BEHIND THE SCREENS: SOCIAL MEDIA MANAGERS AT CULTURAL INSTITUTIONS

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ABSTRACT

Laura March: Behind the screens: Social media managers at cultural institutions
(Under the direction of Dr. Marijel (Maggie) Melo & Dr. Brian Sturm)

Social media managers may not be the first people that come to mind during a pandemic – their work is trivialized, undervalued, and denigrated as tasks any young person could perform. However, they are one of few, if not the only, information professionals at cultural institutions able to nurture scholarship, creativity, and imagination digitally during worldwide shutdowns. While library and museum staff believe social media is important (and will become even more so in the future) many organizations have no strategy for its use nor measure their efforts (Oosman et al., 2014; Aerni & Schegg, 2017; OCLC, 2018). In response to this absence of guidance, this study takes a practitioner-centered approach to learn how these communicators define, perform, and evaluate their work. This research uses longitudinal interpretative phenomenological analysis (LIPA) and dramaturgical metaphors to uncover and document social media managers' lived experiences and the evolution of their role during the initial stages of the COVID-19 pandemic. Results are then used to inform a descriptive framework of social media work at cultural institutions and map participant descriptions of virtual content and programming to a continuum of institutional practices. These applications offer guidance for cultural institutions looking to better support their social media communicators and ultimately foster more meaningful engagement with broader audiences.

To Stuart Isaac Shapiro
For secret reasons.

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LIST OF ABBREVIATIONS

AAM   American Alliance of Museums

ALA   American Library Association

DEI   Diversity, Equity, and Inclusion

IMLS   Institute of Museum and Library Services

IPA   Interpretative Phenomenological Analysis

LIPA   Longitudinal Interpretative Phenomenological Analysis

LIS   Library and Information Science

QLR   Qualitative Longitudinal Research

CHAPTER 1: INTRODUCTION

I. Introduction

COVID-19 forced cultural institutions to reexamine how they serve their communities, as libraries and museums traditionally fulfilled their missions by being physically accessible and assisting patrons face-to-face. By focusing on in-person services – and underestimating the influence and possibilities of online opportunities – many institutions were ill-equipped for a transition to virtual offerings. Yet one role within these organizations was perfectly positioned to digitize services, develop new content, and foster engagement with users searching for community: the social media manager. Social media managers may not be the first people that come to mind during a pandemic – their work is trivialized, undervalued, and denigrated as tasks any young person could perform. However, they are one of few, if not the only, information professionals able to nurture scholarship, creativity, and imagination digitally.

My dissertation focuses on these practitioners, who offer unique perspectives as voices of their institutions during this unprecedented time. Recurring themes of urgency, duty, and inadequate support are summed up by one interviewee's reflection, "In a moment like this, new media becomes invaluable...I go back and forth between feeling invigorated by the challenge and crushed by the weight of it all." I frame these social media managers as cultural intermediaries (March, 2021; Bossio et al., 2020) and apply role theory and dramaturgy as complementary lenses for contextualizing their expectations, functions, and behavior (Biddle, 1986; Patillo, 2018; Goffman, 1956; Shulman, 2017). Using dramaturgical metaphors, my work identifies four

major themes of social media communication work. They are: "plot twists" (paradoxes in professional success, see C4.III), "method acting" (embodying an institution and producing content, see C4.IV), "everyone's a critic" (reviews, self-assessment, and outside feedback, see C4.V), and "bit part to leading actor" (pandemic adaptations, see C4.VI). I merge and synthesize these findings with design thinking to create a descriptive framework for creating social media content (see C5.II and C5.IV) and map activities to a continuum of institutional practices (see C5.III).

While nearly all libraries and museums have a presence on social media (Library Journal Research, 2018, p. 4; Thomson et al., 2013, p. 3), one half of libraries and one third of museums do not have a strategy for its use (OCLC, 2018, p. 2; Aerni & Schegg, 2017, p. 14). Even fewer measure their efforts (Oosman et al., 2014, p. 22; Aerni & Schegg, 2017, p. 15). There is a similar disconnect between the reasons why museums and libraries purportedly use social media – to enhance services, expand their user base, and facilitate interaction – and its actual implementation (Deodato, 2018). For example, the vast majority of cultural institutions use social media for one-way marketing and overlook digital learning opportunities or other engaging experiences, even though educational and interactive posts receive more engagement than marketing content (Lundgren & Crippen, 2019; Trucks, 2019; Baker, 2017). Moreover, community members want cultural institutions to "be present on social media platforms, but not mainly for promotion," and instead, focused on responsive and active communication (Trucks, 2019, pp. 5-6).

How do social media communicators at museums and libraries navigate these discrepancies? While related prior work discusses cultural institutions' social media marketing (Jones & Harvey, 2019; OCLC, 2018), themes present in posts (Harrison et al., 2017; Oosman et

al., 2014; Baker, 2017), and strategies for its use (Zhao, 2019), no known research focuses on museum and library communicators' experience of their role and its evolution. Additionally, emergent research related to COVID-19 shutdowns indicates library and museum staff increased the amount of posts, changed their online content, and developed new services through social media (Koulouris et al., 2020; Statista, 2020a; AAM, 2020) – however, researchers have not yet provided detailed descriptions of the content changes, new services, or role modifications.

In response to this research gap, this study examines how social media practitioners at cultural institutions define their role and offer more in-depth understandings into their significance at a time when many institutions are refocusing from in-person to digital outreach and programming. Results of this work are intended to guide practitioners and their organizations in an effort to support social media managers and foster more meaningful engagement with broader audiences.

II. Purpose & Research Questions

II.A. Purpose of the Study

This longitudinal interpretative phenomenological analysis (LIPA) study investigates how social media practitioners at cultural institutions view and perform their role as well as early influences of the COVID-19 pandemic on their work. In this study, individual perceptions are explored through LIPA-based interviews and compared to prior interview data collected at the start of the COVID-19 pandemic in order to generate rich and contextualized data about their lives. Results of this analysis inform a practitioner-centered descriptive framework of social media work at cultural institutions (see C5.II). This framework, the accompanying map of activities to institution practices (see C5.III), and the resulting synthesis of connections (see

[C5.IV](#)) could be used to develop future training, strategy, and evaluation for practitioners and their organizations.

II.B. Research Questions

- **RQ1:** How do social media managers at U.S. cultural institutions define their professional success, describe the process of creating social media content, and evaluate their work?

- **RQ2:** How has the COVID-19 pandemic influenced the ways practitioners understand and perform their role?

III. Significance

Social media managers are an important voice of their institutions and can facilitate conversations that enrich society through knowledge exchange and social action (Lankes et al., 2015, p. S63). As Americans' trust in their government, healthcare, law enforcement, and other institutions remains close to historic lows in the midst of a worldwide pandemic (Doherty et al., 2020; Khullar, 2018; Norman, 2016; Brenan, 2020), museums and libraries still retain a high degree of public confidence (Dilenschneider, 2017a; 2020a). Adults perceive these cultural institutions as more credible sources of information than non-governmental organizations (NGOs), federal agencies, newspapers, and personal accounts from family members – and expect them to recommend actions related to their missions (Dilenschneider, 2019a; Pestanes et al., 2015; Rosenzweig & Thelen, 1998).

To connect with their communities, libraries and museums use social media, which is now the top source of information for likely and repeat visitors (Dilenschneider, 2017b). The staff members who run these accounts act as cultural intermediaries between their institutions and the public, handling both incoming and outgoing communication. New research on the

people doing this work is critical because they can influence how the public makes sense of the world and its current crises (Sakya et al., 2021). As trusted information sources, cultural institutions can use social media to build collective knowledge, uncover the past, and imagine new futures. To begin this process, we need to learn how practitioners view and assess their job.

III.A. Impact & Audience of Study

This research has implications for current and future practitioners as well as for educators and cultural institutions more generally. A better understanding of social media work at museums and libraries could help improve the experiences of communicators as well as organizations' ability to hire and retain competent employees. In turn, this may inform better approaches to outreach and ultimately improve the reach and capabilities of cultural institutions.

In particular, the connections made between this study's findings to outside frameworks (see Chapter 5) can be used to facilitate more meaningful engagement with broader audiences, especially as they offer guidance to creative and responsive social media work beyond quantitative analytics. Social media workers may be prevented from creating meaningful work if this creative process is limited or blocked by colleagues, supervisors, or institutional priorities. Moreover, research findings could be used to inform educational and training policies – such as developing standards for communicator job requirements, compensation, and revising requirements for ALA-certified degree programs – as prioritizing inclusive social media engagement is crucial to diversifying audiences and shifting to a more socially responsive institutional paradigm. As such, examples of new practices developed during COVID-19 (e.g., online storytimes, livestream artist demonstrations, and virtual town halls) are mapped to a continuum of institutional paradigms to illustrate how practitioners and their institutions can assess their past activities and facilitate more inclusive strategies in the future (see C5.III).

Since almost all libraries and museums have a presence on social media (Library Journal Research, 2018, p. 4; Thomson et al., 2013, p. 3), the experiences and work of their social media communicators is relevant to practitioners, their supervisors, and researchers of cultural and organizational studies. Findings will also be useful for people interested in social media work during the COVID-19 pandemic. Additionally, results could be used to develop evidence-based curricula designed to better prepare future information professionals.

III.B. Contributions

This study describes social media work at cultural institutions at an unprecedented time. By connecting emergent findings to established frameworks, this dissertation elaborates and expands upon related LIS and social media research by incorporating the lived experiences of practitioners. These findings may also help communicators – along with their educators, colleagues, and managers – identify issues, improve social media work, and extend the outreach capabilities of museums and libraries.

In fact, some communicators are already incorporating aspects of my dissertation into their professional practices. I presented my initial findings and an associated online toolkit (available at lauramarch.com/social-toolkit) at the DCDC21 conference in July 2021. Two weeks later, I received an email from a London-based archivist stating, "I have been recommending your social toolkit to colleagues...we are working on decolonizing our archives service...your [toolkit is] incredibly useful in terms of taking this work forward" (V. Cranna, personal communication, July 14, 2021). As this email implies, this study is applicable to digital inclusion efforts that transcend beyond this dissertation and the COVID-19 pandemic. The toolkit itself has already been viewed by more than 320 unique visitors, and I have archived a copy of it in the Carolina Digital Repository for continued access in the future.

IV. Chapter Outline

In Chapter 2, I review contextual information (defining cultural institutions, communications, and social media) and three frameworks (cultural intermediation, design thinking, and role theory) to illustrate the need and means for studying social media practitioners at cultural institutions. Next, in Chapter 3, I describe how I use LIPA and dramaturgy to provide a practitioner-centered description of social media work and its evolution during the COVID-19 pandemic. Findings and related discussion, outlined in Chapter 4, provide dramaturgical interpretations that describe how interviewees came to this position, what content they create and why, how their work is assessed, and changes to their role. These dramaturgical findings include many "plot twists" and paradoxes associated with social media work (see C4.III), such as idiosyncratic career paths, informal hiring yet bureaucratic working conditions, dismissed expertise, a desire for connection while regularly producing one-way messages, and ambiguous responsibilities. Participants used "method acting" techniques (see C4.IV) that require them to live inside social media as an embodiment of their institution, leading to stress, burnout, and overwork. Interviewees recognized "everyone's a critic," but found self-assessment and outside feedback to be more helpful than formal institutional reviews (see C4.V). Although practitioners faced these difficult working conditions, they also revealed the COVID-19 pandemic shifted their role from a "bit part to leading actor" (see C4.VI). Interviewees reported colleagues offering more recognition for their role while, at the same time, they were able to create new and more social media content as a result of their institutions' physical closures. Finally, I articulate these interpretations to larger theoretical constructs in Chapter 5. I position the social media management role as an intermediary between practitioners, their organizations, and broader online cultures (see C5.I) to illustrate these compounding influences on their work. Within this

context, communicators produce content aligned with a design thinking approach (see C5.II). I then map social media activities to a continuum of institutional practices (see C5.III) before synthesizing connections between outside frameworks and this study's findings (see C5.IV) to show how organizations can better assess and plan their responsiveness and inclusion efforts.

CHAPTER 2: LITERATURE REVIEW

This chapter reviews prior research related to social media work at cultural institutions. First, I begin with an overview to provide relevant context on cultural organizations (C2.I.A), the bureaucratization of museums and libraries (C2.I.B), professionalization (C2.I.B.1), vocational awe (C2.I.B.2), and feminization (C2.I.B.3). Next, I outline why communication is important for cultural institutions (C2.II) before focusing on their uses of social media (C2.II.C). Following this, I describe three frameworks with which to view social media work – cultural intermediation (C2.III), design thinking (C2.IV), and role theory (C2.V). These lenses provide a way to interpret how social media practitioners view their role at museums and libraries.

I. Relevant Historical Context

I.A. An Overview of Cultural Institutions

I use the term "cultural institution" to describe both libraries and museums while acknowledging that many other organizations use the designation as well. This includes zoos, historical societies, gardens, religious institutions, and more. For the purposes of this study, I use ALA's (2019a) definition of libraries as "changing and dynamic places where librarians help people find the best source of information whether it's a book, a web site [*sic*], or database entry" that can be public (location-based), school (K-12 associated), or academic (typically higher education related). Even though the American Association of Museums (AAM) shies away from offering a specific definition of museums (Singer, 2019), I apply their description of these organizations as institutions "characterized by encounters with objects and living

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populations, stories, experts and primary learning experiences in welcoming places, supported by scholarship and knowledge" (AAM, 2016, p. 1). In defining and applying the term cultural institution to libraries and museums, I adopt Carr's suggestion of looking for the presence of a collection; a systemic, continuous, organized knowledge structure; and scholarship, information, and thought (2003, pp. xiv-xv). More poetically, "Cultural institutions collect what once was created, discovered, or gathered to solve a problem, to answer a question, or to provoke one" (Carr, 2011, p. 16).

Libraries and museums, moreover, share common themes. These include attending to lifelong learning (allowing multigenerational participation), sharing similar logic and patterns (facilitating self-directed visits), featuring lab-like environments (encouraging active, authentic, and purposeful engagement), integrating the past and present, and placing no limits or requirements on what or how visitors think (Carr, 2000, pp. 121-125). In their foundational text on museum studies, Latham and Simmons (2014) specified museum studies as a sub-discipline "naturally" falling within the purview of library and information science (LIS) (p. 35).

Work traversing museum and library worlds offers positive and synergistic benefits (Lankes et al., 2015, p. S61). Moreover, these institutions "may work best...when boundaries are crossed, or when our expectations are overturned" (Carr, 2011, p. 17). Organizational principles created by librarians influenced museum practitioners and their training (Urban, 2014, p. 597). Stein (2012) advised museum staff to consult librarians when crafting information delivery, "as they are perhaps better equipped than most staff to make sense of such a diversity of source material" (p. 218). On the other hand, museum professionals are seen as particularly helpful in guiding library staff through developing beautiful, rare, poignant, extraordinary, stimulating, and provocative experiences (Marcum, 2014, pp. 78-79).

While libraries and museums do diverge in many ways – including their histories and cultures (Trant, 2009), professional bodies and publishing outlets (Warren & Matthews, 2019; 2020), and academic departments and training (Hider & Kennan, 2020) – the online products created by these institutions offer one area of convergence, including digital artifacts and learning objects (Middleton & Lee, 2007). Additionally, both libraries and museums are challenged with remaining visible in an increasingly crowded online information environment (Hider & Kennan, 2020, p. 48). In fact, Marcum (2014) claimed the reason why libraries and museums are currently experiencing a resurgence in partnerships and collaboration is because digital technology enables new and better capabilities, as materials can be made accessible beyond physical locations and serve wider audiences (pp. 78-79).

The Institute of Museum and Library Services (IMLS) further described the shared purpose of these institutions in their strategic plan, stating "Museums and libraries help inspire the pursuit of new information, encourage a spirit of inquiry, and build collective knowledge for our nation" (2018, p. 2). However, recent cooperation between libraries and museums "are set against a backdrop of 'small government' budget squeezes" (Hider & Kennan, 2020, p. 48). IMLS itself came out of a merger between two prior federal grant making organizations in 1998 (Marcum, 2014, p. 77), causing increased competition for grants. Libraries are facing dwindling support for public funding (OCLC & ALA, 2018, p. 11), and one-third of U.S. museums may never reopen after the COVID-19 pandemic (AAM, 2020).

One way of increasing and diversifying visitors is prioritizing social media and digital engagement (Dilenschneider, 2017b). Unfortunately, most museums and libraries concentrate on one-way communication and struggle to foster interest online (Fletcher & Lee, 2012, p. 517; Jones & Harvey, 2019, p. 3). If cultural institutions want to "reconnect with the public and

demonstrate their value and relevance in contemporary life," they must offer opportunities for people to "actively engage as cultural participants, not passive consumers" (Simon, 2010, pp. i-ii).

Inclusivity and responsiveness can be assessed through mapping practices to historical paradigms. Figure 1 adapts Kletchka's (2018) **continuum of museum practices** into a broader conceptualization for both museums and libraries. Organizations can assess their past activities and encourage more inclusive future work by evaluating how their practices align with three major paradigms – object-based, visitor-centered, and socially responsive (Kletchka, 2018). Traditional practices center authority and expertise on objects (e.g., recommendations of artworks or books), while more recent developments encourage visitor participation (e.g., creative and/or educational activities) and/or socially responsive practices (e.g., community dialogues) (Kletchka, 2018). While the borders between each paradigm are blurred and continually evolving, this continuum provides a means to frame and interpret activities.

Figure 1

Continuum of Socially Responsive Institutional Practices. Adapted from Kletchka (2018, p. 301)

I.B. Cultural Institutions as Bureaucracies

As libraries and museums grew during the twentieth century, many developed into bureaucracies, fostering practices characterized by "excessive concern with formal processes and a tendency for administrative power to increase and become more centralized, and hence by inefficiency and impersonality" (OED, 2013). There are different explanations on why this

occurred. Harris (1973) maintained decreased visitorship did not concern librarians, who, under Dewey, became more occupied with the administrative and organizational tasks of librarianship (including reducing library work to a "mechanical art") and less interested in the philosophical aims and theoretical questions surrounding their work (pp. 27-28). Turner (2020) similarly traced the bureaucratization of American museums to the organization of material culture, in which conventions, terminologies, and methodologies used to amass artifacts are used to reinforce the colonial authorities of institutions. Dain (1975), however, hypothesized, "Goal displacement may well be the natural history of large organizations, regardless of the ideology or attitudes of particular professionals'' (p. 265). Garrison (1972) argued the prevalence of female staff strengthened "a non-professional bureaucratic system of control and low autonomy base for the library worker" as "the dominance of women made more likely the development of an authoritative administrative structure with a stress on rules and generally established principles to control the activities of employees" (p. 152), i.e., feminization – further discussed in C2.I.B.3. Conversely, the promise of bureaucratization – particularly during the Progressive era of the early-to-late 20th century – offered reform by providing a new entry route into the middle class for poor Americans (Garrison, 1979, p.169). The rise of bureaucracy also coincides with (proto-) professionalization of cultural institution employees.

I.B.1. Professionalization.

While early definitions of professionalization derive from assumptions that the work of professionals is enduring and transcends race, ethnicity, and gender, current theories recognize the effect of contextualization and its embeddedness within power structures and relationships (Stauffer, 2016, p. 312). The traditional white Western masculine description of a profession can be seen in Wilensky's (1964) often cited criteria:

Any occupation wishing to exercise professional authority must find a technical basis for it, assert an exclusive jurisdiction, link both skill and jurisdiction to standards of training, and convince the public that its services are uniquely trustworthy...the criteria of distinction seem to be two: (1) The job of the professional is technical – based on systematic knowledge or doctrine acquired only through long prescribed training. (2) The professional man adheres to a set of professional norms. (p. 138)

Mariner (1969) employed this definition to create her criteria for arguing "technical" (e.g., education, exhibition, and curatorial) museum staff were professionals. In order for an occupation to be a profession, it must have:

1. a technical basis for job expertise based on abstract knowledge;

2. exclusive authority on applying and controlling relevant knowledge;

3. advanced academic training and apprenticeship in both theory and practice;

4. public acceptance of the profession to its own jurisdiction and values;

5. technical and professional norms including a related code of ethics;

6. a professional social structure and culture, including associated groups and publications; and

7. a unique career-line (Mariner, 1969, pp. 139-140).

Mariner (1969) also contrasted museum work with that of librarians, whom she described as being "denied full professional status on the grounds that neither the quality of their training nor their code of service meets professional standards" (p. 141). Today, however, the ALA (2019b) provides accreditation for library graduate programs, while there are no standard educational requirements (or accreditation systems) for museum staff in America.

Both library and museum staff are still struggling to attain professional status. Teather (1990) acknowledged similarities between museum, library, and social work employees in only attaining "semi" or "pseudo" professionalization (p. 26). There are now calls for abandoning – or redefining – professionalization efforts due to its capability of maintaining misogyny, classism,

and racism. Building on Ralph Waldo Emerson's "professor of books" model and Bonnie R. Nelson's charge to bring meaningful education to library users, Dilevko (2009) argued for a "retro-progressive" stance against professionalization. Worrying about prestige and "the desire to achieve professional status for librarianship was a significant disservice to the work of librarians" as "the science- and technology-based information model of librarianship [defined by market-based quantitative performance metrics] taught at professional schools in universities inhibits the ability to think deeply and comprehensively" (Dilevko, 2009, pp. 7-8).

Relatedly, Reed (2018) characterized the concept of professionalization as an identity project and means of social closure (e.g., developing boundaries to close off opportunities for outsiders) through credentialism. Attending to individuals' identity construction (along with the role of professional bodies who charge for professional development) may offer a better understanding of the negotiation between the tensions and contradictions of professionalization (Reed, 2018, pp. 234-235). Furthermore, Stauffer (2016) argued cultural institutions and their scholars should reject preconceptions about professional education and redefine the role of information professionals to focus on discovering and implementing services communities actually desire (p. 321).

I.B.2. Vocational Awe.

Asking employees of cultural institutions to attend to community needs to the detriment of their own working conditions and careers, however, is symptomatic of vocational awe. Coined by Ettarh (2018), vocational awe "refers to the set of ideas, values, and assumptions librarians have about themselves and the profession that result in beliefs that libraries as institutions are inherently good and sacred, and therefore beyond critique." It can be viewed as the opposite of professionalization, as one's efficacy is judged by their passion (which, in turn, is directly tied to

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their sacrifice and obedience) rather than the fulfillment of standardized job duties (Ettarh, 2018). Adrianne Russell, blogger and co-founder of #MuseumsRespondToFerguson, connected vocational awe to museum work as well when she recently tweeted "Many people who seek out and perform museum work absolutely have 'vocational awe,' as coined by Fobazi Ettarh and [originally] applied to librarianship. That needs to end" (@adriannerussell, 2020). Ettarh (2018) argued vocational awe leads to burnout, lower salaries, and job creep as well as difficulty holding institutions accountable for their roles in perpetuating hegemonic values and contributing to white supremacy. Additionally, LaPierre (2020) argued vocational awe explains why libraries were expected to remain open – to the potential harm of staff and the greater public – at the beginning of the COVID-19 pandemic.

One way to curb the effects of vocational awe is through worker organization. For example, a group of museum professionals at the Philadelphia Museum of Art created the collaborative and crowdsourced Art + Museum Salary Transparency spreadsheet in 2019 to "break the silence around low wages and workplace exploitation in the cultural sector" (Millar Fisher, 2019). This document is cited as the catalyst of their August 2020 vote to unionize, which became even more pressing in light of allegations of abuse and recent COVID-19-related layoffs and furloughs (Di Liscia, 2020).

Demanding staff at cultural institutions solve complex societal issues sets workers up for failure from the outset. Moreover, taking on extra responsibilities without extra pay or support, including emotional labor work and gendered expectations associated with interacting with patrons, can be also connected to the feminization of cultural institutions.

I.B.3. Feminization.

Feminization refers to either the increase of women into a profession and/or the ascription of "feminine" characteristics (e.g., affective labor such as relationship-building) to that work (Shirazi, 2018, p. 2). As one of the few paid positions available to them in the 19th century, a large number of women flocked to librarianship. Perhaps the most critical reason why male library founders and leaders welcomed women into the field was due to their acceptance of low wages (Garrison, 1979, p. 174). Yet their entrance into paid positions did not include calls for more radical revolution in women's rights or other social change – instead, people created new rationales to explain why women were well-suited to each new occupation open to them. Examples included teaching as a "natural" extension of mothering; work involving writing, music, and the arts suited women's inherent sensitivity and love of beauty; and factory or clerical work aligned with women's sober nature, nimble fingers, and ability to endure boredom (Garrison, 1979, p.177). This logic allowed the public to modify their conceptions of appropriate vocations for women without undermining traditional social systems.

Similarly, art museum education was another occupational opportunity available to women in the U.S. during the early 19th century. Kletchka (2010) connects the feminization of museum education to the field's "ongoing secondary status in most art museum contexts, which persists to this day despite a remarkable degree of professionalization of the field" (p. 27). The feminization of museum work more generally (i.e., beyond museum education) was listed alongside "the increasing importance of affective work" as a reason why people in the field have become increasingly vocal about their job dissatisfaction (Boast & Mott, 2018). More disturbingly, trivedi and Wittman (2018) found 55% of the 500 museum professionals they surveyed experienced sexual harassment, assault, or abuse by work colleagues, with women

making up a disproportionate number of victims and survivors. This high rate of violence provides one indication that the power and authority "of women, femme, and gender non-conforming people is not proportionate to their numbers and gendered discrimination persists" (trivedi & Wittman, 2018, p. 216).

Shirazi (2018) also connected feminization to the performance of reproductive or "shadow labor" by librarians, including uncompensated work teaching information literacy and research skills. Since this work doesn't align with the "publish or perish" model of academic values; it is devalued as "service," which supports the labor of scholarship rather than recognized as valuable in its own right (Shirazi, 2018). The prevalence of (mostly) male supervision in library and museum work also strengthened systems of control in which (mostly female) workers have little authority (Garrison, 1979, p. 194; Kletchka, 2007, pp. 75-76). More specifically, Garrison (1979) contrasted librarianship to "established professions," where practitioners assumed "the responsibility for deciding what is best for the client," e.g., a doctor deciding which drug to prescribe without input from their patient (p. 189).

Yet the idea of anyone – even doctors – determining a plan of action without soliciting input from those involved is not necessarily beneficial nor desirable. More recently, ethics of care (also called care ethics) has addressed critiques of gender essentialism (Jenkins, 2020; Robinson, 2020) while expanding to define "morality as existing not in a series of universal rules or principles that can guide action but in the practices of care through which we fulfill our responsibilities to particular others" (Robinson, 2011, p. 4).

I.C. Summary of Relevant Historical Context

Recognizing the effects of bureaucratization, professionalization, vocational awe, and feminization is key to contextualizing work in cultural institutions today. From their origins,

institutions were framed as instruments of enforcing white male middle- and upper-class values. Yet their founders believed this use of time and resources benefited their communities. Many of today's museum and library staff similarly emphasize community improvement, replacing social control with collaboration. However, even initiatives aimed at decolonizing and democratizing institutions can be problematic if the benefits for including people with previously excluded perspectives are outweighed by the costs (Sullivan & Middleton, 2019, p. 71). Encouraging meaningful communication and engagement with voluntary collaborators, discussed in the next section, is supportive rather than prescriptive.

II. Communications & Social Media

This section begins by reviewing definitions of community and communications used by cultural institutions. Next, library and museum use of social media – including its definition and a detailed look into the practitioners responsible for it – is summarized. This section concludes with an examination of rapid response programming and crisis communication through social media. These topics provide the groundwork to better understand the experiences, values, and motivations that guide social media practitioners' practice at cultural institutions today.

II.A. Defining Community

Before discussing communication methods used by cultural institutions, a baseline definition of **community** – and how it is understood by museums and libraries – is needed. Communities offer members a sense of belonging, shared emotional connections, fulfillment of needs, and a reciprocal relationship between individual and group needs (McMillan & Chavis, 1986, p. 9; Brulé & Spiel, 2019). However, Sullivan and Middleton (2019) questioned the benefit of viewing communities as unified and coherent, due to the potential to reproduce inequalities and oppression. Instead, Sullivan and Middleton (2019) proposed viewing

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community as a "performative articulation of collaboration" (p. 100) in which individuals voluntarily create an alliance to maintain an identity or lifestyle; "it is something we do (a verb), rather than something we are (a noun)" (p. 88). Towards the end of *The Art of Relevance*, Simon (2016) arrives at this same conclusion, acknowledging as "specific communities have particular assets and needs, we spend more time thinking about how to connect them with each other than how to serve each on its own" ("Building a Bigger Room"). This connection is made through communication.

II.B. Defining Communication & Marketing in LIS

Since no one is required to visit cultural institutions, library and museum staff use various communication techniques to engage with their communities and encourage attendance. More specifically, external communication is used to build awareness of what institutions offer and reduce perceived – and actual – barriers to entry (Ewers & Austen, 2006, p. 27). While earlier work on marketing communication in LIS centered on promotional activities, Owens (2002) called for a better understanding of – and focus on – relationship marketing, as it "affords the opportunity to place our resources (money, time, efforts, and resources) on the relationships that are more important and/or more capable of providing beneficial change" (p. 21). The beneficial aspects of marketing on LIS include demonstrating value, building user loyalty, enhancing visibility, shaping public perception, and engendering successful fundraising (Owens, 2002, p. 26). Unfortunately, Solomon (2016) observed most libraries are still "very much entrenched" in the broadcast or one-way transmission model, where promotional messages (particularly about events) are sent out to everyone without consideration for how useful those messages may be for their actual users (p. 4).

Shifting attention to relationship-building also blurs the lines between marketing, outreach, and engagement. For the purposes of this study, however, we can distinguish between **marketing**, traditionally defined as "the action, business, or process of promoting and selling a product" (OED, 2000) and **outreach**, "the activity of an organization in making contact and fostering relations with people unconnected with it, especially for the purpose of support or education and for increasing awareness of the organization's aims or message" (OED, 2004). The ALA (2016) described outreach as services for infrequent or nonusers as well as "for those who are traditionally underserved," with outreach librarians specifically tasked with providing "equitable delivery of library services to all people." Borwick, past President of the Board of the Association of Arts Administration Educators, further distinguished between outreach and **community engagement**; "outreach is (at best) done 'for,' community engagement is done 'with'" (2013). The ALA (2018) similarly defined community engagement as "working collaboratively with community members," such as customers, residents, students, faculty, or other organizations, "to address issues for the betterment of the community." In this vein, Simon (2016) recommended a "community-first" program design model for cultural institutions based on co-developing programs that are relevant to a specific community's assets, needs, and values ("Community-First Program Design").

Cultural institutions that do not participate in conversations or relationship-building maintain their traditional roles as knowledge depositaries and can perpetuate dominant viewpoints while suppressing others (Solomon, 2013, p. 9; Deodato, 2014, p. 734). However, Sullivan and Middleton (2019) pointed out the need for careful consideration when planning to engage and collaborate with people – especially when working to expose and redress injustice – as "the individuals and communities with whom [institutions] collaborate, and who have borne

(and continue to bear) the brunt of systematic inequality, are often left feeling that for them the benefits have been meagre and the struggles and/or harms experienced great" (p. 72).

Furthermore, staff at cultural institutions have been speaking out about engaging and collaborating with a wider range of visitors for decades. In *Revolting Librarians*, Berman (1972) stated, "Nice slogan, 'LIBRARIES TO THE PEOPLE!' But it can only be realized when people make their libraries invigorating, just, and responsive." The Anacostia Community Museum was singled out by Cameron (1972) as providing an important "forum" for community-based cultural heritage interpretation (pp. 190-191). And yet, fifty years later, many museums and libraries continue struggling to appeal to new visitors – especially people of color (Dilenschneider, 2020b).

II.C. Using Social Media

Social media platforms provide a relatively new opportunity for community engagement and outreach as they are defined by their ability to turn digital communications into interactive dialogues (Montalvo, 2011, p. 91). While boyd & Ellison (2007) originally defined social network sites as online spaces with personalized profiles and browsable connections, they updated their definition to include streams of user-generated content (Ellison & boyd, 2013, p. 9). An emphasis on activity and interaction is also seen in the OED (2009) definition, "websites and applications which enable users to create and share content or to participate in social networking." **Interaction** is communication between individuals while user **engagement** is sustained interest in content – regardless of whether that interest is shared with others (Yaros, 2011, p. 60). For example, a user may engage (read, watch, think about) with a post without commenting or sharing it. All interactions and some types of engagement can be measured through **metrics**, such as views, comments, and shares (Solomon, 2016, pp. 90-94). While

metrics do not specifically describe how marketers can be more effective, they do provide information on areas for improvement (Solomon, 2016, p. 96). For example, if visitors are starting videos – but not finishing them – there could be an issue with length, topic, production quality, bandwidth issues, or all of the above. Most social media companies are for-profit and depend on users investing their time, attention, and emotions (Lehmann et al., 2012, p. 164). However, quantitative metrics do not always indicate the full impact of social media posts, including personal emotional responses to content.

Over four and a half billion people around the world (57.6%) were active social media users as of October 2021 (We Are Social & Hootsuite, 2021), including 67.4% of Americans (Statista, 2020b). Facebook, the most popular social network, has over 2.9 billion users alone (Facebook, 2021, p. 3). The average user actively uses social media 2 hours and 27 minutes every day (We Are Social & Hootsuite, 2021). Furthermore, over two-thirds of social media users in the U.S. reported spending at least one hour longer on platforms each day as a result of the COVID-19 pandemic (eMarketer & Business Insider, 2020).

Faced with an overwhelming amount of content and too many posts vying for their attention, many users experience paralyzing anxiety; 80% of those surveyed by Pestanes et al. (2015) agreed their consumption was paradoxically limited by too many available options (p. 7). This is where museums and libraries can shine. While people do not want cultural institutions to tell them what and how they should feel, they expect cultural institutions to provide guidance, support, advice, and descriptions of services and content at the moment of their choosing (Pestanes et al., 2015). Relatedly, people perceive museums as more credible sources of information than family members (Rosenzweig & Thelen, 1998), NGOs, federal agencies, or newspapers – and expect them to recommend actions related to institutional missions

(Dilenschneider, 2019a). Seventy-eight percent of adults in the U.S. reported feeling public libraries help them find trustworthy information (Geiger, 2017). Additionally, the largest portion of American adults report the strongest feelings of trust for libraries and librarians (over health care providers and family or friends), although these differences somewhat invert when the percentages of those who trust a resource "some" are added to those who responded, "a lot" (Horrigan, 2017, p. 32). Trust in cultural institutions may have further increased since the COVID-19 pandemic began, with more people (around 80%) agreeing museums are highly credible sources of information – higher than those who agree "ice cream tastes good" (73%) and similar to those who agree "kittens are cute" (83%) (Dilenschneider, 2020a; Dilenschneider, 2017a). People want cultural institutions to use social media to prolong their experiences through additional related content, to enrich their visits, and to interact and share experiences with friends and family while participating in an event (Pestanes et al., 2015, p. 11). These desires, however, do not necessarily line up with why and how museums and libraries use social media in practice.

II.C.1. Why do Cultural Institutions use Social Media?

Social media is an essential communication outlet for museums and libraries (Harrison et al., 2017, p. 248; Pestanes et al., 2015). It engages younger and more ethnically diverse audiences and is now the top source of information for likely and repeat visitors at all types of cultural institutions (Dilenschneider, 2017b; 2018; 2019b). Lankes et al. (2015) argued incorporating social media into museum and library frameworks, missions, and strategic thinking is necessary in today's participatory culture (p. S62). The ALA (2020a) described social media channels as "a place where libraries can share the work they are doing – and reinforce relationships with decision makers and the communities they represent." Additionally, three-quarters of people use social media to inform their visits to cultural institutions (Dilenschneider,

2019c; 2019d).

While there is enormous potential to widen (and host) audiences through social media, this outcome is never inevitable (Kidd, 2011, p. 69). Museums and libraries must create strategic, useful, ethical, and relevant digital content to successfully engage with online (and offline) users (Solomon, 2016; Simon, 2016). Unfortunately, many institutions seem to confuse the ease of launching a new social media profile or initiative with the hard work of eliciting engaging dialogue online (Kidd, 2011, p. 73). Joo et al. (2019) examined five factors (usefulness, ease, personal attitude, norms, and behavioral control) that affect librarians' intentions to use social media. The researchers stressed the importance of training librarians to use social media tools effectively with diverse patrons and called for future research into "library-level factors—in particular, the relationship between library-level support, resources, and social media activities" (Joo et al., 2019, p. 150).

II.C.2. How do Cultural Institutions use Social Media?

Almost all – about 97% – of libraries and arts organizations have a presence on social media (Library Journal Research, 2018, p. 4; Thomson et al., 2013, p. 3). Information professionals view Facebook as the most important channel, followed closely by Twitter (Simons et al., 2016, p. 25). Eighty-eight percent of libraries and 84% of museums share content on social media at least once per week (Library Journal Research, 2018, p. 4; Aerni & Schegg, 2017, p. 12). However, over half of American public libraries do not have a marketing or communications strategy (OCLC, 2018, p. 2) and one third of museums do not plan their social media activities (Aerni & Schegg, 2017, p. 14).

Types of user engagement with cultural institutions on social media varies. In the United States, more people reported discovering art through social media (22.7%) than museums (20%)

or art galleries (15.9%) (Invaluable, 2016). Fifty-three percent of American adults also "somewhat agree" or "strongly agree" that they are more exposed to arts due to social media (Statista, 2016). Some museums are now arranging exhibitions to better accommodate visitor photography and facilitate the posting of related content on social media (Gilbert, 2016). Yet most museums still concentrate on one-way messaging and do not invite or otherwise encourage users to become actively involved with the institution digitally (Fletcher & Lee, 2012, p. 517).

Libraries are also "struggling to foster interest in their social media activities" (Jones & Harvey, 2019, p. 3) and report limited user involvement with their social networking platforms (Chu & Du, 2013, p. 72). A 2011 content analysis of 439 library Facebook posts found nearly all content involved announcements and institutional information (Phillips, 2011, pp. 514-516) and a 2017 analysis of library posts found those about events were "50% more common than the next most common subjects: collections, services, library community, and university community" (Harrison et al., 2017, p. 254). Relatedly, the most popular objective of using social media for both libraries and arts organizations is one-way marketing-related promotion (Simons et al., 2016, p. 25; Oosman et al., 2014, p. 2; Thomson et al., 2013, p. 3).

However, in their research on science museum social media content, Lundgren and Crippen (2017; 2018) found posts related to general information, research, and news were more popular with users than those of opportunities (events). In one of the few research papers on fostering online library communities, shifting Twitter messaging to an "interesting" (sharing personality-rich content) and "interested" (interacting with and responding to users) strategic approach resulted in a 275% rise of interaction rates and a 366% increase of student followers (Young & Rossman, 2015).

While many cultural institutions eagerly adopted social media (often explicitly to connect with new audiences), most have yet to see any expansion of user engagement (Deodato, 2018). One reason libraries may struggle to foster interest could be due to a lack of consideration for end users' needs, including an absence of market research (Jones & Harvey, 2019, p. 14). Solomon (2013) maintained libraries must interact with people through social media or they risk becoming irrelevant (p. 9). She later argued, "A library is only effective online when it realizes that the people reading the content matter more than the people creating it" (Solomon, 2016, p. 3). Unfortunately, the majority of social applications used by libraries – and cultural institutions more generally – fail to live up to their participatory, interactive, and collaborative principles because of philosophical (rather than technological) challenges (Deodato, 2018). Deodato (2018) further posited librarians' reluctance to use social media "to its fullest extent may be due to the fact that many of [social media's] founding principles directly conflict with longstanding library concepts of control, authority, expertise, intellectual property, and privacy" (p. 23).

Interestingly, research into the benefits and challenges of cultural institutions' use of social media provides contradictory findings. Librarians rank low financial cost and little required training as the biggest advantages to social media use, yet they also rank the time, resources, and technological expertise required as the most challenging aspects (Oosman et al., 2014, p. 6). Accordingly, 71% of U.S. public library staff members stated they were concerned about not having the necessary staff resources with respect to communications – perhaps due to continuing print and other traditional advertising while trying to add social media on top (OCLC, 2018). Similar responses from arts organizations reveal the greatest challenges in adopting digital technologies are "cost and staffing issues, capacity/funding, [and/or] time and staff resources" (Thomson et al., 2013, p. 15). The unrecognized expenses incurred from the time,

commitment, and personnel required to maintain online accounts point to hidden costs associated with social media use, including staff time spent on training, content creation, and channel moderation (Fletcher & Lee, 2012, pp. 505-506; Chung et al., 2014, pp. 16-17). A three-year study on nonprofit marketing costs found the optimal audience acquisition cost is 12.5% of earned revenues (e.g., if a museum generates $20 million in revenue, they should spend $2.5 million on investments to engage their audience – not including staff salaries) (Dilenschneider, 2016). Effective use of social media demands money, training, time, and experience (Chu & Du, 2013, p. 73; Solomon, 2013, p. 26).

More distressingly, research reveals current online engagement with cultural institutions reproduces and enlarges existing racial and educational inequalities (Mihelj et al., 2019). Specifically, "Museums may be unwittingly excluding people of color as a result of minorities' lack of participation within museum's social media platforms" (Moore, 2013, p. 48). This is significant as the proportion of museum visitors of color is decreasing while diversity in the general population is increasing (Farrell & Medvedeva, 2010; Dilenschneider, 2020b). Similarly, the percent of Black library visitors decreased at a larger rate (-10%) than white visitors (-8%) between 2012 and 2015 (Horrigan, 2015). Institutions may not realize this is an issue – perhaps due to the lack of accessible and high-confidence market research (Jones & Harvey, 2019, p. 14; Dilenschneider, 2020b) – or it may be related to cultural hegemony. Whatever the cause, museums and libraries need to focus on their digital cultural competence, particularly in regard to challenging systemic racism (Gibson et al., 2017).

II.C.3. Who are Social Media Practitioners?

While social media is critical to institutional success (BoardSource, 2017), the prevailing attitude toward employees responsible for it can be summed up in a quote from a social media

editor: "the position is always gonna [sic] be viewed as some dumb 20-year-old woman job" (Levinson, 2015). Even as research on the demographics of social media communicators working within cultural institutions is sparse, there are a few sources from which we can infer information concerning prevalence, salary, gender, race/ethnicity, and educational attainment. Librarians list "social networking software" as a key technological skill (2020a), while curators list "provide information...to the public" and "write...publicity materials" as core tasks (2019a) through the National Center for O*NET Development database, which was developed and updated by the U.S. Department of Labor. The U.S. Bureau of Labor Statistics (2019a) also lists a $49,850 median salary for archivists, curators, and museum workers and $49,030 for librarians, curators, and archivists.

Interestingly, the associated U.S. Bureau of Labor Statistics (2019a) median salaries are much lower than those listed on the Association of Art Museum Directors' (AAMD, 2019) yearly report. The AAMD (2019) survey categorized positions more narrowly, revealing museum web managers have a median salary of $60,000 and new media managers have a median salary of $50,000 – both a bit below the $67,412 average median salary of all museum staff surveyed. Neither the AAMD (2019) or U.S. Department of Labor (2019a) statistics included part-time staff or interns in their calculations, so the large difference between overall median salaries ($49,000 - $67,000) is surprising. Perhaps those who self-selected to report their salaries to AAMD felt more comfortable with others knowing their higher pay.

The U.S. Bureau of Labor Statistics and the National Center for O*NET Development databases also provide the opportunity to compare and contrast similar positions across industries. Across all fields on O*NET, public relations specialists make $61,150 (2020b), market research analysts and marketing specialists make $63,790 (2020c), public relations and

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fundraising managers make $116,180 (2020d), and advertising and promotions managers make $125,510 (2019b). None of these general listings required graduate degrees. Pay suppression (and ironically, the requirement of advanced credentials) for similar work at cultural institutions may be attributed to the feminization and the lack of professionalization of the field, discussed previously in this chapter.

Relatedly, another anonymous pay database, PayScale, is helpful for reviewing the self-reported gender breakdown by job title. Duffy and Schwartz (2018) cited 2017 PayScale statistics to determine 70-80% of social media workers self-identify as female (p. 2794). As of 2020, the same PayScale statistics show a slight increase; 77.4-84% of social media managers, specialists, coordinators, and strategists self-identify as female (2020a; 2020b; 2020c; 2020d). More specifically, 75% of respondents who reported their gender in Simons et al.'s (2016) survey of information professionals doing social media work indicated they were "female," which the researchers noted may be "consistent with the current gender composition of information professional occupations more generally" (p. 25). Job recruitment advertisements for social media workers also allude to feminization of social media employment (Duffy & Schwartz, 2018).

Social media communication draws on highly-developed marketing, editorial, creative, technical, and information skills – yet pay is poor and respect remains limited (Hempel, 2018). Moreover, "the emotional toll social media jobs can take isn't balanced by the security of an established career trajectory" (Levinson, 2015). Social media workers take on increasingly important responsibilities – their work is credited as "influencing elections, harnessed to transform fledgling startups into billion-dollar companies, and used as a form of warfare"

(Hempel, 2018). Unfortunately, the idealized practitioner remains unrecognized and marginalized (Duffy & Schwartz, 2018).

While no similar sources for race and ethnicity demographics of social media workers at cultural institutions was found, a recent survey found only 28% of art museum staff employees are people of color (Westermann et al., 2019, p. 9), compared to 40% of the general U.S. population (Schaeffer, 2019). Museum leadership is even less diverse – only 11% are people of color, meaning people from traditionally marginalized race and ethnic backgrounds are disproportionately missing from executive-level positions (Westermann et al., 2019, p. 11). Similarly, the 2017 ALA Demographic Study found 86.7% of respondents self-identified as white (Rosa & Henke, 2017) and an IMLS report revealed "there has been no positive change, and perhaps even a decrease in the diversity of master's-level librarians'' in America over the past 30 years (Sands et al., 2018, p. 4).

Even though a graduate degree is typically required for curatorial, archivist, and librarian positions (U.S. Bureau of Labor Statistics, 2019a; 2019b), social media training is not part of the ALA's (2019b) current curriculum guidelines as described in their Standards of Accreditation. This gap is particularly important to consider as 43% of entry-level reference job postings in libraries studied in 2012 by Detmering and Sproles mention outreach duties and 53% mention technology tasks – this rate is probably much higher today. A general study of social media communicator roles across nonprofit and for-profit organizations provided a five-factor model of related positions (customer service provider, mobilizer, information disseminator, researcher, and community builder) but did not examine the lived experiences of practitioners in each role (Carpenter & Lertpratchya, 2016a). More specifically, a survey of 49 information professionals who routinely use social media as part of their professional work revealed 73% of respondents

believe relevant formal education "would be 'useful' or 'very useful' for a person just entering the social media profession" (Simons et al., 2016, pp. 27-28). Simons et al. (2016) offered initial insights into educational topics desired by social media workers (including marketing, communication, and public relations), but the researchers strongly encouraged "further study into the experiences and practices" of practitioners (p. 29).

II.C.4. What's at Stake?

If cultural institutions want to be valued resources, they must meet their audiences where they are – on social media. Moreover, simply being present on these platforms isn't enough. Libraries and museums need to share substantive and quality content to stand out and engage with their communities; if they don't, their users won't have to look far to find other organizations who will sustain their interest and secure their advocacy instead (Solomon, 2016, p. 14).

Additionally, some social media platforms will automatically create channels for institutions, such as Facebook pages, based on physical locations. This is what happened to The College of New Jersey (TCNJ) Library after staff decided not to develop their own social media presence due to prioritization constraints (Cowell, 2017). However, a Facebook page for the library was created automatically and reflected 54 "followers" and 1,658 "check-ins" as of December 2021 (The Library at TCNJ, n.d.). The page is currently available for anyone to claim – a process requiring little more than being physically present in the space (as confirmed by automatic geolocation) and requesting ownership (F. Tripodi, personal communication, September 11, 2020). Hovering over a small "unofficial page" icon at the top of the page reveals a pop up which states, "This unofficial page was created because people on Facebook have shown interest in this place or business. It's not affiliated with or endorsed by anyone associated

with The Library at TCNJ" (The Library at TCNJ, n.d.). Not only is the library missing out on being part of (and leading) digital conversations about their institution, but it could also be in a precarious position if someone else takes control or otherwise uses their platform in detrimental ways.

Furthermore, cultural institutions have historically reflected and reinforced dominant discourses and therefore have a moral and ethical responsibility to redress past biases through facilitating inclusive online participation (Deodato, 2014, p. 751). This requires digitally and culturally competent practitioners who have enough resources to be effective. COVID-19 provides an additional complication, as people do not intend to visit indoor organizations at the same levels as they did prior to the pandemic (Dilenschneider, 2020c), discussed in more detail below.

II.D. Rapid Response, Crisis Communication, COVID-19, and Social Media

The ways libraries and museums transition their offerings to meet the COVID-19 crisis may be the difference between institutions that endure and those that close permanently. Beginning in spring 2020, the pandemic forced cultural institutions to close their buildings to the public and most staff members. However, some museums and libraries quickly met this challenge by developing rapid response programming and utilizing crisis communication techniques.

It is also important to note that the closure of public libraries also affected those who depended upon their location-based services, including low-income families and people experiencing homelessness (Ashworth, 2020). On the other hand, institutions that remained open (as a result of legal or executive mandates) incurred unnecessary risks, potentially harming both library staff and the public (LaPierre, 2020). LaPierre (2020) connected the vocational awe

associated with librarianship, discussed previously in this chapter, to the expectation that staff would put themselves in harm's way stating, "Dedication to the profession is admirable and even a prerequisite, but martyrdom is counter-productive." Beyond determining a fair burden to place upon library staff, LaPierre (2020) asked "whether the very fact that public libraries provide access to limited resources allows us to make excuses for the fact that so many in our society struggle with underclass status," and noted closures due to the pandemic "might force us to examine some of the inequities in society and envision more widespread solutions." One way cultural institutions are beginning to respond to (and grapple with) social justice issues is through rapid response exhibitions and programming.

II.D.1. Rapid Response Programming.

Cultural institutions use social media for rapid response collecting, exhibitions, and programming that respond to contemporary events. Pandolfi (2018) traced rapid response collection, in which organizations seek out and acquire artifacts related to contemporaneous events, to the memorials created in the aftermath of the September 11, 2001 terrorist attacks in America. Later, in 2014, the Victoria & Albert Museum (n.d.) in London created a specific rapid response collecting gallery with design and manufacturing objects related to major historical moments by soliciting ideas through the hashtag #RapidResponseCollecting on Twitter and Instagram. Their gallery now includes a 3D-printed gun and a pink "pussyhat" from the 2016 Women's Marches. In 2016, Brenda Tindal, one of the pioneers of rapid response programming, managed the development of Levine Museum of the New South's *K(NO)W Justice K(NO)W Peace* exhibition. Tindal co-created the exhibition and related programming with community members in response to the police-involved shooting of Keith Lamont Scott and related protests in Charlotte, North Carolina. Within seven days of the beginning of unrest, the museum hosted

an open house, a town hall, related interactive experiences, and special tours (Tindal, 2018, p. 91). Following this, the museum circulated an "Invitation to Respond" via social media and community contacts to collect dispatches, oral histories, and stories for a more comprehensive program launched later that year (Tindal, 2018, p. 93). Tindal (2018) described her work as an example of transformative dialogue facilitation "and a model for how twenty-first-century museums can respond to national strife and community challenges for years to come" (p. 88).

Due to building closures and limits on gatherings, cultural institutions could not create in-person rapid response exhibitions or programming in early 2020. Not only were communities grappling with the effects of the COVID-19 pandemic (including physical and mental health as well as economic ramifications), the deaths of George Floyd, Breonna Taylor, and other Black Americans at the hands of police provoked a resurgence of Black Lives Matter protests across the country. Some libraries and museums, however, developed efforts aimed at both crises, such as the proliferation of staff- and/or crowd-sourced anti-racist booklists. For example, the Schomburg Center for Research in Black Culture (part of the New York Public Library) created the Black Liberation Reading List in June 2020. Their list of 95 titles focused on books by Black authors that "represent books we and the public turn to regularly as activists, students, archivists, and curators" – most are available for free online through the library's e-reader app (Schomburg Center Staff, 2020).

II.D.1.i. Crisis Communication & Social Media.

In the introduction to their edited volume, *Social Media and Crisis Communication*, Austin and Jin (2018) asserted, "Crisis information production and dissemination are critical for crisis preparedness, crisis response, and crisis recovery" (p. 1). Lin et al. (2016) defined crises as "novel, unpredictable, and are even characterized as chaotic events that require deliberate and

immediate responses; communication is central to crisis response" (pp. 601-602). Social media

as a crisis communication channel can reduce uncertainty and help people gain a sense of control

over a situation, but it is not yet being utilized fully – potentially because of its newness and/or

the general uncertainty surrounding its application and use (Lin et al., 2016). Effective

engagement with the public through traditional and social media remains a struggle during crises,

even as media practitioners and communication scholars recognize its importance (Austin & Jin,

2018, p. 1).

     Lim et al. (2018) created a social media pandemic communication (SMPC) model which

offers a guide to the types of information (internalizing, instructing, or adjusting) practitioners

should publish at specific times during an event (as related to the WHO's continuum of

pandemic phases of alert, pandemic, transition, and interpandemic) as well as preparation

strategies for developing communication efforts to meet public expectations. While their work is

mainly oriented towards health organizations, their model can be applied to cultural institutions –

especially as they engender even more public trust than federal agencies and news outlets

(Dilenschneider, 2019a). Key takeaways from Lim et al.'s (2018) review of their SMPC model

on the 2011 H1N1 pandemic include keeping the public at the forefront of policy decisions and

communication efforts, acknowledging (and not stonewalling) issues that arise during the

pandemic to demonstrate accountability, and paying tribute and honoring people who play a role

in mitigation efforts (pp. 262-263). The potential for distortions, rumors, lies, and

misinformation on social media can be mitigated by frequent and regular updates as well as the

use of a credible spokesperson using an appropriate tone (Lim et al., 2018, pp. 263-264). In a

rapidly evolving pandemic crisis, "dynamic responses via social media can provide the stability

and consistency needed to restore calm" (Lim et al., 2018, pp. 263-264).

Some social media communicators, such as DJ Lilly at the Schlow Centre Region Library in State College, Pennsylvania, used their position as a trusted community resource to amplify up-to-the-minute local news through their social media channels (personal communication, June 11, 2020). Schlow Library's Twitter account had approximately 2,500 followers (@SchlowLibrary, 2020), far exceeding the town mayor's 26 followers (@RonaldLFilippel, 2020) and the Centre County COVID Response grassroots organizers' 73 followers (@ccc19response, 2020). DJ and her library's commitment to sharing emergency information by connecting local government to the community is just one example of crisis communication through social media.

II.D.1.ii. COVID-19, Cultural Institutions, and Social Media.

While prior research provides theoretical guidance for organizations, the COVID-19 pandemic offers additional insights into the practical applications of rapid response programming and crisis communication as it currently unfolds. By early spring 2020, 98% of public libraries and 90% of museums in the United States had closed to the public (ALA, 2020b; UNESCO, 2020, p. 31). UNESCO estimated about one-quarter of Western European, Israeli, and American museums launched online initiatives through social media to stay connected with their audiences when they closed (2020, p. 14). This included reusing previously digitized resources, transitioning planned events from in-person to virtual, developing new social media content (including some specifically related to lockdown restrictions), and professional or scientific-related activities (UNESCO, 2020). While there are no specific statistics for museums in the U.S., the average number of monthly social media posts made by museums and similar cultural institutions in Italy jumped from 72 posts in February to 133 posts in March across Facebook, Twitter, and Instagram (Statista, 2020a). By July, AAM (2020) reported 75% of museums

surveyed had added virtual educational programming (p. 13). Yet the AAM (2020) survey also illustrated the precariousness of museums: one third were not confident in their ability to reopen after the pandemic and two-thirds of directors predicted budget cuts in education, programming, and/or other public services due to closure.

Americans – and people across the globe – began staying on social media for hours longer following stay-at-home and social distancing orders (eMarketer & Business Insider, 2020). With so many people looking for virtual activities, it seemed obvious that most institutions would begin to offer digital experiences for students, families, and other interested audiences. And, for a few early days in March 2020, virtual museum tours did become a viral sensation (Alexis, 2020). Almost as quickly, however, their popularity diminished. Alexis (2020) noted that "virtual museum tours" as a Google search term abruptly fell, while related searches like "virtual field trips for kids," "quarantine date ideas," and "things to read" continued to rise in popularity. This echoes prior research findings on cultural institutions' general inability to move from one-directional to two-way communication. Clearly, museums and libraries need to figure out how to provide content and services in ways that meet their needs, such as developing online activities that align their content to popular search engine optimization terms (e.g., kid-centered virtual museum field trips, online literary trivia date nights, or ebook recommendations).

It would be negligent, however, not to mention a few examples of recent social media-related successes – particularly activities that drew large audiences. Over a thousand people tuned in to watch Drag Queen Story Hour Livestream with Angel Elektra on the Queens Public Library Facebook page on April 23, 2020 (QPLNYC, 2020). In another example, thousands of people across the world (some of whom had never written a letter before and many others who had never visited a museum) became "pen pals" with Philbrook Museum's garden cats that same

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month (Merlin, 2020; J. Martin, personal communication, April 28, 2020). Other activities hosted by libraries and museums included "Ask Me Anything" events, virtual author talks, online fitness classes, civic information talks, draw-alongs, new podcast series, book clubs, and movie watch parties (March & Gibson, 2020). These activities also show how useful social media can be to connect with community members who may never enter a cultural institution's building as a consequence of geographical distance, price, disability, or other circumstance (Pestanes et al., 2015, p. 16). In fact, three years prior to the pandemic, McMillen and Alter (2017) argued social media could be used by museums to attain their accessibility and inclusivity goals. Yet they, like the many social media researchers discussed before, recognized most cultural institutions lacked the resources and knowledge on how to equitably engage with (and respond to) diverse audiences.

II.E. Summary of Communications & Social Media

Cultural institutions can use social media to inspire a more knowledgeable, just, and connected world through their work as informal online educators. Unfortunately, education-related digital outreach remains limited and overshadowed by one-way promotional content (Phillips, 2011; Harrison et al., 2017; Lundgren & Crippen, 2019). Moreover, social media communicators working in libraries and museums must recognize the need for inclusive content that does not continue to oppress marginalized groups in the midst of changing national demographics and the current political climate (Black, 2019, p. 112). People trust cultural institutions and are interested in their content, but museums and libraries risk irrelevance if they do not include their communities in developing meaningful content and meeting potential new visitors where they are.

III. Cultural Intermediation

Cultural intermediation provides a framework that positions social media communicators as emissaries between organizations and their communities. It was originally defined by Bourdieu as the work of taste makers located between producers and consumers (1979/1996), but as a framework, it can be used as an entry point for discussing influences and impacts of social media practitioners' professional work. In particular, cultural intermediation offers a way to understand how social media communicators view their role and how it meets both institutional and community needs.

III.A. Defining Culture

Before discussing its intermediation, it may be helpful to delineate the term **culture** first. Cooke (2017) cited the ALA Diversity Standard's definition of culture as "Customary beliefs, social forms, and material traits of a racial, religious, or social group; a set of shared attitudes, values, goals, and practices that characterizes an institution or organization" (p. 7). Peterson (2004) defined culture as "the relatively stable set of inner values and beliefs generally held by groups of people in countries or regions and the noticeable impact those values and beliefs have on the peoples' outward behaviors and environment" (p. 17). Sociologist Griswold (2013) described "two sorts of culture: explicit, expressive, symbolic forms on the one hand and implicit grounding for action on the other" (p. 8). She described "high culture" as referring to "the fine and performing arts or to serious literature," in contrast to "popular culture, folk culture, or mass culture" (Griswold, 2013, p. 4).

Differentiation between forms of culture without engaging in the complexities of status distinctions, however, is problematic (Boylan, 2020, "Low/High Culture"). Specifically, Griswold (2013) explained how value judgments of humanities scholars led to the distinction of

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performing and literary arts as "higher" than cultural productions made in other arenas. Yet this

conceptual separation may be helpful to expose these inequities (including – but not limited to –

class, gender, race, ability) and their relationships to the experiences of social media

communicators at cultural institutions. Similarly, it may also be a useful tool for describing if

– and how – the cultural objects created by social media communicators are valued differently

than content created elsewhere. For example, a curator's printed pamphlet or a librarian's

physical book display may be viewed as more prestigious ("high culture") than a social media

post ("low culture") – even if the post receives exponentially higher views. Moreover, a broader

understanding of the cultural intermediation process – and the cultural intermediaries themselves

– is needed for a rich interpretation of the influential factors behind social media work.

III.B. Original Context: Bourdieu & Cultural Intermediation

Cultural intermediation is most associated with French sociologist and philosopher Pierre

Bourdieu and his book, *Distinction: A Social Critique of the Judgment of Taste* (1979/1996).

Bourdieu is credited with developing contemporary critical sociology, including tools such as

habitus (norms and values instilled through family, education, and environment) the

differentiation of three forms of capital (economic, social, and cultural), and the concept of field

(a social position influenced by negotiation between habitus and capital) (Burke et al, 2015, pp.

2-3). In *Distinction*, Bourdieu elaborated on the relationship between class and status as situated

within consumer culture through the analysis of French socio-occupational data collected by the

Institut National de la Statistique et des Études Économiques (INSEE) during the 1960s. He

explored patterns of consumption by social groups – including literature, music, food, and

clothing – and identified distinct class-based cultural preferences (Bourdieu, 1979/1996; Nixon,

1997, p. 211). This analysis led Bourdieu to conclude social stratification is both reproduced and legitimized through tastes (Bourdieu, 1979/1996, p. 7; Smith Maguire, 2014).

Bourdieu (1979/1996) further proposed that people with higher cultural, social, and economic capital are more likely to determine what constitutes taste, with those of lower cultural capital accepting these distinctions. (Please note a critique of this argument is provided in C2.III.B.1 and is followed by contemporary extensions of cultural intermediation in C2.III.C). Traditional **cultural intermediaries**, such as radio DJs and fashion magazine editors, exist between production and consumption – studying these workers allows researchers to better understand the relationship between economic and cultural practices (Nixon & du Gay, 2002, p. 498). Social media communicators at museums and libraries are Bourdieusian cultural intermediaries if they work only to increase the value and/or support of their institutions by reinforcing the status quo.

The term "cultural intermediary" existed as a specific category of occupations within the INSEE survey, which recorded facets of peoples' lives (including topics as varied as educational attainment, leisure activities, favorite singers and artists, interest in celebrities, and favorite meals) along with income and jobs (Smith Maguire, 2014, p. 17). Bourdieu (1979/1996) wrote somewhat disparagingly of these cultural intermediaries, whom he viewed as performing the "gentle manipulation" of capitalism (p. 365). He described the purpose of their work as producing "an inexhaustible market for the products they offer" by encouraging "the corresponding needs, expectations and dissatisfactions" (Bourdieu, 1979/1996, p. 153). Nixon and du Gay (2002) noted Bourdieu used the term "new cultural intermediaries" to inclusively describe workers involved in the provision of symbolic goods and services, described by other writers as belonging to a "new service class," "new middle class," or "new petite bourgeois"

arising in France with the growth of educated and salaried occupations during the mid-20th century (pp. 496-497). As the term is no longer novel, nor expanding, Nixon and du Gay (2002) argued against the qualifier "new" when referring to cultural intermediaries (p. 497). Moreover, other theorists have expanded the role of intermediaries from one-way to two-way cultural translation, further complicating notions of taste and class (and discussed in C2.III.C).

Cultural intermediaries do not require or enforce specific desires or purchases – rather, they create favorable conditions for consumers to identify and develop their tastes (Smith Maguire, 2014, p. 20). Bourdieu (1979/1996) interpreted the communication of these conditions in forceful terms, describing it as "symbolic violence through which the dominant groups endeavour to impose their own life-style" (p. 511). In other words, cultural intermediaries can perform "symbolic violence" by creating "discourses that generate legitimacy for a particular point of view and sideline or negate alternative perspectives" (Edwards, 2012, p. 441). The expansion of cultural intermediation as a framework over the past twenty years has grown from perpetuating oppressive systems through this "systemic violence" to encompassing the opposite as well (e.g., disrupting, negotiating, and expanding acceptable possibilities – see more in C2.III.C).

III.B.1. Critiques of Bourdieusian Cultural Intermediation.

Critiques of Bourdieu's original conception of cultural intermediation abound. Most generally, theories concentrating on the relationship between cultural meaning and the social world often downplay the human agency of both cultural creators and the people on the receiving end of these messages (Griswold, 2013, p. 44). More specifically, Bourdieu's limitation of cultural intermediaries to a specific class or occupation is viewed as problematic by more recent

theorists, as this work is performed in many contemporary jobs by people with a range of backgrounds (Smith Maguire, 2014, p. 17; Negus, 2002; Nixon & du Gay, 2002).

III.C. Extending Cultural Intermediation

Contemporary work on cultural intermediation critiques its original, limited definition and addresses its expansion into popular culture, non-dominant practices, and social categories beyond class. To begin with, as Moor (2012) explained, "Bourdieu is more interested in culture in its classical than anthropological sense," as he focused on the role of reproducing class identities through relationships with "legitimate" (e.g., "high") culture, whereas contemporary researchers are more interested in cultural intermediaries' role in reproducing (or disrupting) values and norms (e.g., "low") culture, particularly as they serve commercial, class, and economic interests (p. 564).

However, this broadening of Bourdieu's original scope was not wholly unproblematic. Hesmondhalgh (2006) provided a particularly scathing critique of this practice, arguing Nixon (1997) and Negus (2002) made misguided assumptions which expanded the concept too far (Hesmondhalgh, 2006, pp. 226). Responding directly to Hesmondhalgh's (2006) argument, Smith Maguire and Matthews (2012) explained, "cultural intermediaries are differentiated by their explicit claims to professional expertise in taste and value within specific cultural fields" and proposed "concerted attention to cultural intermediaries as contextualized market actors offers the most promising way to drive forward our understanding of what cultural intermediaries do and why they matter" (pp. 552-553). Two years later, they further streamlined their definition of cultural intermediaries as "the taste makers defining what counts as good taste and cool culture in today's marketplace" (Smith Maguire & Matthews, 2014, p. 1). This seems to have somewhat satisfied Hesmondhalgh, who recently referred to cultural intermediaries as

"providing business and accommodation support" for creative hubs in the UK (Hesmondhalgh et al., 2015, p. 130).

Beyond responding to Hesmondhalgh's (2006) criticism, Smith Maguire and Matthews (2012) extended cultural intermediation work from solely reproducing dominant conventions to expanding what is considered culture. In their view, cultural intermediation facilitates two-way communication, "whereby new areas and aspects of everyday life are identified as 'cultural' problems, and thus brought into the sphere of interventions via particular devices, forms of influence and cadres of experts" (p. 559). Negus (2002) similarly acknowledged "a shift away from unidirectional or transmission models of cultural production towards an approach that conceives of workers as intermediaries continually engaged in forming a point of connection or articulation between production and consumption" (p. 503). In other words, cultural intermediaries' impact can be felt downstream (e.g., informing consumer perceptions, as the term was originally interpreted) or upstream, such as making decisions that become credible to the elites who control the distribution of resources and information (Smith Maguire and Matthews, 2014, p. 10). Moor (2012) further expanded the study of cultural intermediaries to include the influences of both human and non-human elements (e.g., policies, technologies, metrics). She concluded cultural intermediation could be viewed as the combination of these influences, which can in turn actively shape, distort, or even transform meaning (Moor, 2012, p. 576). For example, Tindal's (2018) *K(NO)W Justice K(NO)W Peace* rapid response exhibition (discussed in C2.II.D.1) translated popular and collective online content into an established program launched by and at a cultural institution. As a cultural intermediary, she not only translated dominant narratives, but also facilitated and incorporated non-dominant ideas and challenged cultural hegemony.

III.C.1. From Class-Centered to Intersectionality.

In another early addition to Bourdieu's original analysis, Nixon (1997) suggested researching cultural intermediaries within creative industries requires an exploration of gender, race, ethnicity, and their dynamics within formal and informal workplaces (p. 216). More contemporary research specifically delves into the effects of cultural intermediation on social categories. In particular, Surma and Daymon (2014) studied the effects of gender and Banks (2019; 2020) analyzed the impact of race and, more broadly, intersectionality.

In what the authors described as the first "consideration of gender in discussions of the cultural intermediary role in public relations," Surma and Daymon's (2014) research revealed men and women articulated their experiences and thoughts about life (both at work and at home) differently. While all recognized the foundation of both their professional and personal lives was built on the quality of their relationships, many "embody and replicate the gender-inflected discourse of globalization through their cultural intermediary role" (Surma & Daymon 2014, p. 55). Examples they provided included instances where men described themselves primarily through their professional roles, while women expressed guilt, stress, and frustration over their perceived inability to fulfill their (sometimes competing) workplace and home obligations (Surma & Daymon, 2014). Interestingly, both male and female interviewees equated self-reliance and materialistic achievements with hard work – to the detriment of their personal relationships (Surma & Daymon, 2014, p. 52). The authors suggested applying an ethics of care (briefly discussed at the end of C2.I.B.3) to reappraise relationship dynamics and question current cultural intermediary work that bolsters existing power inequalities through the marginalization of caring responsibilities (Surma & Daymon 2014, p. 60). Furthermore, they called on cultural intermediaries to use their status to "enhance the possibility of less powerful

others engaging and contributing actively in shaping the personal, social and professional lives they (wish to) lead" (Surma & Daymon, 2014, p. 61).

Race and ethnic identity are also described as an influence on cultural intermediation. Banks (2019) used cultural intermediation to frame the identification and cultivation of Black donors to the Smithsonian's National Museum of African American History and Culture. Specifically, Banks (2019) demonstrated how intermediaries utilized cultural steering, which she coined as "the identification and recruitment of a specific segment of consumers to acquire a particular category of a product or service" (p. 2). This perpetuated racialized segregated inclusion, as the philanthropy of wealthy Black people remained clustered at the one Smithsonian museum specializing in African American culture (Banks, 2019, p. 17). As a result, Banks (2019) found cultural intermediation, through the processes of strategic acculturation and cultural steering, facilitates different patterns of consumption based on race, not class.

Banks's (2019; 2020) and Surma and Daymon's (2014) research point to the need for an intersectional approach to cultural intermediation. While a full review of intersectionality is out of scope for this paper, a brief overview is necessary to acknowledge its potential impact on cultural intermediaries and their work. Originally conceived to illustrate how the experiences of Black women are not fully captured within traditional notions of race and gender (Crenshaw, 1991, p. 1244), intersectionality denotes the many ways systemic subordination and social identities (e.g., racism, sexism, classism, ableism) interact and overlap to shape lived experiences (Banks, 2020, p. 5). Ignoring the intersections of race and gender can perpetuate a "colorblind" and/or "powerblind" approach to studying phenomena, which devalues the intellectual labor of women of color and can render public problems as personal or private concerns, further legitimizing oppressive power structures (Tomlinson, 2019). Moreover, some cultural

intermediaries are also key social justice figures who can easily spread messages through large networks and effectively direct campaigns containing aspects of social good (Hutchinson, 2017, p. 7). Intersectionality can expand original conceptions of cultural intermediation from only relating to class to including other social identities and investigating overlapping influences.

III.C.2. From Traditional to Digital Intermediation.

The introduction of online communication spaces further broadens the areas in which cultural intermediaries can play a role. Ignatow and Robinson (2017) described how Bourdieu's work informs contemporary scholarship around "digital society," which they define as "both to research on the social aspects and impacts of digital communication technologies and to the application of digital technologies to research methodologies across the social sciences" (pp. 950-951). Bourdieu's work remains relevant – and has risen to new prominence within digital social science – because technology use provokes new questions regarding the interrelationship (field) between economic resources (economic capital), social positioning (social and cultural capital), and internalized aptitudes (habitas) (Ignatow & Robinson, 2017). Ignatow and Robinson (2017) also added and defined **digital capital**, where "a person's stock of digital capital corresponds to the reach, scale, and sophistication of [their] online behavior" – additional sub-forms include programming capital and social media capital (pp. 952-953). Interestingly, the authors describe programming capital as readily-convertible into economic capital in contrast to social media capital, which "can be converted into social capital, but do not typically make the holder more attractive on the labor market" (Ignatow & Robinson, 2017, pp. 952-953). This critique of social media capital could be further articulated to feminization of social media work, which is not paid as highly as other tech-adjacent fields (see C2.I.B.3's description of feminization and C2.II.3.C's description of social media practitioners for more on this topic).

Social media environments, in particular, require cultural intermediaries to understand and employ new kinds of interactions and skills (Bossio et al., 2020, p. 101). Social media communicators are cultural intermediaries that work in spaces between traditional and new organizational structures while also negotiating norms, etiquette, and policies in both online and offline environments – as such, they are essential not only for their creative labor but for their intermediation, negotiation, and facilitation services (Bossio et al., 2020, p. 97). Hutchinson (2017) similarly described their usefulness as influencers as well as their ability to provide expertise and guidance to online community members – particularly on platform governance and socially-relevant cultural production (p. 6). Building on Moor's (2012) description of both human and non-human influences, Bossio et al. (2020) further argued research on social media managers should consider technology, "especially the role particular social media platforms play in shaping and reshaping communication practices, along with providing mechanisms for audience-measurement and analytics" (p. 99). The section below illustrates the operationalization of cultural intermediation to conduct research.

III.D. Researching Cultural Intermediation & Overview of Related Work

Smith Maguire and Matthews (2012; 2014) offered rich overviews of research on cultural intermediaries, including work on a variety of varied occupations, from cocktail bartenders and fashion industry executives to more traditional media-focused jobs. They maintained the concept of cultural intermediation is useful as it prioritizes issues of agency while placing the contested practices of cultural intermediaries at the forefront, offering a complement to other cultural production studies which often focus on consumers or institutional power more generally (Smith Maguire & Matthews, 2012). Responding to Nixon and du Gay's (2002) call for a more organized approach to studying different types of cultural intermediaries – one that illustrates

differences as well as "family resemblances" (p. 498), Smith Maguire and Matthews (2014) offered a template for reporting findings using three core themes: history, materiality, and impact. First, historically situating cultural intermediation work allows for the assessment of "newness" claims; supports the examination of context, conditions for emergence, and development; and may "reveal the pace and pathways of professionalization: how an occupation's knowledge and practices become formalized and routinized, legitimized and reproduced" (Smith Maguire & Matthews, 2014, p. 8). Material consideration of cultural intermediation includes a deep understanding of practices, accomplishments, tools, and dispositions (Smith Maguire & Matthews, 2014, p. 9). Finally, identifying cultural, economic, and political impacts highlights value (and taste) production, reproduction, and potential contributions "to new and perhaps radical definitions of products, consumers and consumption" (Smith Maguire & Matthews, 2014, p. 10). Relying solely on quantitative data and economic-centered impacts, however, "risks overlooking the pivotal role of relationships" of the personal and subjective (Surma & Daymon, 2014, p. 57).

III.D.1. Social Media Research.

Recent international research incorporates this cultural intermediation framework to study social media work across industries. In particular, Bossio et al. (2020) framed social media managers as cultural intermediaries. The authors interviewed seven social media managers from different professional fields (telecommunications, health, news, entertainment, public transport, and utilities) in Australia to explore how they negotiated organizational reputation as well as managed employees' uses of social media (Bossio et al., 2020). They found social media managers acted as "vital intermediaries" by "facilitating and coordinating policies, procedures and production around both internal and external communication, but also in their efforts to

enact norms and best practice" (Bossio et al., 2020, p. 107). Bossio et al. (2020) called on future researchers to "explore the particularly gendered and age-based demographics and other cultural factors of social media managers," as the "younger women who dominate the sector" may provide "fruitful lines of enquiry...[to] ask what strategies organisations should have in place to ensure this work is sustainable" (pp. 107-108). As such, this work identifies influences of identity in C4.IV.D.3, particularly male privilege, the feminization of the social media communicator role, and gendered safety concerns.

Similarly, Hutchinson (2016; 2017) positioned cultural intermediation as a helpful framework to understand convergent media practices through his digital ethnographic work on online community management for the Australian Broadcasting Corporation (a government-funded news and media organization). He found the framework allowed the observation of "the social construction of technologies and their cultural uses, the users of those technologies, and the techno-cultural relationships that are pivotal to co-creative production environments" (Hutchinson, 2016, p. 168).

III.D.2. Museums & Libraries Research.

Other researchers use cultural intermediation as a way to study museum work. In contrast to the reproduction of dominant narratives and power structures described in the mass communication examples described previously, Durrer and O'Brien (2014) found some cultural intermediaries at contemporary museums, art centers, and galleries have developed an "empathy of exclusion," by building identity relationships and connections with non-traditional audiences through a shared sense of displacement. Through interviews with 22 arts programmers from 10 institutions in the U.K., the authors discussed how these staff members were more than "mere translators of high culture for socially excluded parts of the masses," and were instead

"individuals who can traverse the worlds of state bureaucracy, the art world and the everyday lives of the individuals involved in the co-creation of their artistic programmes" (Durrer & O'Brien, 2014, p. 103). One interviewee shared his experience of growing up in a family who did not regularly visit galleries and used this as an inspiration to create a new arts center where people like his relatives would feel comfortable; another described failing out of art college and using that experience to identify with others who felt rejected (Durrer & O'Brien, 2014, p. 106). While these cultural intermediaries are uniquely suited to promote the arts, Durrer and O'Brien (2014) acknowledged, "their very position to do so shows their mediatory position as privileged" and may act to further reinforce art as an elite field (p. 109). Banks (2019) also identified shared identities as a foundation for cultural intermediation in her work on the cultivation of Black donors to the Smithsonian's National Museum of African American History and Culture (detailed further in C2.III.C.1).

Numerous studies have also applied cultural intermediation to library work. Goulding (2008) briefly identified libraries and their staff as cultural intermediaries, as they possess "large reserves of cultural capital in the resources which they hold and make available for public use" (p. 236). However, her editorial also pointed out that while librarians fit the role of cultural intermediaries "very well," they were not often identified as such (Goulding, 2008, p. 236). Responding to Goulding's (2008) call for research connecting libraries to cultural intermediation, Summers and Buchanan (2018) studied "public libraries good practice" in the U.K., Europe, and the U.S. in locations they described as "disadvantaged communities." They found libraries and librarians, as cultural intermediaries, can "enable and encourage the development of knowledge, skill, taste, and experience in the cultural context, from the consumption of cultural products to active participation in cultural activities and, ultimately, to sustained cultural engagement"

(Summers & Buchanan, 2018, p. 298). Summers and Buchanan (2018) go on to argue for more research within the academic and professional LIS community to better understand and operationalize the intermediation process in practice (p. 299). However, much of the programming and related research they identified focused on perpetuating traditional practices instead of providing ways for people to experience and celebrate non-dominant culture, even though the authors included "taking culture outside the library into the community and bringing community-created culture into the library" as a "good practice" in their conclusion (Summers & Buchanan, 2018, p. 299).

III.E. Summary of Cultural Intermediation

Cultural intermediaries create, translate, or otherwise promote ideas through media such as social networking platforms. Contextualizing social media communicators as cultural intermediaries sheds light on how they perform and view their own work – whether as an arm of existing power structures, an advocate for outsiders, or somewhere in between.

IV. Design Thinking

One way social media practitioners can perform cultural intermediation is through design thinking. Design thinking is both an iterative process and a broader theoretical worldview based on developing artifacts that solve problems (Clarke et al., 2020, p. 759). Similarly, it refers equally to the thought processes and actions behind design work (Clarke, 2020, p.11). The design thinking approach provides a way for museums and libraries to encourage innovation and experiment with new visitor-centered and socially responsive tactics (Nasta & Pirolo, 2021; Clarke, 2020; Clarke et al., 2020). This is particularly important for cultural institutions mired in routine, as maintaining the status quo often kills innovation, relevance, and meaningfulness (Nasta & Pirolo, 2021).

Stanford University's d.school – and its corporate offshoot consultancy, IDEO – provide the most popular and well-known descriptions of the phases involved in design thinking (Pope-Ruark et al., 2019). In their "Design Thinking Bootleg" deck, the d.school outlines five components – empathize, define, ideate, prototype, and test (Doorley et al., 2018) – which are further applied to library practices by Clarke (2020), see Table 1.

Table 1

Alignment and Descriptions of Design Thinking Phases

D.School Component (Doorley et al., 2018)	Design Thinking Phase (Clarke, 2020)	Description
Empathize	Empathetic Discovery	Learning what's happening in a certain space or context through observation, engagement, and immersion.
Define	Problem Definition	Identifying the problem or issue to be solved.
Ideate	Idea Generation	Coming up with multiple solutions to the defined problem – regardless of plausibility.
Prototype	Creation	Developing, testing, and modifying inexpensive and iterative solutions.
Test	Evaluation	Seeking out and reviewing feedback to better inform future practices.

In the past decade, library and information scholars applied design thinking to work at cultural institutions. Clarke (2020) wrote a succinct primer on design thinking, detailing each step and providing multiple examples. In one, she shares how Justin Azevedo (branch supervisor for the Sacramento Public Library) developed a "tough topics" handout detailing sensitive subjects and their Dewey Decimal Classification number for easy access after noticing "teen self-help books circulated strongly, but reference questions about topics like abuse, depression, and sex were rare" (Clarke, 2020, p. 36). In another article, Clarke et al. (2020) surveyed library workers and found design thinking's most common application to be space planning and

program development that incorporates community understandings. Yet the authors noted their respondents struggled with the application of design thinking to intangible experiences and services, perhaps due to IDEO's connection with commercialization (Clarke et al., 2020).

There are also examples of museum work incorporating design thinking. Nasta and Pirolo (2021) argued museums should incorporate design thinking to "help instill a creative culture" that involves "many diverse people, including those who might typically feel isolated from design processes" (p. 18). Similarly, French (2016) promoted a "service design thinking" framework for digital projects that supports holistic and user-centered museum initiatives. Maris et al. (2013) also noted "all actors in the design process negotiate the way the museum should proceed and improve" in their descriptions of practices at the Amsterdam Museum (p. 256). This research connects to Kletchka's (2018) continuum of museum paradigms (see end of C2.I.A) by applying design thinking in order to shift away from traditional object-focused practices.

IV.A. Critiques of Design Thinking

As mentioned previously, design thinking is criticized for its connection to – and origin in – commercialization, neoliberalism, and capitalism. Most significantly, Irani (2018) described how IDEO developed their design thinking approach in response to global competition from Asia. The company marketed design thinking as a way to shift focus from manufacturing products to selling a process, implicitly arguing that design is "too 'creative' to outsource" while other disciplines (e.g., mathematics, technology, engineering, production) "could belong to lesser intellects on the sliding scale of humanity" (Irani, 2018, p. 13). Others, such as Vinsel (2018) and Norman (2010), criticized design thinking as an opportunistic upselling of prior design methods. A few years later, however, Norman (2013) reconsidered his critique, offering "three cheers for design thinking," as it encourages breakthrough thinking and transformative possibilities.

Similarly, Bell and Shank (2007) noted the striking similarities between IDEO's phases and the analyze, design, develop, implement, and evaluation steps of ADDIE (an instructional design model dating back to the 1970s). However, they noted design thinking helps clarify the ADDIE process and identifies additional information needed to move from the initial phases of design to its final evaluation (Bell & Shank, 2007, p. 44).

Design scholars including Tham (2019) and Rylander Eklund et al. (2021) incorporated Irani's (2018) criticisms into their recent extensions of the design thinking framework by further integrating feminist methodologies and embodied sensemaking. Furthermore, Tham (2019) argued the current popularity of design thinking presents a unique opportunity for designers and organizations to reevaluate their positionality and confront power imbalances, creating a heuristic for inclusion (outlined in Table 2).

Table 2

Feminist Design Thinking Heuristics Adapted from Tham (2019)

Design Thinking Phase	Feminist Design Thinking Heuristics
Empathize	Who is (silently) affected by a problem and how can social norms of exclusion or injustice be mitigated by amplifying marginalized voices?
Define	Whose experience should be highlighted and how can problematic issues be corrected through inclusive design?
Ideate	Who is invited and able to voice their opinions and decide creative directions? Are minority representations empowered to challenge unjust designs?
Prototype	How does form/function work against exclusion and promote critical reflection?
Test	Does the design perpetuate social justice and counter marginalization?

IV.B. Summary & Use of Design Thinking

Like Tham (2019), I view design thinking not as a new or groundbreaking approach to design, but as a way to help designers and their organizations make better design choices through a set of established strategies (e.g., empathize, define, ideate, prototype, and test). It is a situated,

embodied, and pragmatic way to explain creative practice (Rylander Eklund et al., 2021). Design thinking offers a framework for encouraging innovation and experimentation.

By using design thinking's standardized vocabulary, practitioners can describe – and defend – different possibilities than the status quo. For example, one previously identified roadblock for implementing the ideation and iteration phase of design thinking at cultural institutions is a fear of failure (Clarke, 2020). Likewise, social media communicators may feel limited in their ability to draft new and creative content due to constraints stemming from their colleagues' unfounded fears of negative feedback from users. By identifying and reflecting upon the rationales for decision-making, practitioners can demonstrate how particular criteria impact their content. However, some areas of social media work lie outside of the domain of design thinking, since institutions are heavily influenced by organizational culture and priorities (French, 2016) and communicators must align their work to the scope of their organization as well as institutional priorities. Role theory, outlined next, provides a way to frame these broader influences on their work.

V. Role Theory

Role theory provides a way to frame these influences on work more broadly by offering a lens to study expectations, behaviors, and relationships between individuals and social structures. It can be used to contextualize the role of social media work as it relates to identity construction; perception of impact; and the relationships between communicators, institutions, platforms, and audiences. Studying the role of social media workers at cultural institutions will contribute to a better foundational understanding of what these social media communicators do and why.

V.A. Roles & Role Theory

The word role is defined in many ways. However, it is commonly understood by sociological theorists (and well-cited among LIS researchers) as **a cluster of characteristic behaviors, attitudes, or patterns within a specified context** (Biddle, 1986, p. 67; Leckie & Pettigrew, 1997; Turner, 2001, p. 233; O'Leary, 2007a; Julien & Genuis, 2011; Patillo, 2018, p. 1; Giannini & Bowen, 2019). In this definition, roles can be specific (applicable only to certain settings) or diffuse (applicable across a wide range of situations) (Diekman, 2007, p. 763). For example, a librarian may view themself as such throughout their workday while also taking on – and taking off – other specific roles (e.g., researcher, disciplinarian, teacher) at certain times. As this example illustrates, roles can also overlap and change.

The term originally comes from the French "rôle," which denoted the parchment paper actors used to read their lines (Diekman, 2007, p. 763). This etymology connects to a dramaturgical understanding of everyday life in which people assume roles like actors assume characters for the stage. Goffman (1956) used this theatrical metaphor and vocabulary to describe, study, and explain human interactions, creating a second definition of role referring to **why and how an individual "performs" within a space** (Zai, 2015, p. 9). A third understanding defines roles as **intermediaries within interactions** (Simpson & Carroll, 2008; Järventie-Thesleff & Tienari, 2016). This critical and postmodern perspective applies the idea of boundary objects (sites or spaces between domains or stakeholders where power is negotiated) to roles (Simpson & Carroll, 2008, p. 41). A role is, therefore, "a vehicle that mediates and negotiates the meanings constructed in relational interactions, while itself being subject to ongoing reconstruction in these relational processes" (Simpson & Carroll, 2008, p. 34).

Leaning on its theatrical etymology, **role theory** provides a lens for researchers to study how behavior stems from the parts people play in their lives (Diekman, 2007, p. 762). An overarching definition describes its use as an attempt "to explain the way that people in particular social positions are expected to behave, or the way in which they develop particular patterns of behaviour when they occupy such positions" (McCarthy & Edwards, 2011, p. 172). Role theory encompasses a wide and varied body of research that examines links between social organizations, cultures, and performances people give through interactions (Martin & Wilson, 2005, p. 651).

V.B. Role Theory Frameworks

Frameworks developed using role theory include functional/structural approaches, organizational role theory, interactionist approaches, hybrid approaches, and framing roles as intermediaries. According to Biddle (1986), **functional role theory** (as a specific sub-theory/perspective) focuses on characteristic behaviors related to social positions within a stable social system (p. 70). As such, roles are conceived as shared expectations and norms which explain behaviors and give individuals a place in society (Biddle, 1986, p. 70; McCarthy & Edwards, 2011, p. 173). **Structural role theory** is similarly focused on role stability, though most often depicted through mathematical symbols (Biddle, 1986, p. 73). In this perspective, roles are shared patterns and expectations that provide a relatively fixed cultural "script" that was "written" to ensure conformity and indoctrinated through repetition (Martin & Wilson, 2005, pp. 651-652; McCarthy & Edwards, 2011, p. 173; Biddle, 1986, p. 73). **Organizational role theory** is concerned with roles within formal organizations and usually focused on planned, task-oriented, and hierarchical social systems – but does not cover the evolution of roles nor roles created through non-standardized processes or expectations (Biddle, 1986, p. 74). Conversely,

interactionist approaches see roles as fluid and negotiated through interactions (O'Leary, 2007a, p. 236). Scholars using this framework adhere most closely to role theory's theatrical metaphor, particularly as related to Goffman's (1956) dramaturgical analysis (Biddle, 1986, p. 72), see C3.II.D. Interactionists view roles as providing fluid guidance and meaning to an individual's life with people negotiating and developing roles, emotions, and activities through interactions rather than stepping into pre-existing prescriptions (McCarthy & Edwards, 2011, p. 173).

Some researchers take a hybrid approach, which incorporates both functionalist and interactionist perspectives. Zai's (2015) article, *Neither Fish nor Fowl: A Role Theory Approach to Librarians Teaching*, offers a noteworthy example of utilizing multiple role theory perspectives together by aligning findings with each role theory perspective. Other scholars merged role theory with outside frameworks. This includes recent work integrating both functional/structural and interactionist traditions as well as insights from postmodern, feminist, and critical-dramaturgical perspectives (Martin & Wilson, 2005, p. 651). In particular, Simpson and Carroll (2008) argued both functional/structural and interactionist approaches are too deeply rooted in determinism and stability while at the same time lacking engagement with critical theory (p. 31). As such, the authors proposed an alternative approach: viewing **roles as intermediary boundary objects** or vehicles mediating and negotiating meanings (as constructed through relational interactions) while, at the same time, being subjected to ongoing reconstruction during the relational processes (Simpson & Carrol, 2008, p. 34). In other words, roles are located between actors and shape identities on both sides. Järventie-Thesleff and Tienari (2016) further extended this insight, describing "roles as intermediaries in interaction" (p. 240). In their view, roles are not necessarily related to positions in social systems (as they viewed

functional/structuralism) nor containers filled with meaning by other actors (as they viewed

interactionism) but, instead, "evolving constructions that are worked on to establish (a

temporary) sense of coherence and distinctiveness" (Järventie-Thesleff & Tienari, 2016, pp. 240-

241). This approach builds on the interactionist perspective by considering additional influences

on roles, including discursive, cultural, and political impacts as well as a more focused concern

on control and contestation (Simpson & Carrol, 2008, p. 31).

Situating roles as intermediaries within interactions provides a solid foundation to

critically examine and understand the complexity of contemporary lived experiences. A social

media role, according to this perspective, could then be located between an institution, an

individual, their audience, and even a social network platform. Research taking this approach can

study how roles emerge from interpersonal and/or intersubjective relationships at an

organization, role mutations in response to improvisations, and how roles shape identities over

time (Simpson & Carrol, 2008, p. 46). This critical expansion of role theory incorporates issues

of power and control while still utilizing **key concepts** (e.g., role conflict, role congruity) as they

have been understood for nearly a century, detailed further in Appendix A.

V.C. Role Theory & Cultural Institutions

While no work using role theory to describe social media communication at museums or

libraries was identified, prior researchers have used role theory to describe work at cultural

institutions (Patillo, 2018; Zai, 2015; Julien & Genuis, 2011; Xiao et al., 2016; Huvila, 2013) and

social media communication (von Platen, 2016; Carpenter & Lertpratchya, 2016a; 2016b; Neill

& Moody, 2015; Akar et al., 2019) separately. Table 3 outlines the methods used, sample size,

and key findings.

Table 3

Summary of Related Role Theory Research

Authors	Methods	Sample	Key Findings
Patillo (2018)	Multiple case study	41	Applied organizational role theory to study academic library middle managers. Expectation consensus among practitioners included effective communication, technical and relationship competence, and supervisory expertise; however, participants also experienced role conflict and ambiguity.
Zai (2015)	Meta-analysis	Not defined	Used a hybrid role theory approach to highlight different role theory perspectives and illustrate how academic librarians have sought out new roles in new areas (i.e., the instruction of information literacy), resulting in "an increasingly heterogeneous and strained profession" (p. 20).
Julien and Genuis (2011)	Survey	788	Combined role theory with identity theory (which aligns to an interactionist perspective) to survey Canadian library staff members and found preparation (i.e., education and training) to be an important influence on how library workers relate to their roles as instructors and advocated for increased consideration for instruction, emotional support, and on-the-job training.
Xiao et al. (2016)	Interviews and survey	7/282	Applied concepts from the role expectation framework to study the role of libraries, archives, and museums in Chinese government-sponsored digital resource integration projects, delineating workers as "leaders," "implementers," and "supporters."
Huvila (2013)	Ethnographic case study	16	Used an interactionist role theory lens to study employees at a mid-sized Nordic museum. The authors traced work patterns and networks, finding participant information strategies often relied upon intuition and personal connections rather than digital technologies.
von Platen (2016)	Qualitative interviews	19	Applied role theory to better understand how Swedish and Danish communication consultants reconstructed their roles to include technical expertise to maintain their "legitimacy" as professionals when faced with social media-related changes.
Carpenter and Lertpratchya (2016a)	Survey	416	Applied the findings from the qualitative interviews discussed below to develop a survey that determined five functional roles of social media workers through factor analysis: customer service provider, mobilizer, researcher, information disseminator, and community builder.
Carpenter and Lertpratchya (2016b)	Qualitative interviews	10	Used an organizational role theory perspective to describe how social media workers managed role conflict and ambiguity by building connections with others in the same role outside of their organization and helping each other advance. The authors recognized building and supporting outside connections creates a "self-reliance paradigm," which "shifts responsibility from the organization to individual workers" (p. 461).

Authors	Methods	Sample	Key Findings
Neill and Moody (2015)	Mixed methods	17/135	Used two focus groups to inform a quantitative survey to identify nine strategic roles associated with social media management: "(1) internal collaborator, (2) policy maker, (3) policing, (4) technology tester, (5) communications organizer, (6) issues manager, (7) relationship analyzer, (8) master of metrics, and (9) employee recruiter" (p. 112).
Akar et al. (2019)	Survey	783	Applied the structural role theory perspective and used social network analysis to find social media user roles provided a statistically significant moderating effect on a social media platform's perceived usefulness, perceived ease-of-use, usage intention, perceived playfulness, and perceived critical mass – but not its trustworthiness.

V.D. Summary of Role Theory

Research using a role theory approach offers a means to uncover how communicators at museums and libraries view their role(s) within their organizations as well as how they perceive the impact of their work. While there is role theory research related either to cultural institutions or to social media, no work was found that applies a role theory perspective to social media work *at* cultural institutions. A critical role theory perspective (which positions roles as intermediaries between individuals, organizations, and interactions) provides a framework that contextualizes power dynamics and identity fluctuation while still incorporating well-established concepts and terminology. Phenomenological methods, discussed in the next chapter, offer a complementary method for studying how social media communicators make sense of their role(s) and understand their experiences.

VI. Summary of Literature

Taken together, the contextual information provided in this chapter (outlining cultural institutions, communications, and social media) combined with three frameworks (cultural intermediation, design thinking, and role theory) illustrate both a need for and way of studying social media practitioners at museums and libraries. Cultural institutions must meet their

audience where they are – on social media – to remain relevant and connect with their

communities. To facilitate this research, I use LIPA and dramaturgy to provide a practitioner-

centered description of social media work and its changes during the COVID-19 pandemic,

discussed next.

CHAPTER 3: METHODOLOGY & RESEARCH DESIGN

This study investigates how social media practitioners at cultural institutions describe their role and the early influences of the COVID-19 pandemic on their work. To situate my methods, this chapter begins with a justification of my methodologies followed by an overview of each approach. Following this, I outline my research design.

I. Justification of Methodologies

My dissertation uses longitudinal interpretative phenomenological analysis (LIPA) and dramaturgy to provide a practitioner-centered description of social media work and its evolution during the COVID-19 pandemic. Since both social media and cultural institutions are well-studied and have extensive scholarly traditions, LIPA offers a systematic procedure to uncover dynamic lived experiences and connect to – and elaborate upon – findings from prior work (Farr & Nizza, 2019; Miller et al., 2018; Eatough & Smith, 2017). However, because LIPA is very new, I include its forebearers – phenomenology (C3.II.A), interpretative phenomenological analysis (IPA) (C3.II.B), and qualitative longitudinal research (QLR) (C3.II.C) – in this review of methodologies. IPA and QLR also provide additional structure and rationale for my research choices. For example, I used QLR's progressive focusing strategy to single out a subsample of participants from my 2020 pilot study (see C3.III.D), a practice not yet covered in LIPA texts. Furthermore, incorporating aspects of dramaturgy into my analysis allows me to contextualize social media work as a performance and provide helpful analogies. Table 4, in the Research

section of this chapter, aligns each of this study's research questions, methods, and justification by phase for additional clarification.

II. Overview of Methodologies

II.A. *Phenomenology*

Phenomenology provides a way to study the subjective. LIS researchers have alternately categorized phenomenology as a philosophy (VanScoy & Evenstad 2015, p. 339), a qualitative methodology (Lin, 2013, p. 469), an attitude (Budd, 2005, p. 56), and an approach to research (Cibangu & Hepworth, 2016, p. 149). This section offers a brief description of phenomenology's overarching philosophical foundations, use, and criticisms before providing an overview of a hybrid phenomenological method, IPA.

II.A.1. Philosophical Foundation & Research Applications.

Phenomenological thinking can be traced back to Aristotle and other ancient philosophers, but Edmund Husserl is usually credited as phenomenology's founder (Moran, 2000/2014, pp. 7-8). In the late 1800s, he began arguing phenomena should be the starting point for understanding essential features of an experience (O'Leary 2007b, p. 195). Husserl is recognized as "the first to conceptualize and define phenomenology" by "acknowledging the shortcomings of natural science methods when applied to the study of human behavior" (Harrison et al., 2017, p. 251). He was interested in the **lifeworld**, or the "the realm of everyday being," that removes subject/object divisions and is inhabited from one's own first-person perspective (Gorichanaz et al., 2018, pp. 882-883). In his own words, Husserl (1936/1984) claimed:

> ...the whole world of natural science (and with it the dualistic world which can be known scientifically) is a subjective construct of our intellect, only the material of the sense-data arises from a transcendent affection by 'things in themselves.' The latter are in principle inaccessible to objective scientific knowledge. (p. 15)

Husserl's phrase, "Zu den Sachen" ("to the things themselves") became both a rallying cry and a

description of the phenomenological intention to "strip away" preconceptions (stemming from

science, tradition, and/or common-sense) to reveal the essence of a phenomenon (Eatough &

Smith, 2017, p. 194; Smith et al., 2009, p. 16).

Today, phenomenology can be understood as a philosophical approach used to study

experiences and consciousness (Smith et al., 2009, p. 15; VanScoy & Evenstad, 2015, p. 339). It

is the study of 'phenomena' (e.g., emotions, relationships, or entities like organizations or

cultures) as they are *perceived* by an individual (O'Leary, 2007b, p. 194; Lin, 2013, p. 470).

Phenomena are contextual, connected, and open ended (Cibangu & Hepworth, 2016, p. 150).

Human experience of phenomena is, consequently, always subjective and not a "direct reality"

(Eatough & Smith, 2017, p. 196). Moreover, the world is only knowable via human

consciousness, which means phenomena make up the reality of the world we perceive (Lin,

2013, p. 471).

Phenomenology's emphasis on examining (and acknowledging) diverse and subjective

perceptions contrasts with positivism's assumption of "authentic knowledge" as detached from

human context and experience (Cibangu & Hepworth, 2016, p. 149). As Moran (2000/2014)

clarified:

> Indeed, the whole point of phenomenology is that we cannot split off the subjective
> domain from the domain of the natural world as scientific naturalism has done.
> Subjectivity must be understood as inextricably involved in the process of constituting
> objectivity...Phenomenology's conception of objectivity-for-subjectivity is arguably its
> major contribution to contemporary philosophy. (pp. 15-16)

Researchers applying phenomenology's philosophical lens believe studying experiences provides

valuable insights into human lives, including its meaningfulness and significance (Eatough &

Smith, 2017, p. 203). While phenomenologists have many different emphases and interests, they

tend to be interested in learning about human experiences – particularly the things that matter most to us (Smith et al., 2009, p. 15).

Researching the phenomena of social media work at cultural institutions during the COVID-19 pandemic provides an opportunity to uncover communicator experiences in an unprecedented time. Additionally, this dissertation is able to build off the established foundation and weight of phenomenology's 100 years of history to study a new role and its use of emergent technology. Framing my research through this lens allows for a rich description of social media work while also prioritizing the lived experiences and reflections of practitioners.

II.A.2. Critiques of Phenomenology.

One overarching criticism of phenomenology is how difficult it is to understand. Perhaps this is because there is no single agreed-upon definition and many scholars take their own distinct approach (Budd, 2005, p. 45). Relatedly, another overarching critique is phenomenology's lack of clear methodological guidance. Lin (2013) explained its conceptual and abstract nature offers few procedural instructions, which makes early researchers look for additional qualitative methodological resources (pp. 469-470). This is where IPA steps in. IPA offers an adaptable, but consistent, approach to study personal lived experiences (Miller et al., 2018, p. 240; Eatough & Smith, 2017, p. 193).

II.B. IPA: Interpretative Phenomenological Analysis

IPA provides a set of flexibly applied processes and principles, which move from descriptive to interpretive meaning-making (Smith et al., 2009, p. 80). It is both a methodology (strategy) and method (data collection process). Founded on phenomenology, hermeneutics, and idiography (Miller et al., 2018, p. 240; Smith et al., 2009; VanScoy & Evenstad, 2015, p. 340), the goal of IPA research is to explore how people make sense of their own experiences

(Pietkiewicz & Smith, 2014, p. 8). It situates people as inherently self-reflective, allowing researchers to make sense of phenomena by inviting participants to share in the sense-making process and witness its articulation (Smith, 2018, p. 2).

First developed by psychology professor Jonathan Smith in the U.K. during the 1990s, IPA began as an approach to understanding subjective health, clinical, and counseling experiences (Eatough & Smith, 2017, p. 193). It has since spread across domains to include museum studies (Latham, 2015), visual research (Bartoli, 2020), user experience design (Linder & Arvola, 2017), education (Holland, 2014; Alase, 2017), and LIS (VanScoy & Evenstad, 2015; Clemens, 2017; Dabengwa et al., 2020). This section will begin by reviewing IPA's connection to phenomenology, hermeneutics, and idiography before discussing critiques and a few examples of how it has been used by recent LIS researchers.

II.B.1. IPA & Phenomenology.

IPA integrates ideas from both descriptive and interpretive phenomenological traditions. As Pietkiewicz and Smith (2014) summarized, IPA is "a method which is descriptive because it is concerned with how things appear and letting things speak for themselves, and interpretative because it recognizes there is no such thing as an uninterpreted phenomenon" (p. 8). Additionally, IPA draws from the work of philosophers Jean-Paul Sartre, Maurice Merleau-Ponty, and others to frame phenomena as existential, interactive, and contextual (Smith et al., 2009). Eatough and Smith (2017) further described IPA as a way to clarify and elucidate phenomena as something experienced by a real, embodied, socio-historically situated person (p. 194).

II.B.2. IPA & Hermeneutics.

Unlike other qualitative approaches, IPA incorporates the researcher's interpretative role into the analysis process, which is what initially drew me to the method. As such, Smith et al. (2009) maintained hermeneutics should be recognized as its own axis within IPA because its theoretical foundations are much older and form a separate body of thought from hermeneutical (i.e., interpretive) phenomenology (p. 21). In their words, "without the phenomenology, there would be nothing to interpret; without the hermeneutics, the phenomenon would not be seen" (Smith et al., 2009, p. 37). Hermeneutics is a theory of interpretation and explores how meaning is constructed along with the complexities of "truth" (O'Leary, 2007c, p. 110). IPA is interpretive because it asks researchers to move beyond the descriptive to provide context and commentary on participants' sense-making (VanScoy & Evenstad, 2015, p. 341).

The hermeneutic circle (or spiral) used in IPA includes differentiating between parts of an experience and deciding which of these to focus on in order to understand the whole of an experience (Eatough & Smith, 2017, p. 196). Similarly, IPA researchers perform a "**double hermeneutic**" – they consider their participants' interpretations of an experience while also their own interpretations of their participants' interpretations (VanScoy & Evenstad 2015, p. 341). In other words, "the researcher is trying to make sense of the participant trying to make sense of what is happening to them" (Smith et al., 2009, p. 9). For example, an interviewee may perform one level of interpretation while speaking to a researcher. The researcher might then perform a second level of interpretation during their analysis.

IPA combines additional hermeneutic stances as well. **Empathetic** hermeneutics describes a concern with "taking the side" of participants to better understand something from their point of view (Smith & Osborn, 2008, p. 53). Alternatively, an IPA analysis can undertake

a **questioning** or "suspicious" hermeneutic stance by using critical inquiry to uncover hidden meanings, motivations, and implications (Smith & Osborn, 2008, p. 53). IPA follows Schleiermacher's lead in understanding interpretation as a craft composed of many skills (including intuition) and not simply mechanical rules to be followed (Smith et al., 2009, p. 25). Smith et al. (2009) cautioned; however, this isn't a "license to claim that our analyses are more 'true' than the claims of our research participants, but it does allow us to see how our analyses might offer meaningful insights which exceed and subsume the explicit claims of our participants" (p. 25). Furthermore, the degree or emphasis of each interpretation style depends upon each unique IPA study's qualities and aims (Smith & Osborn, 2008, p. 54).

II.B.3. IPA & Idiography.

The final influence on IPA discussed in this chapter is idiography. **Idiography** refers to the attention paid to each individual account, with data "interpreted in regard to the particulars of a case rather than generalizations" (Creswell & Creswell, 2018, p. 278). IPA's focus on the idiographic is viewed as its greatest distinction from other phenomenological methods, which often focus only on shared experiences (VanScoy & Evenstad, 2015, p. 341). Eatough and Smith (2017) further explained, "Idiography is concerned with how to understand the concrete, the particular and the unique whilst maintaining the integrity of the person" and reasoned IPA studies use small, homogenous, and situated samples in order to attend to each individual idiographically before starting any comparative analysis (pp. 197-198).

II.B.4. Critiques of IPA.

Beyond Smith's (2011) own evaluation and critiques of IPA articles, two phenomenologists, Giorgi (2010; 2011) and van Manen (2017; 2018), engaged in published back-and-forth debates with Smith (2010; 2018) on the merits of IPA as a phenomenological

method. Giorgi (2010) argued IPA "violates the sense of good scientific practices" since it encourages individual adaptability and, therefore, reduces replicability (p. 7). Smith (2010) responded by stating IPA is flexible but constrained by proficiency, which is developed through training and monitored through supervision (pp. 188-189). He argued replication is not a criterion all qualitative researchers seek to achieve; rather, validity can be evaluated through other means, including auditing (Smith, 2010, p. 189). As such, this dissertation makes use of committee monitoring and supervision, multiple rounds of analysis, and transparent coding.

Van Manen's (2017) criticisms centered on IPA's focus on "personal experience of a participant and on [their] views and understandings, rather than on the phenomenon itself" and argued IPA should be understood solely as a psychological research method instead (p. 778). In his view, phenomenological research must be concentrated solely on the essence of phenomena (van Manen, 2017; 2018). Smith (2018) countered this argument by citing well-established existential and embodied phenomenological principles, in which the participant's reflection becomes part of the phenomenon itself.

Miller et al. (2018) identified additional considerations for researchers interested in using IPA in their overview of related work in education. They described learning the method and conducting an IPA study as a time-consuming process (Miller et al., 2018, p. 250). Moreover, IPA is relatively new, leading to potential issues with journals or publishers being unfamiliar with its best practices and judging merits of a study inaccurately (Miller et al., 2018, p. 250). For example, some journals request large sample sizes, while Smith (2011) cautioned against IPA studies with more than 8 participants, as this could contribute to superficiality instead of in-depth analysis and interpretation (pp. 16-17). Finally, Miller et al. (2018) identified the difficulty of extending IPA research beyond basic description as a final challenge (p. 251). Even with these

challenges, Miller et al. (2018) found IPA to be a promising method, as it provides a clear and structured framework that lends itself to deep exploration while still offering flexibility (p. 250). Furthermore, all of these criticisms have not stopped IPA from gaining support over the past two decades. It has become a widely used approach in human and social sciences, psychology, healthcare, and LIS.

II.B.5. IPA & LIS.

IPA is an appropriate methodology for any LIS research related to the detailed study of lived experience. For example, VanScoy and Evenstad (2015) demonstrated it can be used to effectively explore phenomena experienced by LIS professionals through detailed overviews on two IPA studies: one focused on academic librarians' experiences of reference and information service work, and the other focused on information and computer technology professionals' experiences of burnout (VanScoy & Evenstad, 2015, p. 343). This dissertation shares VanScoy and Evenstad's (2015) aim of using IPA "to contribute the voice of the practitioner to current research" (p. 343). Gorichanaz et al. (2018) further described how IPA was employed in information behavior research related to lifeworld phenomena (p. 890).

Moreover, IPA is experiencing exponential growth in LIS journals and conferences. In an article published in 2015, VanScoy and Evenstad identified only seven IPA studies that explored information and technology experiences of LIS professionals or users (p. 342). A quick search of the Library and Information Science Abstracts (LISA) database identified 26 additional works with "interpretative phenomenological analysis" mentioned in their title or abstract published between January 2015 and October 2021 (not counting the Van Scoy and Evenstad article). This included 14 journal articles, 11 conference papers, and two doctoral theses. Interestingly, Clemens's (2017) IPA-based dissertation was not included in LISA database results (nor

anywhere else in the database) even though other UNC-Chapel Hill SILS dissertations are available through LISA. Perhaps IPA is becoming even more prevalent than this brief search revealed.

II.C. QLR & LIPA

In their SAGE Research Methods chapter, Spiers and Smith (2019) described IPA as well-suited to longitudinal work as it is concerned with dynamic processes that unfold over time (p. 23). There is now an emerging body of work specifically identified as LIPA. LIPA combines IPA with qualitative longitudinal research (QLR) to capture temporal aspects of phenomena (Farr & Nizza, 2019). Fusing QLR and IPA allows researchers to study how an experience (e.g., working through a pandemic) affects individuals, families, organizations, and communities (McCoy, 2017, p. 456).

II.C.1. QLR.

QLR typically consists of small in-depth studies of people where data is generated at least twice over a modest timeframe (9-18 months) to generate rich information about personal experiences and capture potential changes over time (Neale, 2019, p. 2; Saldaña. 2003, p. 16). Unlike quantitative longitudinal studies, QLR can either be **prospective** (planned in advanced) or **retrospective** (formulated after a study is completed) where "newly posed research questions, ideas and themes emerge to grapple analytically with the qualitative complexity in the data" (Hermanowicz, 2013, pp. 194-195; McCoy, 2017, p. 445). Similarly, some QLR projects are composed of multiple distinct yet cumulative experiences (Saldaña. 2003, p. 35). Trustworthiness and credibility are maintained not through consistency or purity of the research instrument, but through strong evidence (e.g., thick descriptions) alongside a persuasive written report (Saldaña, 2003, pp. 35-42; Corden & Millar, 2007, p. 586). One major criticism of QLR as

its own standalone method is its lack of strong philosophical and theoretical foundations (Hermanowicz, 2013). In response, McCoy (2017) proposed combining key tenets of QLR and IPA to enhance trustworthiness, resulting in LIPA.

II.C.2. LIPA.

LIPA offers an emergent methodology for understanding people's experiences and reflections on transitions, including change across time (McCoy, 2017, p. 456). It is particularly helpful for exploring life transitions, health interventions, and traumatic events (McCoy, 2017; Farr & Nizza, 2019). Farr and Nizza (2019) conducted a literature search of multiple databases and found 66 LIPA scholarly articles from 12 countries published before March 2018, with a sharp increase in the number of articles published after 2013 (Farr & Nizza, 2019, p. 5). A Google Scholar search of "longitudinal interpretative phenomenological analysis" resulted in another 28 works published between 2019 and November 2021, showing the popularity of LIPA continues to rise.

LIPA work spans diverse subject areas and methodological choices. Topics covered by LIPA articles identified by Farr and Nizza (2019) are varied and similar to those of IPA works more generally, with illness and psychological distress in the top three on both lists (Smith, 2011; Farr & Nizza, 2019, pp. 5-6). LIPA studies include both prospective and retrospective designs, with the latter being "used to compare the early days after an event to the later adaptation to the change resulting from it" (Farr & Nizza, 2019, p. 8). Researchers overwhelmingly (90%) used interviews to collect data, but only 77% of the works provided explicit information on whether questions or prompts changed between timepoints (Farr & Nizza, 2019, p. 6). Of those that did provide this information, half used a similar interview guide throughout while half used different guides for each time point – and of the studies using

different guides, half adjusted their questions to reflect the outcomes of previous interviews (Farr & Nizza, 2019, p. 9). This reflects Saldaña (2003), Corden and Millar (2007), and Hermanowicz's (2013; 2016) discussion of modifying interview questions over time in QLR more generally, where risking bias is mitigated by the added depth of exploring known issues – a key distinction between QLR and quantitative longitudinal work. As such, modifications to this study's interview guide, most notably including prompts related to COVID-19, are outlined in Appendix C.

Increased depth also leads some LIPA authors to choose to write up only a subset of their findings, due to "not wishing to sacrifice depth for width," along with the brevity required for publication (Spiers et al., 2015, p. 2604; Farr & Nizza, 2019). Results of LIPA studies are alternately presented as themes spanning time, themes tied to time points, or a combination of both approaches (Farr & Nizza, 2019). The clearest and most engaging LIPA articles use a strong narrative voice, often applying vivid metaphors (Farr & Nizza, 2019, pp. 15-16). Consequently, my findings focus solely on themes related to my research questions, I present themes spanning time, and I incorporate dramaturgical metaphors for richer, more vivid descriptions of social media workers and their job performances.

II.D. Dramaturgy

In conjunction with LIPA, Goffman's (1956) conception of work as a performance provides additional insights into social media roles and their enactment. In his dramaturgical theory, he presents concepts such as **front stage** (how a person presents themselves for others to observe) and **backstage** (where a person can relax and "step out of character") (Goffman, 1956, pp. 70-71). While early digital communications researchers emphasized how virtual communities offered new and creative ways to present identity (specifically by offering glimpses into users'

"backstage"), current scholarship considers social media as yet another front stage area used for identity construction and management (Wittkower, 2014). In one recent study, Jacobson (2020) used Goffman's work as a theoretical framework for revealing the personal branding performed by professional social media managers in Canada in response to workplace uncertainty. Dramaturgical metaphors provided a helpful way to describe how social media communicators prepare for (and deal with) their jobs, how they choose what content to create, and their imagined or future audiences (Litt, 2012; Jacobson, 2020).

Like all qualitative work, dramaturgical analysis is criticized for its limited generalizability and reproducibility. Moreover, Goffman's ideas are not summarized or organized into a single coherent or comprehensive theory. While other symbolic interactionists and role theorists developed more formalized methods based on his work, this approach can also simply be used as a helpful analogy to describe people as performers without further complexity (Shulman, 2017, p. 71).

II.E. Summary of Methodology

Phenomenology is a philosophical approach used to study subjective experiences and consciousness. IPA, a relatively new branch of phenomenology, provides a set of flexibly applied processes and principles to explore how people make sense of their own experiences (Smith et al., 2009, p. 80; Pietkiewicz & Smith, 2014, p. 8). An emerging body of work identified as LIPA combines IPA with QLR to capture temporal aspects of phenomena, like studying how a traumatic experience affects individuals (Farr & Nizza, 2019; McCoy, 2017). Creating a strong LIPA narrative can be facilitated by the use of metaphors, such as incorporating dramaturgical analogies.

III. Research Design

III.A. Purpose of this Study

This research examines how social media practitioners at cultural institutions define their role and significance at a time when many institutions refocused from in-person to digital outreach. In this study, individual perceptions of communicators are explored through in-depth IPA-based interviews and compared to prior data collected at the start of the COVID-19 pandemic in order to generate rich and contextualized data about their lives. The first round of interviews occurred between March and June 2020 and the second round took place in July and August 2021. The pandemic's impact on social media communication at cultural institutions motivated me to adapt my initial efforts to better recognize the evolution of their work.

Results of this study informed a practitioner-centered descriptive framework of social media content creation work at cultural institutions (see C5.II.A). Along with this, I also created a free and public online toolkit, available at lauramarch.com/social-toolkit. This digital reference could inform the training, strategy, and assessment of both current and future social media managers at cultural institutions.

III.A.1. Research Questions.

- **RQ1:** How do social media managers at U.S. cultural institutions define their professional success, describe the process of creating social media content, and evaluate their work?

- **RQ2:** How has the COVID-19 pandemic influenced the ways practitioners understand and perform their role?

III.B. Research Evolution & Pilot Study

   My research is informed by two years of related prior work. In spring 2020, I ran an IRB-approved pilot study as part of a doctoral seminar in qualitative methods, built upon a framework I developed in fall 2019 for a graduate seminar in research methodology. The pilot study consisted of interviewing 14 staff members, selected through snowball sampling (see C3.III.D.2), responsible for social media management at eight U.S. museums and libraries and collecting content from their institutional social media accounts. In order for participants to be included in the pilot study, they must have created original content for one or more of their institution's public-facing social media accounts and had the ability to engage with users (e.g., respond to comments) through the same organizational account. These criteria covered the requirements needed to perform Carpenter and Lertpratchya's (2016a) model of social media practitioners as customer service providers, mobilizers, information disseminators, researchers, and community builders. While my intention was to only include eight total participants, I performed additional interviews with participants who requested other members of their team be interviewed. I originally chose eight participants to ensure I had four institutions representing each type of organization (library and museum) while still remaining within the 4-10 total interviews suggested by Smith et al. (2009). I also performed a literature review in fall 2020 as part of my comprehensive exams, with chapters on cultural institutions' history and values, communications and social media, cultural intermediation, role theory, and methods (with a focus on phenomenology and IPA).

   While portions of my research have evolved and shifted with each iteration, my focus remained centered on social media practitioners and their experiences. In the pilot study, I concentrated on personal understandings of their role (e.g., process, task performance,

educational requirements, personality influences), connections to organizations' missions, and critical theory. [Appendix B](#) provides a list of my pilot research questions, interview prompts, and emergent findings. Two emergent findings were the expectation to work well beyond business hours and a reliance on engagement metrics to assess performance.

The COVID-19 pandemic began while I was interviewing my pilot participants and subsequently dominated all conversations due to the semi-structured nature of our discussions. I realized the closure of my interviewees' institutions to the public had many unexpected repercussions on their work – offering opportunities for role modification, growth, and recognition for some, and crushing despair and burnout for others. The pandemic's influence on social media management prompted me to realign my current work, including additional recognition for practitioners as crisis communicators and rapid response programmers. This change in research design due to unexpected findings is supported by qualitative longitudinal research's (QLR) openness to shifting paradigms and methods as a study continues, as "each new wave of fieldwork is shaped in relation to the previous waves, with the aim of building an emergent, cumulative picture" (Neale, 2019, p. 3; Saldaña, 2003, p. 39). Table 4 details each research phase aligned to its corresponding research questions, methods, and justification.

Table 4

Research Questions, Methods, and Justification by Phase

Phase	Research Question	Data, Sample & Collection	Analysis & Justification
1. 2020 Pilot Interviews (Spring 2020)	● How do social media communicators at cultural and academic institutions understand and navigate their work? (SubQs: Tasks, experience/training, desired education)	● Interviews with social media managers via Zoom ● 14 participants total from 8 institutions (4 libraries and 4 museums) ● Participants included social media managers and tangential roles ● Transcripts by Otter.ai	● IPA "directs attention towards our participants' attempts to make sense of their experiences" (Smith et al., 2009, p. 79)
2. 2021 Interviews (Summer 2021)	● How do practitioners define professional success, describe the process of creating social media content, and evaluate their work? ● How did the COVID-19 pandemic impact the ways social media managers at U.S. cultural institutions understand and perform their role?	● Interviews with social media managers via Zoom ● 8 participants total (4 from libraries, 4 from museums) ● Participants narrowed to include social media managers, selected from the pilot interviews via QLR's progressive focusing strategy (Neale, 2019, p. 6) – see C3.III.D for more ● Transcripts by Otter.ai	● LIPA "reveals individual trajectories that show how the participants' experience dynamically evolves within and between study time-points" (Farr & Nizza, 2019, p. 10) ● Dramaturgical analysis using Goffman's (1956) framing of work as a performance provides additional insights into occupational roles and their enactment

III.C. 2021 Interviews

As outlined in Table 4, the second phase of this study consisted of a) re-interviewing

social media communicators and b) comparing their responses to prior data collected at the start

of the COVID-19 pandemic when their organizations first closed to the public. I prompted

participants for their perspectives on professional success, the process of creating social media

content, the evaluation of their work, their workload, and their responsibilities (RQ1) as well as

the pandemic's influence on their role (RQ2). The full semi-structured interview guide is

available in Appendix C. Longitudinal aspects of this study included repeating relevant questions

previously asked during the spring 2020 study and comparing findings (see Appendix C: Tables C1 & C2). The goal of interviewing practitioners was to explore how these individuals make sense of their role in their own words. Section C3.III.F provides additional information on my application of IPA's strategy and procedures during analysis.

III.D. Sampling

The population studied in this research was social media practitioners from cultural institutions in the United States. As this study uses IPA, a small and relatively homogeneous sample is preferred. IPA's creator, Jonathan Smith, argued neither random nor representative sampling is helpful for this method – instead, purposive sampling facilitates finding a closely-defined group "for whom the research question will be significant" (Smith & Osborn, 2008, p. 56). Three to six participants is a sufficient sample size for IPA research, as this allows in-depth engagement with each case and detailed examinations of similarities and differences, but does not produce an overwhelming amount of data which would limit analysis (Smith & Osborn 2008, p. 57). For large doctoral studies in particular, Smith et al. (2009) recommend a range between four and 10 total interviews (e.g., allowing for the flexibility of interviewing five participants twice), as larger datasets may inhibit the time, reflection, and dialogue required for successful IPA analysis (p. 52). As such, a sample of eight participants (four each from U.S. libraries and museums) was sought from amongst the 14 social media communicators interviewed in the 2020 pilot project, originally identified through snowball sampling. Four participants from each type of organization also satisfied the minimum recommended interviews for IPA-based dissertations, providing a solid cohort for comparisons between museums and libraries. Participants chosen to be re-interviewed in the 2021 study managed at least one social media channel for their cultural institution and continued working in a similar position as they had the previous year. This aligns

with QLR's progressive focusing strategy, in which a subsample is singled out for more detailed attention (Neale, 2019, p. 6).

While all pilot participants consented to be contacted at a later date for another interview in 2020, not everyone responded to the 2021 recruitment efforts (see participant constraints, discussed next). Appendix C provides a sample recruitment email template and other consent documentation. I also gave each 2021 participant a $20 Amazon.com gift certificate as compensation for their time and contribution to broader knowledge (Howard & Irani, 2019, p. 10). Funding for interviewee compensation was approved by SILS through a Carnegie Research Grant on February 24, 2021 (see Appendix D). These participants were identified through snowball sampling, discussed in C3.III.D.2. At the beginning of their initial interview, and before recording began, I asked participants if they would like to choose their pseudonym to increase confidentiality and rapport (Lahman et al., 2015; Allen & Wiles, 2016). Half of the participants preferred not to choose a name themselves, so I offered to use their first initial instead (e.g, "Elle" for the first initial L), to which every participant who hadn't provided a pseudonym agreed. Pseudonyms were discussed again at the beginning of each participant's second interview, and they were given the opportunity to change their name as means to ensure ongoing consent (Allen & Wiles, 2016). All interviewees preferred to keep the pseudonym used for their 2020 interviews.

III.D.1. Participant Constraints.

Seven of the 14 participants in the 2020 pilot study met the QLA progressive focusing conditions (i.e., continued management of one or more social media channels for their cultural institution) and agreed to be re-interviewed in 2021. One participant, Anna, interviewed with a coworker in 2020 and alone in 2021. Of the remaining 2020 participants, two did not respond to

requests for a second interview and four no longer worked at their original institutions. Perhaps this was due to the relatively high turnover rate of social media managers at museums (DiStaso & McCorkindale, 2020; AAM, 2012). A 2020 survey of social media managers across industries revealed over half (57%) did not anticipate remaining in their current role in two years, with respondents evenly split on whether they thought their next position would include social media or not (DiStaso & McCorkindale, 2020). As the last AAM National Comparative Museum Salary Study that included yearly turnover rates noted, "Workers in development and web/social media have relatively high turnover rates, with median incumbency in the 2-3-year range," about half as long as all museum staff surveyed (2012, p. 12). Furthermore, 98% of cultural institutions reported closing for at least some time during the COVID-19 pandemic and more than 53,000 industry-wide workers were laid off (AFSCME, 2021).

However, one of the participants who left (Elle), took a similar social media communicator job at her city's regional chamber in spring 2021. While three museum participants would meet IPA's minimum participant guidelines (Smith & Osborn, 2008, p. 57; Smith et al., 2009), I decided to include Elle after seeking advice from my dissertation co-chairs and input from my committee members. Elle's new position encompassed many of the same responsibilities as her previous museum job, including managing multiple social media platforms. Moreover, Elle's departure from the museum echoed the "Great Resignation" trend of 2021, in which a historic number of Americans quit their jobs (Gould, 2021). Elle shares many characteristics with others who have recently resigned, including being an early-to-mid level career employee and working in a tech-adjacent position (Cook, 2021).

Beyond offering insights into historic employment trends, including Elle in this study offers distinct advantages and disadvantages. Benefits included more detailed and fresh

comparisons between working in a cultural institution versus other nonprofit organizations and enhanced truthfulness about personal experiences without as much fear of retaliation. Potential drawbacks to the consistency and integrity of this study included exacerbated positive or negative memories. Moreover, her memories may not have reflected the current state of the museum she worked for, and other biases about her institution, role, or museums in general could have been influenced by the reasons for her resignation. Reflections on these limitations are further discussed in C5.VI.

III.D.2. Snowball Sampling.

As mentioned previously, IPA researchers generally seek to find a fairly homogeneous sample through purposive sampling. One type of purposive sampling is snowball sampling, which was used to identify the pilot study's original participants who were then re-interviewed approximately one year later. Snowball sampling asks interviewees to refer other participants and may yield a greater risk of convenience sampling. As such, it does not seek to provide representativeness of the entire target population and general inferences are impossible to determine. Moreover, snowball sampling does not provide researcher-centered control over the sampling method and the first participants will have a strong impact on the subsequent results. However, these limitations are justified due to IPA's focus on small, homogenous samples as well as the potential disclosure of embarrassing or traumatic behaviors during interviews (e.g., such as not being trained to perform current duties and/or working through a crisis).

Snowball sampling also allows researchers to access, utilize, and study the unique relationships between participants. This can provide additional insights into the target population's experiences, demonstrate how practitioners function within a larger social context, and yield insights into power dynamics (Noy, 2008, p. 329). Correspondingly, social media

workers manage role conflict and ambiguity by building connections with others in the same role *outside* of their organization and helping each other advance (Carpenter and Lertpratchya, 2016b, p. 461), offering additional support for the use of snowball sampling as a means of uncovering and studying potential peer-based networks. Both power dynamics and building outside connections can be inferred from Elle's mention of Jay, another participant, and his institution:

> We have a lot of brand recognition. We're the second-best museum in [City] behind [Jay's Museum]. Whatever. Their marketing team is twice our size. I'm over it. It's cool...He's so smart, we've collaborated with him on stuff. And I'm just amazed that I get to be in the same room as him. (Elle, 20)

III.E. Data Collection

In both 2020 and 2021, I used Zoom, a web-based video conferencing tool, to conduct semi-structured interviews of practitioners. I saved the resulting audio files (without personally identifiable metadata) behind UNC's password-protected firewall. Similarly, I used a UNC-verified *Otter.ai* account to create and edit an automated transcription of the audio. Otter's post-meeting Zoom transcription service provided a secure and editable web-based transcript created through artificial intelligence (Clapp, 2020). After editing, I saved all transcripts in my UNC two-factor authenticated OneDrive account, a cloud-based file hosting service. Interview guides and copies of their corresponding IRB exemptions are detailed in the appendices.

III.F. Data Analysis

III.F.1. Coding Interview Transcripts.

I coded the interview transcripts using NVivo qualitative analysis software, using Smith et al.'s (2009) recommended IPA data analysis process. This includes six steps: (1) reading and re-reading, (2) initial noting, (3) developing emergent themes, (4) searching for connections across emergent themes, (5) moving to the next case, and (6) looking for patterns across cases (Smith et al., 2009, pp. 80-106). Each of these steps is further detailed in Appendix E.

Following Saldaña (2003) and McCoy's (2017) guidance, I coded the 2021 interviews before returning to the 2020 interviews. This strategy offers the opportunity to gain new insights into a period of significant transition (McCoy, 2017, p. 446) while also providing a way to align my findings to my current research questions and exclude no-longer-pertinent information (Saldaña, 2003, pp. 40-41). After coding the transcripts individually, I merged all documents and codes together to identify recurrent patterns. I then performed second-cycle coding, beginning with pattern coding for organization followed by focused coding for conceptual similarities (Saldaña, 2016, p. 235) – further outlined in C4.II. Throughout this process, I wrote daily journal entries, kept an audit trail of changes in a codebook spreadsheet, and annotated segments of text inside the NVivo file. Annotations helped expedite the process of identifying longitudinal themes and connecting themes to existing theory.

VanScoy and Evenstad (2015) described analysis in IPA as "bottom-up," referring to how researchers generate codes based on the data instead of applying pre-existing codes to collected data (p. 345). Similar to grounded theory, analysis moves from exploratory, descriptive, and emergent themes to broader interpretive patterns (Smith et al., 2009, p. 80). Unlike grounded theory, however, IPA research often concludes by connecting findings to existing theory (VanScoy & Evenstad, 2015, p. 341). Accordingly, this study's findings are aligned with role theory (Biddle, 1986; Simpson & Carroll, 2008), design thinking (Clarke, 2020), and a continuum of institutional practices (Kletchka, 2018).

III.F.2. Limitations of Analysis.

As a qualitative study, this study is not intended to be generalizable or easily reproducible. Moreover, as a doctoral student, I completed the project independently and did not have the benefit of additional collaborators to review codes or interpret findings for additional

triangulation. However, my doctoral committee served as guides and provided general oversight as well as specific reviews of this work.

General criticism for phenomenology centers around poor generalizability (Bloor & Wood, 2006, p. 129) and inadequate description of the analytical process (Mills & Birks, 2014, p. 10). IPA analysis is a personal and interpretive method and, again, may not yield reproducible results. However, this method provides a process to reveal meaning-making in particular contexts – precisely what my main research question seeks to identify (Smith et al., 2009, p. 80).

III.G. Trustworthiness and Ethics

III.G.1. Trustworthiness.

To ensure trustworthiness, steps to establish validity, credibility, and confirmability include transparently stating my positionality, including my assumptions and relationship to the topic and subjects (see C3.III.H.3), grounding work in existing theory, and including negative case analyses. I strengthened reliability and dependability by including extensive raw data (i.e., participant quotations) as examples of themes and frameworks to exemplify my interpretations and conclusions (Pietkiewicz & Smith, 2014; Smith, 2011). Some quotes have been lightly edited to remove filler words (e.g., "like," "you know," "um") for enhanced readability and the desire to not undermine participants' competence, and I have employed ellipses to note the removal of extraneous material to maintain succinctness (Lingard, 2019). I have also used brackets to insert grammatically necessary text and to remove personally identifiable information (Eldh et al., 2020), most often replacing the specific name of the institution used with [Museum] or [Library] and specific location with [City] to maintain confidentiality. Moreover, I label each quote with either "20" or "21" to signify the interview date in which it was spoken (e.g., Anna, 21), offering additional clarity and transparency (Farr & Nizza, 2019). Using the shortened year

("20" instead of "2020") also visually separates participant quotes from in-text citations, which use last names and the full year (e.g., Smith et al., 2008). It maintains confirmability through an audit trail of instruments, data, codes, and interpretations – all of which remain sharable but sealed behind multi-factor authentication.

III.G.2. Ethical Concerns.

While QLR does not raise different ethical issues from qualitative research more generally, multiple interactions with participants can heighten the possibility for concerns to arise (Corden & Millar, 2007, p. 587). Steps I employed to ensure ethical conduct included maintaining informed consent as an ongoing process, building and sensitively managing relationships with participants, protecting data and confidentiality, and attending to power dynamics (Neale, 2019; Farr & Nizza, 2019; Derrington, 2019; Snelgrove, 2014; Hermanowicz, 2013). One area of power dynamics that requires additional consideration in QLR is researcher-participant reciprocation, as longitudinal research requires more time from participants than other types of research (Neale, 2019, pp. 7-8). Beyond the small, non-coercive or binding ($20) monetary gift (see Appendix D: Carnegie Grant Approval), my participants may have benefitted from attaining insights into their own experiences, having their story heard without judgment, and gaining the knowledge that their voice may lead to changes in the future (Derrington, 2019, p. 39; Hermanowicz, 2013, p. 202) .

The relationship between researchers and participants also requires more attention in QLR. Some researchers emphasize the importance and benefits of developing strong empathetic bonds (Hermanowicz, 2013, p. 202; Smith et al., 2009, p. 55). Others warn of potential bias due to overidentification, leading to loss of objectivity (Derrington, 2019, p. 37; Snelgrove, 2014). While I did not personally experience any discomfort, strategies for coping with potential issues

related to emotional attachment include detailed journaling and working with one's committee. I did, however, apply an ethics of care by ensuring the interviews were reflexive, sensitive, and negotiable opportunities for rich discussions (Howard & Irani, 2019).

Nevertheless, interviewees may have refrained from providing full answers to background- and issue-oriented questions if they believed their responses negatively reflected their work or institution. For example, an interviewee may have felt pressured to say they have definitive strategies or goals for content creation and dissemination even if their practice was unguided. I assured confidentiality and adherence to IRB standards, while also applying standard interviewing techniques like using icebreakers and building rapport, to help diminish related threats.

As discussed in C3.III.B, interview questions evolved over the course of this study. Unlike quantitative studies, changes to interview prompts and shifts in broader research designs are possible through QLR, as each new phase is shaped by previous phases (Neale, 2019, p. 3; Saldaña, 2003, p. 39). Moreover, trustworthiness and credibility in QLR is supported through strong evidence (such as thick descriptions) and a persuasive written report – not consistency of the interview guide over time (Saldaña, 2003, pp. 35-42; Corden & Millar, 2007, p. 586). Tables C1 and C2 in Appendix C identify the repeated questions, align each to this study's research questions, and justify their longitudinal applicability. Appendix B provides a full list of 2020 interview questions and Appendix C provides a full list of 2021 interview questions. My position as a student employee of UNC may have also unintendedly dissuaded or pressured UNC staff or alumni to participate in this research project or provide certain responses. I managed this concern by ensuring participants knew interviews are confidential, participation

(including answering any specific questions) was voluntary, and their ability to continue at UNC and/or use UNC-related services was not affected by participation.

III.G.3. Researcher Positionality.

Research occurs within a set of socio-political contexts and is an activity with priorities and intentions (Smith, 2012, p. 36). As a researcher, my role is to attempt to gain insights into practitioners' thoughts, feelings, and experiences. While this work does not extensively elaborate on larger critical theory-related themes, concepts including cultural intermediation, feminization, and vocational awe informed my interpretations. These broad conceptual approaches allow me to better contextualize social influences on practitioners' reflections. Moreover, my previous experience in social media work may have provided additional insights into the field but also may have influenced my observations and analysis, as well as those of my participants and their responses. As a white female researcher, I am a member of the target population's dominant culture, and I must remain attentive to the possibility that conducting research on potentially discriminatory practices may have further marginalized minority participants (Bourke, 2014, p. 4; hooks, 1994).

IV. Summary of Methodology & Research Design

Museums and libraries recognize social media as important for their organizations – and agree it will become even more important in the future – even though many have no strategy for its use nor measure their efforts (Oosman et al., 2014; Aerni & Schegg, 2017; OCLC, 2018). In response to this absence of guidance and the associated literature gap, this study takes a qualitative, LIPA-based, practitioner-centered approach to learn how social media communicators define, perform, and evaluate their work as well as examine the evolution of this

role during the COVID-19 pandemic. Chapter 4 reports the findings of this research as a result of this methodology and design.

CHAPTER 4: FINDINGS & DISCUSSION

This chapter reports and contextualizes my findings. First, I provide an overview of the eight participants, their demographics, and the data produced through interviews. Next, I align each of the overarching, first-level themes to the study's research findings and use dramaturgical metaphors to describe the performance of the social media management role. The first-level themes are plot twists (paradoxes in social media management), method acting (embodying an institution and producing content), everyone's a critic (reviews, self-assessment, and outside feedback), and bit part to leading actor (pandemic adaptations). Finally, I discuss each of these themes using participants' own words and additional contextual information.

I. Participants

Table 5 provides an overview of the eight social media communicators interviewed in both 2020 and 2021. The table is organized alphabetically by each participant's pseudonym and includes their institution type, generalized location, preferred pronouns, self-descriptions of race/ethnicity, age, education, title(s), salary, and years in position (as of 2021).

I.A. Table 5

Participant Demographics

Pseudonym	Institution	Location	Pronouns	Race/Ethnicity	Age	Education	Title(s)	Salary	Years
Anna	Museum	Northeast	She/her	• "Yep" (2020)[1] • "Caucasian. White." (2021)	35-36	BA: Photojournalism, French; Some graduate photography classes	Communications Assistant (2018-2019); Communication Specialist (2019-2021)	40-50K	4
Brock	Library	Southeast	He/him	• "White." (2020) • "White." (2021)	43-44	BA: English; MFA: Creative Writing	Director of Communications	80-90K	11
Dee	Library	Northeast	She/her	• "Caucasian." (2020) • "Very Caucasian." (2021)	51-52	BA: Psychology; MS: Library Science	Office Manager	50-55K	10
Eleanor	Museum	Southeast	She/her	• "I'm white." (2020) • "I'm white." (2021)	31-32	BA: Marketing; MA: Communication	Public Relations and Social Media Manager (2017-2021); Assistant Director of Marketing and Communications (2021)	56K; 62K	4

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[1] Anna (who was interviewed in 2020 with a coworker) agreed with her colleague that she was "white" in 2020.

Pseudonym	Institution	Location	Pronouns	Race/Ethnicity	Age	Education	Title(s)	Salary	Years
Elle	Museum; City Regional Chamber	West	She/her	● "I'm white." (2020) ● "Caucasian." (2021)	23-24	BA: Communication; Some graduate English classes (Fall 2020)	Museum: Communication Coordinator (2019-2020); Communication Specialist (2020, 6 months); Communication Manager (2020-2021, 6 months). City Regional Chamber: Marketing Manager (Spring 2021)	32K; 35K; 43K (Now 50K)	2
Gwen	Library	Southeast	She/her	● "I'm white. Caucasian." (2020) ● "I'm white, non-Latina." (2021)	58-59	BA: Religious Studies; MSW: Social Work	Communication Specialist (2015-2019); Communications Manager (2019-2021). Note: No pay increase with title changes.	55K	6.5
Jay	Museum	West	He/him	● "I'm white." (2020) ● "Caucasian slash Native American."[2] (2021)	40-41	BA: English Literature	Online Communities Manager; Communications Manager; Assistant Director of Communications and audience relations (Fall 2021)	50-60K	12
Kay	Library	Southeast	She/her	● "Mixed." (2020) ● "Asian." (2021)	29-30	BA: Journalism; MS: Library Science	Graduate Research Assistant (2019-2020), Social Media Coordinator (2020-2021), Outreach Projects Librarian (April 2021)	50-60K	3

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[2] Jay and Kay used different terminology to describe their race and/or ethnicity in 2020 and 2021. This is discussed in Appendix F.

I.B. Demographic Changes

Many participants modified their self-reported demographic information between their first and second interviews. Most often, these changes reflect promotions (see C4.VI.A.2). Some participants also used different terminology to describe their race and/or ethnicity (discussed further in Appendix F).

I.C. Data by Participant

Detailed information about each interview is described in Table 6. This includes interview dates, average length, talk ratio as a percent of time speaking, and number of words spoken by participants for both years.

Table 6

Interview Data by Participant

Pseudonym	Year	Date	Length	Talk Ratio	Words
Anna	2020	5/4	94	84%	6776
	2021	7/28	87	91%	11855
Brock	2020	6/18	67	88%	7113
	2021	8/2	88	89%	9999
Dee	2020	6/11	72	90%	8343
	2021	7/16	123	86%	14619
Eleanor	2020	6/12	60	82%	8185
	2021	7/23	70	86%	9873
Elle	2020	4/27	122	84%	20232
	2021	8/6	107	86%	16333
Gwen	2020	6/15	70	91%	7593
	2021	7/22	80	90%	8285
Jay	2020	4/28	67	87%	10528
	2021	8/4	83	89%	12369
Kay	2020	3/31	32	80%	4296
	2021	7/19	77	85%	11403

The shortest interview in 2020 was 32 minutes (Kay), the longest was 2 hours and 2 minutes (Elle), and the mean was 1 hour and 8 minutes. Interviews in 2021 were lengthier on average, with the shortest clocking in at 1 hour and 10 minutes (Eleanor), the longest at 2 hours and 3 minutes (Dee), and the mean at 1 hour and 29 minutes. There was a higher talk ratio as well, with participants speaking between 80% (Kay) and 91% (Gwen) of the recorded interview time in 2020 versus 85% (Kay) and 91% (Anna) in 2021. The remaining portion of each interview was filled with questions I asked from the semi-structured interview guides (see Appendix B and Appendix C). The average (mean) number of words participants used jumped from 9,133 in 2020 to 11,842 in 2021. In total, participants spoke 167,772 words over 21 hours and 39 minutes over the course of all interviews.

II. Overview of Codes & Themes

Three rounds of coding produced 284 final codes from 3579 segments (see Table 7).

Table 7

Rounds of Coding and Total Segments Coded

Coding Round	Total Codes	Total Coded Segments
Round 1: Idiographic Analysis	736	4911
Round 2: Merged Coding	278	3299
Round 3: Second-Cycle Coding	284	3579

From the final list of 284 total codes, I identified 19 superordinate themes, or clusters and connections of related themes (Smith et al., 1999, p. 222), shared by at least half of the participants. I organized these superordinate themes into four first-level themes, which represent higher-order concepts shared across cases (Smith et al., 2009, p. 101). Prior literature refers to these as "master" themes, lists, or tables (Smith et al., 1999; Smith et al., 2009; VanScoy &

Evenstad, 2015). My decision to describe these as first-level reflects recent calls for using more meaningful and inclusive terms (SFC, 2020). The first-level themes are: plot twists: paradoxes in professional success; method acting: embodying an institution and producing content; everyone's a critic: reviews, self-assessment, and outside feedback; and bit part to leading actor: pandemic adaptations. Each responds to (and aligns with) the study's research questions (see Table 8).

Table 8

Alignment of Research Questions and First-Level Themes

Research Question		First-Level Theme
RQ1: How do social media managers at U.S. cultural institutions...	A. define their professional success?	**Plot twists:** Paradoxes in professional success
	B. describe the process of creating social media content?	**Method acting:** Embodying an institution and producing content
	C. evaluate their work?	**Everyone's a critic:** Reviews, self-assessment, and outside feedback
RQ2: How has the COVID-19 pandemic influenced the ways practitioners understand and perform their role?		**Bit part to leading actor:** Pandemic adaptations

Subsumed under the four first-level themes are 19 superordinate (or second-level) and 265 third, fourth, and fifth-level codes. Like other LIPA studies, most of my findings are presented as themes spanning time (Farr & Nizza, 2019), although changes between time points are discussed when applicable. For example, Brock and Elle changed their opinions on hosting live virtual events, described in C4.VI.B.1.

III. Plot Twists: Paradoxes in Professional Success

In scripts and other works of fiction, plot twists are unexpected events that change the trajectory or expected outcome of a story (OED, 2021a). Correspondingly, this theme covers the unanticipated and paradoxical experiences of social media managers at cultural institutions. This is seen in the unintentional aspect of becoming a social media manager (see C4.III.A), as well as the differences between informal hiring (see C4.III.B), formal bureaucratic working conditions (see C4.III.C), and dismissed expertise (see C4.III.D). Likewise, the interviewees reported spending the most time sending one-way, broadcast messages while finding two-way conversations and connections to be the most meaningful use of social media (see C4.III.E). Finally, few job duties overlapped between each participant, and these ambiguous responsibilities led to misconceptions of social media work by supervisors, colleagues, and participants themselves (see C4.III.F).

III.A. Idiosyncratic Career Paths

All eight participants described different journeys to their current roles. Half (Anna, Brock, Dee, Jay) specifically noted the seemingly random nature of taking on social media work:

- "I sort of fell into it." (Anna, 20)

- "It was something that I just sort of stumbled into." (Brock, 20)

- "So this opportunity arose sort of randomly for me to become the primary tweeter." (Dee, 21)

- "I kind of fell into this world." (Jay, 20)

A brief description of each participants' career path, detailed next, illustrates these idiosyncrasies.

Anna. Anna began her professional career as a photojournalist. A nonprofit hired her to take pictures of their organization, and she offered guidance on how to use her images online. The nonprofit created a development position for her, which included social media work. Since then, Anna has moved back-and forth between freelance photography and similar marketing jobs at different organizations:

> It started [at the nonprofit] and kept vacillating, where I would do that type of job and then go back to freelance photography, and then do that type of job, and go back to freelance photography. And now I've landed in the same thing doing [Museum] stuff, and gotten away from freelance photography for a while. Although I do do photography at the [Museum]. (Anna, 20)

During our 2021 interview, Anna confided that she was considering leaving her museum for a similar communications-centered position at an environmental law firm. The CEO invited her to join the company after she managed a documentary photoshoot for the group.

Brock. Brock began writing for a university's history magazine while attending its graduate school for creative writing. After completing his degree, he moved to a Midwestern university "doing various staff support positions and communication-related jobs" including work for their library system (Brock, 20). In 2010, Brock's professional connections from that position motivated him to "put my hat into the application pool" for his current position in an academic library. He reflected:

> It was something that I just sort of stumbled into. Most people who have a job like mine... also stumbled into it from some different path. I think that goes for nonprofit communications in general. A lot of people started out doing one thing, maybe it was journalism or event management, or maybe some other kinds of communications work, [like] advertising, and then they ended up finding their way into doing this. It's one of those things that people come to from lots of different paths. (Brock, 20)

Dee. Dee wanted to become a librarian since she was in kindergarten. Her first job, however, was scooping ice cream at Baskin Robbins. She went on to receive a MSLS and worked as a children's librarian for twenty years before her current office manager position. Dee

took on Twitter duties for the institution in 2014 after the colleague previously responsible for

social media left. She described her role making process:

> I started with my personal Twitter account. And I was doing that probably for, I don't
> know, nine months or a year or something. And the person who was doing [Library]'s
> Twitter just coincidentally left for another job. And so it was a vacuum, a Twitter
> vacuum, hashtag Twitter vacuum. And so I said, 'Well, does anybody mind if I do it?'
> (Dee, 20)

She later continued:

> So, my job description actually got rewritten not all that long ago. Not because of
> [Twitter], but just coincidentally, and so there's some element of communication
> assistance or something in there now. And so that's what [Twitter] falls under. (Dee, 20)

> **Eleanor.** Eleanor worked in public relations for a large music company in another city

before moving to her current location for a long-distance relationship. She applied to what she

thought was a similar PR role at her museum, not knowing social media work would be

involved:

> I found this job through people that I knew. It was originally advertised solely as a PR
> manager, I did not know I would be doing social media. And two weeks into my role,
> they were like, 'Alright, we're gonna give you the passwords and you can start plugging
> in content.' And I was like, 'That's okay. You guys can keep handling it.' (Eleanor, 20)

Later in the same interview, she reiterated this sentiment, noting "I would just really like to step

away from social media and focus on bigger projects." By her 2021 interview, this became a

possibility due to her recent promotion:

> This promotion actually came at a really interesting time, because our Director of
> Marketing was out on maternity leave from March to July. I had essentially stepped into
> this role to take on her responsibilities while she was out. At the same time, our
> marketing manager left, so I took on those [responsibilities] as well. What will change
> later is that the social media and ad buying will roll off of my plate onto someone else's.
> (Eleanor, 21)

Eleanor's museum had just started receiving applications for the new social media/ad buying

position when we talked in 2021.

Elle. Elle had not intended to go into marketing after completing her undergraduate

degree in investigative journalism in 2019. One of her professors "landed" her an internship with

a local nonprofit organization that included social media work:

> [The professor] landed me the internship, or helped me get the internship, at [a nonprofit] and that shifted everything. I was like, I can do advertising for great people who help our community. And it was more fun to me than the competitive journalism situation I was getting myself into, so that made it really easy. (Elle, 21)

This experience led to her taking a similar permanent position at a museum after graduating. But

Elle did not realize she would be taking on as much work as quickly as she did, taking over her

supervisor's responsibilities two months after starting her first full-time job (see C4.VI.A.2). At

the end of our 2020 interview – after describing exhausting working conditions – I asked if there

was anything that would lead her to quit. Elle joked, "Hmm. Not right now...I've gotta get them

to fire me first." She left the museum in spring 2021.

Gwen. Gwen started her professional career as a social worker and became the director

of a nonprofit crisis hotline. After having children, she spent time as a stay-at-home parent while

also volunteering at a local museum. Gwen then launched her own personal marketing and

communications business before beginning at her current institution in 2015. She explained her

transition:

> I was tired of being the leader. So I decided to work for an organization where I could be a leader within the organization, but not the leader of the organization. I transitioned into this role about five and a half years ago, and since then, I have been a division of one the whole time. (Gwen, 20)

Gwen's reflections on her role and institution changed drastically between her first and second

interviews. In 2020, she reflected, "I really like this work. I don't see that it's something I need

to quit" when asked about her future plans. But in 2021, Gwen admitted, "I've been looking for

another job since the summer after I started," later adding, "I'm going to have to [stay there], for

my benefits. I'm currently looking for jobs. And if nothing pans out, I'll be there till I retire."

Jay. Like Gwen, Jay launched his own company before starting in social media communication. He ran a literary nonprofit and, in 2009, organized a company event at the museum where he now works. After the event, the museum's Director asked if he would work for them and build the museum's online presence. Jay (21) emphasized the unintentional nature of his career when responding to a prompt about why people become social media managers at museums, answering, "I certainly did not do it by choice, I fell into it very much by accident. So that was not a career path for me."

Kay. Kay responded similarly when asked why someone would choose to become a social media manager at a library:

> Personally, I don't think anyone really works to become [one]. I think that, like in a lot of places, they just end up having to do it because no one else will. And it ends up becoming a part of their job title. And they don't know how to use it. So it's not like they're [setting] out to become the social media manager for the institution. (Kay, 21)

Kay began her professional career as an intern at a research lab while working towards her undergraduate dual-degree in journalism and public health policy. As part of the internship, she used social media to recruit participants for lab studies. Kay continued to work at university research labs, where she also managed social media, for a few years before pursuing a MSLS degree. She then began working as a part-time graduate student for her university's library and moved into a full-time outreach position after graduation. When asked if she would like to continue doing social media work in the future, Kay (21) reflected, "I don't know if I want to do it forever. I know it's something I'm good at. But that doesn't mean I should keep doing it."

Even though participants did not intend to become social media managers themselves, a 2019 survey by Morning Consult reported 54% of 13-38-year-olds would like to become social media influencers and 86% would post sponsored content for money. While becoming an influencer is not the same as taking a full-time social media manager position, perhaps the

participants interviewed in this study make up a final cohort of practitioners who hadn't considered incorporating social media into their professional work. Moreover, "Social Media Manager" job titles have recently spiked in popularity, with related postings increasing more than 1,000% over the past ten years (Rainbow, 2020).

Interestingly, most (Anna, Brock, Eleanor, Elle, Jay, Kay) of the participants' career paths are complicated by a particular role conflict – their dislike of using social media, specifically in their personal lives. Anna (20) explained, "I don't like [social media] that much because...the idea of getting followers is not one that comes natural to me." Similarly, Elle (21) admitted, "I really don't like social media that much." When asked why someone would want to become a social media manager, Eleanor (21) retorted, "Oh my gosh. [They're] masochists!" Brock (20) explained, "I spend so much time looking at screens for work that when it's my own time, I don't want to be anywhere near a screen." Jay (20) felt similarly, noting "I don't really have any personal presence on social media...for the very reason because I just live in it [for work] all the time." Kay also described distancing herself from social media due to burnout (discussed further in C4.IV.B).

III.B. Informal Hiring Process

As the participants recounted their career paths, it became clear many had experienced a casual, unsystematic hiring process. Jay, Kay, and Eleanor described how personal connections and/or personal use of social media led to recruitment at cultural institutions. Similarly, Elle reflected on hiring an intern through nepotism at her nonprofit organization in 2021.

As mentioned in the previous section, Jay was offered a position at a museum after he hosted an event in the building. He remembered:

> I was outside playing basketball, because it was summertime. I got a call and it was the Office of the Director here and the secretary said, 'Do you have time for a meeting? We

want to go over a few things.' I thought it was going to be about doing another event here or something like that...So I swung by, all gross and sweaty. And basically – this was in 2009 – he said, 'We're moving in a new direction.' I've been a pretty early adopter of new media and stuff like that, when it was really pretty fresh. The museum, at that time, didn't have any real presence in that regard. I think they wanted to take it more into the twenty-first century. [The Director] just threw this opportunity out at me. And I said, 'Well, I need to think about that,' because that was not on my radar at all. But I thought about it, and it seemed like a fun opportunity. Of course, in my mind, I was like, I'll do that for a few years and see what happens...so I said yes. And here we are. (Jay, 20).

Likewise, Kay's soon-to-be supervisor reached out personally to persuade her to apply. Kay (20) recalled, "My supervisor contacted me about a [part-time graduate student] job opening with her team. She knew I had some social media experience in the past. So that's how I heard about the position. And I applied and got it." When asked how her supervisor knew her originally, Kay (20) answered, "Well, she followed me on my personal social media accounts." Congruently, Eleanor (21) mentioned reviewing all of her potential new hires' social media accounts, divulging, "I obviously dig through all of their own accounts. And just make sure – I literally have not given an interview to an intern because she was Tweeting about blowjobs or something." Prior research has found at least 70% – and perhaps up to 98% – of employers and/or recruiters review applicants' social media before hiring (Zhang et al., 2020; McKeon, 2020). However, this practice results in biased decisions (Acquisti & Fong, 2020) that do not predict future job performance (Zhang et al., 2020).

On the other hand, Elle's job search was so casual she didn't realize she was applying for a museum-based job located within an academic institution:

When I applied, my current position was advertised on the University of [City]'s website and I was like, 'Man, I guess I'll interview for this job, but I don't really want to work in higher education,' because there are plenty of other problems with higher education. But when I was in the interview, and they told me I'd be great at the museum, I was like, 'Okay, hold on, maybe we can make this work.' (Elle, 20)

Elle (20) also reflected, "I am just like a happy-go-lucky, almost 23-year-old who just keeps finding herself in these positions where I'm managing a lot of things."

The next year, in her new role, Elle began managing an intern and described the casual intern hiring process:

> It was kind of a nepotism hire. Somebody that her mom was friends with knew her, and she didn't have a lot of experience because her internship that she was supposed to have was shut down during COVID. So I got this resume that was like, she worked at all these restaurants. But the stuff that she sent was really great. And this is an unpaid internship, so I really can't be too picky with this. But she's really great at social media, and she really likes to do it. So, as long as she wants to keep working for us, then she can keep working for us. (Elle, 21)

Using social connections to acquire a job is a common practice across industries in the U.S. – some research suggests between 70% and 85% of all positions are filled through networking (Fisher, 2019; Adler, 2016; Harden, 2016). However, slower, deliberate, and objective assessments reduce bias in hiring (Kessler & Low, 2021). Moreover, a recent study found "black and white job seekers utilize their networks at similar rates, but network-based methods are less likely to lead to job offers for African Americans" (Pedulla & Pager, 2019, p. 983). Perhaps this is one reason why museum and library staff remain less diverse than the general population (Westermann et al., 2019, p. 9; Rosa & Henke, 2017) and has even decreased among masters-level librarians in the U.S. (Sands et al., 2018, p. 4).

III.C. Institutional Bureaucracy

The casual hiring process described above contrasts sharply with participants' experiences of rigid bureaucracy within their organizations. Of particular note is the juxtaposition between an informal recruitment process and formalized annual reviews – especially as most participants admitted these evaluations were not meaningfully connected to salary or professional advancement (see C4.V.A for more on formal reviews).

Anna, Elle, Gwen, and Jay described the frustration of breaking through the red tape and (what they saw as) unnecessary procedures associated with social media work at their cultural institutions. Anna (21) specified bureaucracy as the "worst part" of her job, sharing, "I don't

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know how it is at other places, but the [museum's a] bureaucratic machine…it's wild to me that

this is how we operate. It's very frustrating sometimes." Previously, she described her frustration

as stemming from the content approval process:

> [D]epending on what I'm posting or sharing or communicating, it has six people at the [Museum] to go through as well as people with [Strategic Communications] and [Development Communications]…so it feels like walking through mud a lot. But, yeah, that's probably the worst part. (Anna, 20)

She later continued:

> I do wish that things were less rigid in the overview kind of way…I think it hinders things sometimes, especially at a time like now when you need to think on your feet and be flexible, too. [We need to] create new rubrics for ourselves to follow. I don't know who it's serving, really, to stick within some of the limitations. They seem a little random sometimes. And if the goal is engagement and getting our message out there, I don't know that it has to be so formulated. (Anna, 20)

Jay mirrored Anna's responses:

> My least favorite [aspect of social media work] would be – even though we are a very open organization, there are still moments of red tape, or when you want to do something, and it has to go through multiple approval channels. Or something gets watered down from the initial thought because too many cooks are in the kitchen. (Jay, 21)

> Adding needless red tape into public organizations decreases work commitment and

overall performance of organizations by affecting employee behavior and attitudes (Rauf, 2020).

This can also be seen in Gwen's memory of a recent conversation with her supervisor in which

she felt she needed to request permission for correcting errors:

> I said, 'Well, as I was moving through things, I saw that the policies are needing some updates,' as I was reformatting them. 'I just want you to be aware that if I saw that a practice had changed since we had instituted a policy, I noted the practice change.'…Because I also get stepped on. [They will ask], 'Why did you [do that]? How could you have made that decision without consulting with somebody?' (Gwen, 21)

Elle experienced yet another side effect of bureaucracy when her institution made a unilateral

decision that affected her work without consulting her:

> We were shut out of our project management system for a week, because [my institution] wanted us to be on Microsoft Teams. And I was like, it's going to be impossible to get all

of the data off of Basecamp in the time that you need us to get on to Teams, because it's just me. And I can't get rid of this historical data because this is helping me figure out what I need to do in these situations. But they let the [Basecamp] contract lapse. It took a week for us to convince them we needed access to the project management system so we could continue to work...That was another episode where I was like, I'm done with this institution. So yeah, it's just big bureaucratic messes [that] I think were really to blame [for turnover]. (Elle, 21)

Conversely, Jay identified his museum's relative lack of bureaucracy (when compared to other institutions) as the main reason why they were able to pivot quickly during the early stages of the COVID-19 pandemic when other institutions did not:

[O]ur leadership [was] ready to take that plunge, not having to worry about 18 levels of bureaucracy. I think that is probably one of the reasons why you're not seeing some movement from other organizations. Because they get analysis paralysis and they can't figure out what to do. And then you end up talking yourself into doing nothing, because you're scared of jumping into it a little bit too early. (Jay, 20)

Kay demonstrated the difference between obstructive bureaucratic processes versus supportive procedures when she expressed appreciation for her supervisor's review of her work (compared to previous positions that did not):

[In my previous lab position], I was just like a lone wolf in terms of the communication, and they didn't necessarily see how [social media] was important [along] with the rest of a communication strategy. I actually love that my [current] supervisor looks over stuff because there's definitely things that I would have missed or there's stuff around institutional knowledge that I might not know [about] the library. So it's helpful that she looks over it and gives feedback. But a lot of the time, she just looks at it and is like, 'Great, good to go.' (Kay, 20)

Kay described a positive relationship with her supervisor and colleagues, noting in 2021 that they were "one of the best teams I've ever had the pleasure of working with. Everyone in my team has been extremely supportive of my work." Support may be the difference between Kay's gratitude and Anna's frustration.

Rigid adherence to workplace policy decisions made without the support or guidance of all affected parties may also result in disingenuous behavior by the institution. Anna, Eleanor, Gwen, and Kay specified examples of disingenuous behavior as the result of competing

institutional policies and priorities – particularly when related to social justice and diversity, equity, and inclusion (DEI). Anna (21) in particular voiced her criticism, "I think there's a lot of tiptoeing now in order to appear like we're supporting one thing or another, but also not make other people mad. And so it's ineffective either way you go." As Ronke Lawal (founder of Ariatu PR) stated in response to Black protests during the summer of 2020, "Support which includes tangible steps to actions including donations and the amplification of links and resources are welcome. Generic statements which lack depth become a distraction and are not needed during this time" (Hickman, 2020).

Gwen also became disillusioned with her library's ability to accomplish DEI goals. In 2020, she was excited to incorporate more content about racial inequalities, which "feels very relevant and mission specific," while also noting that it could lead to increased negative engagement online, stating, "Now [our low engagement] may change as we move more into having posts about diversity, equity, and inclusion. I anticipate that will change." But in 2021, Gwen revealed she was asked to remove all antiracist content from her social media channels after someone commented, "You hurt my feelings" on a link to a Washington Post opinion piece she posted, "When black people are in pain, white people just join book clubs" (Johnson, 2020). She recalled, "We [previously] put some diversity, equity, and inclusion resources up on our virtual branch. And I said, 'So you're not wanting any mention of this. So should I take that down?' 'Yes.'...I was told I couldn't do anything [after that]" (Gwen, 21). Similarly, Eleanor mused:

> I think some of [my institution's DEI initiative] is a performance, and then [also] the changes they want and promised to make are harder than they expected. And the work is not being done. I think there's still a lot of stuff to contend with to make big changes. I know that we are state funded. So having that aspect of it, we get calls from legislature members that are like, 'We don't like this piece of art.' People have complained about it,

and that rears its ugly head all the time. They're like, 'We're going to strike you from the budget if you don't do XYZ,' and it's just really, really hard. (Eleanor, 21)

Kay summarized:

I'm skeptical of most people. I think a lot of times, people will put stuff on social media and not necessarily think about it...[Some libraries] are taking advantage of these [marginalized] communities, just to be like, 'Oh, look what we're doing' and not actually help[ing] them...Social media doesn't need to just be virtue signaling. (Kay, 21)

How cultural institutions subject their social media managers to bureaucratic processes may be related to another paradox of social media management, the dismissal of their expertise, further outlined next.

III.D. Dismissed Expertise

While the participants interviewed may not have originally intended to become authorities in their field, their years in this role provided expertise in social media work. Unfortunately, most participants (Anna, Eleanor, Elle, Gwen, Kay) felt their role was unappreciated or trivialized by some of their colleagues. Eleanor (20) summarized, "social media is the most work for the least amount of credit." In addition, participants detailed examples of their coworkers' unwillingness to support their work, seemingly without reason. To make matters worse, ideas from non-expert coworkers were implemented over the social media managers' objections.

Since almost every adult in the U.S. uses social media personally, many believe they know how to make an engaging post – yet professional social media management is much more complicated than amateur use, even if it is not well-respected (Rainbow, 2020). Anna described one effect of this paradox:

I'm the literally single person at my workplace whose job it is to do [social media]. Therefore, even if none of us wish it was the case, I'm the expert. And so it's frustrating sometimes when I've gone through all that process, and then get a negative comment from a coworker, or really usually my boss, who's like, 'Oh, I wish you wouldn't have done this this way.' (Anna, 21)

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Kay and Eleanor detailed similar difficulties working with colleagues, with Kay (21) noting, "People won't take my request seriously...if I need a photo, or some information, or something from someone, my request [isn't] seen as important...I take my job pretty seriously, and I want others to take my job seriously." Eleanor recalled a similar issue when she requested photographs (detailed in C4.III.F) and also provided an example of harm that can occur when organizations do not listen to their social media experts. She described the negative impacts of participating in the 2020 "Blackout Tuesday" Instagram trend:

> I definitely had personal issues with Blackout Tuesday and posting those black squares. So, because I'm online all the time, and I also don't sleep, I started seeing around 5 a.m. that people were like, [Blackout Tuesday] is not going to go well. People are tagging #BlackLivesMatter [and] it has wiped out all of the [related] content for years. If you look at that hashtag now, it's all black squares, and it's just devastating. And so I started posting on Facebook on some [social media manager] groups that I'm in, 'Hey, if you're going to post the square, don't use the BlackLivesMatter hashtag. It's clogging everything up. It's burying their work.' Activists can't find information. Literally the day before, that hashtag was full of businesses to support and charities to fund and tips on protesting, what to do if you're pepper sprayed. And now it's truly nothing...I just had so many issues with it. Also, I'm posting a square to say that I'm not posting to make room for Black voices, but I'm taking up room with this black square. (Eleanor, 21)

While she said she was "able to argue in favor of not posting anything on that Tuesday and just step out of the conversation," Eleanor (21) went on to disclose, "I think that it was hard for people who are not on the front lines of social media to understand that [Blackout Tuesday] was not going to be impactful and it was going to backfire."

Moreover, Gwen noted in 2020 that some of colleagues challenged her work, "I take a lot of deep breaths...so if you have somebody who...forgets you might be the person that's hired to do [this] job, it can be a real struggle." The following year, she described an effort to mitigate this struggle – changing the name of her group from marketing to external communications:

> I had to change the name of my committee from marketing to external communications...That came across in the strategic plan, that marketing leaves a bad taste in your mouth and it's too intimidating. But external communications, we can do that.

Okay, fine, whatever. Call it what you want. So, I know I sound really dejected. I'm really sorry. (Gwen, 21)

Gwen's department rebrand aligns with Grönroos's (2004) finding that the term "marketing" (defined as "managing the market relationships of an organization") is out of favor, as it has "lost its credibility" (p. 110).

III.E. Monologues vs. Dialogues

Another contradiction of social media work is the value placed on one-way versus two-way communication. Seven of the eight participants used the word "promote" or "promotion" to describe the purpose of social media posts. This aligns with Solomon's (2016) observation that most libraries and non-profits are still "very much entrenched" in the broadcast or one-way transmission model, where promotional messages (particularly about events) are sent out to everyone without consideration for how useful those messages may be for their actual users (p. 4). However, most participants recognized social media's potential as a meaningful venue for two-way conversations and making connections.

For example, Dee (21) pointed out, "I think the thing to remember is that at the base of it all, your purpose is to promote your library or institution." Similarly, Gwen (21) noted, "my job is to promote services, collections, and programs." Subsequently, six participants (Anna, Brock, Dee, Elle, Jay, Kay) reported that a majority of their time is spent crafting posts versus responding to incoming messages. Of those who provided a ratio, Kay (21) mentioned the highest proportion of time spent on creating original posts (100%), noting "We barely get stuff that requires a response"), and Elle (21) described the lowest (65%). Interestingly, Elle (21) revealed this ratio was the opposite at her new city tourism board job, citing, "35% is me crafting messages to broadcast out, and 65% [of the time] I'm responding to things." She explained, "on

social media, we have constant people asking, 'What should I do while I'm in [the city]?'" (Elle, 21).

Even though most of their time is spent crafting one-way messages, participants preferred to be engaging with responsive users. For example, after Kay (21) noted she did not spend any of her time responding to incoming messages, she mused, "I want that type of stuff. I want people to feel engaged, like they can ask us questions on social media." Similarly, Brock (21) shared, "A lot more time is spent coming up with stuff to broadcast out than responding to incoming messages. We would love to have more engagement and conversation with people on social media than we do." Likewise, when asked for their favorite aspect of social media work in general, participants mentioned fostering connections and conversations. Jay explained:

> I always say that to people – [social media] is not a bulletin board, it's a conversation. If you're just telling people where to go, what to do, when to do it, there's no sense of giving back or conversation or anything. And I think that our mission as a museum is to create a more connected community through art and gardens. It's a pretty short and simple thing. And, at the same time, pretty powerful. (Jay, 21).

Eleanor concurred:

> [I]f you're just putting content out there, but you're not engaging with it, you're not doing the social part of social media. So you have to be liking comments, responding, liking Tweets from other museums, and just engaging in conversations like that. (Eleanor, 20)

This sentiment was also shared by Dee:

> The best thing about Twitter, period, work or otherwise, is making connections with people you would never have met in your life. Making connections with ideas that you might never have come across, because of [the] limited context that you live in. (Dee, 21)

She went on to explain this is why she chose to reply to every Tweet tagged with her institutional account:

> Replying almost always leads to a conversation, which obviously, is the best [part of social media], I think. And it's often very fun. I think a lot of people, if they don't know our [library's] Twitter protocol, I think a lot of people are surprised that they actually get to have a conversation with us. (Dee, 21)

Dee's use of Twitter in this way aligns with Solomon's (2013) assertion that libraries must interact with people through social media, or they risk becoming irrelevant (p. 9). Additional findings related to fostering human connections and meaningful engagement through social media are provided in .

III.F. Ambiguous Duties

As seen in the previous section, social media work often incorporates multiple responsibilities, e.g., managing both incoming and outgoing communication. However, participants noted a variety of responsibilities spanning beyond communications, demonstrating a lack of consensus around the role of a social media manager. Of the 25 responsibilities captured in Table 9, seven were mentioned by all interviewees: consultations/meetings, creating posts, promotion/advertising/marketing, researching content, scheduling posts, supervisory or coordination tasks, and writing.

Table 9

Job Responsibilities by Participant

Duties	Anna	Brock	Dee	Eleanor	Elle	Gwen	Jay	Kay
Budgeting	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	No	No
Community relationships	No	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes
Consultations, meetings	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes
Creating posts	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes
Customer service	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	No	Yes
Email, eNewsletters	Yes	Yes	No	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes
Event planning, management	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	No
Fundraising	No	Yes	No	No	Yes	No	Yes	Yes
Graphic Design	Yes	No	No	No	Yes	Yes	No	No

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Duties	Anna	Brock	Dee	Eleanor	Elle	Gwen	Jay	Kay
PR and media relations	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	No
Photography	Yes	No	No	Yes	Yes	No	No	Yes
Print publications	No	Yes	No	No	Yes	Yes	Yes	No
Project management	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	No	No
Promotion, advertising, marketing	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes
Public educator	Yes	No	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes
Reporting, analytics	No	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	No	Yes
Researching content	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes
Scheduling posts	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes
Signage	Yes	Yes	No	No	No	No	No	No
Strategy work	No	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes
Supervisory or coordination tasks	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes
Videography	Yes	No	No	No	Yes	No	No	No
Web development and upkeep	Yes	Yes	No	Yes	Yes	Yes	No	No
Work responsibilities outside SM	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	No
Writing	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes

Some of the duties were neither the primary responsibility of the coded interviewee nor typically associated with social media work at all. For example, both Eleanor and Elle worked with other photographers at their institutions but described instances in which they took their own photographs (via their smartphones) and posted those images on social media. Eleanor disclosed:

> One of my biggest points of tension is the photography team. One of them in particular, because she does not see social media as important. And so when I need a really nice image that I cannot get on my iPhone, and I ask for it, I really have to fight to show her that it's important. Which is really disappointing. She's come around a little bit now that

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she's seeing the traction that post can get and how important it is that [photographs] look nice on there. (Eleanor, 20)

Elle's off-the-cuff Snapchat post became her institution's most liked photo:

Being in the museum, especially before the pandemic, everyday you can walk around and find inspiration for your next post. You can apply things that are popular in the real world that are really only popular for a day. Like when that Snapchat filter that made you look like the opposite gender was really popular for three days – I was walking around the museum and saw we had a [bust of] George Washington...I did the filter on him and it got 500 likes. It was our most liked photo. (Elle, 21)

Likewise, Jay and Dee were not the primary event planners or managers for their institutions.

Yet Jay connected with musicians to develop livestream music events:

We did a show a few years ago, and in the show an artist had created a lobby of a motel...I thought, 'What if we invite musicians in and do streaming concerts from this little space and it looked like you're performing inside of a motel?' So we did this whole series with local and regional musicians...That's exactly the kind of content that we're doing now. (Jay, 20)

Similarly, Dee reached out to authors via Twitter to invite them to host the finale of her library's

virtual book festival:

The only Facebook Live Stream we did was when we had [two authors] as our finale for [a large annual event]. I will tell you that the reason we got those two very big name authors for free is because of Twitter. They're Twitter pals of ours...and so I DMed them. And I'm like, 'Is there any chance?' And they're like, 'Of course!' I said, 'Our budget is $200.' And they're like, 'I'm not going to charge you!' (Dee, 21)

In the same vein, participants also found themselves doing the work of multiple

employees. Elle explained:

Any issues that we run into, it's because I'm not an octopus. I [only] have two hands...If I could magically split into three people – like a person who's strategizing, a person who's managing our website, and a person who's managing social media – that would be great. But I can't, and [the museum's Executive Director] knows we don't have the bandwidth or the resources to hire anybody else. So I'm all she's got. (Elle, 20)

Anna (20) offered a similar take, "My job at the [Museum] is much broader than just social

media. Because there's only one communications person. So I do everything from social media,

which is pretty much people's idea of this, to marketing, graphic design, and advertising." This

becomes particularly disconcerting when evaluating social media manager salaries, which are

markedly lower than average copywriter, marketing manager, and ad manager salaries (Rainbow,

2020). Furthermore, Eleanor, as discussed in C4.III.A, wasn't even aware social media work

would be part of her responsibilities:

> I think some of us...were just dropped into it. I didn't know that my job was going to have
> social media in it. That was never what I set out to do. I think some institutions have very
> small staffs, [so] you take on a lot. And if you're interested in the marketing role, then
> you have to do social. Or [if] you wanted to do PR, which is what I wanted to do, and
> what my job title only said, then I also [need to] do social. (Eleanor, 20)

Elle (20) also relayed feelings of role ambiguity, recollecting, "I found myself running all

museum communication by myself four months in. I barely had any idea what I was doing. I

barely knew anybody who I worked with." Jay (21) summed up this phenomenon by noting, "I

think a lot of times, especially [for] smaller nonprofits who don't really have resources...you'll

have someone with five different positions, and one of their [responsibilities] is handling social

media."

On the other hand, Dee (20) expressed skepticism that social media work could take up a

full-time position, remarking:

> I know there are people that [have social media] as their job. But I find that baffling. I
> guess it's a juxtaposition in my mind...I find Twitter important, but the concept of social
> media doesn't seem important enough to me to have an actual job. (Dee, 20)

When prompted to share more of her thoughts, however, Dee described the potential advantages

of devoting more time to social media:

> If I was able to spend 40 hours a week doing Twitter, we would have a lot more followers
> than we do. Because that takes effort. You have to go seek out [and] make connections
> with new gene pools to get new followers. And that takes time. People on Twitter aren't
> stupid. And so they know if you're trying to manipulate them into following
> you...mak[ing] it a genuine connection that's worth actually following someone takes
> time, it takes effort, it takes thought. (Dee, 20)

Dee's evolving thoughts mirror one of the most common misconceptions participants shared

about performing social media work – that it is easy and fast.

In fact, Dee further elaborated on the difficulty of social media work in her 2021

interview, "I think most people think Tweeting is pretty easy...[but if] there's some actual

message you want and/or need to convey...it actually takes a long time." She went on to note, "I

would say the only thing that people might be surprised at [about social media work] is how

much time I spent on it" (Dee, 21). This sentiment was shared by many participants, including

Anna, Eleanor, Elle, and Kay. Eleanor shared her intern's presentation on this issue:

> My intern gave a great presentation for his final presentation. And he was like, 'You guys
> have no idea what goes on behind the scenes and how much work it is.' It's a days-long
> process to put together a draft of content, get your edits back, make your edits, schedule
> them, get the schedules approved, and then it goes live. So he was like, 'You guys have
> no idea.' (Eleanor, 21)

Anna, Elle, and Kay also detailed all the minutiae necessary for each post, discussed further in

C4.IV.E. Additionally, C4.IV.B.1 provides a table of the amount of time each interviewee

reported working in general.

III.G. Summary of Plot Twists

Just as plot twists represent unanticipated and paradoxical events in stories, participants

described navigating unexpected career paths as well as inconsistent and ambiguous work

responsibilities. As a unique career line is often cited as a necessary component of

professionalization (Mariner, 1969), the interviewees' idiosyncratic career paths (see C4.III.A)

may offer one reason why social media management is not perceived as a professional

occupation. Additionally, these participants may make up the last cohort of practitioners who had

not intended to become social media managers, as the popularity and desire for related jobs has

increased exponentially over the past decade. Other paradoxes included the disparity between

informal hiring processes (see C4.III.B) and formal bureaucratic working conditions (see

C4.III.C), as well as facing dismissed expertise (see C4.III.D) and ambiguous duties (see

C4.III.F). This lack of authority points to yet another paradox: even though practitioners may not

be respected for their work, they perform the role of virtually embodying their institution.

IV: Method Acting: Embodying an Institution and Producing Content

Method actors "become the character itself" and live as their role even when not on set

(Eken, 2019). Performers who follow the method acting technique "bring their inner experiences

to the character, action, and emotion being portrayed, submerging themselves in the

character...Thus, the audience does not see the performer playing a character; they see only the

character" (Denzin, 1997, p. 98), Likewise, participants expressed a need to become fully

embedded and live inside social media (see C4.IV.A). Just as method acting is criticized for

being inefficient and psychologically damaging (Fearnow, 2005), interviewees shared how this

embeddedness often led to stress, burnout, and overwork (see C4.IV.B). This experience is

exemplified by Elle's reflection:

> Since I was already having to work more than 40 hours, I'd work late into the night...it
> was a lot...It feels like I'm on display all the time...People know it's me or they know it's
> [the Museum] and I feel like I am [the Museum]...[It's] the nature of constantly having
> thousands of people look at you all the time, it got really rough. (Elle, 21)

The following section further details how participants described themselves as the public voice

of their organization, blurring the distinction between the individual and the institution (see

C4.IV.C) and notes the importance of recognizing the people behind the accounts (see C4.IV.D).

Additionally, this section shares how interviewees accomplish their work by outlining their

content creation process (see C4.IV.E).

IV.A. Living Inside Social Media

Six participants (Dee, Eleanor, Elle, Gwen, Jay, and Kay) described a need to become

embedded within social media culture and conversations in order to perform their work well.

Some saw this as a positive, interesting, and even fun part of their job. Alternatively, it was deemed emotionally and mentally draining.

When asked why he has stayed in his position for over a decade, Jay highlighted the non-stop intellectual challenge of social media work, calling himself a "culture vulture:"

> I think in some ways it was luck, just falling into the right thing. But [I also had] that eye for what the right content is. And the other side [to that] is being a culture vulture and consuming things all the time and always knowing enough about the world, whether it's the world of culture, or politics, or sports, or any kind of just culture writ large, to where you can always view the world through the lens of the institution and make connections. So you can always find something about yourself – or the institution rather – that drives collection connections to bring relevance and contemporize yourself a little bit. And so having those two things. And when you do that, it's always new, because the culture is always changing. And the world is always changing. So you don't really get bored, ever. I think that's probably why it's been fun and an engaging journey. (Jay, 21)

Jay's linguistic catch – using "yourself" instead of "the institution" – highlights this merging between the personal and professional. Eleanor, Elle, and Kay shared similar thoughts, with Elle (20) musing that the people best suited to social media work experience role congruity and "are like me, [they] love interacting with people and staying up-to-date and current with what's going on in the world." Correspondingly, Eleanor (20) reflected, "I'm definitely plugged into all the conversations so I can react to stuff really quickly. I consider myself pretty creative and funny. So I can switch a meme format into something that's relatable to the art museum." Returning to the same metaphor of being "plugged in" later, however, Eleanor acknowledged her role engulfment:

> Not only are we underpaid, but I would say our mental health suffers so much because we cannot unplug. We can't look away from what's happening. There's no break. On the PR side as well, it's all connected. And I'm reading all the news. I'm looking at Twitter all the time. And right now there's not a single happy thing in sight. (Eleanor, 20)

Kay shared a similar perspective:

> There's just so much on social media that it can really become draining. There's just so much stuff on there. And so much negative stuff that sometimes you just want to be off.

And for my job, I feel like I do have to stay up on trends, social media trends. So that's not as fun – but sometimes it's fun. (Kay, 21)

One "fun" aspect – as noted by Anna, Dee, Eleanor, and Jay – is participating in museum or library trends. This included account takeovers (Jay), creating collaborative book lists (Dee), and participating in memes, such as the Getty Challenge (Anna and Eleanor). Social media use is pleasurable for a reason – it's designed to grab and keep our attention to maximize profits (Horgan, 2021, p. 91). Moreover, more people are engaging digitally with cultural entities now than they were prior to – or even during the initial states of – the COVID-19 pandemic (Dilenschneider, 2021). The need to continuously participate on social media while also passively consuming content understandably led most participants to disclose feelings associated with stress, overwork, and burnout.

IV.B. Stress, Burnout, and Overwork

The majority of participants shared feelings of stress from their jobs during their interviews. Simply stated, "it's really stressful" (Anna, 20), "it gets stressful" (Elle, 20), and "it's been a really stressful year and a half" (Gwen, 21). In all, 5 participants (Anna, Brock, Elle, Gwen, and Jay) specifically used the word "stress" in their interviews. While none provided a specific definition of stress, Anna (21) reflected that social media managers "are super stressed all the time" because they experience "so many pulls on their attention." Jay (21) acknowledged overcoming stress, reflecting "the sheer amount of content and stuff we were able to do under really strange circumstances and stress and fear and all those things. I'm pretty proud of that." Unfortunately, the negative effects of a stressful and excessive workload include exhaustion and burnout (Dowd, 2020).

IV.B.1. (Over)Working Hours.

Table 10 outlines participants' reflections on the amount of time they spent working.

Table 10

Time Spent Working

Participant	Response
Anna	"[Social media is] a lot more time consuming [since COVID-19]…I feel like I'm never caught up." (Anna, 20)
	"Yeah, definitely for most of the pandemic [I've worked more than office hours]. I've hit a pretty big wall lately, to be honest. So I think my hours now are just massively stretched out." (Anna, 21)
Brock	"Normally, before [the COVID-19 pandemic] started, I worked between 40 and 45 hours a week. Now it's more like 20, because about half of my day is spent taking care of [my] kids." (Brock, 20)
	"[COVID-19] has forced me to reduce my working hours in order to deal with childcare." (Brock, 21)
Dee	"I'm supposed to work 40 [hours]. Probably if you add Twitter in, it's…more like 45ish." (Dee, 20)
	"I have a reminder that pops me every Saturday that says, 'Check for new tweeting.'" (Dee, 21)
Eleanor	"A gazillion. Every hour…during quarantine, [social media] definitely takes up much more of my time. And is the least favorite part of my job." (Eleanor, 20)
	"In June [2021], I was working like 60-65-hour weeks…I think the hours [have] shifted. And then when you're [working from] home, you're like, 'Okay, I guess I'll just look at Twitter and the museum's Twitter and address whatever is there now.' So that's a bad habit of mine. Not a good boundary." (Eleanor, 21)
Elle	"Before coronavirus, it was like 50 hours a week…[now it's] like 55-60 hours a week." (Elle, 20)
	"I'm working 37 to 40 hours. Maybe don't tell everybody. But I learned how to be very efficient when I was managing everything by myself." (Elle, 21)
Gwen	"I'm much more involved with [disseminating information]. So that's changed a lot. In fact, I've spent a whole lot more time with program promotion than I was…So it's felt like more time." (Gwen, 20)
	"I have always done an awful lot. And more than what was asked." (Gwen, 21)
Jay	"Pretty much from when I wake up to when I go to sleep, you know. Not all the time, but I mean, I'm checking back in to see what's happening pretty much all day." (Jay, 20)
	"I work all the time. So I don't really think about it like that. I'm like that. I kind of view life as work and I don't really see much delineation there." (Jay, 21)
Kay	"I will check in if I get an urgent message on a Saturday or Sunday, that's fine. But I think that that is a personal call, I would not expect any other social media manager to have that or want to do that." (Kay, 20)
	"I try to be done by five. Sometimes I'm not." (Kay, 21)

All but one participant (Brock) reported working more than and/or outside of standard office

hours, particularly since the pandemic started. Brock explained this role malintegration occurred

"because about half of my day is spent taking care of [my] kids." Later in the same interview, he

reflected:

> Before all of this started, I was one of those people who was very strict about leaving
> work at work. And when I came home, I'm home, and never the twain shall meet. And I
> would not check my email very [often] from home or on weekends. And that was
> something that took years for me to get to that point. Now, I can't do that because home
> is work and work is home and it just never stops. (Brock, 20)

> Of the other interviewees, most described working additional hours with some, like Jay

and Eleanor, never stepping away from their account feeds. Increased social media reliance

during the pandemic (Statista, 2020c), combined with "the rapid-fire nature of the 24/7 news

cycle, has dissolved any sense of the traditional workday" for social media managers (Rainbow,

2020). Elle – whose total hours spent working for her museum fit between Kay's and Jay's –

described her typical schedule:

> My day starts at seven, whenever I'm on my phone when I wake up in bed and I'm doing
> social listening, looking at what everybody's saying about us, looking at what people
> have commented on our posts overnight. And then it ends [at] six or seven in the evening.
> And then on the weekends, I still find myself – because recently I haven't had time to
> schedule our weekend posts [and] we've been getting submissions from artists that come
> in on Friday – and I'm dealing with them on Saturday and getting them posted on
> Sunday. So it is probably 55 to 60 hours a week. (Elle, 20)

After changing jobs, Elle reported a better work/life balance:

> So now I'm working 37 to 40 hours. Maybe don't tell everybody. But I learned how to be
> very efficient when I was managing everything by myself. And now that I have a team to
> support me...I find myself having finished my entire to-do list by two o'clock. (Elle, 21)

Interestingly, Elle noted that the museum now outsources her previous responsibilities to a PR

firm, who use three employees to do all the work she did:

> It makes me feel like I really was doing as much as I thought I was, because it takes three
> people on their team to keep it together. And I've heard from a lot of people that their
> communications are lacking. And I've heard, internally, that people have had to pick up

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slack that the PR firm isn't handling. So I feel good. And I work with that PR firm in my new job as well. So it's interesting to hear some of the stories. (Elle, 21)

Moreover, Elle was willing to stay at the museum and had asked her supervisor to match the $50,000 salary offer from her new position, but was rebuked. The museum now spends exponentially more than her requested salary increase with the outsourced firm, paying "almost my yearly salary per month to them. So they're hemorrhaging money...they were getting a great deal with me" (Elle, 21). Elle's role overload, competing priorities, and lack of support led to a more insidious issue: burnout.

IV.B.2. Burnout.

Burnout is a psychosocial experience associated with motivation, performance, and psychological difficulties and includes emotional exhaustion, cynicism, and reduced feelings of professional competence or accomplishment (Hill & Curran, 2016, p. 269). Anna, Brock, Eleanor, Elle, and Kay described experiencing the reduced mental capabilities associated with burnout. This aligns with a recent survey of American workers, where more than half of respondents reported experiencing burnout in 2021 (Threlkeld, 2021). Eleanor (21) noted, "There are the catatonic days where you're like, I still gotta get through it."

Kay further explained creating role distance because of role engulfment, "generally, social media can be really draining. It's really easy to burn out on this work." The following year, she described what burnout felt like, "I feel like my brain doesn't work as well right now. And so it's taking me the same amount of time to get stuff done or [even] longer" (Kay, 21). Anna provided additional detail:

> For me anyway, [burnout's] like a fog. Or like a jet lag feeling. I know what I need to do cognizantly in my mind, but the energy and the wherewithal is not there. It takes me longer to do things, even if they're smaller things. The mental gear up to write this paper [or] do this post takes way longer than it used to. And it's not enough anymore to use my old tricks...usually, [I] would go outside and play with the dog for 10 minutes, or go take a quick walk, or make a cup of tea. And those just don't cut it anymore. Without knowing

how to make it better – other than time off, I suppose. Which is a double-edged sword, because there's more work that goes into it. If you're going to take a vacation, it's a bit of a headache to be gone. You have to plan and account for it when you get back. So it's really hard to take time away, still be present when you're doing the time away, and then not feel just as overloaded when you come back. (Anna, 21)

Anna's description reflects a prevalent framing of burnout as a personal problem which places culpability on individuals and shifts blame away from larger systems that create untenable demands. This sentiment is mirrored in Sutherland's (2021) recent textbook for strategic social media management. Her text provides many "self-care strategies" for social media managers, including regular breaks, setting up out-of-office automatic email responses, and adopting healthy sleep habits (Sutherland, 2021, pp. 398-400). Yet historically, the only real catalyst for change in working conditions has come from collective organization (Horgan, 2021, p. 27) – though this is not mentioned among Sutherland's (2021) three-page list of strategies. The impact of collective organization continues today, as "Cultural workers who were part of unions were more protected from [pandemic-related] workforce reductions, with unionized workers experiencing 28% fewer reductions on average than nonunion workers" (AFSCME, 2021, p. 3). Moreover, research indicates a rise in competitive environments and unrealistic expectations in the U.S. corresponds with increased socially prescribed perfectionism, which ultimately results in burnout (Curran & Hill, 2019; Hill & Curran, 2016).

Even though Dee specified she had not experience burnout from her social media duties, her experience taking time off – even before the increased strain of the pandemic – reflected Anna's thoughts:

Honestly, I haven't [experienced burnout]. [However,] I went to Europe in the fall of 2018. And before I left, I figured out the time difference so I would know when to Tweet for [Library] at the right time in [state] compared to where I was. I'm obsessed...I would say the fact that [social media is] not all that I do is helpful for that...I could totally see that getting on your nerves. (Dee, 20)

Dee was not allowed to continue Tweeting during the two weeks she was furloughed in the time

between our two interviews:

> I had to go on furlough for two weeks and I was not allowed to Tweet. And trust me, I asked. And I was like, 'We cannot let our Twitter die for a week, we just can't do it. It will be dead when I get back.' And so one of my colleagues (who is probably the most involved in Twitter, after me, on our staff and is very creative) I trusted her implicitly to do it, took it over for those two weeks. And the fact that I had [the posts] all scheduled out meant it was a lot easier for her to work [Twitter] into her schedule. It was a burden, but it wasn't a humongous burden. We actually had multiple conversations about how this is gonna go. And I pre-wrote tweets, put them in that calendar, so that she would have access to them. Made templates, that kind of stuff. So I pre-did as much as I could. But if...I had just handed her that schedule, she could have figured that out. (Dee, 21)

Dee recognized her coworker was capable of managing her library's Twitter account with

minimal support, but she still felt compelled to perform extra duties (i.e., pre-writing posts and

making templates). This desire to maintain consistency was also echoed by Gwen, Kay, and Jay,

particularly in their discussions of their accounts' voice and tone, further described next.

IV.C. Being *"The Voice of the Entire Organization"*

Interviewees described the voice they use on social media as respectable, fun, casual, and

informative (see Table 11). Furthermore, participants described their role being a, if not the,

primary, voice of their institution. Five of the interviewees described their own voice as the same

as their organization's, further merging the personal and the professional. Participants also used

similar words to describe the voice they used: positive, upbeat, and smart – but also

approachable.

Table 11

Descriptions of Voice & Tone

Descriptor	Prevalence	Example
Fun, light-hearted	5: Anna, Dee, Eleanor, Elle, Jay, Kay	"Interesting, playful, somewhat irreverent but never crossing the line. And we always just call it smart fun...it never feels elite or heady." (Jay, 20)
Respectable, conscientious, clear	4: Brock, Dee, Gwen, Kay	"...we're representing an organization that takes itself very seriously and has a certain aura of respectability. And so everything needs to be free of grammatical errors." (Brock, 20)
Casual, easy-to-understand	4: Anna, Eleanor, Elle, Jay	"...casual but informative and helpful...but not making the museum seem too uppity that normal people won't want to go visit." (Elle, 20)
Informative, educational	3: Eleanor, Elle, Jay	"...informative, but approachable, and educational, fun and all of that." (Eleanor, 20)

Elle, Eleanor, Kay, Brock, and Jay characterized their role as a voice of their organization. Elle (20) simply stated, "my job is being the brand voice." Eleanor offered further details when discussing her thoughts on using social media to further her museum's educational mission:

> You are the public voice. And whatever is on social [media] is what people are seeing, what they're going to learn about. So there's definitely a big education tangent. All of the content you're choosing is what you're choosing to educate your followers about that day. (Eleanor, 21)

Kay provided additional thoughts on how social media reaches a larger audience than other media and her ability to speak publicly for her library:

> [Social media is] a really important way to talk to students and to talk to your patrons. Just because they're not getting a brochure. They're not like reading a paper magazine that we're sending them in the mail. They're all online. And it feels like a really valid way to connect with people in a way that's easy. It's low pressure. And it's comfortable for where most people are already at...I'm able to speak for the library [in a] really public way. And I do work hard to make sure that I am communicating our values and communicating our priorities. (Kay, 21)

Similarly, Jay specified that social media work notably impacts organizations and increased

recognition of this will provoke a reassessment of current practices, particularly salary:

> [I]n some ways, you become the voice of the entire organization. So in terms of who's
> impacting the place on a day to day basis...if you want to really wait it out and see who's
> really informing the reputation and the overall sense of that space. And you did that and
> you base it on how much money the person makes versus their impact? You will
> probably start to see some of those things change. I think it is going to take a general
> reassessment in the industry over time...Most museum directors are still in their fifties,
> sixties even. They did not grow up in this kind of news, new media, social media space.
> But I would say 10 years from now, 15 years from now, you're going to really start to see
> things change. (Jay, 20)

What's more, in 2021, Jay identified the difficulty of developing a standardized voice and its

relationship to his own:

> One thing that we've tried to figure out is how to systemize or standardize tone of voice,
> which is very difficult to do. Because candidly, the tone of voice of our social media, for
> the most part, is my tone of voice through default, because I started it that way. (Jay, 21)

> Dee, Eleanor, and Elle also spoke of the merging between their own voice and that of

their institutions. When prompted to describe the voice she uses, Elle (20) answered, "my social

voice is very similar to my voice, actually. It's nice. That's why I took the job in the first place."

Brock (20), Eleanor (21), and Dee (21) agreed, with the latter noting, "as much as I might want

to maintain the illusion that the tweets are coming from a building, they're coming from me." In

discussing his ongoing weekly conversations with his team, Brock shared:

> There's been articles that we've shared in our group that inform our thinking a lot about
> how to have an authentic voice on social media and a personality. Because I think that's
> really important – for people to see that there are actually human beings doing this and
> that they're just like you. (Brock, 21)

While no participant specifically noted a need to change their voice to fit that of their

institution's, Anna mentioned feeling limited in her ability to discuss matters she found

personally important:

> "I don't hate the idea of social media, but it drains me the way that we do it. And I think
> the way that a lot of places have to do it because of institutional messaging [is]

limit[ing]...if I had more free rein, or the messages that I was imparting had some impact on awareness of climate issues, or letting people know that fracking was going to happen in their backyard...that would feel less contentious." (Anna, 21)

This constraint may have also contributed towards Anna's burnout (discussed previously in C4.IV.B.2), as the interconnectedness between participant and institutional voices make it difficult – if not impossible – for practitioners to separate themselves from their organizations. As such, focusing on what people do at their cultural institutions – rather than "what an inanimate building offers" – recognizes the human effort, creativity, and innovation behind social media work (Kelly et al., 2021, p. 5).

IV.D. Human-ness: Meaningful Engagement, Values & Identity

Like Brock's (21) quote above, all participants emphasized the importance of recognizing the person behind the screen – both social media workers and users. This included the influence of personal values and identity on their work as well as their choice to reveal (or conceal) their real names.

IV.D.1. Meaningful Engagement with Others.

All participants emphasized the personhood of social media managers and community members – particularly when asked to define meaningful engagement. Brock reflected:

Meaningful engagement is where the person behind the social media account connects with the real person out there behind their individual account. Where there's an actual exchange of human-to-human communication, and it's not you acting as the official organ of the organization. Where the mask comes off a little bit, and it's like, actual people work here. And we are just like you. (Brock, 21)

As mentioned in C4.III.E, Jay (21) underscored the use of social media to build connections with community members, as "it's not a bulletin board, it's a conversation," later adding meaningful engagement occurs "if we can make connections and make people feel welcome here, but also live up to our values and have a sense of identity." However, some participants reported difficulty with building personal connections and rapport. Anna pointed out:

My favorite kind of engagement is when someone actually responds with their own feelings or thoughts about something. But that's harder to prompt, even when we ask questions with our posts or [use] call to actions within the posts...But it's really rare that we'll get the type of response that I value, which is a deeper connection. (Anna, 21)

Responding to why her account also rarely received responses from users, Kay (21)

mused, "They don't think it's a real person behind here." Similarly, Dee (21) remarked, "I think

a lot of people are surprised that they actually get to have a conversation with us," later

elaborating:

I think [people] are surprised that they get to have a conversation with an account that has [thousands of] followers...So as far as meaningful, that's the definition, in my opinion. How important is it to me? It's very important – that that's why we do this. A lot of people wouldn't probably concur. But I see this as another library service. The point of a library is to provide information, it's to provide entertainment, it's to provide education. And that happens in a variety of ways. It might be the books on the shelf, it might be the databases on the website, it might be the storytime, or the author visit, or whatever. And in my opinion, [Twitter] is just another way of doing that. And so the fact that people are engaged enough to have a back-and-forth is very important. And if I didn't feel that way, I wouldn't be doing this. (Dee, 21)

Gwen shared Dee's emphasis on human interactions:

To do the work that I do, I think you have to genuinely be interested in people. You have to be able to be empathetic...I do find myself bristling when communicators take out the human element...I find them off-putting, alienating, and depending on who you're talking to, [it] can be incredibly intimidating. (Gwen, 20)

Participants' comments reflect prior research on meaningful engagement as not simply

"sending lots of messages" but constituting purposeful, strategic, and qualitative interactions

including (but not limited to) reflection, relationship-building, active construction of

individualized knowledge, and collaboration (Garrison & Cleveland-Innes, 2005, p. 144; Heath

et al., 2012, p. 2). One process of facilitating these interactions is design thinking, discussed later

in C4.IV.E.4.iii.

IV.D.2. Values & Influences.

Participants' personal values and beliefs also influenced their work. Most notably, Brock,

Dee, Elle, Gwen, and Kay referenced personal values as a reason why they work at their cultural

institutions – most particularly a mission that serves the public. Brock explained:

> I love working for a university [library]. I mean, it's a nonprofit, even though
> [University] is a more profitable nonprofit than some. There's a real sense of
> mission...And you know, that's one of the reasons I like working in a library in particular.
> We have a very democratic mission that is helping the common good and is all about
> giving things away for free. (Brock, 20)

Elle concurred:

> Working for a museum – you're not trying to sell anybody something they don't need.
> You're just promoting art. Because art has so many beneficial qualities. And since it's a
> nonprofit, I'm just trying to help people help themselves...I'm passionate again about
> advertising this museum that is awesome. It's beneficial to everybody in the community.
> (Elle, 20)

Elle felt similarly about the alignment between her personal values and her new job at the city

tourism board, even though it was a public-private partnership:

> I think by continuing to bring more eyes on [my city] and have people watch us, our city
> is going to behave better, or we're going to bring people in...And people won't choose to
> live here if they don't want to even come here on vacation. So bringing more people into
> the city to elect some different officials who would prioritize different things. I feel like
> what I'm doing will help me feel better about this place, because I really do love it...it
> could be improved if we didn't drive away young people as much as we do. (Elle, 21)

Gwen (20) felt similarly about working for a library, "I work for a public institution committed

to freedom of information, and empowering those around them by sharing information...I think

it's a really good fit for who I am." As Kay (20) remarked succinctly, "If I don't believe in the

mission of the group, I don't want to do it."

Moreover, all participants shared a belief that their social media work aligns with the

mission of their institution – excluding Anna. Anna (20) responded "No. I will say it's getting

better, though," when prompted (see C4.V.A for more). Specific connections between the types

of content participants created and institutional missions are further outlined in C4.IV.E.4.i.

Participants' descriptions of the alignment between their personal and professional values

demonstrate Horgan's (2021) discussion of work and identity, as "Work is tied up with our

identities and our everyday lives in profound ways. We are encouraged to love our jobs and live

the 'values' of the companies we work for" (p. 13). Moreover, "work becomes the only avenue

for self-development, respect and fulfillment" possible under capitalism (Horgan, 2021, p. 13).

This also corresponds with vocational awe, as organizations are able to evaluate (and reward)

passion versus the completion of job responsibilities (Ettarh, 2018).

IV.D.3. Identity Influences.

All participants recognized one or more aspects of their positionality and how it

influenced their work. When asked about this influence in 2021, Kay replied:

> A lot of the stuff I pull from archival collections are [things] I personally find interesting,
> or that I personally think should be important...I prioritize archival collections that have a
> social justice or subversive element to it, but also aren't [featuring] white slaveholders,
> which is a lot of our collections. I definitely think my identity, and my interests, really
> make me push things that I think are important for our library to be pushing. (Kay, 21)

In another example, Kay proposed a new Asian American archive when describing the new work

she took on as she moved from part- to full-time in 2020:

> I wanted to submit a new project idea about having an Asian American archive,
> specifically [dealing] with student experience. And my supervisor was totally down.
> [She] was like, 'Yeah, just let me know what I need to do to help you do it.' (Kay, 21)

Anna, Eleanor, Elle, and Brock further explained how their gender identity impacts their work.

When asked why she continues doing social media work at the museum when she dislikes it,

Anna responded:

> Maybe this is [a] feminine stereotype thing, too – someone has to do it. I'll do the
> emotional labor. If I don't do it, no one else will at the [Museum], for sure. Also, I said I
> would do it. So I'm gonna do it. (Anna, 21)

Additionally, all interview data coded as dismissed expertise (see C4.III.D) came from women.

Eleanor also described how her lack of negotiation followed gendered patterns:

> I was just so desperate for a job to move away from Nashville and get here that I didn't really negotiate. And then once my position moved from foundation to the state, I could not negotiate because it was [the] state. And I think sometimes that happens. Women don't negotiate. We don't know how. Women are punished for negotiating. (Eleanor, 20)

Elle explained the ways she presented herself to "keep up with the boys" and seem older after experiencing problems with her museum's curator of history:

> I think [me] being a young girl, [the curator of history] didn't really take me seriously. I've had to work to make sure that people treat me with the respect that I deserve. So I present myself very formally. I always wear heels to make sure that when I'm going into meetings, I'm about as tall as all the men who are going to be in the room. So I've taken certain steps [with] my identity to keep up with the boys. (Elle, 21)

On the other hand, Brock identified areas of his male privilege:

> I've probably had an easier time in my career and have not had to deal with a lot of the same issues that a woman in my position would have to deal with. I can give you a real specific example, which is when our kids were born. I was able to take plenty of time off, but didn't have to count it as family leave. I could just count it as sick time. I'm probably earning more than a lot of my female counterparts. Just because everybody knows that's a thing. (Brock, 20)

Interestingly, Brock was the only participant who listed his real name publicly as the author of social media content (in his library's Twitter bio). He explained:

> I think it's important to identify who you are on behalf of the organization. It keeps you accountable, for one thing. And if something came up, people would know that the buck stops with me. You know, if an issue arose. It makes it just a little bit more personal to know that there's a human with a name, and they're the one managing this account. (Brock, 21)

Conversely, Eleanor asked everyone associated with content posted publicly online – including museum educators and teachers – to remove personally identifying information and make their own social media accounts private after receiving death threats. Eleanor recalled:

> Trump just ushered in this – people are so angry now. And then it bleeds into everything they do and comment on, including museum social media...We put critical race theory on our education site [connected to a Kehinde Wiley painting], and that got a dustup in the

media...we were getting all of these calls and emails, police had to get involved. We got some death threats, I hate getting those in my inbox. [The email writers were] threatening to burn down the museum...it was bad in 2018. But it was not as bad as it is now. (Eleanor, 21)

She later continued:

I had to have the teacher whose name was on the critical race theory lesson, I was afraid they were gonna go after her. And I am used to this kind of stuff now. So it bothers me to a certain extent, but I don't want her having to go through that. So I was like, 'You need to make your social media private, we're going to take your email off the website for now...just kind of close down people's access to you at the moment, until this blows over. And then we can add it back.' And we did it for the rest of the education team, too...[saying], 'Don't be mentioning this, don't be engaging in it, keep it private, if you start feeling unsafe'...I don't think I would want people to know [my real name].

Kay offered similar feelings:

I feel like – especially right now with how intense people have been, essentially I'm afraid of people who are super right-wing being like, 'Oh, you have some who-ha whatever person writing your account. So this is just weird liberal agenda stuff and they need to be fired.' Which is definitely a thing [especially for] critical race. It just feels like if I had my name on there, and had my own professional Twitter account linked, and then was Tweeting about stuff like [a university anti-racism initiative], I would become more of a target. And I don't want that. I like how anonymous it is. (Kay, 21)

Jay, Eleanor, Elle, and Dee also shared their preference for not disclosing their real names on their accounts, although Dee (21) mentioned "at this point, I can't imagine there are too many people who don't know it's me." Elle (21) professed, "I feel like that's a little egotistical in a way...Like if you want to be popular on social media, then be an influencer." Jay (21), however, was wary of tying the account to a specific person in case they did something damaging to the brand, which would leave the organization "in a lurch if something were to change or happen," citing a recent scandal at Bon Appétit magazine, in which many of their YouTube video personalities left due to racial discrimination.

Gender seemed to influence participants' reasons for choosing whether (or not) to reveal their name as authoring their social media accounts. Brock saw this action as providing accountability. Jay was worried about tying accounts to individuals who could negatively impact

the institution's reputation. On the other hand, Eleanor and Kay feared for their personal safety.

Their fear is not unwarranted. Beyond growing rates of antagonistic social media conversations

happening on branded accounts (Rainbow, 2020), 85% of women worldwide reported witnessing

online harassment and 10% have experienced related offline physical harm (EIU, 2021). In

America, people from traditionally marginalized gender, race, and ethnic backgrounds also

reported higher rates of being targeted for online harassment (Duggan, 2017, p. 5). These harms

also relate back to the psychologically damaging aspects of method acting (Fearnow, 2005), as

social media communicators must stay embedded in unsafe virtual environments for their work.

Moreover, when asked why they thought the majority of social media communicators

identified as women, participants shared different thoughts. Eleanor, Elle, Jay, and Gwen

associated this with the larger number of women in the communication field more generally,

with the latter explaining the field's feminization:

> I think women are socially, culturally taught to communicate more and in a more human-centric way. I think that might explain some of it. I would also say that unfortunately, communicator jobs are moving to being less well-paying...I don't know if it's chicken or egg. But you think about women in these roles, and those jobs are not as high paying. (Gwen, 20)

Similarly, Eleanor (20) responded, "I think that [the gender imbalance] probably has to do with

what the whole communication field looks like...And any field where women are really

dominating in it is underpaid, like teachers, nurses, all of that." Anna incorporated gender

stereotypes into her response as well, but also left room for hope, acknowledging how art can

facilitate change:

> [The] communication aspect in general, women are seen as better communicators or more verbal and expressive. Historically, even though it hasn't been representative, it's not like there's as many African American or female or minority artists as there are actually in the world. We mostly still see the white male ones...but I think art gives people a voice. It grabs people who want to have a voice, [and they] gravitate towards it in some capacity or another, or grow interested in it, or foster other people speaking their

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truth too. I think it has to do with longtime gender roles and traits, but it also is a vehicle for breaking out of those. (Anna, 20)

Jay (20) mused, "I think there's an inherent bias still to being both male and white, unfortunately. And I'm sure that I've benefited from those two things in a privileged way that I don't even realize." Interestingly, he also mentioned that while most of his museum's employees are women, his department is not, "Our communications department, which is seven people, is five men to two women...it's the only department that's balanced out...That it's changed that way over time [from] when I started. I was the only guy." (Jay, 20) The growth of male employees who work on Jay's team also aligns with recent research on hiring by gender, as men tend to hire other men while women do not show a preference (Coffman et al., 2021).

IV.E. Creation Process

Social media managers incorporate a variety of influences into their work, but how do they go about producing content? This section details the platforms, technologies, and tools used by participants; how they use them for particular audiences; and the process of developing posts – especially those that led to popular content. Most applied the design thinking phases to their content creation process, although none described it as such.

IV.E.1. Platforms Used.

Most interviewees managed multiple platforms, as outlined in Table 12, which covers platforms run by two or more participants. Dee and Eleanor specified that other colleagues in their organization managed different institutional channels, noted as "Other" in the table. Eleanor also co-managed a YouTube channel with her museum's curator of education, which is noted as "Self / Other." The most frequently managed platforms described by participants – Facebook, Instagram, and Twitter – represent the top three platforms used by museums and libraries more generally (Aerni & Schegg, 2017, p. 12; OCLC, 2018, p. 4). Even though participants were not

directly prompted to identify the platforms they no longer manage, Brock, Eleanor, Elle, and Jay

volunteered that information, citing Pinterest as their most frequently discontinued platform.

Table 12

Platforms Managed by Participant

Platforms	Anna	Brock	Dee	Eleanor	Elle	Gwen	Jay	Kay
Facebook	Self	Self	Other	Self	Self	Self	Self	Self
Instagram	Self	Self	Other	Self	Self	Self	Self	Self
TikTok				Self	Self			
Twitter	Self	Self	Self	Self	Self	Self	Self	Self
YouTube	Self / Other	Self		Other	Self	Self		Self
Discontinued Platform(s)		Pinterest Tumblr Snapchat		Pinterest Veero	LinkedIn		Pinterest Vine	

Eleanor, Elle, and Jay also described looking into TikTok, a newer video-focused social

media platform launched in its current form in 2018 (Tidy & Smith Galer, 2020), with both

Eleanor and Elle creating new accounts for their organizations. Eleanor (21) disclosed she

"added TikTok, but then because I wasn't in the museum, I didn't really do much with it." When

asked why she decided to set up a TikTok account, Eleanor responded:

> It's essentially inescapable at this point. It's the fastest growing, it has so many people on it, there's a lot of room for creativity there. I think what we lack right now is just the time to do [TikTok videos] consistently. It's a good platform. Plus, that content winds up in a lot of other places. So if you're scrolling Twitter, or Instagram, you will probably stumble on TikTok content, so might as well just grab it. (Eleanor, 21)

Jay, on the other hand, has not yet decided to develop a presence:

> We have thought about engaging TikTok, but I'm not going to do it until we feel like we can do it right, because there are so many museums on there that just don't. They got on there because it was the thing to do. I'd rather have nothing than something lame. (Jay, 21)

In comparison, Elle described her use of the platform as "in development" while her intern builds up content:

> We're working on TikTok, that's in development. So we've got this incognito TikTok [account]. I mean, it's public, everybody can see it. But right now it's called [City] Bucket List while our intern adds content to it, and we build it up to something that then we want to call Visit [City's] TikTok. (Elle, 21)

Additionally, Elle (21) described tapping into TikTok's younger audience as a reason for using the platform, stating "age-wise, we've still got an older following, but I think that's going to change once we're bigger into TikTok."

IV.E.2. Differentiation.

Participants described and differentiated their audiences by social media platform. Some also shared using different amounts and types of content on each. Table 13 details each platform by audience as described by two or more participants.

Table 13

Platform Differentiation

Platform	Audience Description	Prevalence	Example from Interview
Facebook	"Older"	Anna, Eleanor, Elle, Jay, Kay	"You're looking at audiences that are over 50 on Facebook who are interacting the most with different posts." (Elle, 20)
	"Women," "maternal"	Anna, Gwen	"Facebook now skews older, older and more maternal across all our platforms." (Anna, 20)
	"White"	Gwen, Jay	"Facebook skews so much older. And I would say probably whiter." (Jay, 21)
Instagram	Millennials: "Younger [than Facebook]," "20-35," "30-40"	Brock, Eleanor, Jay, Kay	"Instagram tends to be the channel that reaches the youngest audience for us. Everything from undergrads to graduate students in the 20 to 35 age range." (Brock, 21)
TikTok	"Young"	Eleanor, Elle	"TikTok is all the young, very cool people." (Eleanor, 20)
Twitter	"Professional"	Brock, Kay	"A lot of library staff members have their own professional Twitter account...And they do engage with the libraries on social media. So we're talking to our staff." (Kay, 21)

Interestingly, the only differentiations shared by half or more of the participants are Facebook skewing older and Instagram skewing towards millennials. This mirrors social media use by age generally in the United States. Active Facebook users skew older, TikTok users skew younger, and Twitter and Instagram users fall in between (Auxier & Anderson, 2021, p. 5; Statista, 2021).

IV.E.3. Audience & Their Influence.

While participants did not break down further their audiences by platforms, they did provide additional context more generally, detailed in Table 14.

Table 14

Audience Descriptions

Description	Prevalence	Example from Interview
"Adults," "Older people"	Anna, Dee, Eleanor, Elle, Jay, Kay	"I assume it's mostly adults." (Dee, 21)
"Donors"	Brock, Elle, Jay, Kay	"I also think we're talking to potential donors." (Kay, 21)
"Local"	Brock, Dee, Eleanor, Elle, Gwen, Kay	"The local [city] area public that might be interested." (Brock, 21)
Peer institutions	Brock, Dee, Elle, Kay	"We're also talking a lot, especially on Twitter, to other library institutions." (Kay, 21)
"Everyone," General public	Brock, Dee, Elle, Gwen	"Libraries have it really pretty tough when it comes to audiences because they're charged with serving everyone." (Gwen, 20)

Elle expounded on the importance of understanding her audience:

> Knowing your follower base, understanding who's following you, or who you want to be following you, that can help you in all kinds of content. What are these people interested in seeing? What are these people interested in reading? What hashtags are these people following that you can put on your images [so] then they'll find those and love your stuff and follow you? (Elle, 21)

Likewise, Dee described learning what time her audience uses Twitter and posting accordingly:

I found out that [Library]'s followers tend to start to ramp up their activity on Twitter around six a.m. They go pretty steadily upward until about noon, and then they start to fall off. So they're doing [Twitter] at work, essentially, until about five, and then there's a little spike around eight p.m., [another at] 10 p.m., and then it drops off completely until it starts to ramp up again [the next day] around six a.m. So I adjusted my Tweeting plan to not send out that batch of Tweets first thing in the morning, but while I'm eating my breakfast, so that it's later, when hopefully more people will be catching them as they come out. (Dee, 20)

Dee also mentioned the importance of differentiating content, or tailoring the content to fit each platform:

I hate it when people have their Twitter connected to their Instagram. [When] they post something on Instagram, all it says on Twitter is 'I just posted a photo on Instagram'...it doesn't work that way. If you're thoughtful about it, it doesn't work that way...you have to accommodate to how Twitter works. (Dee, 21)

Jay (21) agreed, specifying he is able to post more avant-garde content on Instagram, which he has to tame for his more socially conservative Facebook audience, noting "there's stuff we could do on Instagram that we just would not do on Facebook. We'd see [a] different reaction. Or we might change the wording on something to make it more general." He went on to provide an example:

A few years ago, we posted a pic that was a great photo of [a] same sex couple kissing in the [Museum's] garden...And it was such a big deal that all the local news stations did stories on the fact that we posted this picture. It was like this big thing. And on Facebook, for example, [we] had lots of horrible comments, homophobic comments – and Instagram, for the most part, was not [upset]. (Jay, 21)

On the other hand, Anna and Elle shared they often duplicated content, with Anna (21) confessing, "I mean, Instagram and Facebook, we have a lot of the same mirrored content."

Other participants mentioned how identifying gaps in one's audience can also be helpful. Gwen identified people who prefer Spanish materials to English and people without consistent Internet access as two target audiences who were not previously accommodated. To address this, she began translating posts into Spanish:

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Since we last spoke, I've managed this process [of] getting all of our program information translated into Spanish. So the [program] artwork has changed to include Spanish...I do the balance, which is [anything] about the library, or about services, or about collections. The librarians don't do that. So I do the balance of that artwork. But we're including Spanish as much as we can. (Gwen, 21)

She also developed a weekly printed newsletter for those without steady Internet:

Back in November [2020], we started a print newsletter. We've had an electronic newsletter as long as I've been there. But we realized...a large part of the county is unincorporated, [their] Internet access is iffy. Either it's not there, or it's unaffordable. So I developed a print newsletter that would go out during our curbside service. And then I deliver that to the two food pantries in the county as well as [to] our Department on Aging. And that's also translated, it comes in Spanish and in English. (Gwen, 21)

Eleanor shared Gwen's passion for including people that might otherwise be or feel excluded

from her institution, which is why she devoted effort to making diverse visual content choices

(an example of role taking):

I will say, at least like on my Instagram, I try as hard as I can to make sure that the art and the audiences featured in the photos are very diverse. I don't want to you to have to scroll a lot to see someone that looks like you, or an artist that looks like you. (Eleanor, 20)

Likewise, Kay found her prior experience as a useful jumping-off point for reaching others who

may not be aware of certain library services:

Right when I started my job, I was like, 'I'm going to talk about all this stuff that I didn't know about when I was a student.' [For example]...we have a podcasting studio [where] students can reserve and record their podcast. And immediately after that, we did have students reserve the room – and one Tweeted at us, 'Wow, thank you so much, I had no idea. If this was not Tweeted about, I would have known about it.' (Kay, 21)

Kay's experience aligns with Young and Rossman's (2015) report of higher engagement rates

corresponding to "interesting" and "interested" user-centered content.

IV.E.4. Content Production Process.

In the example above, Kay started her content development process with reviewing topics

she wished she had known about as a student. Developing posts follows a similar procedure

across participants, including the selection of topics, group work, organization/scheduling, and

searching for – or creating – associated visuals. Implicitly, most participants also used design thinking as a framework for their development processes.

IV.E.4.i. Types of Content.

Five participants (Brock, Dee, Jay, Gwen, and Kay) detailed the types of content they produced regularly. Brock (20) focused on three areas: promoting services, garnishing financial and administrative support, and advocating for causes "that we believe in, or that will make the academic world and the library world a better place." Dee (20) similarly delineated a "rule of thirds," for her content, describing:

> A third of our content is specifically about [Library], like our services, events that are going on...whatever it is. The next third is general library-liking people things, like book lists or the top 25 animated films – things that any library would potentially be doing...the last third is community information plus fluff. That [is] just interesting things that I think people [would like] – one of the reasons people are on Twitter is because it's just this random list of weird facts. (Dee, 20)

Alternatively, Jay described a simplified 80/20 ratio of content types:

> Within that 80/20 rule, the 80% of stuff that's planned is what I call prerequisite posting. It's like the stuff you have to talk about, and that's not always the most engaging stuff. The most engaging stuff is the off-the-cuff fun stuff. But you [are] never going to be able to – it's impossible to plan that. Really, because you don't know when you're going to have a fun idea, or a witty comment, or something like that. (Jay, 21)

Gwen and Kay both specified connections between the types of content they create and their institutional missions. Gwen (20) explained, "Any strategic marketing communications plan needs to be based on what the goals and objectives are for the organization." She went on to clarify:

> [The] goals when I first started was to push our collections and our spaces...and our programs. The second strategic plan that I've been involved with is more about community engagement. And so I altered [our social media] to be much more intentional...It was still to promote collections, services, and programs, but we also needed to engage with community partners very actively in social media. (Gwen, 20)

Similarly, Kay (20) connected her work to her library's strategic pillars, noting "our job, via social media, is to communicate those pillars and communicate our frameworks by showing how we do it." She later provided an example:

> One of our pillars is we are committed to student success. So [related] things that I would show would be when classes are engaging with our research and instruction professors...let's say a student is using a 3D printer to make something for their chemistry classes, stuff like that. [I'm] showing how the libraries can support innovation and student success. (Kay, 20)

No participant reported performing regular audience analyses or directly asking users what types of social media content they would like to see. This could indicate practitioners may not be fully considering their end users' needs, further stymieing two-way conversations (Jones & Harvey, 2019, p. 14).

IV.E.4.ii. Content Creation Process.

Even though they stayed "plugged in" to social media culture for inspiration (see C4.IV.A), most (Anna, Brock, Eleanor, Elle, Gwen, Jay) participants described the beginning of their content creation process as brainstorming with colleagues. Gwen and Brock were able to work with new team members when COVID-19-related closures forced some institutions to find non-public-facing responsibilities for staff. Both participants reported enjoying this transition, which also included establishing weekly meetings. Gwen's (21) new team includes a circulation library who is "incredibly great with reviewing my writing," a technology librarian, who is "great because we'll start talking about something and he knows how all the systems work together, and how we can make them, make this idea pan out" and a younger colleague who "serves a very different kind of community" in a second library location. She recalled, "We have really good meetings, and we focus on the work and it's really nice. It's the highlight of my week" (Gwen, 21).

In the same vein, Brock's graphic designer was able to shift from mostly print to social

media work. Additionally, a colleague who worked in development moved into social media as

well. He described their weekly meetings:

> It's just us coming up with what we are going to post this week, or next week, or the
> weeks ahead. We come up with the content, we decide – as a group – what works and
> we'll circulate caption text to each other and say, 'Does this look okay? And edits
> welcome.' And it's been helpful to have two additional people to function as sounding
> boards, who also have good ideas of their own. (Brock, 21)

Jay (21) felt similarly, stating, "I like working with the team I have, we have a very collaborative

group who's very tight."

Besides working with other colleagues, participants described other aspects of organizing

content, most notably through scheduling. Dee (21) reflected, "Organization is key." She

elaborated:

> The Tweeting schedule that I have developed is pretty extensive at this point. That whole
> concept became very obvious that [a schedule] was needed in order to have a coherent
> message, a coherent tone, and to not lose communicating things – things weren't slipping
> through the cracks...That's not to say that I always necessarily adhere to the schedule,
> point-by-point. But the fact that I have [it] as a structure to rely on makes it easier for me
> to do it well, to enjoy it. (Dee, 21)

Brock described his process for deciding what to post and when, which incorporates institutional

content as well as topical information:

> There's always official information that has to go out, especially around the start of the
> semester. What services are going to be available, those types of things. Other times, we
> look at *Chase's Calendar of Events*...it's basically [a] 'what happened on this day in
> history type' publication[3]...you can often find things that have a literary tie-in, or a
> historical tie-in, or something that connects to our collections. And so those are useful for
> when you don't have anything else planned. (Brock, 21)

Kay further described using a calendar for organizing future posts, but also highlighted the

benefits of reviewing previously used content:

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[3] *Chase's Calendar of Events* is published yearly by Rowman & Littlefield.

I usually start with opening up a shared online Excel spreadsheet [which is] essentially a huge calendar of every single post I'm going to make...this spreadsheet has years' worth of social media posts for the libraries. We keep all of that just in case, because I do find it useful to look back and see what we were talking about [and] what are some pieces of content that we could potentially reuse...I will open the front page of the website to see if there are any new events that are coming up that maybe I missed in a Teams message or email. But I will double-check the library's website...to see if there's anything coming up. And if so, I will make sure [it's] in our rotation for social media. (Kay, 21)

Jay also described pre-written and scheduled posts:

We've gotten to a point where every Friday we put out, internally, a schedule of what the following week's social posts will be. That's about an 80/20. It's probably about 80% planned. And we always say 'Well, stuff's gonna come up,' in the culture that we might want to respond to or post about...But it gives you a general idea. (Jay, 21)

Along with writing and scheduling and writing, all participants mentioned time spent researching or creating visuals. Brock (21) explained, "You're looking for imagery that's going to connect, so you've got to come up with the right visuals...you're working with an audience whose attention span is really small. You've only got a really small chance to reach them." Jay (21) described this ability to pair interesting text with the right image as an "editorial eye," sharing, "What you need to do [social media] well is [have] an editorial eye...Knowing what to say in the tightest, most succinct way, and how to find the right image and all those things." Anna summed up her scheduling and visual content review together:

There's a lot more behind-the-scenes process that goes into things...[people] don't see all of the time that goes into searching whatever stupid national holiday it is, and then going through our inefficient FileMaker [database] to find images that might match, and then writing the text. Doing all the behind-the-scenes legwork takes quite a while. (Anna, 20)

McGrath (2020) similarly advocated, "online engagement may seem to happen casually or without much planning, but it is often the product of careful labor, coordination, and development involving multiple parties at an institution" (p. 169).

Furthermore, some participants found their colleagues did not know how much work went into developing social content. Recall Eleanor's difficulty working with her museum's

photographer, described in C4.III.F. Anna, Eleanor, Elle, Gwen, and Kay also recounted

challenges stemming from the lack of timely – or any – relevant information. Kay divulged:

> No one tells you what to write about...I spend hours trying to figure out what's new on the website. What new articles are coming out? What are people working on in the libraries? What are the events? What are some collections I think are cool and [may] interest our patrons or people who follow us online? And so I do all the research for it. I will find the finding aid, I'll download the photos. When we were in-person, I would make appointments in the reading room and digitize stuff that wasn't online so I could put it on social media to let people know we have these collections. A lot of people think I have the information on hand and just write the Tweet, but it's a lot more than that. I try to do my best in terms of figuring out what we have in the libraries [and] what librarians are doing so I can promote it. (Kay, 21)

In order to accomplish all of these tasks, participants used many tools, detailed in Table

15. All participants mentioned using analytics, scheduling/approving content, and video

calls/broadcasting tools. Seven also used eCRM tools for emailed newsletters. Other tools

mentioned by two or more participants included those for internal messaging, graphic design,

front-end web development (i.e., HTML), project management, and storage.

Table 15

Technology Tools Used

Tool Function	Name(s) of Tools	Prevalence	Example
Analytics	Built-in social media tools, Hootsuite, Tweets Map, Google Analytics	Anna, Brock, Dee, Eleanor, Elle, Gwen, Jay, Kay	"In Hootsuite, you can even look at what [content] got negative responses, perceptions. It's neutral, positive, and negative." (Gwen, 21)
Scheduling and Approving Content	Hootsuite, SproutSocial, AgoraPulse, Buffer, Later, Google Spreadsheets, Microsoft Excel, Google Calendar	Anna, Brock, Dee, Eleanor, Elle, Gwen, Jay, Kay	"So fighting with Agora to actually schedule everything. That'd probably be like 30 minutes a day." (Elle, 20)
Video chat and broadcasting	Zoom, Facebook Live, Skype	Anna, Brock, Dee, Eleanor, Elle, Gwen, Jay, Kay	"It's hard to be on Zoom all [day]. At the same time, I'm glad not to be in the office." (Anna, 21)
eCRM, Newsletters	Mailchimp	Anna, Brock, Eleanor, Elle, Gwen, Jay, Kay	"I get a lot of email drafts to look at. So we have an email list of almost 200,000 subscribers...we use MailChimp" (Eleanor, 21)
Internal messaging	Slack, Microsoft Teams	Dee, Elle, Jay, Kay	"We use Slack. And there's a random channel, so I often pop Tweets that I think are funny

Tool Function	Name(s) of Tools	Prevalence	Example
			into the random channel. Especially if they're library related." (Dee, 21)
Graphic design	Adobe Illustrator, Canva	Anna, Brock, Gwen	"We use Canva for a lot of graphics" (Brock, 21)
Front-end web development	HTML	Eleanor, Elle, Gwen,	"I ran all of social media and the website, because I was the only person who knew HTML." (Elle)
Project management	Podio, Microsoft Teams, Basecamp, Asana	Eleanor, Elle, Jay	"We use a kind of project maintenance system called Asana" (Jay, 21)
Storage	Google Drive, Microsoft OneNote	Brock, Gwen	"We use OneNote. And we share all the password access information there." (Gwen, 21)

As Jay's department grew over time, he was able to create multiple social media related positions. One of the new positions is now tasked with managing what he described as "prerequisite" posting. Jay noted in 2021, "I now have a person who kind of handles what I would say is day-to-day social media. I'm kind of doing more kind of larger planning, messaging." Anna, Eleanor, and Elle expressed a similar desire to split their current social media responsibilities in two – with their own role focused on larger, strategic needs and another employee responsible for day-to-day posting. All three also described using interns to perform these quotidian tasks, too.

Upon further reflection, however, it is not just strategy work that these participants crave. Participants wanted autonomy over their time. Without this, frustrated social media managers spend their time working under conditions they do not control, in order to produce content they do not value, for their institution's – but not their own – profit (Horgan, 2021, p. 75). Strategy work is seen as an opportunity to regain power. Yet capitalism ensures employees of cultural institutions will always lack total control over their time as a precondition of work.

IV.E.4.iii. Design Thinking.

Beyond outlining the types, process, and technical tools employed, some participants used design thinking to develop their most popular content – although they did not describe it as such. Framing their work as a design thinking process helps illustrate how social media communicators create content in a way that gratifies both their institutions and their users. Moreover, design thinking offers guidance to practitioners interested in developing more relevant, creative, and inclusive content as well as identifying issues that may be impeding their work. Five interviewees (Brock, Eleanor, Elle, Jay, Kay) specified their most successful content explicitly connected their institution to outside trends or social media memes. Jay explained:

> I don't like [content] that's just a joke, or something that...has no connection to us...if it doesn't make sense, don't do it at all. And the creativity comes out of trying to figure out how to bring two disparate ideas together in a way that makes sense. That's a fun challenge. For me, at least. When you do, that's such an 'Aha' moment...here's problem A, and here's problem B. They seem like they don't fit. Then when you finally hear that click, that's such a fun moment. Usually, if you have the right gut instinct, the broader public will respond in the same way when they see that connection made, too. (Jay, 21)

Jay's connection of "problem A" (e.g., a trend or meme) and "problem B" (e.g., his museum) is an example of design thinking, which is intentional problem solving through creative solutions (Clarke, 2020, pp. 13-15). This process is further elaborate by Eleanor:

> If I see a meme floating around, even if it's late at night, then I'm going to do my best to get in on that. So that was like the situation with [a recent viral post]. After hours, I saw [a meme format] starting to float around, and then I texted a couple people on my team. And I was like, 'I'm going to jump in on this, do you have any ideas for artwork?...I get a lot of ideas and help from other people on a team that are egging me on. So then I just do it, and make sure it's not offensive...and if it's starting off slow, then I text a group of people to go 'like' it. And they'll...bump it up in the algorithm. (Eleanor, 20)

Reflecting on her recent success with this method, Eleanor recalled:

> So I did that [with a meme]...and it went totally viral. It was included in some U.K. publication's roundup of the best of those [memes] and it hit early. It was before a lot of other publications, and celebrities, and brands were doing that. So that was really fun to be on the cutting edge. Although I did have to defend it to some higher-ups who just

didn't – they're not the target audience, so [they] didn't get it. I like that part of my job. (Eleanor, 20)

Kay described a similar process as Eleanor, noting:

> When something is happening on social media, or there's a meme that day that everyone is doing and is laughing about, you have to come up with content [the] same day to make it relevant for yourself. And a lot of times, people can't respond that quickly, because they're in meetings for eight hours a day or they're dealing with something else. And not only that, they have to think about how their library services or collection [aligns] in a way that's really smart. (Kay, 21)

She previously shared an example of this happening successfully in 2020:

> [It was] World Bartender Day. So I was like, 'Oh, that'd be interesting to see if we had photographs in the collection of [Local Bar].'...Not only students have a connection to [it], but [also] the community, and it highlights that we're stewards of [City's] history of [City]...I looked up if we had any archival photographs, and we did – from the early 80s. I shared those and that [was] our most engaged post that we've ever had. So that was fun. (Kay, 20)

These descriptions align with the design thinking process of empathetic discovery, problem definition, idea generation, creation, and evaluation (Clarke, 2020, p. 19), outlined in C2.IV.

Unfortunately, supervisors or internal policies that limit practitioners on their ability to participate in larger conversations or make connections can result in frustration. For example, Anna (21) divulged that if she was "able to send [interesting messages], I would not dread [social media work] so much. But as it is, it's this mental gymnastic exercise for something that's a little flat anyway." Applying a design thinking framework may help practitioners recognize and describe roadblocks to their work. Anna's difficulty in assuaging her coworkers' fear of negative feedback (discussed in greater detail in C4.V.C), limited her ability to brainstorm or generate new ideas. Connecting specific issues (e.g., unfounded fears of backlash) with their resulting impact on the design thinking process (e.g., fewer creative ideas) may help practitioners explain why their work is limited and advocate for future changes.

IV.F. Summary of Method Acting

Participants described a constant need to embed themselves within social media culture and embody their institution virtually, much like method actors who live as their theatrical role. Immersing themselves in social media allows practitioners to participate in – and respond to – trends and timely issues related to their institutions' missions (see C4.IV.A). However, this over-extension is draining and leads to stress, burnout, and overwork (see C4.IV.B). Stress may be further compounded by the interconnectedness between practitioner and institutional voices, as interviewees found it hard (or impossible) to separate themselves from their organizations (see C4.IV.C). Many of these issues could be mitigated by better acknowledging and supporting the people behind the screens (see C4.IV.D), including the effort and creativity needed to develop content. In C5.II, I further contextualize the content creation process described by participants (see C4.IV.E) and align it to the design thinking process. This framework illustrates how practitioners can develop relevant and innovative content while also identifying potential barriers.

**V. Everyone's a Critic: Reviews, User Feedback & Self-Assessment**

The Methodist Review first published the phrase, "everybody is a critic," in 1850 (Michel et al., 2011) – see Figure 2. However, this text itself references a biography of Robert Southey – a book reviewer – who wrote the following in a letter dated March 30, 1804:

> I look upon the invention of reviews to be the worst injury which literature has received since its revival. People formerly took up a book to learn from it, and with a feeling of respectful thankfulness to the man who had spent years in acquiring that knowledge, which he communicates to them in a few hours; now they only look for faults. **Everybody is a critic**; that is, every reader imagines himself superior to the author, and reads his book that he may censure it, not that he may improve by it. (Southey, 1804, p. 144 as quoted in M'Clintock, 1850, p. 329)

Figure 2

NGram of "Everybody is a Critic" and Related Phrases Showing their Popularity Over Time
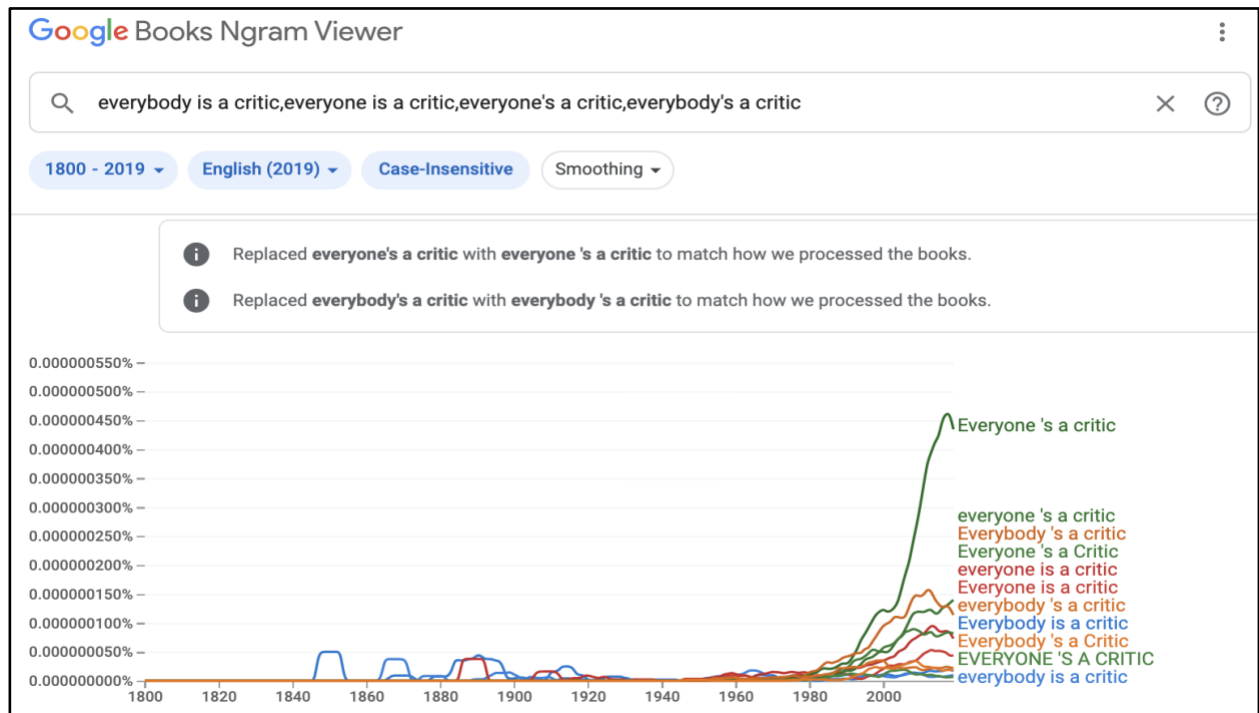
Related phrases referencing criticism of creative work (e.g., acting, art) became exponentially more popular beginning in the 1990s, with the specific cliche "everyone's a critic" being the most prevalent version today.

This first-level theme remains true to Southey's original description of the expression. For example, participants described their formal assessments (see C4.V.A) as offering opportunities for rebuke but never providing rewards. Interviewees also focused on quantitative measurements of their work, even though they valued qualitative aspects of their work more, undermining their own successes (see C4.V.B). Finally, they detailed ways in which they manage criticism – assuaging fear (see C4.V.C) and viewing negative feedback as helpful (see C4.V.D).

V.A. Formal Reviews

All eight interviewees participated in formal annual reviews with their supervisors. Annual reviews took place as part of overarching organizational assessments, usually defined and managed through an outside department (e.g., human resources). Participants described these performance evaluations as composed of self-written goals approved by supervisors – although some (Dee, Gwen Jay) also mentioned receiving input from other colleagues.

Even though their institutions devoted extensive time and resources to regular, systemic evaluations, half of the interviewees (Anna, Eleanor, Elle, Gwen) did not see a correlation between this process and the achievements they valued most. Likewise, recent research identified a disconnect between performance evaluations and rewards (financial or recognition) is associated with negative perceptions of the process, i.e., flawed standards, inflated ratings, and inadequate support (Lin & Kellough, 2019). As Anna described:

> Some of our goals – that's where it starts to get, not frustrating, but kind of comical. We are told that we need to include a DEI goal. [So] then I'm like, 'Well, here's all the ways that I could do that.' [And they respond,] 'Shut it down.'...it feels a little performative internally, like, we need to focus on these things, how are you, individually, going to do it? You can't really run with it. (Anna, 21)

Gwen, unfortunately, received a low review after her supervisor wrongly believed another colleague's assessment of her work:

> We have a new performance evaluation process in place. And it forced my boss – for the first time in six-and-a-half years – to actually sit down with me via Zoom and go through my evaluation. And there were things she included, like 'You missed newsletter deadlines.' And I'm like, 'You don't know my deadlines. How would you know I miss them?'...she said, 'Oh, so-and-so told me.' And I said, 'Well, that's not accurate.' Because during COVID, I upped my newsletter production to weekly. I sent out 52 eNewsletters last year. While they might not have landed in the inbox the same day, they went out every week...So it doesn't matter how much you do. (Gwen, 21)

Perhaps this is one reason why Gwen (along with Brock, Dee, Eleanor, and Elle) described their desire to continue performing high-level social media work as internally motivated. As Brock (21) summarized, "The motivation, at this point, is really more intrinsic than extrinsic."

V.B. Self-Assessment

Not all participants regularly reviewed their content or engagement. However, two (Eleanor, Gwen) began more regular assessments between their 2020 and 2021 interviews. While most used quantitative analytics to evaluate their content, a few offered qualitative feedback in their self-assessments.

Four interviewees (Anna, Eleanor, Gwen, and Kay) described their desire to better evaluate their content. Interestingly, even as the interview prompt, "Do you assess your work? And if so, how?" did not reference any data specifically, all participants understood this question to be about reviewing quantitative analytics. For example, Anna responded:

> I haven't done it. That's one of the things that always gets left behind when I get busy. But I do download [analytics] every month. And I think the goal this year is to do a social media report quarterly. Just to keep tabs on things. (Anna, 21)

Kay replied similarly, also citing her time is spent elsewhere:

> I feel like [analytics] is something that is not as great on my part, just because I'm so focused and trying to do the content creation and the content scheduling...I am doing some assessment in terms of what are our most successful posts and what are our impression numbers and engagement numbers within a quarterly basis. And so that's something I send to the rest of the team, and they are putting it into a little snapshot that the rest of library administration can see. (Kay, 21)

In 2020, Eleanor disclosed, "I never ever looked at engagement and stats on stuff unless something has performed super well." However, in her next interview, she mentioned, "I can't remember exactly when we last talked, and I don't know why I was not doing this before. But now I do all of the social media metrics every week" (Eleanor, 21). Gwen also shared:

> Last summer, which really saved all of us, we purchased a Hootsuite subscription, and that has made life a lot easier for all of us. I also get the benefit of having analytics,

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which I was not getting...I couldn't track what was interesting. So that was another improvement I made this year. (Gwen, 21)

The quantitative data mentioned by participants is further outlined in Table 16.

Table 16

Quantitative Data Reviewed by Participants

Data Reviewed	Types	Prevalence	Example
Engagement	Views, shares, likes, comments	8: Anna, Brock, Dee, Eleanor, Elle, Gwen, Jay, Kay	"We do look at the analytics, about a couple times a year, we look at the analytics. You can tell from daily use and engagement, who is liking things, who is responding to things, and who you're hearing from." (Brock, 21)
Audience	Follower numbers	3: Brock, Dee, Elle	"We've made so many strides. Our Instagram following, when I started, I think it was at 14,000 and we're about to break 20,000." (Elle, 20)
Amount of content	Number of posts	3: Anna, Gwen, Jay	"We do three to five posts every day, 365 days a year." (Jay, 21)

Please note that while Anna and Jay mentioned viewing engagement metrics at times, both specified they were not doing this as a regular part of their job duties (see C4.III.F). For example, Jay (20) disclosed "we're not going to do a ton of analytics, we're not going to do a ton of assessment yet, because it's all in the moment" when discussing recent COVID-19-related changes. After being prompted about assessing his work in 2021, Jay replied similarly, "we do occasional deep dives into kind of looking at our demographics."

Even as participants increased their quantitative measurements, they described having much more interest in intangible and qualitative assessments. Jay articulated this desire as:

It's more about...if you do something [where] you get a sense that people are talking about [you] and it has some buzz, which is a little bit immeasurable. You can't measure buzz, and you can't measure the feeling of relevance. (Jay, 21)

He provided an example of people responding to one of his posts, commenting "and this is why [Museum] is literally my favorite place," to which he elaborated:

> If we're not sparking joy, giving you something to take away, I feel like we're not doing it right. It's hard to measure, but I think you know it when it happens...I do think it's beyond the analytics – it's far beyond analytics. (Jay, 21)

Dee, Elle, Gwen, and Kay described similar moments of success based on qualitative aspects of their posts. For Dee, she retweeted a "word of the day" post featuring a medical condition and started a conversation with someone living with it in the U.K.:

> You get the quantity [of followers] by providing the quality. And, honestly, the quality for me is obviously in the Tweets, but that little interaction with that woman from South Wales this morning, I hope that made her feel a little better. (Dee, 20)

V.C. Assuaging Fear

Buzzworthy and of-the-moment posts are inherently more casual products than formal, polished communications. However, creating this type of content requires overcoming perfectionism and colleagues' fear surrounding social media content. Interviewees seemed to channel Winston Churchill's quote, "Perfectionism is the enemy of progress" to explain their belief that it is better to post something that isn't quite right than waiting or posting nothing at all. Gwen explained, "A part of my role with this organization has been more to reassure them that [social media] doesn't have to be perfect." Clarke (2020) ascribes libraries' tendency to eliminate possibilities "before they have been explored and developed" to both the number of constraints they currently face (i.e., dwindling resources) and a pervasive fear of failure (pp. 30-31). As such, staff may feel as if there is only a single chance for success, which directly contradicts the iterative process of creative and design thinking (Clarke, 2020, p. 30). For example, Anna shared her thoughts on launching a virtual tour at the beginning of COVID-19:

> There have been a few different things where we've had to put our foot down, I would say, because if you come at things...where [if] you have this perfectionist ideal for a virtual tour before you release it, we're gonna lag. (Anna, 20)

Jay further clarified:

> If we treat social media that way we do a print piece, do we also kill its spirit? Do we kill it through the review process? Because that brochure is different than a social media post. There have been a couple of moments in my tenure here where we've had some different systems in place to do some review processes and it's always been a negative for the end result of the content. What we think is you have to put great people in these positions and trust those people to do their work. If you micromanage it, or have it go through 15 different processes, it gets so watered down that you lose anything. And you just end up in this lukewarm middle space, which is where no one wants to be. (Jay, 20)

Since online culture moves so fast, social media managers need to be nimble and trusted enough to publish content quickly and keep up (see C4.III.D). Moreover, participants detailed how negative responses and feedback can actually improve institutions – discussed next.

V.D Negative Feedback as Helpful

While others at their institutions may be afraid of negative feedback from users, Eleanor, Elle, Gwen, and Kay described it as useful. In fact, Eleanor provided an example where being "called out" on social media led to policy changes:

> The museum has an educational website, and, until now, it wasn't edited, it didn't get approved by marketing, nobody really saw it...But somebody called us out on some language that was being used to describe an enslaved person. The [museum used] language [that] called that person an indentured servant, which [was] not at all the situation that person would have been in. We were called out on Twitter, and that led to some policy changes internally. I found that really meaningful. They're drawing attention to an issue that might not have been caught and asking us to change it. (Eleanor, 21)

Moreover, it was only after outsiders complained that her colleagues agreed to her request for additional review:

> Not only do we change [the language], but we changed our internal review process as well, which was something I was fighting for. [I had previously said] this needs to be reviewed by someone and it cannot have Wikipedia [links] on it. So that was [feedback] I consider super meaningful, but it didn't feel good. It wasn't positive. (Eleanor, 21)

Kay and Gwen felt similarly, with the former stating:

> I think it's useful when people send us negative comments on social media...Most small [negative] things that happen on social media definitely reflect a larger question or service problem that we do need to address in real life. (Kay, 21)

Elle, who worked at a museum specializing in Indigenous American art and culture, described the role discontinuity she experienced when tasked with promoting the museum store's products while also aligning social media content to the museum's educational mission. In this instance, the museum's store manager assigned her to advertise a line of candles featuring war bonnets on their label decoration – however, the candle manufacturer had no tribal connections. She received comments noting the candle's cultural appropriation was offensive – it disregarded Indigenous American histories and represented educational negligence (Wood, 2017).

If justified backlash does occur, Kay (21) recommended addressing it quickly, advising "you have to respond immediately. And you have to apologize." Kay's experiences are supported by McGrath's (2020) call to act upon feedback solicited through social media – particularly issues related to the colonial legacies of institutions, lack of diversity, ethics of crowdsourced labor, and making collections and/or exhibitions more accessible (p. 172).

In the same vein, Jay spoke of standing by institutional values even when questioned by outsiders after posting a picture of a same-sex couple (discussed in C4.IV.E.3):

> We have to pick and choose our moments to say, 'Hey, here's where we're going to draw a line in the sand.' And we've done that 10 to 12 times over the time I've been here. And it's always been a good thing in the long run. We've never done something like that, where we stood by our values as an institution went, 'Oh, man, why don't we do that? This blew back in our face.' It's always been overwhelmingly positive. (Jay, 20)

Likewise, Anna, Brock, Elle, and Kay agreed that deleting controversial content was not helpful. Rather, as Brock (21) advised, "You don't want to just pretend like it didn't happen...You've got to own up to it."

V.E. Summary of Everyone's a Critic

The cliché "everyone's a critic" refers to the tendency of people to judge creative work instead of learning from it. As a theme in this study, it covers areas of evaluation that may not be particularly helpful for practitioners, such as formal reviews, which offer opportunities for

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reprimands but not rewards (see C4.V.A). Similarly, participants' self-assessments undermine their own successes by concentrating on quantitative metrics even as they valued qualitative and affective work more highly (see C4.V.B). The theme also covered ways in which interviewees managed criticism, including mollifying their colleagues' and supervisors' fear of social media content (see C4.V.C) and reframing negative feedback from users (see C4.V.D).

VI. Bit Part to Leading Actor: Pandemic Adaptations

While the working conditions described in the previous findings all occurred during the COVID-19 pandemic, participants were quick to point out they actually received more acknowledgement for their work (and produced additional content) as a result of their institutions' physical closures. In a sense, their role shifted from a bit part to a leading actor. The term "bit part" originated in the American theater scene during the 1920s and continues to refer to "a small part in a play or film" (OED, 2021b). Unlike understudies (who only perform if a featured actor is unavailable) or extras (who have no lines), bit parts directly interact with principal actors, but have five or fewer lines of dialogue (Burridge, 2020). Prior to COVID-19 shutdowns, the social media managers interviewed performed a bit part for their organizations – they regularly interacted with colleagues and presented public content but felt undervalued for their contributions. This changed in March 2020 after their institutions closed.

Instead of continuing to play bit parts, the social media managers shifted into leading actors and began performing prominent, main character roles (Booth, 2005) for their libraries and museums. All participants noted their colleagues offered more recognition for their work and most described increasing the amount of content they created. However, stardom came with a cost. Recurring themes of urgency, duty, and inadequate support are summed up by Jay's (20) reflection, "In a moment like this, new media becomes invaluable...I go back and forth between

feeling invigorated by the challenge and crushed by the weight of it all." The findings provided

in this section offer details on the role's elevated importance at cultural institutions (see

C4.VI.A), new content and platforms used (see C4.VI.B), how participants responded to crises

(see C4.VI.C), and the personal toll of living and working through COVID-19 (see C4.VI.D).

VI.A. Moving into the Limelight – Elevated Importance of Social Media

All eight participants described experiencing more recognition for – and understanding of

– their social media work during the early stages of the COVID-19 pandemic. This was

described by Jay, who recounted:

> Our department became the most important department in the museum overnight. I would
> always argue that it was one of the most important anyway...But in a moment like this,
> where everything shifts online, it's triage time...As we move forward, new media, and
> communications in general, are going to become more valuable to the organization. I feel
> lucky that [this is] the department I'm in. (Jay, 20)

Elle also recalled:

> Our Executive Director, on Friday, was like, 'The two most beneficial departments at the
> museum are digitization...and marketing.' Marketing right now is me. That's just me. Our
> videographer is furloughed and our graphic designer is furloughed, so marketing is slang
> for [Elle]. I run the website, yes, but also all of this content is [now] going out on social
> media. And that's the only way we can really engage our usual audience of people who
> would come visit the museum. I think coronavirus is really help[ing] put things into
> perspective. (Elle, 20)

Elle's perspective corresponds to a survey of for-profit marketers in the U.S., which found

spending on social media spiked at the beginning of the COVID-19 pandemic and – for the first

time – showed an increased contribution to company performance overall (Moorman, 2020;

2021). In fact, 2020 was also the first time digital marketing accounted for more money spent

than traditional media (Barker, 2020). Moreover, Anna noted:

> One of the surprises of the pandemic has been my supervisor's understanding [of] what I
> do now is much clearer because they've been forced to use me more...I'm not doing
> [anything] much different than before. But they don't have the same channels for getting
> information out there...they have no other gauge to see how the museum is doing. Now I
> think they see much more of what's underneath the iceberg, so to speak. (Anna, 20)

Brock (20) agreed with this sentiment as well, sharing "Social media is important. It's especially important right now. Because it's the primary way we're communicating with people on a regular basis. And it's just an important way to stay in front of people." Gwen (20) concurred with Anna and Brock's insights into the increased importance of online channels, noting that before COVID-19 "we relied on [in-person] traffic in the library for getting information to people. And now those people aren't in the library. And social media has become more important." She went on to share how this was particularly important for sharing health-related information, as her library is a trusted community resource.

VI.A.1. Trustworthiness.

All four library social media managers (Brock, Dee, Gwen, Kay) described their institutions as trusted or reliable providers of information. Participants further explained how libraries' trustworthiness became a critical aspect of social media content during COVID-19. Dee explained:

> Libraries are built on a foundation of providing information...There was no time in recent history that I can think of that people needed [more] information that was not available, because nobody really knew. Still don't. We were doing our best to pass along reliable information from reliable sources. (Dee, 20)

Similarly, Gwen clarified how her role as a library social media manager shifted to include communicating public health information during COVID-19:

> With COVID, what's been different is – and I'm the one who does this, less so the librarians – is sharing public health information. Because we are a trusted resource in the community. And we have a large following as far as government entities within [County Name] County. (Gwen, 21)

In March 2020, Kay related, "I've seen really good posts by other libraries about the online capabilities and using their platform to do better fact-finding stuff around coronavirus, which I thought was really helpful." The following year, she further explained:

People trust social media inherently, which is not great...that's how people get their news. Making sure that libraries are seen as trustworthy places of information or knowing that there's someone at the library who can help you understand something further, I think is good. (Kay, 21)

Brock (20) summed up his related thoughts by noting, "we have a duty to make available the resources that we can." These practitioners used their library's position as a highly trusted resource (Horrigan, 2017) to disseminate emergency messages and further develop community relationships – both very effective ways to use social media during crises (Shemberger, 2018). Conversely, none of the museum practitioners mentioned trust, reliability, or fact-finding as a major new role for their institutions during COVID-19. As Jay (21) remarked, "at the end of the day, we're a museum, we're not a social service organization." Later in the interview, however, Jay described his multi-year efforts to add more community-related services:

A couple of things that I've done over the last few years [focused on] bringing more community stuff into the museum. For example, I reached out to the city and started having immigration naturalization ceremonies take place at the museum. I spent a couple of years working with the city to make [Museum] an official polling place for elections. We finally got that approved a month ago...now we'll probably have four to five election or voting days here a year. And so we want to do more things like that. (Jay, 21)

While museum social media managers may not have viewed their institutions as bastions of trust in a world of COVID-19-related misinformation, they – along with Brock and Dee – did consider their role to now include creating and sharing light-hearted content as a way to distract, amuse, or otherwise entertain their users during pandemic shutdowns. This aligns with McGrath's (2020) discussion of the "early" days of the pandemic, in which museums "offered more digital engagement opportunities than usual for audiences to playfully and creatively engage with institutions and with one another" (p. 164). However, a recent study found:

When asked what COVID-19 information (if any) they would likely post on social media, 43.9% of respondents, both male and female, reported they would likely share 'scientific' content on their social media. This finding appears to buck the general trend on social media where funny, entertaining and emotional content spread fastest. (WHO, 2021)

Perhaps some participants (and/or their institutions) are wary about incurring politically motivated backlashes associated with posting scientific information (see more about assuaging fear in C4.V.C). More on new and different types of content – as well as platforms used – is described in C4.VI.B.

VI.A.2. Promotions & Title Changes.

Half of the interviewees (Eleanor, Elle, Jay, Kay) reported promotions with title changes and salary increases between their first and second interviews. This is extremely unusual, as the promotion rate in both arts and educational industries averages around 5% per year (SHRM, 2019a; 2019b). However, overall promotion rates may be affected by larger conditions stemming from both the pandemic and 2021's "Great Resignation." One recent industry report, citing LinkedIn's Economic Graph research, noted the rate of job promotions climbed 9% between January and October 2021 (after tumbling in 2020) – however, the overall promotion rate has only advanced 0.9% since 2019 (Corrigan, 2021). Regardless, the high number of promotions offered to the social media practitioners interviewed illustrates the heightened recognition for their work. Interviewee promotions are listed below:

- **Eleanor: Assistant Director of Marketing and Communications** (promoted spring 2021). Previously Public Relations and Social Media Manager (2017-2021).

- **Elle: Communications Manager** (promoted fall 2020), now **Marketing Manager for City Regional Tourism** (transitioned spring 2021). Previously, at a museum, Communication Coordinator (2019-2020); Communication Specialist (2020, 6 months).

- **Jay: Assistant Director of Communications and Audience Relations** (promoted fall 2020). Previously Online Communities Manager; Communications Manager.

- **Kay: Outreach Projects Librarian** (promoted spring 2021). Previously Graduate

  Research Assistant (2019-2020), and Social Media Coordinator (2020-2021).

While Elle was formally promoted to Communication Manager in fall 2020, she reported

performing the duties of the position for over a year, as a result of her supervisor leaving a month

after she started in February 2019. When we spoke in spring 2020, Elle described her title as

"Interim Manager of Communication." In 2021, she disclosed her titles at the museum evolved

from "Communication Coordinator, to Communication Specialist, to Communication Manager"

over the course of her two-year tenure. Moreover, Elle left her job at the museum in spring 2021

and became the Marketing Manager for her city chamber's regional tourism board (a public-

private partnership). Her duties at her new workplace were almost identical to her previous

position (social media management, PR, website management, email communications) but with

additional business-to-business communication:

> [This position is] very similar to what I was doing before. I think a little less outward-
> facing though, there's a lot more business to business communication that I have to do as
> well. (Elle, 21)

VI.A.2.i The Impact of COVID-19 on Promotions.

Some participants shared more details about how the pandemic impacted their changing

titles. Eleanor (2020) said she was searching for another job and trying to leave the field of social

media altogether during her 2020 interview but put those plans on hold: "I was [job searching],

and now with COVID, I'm not." But by spring 2021, Eleanor received a promotion to "Assistant

Director of Marketing and Communications," which came with the promise to hire a new

employee (who would report to her) who would take over day-to-day social media tasks:

> [Social media] is being added to my [future] employees' plates and I'm more of an
> approval person and reviewer. But I definitely want to keep...working together on these
> ideas and a lot of the strategy. But then a lot of the day-to-day, actually doing the social
> media, or the ad buying, or whatever is on the next person. Which has been interesting...I
> think it'll be really interesting when the social media manager comes on board to give up

all of that. I've been doing it for so long that it's second nature, and to have someone else do it, I think it's gonna be crazy. (Eleanor, 21)

Elle received her first promotion after her museum's Executive Director decided to stop

the search for a replacement of Elle's supervisor:

It's mostly just because of the situation we're in. I'm the Director of Communication who I [used to] worked underneath. She left at the end of January...So we were in the search process for a new director. And our Executive Director decided just to stop searching whenever [the pandemic] broke out. They didn't want anybody to travel for interviews. And she's not satisfied with video interviews. So she's just decided to kind of pause that. And in the meantime, I'm in charge. (Elle, 20)

Yet later in the same interview, Elle joked that she was hired because she interviewed virtually

(pre-pandemic):

I think part of the reason why they hired me, besides my sheer raw talent and awesomeness, was [that] I did my interview from a computer in Costa Rica for the job and they [thought], 'that's pretty cool that you're there,' and I was like, 'I'm really just here to drink on the beach, but okay.' (Elle, 20)

This could be indicative of a difference between a more formal hiring process for mid-to-senior

level employees versus a casual hiring process for social media communicators, discussed in

C4.III.B.

Conversely, Jay explicitly stated his promotion was delayed by the COVID-19 pandemic:

[My promotion] was something that actually got delayed by the pandemic. I think it was [the] plan, and then, because of everything getting put on hold, [it] probably would have happened earlier in the year if things hadn't gotten so crazy in the spring. (Jay, 21)

Jay's experience aligns with an HR report finding 30% of U.S. workers who were expecting

promotions had them delayed or denied during the pandemic (BambooHR, 2021). However, Jay

did receive his promotion in fall 2020.

VI.B. Flexing their Chops – New Content & Platforms

Along with the added responsibility of disseminating COVID-19 information,

participants shared the new types of content and platforms they were able to use due to the

pandemic, outlined in Table 17. These changes (hosting virtual events, providing virtual resources, posting "light" content, developing interactive content, producing online videos, and sharing COVID-19-related information) provide a glimpse into the types of pandemic-related modifications implied by broader studies (Koulouris et al., 2020; Statista, 2020a; AAM, 2020). Furthermore, many participants (Anna, Dee, Eleanor, Gwen, Kay) also mentioned they (or their institutions) had previously considered trying out new platforms to offer virtual programming but hadn't committed until the shutdowns. This corresponds to general communications research findings that the pandemic accelerated digital strategies by six years (Statista, 2020c).

Table 17

New Content & Platforms Ordered by Prevalence

Content/Platform	Examples	Prevalence	Quote
Virtual events	Workshops, storytimes, author talks, artist talks, art creation, town halls, film screenings, yoga/meditation, lectures, music	8: Anna, Brock, Dee, Eleanor, Elle, Gwen, Jay*, Kay	"We did an online book talk with a [University] author who had just published a new book, and it went really well, and we got a nice turnout for that." (Brock, 20)
Virtual resources	Educational materials, book lists and recommendations, coloring pages, tours, newsletters	8: Anna, Brock, Dee, Eleanor, Elle, Gwen*, Jay, Kay	"During quarantine, we started a new series called [Museum] Recommends...It's a deep dive into just one work of art." (Eleanor, 20)
Light, amusing, distracting content	Soothing scenes, jokes, funny memes, gratitude posts	6: Anna, Brock, Dee, Eleanor, Elle, Jay	"We decided that our purpose is going to be about escape and respite and giving people a break." (Jay, 20)
Interactive content	Art challenges, quizzes, printable 'zines, cat pen pals	5: Anna, Brock, Eleanor, Elle, Jay	"[Social media managers should know] how to engage with your audience so they might create their own content...using hashtags to get user-generated content." (Elle, 21)
Video	YouTube, TikTok	5: Anna, Eleanor, Elle, Gwen, Jay	"It's a lot when you consider we [came] from zero [videos] – we didn't have a YouTube channel before COVID." (Anna, 20)
COVID-19-related information	Posting health information, rapid response	4: Brock, Dee, Gwen, Kay	"[We're now] sharing information about COVID [and] seeing that as part of our responsibility and role." (Gwen, 20)

* Please note that while Jay managed virtual events and Gwen published eNewsletters prior to COVID-19 shutdowns, both participants recalled significantly increasing these activities after their institutions closed to the public.

VI.B.1. Virtual Events.

All participants mentioned a marked increase – or initial – use of virtual events at their institutions using Zoom or Facebook Live. Table 18 outlines specific types of events discussed by two or more participants.

Table 18

Types of Virtual Events Ordered by Prevalence

Event Type	Prevalence	Example from Interview
Artist/Author Talks, Musicians	5: Brock, Dee, Eleanor, Elle, Gwen, Jay	"Some of our local authors do panels on writing tips or narrating for audiobooks – it's hard to pick one [favorite virtual event] because they're all just so creative." (Gwen, 20)
Activities	4: Dee, Eleanor, Elle, Gwen	"We have an English as a second language book club now...People all over the world are reading the same book online together. Could you do that in person? I don't know that you could." (Dee, 20)
Educational, Lectures	3: Eleanor, Elle, Gwen	"For one of our lectures, we had people on [from] six different continents, and that would never happen [in person]. It's just so much more accessible." (Eleanor, 21)
Storytimes	2: Dee, Gwen	"People have been very appreciative of our storytimes." (Gwen, 20)
Town Halls	2: Brock, Elle	"[After police murdered] George Floyd, [the museum] realized that we couldn't continue putting off [community] town halls until COVID ended because it's still not over. So then we shifted to Zoom town halls, which, I mean, they were great." (Elle, 21)

Five participants (Anna, Dee, Eleanor, Gwen, and Kay) also disclosed their institutions had not staged virtual events prior to the pandemic. Kay shared:

> I think that we had always considered [doing virtual events], but there was so much planning and so much stuff you had to do, like figuring out how streaming works, how Zoom works. But I think the pandemic really forced our hand. And it forced many people to get used to it. And now it is something I think people realize is really good. (Kay, 21)

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Other participants (Anna, Brock, Dee, Eleanor, Gwen) shared Kay's enthusiasm for continuing online events in the future, particularly as a means of including users who might not otherwise attend. Eleanor mused:

> We didn't have any [virtual events prior to COVID-19]. And my hope is that a lot of this stays. Because for one of our lectures, we had people on six different continents, and that would never happen [in-person]. It's just so much more accessible. Even just recording the lecture and posting it later makes perfect sense to me, because, we're having these lunchtime lectures, I don't see those going away. They're at noon on a workday. And so, not everyone can tune into that. I think virtual events have just been so much more accessible. (Eleanor, 21)

Gwen further explained:

> We had somebody sign up for a book club from Japan. Now, we would not have been able to do that unless we had done it virtually. And so there are going to be people who interact with us who've never interacted with us before. Or, I think about moms and dads who have young children who might want to attend a book club, but can't because their kids are doing their homework, and now they can. (Gwen, 20)

Dee (20) was also surprised at hosting an international attendee, sharing "when we started the virtual storytimes on Wednesday mornings, we had 75 families. Out of nowhere there were people from Denmark!" When asked if she thought her library would continue offering online events, Dee reasoned:

> I do. It's actually complicated things similar to the way that we have to provide a book in 14 different ways. And [it's] similar to how we have to provide communication to people in 14 different ways. Well, now that people know that [online attendance] is possible, now we're going to have to provide events to people in 14 different ways. (Dee, 21)

On the other hand, Brock and Elle mentioned their organizations had previously recorded talks or lectures, but not regularly. Brock (21) recalled, "we would record talks or livestream them sometimes for people who couldn't be there in person. But it was not a focus of ours. The real focus was to get physical butts in seats." Similarly, Elle (20) remembered, "we would record [some lecture] events at the museum. And we'd debate whether or not to post them online because people paid admission to go to the event."

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Both Brock and Elle also seemed to change their minds about the importance of

continuing virtual events. When asked if she would like to continue hosting live events online in

2020, Elle mused:

> I don't know, maybe if we did a Facebook Live, we'd have a band come...It'd probably
> be a 15-minute, here's what you're missing because you're not at our event [type of
> video]. We really like getting people in the building. And again, our two biggest events
> every month are free, so it's not like we're trying to get people to pay money...I think for
> our business model it's better to have people there in person. (Elle, 20)

By 2021, Elle had been able to host Facebook Live events, bragging, "we slaughtered the

Facebook Live game for [City], dare I say. We really learned how to get creative with that." She

went on to describe working with her museum's videographer to make weekly Facebook Live

broadcasts, noting "Facebook Live became the unsung hero of the pandemic for [my museum]"

(Elle, 21). In particular, Elle enjoyed the live art demos by local artists:

> We had artists' demos – those were huge. Because it tapped into how indigenous cultures
> are looking to continue their cultures' [traditions]. We would have on indigenous artists
> to show different weaving patterns. We had somebody come on and do pottery, and those
> would be watched. And that was some meaningful engagement, people coming in and
> asking questions. We would be able to feed the questions to the artists live, and they
> would be able to answer those questions live. Once we had one [artist] that went over by
> 45 minutes, because people kept asking her questions, and she would answer them. That
> was powerful to watch. (Elle, 21)

Unfortunately, after Elle moved on to her new position, the museum laid off the videographer

and her museum ceased offering live events. Elle reflected:

> It's unfortunate [the virtual events] can't continue, but they don't have the manpower to
> make it happen...The museum really made a mistake there by not pursuing these things.
> And I hope they learn from the mass talent exodus they saw this year. (Elle, 21)

Brock also seemed to change his mind about virtual events during the course of his 2021

interview. At the beginning of our conversation, he repeated his library's focus on "butts in

seats:"

> There's a certain aspect of organizing events where you really want butts in seats, you
> want people to come. Because if they don't, it looks bad. And so there is a certain type of

event where you don't want to make it accessible online because you want to have something that people can only see in person. And that's the value of it. (Brock, 21)

Later in the same interview, however, he described positive aspects of virtual events, particularly for conversations about to police brutality, Black Lives Matter, and social justice reforms:

> We've had so many forums and facilitated conversations and staff opportunities to come together and discuss what has happened [in 2020], in terms of where we go from here, what can we resolve to do, and how do we make our library reflect the diversity we want to see in the world. And so [what's] been really interesting over the last year, is to have those conversations and to see people opening up in a way that we really didn't before. Zoom has been really good for that. Because in the past, if we've had in-person staff events like that, they were not attended by nearly as many people, and they didn't allow as many people to speak. So I will say Zoom's been good for those healing conversations we've had as a staff, in the wake of everything that's happened last year. (Brock, 21)

Brock and Elle's changes in thinking illustrate the main differences between online and in-person events. While not as exclusive, virtual experiences can offer enhanced accessibility and inclusion. March and Gibson (2022) describe how social media and virtual events can be used to connect with people who may never enter a physical library. Moreover, many disability (self-) activists are active on social media and connecting cultural institutions to conversations related to disability, activities, and justice for disabled people could help educate staff about their community members' needs and experiences (March & Gibson, 2022).

VI.C. Improv Theater – Responding to Crisis

Participants shared many ways they – and their institutions – responded quickly to crises in 2020 and 2021. This section begins by outlining the crisis communication efforts before detailing the rapid response programming/collection described by participants. Finally, examples of crises in which participants delayed or stopped posting content are provided.

VI.C.1. Crisis Communication.

Dee, Eleanor, Elle, Gwen, and Jay shared aspects of their recent work that aligned with crisis communication. As Eleanor (21) succinctly put it, "I've always had a hand in all the

[Museum's] crisis communications, but it just keeps getting stronger because there's so many

crises." Dee further recounted the early days of COVID-19-related closure and its effect:

> All of our communication channels became less about the whimsy. And more about, we've got to get this information out there. Anything. And there was so much competing – I won't call it misinformation, at that time – just different opinions, because nobody really knew what was going on. (Dee, 21)

This echoes Lin et al.'s (2016) findings on using social media to reduce uncertainty during crises

while also helping community members gain a sense of control over a situation. Dee later

reflected on the difficulty of navigating the pandemic:

> It was a lot of navigating – what do we do, when do we do it, how long is this going to last? Because, as my boss is fond of saying, making major changes in a library is like trying to turn the Titanic left. It's a big job. (Dee, 21)

Jay used a similar metaphor to describe his museum's nimbleness:

> I always use the analogy, imagine you're in a giant 747 and the engine goes out, the [plane] just drops. As opposed to if you're in a smaller plane that can glide for a while and land in a cornfield or something. The fact that we're a smaller organization provides a certain nimbleness to us that [a larger museum] would not have...We'll never have the money, or the collections, or the physical space, or anything of a lot of those top-tier organizations, but we can compete with them in the arena of ideas. (Jay, 20)

He also attributed his museum's quick pivot to the time his team had already spent figuring out

their online voice and tone (discussed in C4.IV.C):

> The fact that we had been doing a lot of [online] work already and knew what our tone was, set us up to make a quick transition. So within a week or two, we had a whole game plan, had a whole weekly schedule...In moments of crisis, you look toward the familiar, you look towards routine, you look towards consistency – something to hang your hat on. And us being able just to kind of keep the river flowing for people, to me was probably the biggest success of that more than any individual program or thing. (Jay, 21)

VI.C.2. Rapid Response Programming & Collecting.

Jay's weekly schedule of online events for his museum provided an example of rapid

response programming. Other examples of recent rapid response programming implemented in

2020-2021 by participants' institutions included antiracism book lists (Dee) and virtual town

halls (Elle).

Two participants (Brock and Dee) also facilitated COVID-19-related rapid response

collecting. Brock shared how he helped create an archival deposit process:

> Recently an instructor...[had] students write a coronavirus diary [and] reflect on their
> experiences of remote learning, and being at home, and how this has affected them. As
> part of that final project, [they wanted to] deposit those journals [in] our archives. And
> they Tweeted at us about that, and I shared that with our university archivist. She had
> been thinking of developing a program where we would collect coronavirus stories from
> the whole [University] community. And that [Tweet] helped push that effort forward.
> Now we have a formal process where people can deposit photographs, video, blogs,
> anything they've written – reflections on this time period. We'll archive it, and we'll keep
> it, and preserve it. Years and years from now, when people are wondering what this time
> period was like, we may have a body of material to share as historical documentation
> from people who were at [University] at that time. (Brock, 20)

Dee created a rapid response collection through her own social media content using Twitter

Moments. In 2020, Dee shared, "I have constructed a Twitter Moment about our COVID-19

experience starting from the very first Tweets when...[we caught] wind of what was coming." By

2021, she shared she had created multiple Twitter Moments documenting the pandemic:

> I actually started Twitter Moments, tracking how [Library] responded to COVID. I didn't
> discuss it with anyone, but I felt it was important for us to keep a record. And I didn't
> know how else it was going to happen. So there are now four Twitter Moments on
> [Library's] account...And you can see how things changed. (Dee, 21)

When prompted if she shared the Moments with her colleagues yet, Dee continued:

> I don't think people get it yet. I think we're still too much in the middle of things for
> people to appreciate what [the Twitter Moment archives] are. But they will. As far as I
> know, there's no other record. There's no other chronological record of what [Library]
> did in response to the pandemic.

Brock and Dee's innovative use of online tools for rapid response collecting corresponds to

current trends in museum, library, and archive management – 26% of institutions currently use

digital tools for curation and/or planning, although 39% plan to do so in the future (Tykhonova

& Widmann, 2021).

VI.C.3. Delayed or Stopped Communication.

In contrast to examples of rapid response programming and collection, five participants

also specified recent examples where they – or their leadership – decided to defer or halt

communication because of a crisis. Anna and Elle recounted instances of leadership requesting

the delay of writing and posting public statements related to the 2020 murder of George Floyd

(Anna) and the January 6, 2021 insurrection (Elle). Anna recalled:

> We delayed [our] comment a lot of times on certain things, like post-George Floyd, until
> we felt we had something that we could really genuinely share. Our Dean is an African
> American man and he had a whole statement that...spoke to what we wanted to say. Also,
> it was sanctioned by the University and Dean already. So I think patience has been key in
> some ways. And then as far as wanting to do more, I wish that I understood why...we as a
> unit operated under the fear of pissing off people [that week, like] our donors. Because
> [if] people are going to get mad that we're highlighting diverse artists, [but] the goal of
> [the University] and the [Museum] is to champion DEI, we don't want those people
> involved. But there [were] still other powers at play, [including] donors. (Anna, 21)

Elle similarly remembered:

> January 6 was another day [that] we ended up not saying anything about, because our
> Executive Director was too busy with other things. We sat down and reflected on how
> much of a display of white privilege that was...But I think we could have had a better
> reaction there. And it was out of my hands. Our Executive Director never ended up
> wanting to issue that statement. But having at least written it, and knowing how to look at
> these things from an institutional perspective...learning what you can and can't say or
> how you need to talk to higher-ups to get what needs to be said out there...was something
> that I learned. (Elle, 21)

Elle's desire for "a better reaction" relates to Kist's (2020) discussion of cultural institutions' use

of social media to enable better understanding and critical reflections of contemporary events.

On the other hand, Dee, Kay, and Eleanor mentioned pausing content during the January 6, 2020

insurrection. As Eleanor explained:

> The insurrection was terrifying. We paused all content for a couple days...my boss and I
> were texting, and we were just like, this is too weird, watching this unfold [and having to
> be] posting something chipper. So we should just kind of take a breather. And there's the
> Facebook group that I'm in – if something is happening, they'll usually flag it, too,
> [saying] 'Check your content or pause it' if there's a national disaster. (Eleanor, 21)

Elle and Kay also stopped social media content during the aftermath of George Floyd's murder in 2020. Elle had to ask a colleague to turn off scheduled posts (an example of digital intermediation, discussed in C2.III.C.2), as she was being furloughed due to her museum's budget constraints:

> My two-week furlough happened to be from Memorial Day to June 14th. So I'm watching, [but] I'm not allowed to do any work while I'm on furlough, but I texted our videographer, [who] was handling things while I was gone. And I just texted him to shut [off] every post I had. I had two weeks of content that was planned, and I was just like, 'Turn it off. We're done, go silent.' (Elle, 21)

Kay further explained:

> After George Floyd was murdered, the world changed. And essentially, I was like, 'We need to stop posting.'...I felt like it wasn't appropriate for us to be sending messages...I talked to my supervisor and her supervisor, and they're like, 'We agree, we're gonna pause social media posts for right now. Unless it's absolutely necessary that we need to post something, like if there was a COVID outbreak,' which I thought was appropriate. (Kay, 21)

After Kay shared the decision to pause social media posts with other libraries at her institution, she recalled:

> We did actually get some pushback [from]...the other librarians that run social media accounts [for branch libraries]. And...I had two people go off in the meeting...because I know that these are also people that probably have different political viewpoints than me...So, I had to be like, 'Do you want people to get mad at you on social media? Do you want people to think that you're tone deaf? Even if you think that this is appropriate, I think that it's really easy for anyone else to see that it's not appropriate.' (Kay, 21)

This quote further illustrates the influence of personal values on work (see C4.IV.D.2). Kay went on to share that she responded to people at her institution who, like some of this study's participants, felt it was their duty to offer distractions during tumultuous times:

> There was like a librarian that was like, 'Well, sometimes I think people need a distraction. Why can't we have a nice thing where people can look away once in a while and just forget the problems in the world?' And I again had to be like, 'Okay, I see where you're coming from, but that doesn't matter if someone else posts and thinks that you're being tone deaf.' You can think that you're doing the great job of giving people something else to think about, but that's not what they're perceiving you to be...Let's be

real, nothing you're saying right now is of any importance to what's happening in the world. (Kay, 21)

Kist (2020) similarly noted that "many institutions are currently catering to the emotional needs of audiences by creating positive distractions from the pandemic" but cautioned, "focusing on positive content only may eclipse opportunities to support critical thinking in relation to responsibility and empathy" (p. 345). Moreover, working through the many crises of 2020-2021 affected all participants on a personal level.

VI.D. Surviving the Stage – The Personal Toll of COVID-19

All participants described personal impacts of COVID-19. These included effects on careers, shifts (and increases) in working hours, feelings of instability and uncertainty, and mental health challenges.

Along with the impact of COVID-19 on promotions, discussed in C4.VI.A.2, participants reported other career-related repercussions. Anna, Brock, and Elle relayed their relief of having a stable job during the pandemic. As Brock (20) disclosed, "I'm very happy to still have a job right now." At the same time, Anna, Eleanor, Gwen, and Kay described how hiring freezes and concern about family welfare led them to stay in their positions and limit looking for other jobs. For example, when asked if she was actively searching for other jobs, Eleanor (20) noted, "I was, and now with COVID, I'm not." Furthermore, Dee and Elle were both furloughed in 2020, resulting in lost income.

The extreme rate of furloughs and layoffs at cultural institutions stands in stark contrast to the amount of federal aid provided to organizations. A report entitled, "Cultural Institutions Cashed In, Workers Got Sold Out" from the American Federation of State, County, and Municipal Employees (AFSCME) found the cultural institutions that received the largest sums of Payroll Protection Program funding "cut jobs or reduced the salaries of their lowest-paid workers

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at the first opportunity despite having ample resources to keep workers on the payroll" (2021, p.

2). For example, the Philadelphia Museum of Art received over $5 million in aid but spent tens

of thousands of dollars trying to keep a worker's union from forming – while also reducing its

workforce by 127 employees (AFSCME, 2021, p. 3). Over 35% of library and 40% of museum

staff lost income due to the pandemic, e.g., reduced hours, layoffs, and furloughs (Goek, 2021;

AAM, 2021).

On a more positive note, however, Elle viewed her museum's pandemic-related hiring

freeze as a boon to her own career, noting that it "left me being in charge of [social media]. So it

really super-launched my career, giving me these responsibilities that I wouldn't have before."

Similarly, Eleanor believed her takeover of two colleagues' workloads over the past year led her

supervisor to champion her promotion:

> The Director of Marketing...has been really invested in my growth at the museum. And
> you want to keep your employees that are really good around. I think she really took that
> to heart and was like, 'Okay, if this [social media] doesn't leave her responsibilities, she
> might leave.' (Eleanor, 21)

Eleanor's increased workload led to additional time spent on work. She and other

participants (Anna, Elle, Gwen) related their increased hours to additional time spent on social

media. This was seen more generally in other research, with social media use skyrocketing

during the pandemic (eMarketer & Business Insider, 2020). A vicious cycle developed – poor

mental health led to an increased need for companionship, which led people to seek online

camaraderie, which led to further isolation (Watson, 2021, p. 48). Eleanor (20) divulged, "during

quarantine, [social media] definitely takes up much more of my time and is the least favorite part

of my job." Elle (20) further explained, "we've gone from averaging 1-3 posts a day to like 3-5

posts a day, and so there's so much more to monitor."

However, increased work and hours did not continue for all – Anna, Eleanor, and Jay mentioned slowing their social media activity after an initial burst at the start of the pandemic. In 2021, Anna recalled, "We've slowed that pace to a more functional one...I think the pendulum swung super hard the one way, and now it's more balanced." Jay similarly described waning interest in late April 2020, noting "there's this bell curve to the interest level of [social media]...there's a saturation point. I think [that] probably hit a week ago, two weeks ago probably." Interestingly, the following year he recalled "peak engagement" extending *after* we spoke in 2020:

> The peak engagement was that April through June, July period, when it was the most intense...it was both a very dark period, but kind of the golden era...We were just so inventive. It was both scary, but it was also invigorating. (Jay, 21)

Perhaps a spike of COVID-19 cases in June and July 2020, and resulting lockdowns, led to additional unanticipated interest.

Additionally, the volatility of COVID-19 outbreaks – particularly those associated with the Delta variant – caused all participants to relate continued feelings of instability and uncertainty. As Brock (21) related, "There's just so much we don't know." For example, living with constant unpredictability wreaked havoc on Anna's ability to plan ahead:

> I would have a literal 'To Do' list next to my desk of the next few weeks' worth of activities and I would plan ahead. There [were] only a few things on a daily or weekly basis that popped up to throw a wrench in the normal hierarchy of prioritized things that I had to do. But since this has happened, I feel like I'm never ahead anymore. (Anna, 20)

In 2021, Anna described how living in this uncertainty led to mental health challenges:

> I cried more in therapy in the last year than I had in a while...just the feeling of [being] overwhelmed and burnout, that thins your emotional membrane to begin with. It's been a more heightened, anxious, emotional year. In all the ways. (Anna, 21)

Along with Anna, Eleanor, Gwen, and Kay also shared their experience with similar mental health concerns related to anxiety, depression, and trauma. These findings align with

research on other social media managers' mental health during the pandemic (Dobies, 2021), as well as library and museum staff more generally (Goek, 2021; AAM, 2021). In fact, at the end of our 2020 interview, Eleanor remarked, "I feel like this [interview] was like a therapy session. I can feel good going into the weekend like I told someone about my problems...we [social media managers] all need recognition and maybe a therapy fund or something." Jay (21) similarly recognized, "we're going to need a few years to really get a sense of the impact of it all. And I think we're still traumatized."

VI.E. *Summary of Bit Part to Leading Actor*

While social media managers played an important (if undervalued) role in cultural organizations prior to the COVID-19 pandemic, the closure of museums and libraries in 2020-2021 shifted practitioners from bit parts to leading actors. All interviewees reported they received more recognition for their work (see C4.VI.A), and most described creating new content, joining different platforms, and responding to crises in novel ways (see C4.VI.B and C4.VI.C). Along with increased recognition and responsibilities, participants also faced multiple challenges, including increased working hours, career instability, and mental health impacts (see C4.VI.D). Time will tell whether these changes will continue to impact social media work at cultural institutions beyond the initial stages of the COVID-19 pandemic.

VII. Summary of Study Findings

This chapter reported four major themes of a two-year longitudinal interpretative phenomenological analysis on social media work at cultural institutions. First, participants defined their professional success through paradoxes or role discontinuities. This included navigating idiosyncratic career paths, experiencing informal hiring yet bureaucratic working conditions, encountering dismissed expertise, aiming for conversations but instead producing

one-way messages, and enduring ambiguous responsibilities. Second, they described their content creation process as requiring role engulfment – the sustained embodiment of their institutions within social media culture – which led to increased stress, burnout, and overwork. Moreover, participants felt as if they were the voice of their organization while also recognizing the importance of the people behind online accounts. Third, most participants found self-evaluation and outside feedback (particularly negative comments) more helpful than their institution's formal review process. Finally, the interviewees described how the COVID-19 pandemic elevated the status of their social media work, offering opportunities for role modification and trying new content or platforms, while also requiring crisis communication and exacting a personal toll. The next chapter distills these findings into a practitioner-centered description of the social media role, including frameworks for understanding content development and assessment along with additional dramaturgical interpretations.

CHAPTER 5: CONCLUSION

In the prior chapter, I analyzed how social media practitioners described themselves, their work, and their role. This section expands upon their insights by interpreting social media work through role theory and cultural intermediation (see C5.I). Next, I propose an adapted framework for the content creation process based on concepts from the design thinking process (see C5.II). This framework leads into mapping the participants' practices onto a continuum of institutional practices (see C5.III). I then synthesize these connections with this study's dramaturgical interpretations (see C5.IV) before describing the study's longitudinal changes, limitations, and suggestions for future work (see C5.V, C5.VI, and C5.VII).

I. The Social Media Management Role

When a person takes on a social media management role at a cultural institution, their work intermediates interactions between themselves, their organization, and broader (online) cultures. Figure 3 provides a visual illustration of these relationships. Each higher-order element (practitioner, institution, online culture) can be further divided as well, as seen in Table 19.

Figure 3

Diagram of the Social Media Management Role
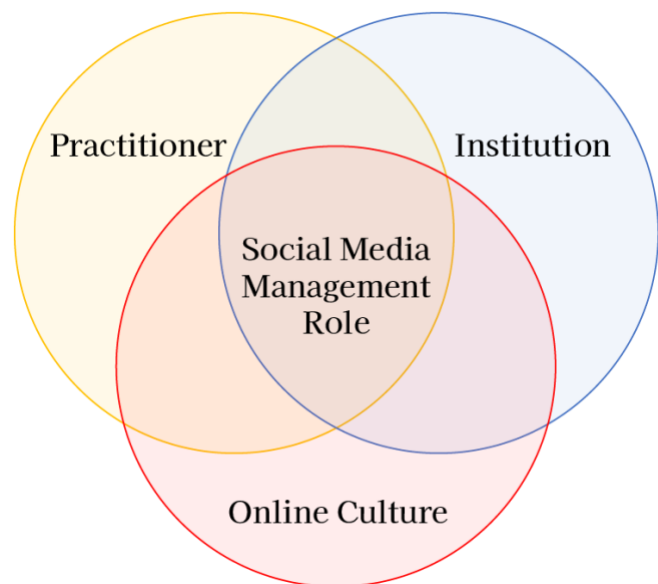
Table 19

Examples of Influences on Social Media Work at Cultural Institutions

Practitioner	Institution	Online Culture
• Identity and positionality • Personal values • Personal beliefs • Prior experiences • Training	• Formal and informal processes • Policies • Supervisors • Colleagues • Institutional history	• Specific communities of followers • Etiquette • Trends (including memes)

These elements – practitioner, institution, online culture – are also constructed and influenced by each other. For example, Eleanor cited a rise in antagonism following Trump's presidency that accounted for threats on her museum's social media accounts. This shift in online culture mores – potentially related to the increased virality of right-wing content and misinformation (Edelson et al., 2021) – influenced Eleanor's desire to conceal the creators of critical race theory educational resources and even swayed her institution to remove a piece of work from public exhibition. Eleanor (20) acknowledged, "I will be honest with you. That's why [the painting] is not on view." Likewise, social media managers' values and beliefs influence their desire to work for their institutions (see C4.IV.D.2) while bureaucratic institutional policies (see C4.III.C) limit practitioners' creativity and community engagement with content.

Additionally, positioning the social media management role between practitioners, institutions, and online cultures illustrates how these communicators act as cultural intermediaries, translating their organization's priorities to the public while also informing internal practices based on user priorities. Participants in this study most often described their role as promoting their institution (see C4.III.E), which aligns with the traditional Bourdieusian conception of cultural intermediation – the work of tastemakers pushing an institutional agenda. Yet interviewees much preferred to engage in dialogues with community members (see C4.III.E

and C4.IV.D.1) and even reported ways in which they helped their institution adopt practices desired by outsiders – a practice better aligned with more contemporary, socially responsive cultural intermediation. This is best illustrated in another example from Eleanor, who reported her museum changed internal policies after being "called out" on social media for describing a slave as an "indentured servant" (see C4.V.D). As such, social media managers facilitate both "downstream" and "upstream" practices (Smith Maguire & Matthews, 2014, p. 10; see C2.III.C). In order to perform this two-way cultural intermediation, participants described taking an approach that aligns with the design thinking process, described in the next section. Additional enactments of role theory concepts are also outlined in Appendix A.

II. A Framework for Content Creation Process: Design Thinking

Social media managers need a way to translate and distill the influences on their work discussed above into content that satisfies both their organizations and their users. As a whole, this study's participants identified a way to accomplish this – design thinking – although none specifically named this approach, nor did any describe following all its phases in their entirety. Figure 4 illustrates how design thinking can be contextualized within the social media management role and how practitioners can apply it to their cultural intermediation. This framework formalizes the content creation process by aligning participants' *in vivo* descriptions of their work to each design thinking phase. Social media communicators can use this framework to develop more relevant and creative content and also identify factors that may impede their work, discussed next.

Figure 4

Contextualized Social Media Creation Process
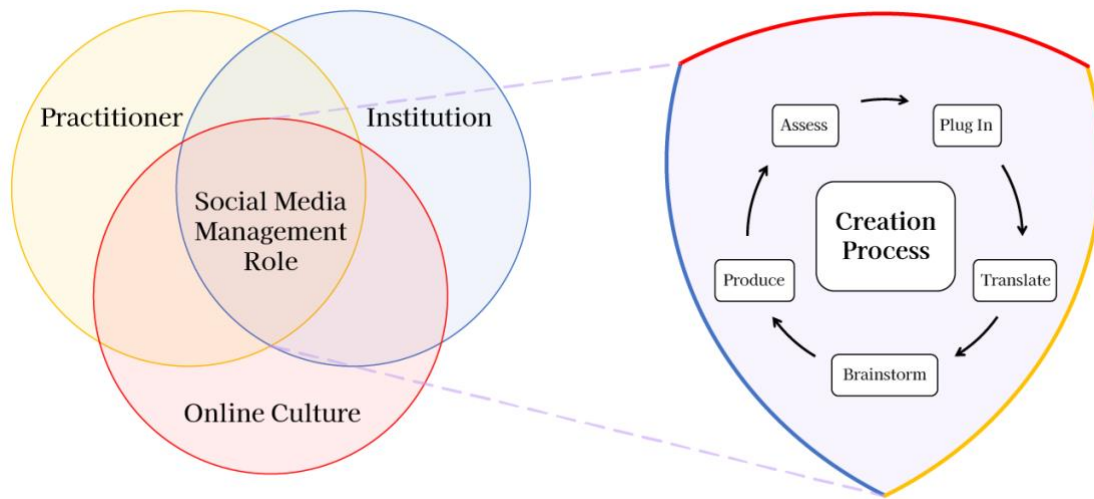
Participant descriptions of their content creation process are provided in Table 20. It begins with practitioners "**plugging in**" to social media, see C4.IV.A, and embodying their institution, see C4.IV.C, aligning with design thinking's empathetic discovery phase. Next, practitioners **translate** their institutional and community priorities by identifying and defining what they wish to tackle through their work, i.e., the problem definition phase in design thinking. Participants then reported **brainstorming** potential solutions, often with other team members, which design thinking describes as idea generation. After brainstorming, they select one idea and **produce** it. Production aligns with design thinking's creation phase but differs slightly as practitioners both create original content as well as coordinate assets managed by other colleagues (e.g., request photographs, edit text, select images from a database). Finally, interviewees described **assessing** their own work (see C4.V.B), akin to design thinking's evaluation or feedback phase, usually through quantitative metrics (e.g., likes, shares, views). However, it is important to note half of this study's participants desired a better assessment of their content.

Table 20

Content Creation Framework Aligned to Design Thinking Phases

Content Creation Process Step	Design Thinking Phase	Prevalence	In Vivo Description
Plug In	Empathetic Discovery	6: Dee, Eleanor, Elle, Gwen, Jay, Kay	"I'm definitely **plugged into** all the conversation [on social media] so I can react to stuff really quickly." (Eleanor, 20)
Translate	Problem Definition	5: Dee, Eleanor, Elle, Jay, Kay	"Seeing how I can **translate**, how can I show by example that we are living our framework and make that attractive to each of our audiences." (Kay, 20)
Brainstorm	Idea Generation	6: Brock, Eleanor, Elle, Gwen, Jay	"We **brainstorm**...I don't have to own every idea. It's really nice to have ideas coming from other places, and especially from people who are in the profession." (Gwen, 21)
Produce	Creation	8: Anna, Brock, Dee, Eleanor, Elle, Gwen, Jay, Kay	"I'm still working...five or 10 hours more a week just because of how much content we've been **producing**." (Elle, 20)
Assess	Evaluation	7: Brock, Dee, Eleanor, Elle, Gwen, Jay, Kay	"I feel like [analytics] is something that is not as great on my part, just because I'm so focused and trying to do the content creation and the content scheduling...I am doing some **assessment** in terms of what are our most successful posts and what are our impression numbers and engagement numbers within a quarterly basis." (Kay, 21)

Unfortunately, some interviewees described limitations in their ability to perform all of

the steps in this content creation process, often preventing them from developing innovative and

meaningful content. Some found aspects too time consuming (a reason both Anna and Kay

offered for not always assessing their work). Others had difficulty navigating colleagues' and

supervisors' fear of negative feedback, curtailing possible brainstorming and production

possibilities (see C4.V.C). Clarke (2020) notes the fear of failure is a prevalent constraint facing

any use of design thinking in libraries. Perhaps acknowledging the helpfulness of negative

feedback – as this study uncovered in C4.V.D – may help mitigate these fears. Additionally,

practitioners should be fairly compensated for the hours they spend "plugged in" and given the

resources (and time) needed to accomplish their responsibilities, including assessing their work regularly and through more detailed, qualitative lenses.

For example, practitioners (and their organizations) could focus on the qualitative connections created through social media work. This can be seen in Kay's connection with a student who signed up to use her library's podcast creation studio (see C4.IV.E.3), Dee's connection with a Welsh woman regarding a rare medical condition (see C4.V.B), and Brock's connection between an instructor and his institution's archivist to facilitate COVID-19 rapid response collecting (see C4.VI.C.2). These illustrate how building relationships and establishing rapport is valuable, even if it does not show up in quantifiable calculations.

III. Mapping Social Media Activities to a Continuum of Practices

While design thinking provides a structure for how social media managers perform their role overall, practitioners also developed new ways to connect with their communities through social media as a result of pandemic shutdowns (see C4.VI.B), some of which offered visitor-centered and socially responsive practices. Prior research from Dilenschneider (2017b) found inclusive social media practices is one way cultural institutions can diversify their audiences, and these novel adaptations can be mapped to Kletchka's (2018) continuum of institutional practices as well. Examples from participants are outlined in Figure 5 and described next.

Figure 5

New Social Media Activities Mapped to Kletchka's (2018) Continuum of Institutional Practices
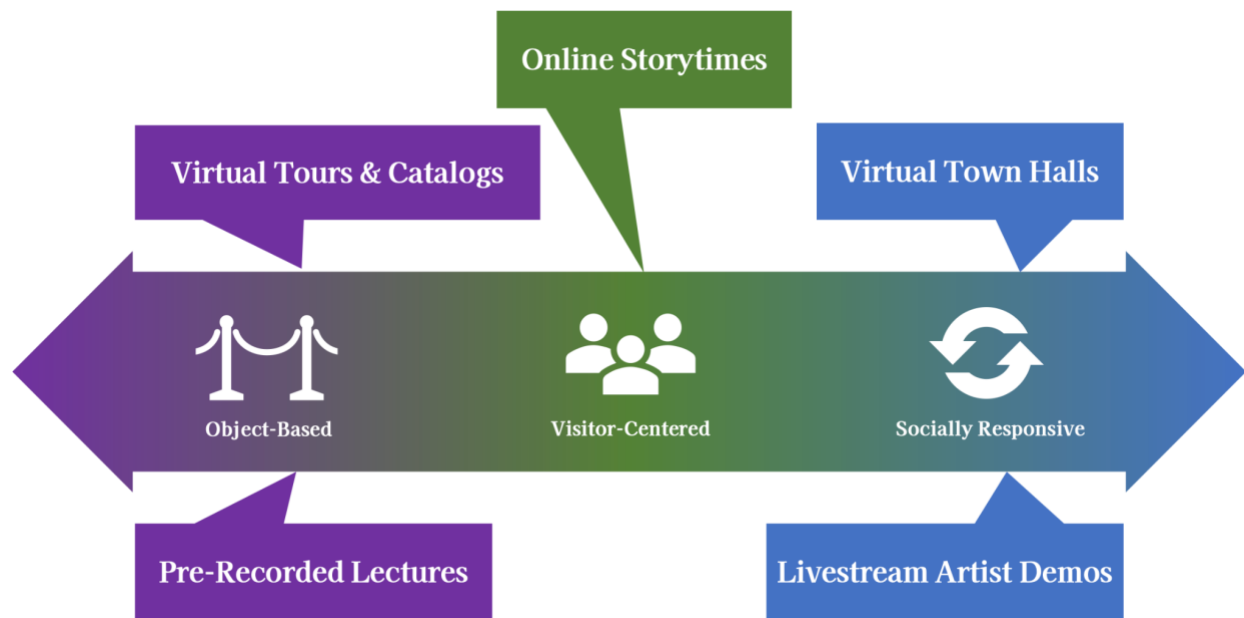
New object-based practices described by Anna, Dee, Eleanor, and Elle included virtual tours and pre-recorded lectures. The virtual tours consisted of digitized collections or catalogs with images and descriptions of work made available online and the pre-recorded lectures detailed were videos on topics determined by – and featuring – librarians or curators. Both of these practices are object-centered because they frame objects and experts as their primary knowledge facilitators (Kletchka, 2018).

Online children's storytimes were a popular new visitor-centered experience reported by Gwen and Dee. These included live readings of stories that encouraged synchronous active participant engagement with children (and their families) tuning in at a convenient time. While stories were chosen by librarians, these events also required dynamic audience participation and creativity, which is why they can be categorized as visitor centered (Kletchka, 2018).

Finally, the livestreamed artist demonstrations and virtual town halls described by Elle and Brock illustrated two new socially responsive activities. Elle (21) recounted her artist demos consisted of working with indigenous members of her local community to develop online educational events in which the selected artists would answer live questions from virtual audience members while working on traditional crafts. Both Elle and Brock also described how their institutions hosted virtual town halls, video chat-based meetings held in conjunction with – and featuring – community members wishing to address racism during the social justice protests of summer 2020. Because both events responded to "important community issues through public participation and dialogue" (Kletchka, 2018, p. 300), they are socially responsive.

It is important to note, however, that not only the content but also the delivery of each activity influenced where each example falls on the continuum. For instance, if a curator selected an artist to perform a livestream demonstration without community input – and the event did not include taking questions from participants – it would not be as socially responsive as Elle's example. Correspondingly, developing tools that allow users to curate and publish their own digital collections (e.g., VR/AR exhibitions, reading lists) may better align with visitor-centered practices. And, as Kletchka (2018) notes, the continuum does not provide clear demarcations between each paradigm and continues to evolve (p. 300). However, mapping practices to the continuum can help cultural workers and their institutions evaluate their past activities and encourage future strategies with greater visitor inclusion. As McGrath (2020) summarized:

> Digital outreach efforts, during a pandemic or otherwise, may result in audiences thinking about materials and contexts far beyond the confines of their immediate project or institution; these responses should be expected and can be productively encouraged and acknowledged. (McGrath, 2020, p. 165)

Additional acknowledgement of social media work at cultural institutions are interpreted through dramaturgical metaphors next.

IV. Synthesizing Findings & Connections to Dramaturgical Themes

The social media manager role, the design thinking process, and the continuum of institutional practices can be combined and synthesized with the dramaturgical themes outlined in Chapter 4. These theatrical analogies provide a helpful way to describe practitioners as performers of a role (Shulman, 2017, p. 71). In fact, Rylander Eklund et al. (2021) suggest using improvisational theater and drama to scaffold professional development related to design thinking, as dramaturgical exercises offer the opportunity to develop shared routines and a common vernacular (p. 15).

This study's emergent themes identified how eight practitioners carried out cultural intermediation by defining their professional success (C4.III), describing the process of creating social media (C4.IV), evaluating their work (C4.V), and reflecting upon the influences of COVID-19 (C4.VI). Aligning these findings to established frameworks allows the experiences and problems of social media work at cultural institutions to be expressed and understood using terms already being taught and used in LIS, organizational, management, and creative fields (Clarke, 2020). This translation and synthesis between (feminist) design thinking (Clarke, 2020; Doorley et al., 2018; Tham, 2019), social responsiveness (Kletchka, 2018), and this study's findings (detailed in Table 21) can help practitioners, their supervisors, and their organizations reckon with current issues, develop strategies to improve social media work, and ultimately improve the outreach capabilities of cultural institutions.

Table 21

Synthesis of Findings & Connections

Design Thinking Phase	Feminist Design Thinking Heuristic	Social Responsiveness	Content Creation Process & Dramaturgical Themes	Practitioner Considerations
Empathize	Who is (silently) affected by a problem and how can social norms of exclusion or injustice be mitigated by amplifying marginalized voices?	What issues are important to your community?	**Plug In** Method Acting: Living Inside Social Media (C4.IV.A); Audience & Their Influence (C4.IV.E.3)	• Work/life balance (see C4.IV.B) • Community knowledge (see C4.IV.E.3) • Safety (see C4.IV.D.3)
Define	Whose experience should be highlighted and how can problematic issues be corrected through inclusive design?	How can your institution foster inclusive public participation and dialogue online?	**Translate** Method Acting: Practitioner/Institutional Values & Influences (C4.IV.D.2)	• Familiarity with institutional content/goals, ability to make inclusive connections between these and community priorities (see C4.IV.D.2)
Ideate	Who is invited and able to voice their opinions and decide creative directions? Are minority representations empowered to challenge unjust designs?	In what ways can content position users as partners in the ongoing processes of curatorial, interpretive, and knowledge exchange?	**Brainstorm** Method Acting: Meaningful Engagement (C4.IV.D.1)	• Focus on human interactions versus one-way communication (see C4.III.E and C4.IV.D.1) • Ability to quickly respond to community priorities creatively (see C4.III.C and C4.V.C)
Prototype	How does form/function work against exclusion and promote critical reflection?	How does content challenge hegemony and promote community-based knowledge and reflection?	**Produce** Method Acting: Creation Process (C4.IV.E)	• Access to (and knowledge of) contemporary multimedia creator tools (see C4.III.F) • Empowered to collaborate effectively and use skills and knowledge (see C4.III.D)
Test	Does the design perpetuate social justice and counter marginalization?	Did content reach, respond to, and resonate with community members?	**Assess** Everyone's a Critic (C4.V)	• Regular and helpful feedback on work that aligns areas of evaluation to practitioner/institutional goals (see C4.V.A and C4.V.B)

Moreover, this synthesis can also be used to relate practitioner experiences to larger LIS and societal concerns. For example, organizations that support better work/life balance may help address practitioner overwork and burnout associated with "plugging in," which is needed to empathize with online communities. This may mitigate the larger turnover rate of social media positions at cultural institutions and also respond to the larger trends of workers joining the "Great Resignation" (see C3.III.D.1). Another example is identifying experiences related to dismissed expertise (see C4.III.D) and its relationship to the production of content. The unwillingness of colleagues to support social media work – or worse, advocate for detrimental uses of social media, e.g., participating in the "Black Square" trend of 2020 – actively curtails socially responsive possibilities. Each first-level theme is further summarized with additional connections to larger issues next.

IV.A. Plot Twists: Paradoxes in Professional Success

Interviewees navigated unanticipated careers, inconsistencies, conflicts, and ambiguous responsibilities to perform the work of social media management at libraries and museums. The idiosyncratic career paths (see C4.III.A) described by participants may offer one reason why social media management is not currently viewed as professional vocation, as Mariner (1969) insists a unique career line is a requirement for an occupation to be a profession (p. 140). Yet only 27% of college graduates hold a job that is directly related to their major (Abel & Deitz, 2014, p. 8), and Americans will switch jobs approximately 12 times by the time they turn 54 (BLS, 2021). Furthermore, working at the same organization for more than two years will cause employees to earn 50% less over their lifetime due to wage stagnation and/or lack of raises (Keng, 2014). Experiencing dismissed expertise (see C4.III.D) and ambiguous duties (see C4.III.F) alludes to other reasons why social media management may not be valued as a

professional career, as practitioners are unable to fulfill Wilensky's (1964) "assert an exclusive jurisdiction" requirement. Additionally, recent increases in the participants' visibility and perceived importance due to the pandemic and/or Great Resignation of 2021 (see C4.VI.A) may influence future practitioners' experiences.

Another way forward is following Stauffer's (2016) argument for redefining the role of information professionals by their ability to discover and implement services desired by communities. Since they "live" inside social media culture (see C4.IV.A), practitioners are well-positioned to identify and create services wanted by community members. However, social media managers must be granted enough power (and resources) to implement new ideas. Participants saw "strategy work" as a means to regain control over their duties (see C4.IV.E.4.ii), but the ability to strategize may not provide the desired autonomy if supervisors or institutional administrators are too fearful to try new things (see C4.V.C).

IV.B. Method Acting: Embodying an Institution and Producing Content

Like method actors who live as their character, participants expressed a never-ending need to embed themselves within social media culture. By submerging themselves in social media, they are able to engage in popular trends and keep up with what other organizations are doing online (see C4.IV.A). Unsurprisingly, interviewees often connected this constant attention to feelings of stress, burnout, and overwork (see C4.IV.B). This requirement for social media managers to sacrifice their personal, "back stage" time is symptomatic of vocational awe (Ettarh, 2018). Vocational awe is also amplified by the alignment between practitioners' personal and professional values (see C4.IV.D.2), which can limit institutional criticism and change (Ettarh, 2018; Horgan, 2021).

Along with living inside social media, practitioners become an online embodiment of

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their institution. These method actors immerse themselves into their role and even merge their

voice with their organization's (see C4.IV.C). However, being "the voice of the entire

organization," as Jay (20) described it, can be difficult when personal and institutional values

diverge. For example, Elle began considering other jobs after she was tasked with creating and

promoting press releases on deceptive museum construction issues. She revealed:

> I really didn't want to be the name behind the press release that came out that said, 'Hey, our building's going to be 35,000 square feet smaller than the taxpayers voted on'...I didn't like having to be behind these press releases that were going to go out. So I bailed. (Elle, 21)

As Elle's quote illustrates, living fully as a "frontstage" embodiment of an organization

makes it difficult for practitioners to separate themselves from their institutions. Eleanor (21)

further described the difficulty of "separating yourself mentally from the feedback your

institution is getting, as opposed to you yourself." This is also why acknowledging the

personhood behind social media accounts is important (see C4.IV.D), including the inequalities

faced by some practitioners due to their identities. For example, two women interviewed feared

adding their real name to their social media accounts would harm their physical safety, while

both men were more concerned about their professional reputations (see C4.IV.D.3). Relatedly,

Kay (21) mused that most users "don't think it's a real person behind here," even though all

participants valued personal connections more highly than other (i.e., quantitative) outcomes (see

C4.IV.D.1). As such, creating content that facilitates human-to-human connections is essential.

IV.C. Everyone's a Critic: Reviews, Self-assessment, and Outside Feedback

Participants evaluated their work – and were evaluated by others – in many ways. All

interviewees described formal organizational reviews (see C4.V.A) though these were not often

seen as meaningfully connected to their daily work. In their self-assessments, interviewees often

focused on quantitative measures even as they valued qualitative aspects of their work more (see

C4.V.B). Perhaps this is because meaningful engagement (see C4.IV.D.1) is resistant to quantification, which leads to a vicious cycle of adding even more organizational bureaucracy and red tape to prove employee time is spent working on "productive" tasks (Horgan, 2021, p. 57). Moreover, interviewees described a need to placate their supervisors, who were overly fearful of negative backlash (see C4.V.C). This fear seemed particularly unfounded by participants who believed outside criticism to be useful (see C4.V.D). Clearly, social media managers receive, and respond to, both internal and external criticisms as part of their role.

IV.D. Bit Part to Leading Actor: Pandemic Adaptations

Social media management roles grew from bit parts to leading actors in early 2020 as a result of pandemic-related closures. One reason why social media managers may not have been as well-respected prior to COVID-19 is feminization. Like the vast majority of social media communicators generally (Duffy & Schwartz, 2018), and people working in libraries and museums specifically (Shirazi, 2018; Boast & Mott, 2018), six of the eight participants identified as women. Most participants reported that it took a global pandemic with mandated shutdowns for their colleagues and supervisors to offer the recognition and support their role deserved (see C4.VI.A). All interviewees also described COVID-19 shutdowns as offering a catalyst for new uses of social media, which is consistent with broader findings that the pandemic accelerated digital communication strategies by an average of six years (Statista, 2020c).

New uses of social media included virtual events, online resources, amusing and/or interactive content, video, and COVID-19 information (see C4.VI.B). These align with McGrath's (2020) early reflections of pandemic changes at cultural institutions:

> In response [to shutdowns], organizations and individuals developed new forms of online programming, utilized social media as sites of dialogue and curation, digitally remediated exhibitions and events that were planned to take place in other formats, and disseminated content and materials that had previously been digitized or digitally recorded. As these

efforts were underway, it became clear that COVID-19's impact would be far greater than a temporary closure. (p. 165)

Moreover, two participants (Brock and Elle) changed their minds about the importance of continuing virtual events post-pandemic over the course of this longitudinal study. Both originally prioritized getting people to visit their institutions in person, but later came to value the inclusive possibilities and practices of virtual events (see C4.VI.B.1). Furthermore, all interviewees mentioned the importance of using social media for enhanced inclusivity and accessibility.

Participants used social media to respond to crises as well (see C4.VI.C). This included crisis communication (see C4.VI.C.1), as well as rapid response programming and collecting (see C4.VI.C.2). All the library practitioners cited their institution's trustworthiness as a critical reason for providing health and emergency resource-related information through social media. On the other hand, none of the museum participants shared this view, perhaps reflecting a wariness about incurring hateful online activity associated with COVID-19 content (Velásquez et al., 2021). In fact, all museum practitioners (as well as Brock and Dee) described increasing lighthearted content as a means to distract from the pandemic, even though "scientific" content about COVID-19 is preferred by social media users (WHO, 2021). Museum accounts are trusted resources and, as such, perfectly positioned to join libraries in combating the spread of misinformation through social media.

Five participants also mentioned examples where they (or their supervisors) decided to delay or stop all communications (see C4.VI.C.3). Examples of this include the aftermath of George Floyd's murder in 2020 and the January 6, 2021 U.S. Capitol insurrection. Working through so many crises took a personal toll on all participants (see C4.VI.D). As a whole, Americans are grieving, traumatized, and struggling with their mental health (Gilbert, 2021;

Eichstaedt et al., 2021). This chronic and perpetual stress changes brain functioning, leading

some neuroscientists to believe all of us are now suffering from mild cognitive impairment –

even if we did not contract COVID-19 ourselves (Cushing, 2021).

But social media work's star may already be fading. Three participants described slowing

their social media activity after an initial expansion. And while participants reported additional

acknowledgement for their role, this did not necessarily translate into higher pay or increased

career stability. This may also be connected to feminization, as both related PayScale titles with

significant gender statistics, Social Media Specialist and Social Media Coordinator, showed a

continued increase of women between 2020 and 2021, to 80.6% and 83.5% respectively

(Payscale, 2021a; 2021b). In fact, Elle's position was outsourced after she left (costing her

museum exponentially more than the raise she requested). Interestingly, the average cost for

outsourced professional social media services is between $48,000 and $84,000 – which is the

same (if not more) than hiring an in-house social media manager (Salesforce, 2016; McCarthy,

2018).

One way to stop further precarity is collective organization. Unionized cultural workers

experienced 28% fewer layoffs this past year than their nonunion peers (AFSCME, 2021, p. 3).

As such, unionization should be added to the list of "self-care strategies" outlined in textbooks

such as Sutherland's (2021) *Strategic Social Media Management*. This will also help address

larger systems that foster oppressive demands and reframe burnout as a symptom of exploitation

that cannot be solved individually.

V. Longitudinal Changes

Three significant changes in participant responses occurred over the course of this

longitudinal study: shifts in self-described demographic information, the initiation of regular

self-assessments, and attitude changes regarding virtual events. First, half of the interviewees (Eleanor, Elle, Jay, Kay) disclosed title changes and salary increases between 2020 and 2021 (see C4.VI.A.2. Promotions & Title Changes), which is particularly surprising because the overall promotion rate of U.S. employees only advanced 0.9% since 2019 (Corrigan, 2021). Two participants (Kay and Jay) also changed their self-descriptions of their race and/or ethnicity, discussed further in Appendix F. Second, Eleanor and Gwen revealed they began performing regular assessments of their social media analytics in 2021 (see C4.V.B. Self-Assessment), which could be related to increased attention to social media work during building closures (see C4.VI. Bit Part to Leading Actor: Pandemic Adaptations). Finally, Brock and Elle seemed to change their attitude towards virtual events (see C4.VI.B.1. Virtual Events). While initially insistent upon the importance (and primacy) of in-person programming, by 2021 they both seemed to reverse their opinion and promoted the use of online events for wider community participation, inclusion, and accessibility.

VI. Limitations

This qualitative study focused on social media work from practitioners' perspectives between March 2020 and August 2021. Like other IPA studies, it is limited in its reproducibility, offering instead a detailed study of lived experience. Additionally, one participant left her original institution in between interview sessions, which may have influenced her responses. Elle's candid answers to prompts about her decision to leave a museum for a similar role elsewhere, however, provided noteworthy considerations. She may have felt freer to discuss multiple instances of overwork and underappreciation – for example, Elle's discussion of the use of three employees to perform her single role offered a vivid example of her previous exploitation (see C4.IV.B.1). In my opinion, her second interview was neither excessively

negative nor overly nostalgic. Including her in my analysis provided additional and credible insights into the experiences of social media communicators at a cultural institution. Furthermore, this work is limited by the time available for analysis and my personal capabilities as a researcher.

VII. Future Work

Additional findings, reflections, and connections made from the vast amount of content collected in this study – over 21 hours of interview data collected across 18 months during several global crises – could fill bookshelves or hard drives. Future work could include developing and assessing curriculum that addresses gaps in practitioner knowledge, including collective organization. Other related work that was out of scope for this project could focus on triangulating practitioners' reflections of their social media content with the actual content they create, studying the impact of practitioners' work from supervisors' and community members' perspectives, surveying a larger number of practitioners, and reviewing communicator requests for help on digital support forums.

VIII. Summary

This dissertation offers a glimpse into the unique experiences and significance of social media communicators at American cultural institutions during an unprecedented time. Findings from an interview-based LIPA study conducted between March 2020 and August 2021 use dramaturgical interpretations to describe how practitioners perform their role as social media managers. Interviewees reported many "plot twists" and paradoxes associated with their work (see C4.III), including idiosyncratic career paths, informal hiring yet bureaucratic working conditions, dismissed expertise, desire for connection while perpetually producing one-way messages, and ambiguous responsibilities. Participants described their "method acting"

techniques (see C4.IV), which required living within social media as an embodiment of their institution, leading to stress, burnout, and overwork. They also acknowledged "everyone's a critic," but found self-assessment and outside feedback as more helpful than organizational reviews (see C4.V). Even as they faced these difficult working conditions, interviewees revealed the COVID-19 pandemic shifted their role from a "bit part to leading actor" (see C4.VI), as their colleagues offered more recognition while they were also able to create new and more social media content as a result of their institutions' physical closures.

These findings connect to larger theoretical constructs. First, the social media management role is an intermediary between practitioners, their institutions, and broader online cultures (see C5.I). Within this context, communicators produce content using an adapted design thinking process (see C5.II). Finally, social media activities can be mapped to a continuum of institutional practices (see C5.III). These connections provide ways in which organizations can evaluate their responsiveness and inclusion efforts while also offering ideas for enhancing social media work (see C5.IV).

Taken together, this study's findings, interpretations, and connections reveal social media work at museums and libraries is at a crossroads. Organizations can continue to undervalue their social media communicators and return to using digital platforms almost entirely for in-person event promotion. Or they can empower these information professionals and improve upon the responsive content, services, and practices developed under the stress of a pandemic.

APPENDIX A: ENACTMENT OF KEY ROLE THEORY CONCEPTS

Beyond contextualizing the role of social media managers as intermediaries, participants illustrated examples of role theory concepts. These are provided below in Table A1. Future research could use each of these concrete examples in work related to role theory or analyzing specific aspects of social media communication.

Table 22: A1

Role Theory Concepts Aligned with Social Media Work

Role Theory Concept	Example
Consensus: An agreement among expectations held by various individuals (Biddle, 1986, p. 76).	Seven of the eight participants used the word "promote" or "promotion" in their description of the purpose of social media posts. This focus on promotion aligns with Solomon's (2016) observation that most libraries and nonprofits use a broadcast or one-way transmission model for outreach, where promotional messages are sent without consideration for how useful those messages may be for their audiences (p. 4). See C4.III.E: Monologues vs. Dialogues.
Conformity: Compliance to a behavior pattern generated by norms, beliefs, or preferences (Biddle, 1986, p. 78-80).	All interviewees described participating in formalized annual reviews, often defined and managed through an outside department. However, half (Anna, Eleanor, Elle, Gwen) did not see a correlation between this process and the achievements they personally valued. See C4.V.A: Formal Reviews.
Role conflict: A stress-producing experience arising from role expectations that are both distinct and incompatible or otherwise at odds with other roles being played (Biddle, 1986, p. 82; O'Leary, 2007a, p. 236).	Most participants divulged their personal dislike of using social media themselves. Some found social media work incompatible with aspects of their personality (e.g., Anna's aversion towards soliciting followers and feeling limited in her ability to use institutional platforms for progressive activism). Others stopped using personal social media accounts due to spending so much time on the platforms for work. See C4.III.A: Idiosyncratic Career Paths.
Role ambiguity: A condition that occurs when expectations are too incomplete to guide behavior (Biddle, 1986, p. 83).	Interviewees described ambiguous duties associated with social media work, with some performing responsibilities without training. For example, Elle began running her museum's social media only a few months after graduating college, noting, "I barely had any idea what I was doing" in 2020. See C4.III.F: Ambiguous Duties.
Role malintegration: The inability to adequately fit different roles together (Biddle, 1986, p. 83).	Brock (20) recounted his inability to work more than 2-3 hours per day during the initial stages of the COVID-19 pandemic because he had to care for his two young children, who were no longer able to attend day care. His role as a responsible father was malintegrated with his role as a full-time social media professional. See C4.IV.B.1: (Over)Working Hours.
Role discontinuity: An experience that occurs when a person is required to perform multiple malintegrated roles (Biddle, 1986, p. 83).	Elle experienced role discontinuity when she was tasked with promoting her museum store's products. In one instance, the store manager asked her to advertise a line of candles featuring war bonnets on their label decoration, an offensive example of cultural appropriation that was contrary to her institution's educational mission. See C4.V.D: Negative Feedback as Helpful.

Role Theory Concept	Example
Role overload: An overwhelming number of expectations (Biddle, 1986, p. 83).	Jay (20) described the impact of role overload when prompted to describe the amount of time he spends on his social media work each day, stating, "If I think about how much I work, I work all the time" (Jay, 20). See C4.IV.B.1: (Over)Working Hours.
Role taking: The internalization of expectations, either as asserted by outsiders or by oneself (Biddle, 1979, p. 7).	Some participants (Eleanor, Gwen, Kay) shared a passion for finding inclusive ways to reach people that might otherwise be or feel excluded from their institutions. Eleanor (20) described her efforts toward making diverse visual content choices, "I don't want you to have to scroll a lot to see someone that looks like you, or an artist that looks like you." See C4.IV.E.3: Audience & Their Influence.
Role making: The construction, adaptation, or modification of a role, which can often include a degree of improvisation or creativity (Martin & Wilson, 2005, p. 652).	Dee (20), who primarily works as office manager, asked to modify her job to include running the library's Twitter account by asking her colleagues, "Well, does anybody mind if I do it?" in 2014. See C4.III.A: Idiosyncratic Career Paths.
Role engulfment: The all-encompassing performance of a role that completely pervades a person's thoughts, self-conception, and interactions (Martin & Wilson, 2005, p. 653).	Most participants felt the need to embed themselves within social media culture to perform their work well. While some saw this aspect of their work as interesting and fun, others felt drained. Eleanor (20) shared how role engulfment threatens her wellbeing, noting, "not only are we underpaid, but I would say our mental health suffers so much because we cannot unplug. We can't look away from what's happening." See C4.IV.A: Living Inside Social Media
Role distance: A conceptualized separation or disassociation between a performer and a role they play (Martin & Wilson, 2005, p. 653).	Some participants managed their role conflict, engulfment, and overload by suspending or deleting their personal accounts. Kay (20) explained, "social media can be really draining. It's really easy to burn out on this work...I didn't do [personal social media] for a long time." See C4.III.A: Idiosyncratic Career Paths and C4.IV.B.2: Burnout.
Role congruity: A match between role requirements and perceived characteristics (Diekman, 2007, p. 764).	Five interviewees referenced personal values as a reason why they decided to work (and/or continued to work) at a cultural institution. Gwen (20) shared, "I think when you enjoy your work, you hope to find a position where the culture supports your work and the kind of professional and individual that you are." See C4.IV.D.2: Values & Influences.

APPENDIX B: 2020 PILOT RESEARCH PROJECT

I. 2020 Research Questions (IRB Study 20-0204)

RQ1: How do social media communicators at cultural and academic institutions understand and navigate their work?
- RQ1a: How do practitioners view their position within their institution?
- RQ1b: What tasks do they perform regularly?
- RQ1c: What experience and training guide their practice?
- RQ1d: What additional education, if any, is desired?
- RQ1e: Have practitioners encountered or created digital content that they perceive as biased or otherwise problematic? If so, what was it, and do they have suggestions for preventing similar issues in the future?

RQ2: What values and perspectives are present (or missing) in social media content produced by information professionals working in informal learning spaces?
- RQ2a: How, if at all, do these values align with their institutions' stated missions?

II. 2020 Emergent Themes

Summary of initial findings
- **Interviewees deeply value their organizations**, but accounts of their lived experience demonstrate their **organizations do not value them nor their work**.
- Descriptions of employment, from the **hiring process** to **workplace expectations** and **(lack of) support**, illustrate a disparity between these institutions' stated missions and how they treat those responsible for accomplishing public education and engagement.
- However, the global coronavirus pandemic of 2020 provided an **opportunity** for some communicators to **finally feel as if their work's importance was recognized.**

III. 2020 Sample Recruitment Letter Template

University of North Carolina at Chapel Hill
IRB Study #: 20-0204

Dear [Name],

My name is Laura March and I am recruiting participants for a research study on how social media practitioners understand and navigate their work. If you can find the time, I would appreciate the opportunity to interview you and study examples of your favorite social media content. I hope that you will be interested in sharing your thoughts and reflections about your experiences.

How do I participate?
Please respond to this email and we will set up a time for an in-person interview or a secure web-based interview through Zoom.

What will I be doing?
If you agree to participate, you will be asked to do a 1-hour web-based interview to talk about your experience and opinions related to your work as a social media communicator. You will also be asked to share examples of your favorite content.

If you have any questions, please contact me at lmarch@unc.edu.

Thank you for interest,
Laura March

IV. 2020 Consent to Participate

University of North Carolina at Chapel Hill
Research Information Sheet
IRB Study #: 20-0204
Investigators: Dr. Lucinda Austin & Laura March

The purpose of this research study is to learn how social media practitioners understand and navigate their work and how their content relates to their institutions' missions. You are being asked to take part in this study because you are a social media communicator at a cultural, educational, or scientific institution.

This study is completely voluntary – you can choose not to be part of this research. You can also say yes now and change your mind later. Deciding not to be in the research study, now or later, will not affect your academic standing, employment, nor ability to receive medical care at UNC.

What we will ask you to do
If you agree to take part in this research, you will be asked to describe your experiences as a social media communicator as well as share examples of your work in an interview. If you agree to share examples of your work, the researchers may save your content for analysis after the interview. Social media content will be saved manually and without identifiable information (no related "handles," URLs, etc.) to ensure confidentiality.

Your participation in this study will take approximately one hour. We expect 10 people will take part in this research study.

You can choose not to answer any interview question you do not wish to answer. You can also choose to stop the interview any time. You must be at least 18 years old to participate. If you are younger than 18 years old, please stop now.

Risks
The possible risks to you in taking part in this research are:
- feeling uncomfortable, and/or
- having someone else find out that you were in a research study, which could include the potential loss of confidentiality of data.
There are no personal benefits to you for taking part in this research.

To protect your identity as a research subject, the research data will not be stored with your name and the researcher will not share your information with anyone. Neither your name, your institution's name, nor other private information will be used in any publication about this research.

If you have any questions about this research, please contact the Investigator named at the top of this form by calling (919) 962-8366 or emailing lmarch@unc.edu. If you have questions or concerns about your rights as a research subject, you may contact the UNC Institutional Review Board at 919-966-3113 or by email to IRB_subjects@unc.edu.

Consent to Participate
Before the interview begins, we will ask you for your consent to participate. If you do not feel comfortable being part of this research project, please let us know now.
If you consent to participating in this interview, please say, "I consent to this interview."

Consent for Participation & Recording
Before the interview begins, we will ask you to consent to having your audio responses recorded. Audio recordings will be saved securely and deleted at the end of this study. Your name and contact information will not be saved in the same location as the audio file.
If you consent to being audio recorded for this interview, please say, "I consent to being recorded."

Consent for Social Media Review
During the interview, you will be asked to provide examples of your social media work and for your permission to save your favorite posts from your preferred platform. Content will be saved securely and deleted at the end of this study. Your name, contact information, and institutional name will not be saved in the same location as the social media content.
If you consent to sharing your social media content, please say, "I consent to sharing my publicly available social media content."

V. 2020 Semi-Structured Interview Questions

Demographics
- Do you have a preferred pseudonym that you'd like me to use for you?
- What gender pronouns do you prefer?
- How would you describe your race and/or ethnicity?
- What's your educational background?
- How would you describe the institution you work for? (Museum, library, educational institution, etc.)
- What is your current job title?

General
- How would you describe your personality?
  - Do you think there is a particular kind of personality type that you think is best suited to social media work?
  - How, if at all, do your personal values align with your work?
- How did you come to be a professional social media content creator?

- ○ If applicable: What was your first position doing social media creation?
- ● What's the best and worst parts of your job?

Process
- ● What are your responsibilities?
  - ○ Walk me through the process of creating a post. Where do you start? (Go through each step)
- ● How would you describe your audience?
- ● What impact/outcomes do you think about when you develop content?
- ● Who do you collaborate with in your museum/library? Any particularly fruitful collaborations?

Personal Impact
- ● Has doing social media work professionally changed any way you think or feel about your personal use of social media?
  - ○ If yes, what? Example?
- ● Have you ever experienced burnout?
  - ○ How did you know that you were experiencing burnout? Can you describe what it felt like for you?
  - ○ What advice do you have for anyone who might be experiencing burnout?

Education
- ● Did you receive any related training or education before you started your first social media-related position?
  - ○ If no training: Do you wish you had formal education in social media?
  - ○ Did you receive any training on making social media content more accessible to people with disabilities, like adding captions to videos or alt tags to images?
- ● If you were promoted and hiring someone else to do your current role, what kinds of experience would your replacement need? Do you believe training on social media would be useful for future social media communicators?
  - ○ What would you like it to include?

Social Context
- ● Social media is one of the few things that research has shown to diversify audiences. Have you received any related cultural competency training or can you think of how the library's/museum's social media content might help encourage diversity?
- ● Why do you think around 80% of social media managers are women?
- ● And why do you think these positions are the lowest paying?

Significance for Cultural Institutions
- ● What do you think would happen if all museums/libraries got rid of social media managers?
  - ○ Or, I guess the bigger question, how would you explain to others that what you're doing on social media is important and why it's important to have experienced people running your accounts?
- ● How do you think your work and/or your life in general would be different if you did social media managing somewhere else?
  - ○ What are the big differences about working for a library/museum or a nonprofit in general versus a corporate social media job?

Problematic Content

- Have you ever encountered digital content (from another institution or your own) that you think was problematic? If so, what happened?
  - Prompt: Perhaps something that seemed biased or just didn't sit well with you.

Future
- How do you see yourself in the future? Do you want to continue doing social media work? Why/why not?

VI. 2020 IRB Exemption

From: IRB <no_reply@unc.edu>
Sent: Wednesday, February 26, 2020 9:32 AM
To: Austin, Lucinda L <lucinda.austin@unc.edu>; March, Laura <lmarch@unc.edu>
Subject: IRB Notice - 20-0204

To: Laura March and Lucinda Austin
School of Information and Library Science
From: Office of Human Research Ethics

Date: 2/26/2020
RE: Notice of IRB Exemption
Exemption Category: 2.Survey, interview, public observation
Study #: 20-0204

Study Title: Social Media Communicators Study

This submission, Reference ID 273475, has been reviewed by the Office of Human Research Ethics and was determined to be exempt from further review according to the regulatory category cited above under 45 CFR 46.104.

Study Description:
Purpose: This study seeks to learn how social media practitioners understand and navigate their work and how their content relates to their institution's mission.

Participants: Ten Information practitioners working in libraries, museums, science centers, or archives that manage or contribute to their institution's social media accounts.

Procedures: Phase 1: Participants will be interviewed. Phase 2: Ten examples of publicly available social media posts for each participant (of participant's choosing) will be reviewed using thematic content analysis.

Investigator's Responsibilities:
If your study protocol changes in such a way that exempt status would no longer apply, you should contact the above IRB before making the changes. There is no need to inform the IRB about changes in study personnel. However, be aware that you are responsible for ensuring that all members of the research team who interact with subjects or their identifiable data complete the required human subjects training, typically completing the relevant CITI modules.

The IRB will maintain records for this study for 3 years, at which time you will be contacted about the status of the study.

The current data security level determination is Level II. Any changes in the data security level need to be discussed with the relevant IT official. If data security level II and III, consult with your IT official to develop a data security plan. Data security is ultimately the responsibility of the Principal Investigator.

Please be aware that approval may still be required from other relevant authorities or "gatekeepers" (e.g., school principals, facility directors, custodians of records), even though the project has determined to be exempt.

APPENDIX C: 2021 RESEARCH PROJECT

I. 2021 Sample Recruitment Letter Template

IRB Study: 21-0567
IRB Email: irb_questions@unc.edu
IRB Telephone: 919-966-3113

Investigator: Laura March

Dear [Name],

I hope this message finds you well!

It has been a year since we last spoke about your role as a social media manager, and I would appreciate the opportunity to speak with you again as part of a research study. The purpose of this research is to learn how social media practitioners at cultural institutions view and perform their role as well as early influences of the COVID-19 pandemic on their work. You are eligible to be part of this study as a social media manager at a cultural institution.

I hope you will be interested in sharing your thoughts and reflections about your experiences once more.

How do I participate?
Please respond to this email and we will set up a time for a secure ninety-minute web-based interview through Zoom.

What will I be doing?
If you agree to participate, you will be asked to talk about your experience and perspectives related to your work as a social media communicator at a cultural institution during the pandemic. You may also be asked to share or discuss public posts from March 2019 - March 2021.

Participants who complete interviews will be given a $20 Amazon.com gift card. You may be asked to confirm (via email) your receipt of the gift card.

If you have any questions, please contact me (Laura March) at lmarch@unc.edu for additional information, or UNC's IRB office at irb_questions@unc.edu.

Thank you for your time,
Laura March

II. 2021 Consent to Participate

IRB Study: 21-0567
Research Information Sheet
Adapted from IRB Study #: 20-0204
Investigator: Laura March

The purpose of this research study is to learn how social media practitioners view their role and early influences of the COVID-19 pandemic on their work. You are being asked to take part in this study because you are a social media communicator at a museum or library.

This study is completely voluntary – you can choose not to be part of this research. You can also say yes now and change your mind later. Deciding not to be in the research study, now or later, will not affect your academic standing, employment, nor ability to receive medical care at UNC.

What we will ask you to do
If you agree to take part in this research, you will be asked to describe your experiences and perspectives as a social media communicator. If you agree to share your social media posts, the researcher may save your content and metadata for analysis after the interview. Only publicly visible social media content will be saved; personally identifiable information will be removed to ensure confidentiality.

Your participation in this study will take approximately one hour. I expect 8 people will take part in this research study.

You can choose not to answer any interview question you do not wish to answer. You can also choose to stop the interview any time. You must be at least 18 years old to participate. If you are younger than 18 years old, please stop now.

Risks
The possible risks to you in taking part in this research are:
● feeling uncomfortable, and/or
● having someone else find out that you were in a research study, which could include the potential loss of confidentiality of data.

There are no personal benefits to you for taking part in this research.

Incentives
Participants who complete interviews will be given a $20 Amazon.com gift card. You may be asked to confirm (via email) your receipt of the gift card.

To protect your identity as a research subject, the research data will not be stored with your name and the researcher will not share your information with anyone. Neither your name, your institution's name, nor other private information will be used in any publication about this research.

If you have any questions about this research, please contact the Investigator named at the top of this form by calling (919) 962-8366 or emailing lmarch@unc.edu. If you have questions or concerns about your rights as a research subject, you may contact the UNC Institutional Review Board at 919-966-3113 or by email to IRB_subjects@unc.edu.

Consent to Participate
Before the interview begins, I will ask you for your consent to participate. If you do not feel comfortable being part of this research project, please let me know at this time.
If you consent to participating in this interview, please say, "I consent to this interview."

Consent for Participation & Recording
Before the interview begins, I will ask you to consent to having your audio responses recorded. Audio recordings will be saved securely and deleted at the end of this study. Your name and contact information will not be saved in the same location as the audio file or resulting transcripts.
If you consent to being audio recorded for this interview, please say, "I consent to being recorded."

Consent for Social Media Review
During the interview, you will be asked for your permission to save publicly visible posts and metadata from your institutions' social media channel(s). Content will be saved securely and deleted at the end of this study. Your name, contact information, and any other personally identifying information will not be saved in the same location as the social media content.
If you consent to sharing your social media content, please say, "I consent to sharing my publicly available social media content."

III. 2021 Semi-Structured Interview Guide

IRB Study 21-0567

<u>**Pre-Interview**</u>
- Before we get started with recording, were you able to read over the consent document I sent over the weekend? Any questions?
- Do you have a preferred pseudonym that you'd like me to use for you?
- If you consent to participating in this interview, please say, "I consent to this interview."
- If you consent to being audio recorded for this interview, please say, "I consent to being recorded."
- Also, if we run over our allotted time, I'm happy to break up our session and continue talking later today or another time. Just let me know if you'd like a break and we'll schedule a follow up.

<u>**Demographics/Identity (omit as needed – if captured in prior interview – or move to wrap-up section if no existing rapport)**</u>
- Which gender pronouns do you use?
- How would you describe your race and/or ethnicity?
- What's your educational background?

- How would you describe the institution you work for? (Museum, library)
- What is your current job title?
- May I ask your salary range?
- May I ask your age and how long you've worked in your current position?
- Why did you start working in social media? Why have you continued?

Responsibilities
How would you describe your social media work in "What I Really Do" meme template (fastnup & YF, 2012)?
- What my [friends/parents/society/boss/I] think I do vs. what I actually do
- Why do you think there are differences between what you "actually" do and how other people view your work?
- What are your responsibilities? What do you do on a typical daily basis?
    - *Prompt*: Walk me through a typical day at work.

Process
Walk me through the process of creating a post. Where do you start? (Go through each step)
- How do you decide what to post? (And where/when?)
- How do you define and describe the group(s) you produce content, and how (if at all) does this influence your work?
- What impact/outcomes do you think about when you develop content?
- What goals do you have for your work?
- How do you evaluate your work?
- What types of online interactions do you think are useful or desirable and why?
- What does meaningful engagement mean to you?

Evaluation of work
Do you assess your work? If so, how?
[*Adjust accordingly*] Beyond quantitative analytics, if you were to make a toolkit for helping people become successful social media managers at cultural institutions, what areas or topics do you think would be important to include?
- Connecting materials to current events?
- Facilitating conversations related to the collection or mission?
- Creating new ways for people to become involved with the institution?
- Collaborating with or developing work that responds to non-traditional communities?
- Acting as a public educator?
- Why do you think ____ is important to know?

How is your position currently evaluated? (Supervisor/360 annual reviews, weekly meetings, board assessments)
- What is covered in these evaluations? Anything missing?
- What are your favorite aspects of your work? Is there anything you wish was different?
- Why do you think people become social media managers at cultural institutions?

Notoriety of work
Do you think your work aligns with the mission of your institution? How so?

- Does your work align with your personal values? If so, how?
- What do you think would happen if all museums/libraries got rid of social media managers?
- What are the big differences about working for a library/museum versus a corporate social media job?
- Do you follow any critical library/museum accounts or trends (e.g., #CritLib, #MuseumsAreNotNeutral)? If so, what do you think about these in terms of your own positionality?
- How much of your time do you think is spent crafting messages to broadcast to your followers versus responding to incoming messages?
  - Do you think this is a good balance? Would you prefer to spend your time (or do you think a generic social media manager ought to spend their time) differently?

Workload issues
Have you experienced any challenges or misunderstandings?
- Are there any assumptions about your work that people get wrong?
- Is there anything people would be surprised to learn about if they knew what was happening behind-the-scenes?
- Can you describe any examples of times you've had to adapt to an unforeseen challenge?

Impact of COVID and other crises
How has COVID influenced your work over the past year?
- Are you posting more/less? Using different platforms? Devoting more/less time to social media activities?
- Changes with the type of content you're creating/publishing?
  - Why did you make these changes?
- Providing any new services through social media (events, collecting content)?

This has been an unprecedented year. What big moments or events happened that may have affected your work?
- Death of George Floyd and racial justice protests last summer
- The 2020 election
- January 6 Capitol insurrection
- Asian-American hate crimes
- Any other big moments?
Do you see your role being different after any of these crises? If so, how?

Wrap-up
- How do you see yourself in the future? Do you want to continue doing social media work? Why or why not?
- At the beginning of this interview, you described your identity as _____. How, if at all, has that aspect of your identity impacted your work?
  - Example?
  - Why do you think that is?
  Is there anything I haven't asked you about that I ought to have?

III.A. Table 23: C1

Alignment of Research Questions to Content Clusters with 2020 Questions in Bold

Interview Question	Connection to RQs
Responsibilities	
How would you describe your social media work in "[What I Really Do](#)" meme template (fastnup & YF, 2012)? • *Prompt*: What my [friends - parents - society - boss - I] think I do vs. what I actually do • **What are your responsibilities? What do you do on a typical daily basis?**	Identifies personal understanding of role and interprets outsiders' understandings (RQ1)
Process	
Walk me through the process of creating a post. Where do you start? (Go through each step) • How do you decide what to post? (And where/when?) • How do you define and describe the group(s) you produce content, and how (if at all) does this influence your work? • **What impact/outcomes do you think about when you develop content?** • What goals do you have for your work? • How do you evaluate your work? • What types of online interactions do you think are useful or desirable and why? • What does meaningful engagement mean to you?	Describe the process of creating content and how work is self-evaluated (RQ1)
Evaluation of work	
Do you assess your work? If so, how? [*Adjust accordingly*] Beyond quantitative analytics, if you were to make a qualitative rubric for defining successful social media work at libraries and museums, what areas do you think it would be important to include? • Connecting materials to current events? • Facilitating conversations related to the collection or mission? • Creating new ways for people to become involved with the institution? • Collaborating with or developing work that responds to non-traditional communities? • Acting as a public educator?	Identifies areas of role evaluation (RQ1)

• How is your position currently evaluated? (Supervisor/360 annual reviews, weekly meetings, board assessments)
    ○ What is covered in these evaluations? Anything missing?
    ○ What are your favorite aspects of your work and is there anything you wish was different?
 • **How do you see yourself in the future? Do you want to continue doing social media work? Why or why not?**
	Identifies and/or evaluates professional success requirements (RQ1) and may reference changes due to COVID-19 (RQ2).

Notoriety of work	
Do you think your work aligns with the mission of your institution? How so? • Does your work align with your personal values? If so, how?	Defines purpose of role, measurement of professional success

Interview Question	Connection to RQs
● **What do you think would happen if all museums/libraries got rid of social media managers?** ● **What are the big differences about working for a library/museum versus a corporate social media job?**	(RQ1)
Workload issues	
Have you experienced any challenges or misunderstandings? ● Are there any assumptions about your work that people get wrong? ● Is there anything people would be surprised to learn about if they knew what was happening behind-the-scenes?	Describes elements of professional success by identifying potential impediments (RQ1)
Impact of COVID-19	
How has COVID influenced your work over the past year? ● Are you posting more/less? Using different platforms? Devoting more/less time to social media activities? ● Changes with the type of content you're publishing? ● Providing any new services through social media (events, collecting content)?	Identifies the pandemic's influence on role performance (RQ2)
This has been an unprecedented year. What big moments or events happened that may have affected your work? [*Possible prompts below*] ● Death of George Floyd and racial justice protests last summer ● The 2020 election ● January 6 Capitol insurrection ● Asian-American hate crimes ● Any other big moments? Do you see your role being different after any of these crises? If so, how?	Triangulates experiences related to COVID-19 to other recent crises and their impact on work (RQ2)

III.B. Table 24: C2

Repeated Longitudinal Questions

2020 Pilot Study Question	Connection to RQ1	Longitudinal Connection to RQ2
What are your responsibilities? *Prompt:* Walk me through the process of creating a post. Where do you start? (Go through each step)	Describes process	Provides a point of comparison for any changes in work performance post-pandemic
What impact/outcomes do you think about when you develop content?	Describes process and self-evaluation	Changes in responses may signal COVID-19's impact on understanding of role's purpose
What do you think would happen if all museums/libraries got rid of social media managers?	Defines role	May identify new duties stemming from physical location closures
What are the big differences about working for a library/museum versus a corporate social media job?	Specifies unique aspects of role at cultural institutions	May indicate different institutional or community-based needs post-pandemic
How do you see yourself in the future? Do you want to continue doing social media work? Why or why not?	Describes areas related to professional success	Changes in responses may signify COVID-19's effect on individuals' goals

IV. 2021 IRB Exemption

From: IRB <no_reply@unc.edu>
Sent: Friday, June 25, 2021 9:03 AM
To: March, Laura <lmarch@unc.edu>; Melo, Maggie <melo1@email.unc.edu>
Subject: IRB Notice - 21-0567

To: Laura March and Maggie Melo
School of Information and Library Science
From: Office of Human Research Ethics

Date: 6/25/2021
RE: Notice of IRB Exemption
Exemption Category: 2.Survey, interview, public observation,4. Secondary data/specimens
Study #: 21-0567

Study Title: Behind the Screens: Social Media Managers at Cultural Institutions
This submission, Reference ID 332846, has been reviewed by the Office of Human Research Ethics and was determined to be exempt from further review according to the regulatory category cited above under 45 CFR 46.104.

Submission Regulatory and other findings:
As a reminder, all human subject research activities are expected to follow all institutional and UNC Health policies, including those that may limit direct contact of participants. If you need to modify or alter

your study design due to COVID-19 in order to conduct your research activities, please submit a modification.

Investigator's Responsibilities:
If your study protocol changes in such a way that exempt status would no longer apply, you should contact the above IRB before making the changes. There is no need to inform the IRB about changes in study personnel. However, be aware that you are responsible for ensuring that all members of the research team who interact with subjects or their identifiable data complete the required human subjects training, typically completing the relevant CITI modules.

The IRB will maintain records for this study for 3 years, at which time you will be contacted about the status of the study.

The current data security level determination is Level II. Any changes in the data security level need to be discussed with the relevant IT official. If data security level II and III, consult with your IT official to develop a data security plan. Data security is ultimately the responsibility of the Principal Investigator.

Please be aware that approval may still be required from other relevant authorities or "gatekeepers" (e.g., school principals, facility directors, custodians of records), even though the project has determined to be exempt.

APPENDIX D: CARNEGIE GRANT FUNDING APPROVAL

From: silsoffice <silsoffice@unc.edu>
Sent: Wednesday, February 24, 2021 10:52 AM
To: March, Laura <lmarch@unc.edu>; silsoffice <silsoffice@unc.edu>
Subject: Carnegie Grant Request - Approval

Your recent application for a Carnegie Grant has been approved.
If you plan to use the funds to purchase supplies/products with part of this grant, please be aware that these should be ordered directly by the SILS administrative office. Send an email to silsoffice@unc.edu to make arrangements.

If you plan on paying participants you will need to submit the necessary paperwork for cash advance. Details about what is necessary for a cash advance can be found at https://sils.unc.edu/hr/handbook/cash_advances. The Cash Advance form can be found on the page as well. If you have any additional questions about cash advances please contact Michelle Taylor at michele@email.unc.edu.

Name: Laura March
Email: lmarch@ad.unc.edu
PID: 730214248
Degree: PhD
Subject Compensation: Yes
Description of Research: My proposed dissertation investigates how social media practitioners at libraries and museums view their role and early influences of the pandemic on their work. Related questions include how social media managers define and measure their success; what (if any) aspects of their work facilitate diversity, equity, accessibility, and inclusion; and what challenges they experience. As part of my study, I plan on interviewing 8-10 social media managers from US-based libraries and museums using interpretative phenomenological analysis (IPA) – this in-depth interview method requires participants to spend additional time and offer more personal insights than other procedures.

Proposed Budget: I would like to offer each interviewee $20 as compensation for their time (up to $200 total), as social media communicators often make less than their colleagues and work longer days.

SILS Administration
Name: Michelle Taylor
Email: michele@email.unc.edu
Comments: Approved. Study subject payments are handled via the cash advance policies/process/forms found at https://sils.unc.edu/hr/handbook/cash_advances. Questions? Please contact Michelle at michele@email.unc.edu

APPENDIX E: STEPS OF IPA ANALYSIS

The following steps are defined, abridged, and reproduced from Smith et al. (2009, pp. 80-106).

Step 1: Reading and re-reading. This first stage is conducted to ensure the participant becomes the focus of analysis. Because most people are used to reading and summarizing complex information in very short periods of time, this part of the process is about removing the temptation to do "quick and dirty" reduction and synopsis. Part of this might involve recording some of the most powerful recollections of the interview experience itself and some of the initial (and most striking) observations about the transcript to guide bracketing.

Step 2: Initial noting. This step examines semantic content and language use on a very exploratory level. The analyst maintains an open mind and notes anything of interest within the transcript. This ensures a growing familiarity with the transcript and identifies specific ways the participant talks about, understands, and/or thinks about an issue. Exploratory comments can be created using *descriptive*, *linguistic*, and *conceptual* comments.
- **Descriptive** comments describe the content of what the participant has said – the subject of the talk within the transcript.
- **Linguistic** comments explore the specific use of language by the participant.
- **Conceptual** comments engage at a more interrogative and conceptual level.

Step 3: Developing emergent themes. The main task in turning notes into themes involves attempts to produce a concise statement of what was important in the various comments attached to a piece of transcript. Themes are usually expressed as phrases, which speak to the psychological essence of the piece. Themes contain enough particularity to be grounded and enough abstraction to be conceptual.

Step 4: Searching for connections across emergent themes. The next step involves developing a chart (or map) of how the themes fit together. This draws together the emergent themes and produces a structure which showcases all of the most interesting and important aspects of a participant's account. Patterns and connections between emergent themes can be found through abstraction, subsumption, polarization, contextualization, numeration, and function. The analyst should also attempt a graphic representation of the structure of the emergent themes through the creation of a table, figure, or other means.

Step 5: Moving to the next case. Here it is important to treat the next case on its own terms to do justice to its own individuality. This means, as far as is possible, bracketing the ideas emerging from the analysis of the first case while working on subsequent cases.

Step 6: Looking for patterns across cases. This usually means laying each table or figure out on a large surface and looking across them. What connections appear across cases? How does a theme in one case help illuminate a different case? Which themes are the most potent? Sometimes this may also lead to a reconfiguring and relabeling of themes.

APPENDIX F: EVOLVING DESCRIPTIONS OF RACE

In response to the same prompt from 2020, "How would you describe your race and/or ethnicity?" two participants (Kay and Jay) offered different responses in 2021. Kay responded "Mixed" in 2020 and "Asian" in 2021. Jay added a second descriptor, responding "White" in 2020 and "Caucasian slash Native American" in 2021. A full list of participant responses is provided in Table 5.

Three participants modified their 2020 self-descriptions through further clarification. Gwen responded "I'm white. Caucasian" in 2020 and "I'm white, non-Latina" in 2021. Similarly, Dee replied "Caucasian" (2020) and "Very Caucasian" (2021), and Elle remarked "I'm white" (2020) and "Caucasian" (2021).

Two participants used the exact same terms. Brock replied "White" and Eleanor replied "I'm white" both years. Anna (who was interviewed in 2020 with a coworker) concurred she was "white" in 2020. In her 2021 solo interview, she responded "Caucasian. White" to the prompt.

Evolving descriptions of race, particularly from the only two self-identified participants of color, may reflect the personal impacts of rising anti-Asian racism (Cheng et al., 2021; Tang, 2021) and the 2020 racial justice protests (Gibson et al., 2020), which gained momentum between the first and second interviews. In particular, Kay's 2021 modification aligns with Cerezo et al.'s (2020) conception of *identity as resistance*, in which identity formation is influenced by repeated and ongoing marginalization and exclusion.

Unlike Kay, who did not elaborate on her change of race/ethnicity self-description, Jay reflected:

> It's very new to me. And then trying to understand my family history more, and we live in this age of 23andMe and all that kind of stuff. And I was not interested in that. But I've become more interested in trying to figure out some of that and understand my identity. But, you know, your blood is different than your upbringing. (Jay, 21)

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Jay's mention of 23andMe echoes Johfre et al.'s (2021) finding that people who have taken genetic ancestry tests "more frequently translate reported ancestral diversity into multi-racial self-identification" (p. 485). Of note, there were no similar differences in descriptions of preferred gender pronouns between 2020 and 2021.

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