and supporting a blog. Employee Matthew Renton was responsible for developing and guiding the launch of the Museum's blog. In this post Renton muses about the timing of the blog's launch and whether the Museum could properly support its efforts. He also stated, "The blog is a fun, informative, revealing and powerful way to share with our audiences, and most importantly listen to what they have to say."⁴⁹ Data on SAM's response rate to online patron comments and questions indicates that it continues to maintain a dedication to not only listening to but also responding to their online patrons. However, information and resources on the Museum's collections or art in general is not a focus and marketing language is often employed in content creation.

⁴⁹ Christina DePaolo "SAM Comes Clean About SOAP." *SOAP*. 10 Oct. 2009. Web. 26 Mar. 2012. <<http://samblog.seattleartmuseum.org/?p=80>>.

The Museum of Modern Art, the Art Institute of Chicago, the Indianapolis Museum of Art, and the Seattle Art Museum Facebook and Blog Comparison Data

A comparison of each case study museum's Facebook and blog data revealed numerous points of interest. When examining the Facebook primary topic comparison data (see fig. 18) for the Museum of Modern Art, the Art Institute of Chicago, the Indianapolis Museum of Art, and the Seattle Art Museum a few trends become clear. MoMA and AIC, the larger institutions in this study in terms of collection size and operating budget, more frequently presented posts that were focused on the topic of *Artwork, Permanent Collections, and Exhibitions* while the smaller institutions, SAM and IMA, more frequently presented information regarding *Special Events for Museum Patrons*. One possible explanation for this difference may be found in the onsite and online audience of each museum. MoMA and AIC may have larger non-local onsite audience and, hence, online audiences. IMA and SAM may have a more local audience bases. MoMA and AIC may assume that to maintain the interest of their far flung patrons who are unable to attend special events, communications should be more focused on art-related information. IMA and SAM with more local audiences can communicate to those that might easily attend events. Or perhaps SAM and IMA have simply taken a short-term view of their Facebook posts and are unaware of this imbalance. As already asserted special events are important to any institution, but striking a balance between events and art-related, communications should be a consideration when calibrating a communication strategy.

Comparative Data of Facebook Post Topics

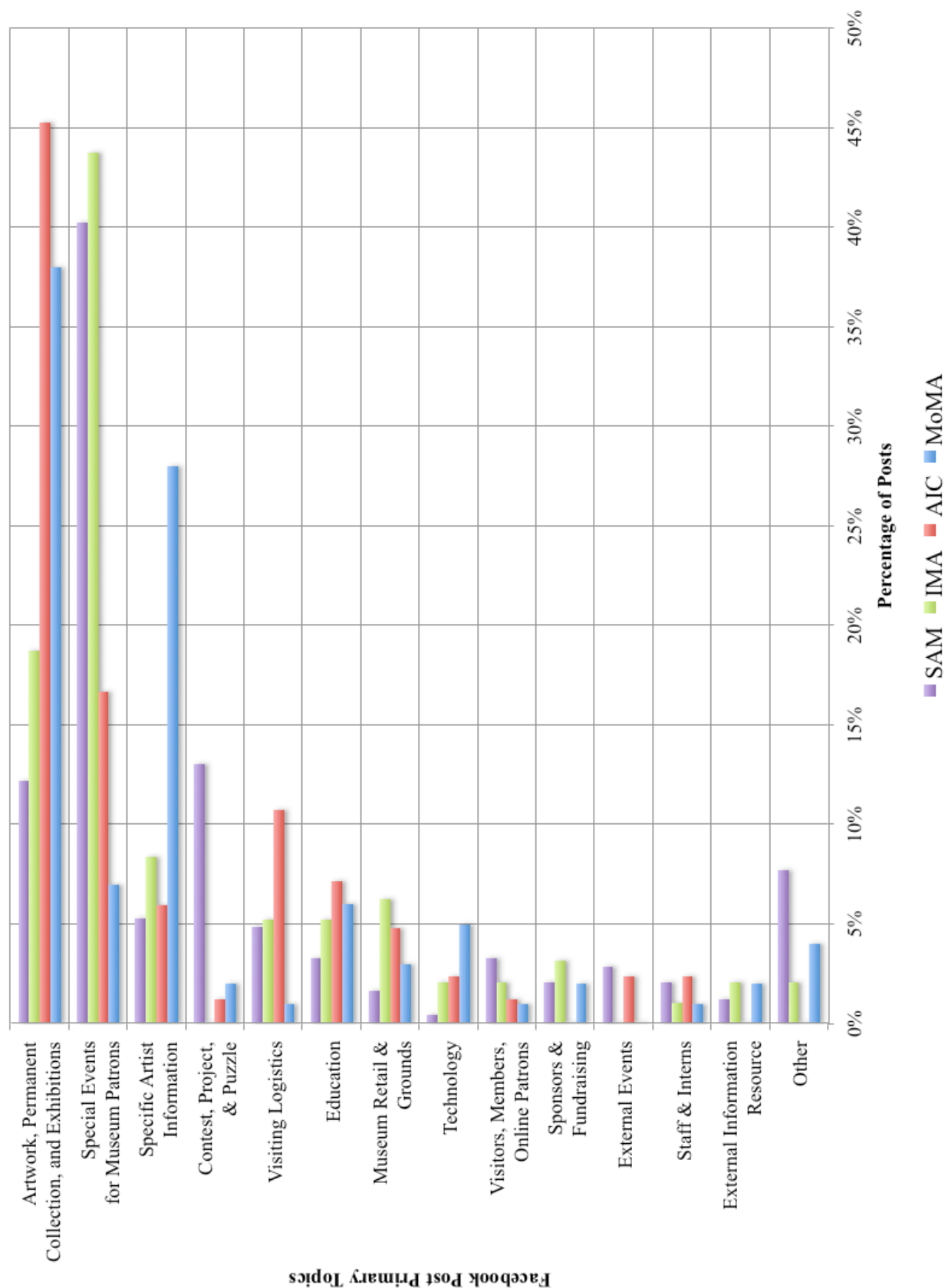


Figure 18 Comparative Data of Facebook Post Topics

One may easily assume that online patrons, either local or foreign to the museum's local, have chosen to follow an art museum because of their interest in the museum's collections and exhibitions. If communications fail to provide compelling information that fulfills this interest on a regular basis, online patrons may become disappointed or disinterested. In the worst case, poorly balanced primary topics may even lead to a degraded perception of a museum as an authoritative and conscientious caretaker of their collections and exhibitions. Online patrons may begin to wonder if the mission of the museum is the production of events rather than the presentation of art.

In the comparison data of the primary topics of blog posts (see fig. 19), AIC had the highest percentage of posts categorized as *Artwork, Permanent Collection, and Exhibitions* with IMA, MoMA, and SAM following descending in order. MoMA used their blog to explore, in long-format, the work of *Specific Artist Information* including discussions of individual works, biographical notes, artistic influences, and theoretical approaches rather than the more generalized and broader approach as epitomized by the category *Artwork, Permanent Collection, and Exhibitions*. SAM and IMA also used their blogs to discuss individual artists, however AIC didn't discuss an individual artist on any occasion. A significant drop in the frequency of posts categorized as *Special Events for Museum Patrons*, as compared to Facebook, may indicate that all museums in this study consider their blog as an ineffective or inappropriate application to regularly discuss these events. One may assume that blog readers have specifically sought out the resource to learn about a topic in greater depth than possible in other social media applications. It may also be safe to assume that discussing a special event in detail would not appeal to

that same audience or that readers may not wish to read a report of an event they did not attend.

In addition, blog data shows only one topic category in which all four museums are represented. While each museum in the study covered a broad range of primary topics at varying frequencies in their blogs, the only primary topic category in which each museum was represented is *Artwork, Permanent Collection, and Exhibitions*. If the assumption is that online patrons are motivated to visit blogs through a desire to investigate the artworks and exhibitions of a museum in more depth than possible in Facebook, the data may indicate that the museums in this study are aware of this reader motivation and have calibrated their blog posts accordingly. While MoMA, IMA, and SAM still used their blogs to report on special events and other non-art related topics these topics appear less frequently in the museums' blogs when compared to Facebook.

One might argue that MoMA and AIC are able to present more art-related communications because of financial resources and the number of staff members available to contribute to social media content. If there is a larger pool of staff to leverage in creating content for social media, the success of engaging this staff may naturally be higher. The two museums may also have written social media policies or more detailed communications plans that guide social media efforts. The frequency of staff members mentioned in MoMA's Facebook posts might support this assertion however AIC's data does not. MoMA mentioned the contributions of curatorial staff more often than AIC, IMA, and SAM (see table 2).

Comparative Data of Blog Post Topics

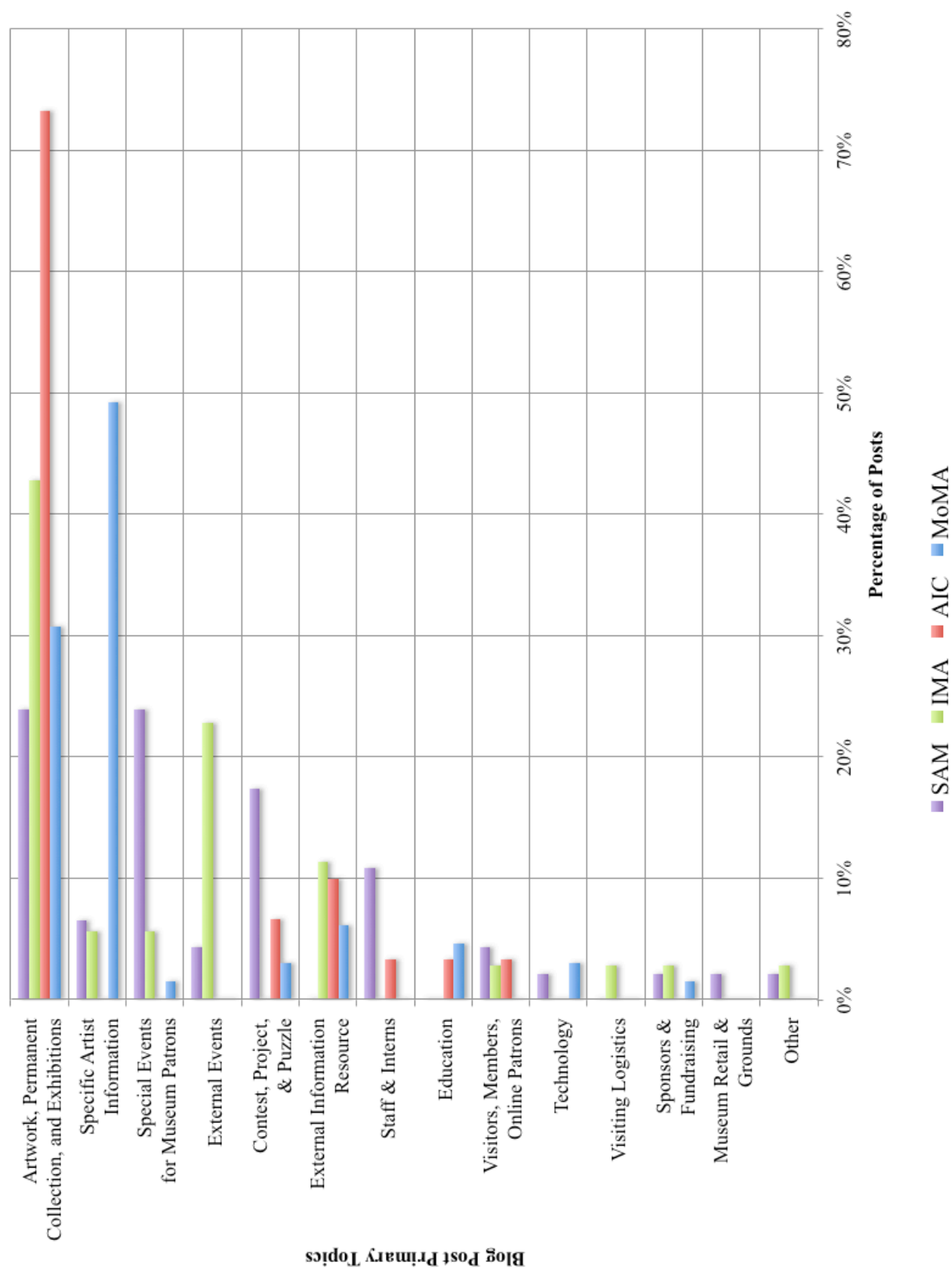


Figure 19 Comparative Data of Blog Post Topics

Facebook: Museum Departments Mentioned in Post				
	<u>MoMA</u>	<u>AIC</u>	<u>IMA</u>	<u>SAM</u>
Curatorial	19%	7%	2%	4%
Guest Artist	3%	1%	3%	0%
No Author Listed	73%	85%	94%	93%
Other	5%	7%	1%	3%

Table 2. Facebook Post Author Comparative Data

As stated, blog applications allow for longer format posts as well as the ability to more clearly identify the author by name and department. Facebook data shows that posts are dominated by a general institutional voice with no author listed, while blog post data show a much greater distribution and diversity of specific staff contributions (see table 3). SAM, however, is the exception to this observation with 41% of blog posts listing no author. It could also be asserted that online patrons may not expect daily posts to a blog, as opposed to Facebook, and that with a longer lead time for creating content,

Blog: Museum Departments Mentioned				
	<u>MoMA</u>	<u>AIC</u>	<u>IMA</u>	<u>SAM</u>
Archivist	3%	N/A	N/A	N/A
Conservation	N/A	7%	N/A	N/A
Curatorial	58%	7%	14%	N/A
Development	5%	N/A	N/A	N/A
Education	6%	N/A	N/A	N/A
External Affairs	3%	N/A	6%	4%
Guest Artist	5%	N/A	N/A	N/A
Horticulture	N/A	N/A	23%	N/A
Marketing	6%	47%	N/A	N/A
Media and Publications	N/A	17%	9%	22%
Research Staff	N/A	13%	N/A	N/A
Volunteer	N/A	N/A	6%	N/A
Guest Other	3%	N/A	14%	N/A
No Author Listed	N/A	N/A	N/A	41%
Intern	N/A	7%	14%	26%
Staff Other	11%	3%	14%	7%

Table 3. Blog Post Author Comparative Data

blog administrators may have more freedom in gathering posts from a great variety of voices. This greater variety of voices may in turn affect the primary topic distribution examined earlier in this section.

There are a number of resources that can provide analytics about an institution's use of social media. Again, these resources are not able to identify topic focus nor the intent or dominant purpose of a post. The intent, or perceived intent, of a communication should be of paramount importance. Might the language and lack of further resources provided in a communication lead a reader to perceive that the purpose of a post is marketing related? Is an institution merely 'drumming up business' or is it educating and sharing information? The language used in a post and the links provided, or lack thereof, might influence the perception of the intent of a communication. Although it would be difficult to argue that marketing is not an essential function of any museum, language should be carefully considered. Museums on Facebook have the luxury of an audience that has self-elected to read the information it presents. Online patrons have chosen to receive communications most likely because of their interest in the institution. Peaking that interest, converting online patrons to onsite patrons, may be achieved by informing and educating rather than communications that say "Last chance to see our exhibition!" or "Come see us today!" It may be the closing day of an exhibition but focusing on the art and artists in the exhibition, focusing on sharing and educating online patrons, may be a better tactic than trying to influence behavior through urgency. The data regarding the dominant purpose of the Facebook posts of AIC, IMA, and SAM showed that each created communications with a marketing tone more often than any other identified purpose (see figure 20). Only MoMA escaped the lure of Facebook as an inexpensive

and immediate marketing platform by posting communications most frequently identified with the intent of *Sharing Information and Resources*.

The category *Resource and Information Sharing* was the most frequent dominant purpose of all four museums' blogs (see figure 21). These posts evidence less intent to educate patrons than the strictly *Didactic* posts that was the next most frequent category identified for both MoMA and AIC. The purpose of *Marketing* was still present in blog posts with both SAM and AIC showing this as the next most frequently identified purpose.

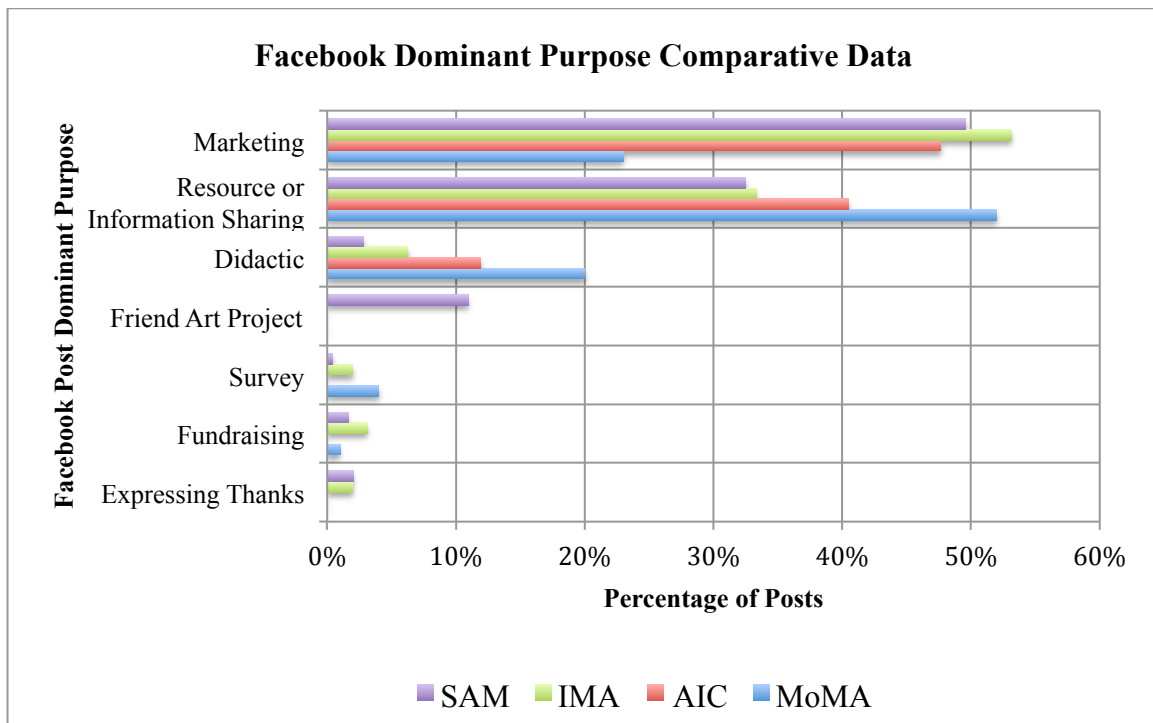


Figure 20. Facebook Dominant Purpose Comparative Data

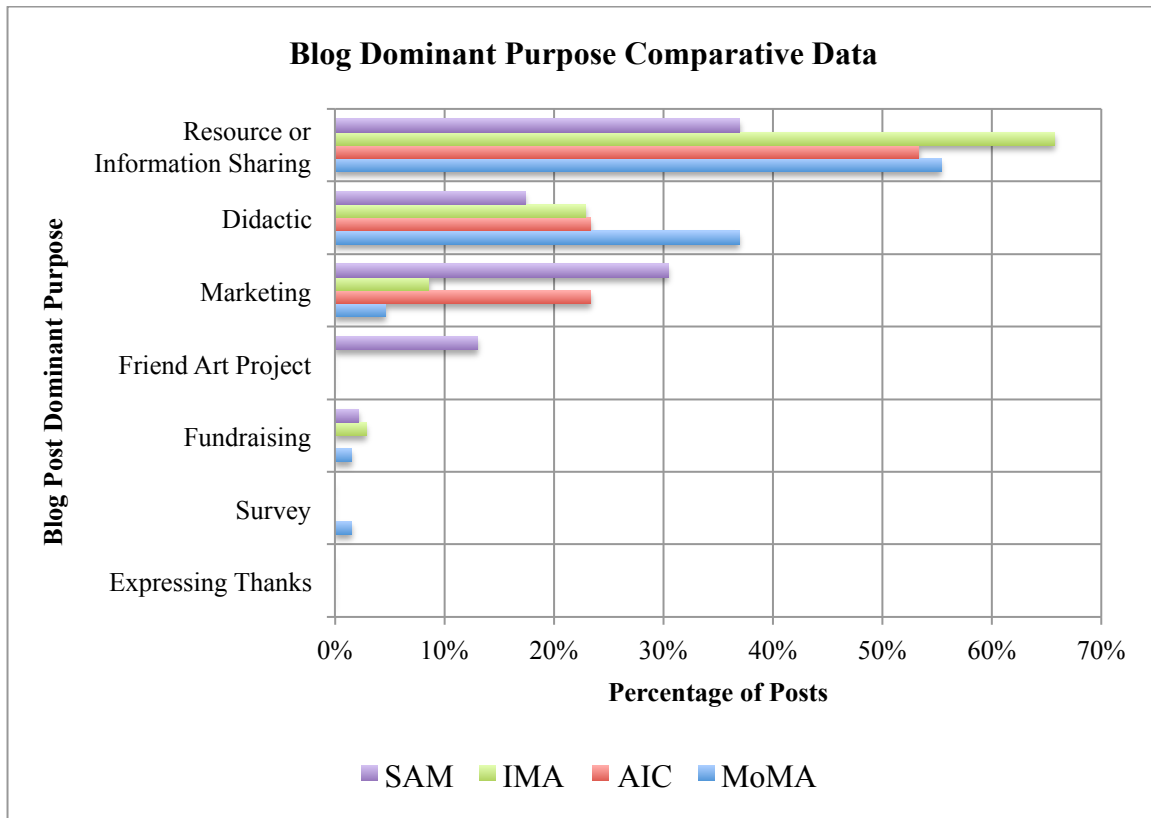


Figure 21. Blog Dominant Purpose Comparative Data

When comparing the dominant purposes of each social media application, the museums posted information identified with the dominant purpose of *Marketing* at much lower rates in their blogs than on Facebook (see table 4). Again, this may indicate that museums see blogs as a more informational platform than Facebook or it may relate to the skills of the authors. A curator may not be posting directly to Facebook, but they may be authoring a blog post about an artist or an exhibition. As an author, a curator may not naturally use the same language that a member of the marketing department might. A curator may tend towards simply sharing or educating rather than resorting to the skill set of marketing professionals who may be more concerned with influencing an online patron's decision to attend the museum. Different staff members will approach their assignments with different skill sets and intentions. The possibility of longer-format posts in a blog, as compared to the limitations of Facebook, may also account for this

difference. A blog might be considered an application where posts can share information or educate readers on art-related topics. However, the advantages and constraints of each application do not change the asserted measures of social media success of mission-driven, art-related, and participatory social media communications. Carefully considered language, links to additional resources, and concise facts or ideas can still be presented on Facebook. A shift in a museums perception of Facebook as a marketing tool to one where valuable culture content can be shared may be necessary.

Marketing as a Dominant Purpose Facebook and Blog				
	<u>MoMA</u>	<u>AIC</u>	<u>IMA</u>	<u>SAM</u>
Facebook	23%	48%	53%	50%
Blog	5%	23%	9%	30%

Table 4. A Facebook and Blog Posts Identified With Marketing as a Dominant Purpose, by Museum

If depth of resources and availability of staff are contributing factors in the *Primary Topic* focus and *Dominant Purpose* of a post, then one might also assume that this would influence how often a museum answers online patron comments and questions. More resources, more eyes monitoring Facebook, or more time of a single employee dedicated to this task may lead to a higher success rate. However, data shows that SAM and IMA, the comparatively smaller institutions, answered questions and comments at a higher rate than both MoMA and AIC. SAM answered 78% of online patron Facebook questions and 76% of Facebook comments while IMA answered 45% of Facebook questions and 50% of comments. MoMA answered 33% of questions and 16% of comments while AIC answered 29% of questions and 15% of comments (see table 5). A similar frequency in successfully answering questions and acknowledging comments shows itself in the blog data. Despite resources or size of staff, SAM and IMA show a

greater dedication to answering direct questions and comments than the larger institutions in this study. Perhaps resources or staff is not a factor but rather the institutions basic understanding that social media is not a static format but a give and take between poster and online patron.

Comments and Questions Answered or Acknowledged by Museum				
	<u>Comment</u> <u>Facebook</u>	<u>Comment</u> <u>Blog</u>	<u>Question</u> <u>Facebook</u>	<u>Question</u> <u>Blog</u>
MoMA	16%	20%	33%	0%
AIC	15%	100%	29%	0%
IMA	50%	56%	45%	67%
SAM	76%	60%	78%	100%

Table 5. Comments and Questions Answered or Acknowledged By Case Study Museums as Compared Between Facebook and Blogs

Overall, SAM was the most active in acknowledging and answering questions and comments on both Facebook and the blog, with only AIC succeeding in addressing a higher percentage of blog comments. One may argue that the more questions or comments online patrons put forward, the more difficult it is to monitor, answer, and contribute to comments and questions. It is easier to answer 5 questions from 1,000 online patrons than 500 questions from 10,000 online patrons. Without page view data from each museum's blog, it is impossible to determine how many blog readers each has. Facebook followers are easily determined and this data does not show a positive correlation between number of followers and numbers of comments and questions. For example, at the end of the data collection period, MoMA had 956,940 Facebook followers while SAM had 31,823. MoMA's online patrons asked 27 direct questions and 56 comments were recorded in detail while SAM's online patrons asked 40 direct questions and 49 comments were recorded in detail. While it may be true that the

number of questions and comments will affect a museum's ability to respond, data would seem to indicate that for the museums in this study it is not a matter of the amount of questions and comments but if the institution values the abilities of social media to directly speak with online patrons. Further research, including a study with a larger sampling of museums, may help to support these assumptions.

General comments and questions are one area to observe while data indicating that a museum is actively requesting responses is another. The data indicates no significant difference between the museums' Facebook pages and blogs and the tactics through which they actively request responses (see table 6). Each museum in this study did, at one point or another, try to actively engage online patrons. MoMA and SAM most actively presented opportunities for online patrons to contribute. The tactics of each museum varied. MoMA often presented quizzes to online patrons with *Do You Know Your MoMA* while SAM presented projects such as the *Beauty Shot Friday* campaign.

Online Patron Response Actively Sought by Museum by Application		
	<u>Facebook</u>	<u>Blog</u>
MoMA	13%	11%
AIC	8%	7%
IMA	5%	9%
SAM	11%	20%

Table 6. Percentages of Posts, Facebook and Blogs That Request a Response From Online Patrons.

The data in this study helped to identify the strengths and possible areas for improvement for each museums' Facebook and blog communications. A casual examination of posts in both applications may have found that on a particular day or week the museum produced stellar example of mission-driven, participatory social media communications. A three-month examination may reveal what a short-term glimpse is

unable to identify and may be a useful tool in recalibrating social media communications that serve the needs of an institution and the expectations of online patrons. It may even be useful to conduct a study that classifies a random sampling of posts and comments over a longer period of time to help characterize and calibrate social media communications. The important point being that institutions should more carefully consider, in whichever way they feel appropriate, its social media communications with an eye towards the what, how, and why of posts. Topics, purposes, and the level to which they respond to online patron comments and questions should always be considered.

Conclusions

As non-profits entered the debate over the use of social media, the concept of radical trust, believing that fans and readers would responsibly contribute to posts, was often cited as necessary in overcoming the many concerns voiced over its adoption.⁵⁰ Social media was seen as an erosion of a museum's authority as any content posted online might be modified incorrectly or irresponsibly through the conversations and contributions of laymen. Radical trust was seen as a necessary behavior that would help institutions recognize that online patrons would respect and responsibly contribute to the ideas put forward by experts. As more and more museums joined the social media revolution, with or without a communication strategy, the apprehension over the loss of authority seemingly fell away. Did this concern truly disappear or has the issue merely been skirted? Is a museum producing valuable cultural content through Facebook and

⁵⁰ Russo, Angelina et al. "Participatory Communication with Social Media." *Curator: The Museum Journal*. 51. 1 (2008): 21-31. Print.

blogs or is social media a series of marketing platforms that enable a museum to push cursory information on openings, closings, and special events? Authority cannot be challenged if the communications produced don't rely on that authority to begin with. There are many examples of social media and Web 2.0 initiatives that are rich sources of cultural content, conversations, and user-generated information. However, from the perspective of a member of the public, content on Facebook and blogs may fall short of offering new resources, ideas, and genuine conversations. Perhaps the issue should not be if museums can trust the public but can the public trust museums to produce valuable content that contributes to their understanding and enjoyment of art?

A quick glance at the top three topic categories of the case study museums' Facebook and blog posts indicates a lack of art related topics for both IMA and SAM (see fig. 22 and 23). While IMA and SAM excel in other areas in this study, they should

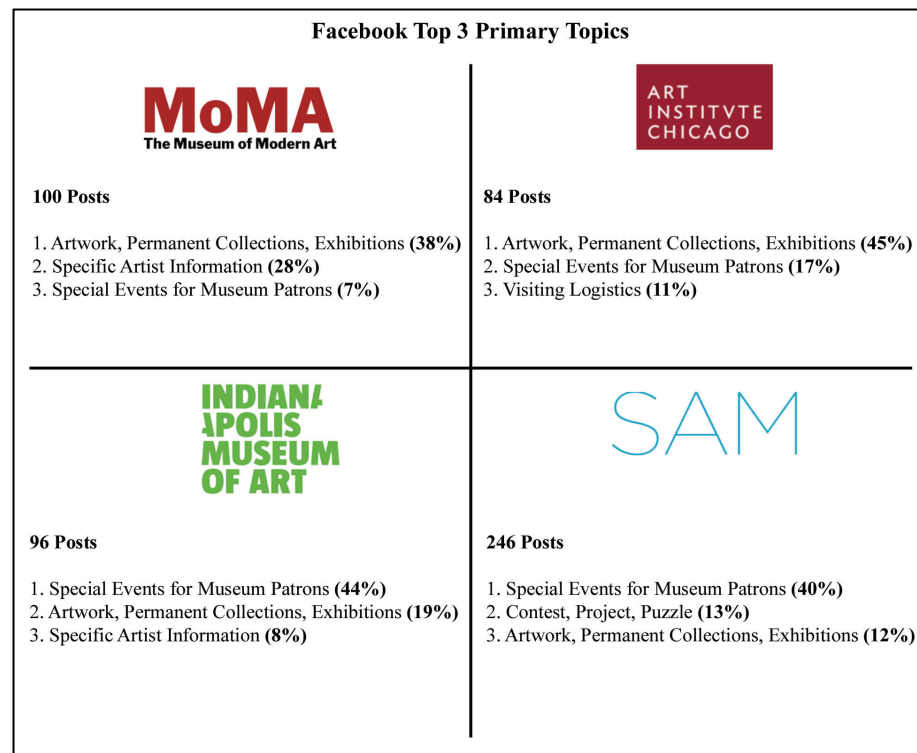


Figure 22. Facebook Top 3 Primary Topics

consider recalibrating the topics of Facebook posts. In addition, SAM may also want to consider examining the topics of blog posts. At the heart of the missions of all of the museums in this study is the desire to share their collections with the public. When social media communications are poorly balanced and weighted towards sharing events and other non-art related information, these missions go unrealized. Rather than treating social media as inconsequential, communications staff should realize the unprecedented access they have to an already interested audience. Social media posts should be treated as an opportunity to talk about the art and exhibitions of each museum. Communications staff may have a number of demands on their schedules however a careful eye should be kept on balancing the topics of social media posts and the links to further resources provided in each post. Short format Facebook communications can be enhanced with links to longer format blogs, online collection pages, exhibition microsites, artist websites, and other resources internal or external to the museum's website that can provide online patrons with further information. If social media communications are poorly balanced and regularly dominated by certain topics, online patron may choose to unfriend an institution or to ignore posts. Facebook and blogs are the very public face of an institution and the information that museum professionals share, sometimes on a daily basis, shapes public perception and expectations. Moving to a consideration of social media tools as part of a long-term accumulative strategy rather than a place to post short-lived information may help to calibrate a well-rounded communication strategy.

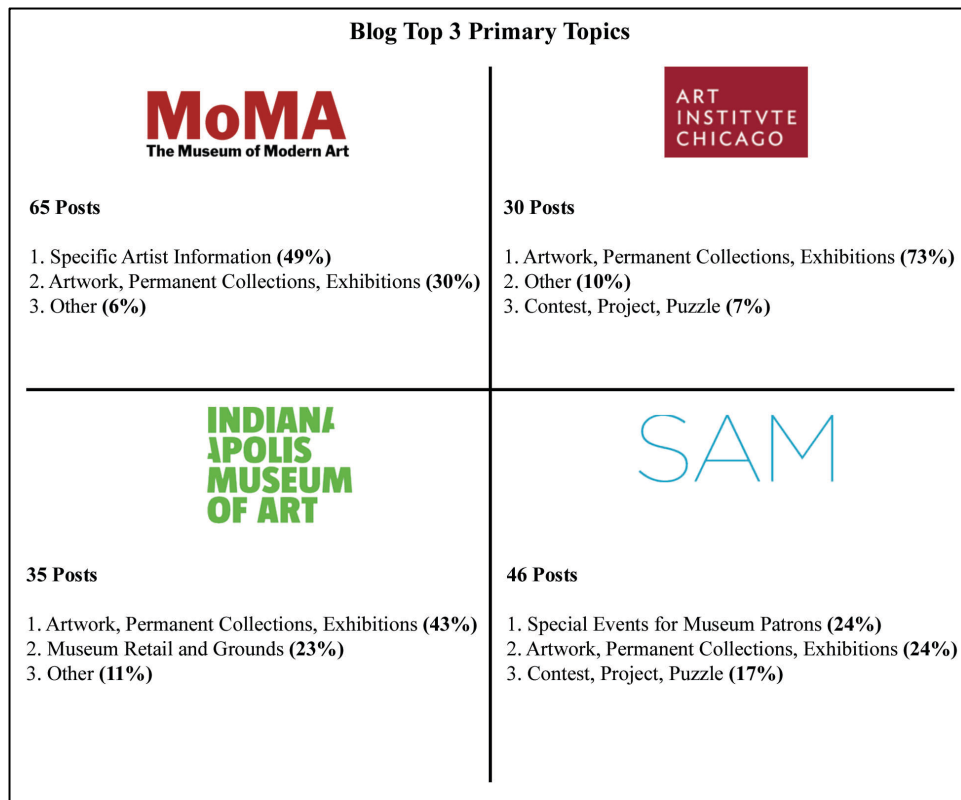


Figure 23. Blog Top 3 Primary Topics

Public perception and expectations of the museum are not only set by the topic of communications but also by the tone they take. Excessive or cliché marketing language or posts that fail to provide further information beyond a simple call to action may also alienate online patrons. Engaging a broader range of staff may help to balance both topic focus and tone as these staff members will tend to think and write within their area of expertise. How an institution mandates or manages contributions is a road that communication experts may need to travel, crafting an approach that dovetails with an institution's unique situation. Just as launching an exhibition involves many areas of expertise, a well-balanced social media communication strategy should also leverage an institution's experts. When a museum engages a broad range of staff, the tone of communications may change accordingly. A look at the most frequent dominant purpose

of the Facebook and blog posts of the museums in this study may quickly illuminate the imbalance of voices within each case study museum (see fig. 24 and 25).

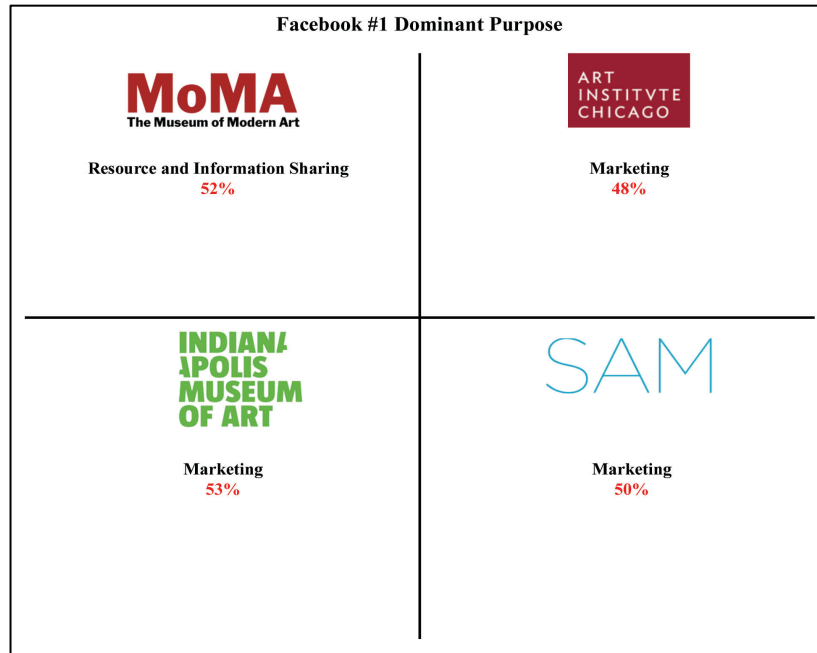


Figure 24. Facebook Most Frequent Dominant Purpose

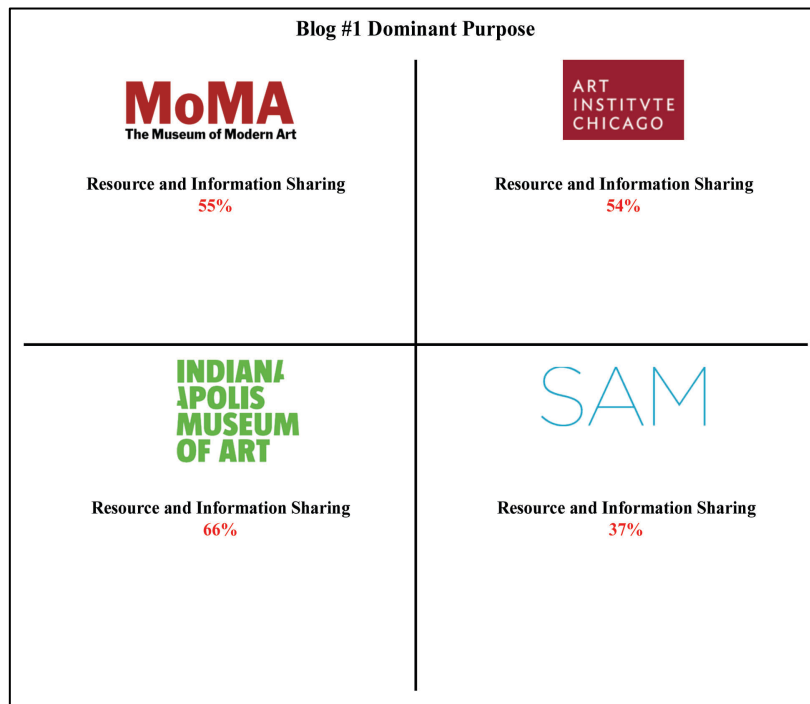


Figure 25. Blog Most Frequent Dominant Purpose

Facebook, and to a lesser extent blogs, are communication tools that the general public regularly uses. Through this use, they have developed a set of expectations on how these media can and should function. Social media are applications through which commenting and conversations regularly take place. If a museum uses social media applications to push information in the classic one-to-many model of a website then it is not only missing an opportunity to engage with online patrons but it is failing to meet the expectations of those same patrons. Observations of the comments in this study showed that online patrons read the comments and questions of their fellow followers. Failing to answer a question or a significant contributive comment is a failure that is visible to all. Would a staff member ignore or walk away from an onsite visitor that asked a question or made a comment about a painting? Although this analogy is simplistic, it is one that may help communication professionals consider the impact of merely pushing information and ignoring questions and comments in social media. Every answer provided and every comment acknowledged is not only meeting the already established expectations of social media users but serves to build a culture of respectful exchange. Innumerable for-profit social media advisors⁵¹ recommend listening to a social media conversation before jumping in. Listening before contributing or answering is an approach that allows one to comment with full knowledge and understanding of a customer's potential concerns or interests. Listen, then talk. The key recommendation is that staff will eventually join the conversation. The data from this study indicates that IMA and SAM diligently monitored the comments of both their Facebook and blog posts and regularly engaged in

⁵¹ For example, Lon Safko. "The Social Media Bible." Hoboken, NJ: Innovative Thinking, LLC. 2010. Print.

comments and answered questions while MoMA and AIC may wish to consider more actively engaging with online patrons.

It is not the purpose of this study to say that any museum failed in its social media efforts. What this study hopes to offer is a data collection, analysis approach, and consideration that encourages all museums to gauge and balance social media communications beyond currently available analytics tools. A communication calendar should not only be what will be done but a record of what's already been accomplished. By retroactively examining topics, purpose, offered resources, and conversations the museums in this study, and other museums that value the importance of social media, may be able to improve the quality of post content and purpose as well as the online patron experience and perception. Social media should be considered a public relations tool through which a museum can share, educate, and converse with their public within a model of reciprocity. If online patrons feel that they are being marketed to regularly, their trust in the institution may falter. If online patrons are unable to learn more about the art and exhibitions presented by the museum, their interest may falter. If online patrons' comments and questions go unanswered their perception of the institution may falter. Museums should take care to maintain a mission-guided balance in social media communications. Each museum should determine its own measure of success but the importance of what you talk about, how you talk about it, why you talk about it, and if you talk with your online patrons should be of paramount importance.

Next Steps

The data collection instrument used in this study may benefit from modifications if research or use is to continue. The data collection process was extremely time consuming with both an extensive list of topic definitions and a great deal of data that went unused in this analysis. The instrument could be streamlined to include only the overarching topic categories, rather than the full list of topic definitions. In addition, the amount of data collected could be modified to better suit the goals of continued study by deleting certain data points or sets of information.

This topic of research would also benefit from direct contact with an institution's online patrons. Contacting online patrons could take the form of a blanket survey or through contacting the individuals that take the time to provide comments or ask direct questions. This information could be used to support or modify certain assumptions about how online patrons perceive museums through the topics and intent of posts. It may also help to clarify what an online patron's perception of a museum might be if a museum fails to engage with or acknowledge a substantive comment or direct question.

Recommendations

If the goal of a museum's social media strategy is to support its mission by presenting art-related information and activities that enhance their online patrons understanding and interest in its collections and exhibitions, then a long-term view of social media communications should be considered. Based on the observations of the four museums in this study, the following items should be considered when developing a mission-driven and participatory social media communication strategy.

- A balance in mission-driven primary topics.
- Providing links and resources that support the primary topic of a post.
- Post content that leverages language that evidences a balance on purposes. Posts should not be dominated by marketing language.
- That a breadth of expert voices is consulted in content creation.
- Questions and comments from online patrons are encouraged in a variety of mission-driven ways.
- Comments and questions are regularly answered and/or acknowledged.

The production of valuable cultural content, and an adherence to a museum's mission, should be reflected in all activities and projects, including social media. By recording data in a standardized format and by analyzing data that considers these points, non-profit institutions can gauge and balance social media communications beyond currently available analytics tools. This information cannot only be used retroactively to examine past posts but proactively when crafting an ongoing social media communication strategy.

Appendix 1 Topic Definitions

Overarching Topic Categories and Individual Topics	Definition
Artwork, Permanent Collection, and Exhibitions	
Archives	Historic documents related to the Museum's history, administration, collections and/or other primary source documentation. Museum topic.
Artwork Professional	A work of art created by a professional artist as opposed to a work created by a museum visitor in museum-hosted workshop. Museum and online patron topic.
Conservation	The preservation or restoration of an object. Museum and visitor topic category. Museum topic.
Curatorial Perspective	An explanation from the curator of the theoretical or conceptual approach in discussing an exhibition, individual artwork, or group of works. Museum and online patron topic.
Film General	A film that is part of the Museum's permanent collection rather than a film shown at a special event or film series. This topic is specific to MoMA, as films comprise part of its permanent collection. Museum topic.
Installation	The physical work within the museum of installing a single work or an exhibition. Museum and visitor topic category. Museum topic.
Opening Current	A special exhibition or presentation of an individual artwork that is currently being presented to the public. Museum topic.
Opening Future	A special exhibition or presentation of an individual artwork that will occur on a future date. Museum topic.
Permanent Collection	Artwork owned by a museum as part of its permanent collection. Museum and online patron topic.
Recent Acquisition	A work that has recently been purchased by the museum as part of its permanent collection. Museum topic.
Special Exhibition Closing	A temporary exhibition that is about to close. Museum topic.
Special Exhibition General	Information on a special exhibition that does not mention opening or closing dates or events. Museum and online patron topic.
Special Exhibition Opening Dates	Specific dates being communicated to the public regarding a special exhibition. Museum topic.
Special Exhibition Opening	Programs, events, and other activities related to the

Events	opening of a special exhibition. Museum topic.
Venice Biennale	A topic definition specifically created for IMA who participated on the 2011 Venice Biennale. Museum topic.
Contest, Project, Puzzle	
Answer to Puzzle	Providing the answer to a museum presented puzzle. Online patron topic.
Friend Art Project	A SAM specific topic where a Friend is asked to produce and submit a photograph related to a museum provided topic. This topic is specifically related to SAM's <i>Beauty and Bounty</i> Facebook project. Museum and online patron topic.
Identify Artwork	Readers are provided with a text based or visual cue and are asked to identify a work of art from the museums permanent collection or a special exhibition. Museum topic.
Ticket Contest	A communication offers Friends and readers the opportunity to win tickets to a special event or free admission to the museum. Museum topic.
Visitor Comment Collection	This topic is specific to MoMA and its presentation of the visitor comment card project <i>I Went to MoMA and...</i> Visitors to the Museum filled out and turned in comment cards that detailed their experiences at the Museum through text or visuals. Museum and online patron topic.
Winner	A communication that mentions the name of the winner of a project or contest. Museum topic.
Education	
Educational Programs	Any lecture, studio class, or gathering with an educational component related to the museum. This does not include activities such as yoga or non-art related programs. Museum and online patron topic.
Printed Publication Museum	An exhibition catalog or other printed publication that relates to artwork or exhibitions presented by the museum. Museum topic.
Tour	A guided tour of the museum's exhibitions or collections. Museum and online patron topic.
External Information and Resources	
Printed Publication External	A publication of any kind that is not related to the museum's exhibitions or collections. This can be a popular or scholarly novel or book that a museum recommends to a reader. Museum topic.
Resources of Interest	A broad category that is characterized by sharing information that may or may not relate back to the museum's collections, exhibitions, or activities that is

	hosted on a third party website rather than information that can be found on the museum's website. Museum topic.
Review External	A third party review of a museum's exhibitions or individual work of art. Museum topic.
Unaffiliated Museum	Information of any kind about a museum that is not a subsidiary of the museum. For example, SAM and MoMA are connected to affiliated museums such as PS1 and the Olympic sculpture part. This definition would be used if the communication provided information unrelated to those affiliates. Museum topic.
Unaffiliated Non-Profit	Information provided to readers about a non-profit organization that is not related to a museum's activities or collections. Museum topic.
External Events	
Holiday	A national or local observation of a date of importance. For example, the observation of the Fourth of July or a Gay Pride event. Museum topic.
Local Award	The recognition of a museum's activities provided by a local source of any kind. Museum topic.
Weather	A communication that focuses on the affects of a weather related occurrence. Museum and online patron topic.
Museum Retail & Grounds	
Museum Café	The museums' food services and any events that might take place there. Museum and online patron topic.
Museum Store	Merchandise or sales in the museum's store. Museum and online patron topic.
Plants or Horticulture	Information on specific plants or the care of the museum's physical grounds. Museum and online patron topic.
None	
None	This is not a primary topic category rather a secondary or tertiary topic coding where only a single topic could be identified. Museum topic.
Online Patron Experience or Knowledge	
Criticism of Post Content	An online patron expresses a concern about the information the museum posted. Online patron topic.
Critique of Exhibition Concept, Artwork, or Artist	An online patron provides their specific opinion on an exhibition, work of art, or artist. Online patron topic.
Desire to Visit Museum or Exhibit	An online patron has not yet visited the museum but expresses an interest to do so. Online patron topic.
General Comment	Online patron topic.
General Praise	Praise is given regarding to the information shared by the museum in a post. Online patron topic.

Personal Memory	Sharing of a past experience at the museum. Online patron topic.
Resources of Interest	The online patron shares a link to a website that provides further information on the topic of the post. Online patron topic.
Sharing of Post Related Knowledge	The online patron shares knowledge that contributes to the topic of the post. No link to an external website is provided. Online patron topic.
Visit Report	A report of a visit to the museum or attendance of a special event. Online patron topic.
Other	
Other	Any topic that did not appear on more than three occasions across all museums. Museum and online patron topic.
Special Events for Museum Patrons	
Film Screening	A film series or individual screening of a film that is not held in the museum's permanent collections. These are popular culture or independently produced films that are presented on a one-off basis. Museum topic.
Special Event	Any manifestation of a social gathering that may or may not be related to a museum's exhibitions or collections. These are not education or workshop-based activities but are characterized as events where museum patrons can socialize. Museum topic.
Workshop	These are events such as Yoga or any activity that does not have an art related component. Museum and online patron topic.
Specific Artist Information	
Artist Biography	A discussion of an artist's life without specifically discussing a work of art. Museum and online patron topic.
Artist Competition	A competition hosted by the museum that only professional artists may participate in. Museum topic.
Artist General	A broad discussion of an artist's work that touches on multiple works of art or the artist's oeuvre in general. Museum and online patron topic.
Artist Interview	The museum or a third party presents a conversation with an artist about their work. Museum topic.
Artist Obituary	The notice of the death of an artist. Museum and online patron topic.
Artist Presentation	An artist directly presents their artwork or project to readers without the mediation of a museum staff member or third party. Museum topic.
Further Information Artist or Artwork	An online patron requests more information about a specific artist or artwork. Online patron topic.

Sponsors and Fundraising	
For Profit	A for profit company that is not related directly to a museums events or activities. Museum topic.
Fundraising	Communications presented by a museum that request monetary donations. Museum topic.
Promotional Partner	A for-profit or non-profit organization that has partnered with the museum in a mutually beneficial activity. Museum topic.
Sponsor	A for-profit organization that has donated its products or services to the museum. Museum topic.
Staff and Interns	
Intern	A temporary member of the museum staff, usually a student. Museum topic.
Staff	Any paid, permanent member of the museum's staff. Museum and online patron topic.
Technology	
App	A program of any sort related to the museum's collections or special exhibitions that can be downloaded to a mobile device. Museum and online patron topic.
Social Media	A communication that mentions a social media platform or application used by the museum. Museum and online patron topic.
Technology In Museum Gallery	Any technological device that physically exists within the museum such as a kiosk. Museum and online patron topic.
Technology On Museum Website	A resource that is hosted on the museum's website. Museum and online patron topic.
Technology Requests Help	An online patron requests assistance in using any form of technology hosted by the museum online or onsite. Online patron topic.
Visiting Logistics	
Cost	The financial cost of admission, special events, or parking. Online patron topic.
Free Admission	Any date or time period during which visitors need not pay an admission price. Museum and online patron topic.
Further Information Dates	An online patron requests further information about the dates of an exhibition or any other event. Online patron topic.
General Visit	A non-specific post that simply encourages readers and Friends to come to the museum without a specific purpose. Museum topic.
Hours	A mention of a museum's operating hours. Museum and online patron topic.
Photo Policy	A museum's policy around a visitor's ability to take

	photographs or their use of said photographs post visit. Museum and online patron topic.
Ticketing Deals	A discount offered on admission or special admission ticket costs. Museum topic.
Ticketing Information	General information about where and how to purchase tickets for admission or activities. Museum and online patron topic. Museum topic.
Registration	Any forms, online or offline, that are required for the participation in a museum hosted activity or event. Museum topic.
Visitors, Members, and Online Patrons	
Expressing Thanks	A communication that expresses gratitude towards readers or special event participants. Museum topic.
Political Figure	A visitor to a museum or special event that has a political affiliation of some sort. Museum topic.
Visitor Adult General	Adult visitors or event participants that are not museum members. Museum topic.
Visitor Adult Member	A communication that specifically addresses members of the museum. Museum and online patron topic.
Visitor Youth	Children or teenagers that are museum visitors or event participants. Museum topic.

Appendix 2 Dominant Purpose Definitions

Museum Dominant Purpose	Definition
Didactic	The content of the post is intended to teach the reader about the topic at hand by providing historical, technical, or otherwise overtly educational information.
Expressing Thanks	A communication that expresses gratitude towards readers or special event participants.
Friend Art Project	A SAM specific purpose where a Friend is asked to produce and submit a photograph related to a museum provided topic. These communications were judged as non-didactic and a separate purpose was created so these specific communication types would not affect data analysis.
Fundraising	A museum is specifically requesting monetary donations.
Marketing	The content of the post was created with the specific intent of driving attendance of special events or visits to the museum's collections and special exhibitions. A call to action is included or other language that prompts or attempts to persuade readers to undertake a specific action.
Resource or Information Sharing	The content of the post is not overtly educational but passively provides readers with information or directs them to a resource that may or may not be related to a specific artist, the museum's collections or special exhibitions.
Survey	The online patrons participation and opinion is requested.

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