Cultural institutions in the digital age: British Museum's use of *Facebook Insights*

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Abstract:
Over the last decade, museums have experienced a strong cultural shift from object-oriented towards audience-oriented strategic approaches. This paper reviews the relevant literature on this transition and provides supportive evidence of the impact that social media have upon the relationship between cultural organisations and their audiences. Data deriving from the use of the British Museum's Facebook page provides a comprehensive evaluation of the museum's general social media strategy. Given the dominance and widespread use of Facebook and other social media, the degree of engagement of cultural organisations with them, seem to have become an inseparable factor on the scale of effectiveness of the relation with their audiences and the levels of visitor attendance. This research aims, by using one of the most prestigious museums in Britain as a case study, to provide an initial comprehensive set of insights into the use of social media by cultural organisations. The findings of this study are based on research conducted for the first author's postgraduate studies at the Centre for Digital Humanities, Department of Information studies, University College London.

Keywords: museums, social media, audience participation, British Museum, digital humanities

Introduction

Over the past decade, an ideological transformation on the part of cultural institutions has been empirically observed (Downes, 2011, p. 11). This change is related to a more open approach that takes into account individual's active role in contemporary life. It is achieved

by changing the cultural communication frameworks and moving from the one-to-one and one-to-many communicative models, to the many-to-many one, contributing in this way to 'a culture of dialogue' (Russo, et al., 2007, p. 21; Boylan, 2004, p. 161). The latter encourages interactivity among users and puts aside the object-oriented ideology of museums promoting a visitor-centred approach (Gu, 2012, p. 11). Thus, museums have gradually started making more use of social media platforms such as Facebook, Twitter and YouTube, to communicate their activities and exhibitions and increase public engagement.[1] This major transformation makes use of the core features and ideas of Web 2.0[2], which have gained ground in learning and communication models (Lazzeretti, et al., 2013, p. 4).

However, despite the fact that online presence has now become almost a necessity, it is often unclear what the organizations are trying to achieve through their use of social media and who their desired target audience is (Finnis, et al., 2011, p. 6). This happens largely because social media strategies are often still at an early development stage although it is possible that they are being shaped by data collected through social media use and tools. The purpose of this paper is to analyse common practices followed by museums, and in particular by the British Museum (BM), in terms of their social media use, extract the most popular methods, and develop effective ways to address the problem of the potential vagueness in their social media strategies. The research question that frames this paper asks how museums might make better use of social media in order to engage with the public more effectively.

Firstly, this study presents a literature review focusing on the educational and social role that museums nowadays have in the community as well as their cultural shift from an object-based to a visitor-oriented approach that could be facilitated through social media. Moreover, this paper uses Kidd's main *frames* that refer to social media use on behalf of institutions as a structure for examining the practices followed by the BM in terms of social media use. In particular, and as part of the discussion, the BM's social media practices that were most popular amongst users are presented and analysed in accordance with statistical data and informed by an interview with the BM's Marketing Assistant.

Finally, the findings of this study, based on the first author's postgraduate studies focused on research results, could be used as indicators to reach out to new audiences and expand existing ones. It is suggested that by building a more informal relationship and demonstrating that knowledge and culture can indeed be combined with new technologies, museums could not only gain wider appeal and extend their authority but at the same time still act as trusted cultural online networks (Russo, et al., 2007, p. 21).

Museums and social media use

During the 16th and 17th century, most European collections were developed from ones located in palaces or owned by members of the nobility (Dana, 1927, p. 17). Consequently, the collections were private and an exclusive privilege of the aristocratic elites. The Enlightenment saw a trend towards the idea of a public place, where such collections would be available and that included the concept of the museum as part of the contemporary civic

life of the people (Gu, 2012, p. 7). At their inception, museums addressed people of the middle, upper and well-educated classes (Kidd, 2010, p. 73).

Museums are now, by nature, public institutions with quite distinct structure, functions and social role when compared to commercial organisations. In other words, the role of social media in museums is quite different from that of a commercial company and something more than being concerned with increasing profits and raising brand awareness. According, to Daniel Pett (2012, p. 2), there are five main 'online interaction categories' employed by cultural institutions through social channels. Firstly, museums attempt to increase accessibility for their audiences; they try to ensure that anyone interested would be able to access the information they have to offer. Moreover, museums aim to extend the learning experience to the online community. The educational value of cultural institutions should be beyond doubt and informal learning has always been one of the core objectives cultural institutions have set themselves. Social media offer new spaces for this function that could be more direct than those limited by a physical location. Online media introduce new ways of experiencing a museum's collection particularly through entertainment and adventure, using the collections as background. Finally, sharing and creating stories is another key category in social media use by museums, whereby users can interact with the institution and with each other, exchange knowledge and participate in cultural dialogues in real time.

In addition to the global financial downturn, resulting in governments adopting a more parsimonious policy towards culture, there is a plethora of alternative ways that people can choose to spend their leisure time; as a result, it is essential that museums evolve and stay relevant (Finnis, et al., 2011, p. 2). The dominance of social media in recent years offers museums a great opportunity to extend their presence onto social platforms and reach people who either choose the internet for information and news or want to be part of a museum's community unrestricted by their physical location. Never before has it been easier for organizations to approach their audiences and build close and daily relationships with them.

However, authority is a core issue that many researchers and museum practitioners question within social networks (Kelly, 2009, p. 4). Compared to the space where cultural activities traditionally take place (i.e. the interior of a museum), activities developed online possibly lack the authority deriving from the institutional context; users may not be able to evaluate the physical features to ensure that the information provided is authentic and reliable (Russo & Watkins, 2008, p. 233; Lynch, 2000). Yet, Angelina Russo et al. (2006, p. 7) support the view that the use of social media tools can not only maintain a museum's relevance but also strengthen its authority.

Another problem concerning institutions using social media as a new platform to reach a wider audience or extend an existing one is that it is considered by many practitioners to be a time-consuming and expensive process (Whitney, 2011, p. 291). Lynda Kelly (2009, p. 10), however, argues that engaging with social networks requires little time on a weekly basis, at no actual cost compared with other marketing and engagement

strategies, and yet yields quick results. The findings of this paper challenge this argument to a degree by revealing a trend whereby cultural heritage institutions acknowledge the need to organise teams to support their social media presence. The cost of creating teams responsible for social media presence can be balanced against the benefits of reaching new audiences and cultivating stronger relationships with existing members of the museum community.

Jenny Kidd (2010, pp. 66-72) argues that social media use in a museum context can be categorized in three main *frames* to serve the aims of each institution's social media strategy regardless of the type and habits of the end-users.

Firstly, the *Marketing* frame helps organizations spread news about their activities, such as events or exhibitions, quickly across and beyond their existing base by creating chains of information that are transferred from 'subscribed' users to their online friends. That way, museums make use of their existing social media contacts to disseminate information as communicants of that information rather than making multiple postings on users' newsfeeds. Kidd supports the idea that the face and voice of each organization should reflect a personal one, to make the interaction more individual, rather than aligning to one unifying communication method which may make the promotion stylized and less successful as a result. Similarly, Kevin Pfefferle (2009) suggests that constructing an approachable presence encourages individuals to interact and connect more personally with and in the institution's activities. In addition, applying the *Marketing* frame in social media use extends the museum's branding activity. According to Jim Richardson (2009), remaining relevant and up-to-date is essential for cultural institutions to successfully engage visitors by means of social networks.

The *Inclusivity* frame refers to the breadth of the online community a museum is able to create. However, frequency in comments and large-scale dialogues does not ensure the breadth and diversity that the institution should be aiming for. Kidd suggests that building a social media strategy that enables museums to discuss 'success' not only internally but also externally, with their users, while remaining dynamic and interesting, promotes reflexivity which appears to be a key aspect of good online practice.

Finally, the *Collaborative* frame is becoming more and more common as museums move to involve their audience in the decision-making processes related to events or exhibitions. This frame is related to the shift from the one-to-one communication model to the many-to-many designs, previously mentioned. Within the *Collaborative* frame, museums create ambassadors for every user group and so rather than simply providing visitors with information they create meaningful experiences with them. (Kelly, 2009)

The division into frames makes the decision for defining objectives and success crucial, as meaning and concept differentiate depending on the circumstances (Simon, 2010, p. 304). This process will set out the goals, which do not have to be specific to each project individually, but can be generalized depending on the direction that the institution needs to focus its effort on. For our purposes here, success depends on the appeal that posts have to

their audience and hence online success can be measured by the likes, comments and shares that result from it.

Methodology

The aim of this study is to provide an insight into how prestigious cultural organisations such as the British Museum (BM), leverage social media to maintain or enrich the relationship with their audiences.[3] The BM is chosen for its cultural significance and because of its international reputation and audience. According to the BM's official website (The British Museum, 2014), it was founded in 1753 as the 'first national public museum in the world', initially to host Sir Hans Sloane's personal collection after his death. The BM opened to the public in 1759 and today hosts some of the most high profile artefacts and collections in the world, such as the Rosetta Stone and the Parthenon sculptures. It offers free entrance to visitors that are estimate to be about six million per year. A short discussion on the Museum's practices will follow in order to emphasize some useful observations related to general social media use in the context of museums.

The sources used here are mainly quantitative; in particular, statistical data were extracted based on metrics measured between June and August 2013, using the *Facebook Insights* tool, kindly provided by the BM's Marketing Assistant. The statistics and graphs used either cover a complete year, in order to give the full picture of the year's online engagement, or cover specific months, i.e. August and January. **Figure 4** shows the optimum posting days and times for one week in August. At the time this study was conducted, *Facebook Insights* limited the information that could be extractable to the current month. **Table 1** and **Figure 3** show January's online progress as an average month with no extremes of high or low results. In addition, updates and posts by the BM were observed, in order to examine the consistency of the BM's social media strategy. However, this study was restricted by time limitations. Furthermore, the focus of this study is on a large-scale museum and so the findings might not necessarily apply to smaller ones. The BM is located in London, a multi-cultural and high-tech city, meaning that its great reputation and engagement with new and digital technologies are not barriers.[4] Moreover, the BM is a history museum and similar studies need to be carried out before suggesting that other types of museums (war, folk art, natural history etc.) can make use of these findings in their social media strategy. It is similarly uncertain that, without further study, the same strategies will have the matching results for a museum in a different geographic region.

As well as the statistics and visualisations generated through the *Facebook Insights* tool, small-scale but indicative qualitative data were used. These were acquired through an informal, semi-structured interview with the BM's Marketing Assistant which took place during the early stages of the first author's dissertation research, and was facilitated by an introduction from one of the two Senior Content Commissioners on the BM's Web Team. Lasting approximately half-an-hour, the interview was structured as an informal meeting which allowed greater flexibility and gave the interviewee the space to freely share their knowledge, rather than being restricted to a pre-prepared framework. The aim of the

interview was to facilitate understanding of the BM's general principles regarding their social media strategy and, thus, constitute a valuable tool to assist the data analysis stage.

Data Presentation

In recent years, the Facebook platform has become not only a space for communication and socializing with friends but also a multi-faceted tool that commercial and non-commercial organisations can use for marketing purposes and data analysis. Facebook, an online Social Networking Site (SNS), founded in 2004 by Mark Zuckerberg and fellow students at Harvard University, initially only addressed Harvard students but gradually expanded to other US universities and after 2005 opened to anyone worldwide who claimed to be at least thirteen years old (Carlson, 2010). According to *The Guardian* (2014), the total number of monthly active Facebook users worldwide in 2013 was estimated to be 1,230 million, making Facebook one of the most popular social networks in the world.

An aggregated report of the online traffic at the BM's Facebook page can be seen in the following figures. All the charts used in this section were generated by the first author, with original data extracted from *Facebook Insights* and used with the permission of the BM. The metrics calculate the activity of unique users; therefore any multiple interactions from the same individual are excluded from the statistics.
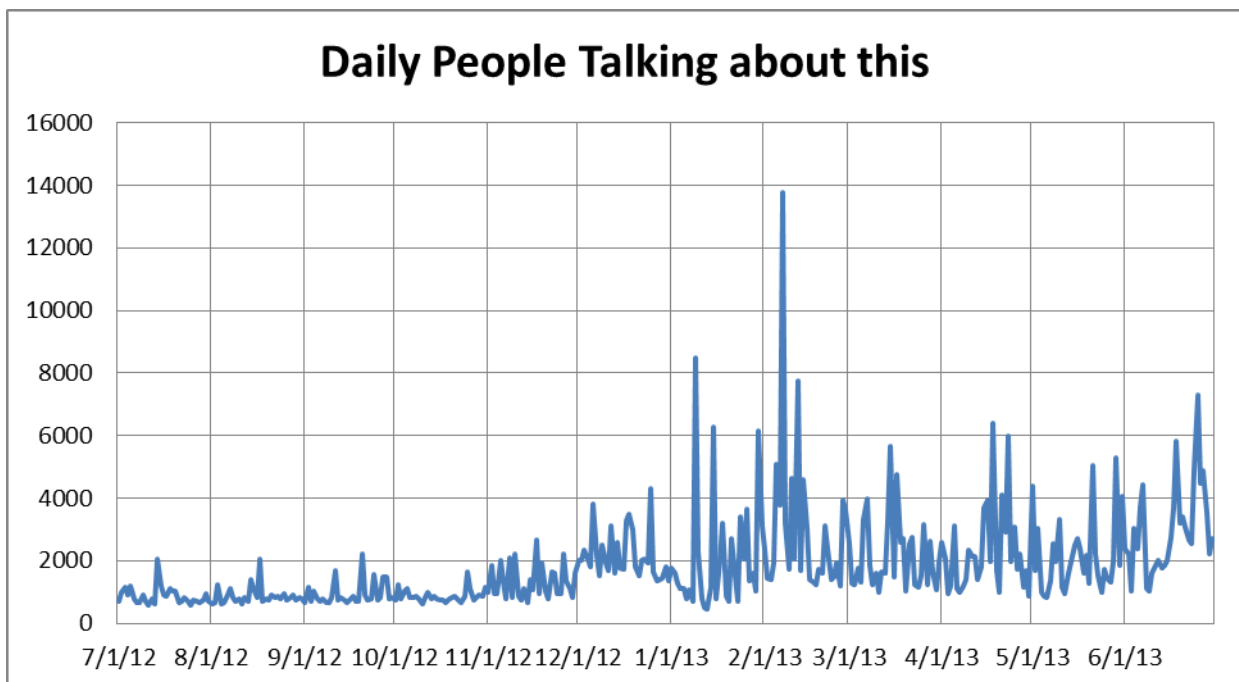

Figure 1: Daily people talking about this (author's chart with original data extracted from facebook insights). Dates are in the month/day/year format.
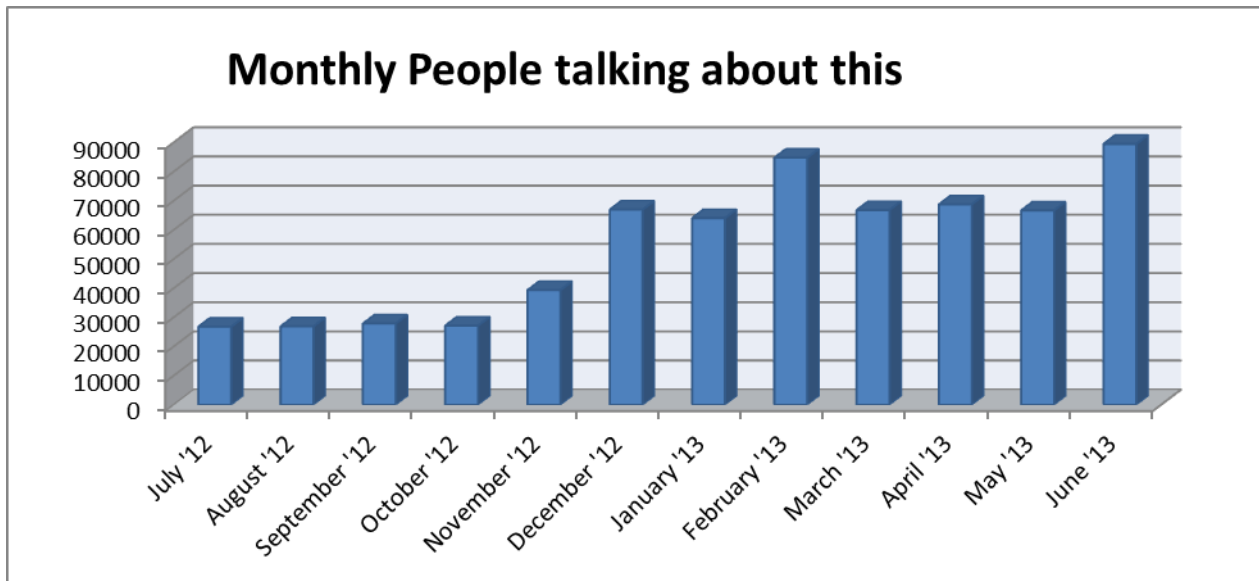
Figure 2: Monthly People talking about this (author's chart with original data extracted from facebook insights). Dates are in the month/day/year format.

Apart from facilitating social relations, Facebook offers organisations who set up a page there an extremely valuable opportunity for gathering data for market analysis that efficiently provides a measure of engagement and the tracking of its progress there. The metrics available through *Facebook Insights* are data that provide a weekly overview of the *post reach* (the amount of people who viewed individual posts) and *post engagement* (the amount of people who interacted with them). Charts and tables can also be generated from the summary of 'likes', 'comments', and 'shares' by online visitors to the page. Moreover, with this tool organisations are able to monitor which part of their Facebook page attracted the most users, and the time of day as well as the type of posts that triggered more interaction. Furthermore, *Facebook Insights* can give limited demographic information about the users' profile, such as gender, language, country of origin and so on;[5] in this way organisations can regularly monitor the response to their online activity and set a social media strategy tailored to their needs and priorities.

Figure 1 shows that between July and October 2012 the amount of online interaction remained low with a slight increase in November. During December the numbers increase and from January onwards the figures show an overall growth with peaks on 9th, 15th and 30th of January. This trend continues over the following months with some fluctuation in the relatively high levels and some peaks that exceed 6,000 users in a day. The greatest augmentation is seen in early February, specifically on 7th when the number of people who created 'stories'[6] about the Museum reached a peak and rose to well over 12,000; this was possibly due to the opening and announcement of two major special exhibitions (Ice Age and Pompeii). Other significant peaks occurred on February 12th, April 18th and 23rd and June 18th and 25th.

Figure 2 shows the same metric but on a monthly basis over the same time range. The total number of people talking about the BM on Facebook per month from July 12th to October 12th were under 30,000, but in November there was an upward trend rising to just over 80,000. The level decreased in March 2013 to just over 60,000 and remained stable for three months, rising again the following June to almost 90,000 users.

In order to approach as accurate results as possible, and as mentioned before, a month with average levels of likes, comments, shares and check-ins was selected for study across different metrics. **Table 1** and **Figure 3** below represent the numbers and percentages of links, photo and video 'clicks' generated in January by individual unique users.

	Number of 'clicks'	Percentage
Link 'clicks'	3156	22,44%
Photo view 'clicks'	10640	75,65%
Video play 'clicks'	268	1,91%
Total 'clicks'	14064	100%

Table 1: Photo and video 'clicks' in numbers and percentages for January 2013 (author's table with original data extracted from Facebook insights).
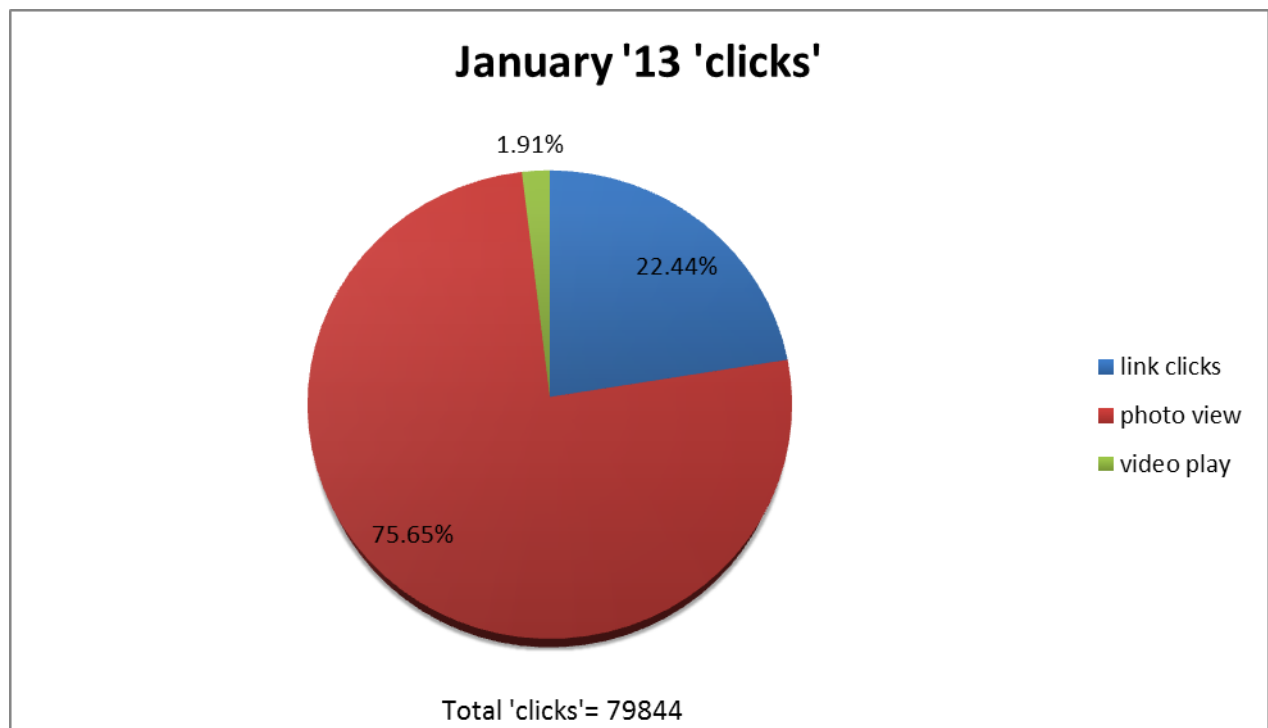

Figure 3: Link, photo and video clicks in percentages in a pie chart (author's chart with original data extracted from *Facebook Insights*)

Table 1 and **Figure 3** present the content types that are usually featured on the BM's Facebook page updates; how many people each type attracted and how many in relation to the total. It is clear that most 'clicks', by far, come from photo views; those to 'links' represent 22.44% of the total and video plays attracted only two hundred and sixty-eight unique users during January 2013.

In addition, a valuable method for reaching the greatest number of users was to monitor the optimum posting times. With this tool, the organisation is able to see which days of the week and at what time of the day most people are online and willing to interact with updates. For this purpose, the number of Facebook friends of the BM page who interacted with any post, by day of the week and time of the day were studied. The snapshot below shows data from Sunday 12th August to Saturday 18th August 2013. Times of the day are shown in UK time zone and the numbers are calculated in thousands.
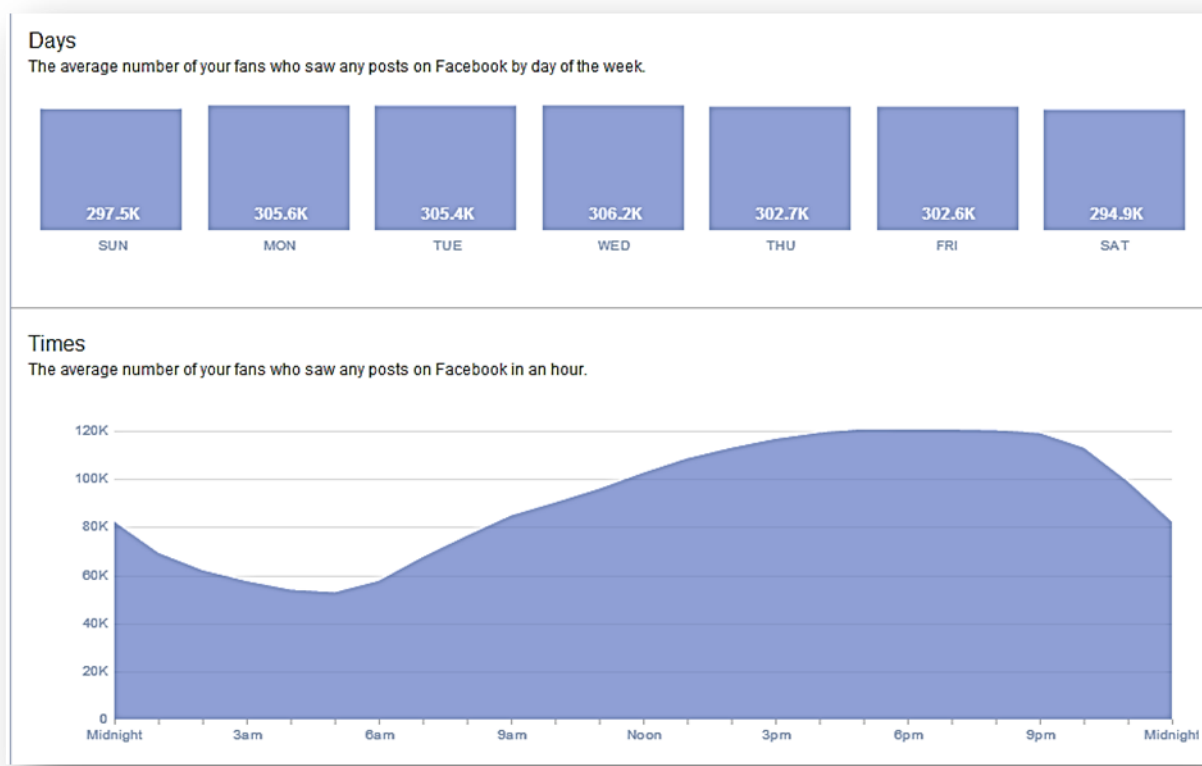

Figure 4: Optimal days and times from Sunday 12 August to Saturday 18 August 2013 (author's chart with original data extracted from *Facebook insights*)

As shown in **Figure 4**, Wednesday was the day when most BM Facebook 'fans' were online. The rest of the working days had slight variations but it is apparent that even if numbers are still great, there is a clear reduction in online users during the weekend.

From **Figure 4**, which shows days and times, it seems that from midnight, when an average of around 80,000 fans were online, the number falls at a regular rate with the minimum number online at around 5am, after which the average number steadily grows. At 9am an average of over 80,000 people were online and at noon the number reached more than 100,000; the average number of Facebook 'fans' online continued to increase until

5pm when the peak of 120,776 was reached. This level remained stable with no significant change until 9pm, when rates steadily declined until midnight.

Concerning the interview given by the BM Marketing Assistant, what follows is a synopsis of what was said.

The BM uses many social media platforms to engage audiences; these are Facebook, Twitter, Foursquare, Pinterest, Google Plus and YouTube. All media are monitored by the Marketing department except for the YouTube channel that is controlled by the BM's Web Team. The primary purpose of the online activity, according to the Marketing Assistant, is to promote interesting exhibited objects and inform people about current and future exhibitions taking place in the museum. It has also been observed that posting about special temporary exhibitions, in addition to the permanent free of charge collections, increase ticket purchases, but that is an additional consequence and not the main focus.

Regarding the style and tone, members of staff who monitor posts aim not only to inform but also to encourage users to participate in discussions. The museum is not passive; it is trying to be responsive as much as possible.

A key aspect of dealing with Facebook is that practitioners try to 'make the content visual'. In other words, they use images of objects edited through Photoshop by the Web Team to make the content appealing. The activity is currently narrowed to one post per day (but the department wishes to increase this number).

Concerning Twitter use, spreading information is the core purpose of participating in social media. In order to broaden the audience that will see the tweets, the museum uses its followers to forward them by 'retweeting'. Four tweets a day is the recommended number according to the BM's Social media strategy.

The published content is advised to be balanced regarding the amount of information around special exhibitions and permanent collections. Moreover, users should feel they are creating a bond of friendship with the museum and being exclusive. Furthermore, the Marketing Assistant was aware of the audience that they addressed; followers and friends are international with different needs and interests and not always capable of physically visiting the museum and seeing its theme-based displays onsite.

Museum professionals dealing with social media receive feedback on the online success by measuring the engagement in each platform. For instance, on Facebook, engagement is calculated by the total number of likes, shares and comments and on Twitter by the 'retweets'. They also rank post and tweets according to engagement level. That way they export qualitative results for good practice, such as those that demonstrated that keeping the posts and tweets relevant, attract users' attention. As an example, the Marketing Assistant mentioned the post for Egyptian mummies on Mother's Day and another one on the 60th anniversary of the Queen's coronation.

In conclusion, the interviewee underlined the fact that special exhibitions require and offer chances for additional promotion opportunities. For example, the large-scale *'Life and Death in Pompeii and Herculaneum'* exhibition was also promoted by the *'Pompeii Live'* cinema broadcast and the respective application, in addition to their usual social media

practices. Also, notable features had been followed to boost the *Ice Age* exhibition; museum Professionals created a hash tag on Twitter (#soundtrack) and asked people to suggest theme songs. They then gathered all responses and created a playlist related to the exhibition's content. Returning to the general policies implemented across all social platforms, the interviewee referred to the regulations set to frame consistent interaction among all their social media facets. In particular, the social media administrators are advised not to automatically remove comments written in non-Latin characters and foreign languages (which is a common practice elsewhere to avoid spam), possibly because the audience of the BM is international and so frequently encounters comments and posts in languages other than English. Moreover, the BM retains the right to remove any kind of offensive or off-topic comments which is clearly stated in the 'About' section of the Museum's Facebook Page. The meeting closed with the Marketing Assistant mentioning a new Digital Media Policy that is being drawn by the BM's Web Team, but this was not yet ready to be distributed.

In order to provide a complete picture of how the BM uses social media and measures online success, an email was sent to the current (as of March 2014) Social Media and E-marketing Assistant, who responded saying that the BM's social media strategy is currently under development and thus, yet unpublished; also, the Museum makes use of a variety of methods to measure levels of engagement, such as Google, Twitter, Facebook and Museum Analytics.

Discussion

The findings of this research drive to the conclusion that, during the period between late June and late August 2013, the BM's Facebook activity followed methods similar to Kidd's *Marketing and Inclusivity* frameworks.

In particular, the BM Marketing Assistant verified that the museum uses brand advocates to disseminate current and future events and exhibitions. This was achieved by creating an information pyramid. The advocates are subscribed online friends that share the information with their own online friends in social media and thus, create a strong chain that develops a larger audience than the BM's online friends. The posts that fans 'shared' appeared on their friends' newsfeed, giving them in turn the opportunity to also 'share' the updates and so on. This way, the museum manages to always be present in a wide circle of online users without the danger of being considered as 'annoying' because of multiple updates. Furthermore, the BM makes their fans feel part of a whole, by discussing certain elements of online 'success'. For example, the museum encourages users to share or like the posts and congratulates the effort when a target is reached (although no detailed statistical data are shared externally). This is considered to be a very good online practice, as it reflects a personal relationship with the supporters of a campaign and shows that the people monitoring the BM's social accounts recognize the audience's reaction. The interaction and updates on behalf of the museum were personal and created a sense of

immediacy but at the same time were also aligned to the museum's principles regarding commenting, as stated in the '*About'* section of their Facebook page (2013).[7]

In addition, based on the statistical data extracted from the *Facebook Insights* tool, the following practices could be considered when shaping a social media strategy:

The most popular updates contained mainly attractive images representing objects from the museum's permanent or temporary collections with bright colours and contrast (e.g. black-gold), which appealed to the audiences' attention and secondly links directing to the museum's events' webpages.

Table 1 and **Figure 3** show the type of content that is more attractive to followers. It is apparent that photo views account for the majority of 'clicks', probably because they can be viewed immediately unlike links that take the user off to another site. Videos, despite being more dynamic, require time to be seen and so are often ignored. Consequently, picture-based content (within a balanced total) is preferable. Posting mainly images shows an awareness of the most attractive content types, and so which ones help achieve engagement goals.

Moreover, **Figure 4** gives a representation of the average online traffic on a weekly and daily basis. For example, the overall percentage time that users are online at the weekends is lower than during working days. Likewise, the chart shows that during the night fewer people are online.[8] The most active time range of the day is the optimum twelve-hours between 9am and 9pm on weekdays; in particular, evening hours appear constantly active. These figures show that people have time to engage with social media both during and after work. Also, the fact that high proportions of online activity are observed during standard office hours may reveal that either people engage with social media while working or they just have their networks running in the background, but without necessarily paying much attention to updates. Overall, because times are shown in the UK time zone and do not present any anomalous results, such as significant online activity during night hours, it would seem to indicate that the majority of users interacting with the BM's Facebook Page are either from the UK or from countries with a similar time-zone.

Updates remained interesting (posts were usually relevant to the day they appeared) and promoted discussion among users. Also, frequency was kept to an average of two posts per day, which is considered appropriate to maintain a good daily online relationship with users without being annoying.

In accordance with Richardson's (2009) suggestions for good practice, the Marketing Assistant interviewee emphasised that the Museum sets as a priority that posts remain relevant to a particular day; as examples: the Queen's Coronation anniversary and Mother's Day. *Facebook Insights* offers the possibility to check whether this practice is consistent, but it is not appropriate for examining individual cases. For example, there was a post triggered by the birth of the son of Duke and Duchess of Cambridge on 23rd of July 2013 (**Figure 5**).

Figure 5: Post relevant to the royal **birth on** 23rd July 2013

The tables and figures presented in the *Facebook Insights* section show which indices can be measured to optimize an organization's impact. As a result, we would argue that aiming to sustain engagement at a high level is more important than short term sharp increases.

   Facebook Insights offer the opportunity to analyse reach by gender and age. Although it is recognized that it is extremely important to be able to identify the target audience and act accordingly, the accuracy of the data provided here may be questionable; as stated in Facebook's Help Centre (2013) for *Facebook Insights*, the information 'is based on the data people enter in their profile'. Consequently, it is almost impossible to verify the information, for example, a device's IP address or whether the information registered by users is accurate, and so there is a possibility for error in the demographic results. It is worth mentioning, though, that attempts to measure '*paid reach*'[9] returned zero results, which reveals the lack of commercial posts on behalf of the BM.

   By remaining relevant and up-to-date museums can increase audience engagement and potentially raise visitor numbers. Posting updates which include images also tend to generate high rates of interest. By keeping track of the days and times that most people view, for example posts or tweets and analysing conversations and users' profiles, museums can have a broad overview of what constitutes both attractive and unsuccessful practices. Such observations could assist cultural institutions that make use of the potentials of social media in forming coherent strategies focused on specific population groups while at the same time setting realistic targets. There are limits as to how far we might generalize from the findings of a single case study but we can, however, establish strong indications and offer a suggestive framework rather than a definitive handbook.

With regards to the interview, it is clear that the BM understands the significance of sharing knowledge between experts to achieve the best possible outcome. In addition, the fact that there is so much available information about the Museum's social media use and its parameters shared with the affiliated departments shows that these departments measure the online activity on a regular basis and are possibly aligned to what has proved to be successful.

The interviewee emphasised that the primary social media communication method is to be responsive. The updates on their pages maintain a human tone that makes fans feel exclusive and creates the potential for permanent 'friendships'. Additionally, through viral reach on Facebook and by Twitter's 'retweets' from existing followers, the BM;s professionals manage to reach a wide range of users, which extends much further than those that have 'liked' its page. Also, the practice of using 'fans' as 'advocates' to disseminate information helps the Museum eschew deluging users' newsfeeds and thus avoids being 'unliked'. The BM's Marketing Assistant also pointed that before and during any special exhibition, despite all the extra promotion involved, the practitioners avoid omitting the permanent collections to keep a balance of content; they wish to attract more people but not at the expense of the permanently exhibited objects. Overall, based on data from the current tools provided directly by the social media[10], it can be argued that social media can constitute a significant tool for improving museums' or cultural institutions' audience reach; for example, according to BM's Facebook Page (2013), the total number of 'Likes' kept increasing, reaching 397,615 by the end of August.

Conclusion

Today, people from anywhere in the world can have virtual access to a museum collection, discuss and learn in an informal and entertaining way, as well as contribute to conversations fostered by the museum itself and act as brand advocates. As a result, museums should be encouraged to follow practices based on their audiences' online habits and preferences. In addition, the quest for new ways to connect the online with onsite cultural participation may have the potential for positive impact for museum engagement. Indicative of this is *QRator*, a visitor engagement project, applied in the *Grant Museum of Zoology* and the *Museum of the Brands* in London.[11]

This paper briefly looked at the history of museums from their inception to today, focusing on their relationship with the community and their shift to a more visitor-oriented approach, where social media could play a critical and effective role. Based also on Kidd's three frames referring to social media use on behalf of institutions, we can suggest that the BM's online social media strategy employs elements found in Kidd's *Marketing* and *Inclusivity* frames. Furthermore, we examined them in order to present a coherent and reliable set of best online practices. For example, through the analysis of the *Facebook Insights* data and the interview conducted with the BM's Marketing Assistant, we found that updates which contain images and links in combination with relevant to the day, interesting and up-to-date content that remains personal and responsive appeared to be the most

popular online practices followed by the BM. Apart from and according to our findings, we believe that a successful social media strategy should also take into account the times and days that online fans are more willing to interact with the content.

Future research on the BM's social media practice could focus on the collection of data from more social media platforms and the examination of whether physical public engagement has increased since the introduction of social media use at the BM in 2009. Another interesting and valuable perspective would be to look into the ethnic and social groupings of physical visitors to the museum before and after the social media strategy was launched and perhaps quantify any variation; are museums indeed becoming accessible and of interest to a wider audience and less the preserve of the middle, upper and well-educated classes? Can we discern any difference between those that visit the museum in person or only interact with it online or perhaps more importantly those who visit the museum only after interacting with it online?

Biographical notes:

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Notes:

[1] Indicatively, the BM became member of: Facebook in 2009 (https://www.facebook.com/britishmuseum); Twitter in 2009 (https://twitter.com/britishmuseum) and Youtube in 2006 (http://www.youtube.com/user/britishmuseum/).

[2] Web 2.0 is a term coined by O'Reilly Media Web 2.0 Conference of 2004, referring to the technological changes that facilitated user generated content and immediate communication. Social media is one of the terms promoted by these changes that brought consumers in the centre of interaction. To read more about Web 2.0 and the opportunities it presents in marketing strategies see: Berthon, et al., 2012.

[3] More specifically, because of its dominance and widespread use among social networks of any kind (Pett, 2012, p. 5), focus will be given to the BM's Facebook group, to provide users analytics. The study follows the implementation of BM's social media strategy on Facebook platform with emphasis on its resonance on the online audience.

[4] The BM is also a major tourist attraction and so will always attract large numbers of visitors regardless of any social media campaigns.

[5] Concerning the users' privacy, Facebook Insights use completely anonymous data regarding their online activity, which they accept in Data Use Policy to be used for this reason and stakeholders do not have access to any personal information.

[6] Means that users took an action on the Page what will be visible to their friends, which means either like, comment or share actions.

[7] 'This page is an open forum where anyone is welcome to contribute. Discussion is encouraged, but please be aware that any offensive, defamatory, obscene or harassing comments or personal attacks of any kind will be removed. Spamming, repeat submissions of the same (or very similar) contributions or content that is off-topic may also be removed.' (Facebook, 2013) Available at: https://www.facebook.com/britishmuseum/info.

[8] Possibly sleeping or decided to be offline.

[9] Unique users who saw a post through an advertisement.

[10] These include the profiles analysis, metrics about most attractive posts, peak times etc. as noted above.

[11] QRator is a collaborative project that attempts to improve interactivity in museums, by collecting visitors' interpretations about objects through social media.
For more information about the project: http://www.qrator.org/about-the-project/what-is-qrator/
UCL Grant Museum of Zoology: <http://www.ucl.ac.uk/museums/zoology>
Museum of Brands: http://www.museumofbrands.com.