Relaunching the *COVID-19 Chronicles*: A Social Media Campaign During the COVID-19 Pandemic

COVID-19 CHRONICLES / Worcester's Community Archive

A Major Qualifying Project
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Abstract

In this project, I sought to revive community interest in the *COVID-19 Chronicles* digital archive in order to understand how cultural institutions, like Worcester Historical Museum (WHM), can meaningfully engage with and effectively collect stories from their audiences during the pandemic. My objectives for this project were threefold: 1.) to promote the contribution of quality items to the *COVID-19 Chronicles* items, 2.) foster a space for dialogue surrounding the experience of the pandemic in Worcester, and 3.) inspire community contributors to pursue their own projects and initiatives using the items in the archive. To this end, I constructed and managed a social media campaign for the *COVID-19 Chronicles* brand, crafted digital exhibits, and interviewed social media managers from other historical institutions across the country. Based on the results of my own social media campaign and the themes that emerged across interviews with social media managers of other historical institutions, I observe a growing need for museums to adapt to the digital spaces utilized by current and prospective audiences and consider how social media can be used to define and build meaningful relationships with such audiences. Ultimately, this project is a reflection on how COVID-19 has accelerated a drastic shift to online spaces and what that will mean for professionals in writing and interactive media going forward into a post-pandemic future.

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Executive Summary

With Worcester Historical Museum (WHM) as my sponsor, I sought to revive interest in Digital Worcester's *COVID-19 Chronicles* archive. This project work, which spanned eight months in total (from September 2020 to April 2021), was grounded in three main objectives:

1. Promote the meaningful contribution of quality items to the *COVID-19 Chronicles*—to create a robust digital archive for future historians.
2. Foster a space for dialogue between users about the experience of COVID-19 in Worcester—to build community in the present.
3. Generate user interest in utilizing the items in the archive to pursue user-driven projects—to transform a community archive into a *community-driven* archive.

To these ends, I conducted research on designing and evaluating participatory experiences, the applications of user-generated content (UGC), social media practices for museums, and the nature of rapid response collection and other digital COVID-19 archives; created and maintained an active Facebook page for the *COVID-19 Chronicles*; built digital exhibits for the *COVID-19 Chronicles* website; and interviewed social media managers from other historical institutions across the country. In this report, I present my findings and recommendations for WHM and other similar institutions looking to promote archive initiatives on social media platforms/

Guiding Principles & Applications

Based on my research topics (participatory experiences, UGC, social media for museums, and rapid response collection initiatives for COVID-19), I compiled a list of guiding principles and their potential applications for WHM and the *COVID-19 Chronicles*. While these principles served to inform my project methods, I encourage WHM to consider these ideas and applications for both future work on the *COVID-19 Chronicles* and for other relevant institutional practices.

Participatory Experiences Principles & Applications for WHM	
Guiding Principle	**Application to *COVID-19 Chronicles***
Always be able justify a participatory event in a larger context.	Construct social media posts that emphasize the historical relevance and importance of users' contributions.
When possible, utilize participatory events to lower barriers to entry.	Extract comments and photos from social media to submit to the archive on behalf of participants, without requiring participants to do so themselves.
Be cognizant of the opinions of audiences and stakeholders as participation unfolds.	Stay connected with audiences in social media contexts beyond the realm of the *COVID-19 Chronicles*, like on third-party comment threads.

Understand and make clear what the personal benefits are to participation in this project.	Create social media content that is relevant to users and the things they care about and frame it in such a way that users will get fulfillment from engaging with it.
Provide participants with instructional scaffolding to guide them through participation.	Comment on one's own social media post with a personal answer to a specific question to demonstrate how easy it is to participate.
Design with an audience-centric and object-centered approach that connects with people through personalized entry points, building off of the "Me-to-We" design framework.	Construct social media posts that connect archive items to individuals' personal experiences and encourage participants to share their connections to that item (or type of item).
Continuously evaluate and iterate on participatory practices with an eye towards long-term sustainability of the project.	Utilize those platforms and tools that WHM is already familiar with, but explore new kinds of interesting and engaging social media techniques within those constraints.

User-Generated Content Principles & Applications for WHM	
Guiding Principle	**Application to *COVID-19 Chronicles***
Give users the space and creative agency to construct unique and personal UGC.	Dedicate a social media space (page, group, community, etc.) exclusively to content related to the *COVID-19 Chronicles*.
Offer audiences a story by constructing a narrative around existing UGC.	Feature UGC in social media posts and frame it in the context of both the piece's personal story and the larger story of the pandemic.
When possible, use UGC to provide a framework to inspire "citizen curators."	Co-construct exhibits on social media with calls for contributions to the exhibit as it's being built.
Adopt social media practices that are conducive to sharing UGC.	Prioritize UGC that's in the form of images or videos, which tend to be more popular and engaging on most social media platforms.

Social Media for Museums Principles & Applications for WHM	
Guiding Principle	**Application to *COVID-19 Chronicles***
Adapt to the digital spaces that institutional audiences are using.	When deciding on which social media platform(s) to use, pick those where institutional audiences are most active.
Maintain a social media presence that connects the values and missions of the institution with the goals of the campaign.	Let institutional values drive the branding and tone of the *COVID-19 Chronicles*' voice on social media, such as by emphasizing the togetherness of the Worcester community.
Treat social media campaigns as participatory experiences.	Incorporate instructional scaffolding into social media posts to give users constraints on what they can comment/contribute.
Design content around a given social media platform's algorithm.	In designing posts for Facebook, use external links sparingly since its algorithm prioritizes native content.
Strive for an "automatic journey" in social media storytelling.	Create social media post campaigns in sets of three, where each post shares the same underlying theme or topic.
Develop a consumer-oriented culture in social media spaces.	Reply to users' comments frequently and in a diplomatic, yet personable manner, even if the comment is hostile or impolite.
Emphasize content planning for social media posts.	Establish a regular posting schedule and utilize social media publishing tools to help ensure consistency.
Drive traffic to specific social spaces through cross-platform promotion.	Promote the *COVID-19 Chronicles* website on Facebook, and promote *COVID-19 Chronicles* social media on the website.
Identify and engage with opinion leaders to create a retention plan that rewards users for contributing.	Champion those social media users who frequently post UGC by incorporating their content into other social media posts or digital exhibits.

Community Archives & COVID-19 Principles & Applications for WHM	
Guiding Principle	**Application to *COVID-19 Chronicles***
Don't judge the historical value of (potential) items based on how relevant or irrelevant they seem right now.	Don't ignore or over-moderate those item submissions or social media conversations that seem off-topic or irrelevant.
Use the archive's position to promote change and don't commodify the traumatic pandemic-related experiences of marginalized communities.	Use social media platforms to promote and drive visibility to those causes that align with the institutional values of the archive by featuring those movements or initiatives in social media posts.
Prioritize the privacy and safety of archive contributors and creators.	Include clear and accessible privacy policy and usage rights statements on all major archive channels, including social media pages and the website.
Use specific, scaffolded contribution calls on all archive platforms.	Use hashtags or other similar phrases across both social media and the archive website to create a cohesive archive culture that cross-promotes itself.
Emphasize community in the city of Worcester by referencing specific locations and local culture.	Feature content on social media that highlights how local organizations, restaurants, buildings, and other locations are experiencing the pandemic in Worcester.
Use the items in the archive to tell meaningful and moving stories.	Curate exhibits based on powerful or otherwise successful social media posts and topics using the items in the archive.

Social Media Practices

In constructing posts for the *COVID-19 Chronicles* Facebook page, my goal was to champion contributors by sharing archive content and empower users to contribute via specific prompts. Instead of relying on the open-ended "share your story" call to action that the *COVID-19 Chronicles* website and prior WHM *COVID-19 Chronicles* posts embraced, I wanted to provide users with specific contribution prompts, i.e., instructional scaffolding, related to existing archive items (Simon, 2010). In particular, I wanted to create contribution calls that were universally relatable and easy to act on (e.g., by leaving a comment on the post) in order to lower barriers of entry to archive contribution. I strived to connect these contribution calls to items that

were already in the archive—though in some cases I would submit my own items to the archive to support the kind of posts I wanted to create.

Covid-19 Chronicles
Jan 15 ·

This week, we'll be highlighting some of the COVID-inspired artwork that has been submitted to our archive. Today, we're starting with this watercolor self portrait by Maggie Hart, titled "The Surge."

This piece comes in response to the "fear and anxiety when listening to the media warning us of the coming surge of cases, numbers of Covid-19 death tallies and how we need to protect ourselves and others."

How has the media made you feel during this pandemic? #WorcesterCovid19 #ArtOfCovid

"The Surge" courtesy of Maggie Hart, March 28, 2020.

Sample *COVID-19 Chronicles* Facebook Post

In regards to post scheduling, I approached channel planning with an emphasis on theme and automatic storytelling in order to connect individual *COVID-19 Chronicles* stories into a larger narrative. Based on those days of the week and times that tended to generate the most visibility for non-profit cultural institutions, I posted to the *COVID-19 Chronicles* three times a week on Fridays, Mondays, and Wednesdays in the window of 8AM–10AM. Each set of three posts was centered around a specific theme or topic, indicated by a specific hashtag (e.g., "#ArtOfCovid"). I always posted the first of a set on Fridays so that each weekly campaign concluded on the *COVID-19 Chronicles* Facebook page the day before the related summary post went live on WHM's channels. In managing the *COVID-19 Chronicles* Facebook page, including the construction and scheduling of posts, I gathered the data and experience necessary to measure the impact of social media and conduct interviews with social media managers of other cultural institutions.

Recommendations for WHM

Based on the results of my own social media campaign and themes that emerged from virtual interviews with three social media managers from other historical institutions across the country, I'd like to propose that WHM consider expanding its social media presence and begin catering content to the strengths of those platforms it is already active on (e.g., by not duplicating content/posts on its Facebook and Instagram channels). All of my interviewees indicated that their institution had an active social media presence on the "Big Three," that is, Facebook, Twitter, and Instagram. In this way, they are able to connect with and cater content to diverse

audiences based on the limitations and strengths of these platforms—Twitter's 280 character limit or Instagram's emphasis on pictures, for example.

However, to effectively construct and manage such a cross-platform campaign, institutions must rely on dedicated community managers. Historically, social media has been seen as a "tacked on" job, and some cultural institutions, like WHM, don't even have a formal position dedicated to social media management (e.g., WHM's social media manager's formal position title is "exhibit coordinator"). Even those institutions that do give social media its own role still may not respect it as such. One interviewee aptly captures this underappreciation: "a lot of people are going to tell you like 'well, you know, my teenage son has an Instagram account, he could do your job'—[there's] this idea that everybody's on it, so it's not that hard." And yet, experience has shown that it is hard. All of my interviewees spoke to not having enough time to give social media the attention that they feel it deserves as they get saddled with other communications and marketing-related responsibilities for their institutions. While the COVID-19 pandemic has helped change institutional attitudes towards social media-based roles, many institutions like WHM still don't even formally have such roles. As such, these institutions should consider hiring dedicated community managers to develop dynamic cross-platform strategies for their social media presence.

1. Introduction to the *COVID-19 Chronicles*

In March of 2020, as the consequences of the COVID-19 global pandemic became clear, businesses and organizations across the country shut down in the name of public health, and Worcester Historical Museum (WHM) was no exception. Concurrently, Digital Worcester—born of the collaborative effort towards community curation and digital archiving between WHM and Worcester Polytechnic Institute's (WPI) Humanities and Arts Department—launched the *COVID-19 Chronicles*. The basis of this project was simple: history is happening now. Through community collection initiatives, the *COVID-19 Chronicles* sought to document the experience of the COVID-19 pandemic in Worcester for future historians while simultaneously building community in the present.

At its core, the *COVID-19 Chronicles* is a community archive. It offers a platform for the people of Worcester to share their story of the city during the COVID-19 pandemic through the submission of photographs, text, videos, or recordings—collectively referred to as items. Powered by Omeka Classic, an open-source content management system for digital collections, the *COVID-19 Chronicles* website also allows users to explore the submissions of others via pages that feature an item's title, description, and other relevant metadata. Through the website's search functionality, users can filter these items by various fields, as well as sort by title, creator, or date added. However, while some items are categorized into collections, WHM archivists curated no formal digital exhibits created from these items prior to this project.

Additionally, the *COVID-19 Chronicles* project lacked promotion after its initial creation. Between April and June of 2020, WHM promoted the *COVID-19 Chronicles* through its Facebook and Instagram channels. However, in the months before its relaunch during October 2020, WHM issued no formal calls for contribution to the digital archive. Because engagement levels declined over the summer, WHM stopped featuring the project on social media, and the number of contributions to the digital archive decreased.

In this project, my goal was to revive community interest in the *COVID-19 Chronicles* and thereby provide a framework for how principles of interactive media can be used by cultural institutions to drive audience engagement and content curation during ongoing periods of extreme trauma. Using WPI's tried and true pillars of theory and practice, I derived my project's praxis-based methodology from prior research and theories that exist in the current literature on institutional participation, social media practices, and rapid response collection. The specifics of this project will be of interest to professionals in writing, interactive media, and history.

Ultimately, I argue that the COVID-19 pandemic has highlighted a growing need for cultural institutions to have a robust, cross-platform social media presence in order to effectively connect with their audiences during this digital era. Chapter 2 presents the necessary background on participatory experiences, social media, and the nature of archiving trauma needed to understand the context of this project. Chapter 3 outlines my methodology for constructing a participatory social media campaign for the *COVID-19 Chronicles*. In Chapter 4, I discuss the outcomes of my campaign, including what successes and challenges I encountered. Finally, in Chapter 5, I present my conclusions and discuss further opportunities for research that have emerged from this project.

2. Background on Participation, Social Media, and Archiving COVID-19

The goal of this project was to construct a social media campaign that simultaneously engages WHM's audience and supports the collection and curation of user-generated content (UGC) during the COVID-19 pandemic. As such, the participatory goals for the relaunched *COVID-19 Chronicles* social media campaign were threefold:

4. Promote the meaningful contribution of quality items to the digital archive.
5. Foster a space for dialogue between users about the experience of COVID-19 in Worcester using the items in the archive as discussion points.
6. Generate user interest in utilizing the items in the archive to pursue user-driven projects.

In this chapter, I provide the background needed to understand this project by exploring the existing literature on how cultural institutions can use social media to design participatory experiences in the context of the COVID-19 pandemic, including:

- The benefits of participatory experiences and how to design and evaluate such projects.
- The value of contributory projects, how to curate user-generated content (UGC), and the advantages of UGC on social media platforms.
- How museums can adapt to the needs of their audience in the digital age by engaging with users on social media.
- The nature of rapid response collection and how community archives can effectively and ethically document the COVID-19 pandemic.

In my review of these topics, I extract general insights and consider how they may be applied to the specifics of my use and study of WHM's *COVID-19 Chronicles*.

2.1 Participatory Experiences

Participatory experiences offer a means of transforming a passive consumer of content into an active cultural participant. In her book, *The Participatory Museum*, Nina Simon outlines the benefits of adding participatory techniques to the "cultural professional's toolbox" and provides a framework for designing and evaluating participatory projects. In this section, I illustrate some of these concepts and explore how they have been and can continue to be operationalized to serve the *COVID-19 Chronicles*.

2.1.1 Benefits

Participatory experiences aren't inherently beneficial on their own, and cultural institutions must first and foremost be able to justify why a given project should be participatory. Generally, this justification is a desire for input or involvement from external participants, who would bring more to a project than institutional staff alone could. However, participation is a two-way street, and these organizations must be willing to trust their participants' abilities and demonstrate responsiveness to their actions and contributions for a project to truly be participatory (Simon, 2010). In the case of the *COVID-19 Chronicles*, WHM's goal is to build an archive for the future and a sense of community in the present using personal contributions from

the people of Worcester during a historical event of extreme trauma and isolation. To this end, WHM trusts its participants to submit relevant, quality items—an action it then responds to by including these items in the public archive. However, while this basic exchange is indeed participatory and suitable for content collection, it barely scratches the surface of the benefits that participatory projects have to offer.

One of the most valuable applications of participatory projects is the ability to disguise archive processes and limit the barriers to entry of content creation, which is of particular interest for the *COVID-19 Chronicles*. Simply put, participatory projects should make participation easier (Nielsen, 2006). For example, the Bibliotheek Haarleem Oost library in the Netherlands sought to add tags to the books in their collection so potential readers could get a better idea if a book was suited to their tastes. The library staff could have easily added tags themselves based on the books' descriptions, but they thought the tags would be more relevant if they came from those who had actually read a given book. However, very few readers wanted to take the time to sit down at a computer and enter tags into the library's system for a book they were returning. The library's participatory solution was to create a drop-off system with various genre labels. Readers could quickly glance at these labels and physically drop their book off in the bin with the tag they thought most appropriate. Over time—and without ever requiring a participant to enter tags digitally into the system—the library built a database of community-tagged books (Simon, 2010). For a user to submit an item via the *COVID-19 Chronicles* website, they are required to fill in a plethora of fields, including item type, title, creator, date created, and description, with certain item types even calling for additional fields. And so, this begs the question: what can be done for the *COVID-19 Chronicles* to make participation easier? It's a worthy pursuit, as increased participation has the potential to reflect positively on the institution.

Another strength of participatory projects, applicable to the *COVID-19 Chronicles*, is how they can further institutional goals beyond content collection. Nina Simon writes that "[p]articipatory projects can change an institution's image in the eyes of local communities, increase involvement in fundraising, and make new partnership opportunities possible" (Simon, 2010). Projects like these can do wonders for an institution's reputation among audiences and stakeholders, and the *COVID-19 Chronicles* presents an opportunity for WHM to stay connected and increase their standing with a community that is not currently able to visit the museum in person (InterAct, 2001). And institutions aren't the only ones with this potential to grow from participatory projects.

Perhaps the most meaningful benefits of participatory experiences can be seen in the participants themselves. Nina Simon outlines three kinds of value that are reflected in participatory projects: learning, social, and work. As part of a participatory project, participants can hone their research and creative skills, feel connected to the institution and confident in what they can contribute, and ultimately still produce work that is useful to the institution. On top of this, these projects can give participants useful skills that will last a lifetime, including the opportunity to work with people from diverse backgrounds, the ability to access and interpret different sources of information, and the chance to act responsibility with the interest of a larger community in mind, to name a few (Simon, 2010). In this way, participatory experiences have the potential to support the growth of all involved, institution and audience—if they are designed effectively.

2.1.2 Design

At the most basic level, designers should construct participatory projects that people want to participate in. Nina Simon writes that participatory experiences should "offer every visitor a legitimate way to contribute to the institution, share things of interest, connect with other people, and feel like an engaged and respected participant" (Simon, 2010). These guidelines culminate in this idea of an "audience-centric approach" that communicates how a project is relevant and valuable to the individual through "personalized entry points" that take into account the audience's needs and interests. These entry points can be actual interests, like history or art; user identities, including race or age; and many other facets of an individual and their preferences. In an online environment, these entry points should also be constructed with the "90-9-1 principle" in mind. The assertion of this principle is simple: 90% of online users are lurkers who will never contribute, 9% of users will contribute a bit, and the remaining 1% will be ultra-contributors (Nielsen, 2006; Simon, 2010). A well-designed experience will be accessible and fun for all three of these types of online users. Finally, Nina Simon argues that participatory experiences should strive to give participants what games researcher Jane McGonigal calls the four things that people need to be happy: "satisfying work to do, the experience of being good at something, time spent with people we like, and the chance to be part of something bigger" (Simon, 2010). While the *COVID-19 Chronicles* has always promised users the opportunity to take their place in history, a participatory initiative targeted toward present community-building would benefit from such design principles.

A successful participatory experience addresses two counter-intuitive principles related to constraints and collaboration. The first of these principles is that "participants thrive on constraints, not open-ended opportunities for self-expression" (Simon, 2010). Simon argues that open-ended participation—which requires self-directed creativity—can actually discourage participation and often results in low-quality content. To combat this, participatory experiences should provide participants with support materials and guiding constraints, known as "instructional scaffolding." Prior to this project, the *COVID-19 Chronicles* lacked instructional scaffolding, using the open-ended "share your story" call for contribution.

The second principle that participatory designers should consider is that in order to confidently collaborate with others, participants need to engage through personal, not social, entry points. Nina Simon presents a "Me-to-We" framework for the design of participatory experiences with five content-based stages that build off each other (Simon, 2010):

1. Individuals consume content.
2. Individuals interact with content.
3. Individual interactions are networked in aggregate.
4. Individual interactions are networked for social use.
5. Individuals engage with each other socially.

Based on this framework, designers of participatory experiences should strive to start with an entry point where individuals consume content that is relevant to them. Building off of this foundation, we can then design participatory experiences wherein individuals interact with content—interactions that can later be networked with other individual interactions to promote social events. With users browsing items, submitting their own items, and the subsequent publishing of those items in the archive, the *COVID-19 Chronicles* functions at stage three of the

"Me-to-We" framework. However, using these other principles of design, I have endeavored to push the potential of the *COVID-19 Chronicles* to offer a more rewarding experience to participants at stages four and five.

Those participatory projects concerned with content collection should also consider an object-centered approach to design. The *COVID-19 Chronicles* is a digital archive composed of items that we want to share, highlight, and generate discussion around. In this context, these items can become "social objects," that is, content that drives socially networked experiences. Social objects tend to be personal, active, provocative, and relational, ultimately requiring a platform to promote them as the center of conversation (Simon, 2010). In this way, designers can construct questions around a social object, but even these questions need to be carefully designed. Simon writes that "many institutionally-supplied questions are too earnest, too leading, or too obvious to spark interest, let alone engagement" (Simon, 2010). As such, questions should be open to a variety of responses; draw on participants' personal knowledge and experience, not on their comprehension of institutional trivia; and framed to focus on the visitor, not the object. Finally, questions constructed for social objects should be simple, as simple questions can build a user's confidence to engage in deeper, more meaningful ways (Simon, 2010). While the initial design of a participatory experience is an important and crucial step, as participants' needs change so too should the project's, and evaluation is necessary for iteration.

2.1.3 Evaluation

As a rushed rapid response collection initiative, the *COVID-19 Chronicles* lacked an evaluation plan. Evaluation is a crucial step at every stage of a participatory project in order to iterate and improve upon the quality of engagement. Before developing methods and tools for evaluation, we should keep in mind a number of considerations about participatory projects. Firstly, participatory projects are about both process and product and aren't made exclusively for participants. Given their ongoing nature, participatory projects often stand to benefit from incremental and adaptive measurement techniques. Finally, given the nature of these projects, it may be beneficial to make the evaluative process part of the participation (Simon, 2010). With these values in mind, the general steps of evaluating participatory projects include the following (InterAct, 2001):

- Stating goals so all involved share the same vision.
- Defining behaviors and outcomes related to those goals.
- Quantify the impact of those outcomes through measurable indicators.

In order to meaningfully assess the impact of a project, we should develop specific measurement tools based on a project's defined goals and outcomes. Designing successful evaluative tools requires a 360 degree approach that looks at the goals, outcomes, and indicators for staff, participants, and nonparticipating visitors. The best evaluative indicators tend to be action-oriented, important, measurable, and simple and can be developed by reviewing the specific skills and values that a participatory project supports to determine what markers would be best suited to reflect that project's goals (Simon, 2010). Through these indicators, we can gauge the impact of participation at various stages of the project and assess how we might iterate and improve on our design.

Finally, no evaluation of a participatory project would be complete without examining how it can be managed and sustained long-term. To this end, as evaluators we must assess how aligned our projects are with the culture of our institutions. A project can be innovative and mission-aligned, but to be truly embraced, it must also be manageable for museum staff. Nina Simon suggests that participatory projects are unhealthy when the participating community is centered around one person (Simon, 2010). Generally, that single person is the driving force behind project initiatives and participatory calls for action. As such, a project stands to crumble when that leading person leaves or gets pulled away because of other obligations. At its launch, responsibilities for the *COVID-19 Chronicles* were not effectively delegated amongst WHM staff, and maintenance of the archive soon informally fell into the lap of a museum volunteer with many other obligations. Successful participatory projects should be sustainable—for as long as the nature of the project warrants—by an institution and a community of participants, not an individual.

With this understanding of the design and evaluation of participatory projects and their potential benefits, here is a table of guiding principles—and their applications—that I have endeavored to keep in mind when constructing participatory events for the *COVID-19 Chronicles*:

Participatory Experiences Principles & Applications for WHM	
Guiding Principle	**Application to *COVID-19 Chronicles***
Always be able justify a participatory event in a larger context.	Construct social media posts that emphasize the historical relevance and importance of users' contributions.
When possible, utilize participatory events to lower barriers to entry.	Extract comments and photos from social media to submit to the archive on behalf of participants, without requiring participants to do so themselves.
Be cognizant of the opinions of audiences and stakeholders as participation unfolds.	Stay connected with audiences in social media contexts beyond the realm of the *COVID-19 Chronicles*, like on third-party comment threads.
Understand and make clear what the personal benefits are to participation in this project.	Create social media content that is relevant to users and the things they care about and frame it in such a way that users will get fulfillment from engaging with it.
Provide participants with instructional scaffolding to guide them through participation.	Comment on one's own social media post with a personal answer to a specific question to demonstrate how easy it is to participate.

Design with an audience-centric and object-centered approach that connects with people through personalized entry points, building off of the "Me-to-We" design framework.	Construct social media posts that connect archive items to individuals' personal experiences and encourage participants to share their connections to that item (or type of item).
Continuously evaluate and iterate on participatory practices with an eye towards long-term sustainability of the project.	Utilize those platforms and tools that WHM is already familiar with, but explore new kinds of interesting and engaging social media techniques within those constraints.

Table 1. Participatory Experiences Guiding Principles & Applications

While research suggests that these principles should, in theory, lead to increased levels of meaningful and quality engagement, I anticipated a few challenges associated with the practical applications of these guidelines:

- *Pandemic fatigue*. People are tired of living through, talking about, and seeing news related to COVID-19. As such, I imagined it may be difficult to justify this project in a larger historical context while simultaneously illustrating what the personal benefits are to participation.
- *Astroturfing*. In providing instructional scaffolding for users—by commenting on my own posts or submitting items to the archive myself—I wanted to ensure that I was not creating a false sense of participation.
- *Privacy preservation*. While I wanted to be able to hide the archival process of item submission (by submitting social media actions to the archive myself), social media users still need to consent to having their name and content appear in the archive. I worried that these necessary protocols would discourage interaction.

To better understand those disconnects between the theory and practice of implementing participatory projects, I have kept these challenges in mind as I navigated the application of these principles.

2.2 User-Generated Content

The *COVID-19 Chronicles* is a community archive: an archive built on user-generated content. User-generated content, or UGC, can be defined as any media—videos, images, audio, etc.—that is created by unaffiliated visitors, or users, rather than an established brand or company (Gurney, 2019). In order to craft effective exhibits and social media campaigns for the *COVID-19 Chronicles*, it's important to understand the benefits that UGC has to offer.

2.2.1 Value of Contributory Projects

Contributory projects, like the *COVID-19 Chronicles*, provide a framework for the collection of UGC and can be valuable to cultural institutions for a number of reasons. These kinds of contributory activities tend to be accessible for visitors of all types, without requiring

much setup or training. Ideally, they can function with minimal staff support, and, as such, are often self-explanatory and self-maintaining (Simon, 2010). Beyond their structural benefits, contributory projects are perhaps most valuable for the kinds of content they support.

Visitors have the potential to contribute personal and creative works for compelling crowd-sourced exhibits or collection projects, opinions and stories, and even memories and photographs for reflective spaces. This kind of UGC tends to be more personal, authentic, spontaneous, diverse, and relevant, especially when the project gives these users the space and creative agency to construct such unique and personal works. The end result is a valuable exchange between institutions and their audiences: "visitors' contributions personalize and diversify the voices and experiences presented in cultural institutions... while [contributory projects] expos[e] audiences to content that could not be created by staff alone" (Simon, 2010). However, collecting UGC from visitors via contributory projects is just one piece of the puzzle—the next step is curation.

2.2.2 Curating UGC

At the most basic level, a curator of UGC acts as a sophisticated filter. Like a moderator, curators are responsible for removing content that is deemed profane, offensive, hateful, or otherwise inappropriate. In the case of community archives, this could also involve removing duplicate items, items that are of intentionally low quality, or those items that have been submitted against a creator's wishes. The surface goal of any curator of UGC should be to create a product—or in this case, archive— with a focused set of user contributions (Simon, 2010). For the *COVID-19 Chronicles*, we would want to ensure, via item curation, that all submitted items reflect back in some way to the experience of the COVID-19 pandemic in Worcester. Of course, the role of curator can and should go beyond that of just filtering out "bad" content.

Traditionally, curators have always been historians and subject experts; however, with digital tools making knowledge more accessible to everyone, the role of curator is shifting to that of a storyteller. Nancy Proctor argues that contemporary museums have felt a number of evolutionary pressures, including (Proctor, 2010):

- A shift from substance and solidity to activity and performance.
- A desire to prioritize temporary exhibition over permanent collection.
- A need to focus on creating events and sensations instead of generating knowledge.

While museums were once centers of knowledge and fact, history is now at the fingertips of anyone with a smartphone or computer thanks to modern search engines and other such information technologies. And with such advances, anyone can become a historian or a subject expert, so where does that leave curators? The role of curator must evolve alongside the institutions they work for, donning the mantle of storytellers and narrators, especially when it comes to the interpretation of UGC. As a moderator and facilitator of the conversation that surrounds the museum's objects and artifacts, these new curators are responsible for crafting thought-provoking exhibits. Such exhibits may even go so far as providing a framework for and inspiring "citizen curators" to pursue their own projects using the museum's archives (Proctor, 2010). In this way, curators act as a bridge between cultural institutions and their audiences.

2.2.3 Advantages of UGC on Social Media

In addition to creating compelling collections and stories, UGC can also be used to help institutions develop their brand and drive engagement through social media. One such advantage of UGC is that museums can use it to adapt to audience needs and tell a story that represents a range of different user experiences. Conducted by Offerpop, a 2016 survey of how consumers and marketers think about UGC found that "85% of consumers find visual UGC more influential than brand photos or videos" (Gurney, 2019). Brands can use UGC to tell a diverse, authentic story in a way that features real people that an audience can relate to and building social reputation in the process. Ultimately, UGC is a growing resource for promoting museum actions and community involvement.

One such example of the effective use of UGC on social media is the Children's Museum of Indianapolis' Instagram stories. Instagram stories are a feature that allow users to share temporary content with their followers. Content shared on a user's story only lasts for 24 hours before it is deleted, and over 500 million people are posting to their Instagram stories each day (Gurney, 2019). The Children's Museum of Indianapolis found that using candid photos from real people tended to draw users in and that by featuring UGC on their story, they were more likely to be tagged in other users' stories. Additionally, because Instagram stories only last for a day, they allowed the museum to feature a wide variety of UGC without concerning themselves with the staying power of the material. When tailored to the right channel and audience, UGC can be a powerful engagement tool for museums on social media.

To continue to develop my list of guiding principles and their applications, here is a table highlighting my understanding of how UGC and its benefits are pertinent to the *COVID-19 Chronicles*:

User-Generated Content Principles & Applications for WHM	
Guiding Principle	**Application to *COVID-19 Chronicles***
Give users the space and creative agency to construct unique and personal UGC.	Dedicate a social media space (page, group, community, etc.) exclusively to content related to the *COVID-19 Chronicles*.
Offer audiences a story by constructing a narrative around existing UGC.	Feature UGC in social media posts and frame it in the context of both the piece's personal story and the larger story of the pandemic.
When possible, use UGC to provide a framework to inspire "citizen curators."	Co-construct exhibits on social media with calls for contributions to the exhibit as it's being built.

Adopt social media practices that are conducive to sharing UGC.	Prioritize UGC that's in the form of images or videos, which tend to be more popular and engaging on most social media platforms.

Table 2. User-Generated Content Guiding Principles & Applications

Despite all these benefits, curating and featuring UGC on social media channels isn't without its own set of challenges. Here are some of my main considerations related to these applications of UGC:

- *Building an audience*. Creating a dedicated social media space would likely require building an audience from scratch. Given the drought of *COVID-19 Chronicles* content on WHM's platforms for several months prior to this project, I anticipated difficulties in building an audience that was enthusiastic and consistent regarding participation.
- *Short-form storytelling*. Most social media users (and algorithms, see Section 2.3.2) tend to favor posts that are short and visual. These constraints will likely limit and dictate the kinds of UGC stories that can be told effectively on social media.
- *Exhibit integration*. Due to the constraints of social media platforms, collaboration on exhibit content via these channels is limited to what users can communicate or share on posts and comments, and, in most cases, these communications won't happen in real-time. And in addition to requiring active and enthusiastic participants, I imagined that the workflow of exhibit building on social media would pose a challenge.

To be better equipped to address these challenges at the intersection of UGC and social media, I wanted to understand the existing relationship between cultural institutions and social media.

2.3 Social Media for Museums

As a platform for participatory experiences, social media can be a powerful tool for museums to stay relevant and connected with their audiences. Especially now with COVID-19 restrictions in place, more and more cultural institutions are turning to social media to stay engaged with visitors, albeit remotely. As such, museums are faced with the challenge of adapting to audience needs in the age of social media. This section explores the construction of participatory social media campaigns with those challenges in mind.

2.3.1 Adapting to Audience Needs

As institutional communities embrace and adapt to new technologies, so too must their institutions, especially when it comes to having a presence in online spaces. Social media and other digital tools have made "knowledge generation and publication faster and easier for everyone, experts and enthusiastic amateurs alike" (Proctor, 2010). Indeed, these platforms offer new opportunities to build human relationships by focusing dialogue around user-curated identity artifacts. By listening to the conversation that users are having online, curators can find ways to incorporate those trends and topics that are most important to their audiences into their institution's social media campaigns (Gurney, 2019). In the article "Digital: Museum as Platform, Curator as Champion, in the Age of Social Media," Nancy Proctor presents Angelina

Russo's revision of a set of precepts created by Nicholas Poole, the CEO of Collections Trust in the UK. According to this "new social contract" between museums and users in the digital age, institutions should embrace the following principles (Proctor, 2010):

- Collections belong to the museum.
- Many voices are critical to the interpretation of culture.
- Go where participation takes you.
- Provide a platform for culture, training/advocacy to support, and work together with audiences to construct content.

With COVID-19 restrictions in place—and a desire to document this historic time—the need for museums to adapt to a digital space has become even greater. With the onset of the pandemic causing many businesses to go remote, the Unionville Museum in a small Connecticut town decided to go online and post a request for photos and stories related to the virus on its website and Facebook page (a practice generally known as rapid response collecting, which I will review in Section 2.4.1). In doing so, the museum observed a number of positive effects from their involvement on social media (Raymond, 2020):

- They received a number of contributions from local Facebook groups.
- They stay connected with their audience during a time of isolation.
- Younger residents of the town demonstrated an increased awareness of the museum than before the pandemic.
- They increased their use of digital media, which was something they felt they'd have to do anyway, sooner or later.
- Individuals and businesses expressed appreciation at being able to share their experiences.

Though the transition to digital platforms can be difficult and daunting, social media offers a host of tools for sharing content and engaging with audiences in ways that could never be done in a physical museum. Social media enables users to leave comments and reactions on photos and posts (and view and respond to the comments and reactions of others), tag and send personal messages to other users or institutions, and even save content to send to their family, friends, and other social networks (Simon, 2010). In an online space like social media, curators can craft virtual narratives, tours, and exhibits using digital images, video, and text that are easily accessible and shareable amongst an institutional audience (Simon, 2010). Through social media, museums can stay connected with not just their audiences but with their peer institutions as well. Social media takeovers, tags, and content swaps enable the formation of digital partnerships and collaborations between institutions (Souza & Lee, 2020). Finally, social media can "giv[e] identities to multiple museum departments within these institutions," and hashtags can highlight museums as a shared cultural space for their community (Gonzalez, 2017; Gurney, 2019). Through the construction of a participatory social media campaign, I endeavored to develop such a space and identity for the *COVID-19 Chronicles*.

2.3.2 Constructing a Participatory Social Media Campaign

First and foremost, any participatory social media campaign must be consistent with the values of the institution. An institution's mission needs to be reflected in their social media presence and is responsible for driving the branding, tone, and voice of the institution on these

digital platforms (Eves, 2020). Nina Simon writes that "speaking the language of the institutional mission helps staff and stakeholders understand the value of participatory projects and paves the way for experiments and innovation," and social media should be no exception (Simon, 2010). As such, the content produced for these channels ought to reinforce what makes the institution unique and then relate the goals of their campaign with their mission. Consistency with institutional values is the first high-level step in constructing a participatory social media campaign.

For those institutions that want to use social media as a platform for audience engagement—as opposed to pure promotion—a social media campaign should be treated as a participatory experience. Museums should engage with their online communities using those design principles of participatory experiences. For example, the New-York Historical Society and the Hirshhorn Museum in Washington D.C. collaborated to build an easy interactive challenge for social media users with their #MuseumSunshine campaign that "called for images of bright, yellow artworks, plein-air sunrises, light-up or glowing works, and generally, anything that feels sunny" (Eves, 2020). These "sunny" constraints on the museums' call for contributions is an effective use of instructional scaffolding to encourage participation from their audience. Institutions can also strive for an active audience on social media by asking followers what they would like to see, utilizing hashtags for easy engagement, and constantly evaluating their social media presence for best practices. This evaluation might include looking at how meaningful post and description content is, if logos and imagery are drawing attention, and whether or not a museum's posting and commenting presence is consistent and effective across all chosen platforms (Eves, 2020). Each social media platform has its own strengths and weaknesses, and effectively navigating those characteristics of a museum's chosen platforms is important to building and engaging with audiences.

To be successful, institutions must be able to design content around a platform's algorithm. A social media algorithm is a set of sophisticated rules and calculations that a platform uses to determine what content users see and in what order they see it. For example, Facebook's algorithm controls the order and presentation of posts on a user's newsfeed so they see what is most relevant to them based on the kinds of content they have engaged with prior. Facebook's 2019 algorithm update was especially focused on combating misinformation and incorporated strategies for filtering out posts that were needlessly controversial or "spammy" (Barnhart, 2020). As such, someone designing a participatory social media campaign with Facebook's algorithm in mind might consider the following (Barnhart, 2020; Funk, 2012):

- *Effectively time posts.* Recent posts tend to be prioritized by the algorithm, so they should be posted when their users are generally using Facebook.
- *Feature more videos.* Videos tend to drive higher engagement rates compared to other forms of content and are prioritized by the algorithm.
- *Avoid "engagement bait."* Facebook's algorithm attempts to filter out all posts or comments that explicitly ask for engagement. E.g., "Comment YES if you think..."
- *Encourage personal engagement*. The Facebook algorithm generally prioritizes content from friends and family over businesses, so encourage individuals on your social media team to share posts and engage with content from their personal accounts without astroturfing.

- *Use external links sparingly.* Facebook prefers its native content over content from external websites, so the algorithm will favor pictures or tags over external links.
- *Craft unique posts.* Duplicate content will often be overlooked and forgotten—every Facebook post should be unique to Facebook. If duplicate content can't be avoided, make sure the content descriptions are at least different.

By establishing clear goals for participation and constructing engaging posts, cultural institutions have the power to conduct powerful and engaging social media campaigns—consider the British Museum, for example. The British Museum plans all of its social media channels separately while thinking about what's coming up next week and next month in the trajectories of each of its unique platforms. Even within the same platform, they may adopt different strategies, like in the case of their Instagram newsfeed and Instagram story. For instance, the content they post on their Instagram story tends to be "more playful [and] spontaneous," while the content on their newsfeed tends to be more thought out and deliberately planned with a tendency to "post things in threes so that they have the sense of this automatic journey" (Copp, 2018). The British Museum emphasizes this "automatic journey" in their general social media storytelling strategies as well. In featuring a curated artifact on one of their social media channels, they endeavor to bring the people who are a part of that artifact's story to life by asking and answering questions like who made it, who was it made for, who's used it and how is it used, and how might that relate to what is happening today. For the British Museum, driving engagement on social media is all about finding a balance between posting about what's popular or what will generate interest and being faithful to their collections (Copp, 2018). However, on its own, crafting compelling posts isn't enough to sustain a social media campaign.

Those social media campaigns that survive and thrive do so thanks to effective community management, and the first step in effective community management is understanding one's audience. In the journal article "Community relationship management and social media," Lawrence Ang writes: "the users of [social media] are primarily a community of people bonded together by a common interest—not necessarily customers of organisations" (Ang, 2011). People use social media to facilitate social interactions with one another and nearly always for non-commercial purposes. As such, community managers must build and maintain a strong personal connection between their brand and social media users by committing to the following (Funk, 2012):

- A *consumer-oriented culture* that prioritizes responsiveness, personality, and authenticity. By responding to users frequently and immediately, community managers can find those loyalists that will serve as ambassadors between the brand and prospective users.
- An emphasis on *content planning* that involves an active posting schedule to keep social media spaces fresh and front and center on the news feeds of its audience.
- The *promotion of social spaces* in order to drive traffic to the brand's pages, either through boosted posts and paid advertisements or cross-platform promotion.
- A solid *retention plan* that rewards the contributions of current users by providing a unique window into the inner workings of the brand's culture.

Community managers can employ a number of practices for pursuing the aforementioned objectives. As a prerequisite, community managers must be great listeners who constantly stay abreast to social media conversations about their brand and the industry it falls within, even if those conversations are happening outside of their designated spaces. Informed by such

conversations, community managers should invite interaction and solicit feedback from their users to strive for high levels of engagement—which can usually be measured in the form of likes and comments. In regards to content planning, social media publishing tools allow for the construction of posts ahead of time and the scheduling of such posts during off-hours; however, in order to maximize responsiveness to users' questions and comments, community managers should be flexible and able to engage on social media at unusual times as well. To promote social spaces and reward current users, community managers should identify and actively engage with "influentials," that is, those brand loyalists who have emerged as opinion leaders within the brand's social media spaces and have demonstrated a willingness to help the brand grow (Ang, 2011; Funk, 2012). In this way, community managers can "inspire interactivity not just between members and the brand, but also among members" (Funk, 2012). These kinds of strong-knit, supporting communities are integral to developing a brand's consumer-oriented culture and ensuring its long-term sustainability on social media.

Based on this literature review of social media for museums, here is a table of my guiding principles and their applications related to the adaptation to audience needs and the construction of a participatory social media campaign:

Social Media for Museums Principles & Applications for WHM	
Guiding Principle	**Application to *COVID-19 Chronicles***
Adapt to the digital spaces that institutional audiences are using.	When deciding on which social media platform(s) to use, pick those where institutional audiences are most active.
Maintain a social media presence that connects the values and missions of the institution with the goals of the campaign.	Let institutional values drive the branding and tone of the *COVID-19 Chronicles*' voice on social media, such as by emphasizing the togetherness of the Worcester community.
Treat social media campaigns as participatory experiences.	Incorporate instructional scaffolding into social media posts to give users constraints on what they can comment/contribute.
Design content around a given social media platform's algorithm.	In designing posts for Facebook, use external links sparingly since its algorithm prioritizes native content.
Strive for an "automatic journey" in social media storytelling.	Create social media post campaigns in sets of three, where each post shares the same underlying theme or topic.

Develop a consumer-oriented culture in social media spaces.	Reply to users' comments frequently and in a diplomatic, yet personable manner, even if the comment is hostile or impolite.
Emphasize content planning for social media posts.	Establish a regular posting schedule and utilize social media publishing tools to help ensure consistency.
Drive traffic to specific social spaces through cross-platform promotion.	Promote the *COVID-19 Chronicles* website on Facebook, and promote *COVID-19 Chronicles* social media on the website.
Identify and engage with opinion leaders to create a retention plan that rewards users for contributing.	Champion those social media users who frequently post UGC by incorporating their content into other social media posts or digital exhibits.

Table 3. Social Media for Museums Guiding Principles & Applications

Here is the list of those challenges that I felt were most pertinent to the application of these institutional social media guidelines:

- *Integrating with existing institutional culture*. A lot of institutions may not be comfortable in digital spaces and even more resistant to managing multiple digital channels via cross-platform promotion, simply because it's not part of their institutional culture. For a project like this to be sustainable, the institution must be willing to embrace new technologies and practices, which could prove to be a struggle.
- *Establishing a brand tone*. While I want the voice of the *COVID-19 Chronicles* social media to reflect project values, I don't want it to sound too corporate or inhuman, as it would be harder to build meaningful human connections with users that way.
- *Building an audience*. Again, I reiterate that a lot of these strategies rely on an active audience that regularly contributes and engages with a brand on social media. With the prior lack of *COVID-19 Chronicles* content, I think it will take a lot of time and effort to build an audience that will allow for the application of these principles.

Museums should be comfortable with the deployment of these strategies at any point in time, but there is one final condition needed to understand how such practices might fit into the context of this project: the COVID-19 pandemic.

2.4 Community Archives and COVID-19

At the heart of the *COVID-19 Chronicles* project is a simple idea: history is happening now. However, from such a simple notion arise a number of complex considerations, especially in the context of COVID-19 community archives. In this section, I define rapid response collecting, highlight some of the issues that arise with content collection in the world of

COVID-19, and conduct an environment review of three other COVID-19 rapid-response collecting initiatives to inform my work on the *COVID-19 Chronicles*.

2.4.1 Rapid-Response Collecting

Rapid-response collecting arises out of an institutional need to preserve history in the moment. This historical collection practice is defined as the "aim to salvage artifacts during or just after events occur" because the holders of artifacts may not understand their historical value until it's too late (Documenting COVID-19.2020). As such, we must collect all that we can before time and current judgments filter out artifacts that may hold more significance later on. For example, curators at the Mütter Museum in Philadelphia are concerned with the collection of ancient physical specimens and have recently been interested in the DNA present on envelopes from the 1918 flu epidemic. By testing the glue strip of an envelope from this time period, scientists can determine if the person licking the envelope had active influenza or antibodies. However, while many archives and individuals saved letters from this time period, most didn't think to salvage the envelopes since their historical significance was not immediately obvious (Precedents to documenting COVID-19.2020). While it may be tempting to document as much as we can in the moment, there are still a number of ethical concerns to consider.

Ethical documentation serves to transform the outside observer into an active agent of change. The COVID-19 pandemic in particular has been "a moment ripe for consideration of how public historians and memory workers can ethically document our current social, public health, and economic crises, and help dismantle structural inequalities through these efforts" (Documenting COVID-19.2020). We are experiencing not just a single pandemic of the coronavirus, but rather "twin pandemics of COVID-19 and racial inequality," as the pandemic has highlighted glaring disparities in our country's healthcare infrastructure related to race and socioeconomic status (Documenting COVID-19.2020). As such, the duties of historians should be to document events in such a way as to promote the betterment of society and address underlying injustices, not "commodify" the traumatic experiences of certain communities for the entertainment of outsiders. In the case of traumatic and politically-charged events, like the pandemic, community archives must also take additional steps to protect their contributors.

In practicing rapid-response collection, community archives must be cognizant of the individual ramifications of contribution—consider Washington University's *Documenting Ferguson* archive, for example. This community collection project, started in response to the Ferguson protests that followed the fatal shooting of Michael Brown in Missouri in 2014, allowed users to upload any materials related to the protests and racial unrest. Little did the archive creators and contributors know that the police were surveilling the archive and using its materials to arrest contributors nearly a year later (Precedents to documenting COVID-19.2020). Community archives, while they can serve as a powerful tool for documenting traumatic historical events, must prioritize the protection of their contributors in the present.

2.4.2 Environment Review of Digital COVID-19 Archives

Since March of 2020, a number of digital archives dedicated to documenting the pandemic through user-generated content have emerged. This section evaluates the strengths of three such archives—*A Journal of the Plague Year*, the *Queens Memory COVID-19 Project*, and

A Milwaukee Coronavirus Digital Archive—that have informed the relaunching of the *COVID-19 Chronicles*.

2.4.2.1 Social Media Compatibility: *A Journal of the Plague Year*

Initiated by Arizona State University, *A Journal of the Plague Year* is one of the most popular and lucrative COVID-19 digital archives—with over 12,000 submitted items—partly thanks to its impressive compatibility with social media. With a global perspective on the pandemic (as opposed to the *COVID-19 Chronicles* that is centered on Worcester's experience), *A Journal of the Plague Year* calls for the contribution of social media artifacts via Facebook posts, Instagram and Snapchat memes, and various screenshots on its other social media channels. On their website, they even include a section for specific contribution calls (i.e., with instructional scaffolding) tied to a certain hashtag, such as #FoodIsLife and #HealthcareHeroes. The design of the *A Journal of the Plague Year* website also emphasizes shareability, with buttons for sharing the archives items and stories on Facebook, Twitter, Pinterest, and even Tumblr (Arizona State University, 2020). The cross-promotion between *A Journal of the Plague Year*'s website and social media channels serves to create an effective and cohesive community archive culture.

2.4.2.2 Community: *Queens Memory COVID-19 Project*

With a unique design, the *Queens Memory COVID-19 Project* takes an unconventional approach to the digital archive format in order to emphasize community. Geography is front and center for the *Queens Memory COVID-19 Project*, as website users explore the archive's stories via an interactive map of the Queens borough (see Figure 1). Each item is represented by a node on the map (located where the item was created or submitted) that users can click on for an expanded display of the item that includes accompanying text from the item's creator. Virtual exhibits place these nodes in a sequence in order to tell specific pandemic-related stories (Queens Public Library, 2020). The *Queens Memory COVID-19 Project*'s emphasis on geography is used to effectively drive storytelling around familiar community locales. Such a strategy could be transferable to WHM's existing audiences, who tend to be most invested in the events going on around their home, street, or other place in Worcester that they care about.

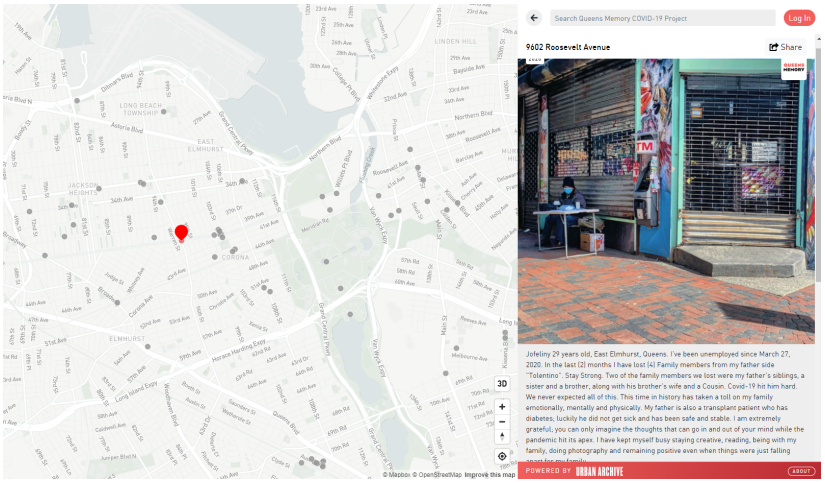

Figure 1. *Queens Memory COVID-19 Project* Website

2.4.2.3 Curated Exhibits: *A Milwaukee Coronavirus Digital Archive*

Powered by Omeka and focused in the Milwaukee area, *A Milwaukee Coronavirus Digital Archive* matches the *COVID-19 Chronicles* in both scope and structure and offers an effective approach to digital exhibits. To tell stories using the items in its archive, *A Milwaukee Coronavirus Digital Archive* has a page dedicated to curated exhibits. Each exhibit has a powerful and evocative title and theme, like "What I Would've Worn," which features photographs of the exhibit's author in the outfits that she would've worn to various events had they not been cancelled because of the pandemic, and "Nowhere to Play," a collection of photographs of empty playgrounds at the author's childhood home of Eden, Wisconsin (see Figure 2). Exhibits are also tagged with various thematic and pandemic-related labels, such as "Art," "Empty Spaces," "Community," and "Reflection," to name a few (University of Wisconsin-Milwaukee, 2020). Through the creation of compelling digital exhibits, *A Milwaukee Coronavirus Digital Archive* is able to tell meaningful stories using the items in its collection.

Figure 2. *A Milwaukee Coronavirus Digital Archive*'s "Nowhere to Play" Exhibit

From this background on rapid-response collection and the environment review of other digital community COVID-19 archives, here are my guiding principles and applications:

Community Archives & COVID-19 Principles & Applications for WHM	
Guiding Principle	**Application to *COVID-19 Chronicles***
Don't judge the historical value of (potential) items based on how relevant or irrelevant they seem right now.	Don't ignore or over-moderate those item submissions or social media conversations that seem off-topic or irrelevant.

Use the archive's position to promote change and don't commodify the traumatic pandemic-related experiences of marginalized communities.	Use social media platforms to promote and drive visibility to those causes that align with the institutional values of the archive by featuring those movements or initiatives in social media posts.
Prioritize the privacy and safety of archive contributors and creators.	Include clear and accessible privacy policy and usage rights statements on all major archive channels, including social media pages and the website.
Use specific, scaffolded contribution calls on all archive platforms.	Use hashtags or other similar phrases across both social media and the archive website to create a cohesive archive culture that cross-promotes itself.
Emphasize community in the city of Worcester by referencing specific locations and local culture.	Feature content on social media that highlights how local organizations, restaurants, buildings, and other locations are experiencing the pandemic in Worcester.
Use the items in the archive to tell meaningful and moving stories.	Curate exhibits based on powerful or otherwise successful social media posts and topics using the items in the archive.

Table 4. Community Archives & COVID-19 Guiding Principles & Applications

While looking at the strengths and weaknesses of similar initiatives can be a powerful tool for informing the design of my own digital archive and social media undertakings, each project will have its own set of specific challenges and limitations. Here are some of obstacles that I imagined would emerge out of the applications of the aforementioned principles:

- *Balancing pandemic topics*. Providing all of the pandemic-related social, political, and economic issues with the attention and detail that they rightfully deserve may overburden audiences and drive them away. There should be a balance between the important hard-hitting discussion points and the light-hearted—but still meaningful and pertinent—content.
- *Lowering barriers to entry*. Emphasizing user privacy and protection often acts against lowering barriers to entry, i.e., making it easier to submit items to the archive. Presenting privacy statements in such a way that is both detailed and readily understood will likely prove difficult.
- *Connecting with local culture*. As someone not native to Worcester who has only been partially immersed in Worcester culture for a few years, I anticipated a learning curve in understanding what artifacts and locales were most important to—and could therefore be used to effectively connect with—the community that this project is targeting.

With the compilation of these guiding principles, applications, and potential challenges—from this section and all prior sections in this background chapter—I am able to develop the methods necessary to pursue my project objectives and answer the corresponding research questions.

In this background chapter, I have set the stage for my work on WHM's *COVID-19 Chronicles.* Embedded in the exceptional circumstances of the COVID-19 pandemic, this project lies at the intersection of participatory experience design and evaluation, the nature of user-generated content, social media practices for museums, and principles of rapid response collection archive initiatives. Using the guiding principle and application tables that I developed throughout this chapter, in the next chapter I outline my methods for promoting engagement with the *COVID-19 Chronicles*.

3. Methods of Understanding Social Media Engagement

By relaunching a social media campaign for the *COVID-19 Chronicles*, I sought to encourage UGC contributions and drive engagement between the archive brand and WHM's audiences. Here is a reminder of my three main project objectives, including my purpose behind each objective:

1. *Promote the meaningful contribution of quality items to the digital archive.* I wanted to develop a framework for how cultural institutions can use social media to promote content collection for digital rapid-response collecting archive projects.
2. *Foster a space for dialogue between users about the experience of COVID-19 in Worcester using the items in the archive as discussion points.* My purpose here was to understand the dynamics and tensions related to cultural institutions using curated archive items on social media as discussion points to build relationships with their audiences.
3. *Generate user interest in utilizing the items in the archive to pursue user-driven projects.* In doing so, I wanted to illustrate how a community archive might be transformed into a community-driven archive that sustains itself. Unfortunately, my third and final objective of generating interest in the pursuit of user-driven projects proved to be beyond the scope of this project. I revisit this objective and its unforeseen complexities in Section 4.3.

From these objectives, I identified three research questions to inform my project methodology:

- How can we effectively drive contributions to digital community archives during periods of extreme trauma?
- How does one create and measure a successful participatory social media campaign during a pandemic?
- How has COVID-19 impacted audience reception to and engagement with cultural institutions' artifacts on social media?

In order to answer these questions, in this chapter I outline my methods of data collection and evaluation, including the maintenance of a social media presence, measurements of social media impact, and interviews with social media managers of other institutions that are using social media during the COVID-19 pandemic. The methods described here establish the context for my research findings and the conclusions I derive from those findings in Chapters 4 and 5.

3.1 Maintaining a Social Media Presence

Based on the guiding principles and applications outlined in my background chapter, this section briefly reviews the social media practices I employed for the *COVID-19 Chronicles*, including how and why I integrated the *COVID-19 Chronicles* social media campaign with WHM's existing Facebook page and my methods of post construction and other social media practices. This step was an important prerequisite for both measuring social media impact and conducting interviews with other social media managers. In running a social media campaign, I obtained the metrics needed for my analysis of social media impact and the experience to inform the construction of my interview questions, respectively.

3.1.1 Platform Integration with WHM's Social Media Channels

To motivate the social media practices I employed for the *COVID-19 Chronicles*, I first want to provide context on WHM's current social media practices. WHM crossposts duplicate content between its Facebook and Instagram accounts—with follower counts of roughly 9,400 and 4,000 respectively—with three posts per weekday at regular assigned time slots of 9:30AM, 11AM, and 2PM, two posts on Saturday at 11AM and 2PM, and one post on Sunday at 2PM. The majority of these posts ask or answer questions related to WHM's "Fascinating Worcester" trivia campaign, which tests users on their institutional knowledge of Worcester's history. With WHM's current social media conventions in mind, I sought to develop a plan for integrating the *COVID-19 Chronicles* with WHM's presence on social media.

Based on these observations—and with an eye towards the long-term sustainability of any *COVID-19 Chronicles* social media channels—I wanted to create a space dedicated to the *COVID-19 Chronicles* that could still be accessible to WHM audiences. In particular, I wanted to highlight *COVID-19 Chronicles* content by creating a new space that wasn't already diluted with a high volume of other historical Worcester-related posts like WHM's current Facebook feed was. Given WHM's familiarity with and active following on Facebook, I decided to create a dedicated *COVID-19 Chronicles* Facebook page. Working with WHM's social media coordinator, we also assigned WHM's Thursday 2PM time slot to the *COVID-19 Chronicles*. This scheduled post on WHM channels acted as a point of entry for WHM's current audiences by highlighting some of the content from the *COVID-19 Chronicles* page that week. This arrangement provided me with the freedom to craft my own posts and develop my own strategies for the *COVID-19 Chronicles* page while still staying connected to WHM's larger audience.

3.1.2 *COVID-19 Chronicles* Post Construction and Scheduling

In constructing posts for the *COVID-19 Chronicles* Facebook page, my goal was to champion contributors by sharing archive content and empower users to contribute via specific prompts. Instead of relying on the open-ended "share your story" call to action that the *COVID-19 Chronicles* website and prior WHM *COVID-19 Chronicles* posts embraced, I wanted to provide users with specific contribution prompts, i.e., instructional scaffolding, related to existing archive items (Simon, 2010). In particular, I wanted to create contribution calls that were universally relatable and easy to act on (e.g., by leaving a comment on the post) in order to lower barriers of entry to archive contribution. I strived to connect these contribution calls to items that were already in the archive—though in some cases I would submit my own items to the archive to support the different themes I wanted to explore in my posts. For example, in the sample post from Figure 3 below, I featured a watercolor painting that was submitted to the archive along with the prompt "how has the media made you feel during this pandemic?" While the featured item is a painting, a contribution call like "have you created any pandemic-related art?" already has an inherently high barrier to entry (i.e., the user created art) and is very open-ended. As such, I opted instead to base my prompt on the inspiration behind the painting, which was something that presumably everyone could relate to or had experienced. I constructed the majority of *COVID-19 Chronicles* posts with these considerations in mind.

Covid-19 Chronicles
Jan 15 ·

This week, we'll be highlighting some of the COVID-inspired artwork that has been submitted to our archive. Today, we're starting with this watercolor self portrait by Maggie Hart, titled "The Surge."

This piece comes in response to the "fear and anxiety when listening to the media warning us of the coming surge of cases, numbers of Covid-19 death tallies and how we need to protect ourselves and others."

How has the media made you feel during this pandemic? #WorcesterCovid19 #ArtOfCovid

"The Surge" courtesy of Maggie Hart, March 28, 2020.

Figure 3. Sample Post from the *COVID-19 Chronicles* Facebook Page

In regards to post scheduling, I approached channel planning with an emphasis on theme and automatic storytelling in order to connect individual *COVID-19 Chronicles* stories into a larger narrative. Based on those days of the week and times that tended to generate the most visibility for non-profit cultural institutions, I posted to the *COVID-19 Chronicles* three times a week on Fridays, Mondays, and Wednesdays in the window of 8AM–10AM. Each set of three posts was centered around a specific theme or topic, indicated by a specific hashtag (e.g., "#ArtOfCovid" for the post in Figure 3). I always posted the first of a set on Fridays so that each weekly campaign concluded on the *COVID-19 Chronicles* Facebook page the day before the related summary post went live on WHM's channels. For managing multiple posts of different campaigns, I utilized the Buffer social media managing platform. After conducting a review on multiple social media management platforms—using cost, scheduling capacity, included analytics, and collaboration features as criteria—I determined that Buffer would be the most convenient platform for my project purposes. In managing the *COVID-19 Chronicles* Facebook page, including the construction and scheduling of posts, I would gather the data and experience necessary to measure the impact of social media and conduct interviews with social media managers of other cultural institutions to answer my research questions.

3.2 Measuring Social Media Impact

With my dual objectives of promoting the archive and facilitating discussion, I measured the impact of the *COVID-19 Chronicles*' social media initiative on two fronts: archive contributions and social media conversations. As a prerequisite for both of these measurements, I also looked at the visibility of the *COVID-19 Chronicles* Facebook page to support my analysis of these main objectives. In this section, I review my methods for measuring social media visibility, archive contributions driven by social media, and discussion on social media.

3.2.1 Social Media Visibility

In order to contextualize the impact of social media in driving archive contributions and discussion, I first needed to assess how effective my practices were for building an audience on the *COVID-19 Chronicles* Facebook page. To measure the visibility of the *COVID-19 Chronicles* page, I relied on Facebook's "Page Insights" feature to gather data on post reach—that is, how many people saw a given post—and user engagement, which includes metrics like clicks, reactions, comments, and shares that a post receives. Using a spreadsheet, I compared these quantitative measurements to post topic and type (image, video, link, text, etc.) for a clearer picture of which posts performed the best. While I could have purchased more sophisticated social media analytics, I believed that the metrics provided by default would be sufficient for the scope of my project. This focus on post visibility served to help me better understand which social media practices are most effective at promoting engagement on the *COVID-19 Chronicles* Facebook page.

3.2.2 Social Media to Drive Archive Contributions

I contextualized these metrics of engagement from the page to assess how effective social media was at driving contributions to the *COVID-19 Chronicles* website. Every *COVID-19 Chronicles*-related post that I wrote was accompanied by a #WorcesterCovid19 hashtag to enable me to keep track of those posts that were intended to drive users to contribute to the archive. Using the same spreadsheet as before, I then compared the topic and dates of these #WorcesterCovid19 posts with the topic and dates of archive submissions to the *COVID-19 Chronicles* website to see if there was any correlation between what I posted and what was submitted. Concurrently, I also kept track of those social media items shared with the *COVID-19 Chronicles* page that I submitted to the archive on behalf of a user to illustrate how social media might be used to lower barriers of entry to contribution. By comparing *COVID-19 Chronicles* social media posts with archive submissions, I examined how social media activities might affect archive contribution patterns.

3.2.3 User Engagement via Discussion on Social Media

In exploring how social media can be used as a space for pandemic-related dialogues, I measured the quantity and quality of discussion on *COVID-19 Chronicles* posts. Quantitatively, I looked at the word length of comments on #WorcesterCovid19 posts, as well as the number of replies and users involved in any given comment thread, as an indication of how much effort users put towards engaging with specific posts or topics. In regards to quality, I used sentiment analysis to categorize comments on #WorcesterCovid19 posts as either positive, negative, or neutral and impersonal or personal based on whether a comment was focused primarily with oneself or with others (Mehta, 2008; Newberry, 2020). While these labels served to simplify complex social, political, and economical feelings related to the pandemic, I felt such categorizations were necessary to understand the general kinds of responses that certain post topics elicited, which could offer insight into how COVID-19 has impacted audience reception of cultural and historical artifacts. Through this discussion analysis, I sought to better define what a successful participatory social media campaign might look like during a pandemic.

3.3 Interviewing Cultural Institutions on Social Media Use During COVID-19

To supplement my own data and findings, I conducted virtual interviews with dedicated social media managers of other cultural institutions across the country. Based on the questions and challenges that emerged as I managed the *COVID-19 Chronicles* Facebook page, I developed a set of eleven questions to use as a basis for discussion during each interview. I primed each question with a one-sentence observation based on my own research and experience:

1. Social media is one of the most fundamental ways in which museums stay connected with their audiences remotely. Which platforms does your institution use and why do you use those specific platforms?
2. Social media offers users and institutions lots of different ways to engage with one another. How does your institution use social media to engage with audiences?
3. Many institutions are turning to dedicated community managers to run multiple social media platforms that cross promote one another. Do you have someone who coordinates all of your social media activities?
4. My work is concerned with managing and driving user engagement between our Facebook page (the *COVID-19 Chronicles* Facebook page), the Worcester Historical Museum's Facebook page, and the *COVID-19 Chronicles* website. How do your institutional channels engage with or reference each other?
5. My goals for our social media campaign was to promote the archive, encourage users to contribute to the archive, and lower the barriers to entry for submitting an item. What are some of your goals (either institutional or specific to a given project) and how does social media help you achieve them?
6. Social media platforms make it very easy for institutions to track all the quantitative activity for their page or account. How do you measure the impact of your social media activities? What quantitative or qualitative metrics do you look at?
7. One of the challenges we face is a lack of audience engagement (comments, likes, etc.). How have you overcome that challenge of connecting with users?
8. I struggle in building human connections with social media users. How do you build human connections with your audience on social media? How do you measure those human connections?
9. One of the struggles I'm dealing with as the *COVID-19 Chronicles* is that people are sick of talking about this pandemic. How has the pandemic affected your institution's goals and strategies for reaching audiences?
10. One of the few silver linings of this pandemic is that a lot more people are becoming adept at using technologies to stay connected remotely. Has the pandemic changed your perceptions of the technologies available to your institution?

11. COVID has undoubtedly changed the way that institutions are doing things. In a post-COVID world, which practices (that you adopted because of COVID) would you be interested in keeping or iterating on? Which practices would you abandon and why?

After developing these questions, I identified and requested interviews from eight institutions whose social media campaigns and COVID-19 archive initiatives I found compelling. I conducted and recorded 30-minute real-time interviews over Zoom with three social media managers that agreed to participate in my project. I deleted all recordings after transcribing and omitting all names and identifying information from each interview. The edited transcripts can be found in Appendix C. In conversing with professionals that manage social media for cultural institutions, I developed a better understanding of how COVID-19 has impacted institutional practices, what other institutions are doing to drive user engagement and contribution, and how institutional social media managers are able to craft and measure successful participatory social media campaigns.

4. Discussion of *COVID-19 Chronicles*' Social Media Campaign

In this project, I wanted to determine how social media might be used as a tool to increase archive contributions and create a space for community discussion regarding the experience of the COVID-19 pandemic in Worcester. To this end, I constructed a social media campaign for the *COVID-19 Chronicles* digital archive, interviewed professional social media managers of other cultural institutions, and even attempted to build exhibits that would inspire the creation of user-driven projects using the archive. Based on this project work and all the data that I collected, three major themes emerged:

1. To meaningfully engage with audiences, especially during a pandemic, cultural institutions must adapt to digital spaces—using cross-platform social media campaigns and dedicated community managers—and appeal to what their audiences care about.
2. The fast-paced, spur-of-the-moment nature of most social media platforms isn't conducive to the privacy and rights considerations that must accompany archival submissions, suggesting that social media may not be an effective, or even ethical, tool for lowering barriers of entry to item submission.
3. Coordinating and integrating social media activities with exhibit construction for a digital community requires careful planning and an active contributor base.

In this chapter, I discuss how my research supports and suggests these three themes. The first section explores my findings related to how cultural institutions engage with their audiences on social media platforms using the following points to guide discussion topics:

- The quantitative and qualitative results of my own social media campaign.
- The challenges to building an active social media audience that both I and my interviewees have observed.
- The institutional tendency to undervalue social media and the role of social media managers, suggested by my own experiences working with WHM and my interviewees' testimonials.
- My thoughts on the pre-existing tensions between museums and users on social media—and the complexities that the COVID-19 pandemic has now introduced to this dynamic—after conducting my own social media campaign and interviewing other institutional social media managers.

The second main section of this chapter illustrates the challenges I faced in utilizing social media as a tool to lower barriers of entry for submitting items. In this section, I explain why the social media strategies that I employed were not effective at simplifying the archival contribution process. Finally, in the third section of this chapter, I revisit my objective of generating interest in user-driven archive initiatives through the construction of curated exhibits in an effort to highlight the complexities of such an undertaking for future social media managers and exhibit builders.

The COVID-19 pandemic made digital spaces, like social media, a necessity for communication amidst a global lockdown when individuals could not meet with one another in person. Although we are beginning to feel many effects of COVID-19 subside in the wake of

mass vaccinations, I believe that our reliance on digital spaces, which the pandemic reinforced, is here to stay. The coronavirus brought with it a newfound appreciation for those roles and businesses that maintain and create digital spaces, like social media managers—roles which will likely only continue to grow in importance as we move into the post-pandemic era. As such, professionals in writing and interactive media must continually learn and iterate on how they utilize these digital spaces to efficiently and effectively reach their audiences. My hope is that this research, and my subsequent findings, will contribute to the larger conversation on 1.) the role of interactive media within the professional writing discipline and 2.) the role of professional writing within the interactive media discipline in a post-COVID future.

4.1 Engaging with Institutional Audiences on Social Media

My experiences running a social media campaign for the *COVID-19 Chronicles* and the testimonies of my interviewees suggest that cultural institutions must be willing to adapt to the best practices of digital social media spaces in order to meaningfully connect with their audiences online. In particular, my findings indicate that institutions will benefit immensely from cross-platform social media campaigns (which play to the strengths and weaknesses of each platform) run by dedicated community managers and—especially during an ongoing period of trauma—by focusing on those issues and topics that their audiences care most about. To support these findings, I discuss the following topics in this section:

- The results of my own campaign for the *COVID-19 Chronicles*.
- The challenges of building an audience.
- The need for a cross-platform campaign with a dedicated manager.
- Observations on social media engagement during the pandemic.

4.1.1 Results of *COVID-19 Chronicles* Social Media Campaign

Ultimately, my *COVID-19 Chronicles* social media campaign did not garner enough visibility to meaningfully determine if social media is an effective tool for lowering barriers to archive contribution. Through the construction of nearly seventy individual social media posts over a five-month period that spanned from October 2020 to March 2021, I gathered the following metrics shown in Figure 4 below (see Appendix A for the full data set). More sophisticated social media analytics might have offered more insight, but such analytics would have cost money, which was not within this project's budget. While I saw some upward trends in post reach and number of likes, the numbers remained modest overall. No post ever received more than five likes, comments were nearly nonexistent, and by the end of March, the page had only thirty-five followers. As one would expect, I did see an increase in the number of likes and the number of people that saw a given post (i.e., post reach) when a post was shared one or more times. Overall, these numbers indicate a lack of penetration across the board, suggesting that the *COVID-19 Chronicles* Facebook page did not succeed in building a substantial audience.

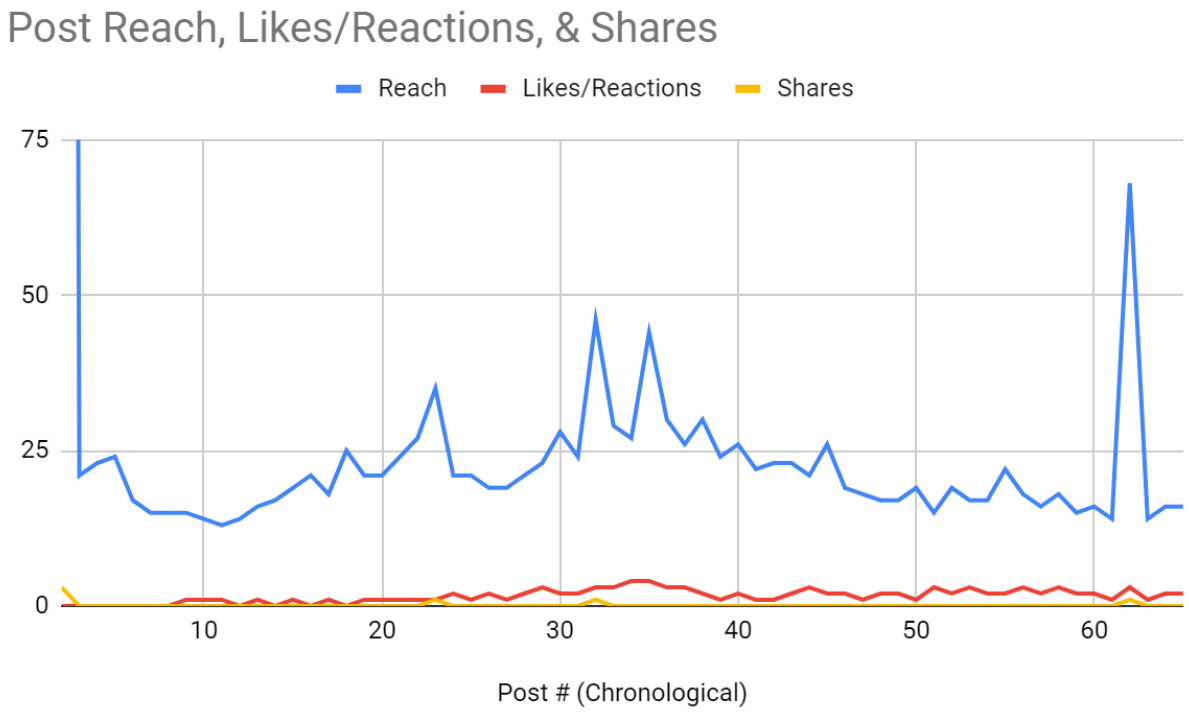

Figure 4. Line Graph of Post Reach, Likes/Reactions, & Shares

Given the low overall performance of the social media posts, my data is inconclusive as to whether or not social media is an effective tool for driving archive contributions. I found some correlation between what I posted on social media and what was submitted to the archive (see Appendix B). For example, the archive received a Halloween-related submission ("Halloween smiles in the hospital") two days after I made a post about Halloween decorations in Worcester. However, it's possible that this correlation is merely the result of opportunistic timing. Further research would need to be conducted to determine if this—and other correlations like it—were a direct result of social media activities or not.

While engagement levels were minimal across the board, the page did receive one comment that prompted a meaningful interaction between myself—as the *COVID-19 Chronicles* page manager—and one other user. In the comment thread shown below, associated with the social media post in Figure 4, the user left a negative and impersonal 16-word comment that calls attention to the fact that the Friendly House volunteers in the featured picture were not wearing face masks. I responded saying that the picture had been taken in 2019, prior to the pandemic, and that I wanted to know more about what goals they had for their original comment. Based on this prompt, the user responded with an over 300-word personal response that reflects on their prior comment and why they harbor such a negative attitude towards anti-maskers. Given the effort and detail that went into this follow-up comment, I conclude there is potential for meaningful discussion on social media platforms.

Covid-19 Chronicles
Posted by Buffer
Nov 25, 2020 ·

COVID doesn't stop the kindness. Worcester's own Friendly House on Grafton Hill continues to support the community during these tough times through their annual Thanksgiving dinner food pack event, complete with turkey, vegetables, and even dessert.

Sometimes it's the simple things. In spite of everything that's happened this year, what are you thankful for? #WorcesterCovid19 #ACovid19Thanksgiving

Photos courtesy of "Cecelia, the Worcester alt newspaper."

Figure 5. *COVID-19 Chronicles* Thanksgiving Post and Comment Thread Excerpt (Below)

Commenter: "No masks and right next to each other. What kind of dumba$$ cognitive dissonance is this??"

COVID-19 Chronicles: "Hi [Name], we appreciate your vigilance. Although it was unclear from our original post, these photos were actually from Friendly House's 2019 Thanksgiving giveaway—hence no masks.

That being said, we'd like to take this opportunity to start a dialogue around this 'mask shaming' culture that we're seeing on social media. Unfortunately, wearing masks has become a divisive political issue rather than a public safety one. With that in mind, we'd like to ask what your goals were for your original comment. Did you just want to call attention to this hypocrisy? And if so, to what end? Or were you hoping to convince others to wear masks? We'd love to hear your thoughts!"

Commenter: "I'm sorry for being so reactionary. Yes, I too am... well, sad, angry, those don't even begin to touch the feelings I get around the No Maskers.

I dunno, I guess my goal was to call attention to the apparent hypocrisy, hoping that maybe someone there would go 'Oh yeah, duh, we're COVID chronicles and we're Friendly House so maybe we oughtta [sic] set a good example' or.... something.

I loathe wearing masks. I loathe having to don the whole dang hazmat suit (mask, gloves, face shield) just to go out my [sic] house.

I *hate* that I go to such lengths NOT to spread this horrendous disease, and not to catch it, and that some others are so incredibly selfish that they can't bother.

And not only can't bother, but adamantly defend their rights to spread a deadly illness.

> I'm generally a really nice person. I go out of my way to be kind. I work in-home care with the elderly/disabled/dementia because I *love* my job, but I'll be damned if some foolish, arrogant asshat claiming their rights not to mask up somehow ends with me spreading it to my clients. Or my child. Or my partner. Or our cats (yes, there's talk-- scientific in origin-- of house pets being able to catch it).
>
> I doubt I can convince non-maskers to wear masks. Even those willing to wear them are still insistent on wearing them below their noses. Even those willing are somehow, 10 months out, lacking the knowledge that near to half of carriers are asymptomatic.
>
> Yeah, I'm pissed. I'm *really* pissed. The stupid, it burns.
>
> It may have been helpful if y'all had qualified the picture with a 'This is from T-day 2019, so, no masks'.
>
> Again, sorry I got so explosive at you, and thank you for getting back to me so diplomatically 🙂"

Although this is only one example, this interaction aptly captures and demonstrates an example of meaningful discussion on social media between an institution and an audience member. Based on this instance of personal reflection on behalf of the commenter, I would argue that there is space on social media platforms to build meaningful relationships and dialogues between cultural institutions and their audiences. In this case, the conversation was prompted by a miscommunication (i.e., assuming the featured photograph was from Thanksgiving 2020) as opposed to a deliberate attempt at usr engagement. However, from this we might observe that social media users are more likely to engage with content that they passionately disagree with. Additionally (or perhaps alternatively), this example illustrates how the pandemic has affected social media users' behaviors, which I will explore more fully in Section 4.1.4.

4.1.2 Challenges to Building an Audience on Social Media

One of the biggest struggles I faced in running the *COVID-19 Chronicles* Facebook page was building an audience. I hypothesize that visibility metrics remained consistently low for two main reasons: 1.) the page didn't experience enough penetration early on (in part because the page was created five months after the launch of the archive and because of the low support from WHM's existing channels), and 2.) the Facebook algorithm doesn't support low-performing posts. This is a vicious cyclical dynamic that one of my interviewees spoke to at length: " if we have a bunch of low-performing Facebook posts in a row, we're likely to stay in that tier of low-performing Facebook posts, and it's hard to climb out of that hole." Additionally, after an algorithm update in May 2019, Facebook announced that "the Page links that are surfaced to people will be ones they find worth their time." In response to this, Brent Barnhart of Sprout Social writes: "the takeaway from these efforts is that 'likes,' comments, reactions and any other form of engagement are all valuable currency for brands who want to be seen as relevant to their followers" (2020). This is all to say, because the *COVID-19 Chronicles* page didn't perform well initially, it wasn't prioritized by the algorithm and, as such, page visibility plummeted. And so, this begs the question: why didn't the page perform well early on? In my case, I infer that it is because the WHM Facebook page was the only real point-of-entry. Looking back, I think

bringing in new audiences—as opposed to simply trying to absorb WHM existing audience—would have been a more effective strategy to grow the page initially.

4.1.3 Need for a Cross-Platform Campaign with a Dedicated Community Manager

To maintain an effective and engaging social media presence, institutions should strive for an adaptable cross-platform campaign that plays to platform strengths. All of my interviewees indicated that their institution had an active social media presence on the "Big Three," that is, Facebook, Twitter, and Instagram. In this way, they are able to connect with and cater content to diverse audiences based on the limitations and strengths of these platforms—Twitter's 280 character limit or Instagram's emphasis on pictures, for example. However, for these social media managers, it's not enough to simply be active on the tried-and-true "Big Three." As one interviewee observed: "new platforms come up, they die, they shift, they morph, so a lot of people are also looking towards things like TikTok or Snapchat." Indeed, all of my interviewees discussed how they were experimenting with short-form video formats in anticipation for a presence on the popular TikTok platform. Effective cross-platform social media campaigning is about adaptability: adapting to diverse audiences, adapting to platform strengths and weaknesses, and adapting to the ever-shifting social media landscape.

However, to effectively construct and manage such a cross-platform campaign, institutions must rely on dedicated community managers. Historically, social media has been seen as a "tacked on" job, and some cultural institutions, like WHM, don't even have a formal position dedicated to social media management (e.g., WHM's social media manager's formal position title is "exhibit coordinator"). Even those institutions that do give social media its own role still may not respect it as such. One interviewee aptly captures this underappreciation: "a lot of people are going to tell you like 'well, you know, my teenage son has an Instagram account, he could do your job'—[there's] this idea that everybody's on it, so it's not that hard." And yet, experience has shown that it is hard. All of my interviewees spoke to not having enough time to give social media the attention that they feel it deserves as they get saddled with other communications and marketing-related responsibilities for their institutions. While the COVID-19 pandemic has helped change institutional attitudes towards social media-based roles (see Section 4.1.4 below), many institutions like WHM still don't even formally have such roles. As such, these institutions should consider hiring dedicated community managers to develop dynamic cross-platform strategies for their social media presence.

4.1.4 Social Media Engagement During a Pandemic

Before analyzing how the pandemic has impacted institution-audience interactions on social media, I first attempt to explain the tensions that already exist. Both museums and individuals use social media with the goal of building human relationships through meaningful engagements and connections on a platform. In order to build these connections, each entity brings something to the table: museums generally have historical or cultural artifacts while individuals have identity artifacts (see Figure 5 below). Both parties must curate these artifacts for their platform of choice. Just by having a presence on social media, individuals curate their identity artifacts in the way they present themselves and by what they choose to share and not

share from their real lives. Museums, on the other hand, tend to curate their historical or cultural artifacts into story artifacts for social media. Ideally, museums' curated story artifacts will resonate with users' curated identity artifacts, prompting participation in the form of meaningful comments and discussion. However, if this connection fails due to conflicting rhetorical goals, then engagement suffers and neither party benefits. To reduce these tensions in my own social media campaign, I sought to use instructional scaffolding to create meaningful discussion prompts that drew on users' personal experiences, not simple questions that tested institutional knowledge of the story I was sharing. However, one of my interviewees spoke to their struggles in using such a technique: "some of the things that I feel are super compelling and interesting aren't necessarily the things that get the most likes, which is disappointing, but you got to remember that social media is such a clique-y, short-term thing that people aren't necessarily digging as deep into as you want them to on it... as a history person, that can be really frustrating." Although Nina Simon advocates for designing questions around participants' personal experiences (2010), my own research and the efforts of others suggest that this may not always be the most effective approach to connect with users on social media platforms.

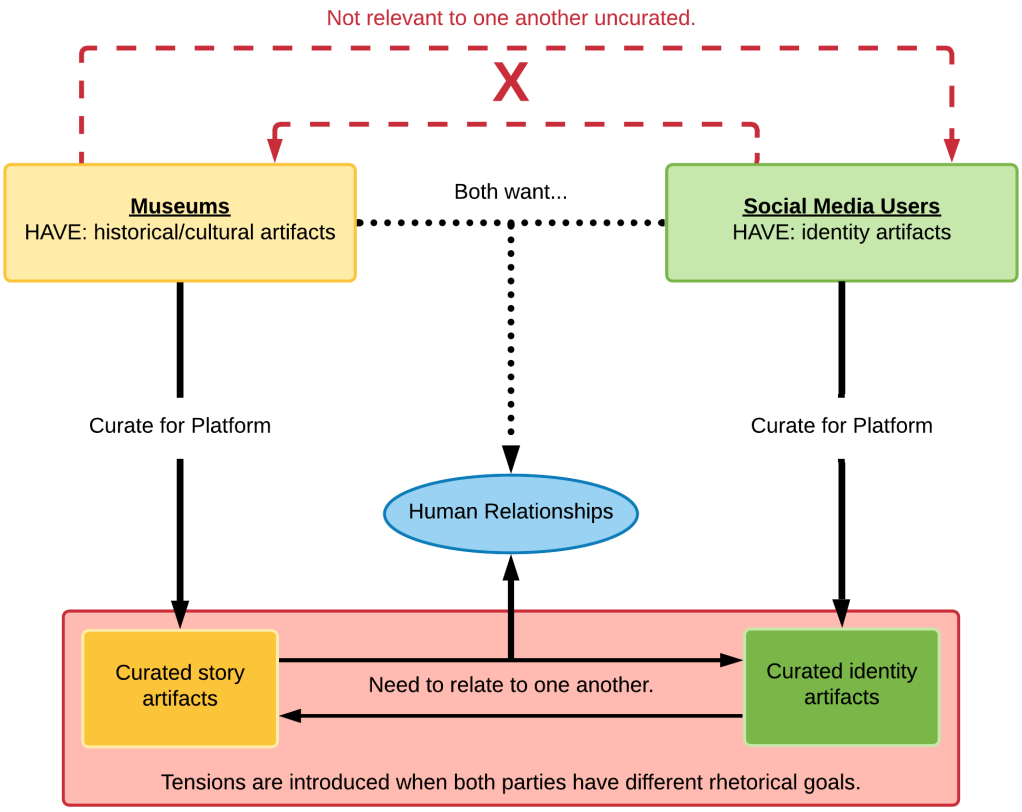

Figure 6. Social Media Exchange Between Users and Institutions

On top of all this, the COVID-19 pandemic has introduced further complexities into this dynamic between museums and their audiences. Immediately evident to me was the presence of "pandemic fatigue." After several months of coronavirus-related news and restrictions, people were simply sick and tired of talking about COVID-19 and for good reason. Although the

pandemic is an important topic, especially for historians, it imposes a burden on people—it's emotional, depressing, stressful, politically charged, and a whole host of other negative qualities for different people. As such, I postulate that even simply presenting as the *COVID-19 Chronicles* deterred users. My very first post on the *COVID-19 Chronicles* page, which introduced the project, reached nearly 900 people and yet, it received no likes or comments. In fact, the only real meaningful participation on the page originated from a miscommunication that angered a user so much that they felt compelled to comment in order to draw attention to the hypocrisy of the post (see Figure 4 in Section 4.1.1). When people are already so immersed in the culture of COVID-19, both in their own lives and through the news cycle, the existence of pandemic fatigue in social media communications is not surprising.

Although the presence of pandemic fatigue proved detrimental to the *COVID-19 Chronicles*, other cultural institutions also struggled with developing effective strategies for engagement amidst depressing news feeds and ever-increasing death count reports. All of my interviewees talked about trying to provide their users with distractions from the COVID-related news by "trying to not get caught up in the fact that everyone kept on tweeting the amount of deaths" and "making sure that [users] understand that we did care and we're just trying to provide them with a kin of an escape." Much like the scaffolded #MuseumSunshine campaign (Eves, 2020), one interviewee even organized a virtual bouquet campaign wherein they "tossed" floral-related media to users and other museums on Twitter as a way of saying "hey, we're thinking of you" amidst a "very bleak news cycle." While this "escape" approach to navigating pandemic fatigue proved effective, it likely would not have been useful for the *COVID-19 Chronicles*, which specifically sought to generate pandemic-related dialogues.

Undoubtedly, COVID-19 has impacted user behaviors on social platforms; however, it has also cast a spotlight on the role of the social media manager. The pandemic brought with it a global shift to online spaces—certain professionals learned to work remotely, older generations learned how to navigate video call software like Zoom or FaceTime, and museums turned to digital programming and social media platforms to stay relevant during the closure of their physical locations. With this global shift to online spaces, the importance (or rather, perceived importance) of institutional social media managers has come to light. One interviewee said: "internally, my job used to be considered more of a bonus job... now that the pandemic happened, social was the only way that we could connect with people... so it kind of became a free-for-all for the different departments as to who could get me to post about them." Another interviewee spoke to this newfound respect for their job as well: "I think people in different departments have realized how important digital marketing and social media is, and they're a lot more willing to contribute their time and effort to helping create content. There's more of an acceptance of devoting resources and money and time to digital outlets because that's all we have, and it's proven to be super effective during this time. I think that shift is going to continue into the future, even when it's safe to be back in person." The pandemic emphasized the importance of a robust social media presence, and I expect that cultural institutions will be more willing to invest in social media and a dedicated community manager going forward.

4.2 Limiting Barriers of Entry to Archive Submission Via Social Media

In order to increase contributions to the archive, I sought to use social media as a means of lowering barriers to entry to item submission; however, the ephemeral nature of social media platforms poses a difficult challenge. Ultimately, users did not respond to my social media posts with archival materials or stories, and, while this is likely in part because of the low level engagements on the page, I think it's also because social media is not an effective channel for communicating the privacy policies that must accompany archive submissions. I created a dedicated page for the *COVID-19 Chronicles* because I didn't want to bog down all of my posts with a disclaimer that I would submit users' comments to the archive, which I felt would discourage participation. Instead, I included all of the archive's terms and conditions of submission in the page's description. However, looking back, I realize that this "solution" created a dilemma. If potential participants read the page description, they would likely be discouraged from participating. If actual participants engaged with the page without reading the description, then I couldn't ethically submit their contributions to the archive without their knowing (even though they technically agreed to it by participating on the page). I propose that this dilemma is embedded within the spur-of-the-moment nature of social media itself. Social media is intended to be accessible and fast-paced, encouraging users to comment and like posts immediately after they see them with little consequence. However, submitting an item to the archive is a slow and methodical process because we want to protect the privacy and rights of our contributors. Ultimately, I don't think social media is conducive to the privacy considerations that must accompany archive submissions.

4.3 Constructing Exhibits and Integrating with Social Media

As part of my work, I wanted to transform a community archive into a *community-driven* archive through the integration of social media and digital exhibits; however, given the state of the *COVID-19 Chronicles* page, this objective proved beyond the scope of this project. Without an active and dedicated contributor base on social media, it was impossible to "co-create" a digital exhibit. Instead, I attempted to coordinate my social media posts with the launch of an ongoing exhibit so users would be inspired to contribute an item that corresponded to a given exhibit's topic. Ideally, I would then incorporate those new user submissions into the exhibit in order to champion those contributors and inspire further contributions. However, even this proved far too difficult to coordinate without regular contributors. My ambition ultimately got the better of me in this case, and I think this would be an interesting avenue to pursue for those institutions who already have established and devoted community contributors.

Based on all I have discussed in this chapter, I'd like to present a compiled list of what I would have done differently were I to redo this project. Although this social media campaign for the *COVID-19 Chronicles* occurred during unprecedented circumstances, which will likely never present in the exact same way again, my intent is that future students interested in utilizing social media for digital history processes will find these recommendations useful:

- *Prioritize visibility early on and adapt to algorithms.* The WHM Facebook page was the only real point-of-entry for the *COVID-19 Chronicles* page, which resulted in low initial engagement levels that the algorithm later used against me. Understand how the

algorithms of your chosen platforms operate so you know what dimensions of your social media presence to prioritize and when.

- *Construct a cross-platform campaign.* Being active on only one platform (Facebook) limited my potential audience and the kind of content I could create. By utilizing multiple social media platforms (and playing to their strengths), you have the potential to reach a wider audience and leave a broader impact.
- *Temper expectations for social media discussions.* As social media managers, we want our users to "dig deep" and engage with our content in important and meaningful ways, and so, we create content that reflects that desire. However, we must understand that people don't use social media to participate in deep reflective discussions all the time (especially during periods of trauma), and instead, we must put ourselves in the shoes of a user and think about the kind of content that they would most want to engage with.
- *Play to platform strengths.* The *COVID-19 Chronicles* item submission form is long and tedious for a reason (to protect users' privacy). While we should always strive to lower barriers to entry, we must do so in a way that plays to platforms strengths, not weaknesses. The spur-of-the-moment nature of social media is not necessarily conducive to protecting users' privacy rights and therefore not a good substitute for the item submission form.

5. Relaunching the *COVID-19 Chronicles* Conclusions

The COVID-19 pandemic has moved audiences to digital spaces, and, although physical locations will become more relevant during the reopening of a post-pandemic world, the shift to online platforms will still continue. The presence of this shift suggests that museums should not rely solely on in-person events and should consider dedicating more time and resources to building a social media presence—which can no longer simply be an afterthought—and organizing other channels for online engagement for their audiences, such as virtual programming, digital exhibits, and user-generated digital archives. That being said, eliciting participation and meaningful engagement online is no easy feat, even on social media platforms where participation (especially in the form of dialogues and discussions) seems like it should come naturally. Participatory experience design principles, including instructional scaffolding, can be a good starting point, but continuous evaluation and iteration on institutional methods for eliciting and measuring participation is necessary in order to learn what works and what doesn't when engagement strategies are put into action. Although shifting to these onlines spaces may seem daunting and difficult for cultural institutions that are stuck in their old ways, the rewards of building meaningful relationships with audiences are well worth it.

Based on all I have accomplished within this project and the themes that have emerged in the process, I'd like to present two interwoven avenues for future research opportunities: integrating social media and institutional practices, including archival content collection, and defining and engaging with institutional communities. The potential for integrating social media activities with other institutional practices, like item collection, is promising. Even if we cannot ethically collect archival submissions through these platforms, social media can still be an effective channel for generating interest in archival initiatives. Future research might explore how museums can utilize social media platforms in novel ways to build meaningful channels of engagement with their audiences. Social media can often feel trendy and ephemeral, and yet, the conversations had on these platforms offer a unique insight into the current state of the world.

Writers and historians alike should endeavor to support and document these short-lived dialogues, especially during historical events like the pandemic. More research might also consider how to support and document social media activities effectively and ethically. But at the core of these opportunities is community management—and at the core of community management is community.

Through quarantine restrictions and state lockdowns, the COVID-19 pandemic fragmented individuals and their stories—with the *COVID-19 Chronicles*, WHM and Digital Worcester sought to bring these stories back together and build a community around Worcester's collective experiences, but these efforts raise a number of questions. Individuals join communities based on their personal identities, which can include professional interests, hobbies, religious affiliations, race or ethnicity, sexual orientation, gender identity, and so many other identity-based factors. But what is a community for a historical museum? For WHM, we see a deceptively simple answer: people who care about Worcester's history. Now, what is a community for a digital pandemic archive centered around a city? The *COVID-19 Chronicles* sought to "build community in the present"—is this community the same as WHM's Worcester history buffs? I would argue that the *COVID-19 Chronicles*' target community is anyone who lives in Worcester. Yet even this distinction raises complex considerations. Is geographic location an effective determinant of community? What about those residents who don't consider their Worcester home to be a critical part of their identity? Future community managers for museums might think through such questions and consider what it takes to define, build, and design activities for institutional communities.

As a research project conducted virtually over a 7-month period during a global pandemic, I recognize that the conclusions I derived from this work are embedded in exceptional circumstances, which, while they provided a unique opportunity for this research project, ultimately felt limiting. For one, I felt limited by WHM's existing online practices, which included constraints related to post timing, post type (i.e., all WHM posts had to include a picture and only a picture, no links or videos), and platform (e.g., I didn't consider using Twitter because WHM didn't have an active presence on Twitter). I entered this project nearly five months after the onset of the pandemic—by then, WHM had already established its social media presence during the COVID-19 era. Additionally, the combination of the archive's status as the *COVID-19 Chronicles* and the presence of pandemic fatigue seemed to limit the levels of engagement that I was able to elicit with my posts. By recognizing these limitations, I endeavor to inform future research related to rapid response collection and fostering engagement during ongoing periods of trauma, like the COVID-19 pandemic.

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Appendix A: Social Media Visibility & Engagement Metrics

This appendix features the social media visibility and engagement metrics from my data set (October 26, 2020 to March 24, 2021) that I used to assess the effectiveness of the *COVID-19 Chronicles* social media presence. This subset includes the date of the post(s), the post type (picture, text, link, or video), how many people the post reached, and the number of likes/reactions, comments, shares, and clicks a post received.

Social Media Visibility & Engagement Metrics						
Date	Post Type	People Reached	Likes & Reactions	Comments	Shares	Clicks
10/26/2020	Picture	896	0	0	3	19
	Text	21	0	0	0	0
	Picture	23	0	0	0	0
10/27/2020	-	-	-	-	-	-
10/28/2020	-	-	-	-	-	-
10/29/2020	-	-	-	-	-	-
10/30/2020	Picture	24	0	0	0	3
10/31/2020	-	-	-	-	-	-
11/1/2020	-	-	-	-	-	-
11/2/2020	-	-	-	-	-	-
11/3/2020	-	-	-	-	-	-
11/4/2020	Picture	17	0	0	0	0
11/5/2020	-	-	-	-	-	-
11/6/2020	Picture	15	0	0	0	0
11/7/2020	-	-	-	-	-	-
11/8/2020	-	-	-	-	-	-
11/9/2020	Picture	15	0	0	0	0
11/10/2020	-	-	-	-	-	-
11/11/2020	Link	15	1 (Sad Emoji)	0	0	1
11/12/2020	-	-	-	-	-	-
11/13/2020	Picture	14	1	0	0	0
11/14/2020	-	-	-	-	-	-
11/15/2020	-	-	-	-	-	-
11/16/2020	Picture	13	1	0	0	1
11/17/2020	-	-	-	-	-	-
11/18/2020	Picture	14	0	0	0	0
11/19/2020	-	-	-	-	-	-
11/20/2020	Picture	16	1	0	0	0

11/21/2020	-	-	-	-	-	-
11/22/2020	-	-	-	-	-	-
11/23/2020	Link	17	0	0	0	1
11/24/2020	-	-	-	-	-	-
11/25/2020	Picture	19	1	6	0	6
11/26/2020	-	-	-	-	-	-
11/27/2020	Picture	21	0	0	0	0
11/28/2020	-	-	-	-	-	-
11/29/2020	-	-	-	-	-	-
11/30/2020	Picture	18	1	0	0	0
12/1/2020	-	-	-	-	-	-
12/2/2020	Video	25	0	0	0	1
12/3/2020	-	-	-	-	-	-
12/4/2020	Picture	21	1	0	0	0
12/5/2020	-	-	-	-	-	-
12/6/2020	-	-	-	-	-	-
12/7/2020	Link	21	1	0	0	1
12/8/2020	-	-	-	-	-	-
12/9/2020	Picture	24	1	0	0	0
12/10/2020	-	-	-	-	-	-
12/11/2020	Picture	27	1	0	0	1
12/12/2020	-	-	-	-	-	-
12/13/2020	-	-	-	-	-	-
12/14/2020	Link	35	1	0	1	0
12/15/2020	-	-	-	-	-	-
12/16/2020	Picture	21	2	0	0	0
12/17/2020	-	-	-	-	-	-
12/18/2020	Picture	21	1	0	0	0
12/19/2020	-	-	-	-	-	-
12/20/2020	-	-	-	-	-	-
12/21/2020	Picture	19	2	0	0	0
12/22/2020	-	-	-	-	-	-
12/23/2020	Picture	19	1	0	0	0
12/24/2020	-	-	-	-	-	-
12/25/2020	-	-	-	-	-	-
12/26/2020	-	-	-	-	-	-
12/27/2020	Picture	21	2	0	0	0
12/28/2020	Picture	23	3	0	0	0

12/29/2020	-	-	-	-	-	-
12/30/2020	Picture	28	2	0	0	0
12/31/2020	-	-	-	-	-	-
1/1/2021	Picture	24	2	0	0	0
1/2/2021	-	-	-	-	-	-
1/3/2021	-	-	-	-	-	-
1/4/2021	Picture	46	3	0	1	2
1/5/2021	-	-	-	-	-	-
1/6/2021	Picture	29	3	0	0	1
1/7/2021	-	-	-	-	-	-
1/8/2021	Link	27	4 (1 Love)	0	0	3
1/9/2021	-	-	-	-	-	-
1/10/2021	-	-	-	-	-	-
1/11/2021	Picture	44	4	9	0	9
1/12/2021	-	-	-	-	-	-
1/13/2021	Link	30	3	0	0	1
1/14/2021	-	-	-	-	-	-
1/15/2021	Picture	26	3 (1 Love)	0	0	1
1/16/2021	-	-	-	-	-	-
1/17/2021	-	-	-	-	-	-
1/18/2021	Picture	30	2	0	0	0
1/19/2021	-	-	-	-	-	-
1/20/2021	Picture	24	1	0	0	0
1/21/2021	-	-	-	-	-	-
1/22/2021	Picture	26	2	0	0	0
1/23/2021	-	-	-	-	-	-
1/24/2021	-	-	-	-	-	-
1/25/2021	Link	22	1	0	0	0
1/26/2021	-	-	-	-	-	-
1/27/2021	Link	23	1	0	0	1
1/28/2021	-	-	-	-	-	-
1/29/2021	Picture	23	2	0	0	0
1/30/2021	-	-	-	-	-	-
1/31/2021	-	-	-	-	-	-
2/1/2021	Picture	21	3	0	0	0
2/2/2021	-	-	-	-	-	-
2/3/2021	Picture	26	2	0	0	0
2/4/2021	-	-	-	-	-	-
2/5/2021	Text	19	2	0	0	0

2/6/2021	-	-	-	-	-	-
2/7/2021	-	-	-	-	-	-
2/8/2021	Link	18	1	0	0	0
2/9/2021	-	-	-	-	-	-
2/10/2021	Picture	17	2	0	0	0
2/11/2021	-	-	-	-	-	-
2/12/2021	Picture	17	2	0	0	0
2/13/2021	-	-	-	-	-	-
2/14/2021	-	-	-	-	-	-
2/15/2021	Picture	19	1	0	0	0
2/16/2021	-	-	-	-	-	-
2/17/2021	Picture	15	3	0	0	0
2/18/2021	-	-	-	-	-	-
2/19/2021	Picture	19	2	0	0	0
2/20/2021	-	-	-	-	-	-
2/21/2021	-	-	-	-	-	-
2/22/2021	Picture	17	3	0	0	0
2/23/2021	-	-	-	-	-	-
2/24/2021	Picture	17	2	0	0	1
2/25/2021	-	-	-	-	-	-
2/26/2021	Picture	22	2	0	0	0
2/27/2021	-	-	-	-	-	-
2/28/2021	-	-	-	-	-	-
3/1/2021	Picture	18	3	1	0	1
3/2/2021	-	-	-	-	-	-
3/3/2021	Link	16	2	0	0	0
3/4/2021	-	-	-	-	-	-
3/5/2021	Picture	18	3	0	0	0
3/6/2021	-	-	-	-	-	-
3/7/2021	-	-	-	-	-	-
3/8/2021	Link	15	2	0	0	0
3/9/2021	-	-	-	-	-	-
3/10/2021	Picture	16	2	0	0	0
3/11/2021	-	-	-	-	-	-
3/12/2021	Picture	14	1	0	0	0
3/13/2021	-	-	-	-	-	-
3/14/2021	-	-	-	-	-	-
3/15/2021	Picture	68	3	0	1	1
3/16/2021	-	-	-	-	-	-

3/17/2021	Picture	14	1	0	0	0
3/18/2021	-	-	-	-	-	-
3/19/2021	Link	16	2	0	0	0
3/20/2021	-	-	-	-	-	-
3/21/2021	-	-	-	-	-	-
3/22/2021	Picture	16	2	0	0	0
3/23/2021	-	-	-	-	-	-
3/24/2021	Picture	22	2	0	0	0

Appendix B: Post Topics & Archive Submissions

This appendix features the social media post topic and archive submission portions of my data set (October 26, 2020 to March 24, 2021) that I used to determine if what I posted on social media affected what users submitted to the archive. This subset includes date (for both social media posts and archive submissions), post topic, archive submission item name, and a "Contributor Me?" yes/no boolean for who contributed the archive item ("Y" meaning I contributed the item, "N" meaning someone else contributed the item).

Social Media Post Topic Impact on Archive Submissions			
Date	Post Topic	Item Name (Archive Submission)	Contributor Me?
10/26/2020	Welcome to the COVID-19 Chronicles	-	-
	Join the Conversation		
	Worcester Trick-Or-Treating Cancelled		
10/27/2020	-	-	-
10/28/2020	-	Creepy on Coolidge	Y
		Oread Street Haunted House	Y
		Socially Distanced Skeletons on Metcalf Street	Y
		Worcester Trick-or-Treating Cancelled	Y
10/29/2020	-	-	-
10/30/2020	Halloween Decorations in Worcester	-	-
10/31/2020	-	First Election	N
11/1/2020	-	Halloween smiles in the hospital	N
11/2/2020	-	COVID-19 Obituaries: Maria C. Martinez Cabrera	Y
		COVID-19 Obituaries: Joseph Vo Van Ngo, Bay Thi Huynh, and Kim Chi Nguyen-Ngo	Y
		COVID-19 Obituaries: Maria E. Monterrosa	Y
		Worcester COVID-19 Rose Memorial	Y
		WPI Cheese Club Costumes	Y
11/3/2020	-	Remote Teaching Setup	N
		Sept 9, Sept 16, & Oct 29 Risk Maps: Average Daily Incidence Rate for COVID-19 in MA	Y
11/4/2020	COVID-19 Costumes	-	-
11/5/2020	-	-	-
11/6/2020	City Hall Rose Memorial	-	-

11/7/2020	-	-	-
11/8/2020	-	-	-
11/9/2020	Worcester & the 1918 Flu Epidemic	-	-
11/10/2020	-	-	-
11/11/2020	COVID-19 Obituaries	-	-
11/12/2020	-	Socially Distant Grandson	N
11/13/2020	Nursing Homes During Easter	-	-
11/14/2020	-	-	-
11/15/2020	-	-	-
11/16/2020	Hosting Easter Dinner	MA Department of Public Health COVID-19 Thanksgiving Tips	Y
		City of Worcester: Tips for a Safe Thanksgiving	Y
		Worcester Magazine Article: Biden Election Announcement Caught Worcesterites Off-Guard	Y
		MassLive Article: Baker Preparing Field Hospitals for Winter	Y
		WPI COVID-19 Seminar Course	Y
		Governor's COVID-19 Order #54: Regulating Gatherings	Y
		Worcester Business Journal Article: Caution for Thanksgiving	Y
		Friendly House on Grafton Hill Thanksgiving Dinner Box Giveaway	Y
		A Friendly House Halloween	Y
		MassLive Article: MA Reaches 10,000 COVID-19 Deaths	Y
		Worcester Magazine Article: Worcester Green Plan	Y
11/17/2020	-	-	-
11/18/2020	Canceled Easter Services	Early Family Thanksgiving Social Distancing Outside on the Deck	N
11/19/2020	-	Navigating a New Mindset	N
11/20/2020	Tips for a Safe Thanksgiving	1918 Flu Pandemic Pictures & Headlines	Y
		COVID-19 Obituaries: Salvatore P. Panzera	Y
		COVID-19 Obituaries: Eva Zuspann	Y
11/21/2020	-	-	-

11/22/2020	-	YWCA Daybreak Breakfast Disrupting Racial Inequity	Y
		T&G Article: Mass Cultural Council details "staggering" losses in the arts due to pandemic	Y
		T&G Article: Clak University heightens campus alert	Y
		Worcester Virtual Festival of Lights Announcement	Y
		T&G Article: DCU to be a Field Hospital Again	Y
		T&G Article: Remote learning causing challenges for Worcester's nutrition programs	Y
		T&G Article: Socially Distanced Santa Visits	Y
		Next Steps Following a COVID-19 Test	Y
		MassLive Article: 2 Free COVID Testing Clinics During Thanksgiving	Y
		Worcester COVID Experience Survey	Y
11/23/2020	Thanksgiving Travel Caution	-	-
11/24/2020	-	-	-
11/25/2020	Friendly House Thanksgiving Giveaway	-	-
11/26/2020	-	-	-
11/27/2020	UMass Memorial Nurses	-	-
11/28/2020	-	-	-
11/29/2020	-	-	-
11/30/2020	Technocopia PPE Masks	Boston Globe Article: Worcester Schools See Rocky Rollout of Online Learning	Y
12/1/2020	-	-	-
12/2/2020	Face Shield Stability	-	-
12/3/2020	-	-	-
12/4/2020	Teacher Home Setups	-	-
12/5/2020	-	-	-
12/6/2020	-	-	-
12/7/2020	Rocky Rollout of Online Learning	T&G Article: In Santa's mailbag, a peek into children's pandemic worries	Y
		T&G Article: National Guard helping set up DCU field hospital	Y
		T&G Article: Cyber Monday morphs to Cyber Month	Y
		Mask Shaming Facebook Discussion	Y

		T&G Article: Worcester School Committee defends delay of return to physical classrooms	Y
		Worcester Art Museum Christmas Trees	Y
		T&G Article: 'The Nutcracker' at The Hanover will be different but won't disappoint the participants	Y
12/8/2020	-	-	-
12/9/2020	Parenting During Remote Learning	St. Vincent Hospital	Y
		Facemasks by Worcester Stitchers for Health	Y
12/10/2020	-	Worcester Virtual Festival of Lights	Y
12/11/2020	Virtual Festival of Lights in Worcester	-	-
12/12/2020	-	-	-
12/13/2020	-	-	-
12/14/2020	Pandemic Santa Letters	-	-
12/15/2020	-	-	-
12/16/2020	Pandemic Hero Christmas Tree	DPH Vaccine Distribtuion Timeline Graphic	Y
		I Am Worcester - "Mask Up" Gallery	Y
		Tower Hill Botanical Garedn's Rainbow Tunnel	Y
12/17/2020	-	-	-
12/18/2020	Driveway Birthday Message	-	-
12/19/2020	-	-	-
12/20/2020	-	-	-
12/21/2020	21st Birthday in Quarantine	-	-
12/22/2020	-	-	-
12/23/2020	7th Birthday FaceTime	-	-
12/24/2020	-	-	-
12/25/2020	-	-	-
12/26/2020	-	-	-
12/27/2020	Vaccination Distribution Timeline	-	-
12/28/2020	I Am Worcester Project	-	-
12/29/2020	-	-	-
12/30/2020	Worcester Common Oval Lights	-	-
12/31/2020	-	-	-
1/1/2021	Stay Wicked Fah Apart	-	-
1/2/2021	-	Article: "Worcester will serve as 'super site' to	Y

		vaccinate first responders from area communities"	
		Dr. Matilde Castiel Receives Vaccine	Y
		Dr. Michael Hirsh Receives Vaccine	Y
		Coronavirus vaccine arrives at UMass Memorial Health Care in Worcester	Y
		Mass Audubon Broad Meadow Brook Adapts to Covid Regulations	N
		Broad Meadow Brook Summer Camp 2020	N
1/3/2021	-	-	-
1/4/2021	Hopeful Chalk Messages	Honee Hess & Phil Magnusson	N
1/5/2021	-	-	-
1/6/2021	We Can Do Hard Things	-	-
1/7/2021	-	-	-
1/8/2021	Worcester as Vaccine Super Site	-	-
1/9/2021	-	-	-
1/10/2021	-	Books I read in 2020	N
1/11/2021	Vaccinations in Worcester	-	-
1/12/2021	-	-	-
1/13/2021	Pfizer Arrives at UMass Memorial	T&G Article: Long Lines for COVID-19 Testing	Y
		T&G: School Nurses Volunteer for COVID Testing	Y
1/14/2021	-	-	-
1/15/2021	The Surge Watercolor Painting	-	-
1/16/2021	-	-	-
1/17/2021	-	-	-
1/18/2021	Queen of Corona Drawing	-	-
1/19/2021	-	-	-
1/20/2021	Caregiver Pastel Painting	-	-
1/21/2021	-	#HeartWorcester Graphic	Y
		Hello Teacher! An almost daily journal of teaching during COVID (Day 1–92) [25 items]	N
		Telegram & Gazette Article: Worcester schools distributing science kits to homebound students	Y
1/22/2021	COVID-19 Testing at UMass Memorial	-	-
1/23/2021	-	-	-

1/24/2021	-	-	-
1/25/2021	Long Lines for COVID-19 Testing	Holmes Field Playground	Y
1/26/2021	-	Paper Product Shortage	N
		Hello Teacher! An almost daily journal of teaching during COVID (Day 95)	N
1/27/2021	Volunteer Swabbers	MassLive Article: Racism-free WPS Instagram Account	Y
1/28/2021	-	-	-
1/29/2021	Library Heart Campaign	-	-
1/30/2021	-	Hello Teacher! An almost daily journal of teaching during COVID (Day 98)	N
1/31/2021	-	-	-
2/1/2021	Support for First Responders	-	-
2/2/2021	-	Hello Teacher! An almost daily journal of teaching during COVID (Day 100)	N
2/3/2021	Hearts on Friedel Street	Main South Worcester #1–3 [3 items]	N
2/4/2021	-	-	-
2/5/2021	Teaching During Pandemic Journal	-	-
2/6/2021	-	Pandemic Diary #1–6 [6 items]	N
		Hello Teacher! An almost daily journal of teaching during COVID (Day 103)	N
2/7/2021	-	-	-
2/8/2021	Science Kits for Remote Students	-	-
2/9/2021	-	-	-
2/10/2021	Hearts for Students	-	-
2/11/2021	-	-	-
2/12/2021	Cooking During Quarantine	-	-
2/13/2021	-	-	-
2/14/2021	-	-	-
2/15/2021	No Shucking at Shaw's	Hello Teacher! An almost daily journal of teaching during COVID (Day 108)	N
2/16/2021	-	-	-
2/17/2021	Pandemic Food Programs	-	-
2/18/2021	-	-	-
2/19/2021	Newton Square LED Signs	-	-
2/20/2021	-	-	-

2/21/2021	-	-	-
2/22/2021	Pop-Up Signs in Lincoln Square	-	-
2/23/2021	-	-	-
2/24/2021	Worcester Artist Signs	Biggest signs in Worcester	N
		Armenian Church of Our Savior Fundraiser	N
		Bagel Time Social Distancing Reminders	N
		WPI's online questionnaire	N
2/25/2021	-	-	-
2/26/2021	Protecting Pets from COVID	-	-
2/27/2021	-	-	-
2/28/2021	-	-	-
3/1/2021	Virtual Learning with Pets	-	-
3/2/2021	-	-	-
3/3/2021	Pet Life During the Pandemic	-	-
3/4/2021	-	-	-
3/5/2021	Child Wearing Adult Mask	-	-
3/6/2021	-	-	-
3/7/2021	-	-	-
3/8/2021	Racism-Free WPS	-	-
3/9/2021	-	-	-
3/10/2021	Supporting Kids Through COVID	-	-
3/11/2021	-	-	-
3/12/2021	Quaran-TRex	Hello Teacher! An almost daily journal of teaching during COVID (Day 118 & 123) [2 items]	N
3/13/2021	-	-	-
3/14/2021	-	-	-
3/15/2021	Breathe No Evil	-	-
3/16/2021	-	-	-
3/17/2021	Turtle Boy Wearing Mask	WooSox Smiley Ball Wears a Mask	Y
3/18/2021	-	Vaccinated Smiley WHM Phone Holder	Y
3/19/2021	We Want Our Summer Back	-	-
3/20/2021	-	-	-
3/21/2021	-	-	-
3/22/2021	Pandemic Summer Camp	-	-
3/23/2021	-	Worcester Stitchers Materials [8 items]	Y
3/24/2021	Empty Playground	-	-

Appendix C: Interview Transcripts

Included in this appendix are the transcripts of the three interviews I conducted with the social media managers of various cultural institutions. I have omitted all identifying information from these interviews and edited the transcripts for simplicity and clarity.

Transcript 1

Allison: So social media is one of the most fundamental ways in which museums can stay connected with their audiences remotely. Specifically, what platforms does your institution use, and why do you use those specific platforms?

Interviewee: So currently we are on Instagram, Twitter, Facebook. We are also on LinkedIn and TikTok. My institution, when I first started with them which was December 2018, had what they call the main three, which was Instagram, Twitter, and Facebook. I started going into LinkedIn because I noticed that depending on the program that we're offering or the content that we had, it also really fit into that LinkedIn community and that kind of audience of people wanting to learn, or if we had seminars or classes, that was a great way. I noticed a lot of conversions coming in from LinkedIn. So I use it sporadically, not in the same way that I use the other platforms, but it does help us in terms of our goals. And TikTok is something that we're still experimenting with and we're not fully there yet. We're still all working from home, so it's a little difficult to create video content that would be good for TikTok. But we're kind of playing around with it, seeing what works, what doesn't, and if it fits with our overall goal.

Allison: I wouldn't have thought of doing the LinkedIn thing, but that makes sense of why it would be important for connecting with people in that audience. So obviously social media offers users and institutions lots of different ways to engage with one another, and so you've told me which platforms you use, but how does your institution specifically use social media to engage with their audiences? Like what sort of actions?

Interviewee: So, we have multiple institutional goals at any one time, and it gets a little complicated just depending on the department and a lot of internal politics I guess I would call it. Our main goal is always awareness. We want to start that conversation, we want people to know who we are, what we do, and where we are because at least one of the main issues that we started with, and that we still currently have as an institution, is people don't know where we are or that we exist. And a lot of people actually come up to us and say "oh I thought you were closed." So our main goal is always awareness, making people aware of the fact that the museum still exists, we're still serving the community. After that, our other main goal is just sharing [City] stories. [City], being such a diverse place, a

lot of people don't think that their particular history can be found in our museum, and we try super hard to share different aspects of everybody that's come in, that's left, and we're trying to show the community that we are of old [City] and new [City].

Allison: So basically visibility for the museum, as well as kind of championing the people that the museum represents. So a lot of institutions have been turning to dedicated community managers, like you I think, to run multiple social media platforms that sort of cross-promote one another. So I would assume that you would coordinate all of these different social media activities, and so a lot of my work is sort of concerned with managing and driving user engagement between the Worcester Historical Museum's website and their Facebook page, so how do all these different channels reference or cross-promote each other, if that makes sense. Is that something that you think about?

Interviewee: You mean like how do I promote the channels on individual channels?

Allison: Yeah, do you reference them? Are the audiences discrete, like the Facebook audience and the LinkedIn audience, or do they kind of overlap?

Interviewee: So I used to think they overlap. However, there's certain times where I'll do the same post on all platforms, and I notice because of the comments just how vastly different our audiences are. So a big deal here in [City] was that at some point in the seventies, it snowed for the first and last time ever. So we always post a different image from that day and make it like an "On this day, it snowed in [City]. Where were you when it happened?" and that was actually a post we did this year in January. On Instagram a lot of the comments were "I wasn't even a thought," "I was still in my mom's womb," "people weren't even thinking of me yet," "I wasn't born." And when you go into our Facebook, the comments were vastly different, people were saying that they were a professor at [University], shopping with their mothers for their sweet 16 dress—like you could really tell the age difference between the audiences just by that same post. So I used to think our audiences were the same, but I'm slowly realizing that that's not the case. I was thinking perhaps our Twitter and Instagram audiences are more similar to each other, but our Facebook audience is definitely made up of older people.

Allison: I think that's interesting, and I guess a follow-up question to that is you're doing the same post on these different platforms, right, do you think that there's a way to sort of use the same content or the same theme or central idea of a post and kind of twist it in a way that is either more accessible or better understood by those specific audiences on each platform?

Interviewee: Yeah, so I try every now and then to switch up the captions a little bit, and honestly, it depends on how much time I have. It sounds terrible, but my job isn't just social media, and I'm starting to take on different things because we're still in that day and age where people think social media isn't a complete job. So, there are times where I have my extra moment where I can sit and think about it and say, "okay how would it fit best here, how would it fit best there," but normally the only platform that I give that specialized attention to I would say is Twitter because of the character limitation. But Facebook and Instagram more or less always get the same content, unfortunately, and then we'll just notice the differences in responses when we get to the comments or whatever engagement we get.

Allison: Yeah, so that leads me to my next question. These social media platforms make it very easy for institutions or social media managers to track all of the different activities on their page or their account or whatever, and so, how do you measure the impact of your social media activities? Like what quantitative or qualitative metrics on social media do you look at? Is it comments, number of comments, the specific content in comments? There's a lot of different statistics floating around, so I'm curious which ones you really pay attention to, and the ones that matter the most to you.

Interviewee: Shares and comments. Shares come in first. The way I usually see it is for you to have shared a post on Instagram or on Facebook that we made means that you thought that the post was so amazing or so cool or so funny or so whatever, that you just needed people to see it. So that is a level of connection that I really value. Comments is where the conversation happens. So if I posted something, and you felt the need to stop scrolling and write a comment of some sort, be it sharing your own personal story or just telling me you hated the image, it's fine. I made you stop, so both of those to me or the most important just because one of them engages the community—it expands it because by sharing your increasing my impressions, my engagement, and you're possibly bringing me more people that might like whatever you just shared—and the other one retains community because we're having that conversation with people. So those are the two I look for the most. Unfortunately, a lot of people in my position do not look for that because they can't see that on the back-end. I see shares on back-end, but they can't, so they just look for likes. Suppose we get 50 likes, but it could be shared 200 times, but they don't notice that. It's a little complicated to explain that to people sometimes.

Allison: I understand, and I want to focus a little more on the quality of comments, of you getting both sort of positive and negative comments, right, and what's your approach for engaging with those comments, and how is it different based on, say,

if someone says “I hate this picture” or whatever, kind of negative thing, how do you then try to engage with that and make sort of a meaningful conversation? Or do you just sort of let it sit there?

Interviewee: So, no, I try not to, just because it almost, at least to me, and I don't know how other museums would do this, it almost looks hypocritical in my opinion to only respond to positive comments and not to do anything with the negative ones. And this happens a lot because [City] is a kind of a transforming city, so a lot of buildings that used to be here in the 40s, 50s, 60s are no longer here, and it just so happens that those are the buildings that I sometimes feature on social media. So it actually happened that one time we posted, and a community theater that is still standing, but it's technically closed to the public and the city is just waiting for the preservation board to let them demolish it and make it into a condo or something. And we did have a lot of comments of people talking negatively about the city. We are not going to do that because that would be terrible, but I do try to say like “I understand how you feel,” “you know history will always have a place in our hearts,”—I try to sympathize with them because the people do care as much as we do about the history. I just try to not engage in the negative feedback and kind of just stay like “we get it.”

Allison: Okay, yeah, so like validation but then sort of not pushing it further in and prolonging that negativity.

Interviewee: We are sort of a government-funded building so we do have to be careful about it, but I don’t want to leave them just hanging there because that’s not fair either.

Allison: That makes a lot of sense. So moving on to the next question, one of the challenges that I really encountered in starting from scratch for the social media page is actually building up an audience. So I've been facing a real lack of audience engagement, like we get very few comments, very few likes. How have you kind of overcome that challenge of connecting with users, attracting audiences? Maybe it's hard for you to speak to that if you came in, and there was already a big following, but I don't know if you have any ideas there.

Interviewee: Well, when I started I noticed a couple of things that they weren’t doing and things that I thought we could try that would help, one of them being the being the geotags. Like I said, a lot of people think we're closed or we're dead or we're not on social, so they'll come visit the museum, use the geotag so you see that they were in [Institution], but they don't tag us, so I do take about one to two days a week to go through that geotag and see if I find any photos, and then I'll, by hand, DM people and be like, “can we use this image? We’ll tag you, we’ll feature you,” and that alone actually brings in people because they didn't know that we

were on social. Showing other people that you get visitors will also help just because a lot of the time it's different for you to say “we're great, come see us” and it's another thing to say “hey, they came and saw us and look at this photo they took—you can pick the same picture, come and see us.” So that was something that I also implemented with them. And then I tried to test out the different features that are coming out on on these channels, even if I'm not super successful at it just because, for example Instagram reels in the beginning of that launch, Instagram was really pushing reels and really getting those creators out there, so even if we made a terrible video, which our beginning videos are not the best, I noticed that whenever we did post reels, we did get a small burst of followers coming in because reels does have almost its own audience of people just going straight to the reels tab and treating it like a TikTok.

Allison: Right, yeah. So I think that speaks to this idea that you want to look at content separately for each platform and cater to the strengths and weaknesses there, but then also within platforms, there are different features that kind of have their own strengths and weaknesses that you have to consider when you create content. That’s awesome. So you’ve spoken to this already a little bit, but I want to see if I can get any more out of you with the kind verbiage I'm using. I feel like I struggle a lot with building meaningful human connections with social media users, and so how do you approach that problem of building human connections, and what does that mean to you? Are human connections something that you're looking for, and again, do you measure that differently than you would just by social media metrics?

Interviewee: So, I measure human connections by the quality of the comments that we get to the images that we post. So if we’re starting that conversation, and we’re having people ask for further clarification on an image, and we have that opportunity to engage with them. So if we post “our Macy’s here was called Burdines back in the day” (and everyone here is obsessed with Burdines—the icon that it used to be), and we post an artifact of it, and I pose a question like “what do you remember most about this chain?” and then you just see the stories come pouring in, and I take the time to go in and be like if people say “oh I used to work there from 87 to 89,” I take the time to be “okay, what was your favorite memory working there?” and I have individual conversations with every single comment, which is a little time-consuming depending on how many comments this has, but it gives them a sense of like “oh you're listening to me.” And being a history museum in [City], people really enjoy our archived images, so just by posting one you’re already starting that conversation and you’re already getting people a little intrigued: “you know, I didn't know this,” “I didn't know that she was this,” “I didn't know that

this was here." So I try, it's complicated because not every post does that, and sometimes our posts get a little sales-y, but that's more not my decision.

Allison: Right, that makes sense. And do you see with engaging with all these people and their stories, do you have kind of, like, loyalists or people that you recognize that you have kind of long-term conversations with? How well do you know the community?

Interviewee: Maybe you'll notice this as well when running your own social media pages if you're the only social media manager. Since I'm the only one looking at these pages, there's a bunch of handles that I recognize of people that you can tell we're at the top of their feed and whenever we pull something, twenty minutes doesn't even go by, and I'll get a like or a comment or a DM saying "this is great" or "this one sucks" or whatever. I have a handful of handles that I recognize when I post, but I don't know who they are in real life.

Allison: And I think it's interesting too because I feel like I've been struggling a lot with kind of the branding voice that I use. From the beginning, I always used like "we as an institution do this, this, and this." I wasn't revealing myself as a person, even though people know that there is a person who's making these posts and there's a person behind this. I think it can get kind of confusing when there's multiple people managing social media. It's like you don't know who's posting a certain thing. So what kind of approach to the social media voice do you use? Do you use "we," "I," or does that not really come up in your posts? Do you think that the users know that you're a person behind this and that you're the same person or do you think they just see it as just like the institution?

Interviewee: I've never thought about how they see it. As a rule of thumb, and how I managed socials in my previous jobs (and I used to work in local government so that was even more strict), I do an institutional "we" when I post. I also do small things, and again, I'm not sure if over museums do it this way too, but I'll use the skin-neutral yellow emojis. Apple has gender-neutral emojis, and if I'm using any sort of person emoji, I'll use people. So if you're just looking at our Instagram, you wouldn't really notice who's running the page. Sometimes if I'm DMing somebody and I'm helping them with an image or I'm helping them with a question about the museum, sometimes it does slip, and I'll put "oh, let me email somebody and I'll get back to you." And I think in DMs it can be a little more personal because you're talking to them directly, and it's a little more private. If it slips, I think it's fine. But in posts and in comments and anything public facing, I use an institutional "we."

Allison: I think it makes sense why. Okay, so now to shift gears a little bit and talk about these kinds of things within the context of the pandemic, I think another struggle that I've seen a lot, especially as the *COVID-19 Chronicles* that is so centered around pandemic-related things, is that people are starting to get sick of talking about the pandemic. I guess I'm just wondering how has the pandemic as a whole and this shift to digital online spaces affected your institutional goals or your strategies for reaching audiences. Have you seen kind of a shift since the pandemic started and as the pandemic continued to go on for as long as it has?

Interviewee: The beginning of the pandemic was really hard for us because we closed from literally one minute to the next, and they gave me I want to say, four or five days to shift to a fully online museum. We closed the building, I had to go back in at one point and then socially distant shoot video. It was a mess, and I know that neighboring museums also felt the same way. It was a very quick pivot because you didn't know what to post, you didn't know when to post it, you didn't know if you could or how. Our goal kind of became how do we digitize our museum, and that was the only goal up until, I want to say, September when our director decided that we were going to open again and because of the hardships that people are facing, we're going to be free—our admission prior to was ten dollars. So then our new goal became getting people back in the building but having them feel safe, so we cut the admission capacity that we were allowing. We're only allowing 25 people into the building now. But ever since we opened, I would say our institutional goal has kind of shifted back and forth a lot. It's become from getting people back in the building to getting them back in the building while also selling our now virtual paid online programs because that is what we're using as revenue. And then now it's not really putting them back in the building, but sort of yes because we have a third floor, which is where our main exhibition usually goes and it's empty. We're still adjusting to all of this. Thankfully, our director was able to keep us on the boards so nobody was furloughed, and that was a huge relief for all of us. But in terms of the actual museum and the way that it's running, we're still adjusting to that.

Allison: Of course. So I think one of the few sort of silver linings of this pandemic too is that a lot of people are becoming kind of more adept at using technology and stuff to stay connected, like the social media platforms. I'm wondering how has the pandemic and this shift in goals that you guys have seen with your institution affected your perception of social media or other digital technologies. Have you had to use them differently now? Have you seen users using them differently?

Interviewee: Internally, my job used to be considered more of a bonus job. Like, "oh we're on social" and "yes, we're this huge museum in [City], and we're also on social." Now that the pandemic happened, social was the only way that we could connect

with people. So it kind of became a free-for-all for the different departments as to who could get me to post about them. It became very like “oh we need to put this on social,” “let's make sure that we have this,” and everyone kind of started thinking more about what my role is as a social media manager so they were expecting me to edit videos, they wanted me to design graphics, they wanted me to create this, they wanted me to create that, they wanted me to create a website, and I’m like “woah, no no no.” I did end up having to dabble a bit in video editing and graphic design, and it kind of brought a new spotlight to our roles in social media, to everyone's roles because I have talked to different people about this, and it was the same thing across different institutions, where it kind of brought a new spotlight into what we do and this is the best way to connect with people. In terms of how people connect with us, it kind of changed from month to month. So in the beginning of the pandemic, we were trying to not get caught up in the fact that everyone kept on tweeting the amount of deaths that were happening at that time. And how do you post this happy-go-lucky content when two minutes later your local news station is tweeting how many people got sick? And there was the fatigue of people wanting to know the news, and then there was the group of people that did not want to know the news, and then there were the people that were completely cutting off the internet because of everything that was being poured into it because everything was closed. So there’s that changing audience where now we're kind of getting more online friendly. People were kind of doing the half and half of half going out, half staying in. I don't know if you're aware, [City]'s basically completely open (nobody here cares). But now we're kind of in that weird half and half, but in the beginning, we weren't sure how to connect with people without seeming like we didn't care but making sure that they understand that we did care and we're just trying to provide them with a kind of an escape in any case. So we did some programming, we did some history talks with our historian who has a really creepy cult following, and that did help some people so we were proud of those programs that we put through.

Allison: So you mentioned how the pandemic kind of put a spotlight on your role as a social media manager, and you had mentioned before that you feel like you don't have time to do all the things you want to do there because of your other kind of responsibilities. Can you see in the future that sort of thing changing or like a shift in that sort of role of having you completely dedicated to those spaces? Like thinking about a post-COVID world, what would you want to change based on what you've learned from the pandemic and what you've seen?

Interviewee: I speak just for my museum, there's no huge love for the marketing department, except obviously when there is an emergency, i.e. the pandemic. I would love a little bit more respect when it comes to what creators do, and in specific to what I

and my director do. So my director handles PR mostly and I do digital—everything digital, so newsletters, video, now I do graphics, website partnerships—anything that has to do with our digital face is basically what I do. When I did ask for help, they offered me an intern because that is usually who handles social in institutions, so that tells you that we're still in that phase where people think an intern can handle a social media page for an institution as important as a museum. So I'm not sure where we will go from here, but I hope, if anything, this entire experience has bought maybe a little bit more respect for marketing departments in different organizations.

Allison: I hope so too. I think one thing that it's been really really hard for me in running this project, which it's basically just a Facebook page because the institution is so stuck in their ways of they don't want to change how they're doing things, even though their audience is changing and the needs are changing, like they're not so much adapting to those new technologies. My kind of only option was a Facebook page because that's the only thing that would be long-term sustainable for them just because that institutional culture is so rigid and not flexible. Do you see that in your institutional at all? It seems like there's a lot more willingness to try out new platforms, new features, and there's kind of that space for experimentation. I'm wondering how from the inside can we promote that institutional culture change and how can we convince people that we need to stay up-to-date with this stuff? You seem like you had some success with that, so I'm curious how much work you had to do to get it to happen.

Interviewee: Thankfully, we have a really great director. So my executive director would be the one that we would say is stuck in his old ways, but my marketing director very much lets me do whatever I please. Her kind of philosophy when it comes to these things has always been it's best to say sorry than to ask for permission. On TikTok, you know there was that huge controversy about it being a Chinese app that is tracking you and watching you sleep and a bunch of craziness, and my entire institution went crazy because they thought that somehow our collections we're going to be hacked, and I'm like "we don't even have a link on our TikTok page, I don't see how that's going to happen, but okay." They've kind of warmed up to it. It is a little hilarious honestly, working with people who are not... I guess I'll say modern. Just today if at some point after this you want to look at our newest post, we have a local holiday because it's March 5th and 305 is our area code in [City]. So every year we make a post about it, and I used Will Smith's [City] song, and it sparked a conversation, I guess we'll call it, because like "is that who we are?" and this song mentions women in bikinis, and, you know, "this is unacceptable to think that women wear bikinis and this, that. and the other" and I'm like, "it's just a song though, and everyone loves this song, and it's okay to use

it.” But we use it without permission, and then it’s like “well, it’s up, so I don’t know what to tell you.” I handle things a little savagely. More so than most people.

Allison: That's awesome, and it seems like that kind of aggressive approach is what has to happen, so they can see how this works instead of it just all being theoretical, like “well I don't know if that's such a good idea” but just do it and see what happens and then look back on it.

Interviewee: A lot of times they want to meet about it and have a conversation about it and send us the copy and approve, but by the time you do all this, the time or the fad or the theme or whatever you want to do is gone, and there's no point in me posting it. So sometimes you just jump, and if it sucks then I'm like, “okay I'm sorry, I didn't mean to,” but if it works out well, and they still try to kill you then it’s like “oh but it did well so there you go.” Honestly, that’s the approach I’ve had since I started, and thankfully it hasn’t done me wrong yet, but we’ll see. I also am careful with what I post, I don’t just post anything, but there's things that I think are fine, but I know they wouldn't agree with at the time without a very heavy conversation. And I just don't have the time for that conversation.

Transcript 2

Allison: To get started here, social media is one of the fundamental ways in which museums can stay connected with their audiences remotely, so my first question is which platforms does your institution use and why did you pick those specific platforms?

Interviewee: I'm sure if you talk to other social media managers you'll learn that some platforms predate them. So I've been at the museum for about two years now and the platforms we have preexist me, but I will say our main platforms are Twitter, Facebook, and Instagram—in terms of our largest followings and the ones that I manage the most. We also have accounts on YouTube, Tumblr, LinkedIn, and Pinterest that are also used pretty frequently. I would say that Twitter, Instagram, and Facebook are the big three, so if you're going to have a presence, those are the ones to be on. Obviously, new platforms come up, they die, they shift, they morph, so a lot of people are also looking towards things like TikTok or Snapchat, which we've never had a Snapchat account, and I probably wouldn't start one. But if I was going to have more resources allocated to short-form video, TikTok would be something under review. Does that help?

Allison: Yeah, that makes a lot of sense and that is the trend I've been seeing with those main three. So all these different social media platforms offer lots of different ways to engage with users (institutions engaging with users), so what sort of social media actions—like posting, commenting, whatever else that might be specific to a certain platform—does your institution use to engage with audiences?

Interviewee: Do you mean like how we use the platforms?

Allison: Yeah, basically.

Interviewee: I'll say that social media is the most powerful communications tool at businesses' disposals. And there sometimes is a gulf of understanding that internally. Not everybody recognizes or understands social media. In terms of museums, especially history museums, we're used to dealing with stuff that has a much longer history than social media, so I think sometimes it takes a little bit more institutional capacity building and knowledge building for people to get it—of how useful a tool it is. And I will say that also with social media and museums in particular, we operate this way, as do other museums, which is that social media is also there to help humanize your institution. So the more that you can act like a person on social media, the better. That also comes with having an institutional voice. That also comes from posting. Part of your social media strategy does involve posting and content creation, and it also involves responding in a visitor

services kind of way to messages we receive, whether it's DMs or comments or mentions. But we also do interact with other accounts. One example, during the pandemic in particular, is on Twitter I posted a few kind of collaborative social media campaigns where a lot of museums participate, so back in March there was one where we wanted to lighten everyone's mood and Twitter as a feed because it was a very bleak news cycle at the beginning of pandemic. So we asked social media managers around the world to throw virtual bouquets at other museums just to be like "hey, we're thinking of you," and it's one of those things where most museums, historic houses, cultural organizations participated because there's a very low barrier to participate. Everybody's got something in their collection that is floral or related to nature or whether it's a botanical illustration or Andy Warhol painting, everybody's got something that they can use. So that kind of conversational campaign is great—it leads to increased engagement for the museums that participate and also audiences love it. Or online communities, "audiences" isn't always the right word because that makes it seem like we're talking to them and it's not a conversation, but it's an online community. So I would say that that was something that was really beneficial during the pandemic. That's one of the ways we use social, in these larger collaborative campaigns where we talk with other museums as well as our followers or even audiences that may not have found us yet.

Allison: Yeah, that's really cool. Did you guys see not just other institutions but users engaging in that bouquet throwing type of thing?

Interviewee: Yeah, of course. That's the best part of the call to action. Some museums were even saying like "share with us," but we had a lot of people who were like "I took a picture outside my window today," "here are the flowers I saw on my walk yesterday" because a lot of people were escaping to nature as their way of dealing with the pandemic. It was just such a surprise, I think, for a lot of people who are expecting to see the worst possible news circulating on Twitter, so then to see bright florals and nice notes, so we had a lot of people saying "oh my gosh, this is so sweet" or "it's getting me in the emotions" or "it's warming my cold Finnish heart" was one of them I remember. So that's when I think it's really a success—when it's very obvious how much it mattered to your audience, not just your fellow museums.

Allison: That's really cool. I feel like a lot of what I've been trying to do, specifically as the *COVID-19 Chronicle*s, is talk about specific COVID-19 content, and I'm really seeing this pandemic fatigue of people not wanting to talk about the pandemic because they've been dealing with it for a year now, and they really do need those escapes, right. And I also like how you speak to using social media as a way to humanize the institution. I know that's something that I've struggled with a lot,

and I'll look at it from the institutional voice. I kind of go back and forth. In a post maybe I'll say like “okay, we as the *COVID-19 Chronicles* are thinking this, this, and this,” but maybe in a comment I might say “okay, well this is what I think of this issue, what do you think about that?” like trying to show that there's a person behind the social media and that I'm an individual too who's running this thing. And I want to build that human connection with you not just as an institution, but from an individual perspective too. Are there any other specific examples like that or techniques that you use to try to humanize the museum on social media?

Interviewee: I think history museums in particular are maximalists, using big words and things like that, and part of it is knowing the audience that you’re talking to. So you’re speaking to an intelligent, non-expert audience is how I approach it. So if you’re a contemporary art museum and you’re going to use an art historical term that's not something that everybody knows, you would define it in the same breath, in the same line in terms of social media. So at the [Institution], it's just me and I do love a level of anonymity, but there are situations where if you are DMing a museum, and they're pointing you towards other resources, they might sign off with their first name. I do think that there is a level of misunderstanding among the public sometimes. It's not just a bot dealing with social media, there’s a person behind the screen. I would say a lot of it is the kinds of stories we choose to tell and how we tell them is part of that humanizing element so that people know that the museum is a living breathing thing and not just a repository.

Allison: That makes a lot of sense. What I've been seeing is that you don’t just want to test institutional knowledge of your users because that's not bringing their personal stories in. You want to engage with them in ways that makes them think about their experiences so they feel like they can relate to the content. I'm going to assume that you’re a dedicated social media manager. Do you have other responsibilities that you feel may take you away from social media at times? I know a lot of institutions don't have a dedicated person like that, and so you'll have one person who's wearing all these hats. Maybe they're making exhibits but then they're also running social media. So social media is not always getting the attention that we're starting to see that it deserves.

Interviewee: Right, that's a really good point, and you’re right. Especially for those museums that are smaller and have more limited budgets with more limited staff, social media is very often a percentage of a person's job. I think where you see the biggest payoff is when you actually do get the resources to make it its own role. I do get the question a lot, like “so do you just do social media?” And it’s always the “just” that throws me because even within “just” doing social media, there are ways that things aren’t prioritized institutionally. Content creation is really important, finding the right images, telling the right stories, dotting your i's and

crossing your t's, and making sure you have all the correct vetted information, and then telling the story in an interesting way and then finding a way to balance that on your feeds through varying departmental objectives is a struggle in and of itself. But sometimes that becomes the "well can you just put this on social?" It's like, okay well, if you're trying to drive program attendance, the best way to do that is really going to be through paid advertising. So if you don't have a budget for it, there's really only so much that you can expect organic social to do for you. It's one of those things where people online don't like being sold to in a very obvious way, so you have to couch it between the content and the story that you're actually telling. But also with the way social media algorithms work, if we have a bunch of low-performing Facebook posts in a row, we're likely to stay in that tier of low-performing Facebook posts, and it's hard to climb out of that hole. So everytime someone is like "what's the worst that can happen," it's we won't get a lot of likes AND we're shooting ourselves in the foot a little bit in terms of churning out content that we know isn't going to reach the goals of a particular department or have the desired effects on our channels for our communities and how that actually will impact the rest of our content going forward. So I am primarily social media, but I'm also part of the communications team, collaborating with other departments pretty frequently on things that aren't always strictly social. It might be tangentially related to social, if that makes sense.

Allison: Yeah. I can speak to that issue of algorithms too because I feel like I'm in that hole. A lot of my work is kind of concerned with managing and driving user engagement between the *COVID-19 Chronicles* Facebook page, as well as the museum-specific Facebook page, and then also the *COVID-19 Chronicles* website. So thinking about this idea of cross-promotion, do all the different channels, like your Facebook or Twitter or Instagram or the website, reference each other? Do the audiences overlap that you've seen? Or are the audiences more discrete? What have you seen there?

Interviewee: I think that's changed a lot in the last few years. When Instagram was new, there was a lot of posting on one channel saying "hey, follow us on this other channel," and I think that's kind of gone by the wayside a bit. In terms of actually cross-posting, for us even if the content seems similar, it's all different across three platforms because of things like character limits and audience. We do have a fair amount of overlap. Obviously, our Instagram following skews a bit younger but overlaps with our Facebook following which skews older. Sometimes I don't post memes on Facebook the way that I do on Instagram because I've found our audience reacts more favorably to it on Instagram. So there's sometimes a decision in terms of different content being sold, and honestly, I would love to do a better job of creating Twitter-specific content, but it just requires so much of

being on the platform consistently. If I'm doing ten other things, I can't be the one who's also posting on Twitter in real time all of the time. That's something I wish I did a better job of. But yeah, we definitely have some overlapping audiences. We're hyperlocal, so like 60% of our following is [State]-based, which is a lot, so that also informs what we post about in terms of our strategy. In this realm, social media could actually be a physical driver of visitorship into the museum and it often is. But still every post should be enjoyable in and of itself, even if you were not able to visit the museum because we don't want to discount the 40% of people who couldn't necessarily visit us but would still be engaging with us online.

Allison: That's become even more important during COVID-19 with all of these closures. So social media platforms make it very easy for institutions to track all of the quantitative activity for your page or your account, and so how do you measure the impact of your social media activities? What quantitative or maybe qualitative, like the quality of comments or something, do you look at to see if a certain post or campaign was successful or not successful? Which of those metrics do you value the most?

Interviewee: They're both important. I've heard from some friends in the field who have got away from reporting on follower counts. We're not there yet, and I do still think the follower counts are important. I do find a correlation often between them. Actually Instagram has surpassed Facebook for our largest following. I also find that the quality of comments that we get on Instagram is consistently better, not to say that sometimes Facebook doesn't have great comments as well or great feedback or great resources, but just that Instagram is the one that I see the most with. I always take the qualitative stuff, I probably even put more focus on it than other people do just because I don't think it's one of those things that we, as an institution, are used to looking at. I keep accounts of our follower growth and platform growth. I do a year-in-review analytics of our platforms and identify weak points and try to address those in the strategy going forward. Also I do monthly analytics reports where I pull out our top posts and our worst posts in terms of engagement and try to make some short form explanations of why we think this did well, why we think this didn't do well, and there's very few surprises I've found with the worst posts. It's usually stuff that I'm like "I know this isn't going to do well" and then it doesn't do well. I also pull out comments from our followers so that senior staff can get a sense of what people are sharing back with us when we share with them. And then any dedicated campaign, so something like #MuseumBouquet, I had a separate report for so I can get the highlights. It got picked up in mainstream press and media, which is unusual but very nice, and that also said the hashtag and kept it going even longer. I also had some other paid analytics after the fact that helped me flush out those reports.

Allison: That kind of evaluation step is super important for sure. That's cool that you're able to do that and present it back to the institution. Do you have a specific example of when a post doesn't go well and you know it's not going to go well? What's that reason, or is it very specific to the content?

Interviewee: I think it's about getting to know your audience. When you start, you don't know the audience as well so you start to figure it out by what you post and what performs the best. Then there's a certain percentage of posts, let's say 10%, which are mission-related and important but you know might not necessarily get the most likes. Obviously, as an institution it's part of our mission, right. We do things all the time not necessarily because we think "oh this exhibition is going to be a huge blockbuster, and everyone's going to pay to come see it." You hope people are going to come pay and see it, but at the same time, there's a certain level of responsibility and scholarship that goes into it, where it does have value even if it's not going to be a huge blockbuster. So in the same way, I do approach social media posts so that we have a balance and don't post a lot of low-performing posts in a row. So sometimes I'll know the image isn't super strong or it won't necessarily be a thumb stopper, but the story behind it is really important, and even if we don't get necessarily as high engagement as I would like, I find that the quality of the comments that we get are usually worth keeping it around. Then there are the occasional posts where maybe institutional politicking from powers-that-be means that this does have to go out, even though I don't think it will be successful, and then it's usually not. It's really just getting to know your audience pretty well. For example, for [Institution], a lot of people just get our name, which could mean a lot of things. Some people think it's a separate club that you need entry to because it has that kind of name, and then some people don't realize that we also tell stories about American history and it's often American history through a [State] lens but sometimes it is just American history. But what they love the most from us is black and white photos of the city. That is what, without fail, tends to perform really really well so I try to make sure that we inject that into our feed every week to keep the people who may be most interested in that involved without alienating everyone else that we're trying to attract.

Allison: That seems like a really good approach once you develop that understanding of the audience and are able to achieve that balance. So to shift gears real quick in our last couple minutes, I want to talk specifically about the pandemic. So one of the silver linings that we've seen with this pandemic is that a lot of people are becoming more adept at using technology in order to stay connected with one another remotely. So how has the pandemic changed your perception of the digital technologies or social media as a tool that's available to your institution? What

different practices because of COVID-19? Which ones have been successful, which ones have not been successful, and even thinking ahead to the future, what would you want to keep doing in a post-COVID world, whatever that might look like? What do you think might be here to stay and then what do you think might just be a fad?

Interviewee: That's a great question. I'd be curious to hear everyone else's answer to this one. For me personally, my views have not shifted or changed at all. I like to say I live on the internet because I do. I'm on it all the time, and I think for some people the pandemic forced them to shift into this digital space that they are not familiar with before, whereas 98% of my job can be done remotely. I think for the institution, obviously the adoption of digital programming and live streaming, all the virtual programming that we shifted to, I think that was a bigger "digital pivot" for the institution as a whole. We've had conversations internally about even in whatever a post-COVID world looks like, we wouldn't abandon our virtual programming because of the reasons you mentioned, like we have national reach for people who would never be able to visit in person. Digital visitorship triples what the physical visitorship sometimes is for certain programs. I think we're looking at a hybrid model going forward, and I think that that's great. I think that did wake a lot of people up to the fact that we have these capabilities. I do think the question will be more about what the demand is for them because obviously earlier in the pandemic that's when if you had people who were fortunate enough to be bored at home, they enjoyed a lot of the virtual programming, but you know the further into the pandemic you get it, just the way that you're saying people have gotten tired of talking about the pandemic, people also get Zoom fatigue and then if you are, let's say, creating a program for families, a lot of parents were working at home and have their kids there have a set schedule. So if you're going to introduce new programming, it's not necessarily going to make it onto their slate because they're already so busy, and if they have a system that works they're probably not going to mess it up just to add something new that you decided to offer. So I really do think it's going to come down to demand, like what people will want when they're no longer sheltering in place or forced in front of their screens.

Allison: For sure, and so my final question here is do you feel like the pandemic has redefined your role as a social media manager at all? I don't want to put words in your mouth, but do you feel like you get more respect now that everyone's so reliant on these online spaces? Or has it been the same for you? Either is totally fine.

Interviewee: It's such a nice question, I have to laugh a little. I don't want to just say no, but I think no is the answer. There's an example I shared with a friend once, and I'm trying to remember it. I think it's something like, let's say that you're an elbow

doctor. You've been studying and living with your elbow and other people's elbows for your entire career. And then you have someone walk in one day who says “hey did you know this elbow was here?” Like yes, it’s been here this whole time. I will say I think the internet and connecting online was a revelation for some, but not for you if you were already working in those fields. That was the case for me. I do think that there are few people who have more respect for what I do. A lot of people are going to tell you like “well, you know, my teenage son has an Instagram account, he could do your job.” That’s sometimes a thing faced by museum social media managers is this idea that everybody's on it, so it's not that hard. But overall I would say that my institution is pretty lovely about it compared to other places. I think a lot of people now recognize that it exists and its capabilities. I don't think they are necessarily as aware of the limitations or what it takes to do it well, but I would be curious how that will shift going forward.

Allison: Yeah, for sure. I definitely feel like I'm seeing a shift anyway just from my perception as a student who has casually used social media and now moving to these online spaces. And what I've seen in interacting with the museum too, for them it kind of feels just like a tacked-on job that before didn't really matter as much but now with the pandemic, it’s so important.

Interviewee: I hope that’s the case. Everyone’s like “hey this is amazing and spend more resources here, and we need to really work on growing this because it's an amplification of all of our other efforts.” It seems like a no-brainer to me, for sure.

Allison: Yeah, so this has been really helpful to me, and I definitely want to take some of the stuff that you talked about and use it in my project materials but also going forward in those positions that I have where I'm still going to be running the social media channel after my formal academic project is over. So it's nice to think about the long-term stuff that I can do with what I’m learning here.

Interviewee: Yeah, and I’d say that if it does feel like a tacked-on, not like a standalone job, it's very easy for it to feel overwhelming, but it is one of those things where it's you do what you can and partner with organizations when you can in social because I do think that that helps a lot. There’s also this thing called the 70-30 rule where 30% is you talking about yourself and 70% is you talking about things outside of yourself, and I think that’s a good strategy to employ, especially if you're already overtaxed and overwhelmed.

Transcript 3

Allison: Social media is one of the most fundamental ways in which museums stay connected with their audiences remotely. So which platforms do you use and why do you use those specific platforms?

Interviewee: I'm with the [Institution]. I'm the marketing and communications manager, and we use Twitter, Facebook, YouTube, Instagram, and then we have a Flickr account—we don't really use that as much anymore. Facebook we use mainly for posting events and longer-form articles and blogs that we produce ro share from other organizations and publications. Instagram is mainly snippets from our collection: images, ephemera, objects, things that are in the archives that we want to show people and tell a story about. Twitter, similar to Instagram, but more text-based, obviously it's pretty limited. And then YouTube, we have in the past uploaded recordings of all of our live programs, or not all of them but the ones that we are able to film, and then now we're putting our digital programming up there. Flicker was kind of a replacement for a digital online gallery or digital archive in the past, but now that we have more funding and capacity, we have our own digital archive, so that's not used as much anymore, but we still have it in case people want to access what was up there in the past.

Allison: That's cool that you use the platforms in different ways instead of just duplicating content across multiple platforms. What specifically on those platforms do you do to engage with audiences, like what specific actions? There's lots of different things you can do on social media, like Instagram you have the feeds and the stories. So I'm wondering which particular parts you use to engage with audiences?

Interviewee: On Instagram, we definitely do more posts than stories, but when we have stuff where there needs to be a live link, we'll do the stories. Then I would say we probably get the most engagements, in terms of comments, on Instagram, so staying really vigilant about responding to people in a timely manner, answering questions—some stuff you don't need to respond to but definitely staying engaged. Same thing on Facebook: responding, answering questions, trying to keep the tone kind of light and inviting, so people feel like they're not talking to a robot. If it sounds like they're talking to a real person, I think people are more likely to engage with an institution's social channels. And then doing little things, like at the beginning of the pandemic, we started a #WhoWhatWhere series on Instagram and Twitter where we'd post an image from our archive without any context and let me people guess where in [State], who, what, and so storytell, and then we'd respond "you got it right" or "no, it's actually this" and with little things like that, you can be creative and find fun ways to encourage people to

actually engage. I think that's hard for every institution—figuring out how to actually form a dialogue with people on channels where sometimes it feels you're shooting stuff out into the ether.

Allison: Yeah, for sure. I feel like that sometimes in running my own channels. And I like how you speak to this idea of trying to make the institution seem like a person—I feel like that's something I've been struggling with a lot. Do you have any specific examples of how you try to make it more personable? I know I've tried instead of "*we* think this, this, and this," I'll sometimes say "I think" so they know that there's a person behind it, but I don't know how effective that is. Do you have any certain techniques that you used that you've seen work? Or that you've seen don't work?

Interviewee: Like what you're saying, I think even small nuances of language can make it seem like it's a human being and not the institution. Using humor, I think tone goes a long way. One thing that we do is a "staff pick" series every now and then, where it's actually different people, not just me as the social media manager, but different people from within the organization, using their voice on the blog or Instagram to try to put an actual diverse group of people behind the platform. Encouraging staff members to speak in a way that's true to themselves, to take it in whatever direction they want. I think little things like that.

Allison: That's really interesting, and this leads into my next question too because I feel like I've been seeing this dynamic or this shift where a lot of people are starting to think about making social media managing a complete job where one person is dedicated to running all these different platforms. Maybe you can speak to your job because you're not just a social media manager, you're also communications in other areas too. So I think there's this tension of yes, you want to feature all these other voices and you want to have all these other departments contribute stuff to the social media, but then at the same time, does that make things more challenging if you have inconsistent tone or branding across multiple platforms? What do you think are the pros and cons between doing it that way and having a lot of people contribute to the social media presence versus just one dedicated person who can do that as a full-time job?

Interviewee: We're a pretty small team, so I'm in charge of all the marketing, all the communications, and that of course includes social platforms. So it's pretty much just the [Institution] Facebook, Instagram, all that, but we do have a separate Instagram account for our museum store (which hasn't been open in a year, so it hasn't been an issue). I didn't run that, the store manager ran that, and I feel like that would get a little confusing at times. I'm happy for someone else to run that platform, I've got enough on my plate, but like you said, how to figure out how to

keep the same tone, how we can help each other out by posting similar content on the same day—that can be a little bit confusing. So doing really basic stuff like having a social media calendar that more people than just me had access to, so we could keep in mind what we're going to be putting out to the world and when. In terms of having other people contribute, I think it's really helpful because it makes my job easier. I think everyone within the organization has really incredible specialized knowledge about their particular part, whether the librarian who knows everything within the archives or the digital archivist who knows all about our online offerings, they can really contribute more than I can a lot of the time in terms of content and knowledge. But I like to be the gatekeeper, so if we are doing something like the "staff picks" series, people contribute their content to me, and then I can edit it as needed to make sure the tone is consistent and appropriate with what we're putting out there. I like it to be collaborative but also for the person who's managing these platforms to have a final say on what we use or don't use.

Allison: I really like that analogy of a gatekeeper, that makes a lot of sense to me. In thinking trying to coordinate all these different platforms and such, a lot of what I've been doing is concerned with managing and driving user engagement between our Facebook page as the *COVID-19 Chronicles* project, but then also the museum's Facebook page and then also our archive website, so how do your institutional channels either engage with or reference each other? Do you direct people to certain channels from other channels? Have you noticed that audiences tend to be pretty discrete? How do you create this cross-platform presence with specific strategies for each platform but an overall strategy?

Interviewee: It's difficult, right, because some people are just coming to Instagram to look at a cool historical photo and like it but maybe not even read the caption, which is totally fine. We want to create content that people can flash through and enjoy and maybe learn something, but our in-goal is to get people to our website and engage with the organization on a deeper level, whether that's visiting us, donating money, digging into our online archive, contributing to our COVID-19 collection project. With our Facebook posts, we're almost always trying to direct people either back to our website or to something like the YouTube channel where they can get in with a more lengthy panel discussion or collection talk or something like that. In the past, we would create specific websites for some of the exhibitions we did, so there are a lot of out there [Institution]-managed URLs, but really at this point we're only trying to drive people to the main CHS website. Our COVID-19 project seems like it's a little different than yours because it seems like you have a separate website for your COVID-19 project. Ours is within the [Institution] website, so it's a little bit easier for people to understand that it is part

of this organization. Definitely using all of our social platforms to drive people to the website and drive people to that specific project.

Allison: Do you have any strategies for doing that that don't come across as too salesy or promotional? I feel like a lot of times, I'm just like "go to this link," and I don't know if that's the most effective way. Do you have any ideas for how to subtly direct people so they think it's their idea maybe and not yours? If that's something you've had success with.

Interviewee: I know what you mean, and I've found that it's not really effective when you're like "hey, go read this blog, here's the title, and here's the link." I've started just picking out a section of the blog, like an interesting fact or a leading sentence that naturally leaves people wanting more and then including the link. For our COVID project, we also have an online gallery where every few months we'll put twenty new ones up, and so I'll share an image in a little snippet that's someone's submitted and then say "here's this person, this is their story, and you can also submit yours and become part of the historical record." Little things like that are more effective than just being like "here's the link, go there" because I totally know what you mean. It's easier to do that, and sometimes still do that but more effort is usually helpful.

Allison: I've been trying to do stuff like that. I was trying to champion the stories that we already have and then use that to get more people to submit stories and then champion those stories, so that was the cycle I was going for. So social media platforms make it very easy for institutions to track all of the quantitative data for the activity on their page or their account, so I'm wondering how you measure or evaluate the impact of your social media activities? What quantitative, or even qualitative if you're if you're looking at discussions and comments and that sort of thing, what metrics do you look at and use to see if something did well or something didn't?

Interviewee: There's so many tools out there now, both on the social platforms and off. I would say we rely on the analytics tools built into each social platform the most, and then Google analytics for finding out how we are driving users to our website from social. So depending on the channel, we'll look at shares, comments, and reach. We're tracking followers and subscribers, every month I submit a report to my director with how many followers we've gained, how many newsletter subscribers we've gained. In terms of qualitative data, tracking what does well and what doesn't. So what type of images get more likes, what type of images get more comments, and how can we keep moving in a direction to give people what they want. It's hard because some of the things that I feel are super compelling and interesting aren't necessarily the things that get the most likes, which is

disappointing, but you got to remember that social media is such a clique-y, short-term thing that people aren't necessarily digging as deep into as you want them to on it. As a history person, that can be really frustrating. So yeah, keeping track of what gets the most attention in terms of likes, shares, reach, etc. and then how that relates to the content and then continuing to try to steer in that direction.

Allison: I feel like I'm definitely in that boat of "oh, here's something that I think is so awesome," and I want to start this big discussion about it and get people in and participating, and then it gets no comments, like they just didn't want to spend the mental energy on it. And so, in our last couple minutes here, I do want to shift and talk about how the pandemic has affected all this. One of the struggles that I'm really dealing with is that people are sick of talking about it, and especially as the *COVID-19 Chronicles* where all of our content is about COVID and we're trying to have discussions about COVID, it's just not reaching people. So in that vein, how has the pandemic affected your institution's goals, and your strategies for reaching audiences too?

Interviewee: I think it's actually helped us because people are only interacting for the most part online. Whereas we used to have live programming in our physical space once or twice a week and we'd have 20 to 40 people in-person, now we can post the same sort of content online on YouTube and have hundreds of views within a few days, so that's pretty amazing. Those people might not be watching the entire thing, but I do feel like our reach has expanded, people are spending more time on social media, and our followings have definitely grown across the board. Because of all of those things, I think people in different departments have realized how important digital marketing and social media is, and they're a lot more willing to contribute their time and effort to helping create content. There's more of an acceptance of devoting resources and money and time to digital outlets because that's all we have, and it's proven to be super effective during this time. I think that shift is going to continue into the future, even when it's safe to be back in person.

Allison: So that was another question I had too. In thinking about this post-COVID world, whatever that looks like, what specific things (that you guys have been doing differently because of COVID) do you want to keep? And then what things wouldn't you want to keep? What would you want to abandon vs. what would you want to keep iterating on?

Interviewee: I think our digital programming will continue. Obviously, we want to get back in person, we want to have people in the gallery, we want to have exhibitions, but thinking about how we can create a hybrid situation where we're doing in-person stuff but it's also available online. In staging an exhibition, how can we make this

available for folks who live in [City] and are able to visit, but we're the [Institution]—we're serving the whole state, which is gigantic, so how can we make that content available on our website? How can we make that content easily put on social media channels? So that might be creating an actual online exhibition or gallery, or just spending more money on having a photographer come in and take pictures of the artifact so they're super good quality photographs that we can put out on Instagram, etc., etc. In terms of programming, we definitely want to keep digital programming available to some extent, so if we start having in-person programs, making sure that we hire a videographer or have someone dedicated to recording, and ideally I'd love to have that stuff be live. So instead of just posting a YouTube video after the fact, like we used to do for a live program, having it go live on Zoom at the same time that people are able to come in and be in person. I feel excited about those things. I think it really gives organizations the opportunity to reach a much greater swath of people.

Allison: I think you're right that COVID has created more respect for social media and for the people that do it. Going forward, if you want to try to do all these other things in digital online spaces, you'll have to make sure that you'll have the resources to do that even if you go back to doing everything that you did before. Do you envision yourself getting a lot more work? Do you feel spread too thin or does it feel manageable? Does it feel like it's going to be more efficient and more effective in the future?

Interviewee: I feel like with any non-profit you always need more people. Once we got past the initial growing pains of having to figure out how to do stuff digitally, it actually made things easier, doing stuff totally online because you're not working any in-person event that has a whole different level of coordination and things to think about. It'll be interesting to see how we can transition to a hybrid model. Now we know how to do that in-person stuff and we know how to do the digital stuff, so we'll have to figure out how to merge those two things. People's skill sets have evolved, and maybe there will be more positions for people who have more specialized skills in doing both or one or the other or whatever. It'll be interesting.