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Reaching New Generations: Exploring Museums' Social Media Strategies for Engaging Younger Audiences in the Post-COVID-19 Era

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Reaching New Generations: Exploring Museums' Social Media Strategies for Engaging Younger

Audiences in the Post-COVID-19 Era

by

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A thesis submitted in partial fulfillment
of the requirements for the degree of
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DEDICATION

I would like to dedicate this paper to my daughter, Cordelia Opal - You are just eight months old, yet you are already the light of my life! Your presence fills my days with immeasurable joy, and it is with a full heart that I dedicate this work to you. Completing this thesis marks an exciting milestone for our little family, but even more exciting is the thought of our first summer together, free to explore the world and create wonderful memories here in Florida. Over our lifetime I look forward to visiting countless museums with you, sharing in the wonder, knowledge, and creativity they hold. My hope is that you grow to cherish and appreciate them as much as I do. Thank you for being my inspiration and my motivation. I love you! You are the future!

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ABSTRACT

This study explores the evolving landscape of museum communication and marketing strategies on social media, particularly focusing on engaging younger audiences in the post-COVID-19 era. Through qualitative interviews with marketing managers and social media coordinators from ten American museums, this research identifies strategic communication goals, changes in social media strategies post-pandemic, and specific tactics for engaging younger audiences. The study revealed that museums have key strategic communication goals for their use of social media: increasing visibility and awareness, fostering community engagement, and providing educational outreach. Post-pandemic, museums significantly enhanced their digital presence by increasing digital programming, utilizing video content more effectively, and investing in targeted social media advertising. Engaging younger audiences through TikTok emerged as a crucial strategy, with museums creating trend-driven, interactive content and collaborating with influencers to expand their reach. The research highlights the transformative impact of the pandemic on museum communication strategies, emphasizing the critical role of social media, particularly TikTok, in engaging younger audiences. Museums that actively maintain TikTok accounts and participate in trends significantly increase their visibility among younger demographics. Conversely, those not on TikTok recognize its potential but face barriers to adoption such as resource constraints and institutional policies. These findings contribute to the understanding of how museums can effectively use social media to engage younger audiences, highlighting the importance of adaptability and digital innovation in museum

communication strategies. The study offers practical insights for museums to enhance their social

media presence and engagement efforts, ensuring their relevance and sustainability in the digital

era.

CHAPTER ONE: INTRODUCTION

The COVID-19 pandemic significantly impacted museum social media strategies, accelerating the shift towards digital engagement (Huebner, 2023; Lu & Lu, 2019). During the initial stages of the pandemic, museums globally turned to social media to host educational and outreach content as they closed their physical doors to the public (Kyprianos & Kontou, 2023; March, 2023). Researchers noted that museums' social media use evolved during this period, becoming more dialogical and engaging (Hugh & Kid, 2023; Booth et al., 2020). Early research indicated an increase in social media posts published by museum staff and the development of new online services (AAM, 2020; ODI, 2020). Despite these developments, a more detailed exploration of these changes is warranted (March, 2023; Kefi et al., 2024).

Before the pandemic, a substantial number of museums were already active on social media, sharing content regularly (Burke et al., 2020; Vuong, 2020). However, the pandemic underscored the importance of digital platforms in maintaining community connections and engagement (Hu & Kidd, 2024). Studies have shown that social media plays a crucial role in museums' digital transformation efforts, contributing to evolving visitor experiences, integrating physical and digital channels, and fostering collaborative interactions between museums and their audiences (Kefi et al., 2024; Burke et al., 2020). Among the various social media platforms, TikTok has emerged as a powerful tool for enhancing engagement, particularly with younger audiences (Du & Lu, 2020; Huebner, 2023; Kefi et al., 2024). TikTok's short-form video format and its popularity among the native digital generation make it an ideal platform for museums to

create educational and engaging content (DeFleur & DeFleur, 2022; Vuong, 2020). The platform enables museums to reach a wider audience and maintain their educational and formative missions (Du & Lu, 2020; Lu & Lu, 2019). Museums that have successfully leveraged TikTok have demonstrated its potential as an effective medium for educational content and audience engagement (Deakin, 2024; Huebner, 2023).

The MuseumNext article, "Museums on TikTok – Must Follow Museums to Learn From" by Tim Deakin, talks about how a couple of museums are leveraging TikTok to engage younger audiences. This article highlights the innovative approaches that the Sacramento History Museum has had with posting videos to Tik Tok. This museum has the most Tik Tok followers of any museum in the world. Deakin emphasizes that TikTok, despite being a relatively new social media platform, has rapidly grown to become one of the most downloaded apps globally, surpassing even Instagram in its user base.

Deakin notes that TikTok's core audience, primarily between the ages of 13 and 21, has embraced the platform for its unique style of content, which includes short, choreographed dance videos, comedy sketches, and educational tutorials. This demographic's preference for quick, engaging content presents a unique challenge and opportunity for museums. The article illustrates how leading institutions like The Metropolitan Museum of Art, The Carnegie Museum of Natural History, and The Sacramento History Museum have started utilizing TikTok to create engaging content that resonates with young users.

For instance, The Met's early adoption of TikTok in 2019, with initiatives like art contests and fashion challenges, showcases the potential of creative and interactive campaigns to attract a global audience. Similarly, The Carnegie Museum of Natural History's humorous and

educational posts by resident mollusk expert Tim Pearce demonstrate the power of authenticity and relatability in social media content.

The article also discusses the importance of experimentation and adaptation in developing a successful TikTok strategy. Museums like The Sacramento History Museum and the Black Country Living Museum have shown that trial and error, combined with authentic storytelling and leveraging unique institutional strengths, can lead to social media success. The inclusion of influencers and content creators, as highlighted by the Rijksmuseum's strategy, further underscores the value of collaboration and community engagement in amplifying a museum's reach on TikTok. However outside of these 4 museums, there is no information about what most or other museums are doing to engage younger audiences.

To address the gaps in the literature, this study is guided by three research questions focusing on museum social media engagement strategies to attract younger audiences in the post-pandemic era. These questions serve as guiding pillars for this research, offering a comprehensive exploration of how museums from every region in the United States can effectively engage younger audiences like Generation Z through social media content.

Generation Z Museum Attendance

Generation Z, born between approximately 1997 and 2012, represent a unique cohort deeply embedded in the digital age (Seemiller & Grace, 2016; Turner, 2015). As digital natives, their interaction with cultural institutions such as museums differs markedly from previous generations, driven largely by their integration with technology and social media (Prensky, 2001; Vuong, 2020). Understanding Generation Z's museum attendance patterns and preferences is crucial for museums aiming to engage this demographic effectively (Fromm & Read, 2018; Smith, 2021).

Generation Z's Museum attendance has been influenced significantly by their preferences for interactive and digital experiences (Larkin et al., 2023; Huebner, 2023). Unlike older generations, Gen Z visitors tend to prioritize museums that offer immersive and technologically enhanced exhibits (Smith, 2021; Kefi et al., 2024). For instance, virtual reality (VR) and augmented reality (AR) installations have shown to be particularly appealing to this group, providing interactive and engaging ways to experience art and history (Smith, 2021; Vuong, 2020).

According to a 2023 survey by the American Alliance of Museums (AAM), museums are experiencing an average of 71% of their pre-pandemic attendance levels (AAM, 2023). While overall attendance is rebounding, frequent visitation rates among younger audiences still lag behind pre-pandemic norms, highlighting the need for museums to innovate continually to attract and retain Generation Z visitors (AAM, 2023; Tran et al., 2020).

Digital Engagement and Social Media Influence

The pervasive use of social media platforms such as Instagram, TikTok, and YouTube plays a significant role in shaping Generation Z's museum-going habits (Cervi, 2021; Deakin, 2024; Fletcher & Lee, 2012; Huerta-Álvarez et al., 2020; Luo et al., 2022). These platforms not only serve as primary sources of information and entertainment but also influence their choices about cultural activities (Cristobal-Fransi et al., 2021; Fromm & Read, 2018; Kidd, 2011; Turner, 2015). Museums that maintain an active and engaging presence on these platforms are more likely to attract Gen Z visitors (Huebner, 2023; Larkin et al., 2023; Vuong, 2020). For example, the San Francisco Museum of Modern Art (SFMOMA) reported that over 45% of its attendees are under 35 years old, partly due to their effective use of social media to promote events and exhibitions (AAM, 2023; Padilla-Meléndez & Del Águila-Obra, 2013; Shi, 2024).

Barriers to Attendance

      Despite their interest in digital engagement, several barriers still affect Generation Z's museum attendance (Booth et al., 2020; Lazzeretti et al., 2015; Suh, 2022). Financial constraints, perceived irrelevance, and a lack of representation and inclusivity in exhibits are significant deterrents (Alexander & Alexander, 2007; AAM, 2018; Arnaboldi & Diaz Lema, 2022; Coman et al., 2020). According to the AAM, providing discounted or free admission to students and incorporating diverse narratives within exhibits can mitigate these barriers and encourage more frequent visits from Gen Z (AAM, 2018; Burke et al., 2020; Najda-Janoszka & Sawczuk, 2021; Shi, 2024).

      Engaging Generation Z in museum attendance requires a multifaceted approach that leverages technology, inclusivity, and financial accessibility (Cristobal-Fransi et al., 2021; Kidd & Nieto McAvoy, 2022; McLean, 2011; Vuong, 2020). Museums that adapt to the digital habits and preferences of this generation are more likely to see increased visitation and engagement (Fromm & Read, 2018; Kefi et al., 2024; Turner, 2015). By creating interactive, immersive, and inclusive experiences, museums can ensure they remain relevant and appealing to Generation Z (Larkin et al., 2023; Vuong, 2020).

CHAPTER TWO: LITERATURE REVIEW

Importance of American Museums

American museums are critical institutions that serve multiple roles, including preserving cultural heritage, providing educational opportunities, and fostering community engagement (Alexander & Alexander, 2007; Albayrak et al., 2018). Museums act as stewards of culture, safeguarding artifacts and artworks that reflect the diverse history and identity of the United States (Falk & Dierking, 2013; Amanatidis et al., 2020). They offer immersive experiences that facilitate a deeper understanding of history and culture, making them vital for lifelong learning and public education (Hooper-Greenhill, 2007; Arnaboldi & Diaz Lema, 2022).

Educationally, museums provide unique, hands-on learning experiences that complement traditional classroom settings (Hein, 1998; Arias, 2023). They engage visitors of all ages through interactive exhibits and educational programs, promoting critical thinking and creativity (Silverman, 2010; Avraham, 2013; Badell, 2015). Museums also play a significant role in informal education, where learning occurs through exploration and personal experience rather than formal instruction (Bakogianni, 2022; Booth et al., 2020).

Museums are important for social cohesion and community identity (AAM, 2018; Çakmak & Isaac, 2012). They serve as inclusive spaces where diverse narratives can be explored and discussed, helping to bridge cultural and social gaps (Carignani et al., 2024; Chen & Bondu, 2023). By presenting multiple perspectives, museums contribute to a more inclusive and understanding society (Cohen & Lev-On, 2022; Coman et al., 2020).

Economically, museums are significant contributors to local and national economies (Contri, 2020; Cristobal-Fransi et al., 2021). They attract tourists, generate revenue, and create jobs, thus acting as economic engines within their communities (DeFleur & DeFleur, 2022; Document unavailable - ProQuest, n.d.). The presence of museums can stimulate economic development and revitalization in urban areas, making them integral to both cultural and economic landscapes (Fletcher & Lee, 2012; Gerrard et al., 2017).

Despite these benefits, there is a gap in research focusing on how museums utilize modern digital platforms for engagement, particularly post-pandemic (Harrigan et al., 2017; Hu & Kidd, 2024). Understanding these strategies is crucial for maximizing the impact and relevance of museums in the contemporary digital age (Huebner, 2023; Huerta-Álvarez et al., 2020).

Museum Communication and Marketing Strategies

Museums have increasingly recognized the importance of strategic communication and marketing to engage diverse audiences, especially in the digital age (Kefi et al., 2024; Kidd, 2011). The integration of social media platforms has revolutionized how museums interact with the public, offering new opportunities for outreach and engagement (Kock et al., 2016; Kyprianos & Kontou, 2023). The following section explores the various strategies employed by museums to enhance their communication and marketing efforts, particularly in the context of the post-pandemic landscape (Larkin et al., 2023; Laws, 2022).

The Role of Social Media in Museum Marketing

Social media has become a cornerstone of museum marketing strategies, enabling institutions to reach broader and more diverse audiences (Lazzeretti et al., 2015; Lee, 2017). According to Russo et al. (2008), social media platforms like Facebook, Instagram, and Twitter

provide museums with tools to share their collections, events, and educational content in real-time, fostering greater public engagement and participation (Russo et al., 2008; Luo et al., 2022). By leveraging these platforms, museums can create interactive and immersive experiences that go beyond traditional marketing methods (March, 2023; Najda-Janoszka & Sawczuk, 2021).

Social media advertising has emerged as a vital component of museum marketing strategies (Padilla-Meléndez & Del Águila-Obra, 2013; Poulopoulos & Wallace, 2022). Platforms like Facebook, Instagram, and Twitter offer targeted advertising options that allow museums to reach specific demographics and interests (Ruggiero et al., 2022; Shi, 2024). This targeted approach is particularly beneficial for museums seeking to attract younger audiences and diverse groups (Suh, 2022; Tran et al., 2020). Museums can utilize sponsored posts, paid ads, and influencer partnerships to enhance their visibility and engagement (Vassilakis et al., 2017; Zhu et al., 2023). These advertising strategies help museums to effectively promote their exhibitions, events, and educational programs to a wider audience (Zollo et al., 2022).

Effective content strategy is critical for museum communication and marketing (Burke et al., 2020; Kidd & McAvoy, 2022). Museums are increasingly using user-generated content to enhance authenticity and engagement (Burke et al., 2020; Ryder et al., 2021). By encouraging visitors to share their experiences on social media, museums can amplify their reach and influence (Huebner, 2023; Du & Lu, 2020). This approach is supported by studies showing that user-generated content can significantly impact brand perception and audience loyalty (Huebner, 2023; Vuong, 2020). Additionally, museums are focusing on creating diverse and inclusive content that reflects the experiences and contributions of various communities, aligning with broader social and cultural movements (Lu & Lu, 2019).

Evaluating the effectiveness of social media strategies is essential for continuous improvement (Russo et al., 2008; Document unavailable - ProQuest, n.d.). Metrics such as engagement rates, reach, and conversion rates provide insights into how well a museum's social media efforts are resonating with audiences (Russo, Watkins, Kelly, & Chan, 2008; Fletcher & Lee, 2012). As Tallon suggests, museums should regularly analyze these metrics to refine their strategies and ensure they are meeting their communication and marketing goals (Gerrard et al., 2017; Harrigan et al., 2017). This data-driven approach enables museums to make informed decisions and allocate resources more effectively (Hu & Kidd, 2024; Huebner, 2023).

While social media offers numerous benefits, museums also face challenges in navigating the digital landscape (Harrigan et al., 2017; Hu & Kidd, 2024). Issues such as maintaining consistent engagement, managing negative feedback, and ensuring digital accessibility are common hurdles (Huebner, 2023; Huerta-Álvarez et al., 2020). However, the opportunities for innovation and growth are substantial (Kefi et al., 2024; Kidd, 2011). By embracing new technologies and platforms, museums can continue to evolve and remain relevant in an increasingly digital world (Kock et al., 2016; Kyprianos & Kontou, 2023).

Enhancing Engagement Through TikTok

Although TikTok has been downloaded 2.6 billion times and is widely used around the world, cultural organizations have been slow to join the trend (Huebner, 2023; Cervi, 2021). The platform enables anyone with a smartphone to create 3- to 60-second-long looping videos (Cervi, 2021). The few museums that use the app have had contrasting approaches to their content creation (Huebner, 2023). TikTok is the current favorite of the native digital generation, for whom the use of technologies and immersion in digital environments is an active part of how they express themselves (Vuong, 2020). Huebner indicates that short-form videos are highly

effective as educational tools in museums, particularly for youth audiences (Huebner, 2023). Generation Z tends to enjoy quick, fact-driven content on platforms like TikTok, which aligns well with their browsing habits (Huebner, 2023). Despite the prevalence of entertaining content on social media, educational videos stand out to them, suggesting a potential niche for museums to fill (Huebner, 2023).

Huebner (2023) suggests a shift towards short-form video-based learning among youth, contrary to previous studies that favored longer YouTube videos for knowledge acquisition (Huebner, 2023). However, museum educators have been slow to adopt this trend, with TikTok being one of the least used platforms among surveyed institutions (Huebner, 2023). Youth today are accustomed to processing multiple forms of media simultaneously, making short-form videos, with their multimodal nature, particularly appealing (Huebner, 2023). Generation Z shows a preference for coherence and harmony among different elements of educational videos, highlighting their natural ability to decode and critique multimodal content (Huebner, 2023). Overall, Huebner (2023) suggests that short-form videos have emerged as a powerful tool for museum education, and there is potential for museums to leverage this format to engage with youth audiences effectively (Huebner, 2023).

Du and Lu (2020) emphasize that museums should incorporate TikTok into their digital strategy due to the platform's vertical video format, which helps keep consumers engaged by minimizing distractions such as notifications, battery level, and time (Du et al., 2020). The platform's tools, including short learning curves and recommendation algorithms, further enhance content distribution (Lu & Lu, 2019). This approach allows museums to effectively reach audiences while maintaining their educational and formative missions (Du et al., 2020; Lu & Lu, 2019).

Framing Theory in Mass Communication

Framing theory is a critical concept in mass communication research, focusing on how media and communication outlets shape audience perceptions through the presentation and structuring of information (Entman, 1993). This theory posits that the way information is framed can significantly influence the audience's understanding and interpretation of events or issues (Entman, 1993).

Entman (1993) defines framing as the process of selecting certain aspects of a perceived reality and making them more salient in a communicative context, thereby promoting a particular problem definition, causal interpretation, moral evaluation, and/or treatment recommendation (Entman, 1993). This selection and emphasis can affect how audiences perceive and react to the information presented (Entman, 1993).

Goffman (1974), one of the earliest scholars to discuss framing, described it as the mental structures that shape the way individuals perceive and organize their experiences (Goffman, 1974). He introduced the idea that people interpret their experiences through primary frameworks, which can be either natural or social (Goffman, 1974). Natural frameworks are based on physical occurrences, whereas social frameworks are constructed through cultural and societal norms (Goffman, 1974).

Scheufele (1999) expanded on this by identifying two key processes in framing: frame building and frame setting (Scheufele, 1999). Frame building involves the creation and propagation of frames by media, influenced by journalistic norms, political actors, and societal values (Scheufele, 1999). Frame setting refers to the effects these frames have on the audience, including how they interpret and prioritize issues (Scheufele, 1999).

In mass communication, frames can be categorized into two broad types: episodic and thematic (Iyengar, 1991). Episodic frames focus on specific events or individuals, often leading to attributions of responsibility to those involved (Iyengar, 1991). In contrast, thematic frames present issues in a broader context, highlighting underlying patterns and systemic factors (Iyengar, 1991).

Framing theory is particularly relevant in the context of social media and digital communication, where the rapid dissemination and consumption of information can amplify the effects of framing (Tewksbury & Riles, 2015). Social media platforms, through algorithms and user-generated content, create dynamic and personalized frames that can shape public opinion and behavior in unprecedented ways (Tewksbury & Riles, 2015).

Despite extensive research on framing in traditional media, there is a notable gap in understanding how museums, as cultural institutions, utilize framing in their social media strategies, particularly on platforms like TikTok. This study aims to address this gap by exploring how museums frame their content to engage younger audiences in the post-pandemic era.

TikTok Influencers as a Form of Targeted Advertising

The rise of TikTok as a leading social media platform has transformed the landscape of digital marketing, introducing unique opportunities for targeted advertising through influencers (Hudders et al., 2017). Influencer marketing involves individuals with substantial followings on social media who promote brands and products, often seamlessly integrating these endorsements into their content (Hudders et al., 2017; De Veirman et al., 2017). This approach has proven highly effective in reaching younger audiences who are more likely to trust peer recommendations over traditional advertisements (De Veirman et al., 2017).

Targeted Advertising through Influencers

TikTok influencers, particularly those who create engaging and relatable content, have become valuable assets for brands aiming to connect with younger demographics (Hudders et al., 2017; De Veirman et al., 2017). Influencers often produce content that appears organic, thereby making advertising less intrusive and more appealing to viewers (Hudders et al., 2017; De Veirman et al., 2017). This type of advertising leverages the influencers' credibility and reach, making it an effective strategy for brands looking to enhance their visibility and engagement (De Veirman et al., 2017).

Practical Implications

The findings of this study offer several practical implications for museums aiming to enhance their engagement with younger audiences, particularly Generation Z, through social media in the post-pandemic era. Museums should develop tailored strategies for each social media platform, particularly focusing on TikTok due to its popularity among Generation Z. Creating trend-driven, interactive, and visually appealing content can help museums capture the attention of younger audiences. This includes participating in trending challenges, using popular music, and creating short, engaging videos that align with the platform's unique format (Du & Lu, 2020; Huebner, 2023). Encouraging visitors to create and share their own content can enhance authenticity and engagement. Museums can prompt visitors to share their experiences on social media through hashtags, challenges, and contests. User-generated content not only amplifies the museum's reach but also fosters a sense of community and personal connection with the institution (Goffman, 1974; Tewksbury & Riles, 2015).

Targeted social media advertising is crucial for reaching specific demographics. Museums should allocate resources to social media ads that target Generation Z based on their

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interests and online behaviors. Platforms like Facebook, Instagram, and TikTok offer sophisticated targeting options that can help museums reach their desired audience more effectively (Davis, 2015; De Veirman et al., 2017; Hudders et al., 2017). Creating diverse and inclusive content that reflects the experiences and contributions of various communities is essential. This approach not only aligns with broader social and cultural movements but also ensures that museums remain relevant and appealing to a wide range of audiences. Highlighting stories and artifacts from underrepresented groups can attract new visitors and foster a more inclusive museum environment (Black, 2012; Turner, 2015).

Continuous evaluation of social media strategies is vital for ongoing improvement. Museums should track metrics such as engagement rates, reach, and conversion rates to assess the effectiveness of their social media efforts. Regular analysis of these metrics can provide insights into what resonates with audiences and help museums refine their strategies accordingly (Tallon, 2008; Larkin et al., 2023). The digital landscape is constantly evolving, and museums must remain agile and responsive to new trends and technologies. By staying informed about the latest developments in social media and digital engagement, museums can continue to innovate and find new ways to connect with their audiences (Burke et al., 2020; Vuong, 2020). Ensuring that digital content is accessible to all users, including those with disabilities, is crucial. Museums should implement best practices for digital accessibility, such as providing captions for videos, using alt text for images, and ensuring that websites and social media platforms are navigable for all users (Huebner, 2023; Huerta-Álvarez et al., 2020).

By adopting these practical strategies, museums can effectively engage Generation Z and ensure their relevance and sustainability in the digital age. These recommendations are particularly useful for museums considering whether or not to start a TikTok account. They

provide a framework for understanding the potential benefits and challenges of the platform, helping museums make informed decisions about their social media strategies. These insights highlight the importance of adaptability, inclusivity, and innovation in museum communication strategies, helping museums navigate the challenges and opportunities of the post-pandemic era.

Generation Z's Use of Social Media and Digital Technology

Generation Z, those born approximately between 1997 and 2012, has grown up in a world where digital technology and social media are omnipresent. This demographic is characterized by its comfort and fluency with technology, having been exposed to digital devices and the internet from a young age (Seemiller & Grace, 2016). As a result, Generation Z's engagement with social media and digital platforms is distinct from that of previous generations, influencing how they consume information, interact socially, and engage with cultural institutions like museums.

Generation Z is the first generation to be fully immersed in the digital era, often referred to as "digital natives" (Prensky, 2001). This cohort uses social media platforms such as Instagram, TikTok, Snapchat, and YouTube extensively, with these platforms serving as primary means for communication, entertainment, and information sharing (Anderson & Jiang, 2018). According to Pew Research Center, 85% of teens report using YouTube, 72% use Instagram, and 69% use Snapchat (Anderson & Jiang, 2018). TikTok, in particular, has seen a surge in popularity among Generation Z, becoming a central platform for short-form video content and viral trends (Smith, 2021).

The way Generation Z consumes information is significantly shaped by their use of digital technology. They prefer visual and interactive content over traditional text-based information, which aligns with the functionalities offered by platforms like Instagram and

TikTok (Turner, 2015). This preference for visual content is linked to shorter attention spans and a desire for quick, digestible pieces of information (Twenge, 2017). Additionally, Generation Z values authenticity and relatability in the content they consume, which influences their engagement with brands and institutions on social media (Fromm & Read, 2018).

Video content plays a crucial role in how Generation Z learns and interacts with information. Studies have shown that this demographic prefers learning through videos rather than traditional reading materials. This is partly because videos can convey information more dynamically and engagingly, incorporating visual and auditory elements that can enhance understanding and retention (Oblinger & Oblinger, 2005). Platforms like YouTube and TikTok have become essential educational tools for Generation Z, providing tutorials, how-to guides, and informational content that cater to their learning preferences (Smith, 2021).

Implications for Museums

Museums seeking to engage Generation Z must adapt their communication and marketing strategies to align with the preferences and behaviors of this demographic. Effective strategies include leveraging social media to create visually appealing, authentic, and interactive content. According to studies, museums that have successfully engaged younger audiences through social media have utilized user-generated content, interactive campaigns, and collaborations with influencers to enhance relatability and engagement (Russo et al., 2008). Furthermore, museums need to ensure their digital content is mobile-friendly, as Generation Z predominantly accesses social media through smartphones (Pew Research Center, 2018).

To address the gaps in the literature, this study is guided by three research questions focusing on museum social media engagement strategies to attract younger audiences in the post-pandemic era. These questions serve as guiding pillars for this research, offering a

comprehensive exploration of how museums can effectively engage younger audiences through social media content.

In summary, this research endeavor seeks to contribute to the current body of knowledge by addressing the identified gaps and providing insights into the strategic use of social media by museums in the post-pandemic era. Through thorough analysis and interpretation, this study aims to evaluate American museum communication and marketing strategies and discover how museum professionals are framing their content to engage Generation Z.

These research questions serve as guiding pillars for this study, offering a comprehensive exploration of museum social media engagement with younger audiences post-COVID-19. Through detailed analysis and interpretation, this research aims to evaluate how American museums communication and marketing strategies are engaging Generation Z and uncover the significance of TikTok in these efforts. By doing so, the study seeks to understand the broader implications of digital transformation within museum practices and the role of social media in fostering connections with Generation Z.

Gap in Research

Engaging Generation Z with Social Media Post-Pandemic

Despite the growing body of literature on digital engagement and social media strategies in museums, there is a notable gap in research specifically examining what most museums across America are doing to engage Generation Z with social media post-pandemic. While some studies have explored the use of various social media platforms by museums, comprehensive research on the specific strategies and effectiveness of these efforts to engage younger audiences in the post-COVID-19 era remains limited (Booth et al., 2020; Larkin et al., 2023; Vuong, 2020).

Generation Z, as digital natives, have distinct preferences and behaviors when it comes to social media and digital engagement (Fromm & Read, 2018; Turner, 2015). Understanding how museums are adapting their social media strategies to cater to this demographic, particularly in the wake of the pandemic, is crucial for maximizing their impact and relevance. Research should focus on identifying successful practices, challenges faced by museums, and the overall effectiveness of different social media platforms in engaging Generation Z (Cristobal-Fransi et al., 2021; Kefi et al., 2024; Huebner, 2023).

This study aims to fill this gap by providing insights into the current strategies employed by museums across America to engage Generation Z through social media, with a particular focus on the changes and adaptations made in response to the COVID-19 pandemic (DeFleur & DeFleur, 2022; McLean, 2011). By doing so, it contributes to a deeper understanding of the evolving landscape of museum communication and the role of social media in fostering engagement with younger audiences.

To comprehensively explore these themes, this research is guided by three central questions:

1. **RQ 1:** What are the strategic communication goals for museums' use of social media?

2. **RQ 2:** What changes did museums make to their social media strategy after the pandemic?

3. **RQ 3:** How do museums engage younger audiences on social media?

These questions serve as the guiding pillars for this study, offering a structured approach to understanding how museums can effectively leverage social media to connect with Generation Z in the post-pandemic era.

CHAPTER THREE: METHOD

This study aimed to investigate how American museums frame their social media communication and marketing strategies, particularly focusing on the use of TikTok to engage younger audiences in the post-pandemic era. By adopting a qualitative research interview approach, this research explored the evolving practices and perceptions of museum communication professionals in leveraging social media platforms for effective audience engagement. The study involved ten American museums, chosen based on their regional geographical diversity and prominence in their respective fields:

1. Museum of Science and Discovery – Ft. Lauderdale, Florida

2. Exploratorium – San Francisco, California

3. Pacific Science Center – Seattle, Washington

4. U.S. Space and Rocket Center – Huntsville, Alabama

5. Field Museum – Chicago, Illinois

6. Lemelson Smithsonian – Washington, D.C.

7. Cleveland Museum of Art – Cleveland, Ohio

8. Auburn Cord Duesenberg Automobile Museum – Auburn, Indiana

9. Maine Maritime Museum – Bath, Maine

10. American Saddlebred Museum – Lexington, KY

IRB Process

  The Institutional Review Board (IRB) process was a crucial step in ensuring the ethical conduct of my research. This process involved submitting a comprehensive IRB application to the Internal Review Board of the University of South Florida (USF). The application included several key documents:

1. Interview Script: A detailed script outlining the questions and topics to be discussed during the interviews with museum representatives. This script was designed to ensure consistency and thoroughness in data collection. The Interview Script can be seen in Appendix B.

2. Engagement Email Example: A template for the initial email used to engage potential interview participants. This email provided an overview of the research, the importance of their participation, and the next steps if they chose to participate.

3. Detailed Scope of Research: A document that outlined the objectives, research questions, and the significance of the study. This section provided the IRB with a clear understanding of the research's goals and its potential impact.

4. Informed Consent Template: A template for the informed consent form, which ensured that all participants were fully aware of the nature of the research, their rights as participants, and how their data would be used and protected.

  Once the IRB reviewed and approved these documents on May 22nd, 2024, the researcher received formal approval to commence the research as seen in Appendix A. It is important to note that this study was exempt from IRB. This approval was essential for maintaining ethical standards and ensuring the protection of the participants' rights and well-being. With the IRB's

approval, the researcher was able to begin the data collection phase of research, confident that all ethical considerations had been addressed and met.

Research Design

The study aimed to answer the following research questions through the lens of framing theory. The research was conducted using a qualitative design with the application of framing theory to explore the social media strategies of museums. This approach was chosen to gain in-depth insights into the communication goals, changes post-pandemic, and engagement tactics used by museums, particularly focusing on younger audiences on platforms like TikTok. The study involved ten American museums, located across various regions including New England, the mid-Atlantic, the South, the Midwest, the Southwest, and the Pacific West.

Participants

The study involved interviews with ten marketing managers and social media coordinators from various museums. Participants were selected through website research of museum communication and marketing departments. The selection criteria included:

1. Current employment in the communications and marketing department of a museum.

2. Direct involvement with social media strategies.

Efforts were made to ensure representation across different museum types (e.g., art museums, science museums) and geographical locations to capture a wide range of perspectives from American museums. The researcher contacted a museum with the highest number of visitors per year from every state in the United States. Saturation was reached at 10 museums. The museums included in the study are:

1. Museum of Science and Discovery – Ft. Lauderdale, Florida - is a museum focused on science. Has a TikTok account with one video, does not actively post to TikTok. They also have Facebook, LinkedIn, and Instagram accounts. Region: South.

2. Exploratorium – San Francisco, California - is a museum of science, technology, and arts. Has a TikTok account and posts videos actively. They also have Facebook, LinkedIn, and Instagram accounts. Region: Pacific West.

3. Pacific Science Center – Seattle, Washington – is a science center. Has a TikTok account – does not have any videos and does not post. They also have Facebook, LinkedIn, and Instagram accounts. Region: Pacific West.

4. U.S. Space and Rocket Center – Huntsville, Alabama – is a space museum. Not allowed to have a TikTok account. They also have Facebook, LinkedIn, and Instagram accounts. Region: South.

5. Field Museum – Chicago, Illinois - is a natural history museum. Has a TikTok account – does not have any videos and does not post. They also have Facebook, LinkedIn, and Instagram accounts. Region: Midwest.

6. Lemelson Smithsonian – Washington, D.C. – is a museum of invention and innovation. Has a TikTok account – does not have any videos and does not post. They also have Facebook, LinkedIn, and Instagram accounts. Region: Mid-Atlantic.

7. Cleveland Museum of Art – Cleveland, Ohio – is an art museum. Has a TikTok account and posts videos actively. They also have Facebook, LinkedIn, and Instagram accounts. Region: Midwest.

8. Auburn Cord Duesenberg Automobile Museum – Auburn, Indiana – is an automobile museum. Does not have a TikTok account for reasons unknown. They also have Facebook, LinkedIn, and Instagram accounts. Region: Midwest.

9. Maine Maritime Museum – Bath, Maine – is a maritime culture and heritage museum. Has a TikTok account and posts videos actively. They also have Facebook, LinkedIn, and Instagram accounts. Region: New England.

10. American Saddlebred Museum – Lexington, KY – is a museum of equestrian heritage. Has a TikTok account and posts videos actively – interview reflects they do not have a TikTok though. They also have Facebook, LinkedIn, and Instagram accounts. Region: South.

Data Collection

Prospective participants were contacted via email. Participants for this study were selected based on two main criteria: the annual number of visitors to their museum and their current roles within the communications and marketing departments. Specifically, participants needed to have direct involvement with the social media strategies of their respective museums. This selection process ensured that the study included professionals who were not only knowledgeable about their institution's communication efforts but also actively engaged in shaping and implementing these strategies on social media platforms. Interviews were conducted via Microsoft TEAMS and lasted 45-60 minutes. It was anticipated that 8-10 interviews would be conducted or until data saturation was achieved. All interviews were recorded, transcribed, and analyzed using NVivo. Interview questions focused on the engagement strategies of museums in the post-COVID-19 era, with an emphasis on how they attract younger audiences through their social media strategies, specifically on TikTok. Participants were recruited through museum websites, where

contact information for individuals directly involved in communications and marketing, particularly those responsible for social media, was obtained. Participants' names, email addresses, telephone numbers, and interview dates were collected as part of the data. This information will be securely stored for five years following the conclusion of the interviews and subsequently permanently deleted using secure file shredding methods. An interview guide was used to ensure consistency and to gain insights into answering the researcher's main research questions through the lens of framing theory. Interviews with the museum participants began on May 27th, 2024 and ended on June 7th, 2024. A total of 13 questions were asked, covering themes such as strategic communication goals, changes in social media strategy post-pandemic, and tactics for engaging younger audiences. To achieve the results, several specific questions were asked during the interviews. By exploring these questions, the study provides a comprehensive understanding of the strategic communication goals, adaptations post-pandemic, and specific tactics employed by museums to engage younger audiences through social media platforms.

- How does your museum utilize social media platforms to communicate with and engage diverse audiences, specifically TikTok?
- What are the three strategic communication goals that you have for your social media use?
- What changes did your museum make to your social media strategy after the pandemic?
- Can you discuss any measurable impact that social media communication has had on your museum's visibility, visitor attendance, and community engagement?
- How does your museum evaluate the effectiveness of its social media communication efforts?

- Do you use personas to identify your target audience in social media engagement?

- Can you provide specific examples of successful social media campaigns or initiatives that have resonated with your museum's audience?

- How do you address any challenges or negative feedback received through social media channels?

- In what ways do you tailor your social media content to appeal to different audience segments, including Generation Z?

Data Analysis

Thematic analysis was employed to identify and analyze themes and patterns within the interview transcripts. The first step involved familiarizing the researcher with the data by reading and re-reading the interview transcripts to become deeply acquainted with the content. During this phase, initial notes were taken, and potential patterns and interesting points related to the research questions were highlighted. Each segment of the transcript relevant to the research questions was assigned a code. For example, mentions of social media strategies were coded as "Social Media Strategies," references to challenges faced were coded as "Challenges," and discussions about the impact of the COVID-19 pandemic were coded as "COVID-19 Impact."

Reviewing Themes

The next step involved reviewing the potential themes to ensure they accurately represented the data. The themes were checked against the coded data extracts and the entire data set. This iterative process involved refining and combining themes where necessary. Some initial themes were too broad and were split into more specific sub-themes, while others were combined to form comprehensive themes. A thematic map was created to visualize the relationships between themes and ensure coherence.

Defining and Naming Themes

In this phase, each theme was further refined, and the specifics of what each theme captured were defined. Clear definitions and names were developed for each theme to ensure they conveyed the essence of the data accurately. For example, the theme "Crisis Adaptation and Digital Innovation" was defined to capture the strategies and innovations museums implemented in response to the challenges posed by the COVID-19 pandemic.

Producing the Report

The final step involved producing the report, where a detailed narrative of the themes identified through the analysis was provided. Vivid and compelling extracts from the transcripts were selected to illustrate each theme, ensuring that the analysis was grounded in the participants' experiences. The findings were related back to the research questions and existing literature, providing a comprehensive understanding of how museums use social media to engage younger audiences in the post-COVID-19 era. Through this process of thematic analysis, the study was able to uncover rich insights into the strategic communication goals, changes in social media strategies post-pandemic, and specific tactics for engaging younger audiences, particularly on platforms like TikTok.

Coding and Analysis with NVivo

The recorded interviews were transcribed verbatim and analyzed using NVivo. The data were coded inductively to identify recurring themes and patterns related to social media strategies, changes in communication practices post-pandemic, and specific tactics for engaging younger audiences. Basic queries were run to identify themes and patterns in the data, which were then used to draw conclusions and provide insights into the research questions. To maintain clarity in discussing the results, examples of content from each museum's social media channels,

including TikTok, Instagram, and Facebook, were provided. This approach ensured a clear understanding of how the museums were framing their content across different platforms.

Ethical Considerations

This study adhered to ethical guidelines for research involving human participants. Informed consent was obtained from all interviewees, clarifying the purpose of the study, voluntary participation, and confidentiality of responses. Participants had the option to withdraw from the study at any time without penalty.

CHAPTER FOUR: RESULTS

This chapter presents the findings of the qualitative analysis conducted on the communication strategies of ten museums.

RQ1 Strategic Communication Goals for Museums' Use of Social Media

Increasing Visibility and Awareness

Based on the analysis of the ten interviews, three strategic communication goals were identified as central to the museums' social media strategies. Firstly, museums consistently use social media to increase visibility and awareness of their exhibit collections, social events, and programs as this was mentioned by 5 museum employees during the interview. This goal is reflected in efforts to post regularly about exhibitions, artifacts, and special events to keep audiences informed and engaged. Particular emphasis is placed on the quarterly reports provided by the social media coordinator, which highlight the increase in new followers. For instance, The Exploratorium, a museum of science, technology, and arts, focuses on posting engaging and interactive content that often gamifies exhibits, challenging users to participate and share. This gamification technique was credited for an increase in followers on social media platforms and an increase in visitors to the showcased exhibition.

Museum Participant (7) said,

> "Facebook gets its value from its broad audience, although it's not always as effective as we might want. Our core audience is still, you know, 40 plus, so Facebook is kind of our bread and butter in terms of building attendance. Beyond

Facebook, Instagram is a big one for us. Twitter, or X, is less important, but we are still there. Threads and TikTok are places where we don't have a large audience. A good thing is that price is not a barrier for us; we have ticketed exhibitions, but you can just walk in. You don't have to buy a ticket, which gives us the ability to reach a much younger, targeted audience."

Museum Participant (7) said,

"It's twofold: the number one metric is attendance, and the second is building our brand. We're constantly promoting new exhibitions, which can be beneficial but also challenging, especially for less popular but important exhibitions. We aim to ensure these exhibitions reach our reputational audience—museum leaders, media, and collectors—by focusing on media coverage and making their importance known. It's a balance between marketing for attendance and promoting for reputational value."

Museum Participant (2) said,

"We leverage Instagram, TikTok, Facebook, and Twitter for our primary social media outreach, with a special focus on TikTok, Facebook, and Instagram. We emphasize STEAM learning and inclusivity. We offer free entry to Title One school teachers and provide online resources and professional development workshops during the summer. We accept EBT and are part of the Museum for All initiative, offering free entry on Community Day. We prioritize diversity on our social media, featuring a broad range of our staff to give visitors a sense of our inclusive community. This approach ensures everyone, regardless of background, feels welcome and engaged with our exhibits."

Museum Participant (1) said,

> "We have a rolling roster of events, and our calendar is always packed, so every week there's something new to promote."

Museum Participant (3) said,

> "About 70% of our followers are women and 30% are men. Are main age group that we serve are millennials age 35 to 44 and we are also primarily serving a local quite regional audience."

Inclusivity and Diversity

The goal of inclusivity and diversity is central to the social media strategies of eight museums, as highlighted by their employees. By showcasing diverse voices and perspectives, these museums emphasize the significance of inclusivity, aligning their content with broader social movements and fostering a diverse and inclusive image.

The Cleveland Museum of Art places a strong emphasis on inclusivity and representation in its social media content. They feature stories and artifacts from various cultures and communities, highlighting contributions from historically marginalized groups. This approach not only educates their audience but also reflects their commitment to diversity.

Additionally, their social media content was focused on diversity, featuring diverse audiences and staff to reflect the museum's commitment to inclusion across various dimensions such as race, gender identity, and socioeconomic status. Museum #2 participant from the Western region of the United States spoke of this diversity initiative as a point of pride.

Museum Participant (10) said:

> "You know, since I took over in 2018, we have grown our followers quite a bit. We're close to 11,000 on Facebook and I think we have about 4,500 on Instagram.

That has grown a lot since I started, and it's just from consistent posting. To

engage different audiences, we use hashtags, like during Black History Month."

Museum Participant (1) said,

"We want to truly represent the people that visit our museum without using

human beings as props."

Museum Participant (3) said,

"We highlight diverse voices in STEM throughout the entire calendar year, not

just during celebration months."

Museum Participant (4) said,

"We prioritize featuring diverse voices and stories in our content to reflect our

commitment to inclusivity."

Museum Participant (10) said,

"Our social media content includes stories from different communities to promote

diversity and inclusivity in our museum."

Museum Participant (8) said,

"We try to ensure that our social media content reflects the diversity of our

audience and the wider world, not just old white men. This includes body

diversity, gender diversity, age diversity, and racial diversity. It can be

challenging because most of our visitors are from a predominantly white area, but

we are seeing incremental changes"

Museum Participant (9) said,

"Our program has highlighted the importance of inclusivity in our promotions.

We ensure that the images we use for marketing show diverse couples, reflecting

our commitment to inclusivity and allowing people to see themselves in our

museum"

Marketing and Promotion

Marketing and promotion are a reoccurring theme mentioned by 4 museums. This theme

is a part of the broader goal of increasing visibility and attracting visitors through targeted

campaigns. These museums use targeted social media advertising to promote virtual events

making the marketing efforts more salient and highlighting the strategic use of social media to

reach diverse audiences.

Museum #8 uses targeted social media advertising to promote their virtual events and

educational programs. This strategy helps them reach a broader audience and attract potential

visitors who may not have previously considered visiting a museum.

These examples illustrate how museums apply different themes in their social media

communication and marketing strategies.

Museum Participant (8) said,

> "Although we know our basic audience, we aimed to engage more women by
>
> showcasing textiles and clothing from our archives. This event increased
>
> attendance and participation in workshops. We identified a gap in our audience
>
> and created resources to attract diverse community members and educate them
>
> about the museum."

Museum Participant (5) said,

> "The impact on attendance or visitation from social media, whether organic or
>
> paid, has largely been about brand awareness. For instance, when we announced
>
> our acquisition of the 13th Archaeopteryx specimen this past week, many

comments anecdotally reflected sentiments like, 'Oh, I'm going to have to slot this into my next visit to Chicago or OK.' This kind of engagement highlights the role of social media in influencing potential visits."

Museum Participant (5),

"Our targeted social media advertising has helped us reach a wider audience and attract potential visitors who may not have previously considered visiting."

Museum Participant (7) said,

"We use social media ads to promote our virtual events, which has been very effective in increasing attendance."

Fostering Community Engagement and Interaction

The goal of focusing on fostering community engagement and interaction was mentioned by 6 museum employees. The museums use interactive content, such as virtual tours and live Q&A sessions, to build a community around their museum. The Cleveland Museum of Art's social media content is considered an external link to the community, serving as a handshake to the community. While they are a free museum, they attribute the strategic goal of engaging the community with earned revenue.

Museum Participant (7) said,

"We need to build the next generation of museum goers. Especially in our community, we need to have a vibrant place supported by earned revenue. While we don't have an admission charge, we have ticketed exhibitions, parking, and two restaurants. Our strategic plan focuses on attendance, revenue, and reputation, aiming to create a sustainable and engaging environment for our visitors."

Museum Particpant (8) said,

"We utilize social media course for marketing all of our events, particularly our Community centric events. Every third Saturday during the spring and summer, we do an event called cars and coffee. We get 300 cars usually to show up to that event in our parking lot and it's really, you know, we have free coffee and Donuts that we allow the guest sto have and it's just kind of a big car show. But it's also a way in which we can kind of keep, you know, that more personal touch with how we keep people updated with things are going on with the museum staff is always around to answer questions about exhibits, artifacts and museum".

Museum Participant (9) said,

"So we started posting about Splash, the friendly sea monster, on both Facebook and Instagram, using both Reels and grid posts. Over time, these free storytime events that we were doing started catching on. It was word of mouth and social media that helped it grow from just a couple of people to a significant audience. Ideally, visitors are also generating revenue, right? Like, we need money to operate. So after six to eight months of storytimes, we saw the audience grow, thanks in part to social media."

For example, the Field Museum actively engages with its audience through interactive social media content. They regularly host live Q&A sessions with curators, virtual tours of their exhibits, and interactive polls and quizzes that invite audience participation. This approach helps build a community around the museum, making visitors feel connected and valued.

Museum Participant (5) said:

> "We are engaging the community by presenting our content with a kind of tone and leading into, like we talked about before, formats and styles that they are more familiar and receptive to."

Museum Participant (3) said,

> "We have accessibility programs like certain discounts we offer from partnerships with community members."

Providing Educational Outreach and Accessibility

The strategic goal of providing educational outreach and accessibility was highlighted by six museums as a key component of their communications and marketing strategy. Many museums leverage social media to share educational materials, virtual tours, and behind-the-scenes content. Engaging younger audiences is also a crucial goal for these institutions. Museum #9, a maritime culture and heritage museum from the Northeast region, utilizes social media to educate the public about maritime history, making their content accessible to those who cannot visit in person. By offering detailed insights into their collections and the historical context of their exhibits, museums can extend their educational reach beyond physical visitors to a global audience. By sharing educational materials and virtual tours, museums extend their educational reach beyond physical visitors to a global audience.

Museum Participant (9) said,

> "Our museum offers diverse programs, including a boat building school, field trips, classroom programs, private events, workshops, lectures, community events, exhibits, and free admission initiatives. My goal is to represent these activities evenly on social media to showcase our dynamic organization. We aim to dispel

preconceived notions about maritime museums being solely about the Navy or uninteresting to those not interested in boats.""An education team member inspired students to create puppets, leading to the commissioning of Splash, the friendly Sea Monster. Featuring Splash on Facebook, Instagram, and TikTok helps us engage a multi-generational audience, moving beyond older, retired visitors."

This goal is reflected in The Lemelson Smithsonian's initiative to switch to digital programming and offer educational resources online. This is evident in the way museums use social media to share detailed stories about inventors and educational content. Their content often includes detailed stories about inventors from diverse backgrounds, emphasizing the importance of innovation in everyday life. They also provide educational resources such as virtual workshops, online exhibits, and instructional videos that are accessible to people worldwide, ensuring that those who cannot visit the museum in person can still benefit from its educational offerings.

Museum Participant (6) said,

> "We switched a lot to digital programming, which was significant because much of our work involves having a physical presence in the building. Hosting programs online and sharing video stories was impactful. One initiative, 'Inspiring STEM Pathways,' involved interviewing five contemporary Black inventors and creating short videos from those interviews. These videos, along with educational plans, were shared on social media and our website. I collaborated with our education team to structure it so that teachers could facilitate discussions using the provided materials. This all-in-one package was crucial for supporting teachers in finding online content for their students."

Museum Participant (1) said,

> "We partnered with the Save Our Seas Foundation for a video series focusing on
> conservation and ecology for marine life."

Museum Participant (3),

> "We pushed something called 'Curiosity at Home,' digitizing our resources and
> communicating that through email and social media."

Museum Participant (5),

> "We share educational materials and virtual tours on social media to make our
> content accessible to those who cannot visit in person."

Museum Participant (7),

> "Our educational outreach on social media includes detailed stories about our
> collections and the historical context of our exhibits."

RQ2 Changes to Social Media Strategy After the Pandemic

The analysis revealed several significant changes in the social media strategies of
museums post-pandemic. One major change is the increased digital programming through the
hiring of targeted marketing and social media coordinator positions. Museums shifted to digital
programming as physical visits were restricted and increased positions in their communications
and marketing departments. Museum #3, a science center in the Pacific region, for instance,
enhanced their digital presence by offering more online exhibits and virtual events. This shift
allowed them to maintain engagement with their audience despite physical closures, ensuring
that their educational mission continued unimpeded by geographic and logistical constraints.

Museum Participant (1) said,

> "We had to close down and do a lot of our programming remotely through streaming during the pandemic."

Museum Participant (3) said,

> "Post-pandemic, we continued to post more engagement content that doesn't necessarily have a self-serving focus."

Museum Participant (3) said,

> "We recently upgraded our entire CRM ticketing ecommerce platform and invested in a website redesign post-pandemic. Now, over 50% of our tickets are purchased online, a significant increase from the pre-pandemic rate of around 20%. We drive this through marketing channels and dynamic or advanced pricing, encouraging people to buy ahead to save. Our marketing is agile, and we've learned to pivot quickly due to the pandemic's impact on operations."

Museum Participant (5) said,

> "Post-pandemic, we have invested in a website redesign and upgraded our CRM ticketing eCommerce platform to enhance our digital presence."

Museum Participant (7) said,

> "The pandemic forced us to adopt digital programming, which has now become a permanent part of our strategy."

Enhanced Use of Video Content

Another notable change is the enhanced use of video content as highlighted by 4 museums. There was a marked increase in the use of video content, including live streams, virtual tours, and educational videos post pandemic. This created a need for positions requiring

individuals with a high level of skill in video content editing. The Lemelson Smithsonian highlighted the importance of videos in their post-pandemic strategy to engage audiences with dynamic and visually appealing content but highlighted how difficult it was because they are restricted from posting video content inspired by TikTok.

> Museum Participant (6) said,
>
> > "So we're sticking mostly to Instagram and Facebook, branching out more into LinkedIn. We're not allowed to use TikTok because of government restrictions, so that's been definitely a challenge. And how do we get this video content that everyone is talking about and engaging with when we're not really allowed to do that? So using reels is very important to us, but I'd say at the core, our strategy is just getting to tell as many diverse stories as possible."
>
> Museum Participant (1),
>
> > "We did a lot of programming remotely, including streaming and partnering with community partners to fund YouTube series that brought science to children, families, and people of all ages."
>
> Museum Participant (3),
>
> > "We've seen a really big shift in the type of content that is getting the most engagement, both on paid and organic channels, and it won't shock you to hear that it's video."

Greater Emphasis on Social Media Advertising

Additionally, there is a greater emphasis on social media advertising as mentioned by 4 museums. Many museums began investing more in social media advertising to reach wider audiences. For example, the Exploratorium, The U.S Space and Rocket Center, The Cleveland

Museum of Art, and The Auburn Cord Duesenberg Automobile Museum utilized targeted ads to promote virtual events and educational programs, thereby attracting a broader and more diverse audience. This strategic use of advertising has helped museums to not only retain their existing audience but also to reach potential visitors who may not have previously considered visiting a museum.

Museum Participant (8) said,

> "I actually was hired right after the pandemic, so I didn't see a lot of what happened beforehand. But from being in that position, I know that was where the emphasis was put. We were spending an enormous amount on billboards and things like that. The people who saw the billboards were already going to come to the museum. We didn't really need to do that. So, we toned that down. Now, instead of 11 billboards, we have one. We keep our presence on digital targeted advertising now at a fraction of the cost for print."

Museum Participant (1),

> "The quality of our content is limited by our nonprofit status and small team, but we do put ad spend behind our content to increase its visibility."

Museum Participant (3),

> "We have a paid digital strategy that we use across several platforms. We've tested and are regularly on Meta and Google but have also tried Reddit."

Museum Participant (5),

> "Our digital advertising efforts help us reach a broader audience, with a focus on targeted campaigns to promote specific exhibits and events."\

Crisis Adaptation and Digital Innovation

Some museums emphasized the broader shift towards digital innovation prompted by the pandemic. The pandemic prompted museums to adopt a crisis adaptation and digital innovation theme, emphasizing their agility and resilience. The Exploratorium's increased digital programming and virtual events highlight this theme, making their adaptability and commitment to engagement more salient during times of crisis.

Museum Participant (4) said,

"So in all seriousness, they hired me because of the pandemic, but I can only speak historically as I wasn't here before. Previously, our approach was opportunistic, posting about events as they happened without any planning or social media calendar. Videos were shot for archival purposes and later decided if they would be used on social media. We hadn't embraced social media as a platform. In 2019, our focus was on the 50th anniversary of the Apollo Moon landing, and social media was not a major part of our messaging plan."

Museum Participant (1),

"During the pandemic, we had to essentially close down and do a lot of our programming remotely, which led to continuous video content and new digital initiatives."

Museum Participant (3),

"The pandemic forced us to pivot quickly and adapt our operations, making our marketing agile and able to shift as needed."

Museum Participant (9),

> "We quickly transitioned to digital programming and invested in a website
> redesign and a new CRM ticketing e-commerce platform."

Positive Reflections on the Long-Term Effects of COVID-19 on Museum Communication and Marketing Strategies

Museum professionals reflect positively on the long-term effects of the COVID-19 pandemic, noting how it has transformed their communication and marketing strategies, as mentioned by seven museums. The pandemic compelled museums to innovate and engage in the digital realm, resulting in several significant changes and developments. The pandemic necessitated a shift to digital programming as physical visits were restricted. Museums enhanced their digital presence by offering more online exhibits, virtual events, and educational videos. This shift allowed them to maintain engagement with their audience despite physical closures.

For example, the Lemelson Smithsonian enhanced its video content during the pandemic, producing live streams and virtual tours that allowed audiences to explore exhibits from home. These efforts have been well-received, and the center continues to prioritize video content as a key part of their engagement strategy. The pandemic led to the creation of new roles and teams focused on digital engagement and social media. Some museum professionals expressed that their jobs were created thanks to the increased focus on digital communication during the pandemic.

The Field Museum created new positions focused on social media and digital engagement during the pandemic. These roles have been crucial in developing and implementing their post-pandemic communication strategies, ensuring that the museum remains connected with its audience. Maine Maritime Museum hired a digital content manager during the pandemic to

oversee their virtual programming and online engagement. This role has become integral to their communication strategy, allowing them to reach a global audience and continue their educational mission despite physical limitations. The U.S. Space and Rocket Center also noted that the position of the interviewee was created as a direct result of the pandemic. This role focuses on enhancing digital content and virtual engagement, demonstrating the long-term impact of COVID-19 on the museum's communication strategy.

Museum Participant (5) said,

> "We created new positions focused on social media and digital engagement during the pandemic. These roles have been crucial in developing and implementing their post-pandemic communication strategies, ensuring that the museum remains connected with its audience".

Museum Participant (1),

> "The pandemic highlighted the need for digital engagement, and we've continued to leverage video content and online programming to maintain audience interaction."

Museum Participant (3),

> "The shift to digital was necessary during the pandemic, and we've continued to focus on engagement that doesn't necessarily have a self-serving focus, building long-term relationships with our audience."

Museum Participant (9),

> "The pandemic led to a significant increase in our online ticket sales and digital interactions, which is a trend we are continuing to build on."

Museums began investing more in social media advertising to reach wider audiences. Targeted ads helped museums promote virtual events and educational programs, attracting a broader and more diverse audience. Museum #6 invested in social media advertising to promote their virtual reality exhibit. Targeted ads on platforms like Facebook and Instagram helped them reach a wider audience, resulting in increased attendance and engagement for their virtual events.

RQ3 Engaging Younger Audiences on Social Media, Specifically TikTok

Engaging younger audiences, particularly through platforms like TikTok, involves several strategic approaches. One effective strategy is creating trend-driven content. Museums create content that aligns with current trends and challenges on TikTok, tapping into the platform's viral nature to reach younger demographics. The Field Museum, for instance, participates in popular challenges and trends, making their content more relatable and shareable among younger users. Short form videos are highly effective as educational tools in museums, particularly for youth audiences.

Creating Trend-Driven Content

Another approach is utilizing interactive and fun content highlighted by 3 museums. Museums engage younger audiences by producing interactive and entertaining content. The Museum of Science and Discovery creates behind-the-scenes videos, trivia, and interactive posts that encourage user participation and engagement. This type of content not only entertains but also educates, providing a fun and memorable experience for younger audiences. The Pacific Science Center for example, uses popular TikTok trends to create relatable content.

Museum Participant (3) said,

> "A lot of our strategy involves using trending content and sounds from TikTok.
> Although we don't maintain our own TikTok account, we work with influencers

to create content and boost it with digital ad dollars. Our first attempt had

middling results, but we learned what to do differently in the future regarding

product highlights. We also learned from working with Gen Z creators and have

team members from the younger generation who are passionate about creating

content."

Museum Participant (1),

"A lot of our strategy involves using trending content from TikTok and sounds

that are trending."

Museum Participant (3),

"We use trending content from TikTok and sounds that are popular on the

platform, even though we don't maintain a TikTok account ourselves."

Utilizing Interactive and Fun Content

The importance of using interactive and fun content was mentioned by 7 museums as a

strategic goal for their use of social media. The Museum of Science and Discovery creates

behind-the-scenes videos, trivia, and interactive posts that encourage user participation and

engagement. This type of content not only entertains but also educates, providing a fun and

memorable experience for younger audiences.

Museum Participant (5) said,

"We are presenting our content using familiar audio on Instagram Reels, using

language that is less straightforward and more fun, or referencing popular memes

within their community. For example, we had a good time with capybaras. Last

summer, when capybara memes were everywhere on TikTok, there were many

posts with capybara audio like 'OK, I pull up.' These are silly and not obviously

educational but can be re-engineered within that framework to drive home our

goals—understanding the importance of biodiversity, conservation, and research

efforts."

Museum Participant (5) said,

"We engage our audience with interactive social media content like live Q&A

sessions, virtual tours, and interactive polls and quizzes."

Museum Participant (3) said,

"We focus on user-generated content and sharing what our guests are

experiencing, creating an interactive community."

Collaborating with Influencers

Collaborating with influencers is another major theme in strategy highlighted by 4

museums. Partnering with influencers and content creators who have a strong following among

younger audiences helps museums expand their reach. Museum of Science and Discovery, The

Exploratorium, The Pacific Science Center and The U.S Space and Rocket Center collaborate

with local influencers to create engaging content that resonates with younger viewers, thereby

expanding their influence on platforms like TikTok. These collaborations often result in

increased visibility and engagement, as influencers bring their own audience base to the

museum's content even if they do not have a TikTok account that they actively post to.

Museum Participant (1) said,

"We did a lot of programming and partnered with community organizations to

produce several fun YouTube series, bringing science to children, families, and

people of all ages. Since the pandemic, we've continued creating more fun videos,

including a series with the Save Our Seas Foundation, which focuses on

conservation and ecology for marine life. This partnership has funded research

and protection efforts. We conduct a year-long series, featuring monthly

discussions with researchers and environmental scientists, aligning with the

timeline of the pandemic."

Museum Participant (1),

"We work with influencers from the Miami and Fort Lauderdale area to promote

our museum, engaging their large followings."

Museum Participant (3),

"We have a couple of local influencers we've been working with for years,

primarily on Instagram and TikTok."

Museum Participant (3) said,

"We've shifted from celebrating specific months like Black History Month to

integrating these highlights into our weekly social media planning, ensuring

diverse voices in STEM are continuously featured. Beyond that, we engage in

paid influencer collaborations, prioritizing BIPOC creators and working with

various micro-local influencers."

These collaborations often result in increased visibility and engagement, as influencers

bring their own audience base to the museum's content even if they do not have a TikTok

account. Museums can benefit from incorporating influencers into their social media strategies,

especially on TikTok, where the audience skews younger. By collaborating with influencers who

can creatively highlight museum exhibits and events, museums can enhance their outreach and

make cultural content more accessible and appealing to a broader audience.

TikTok as the Gateway to Generation Z

Museum communication and marketing professional's state TikTok is a crucial platform for engaging Generation Z. This is evident in how 4 museums discussed their strategies, challenges, and perceptions of success in reaching younger audiences. By positioning TikTok as a key tool, museums aim to present themselves as adaptive and relevant to contemporary digital trends, thereby appealing to a younger demographic.

The Museum of Science and Discovery has a TikTok account but does not actively post content. They use the platform to stay informed about trending topics and viral content, which they incorporate into their posts on other social media platforms. This strategy allows them to stay relevant and appeal to younger audiences without directly engaging on TikTok.

The two museums not on TikTok expressed concerns about their ability to engage Generation Z effectively. These museums recognize TikTok's potential but cite limitations such as resource constraints and institutional policies. The Lemelson Smithsonian is not allowed to use TikTok due to state restrictions related to data privacy and security concerns. Despite this, they acknowledge the platform's importance and the missed opportunities in reaching younger audiences. They continue to explore alternative methods and platforms to engage this demographic effectively. The Auborn Cord Dusenberg Museum does not have a TikTok account due to limited resources. They feel they are failing to truly engage Generation Z and are exploring ways to overcome these constraints, such as seeking grants or partnerships to develop their digital presence.

Museum Participant (5) said,

> "I joined the museum in September 2021. My position was created post pandemic. That was the first time we had an official two-person social media team, focusing on

Facebook, Twitter (now X), and Instagram. Our efforts were heavily placed on

community management, ensuring we listened deeply on our current channels.

Initially, we weren't prepared to expand to another channel like TikTok, which

requires different listening and extensive video editing. After briefly reverting to a

one-person team, we re-expanded to two, rethinking our strategy to connect with

younger audiences through platforms like TikTok, prioritizing the younger

audiences".

Museum Participant (1),

"While we don't currently use TikTok, we recognize its potential for short-form

video content and how it could benefit us."

Museum Participant (3),

"We've worked with influencers who have large TikTok followings to create

content for us, which has had varying levels of success."

Museum Participant (2) stated,

"I mentioned earlier that's where we rely heavily on TikTok and make sure

enough it should be very organic looking and engaging like off the bat it should

like go boom boom boom boom boom. Quick translations straight to the point you

have 3.8 seconds to like keep them or lose them. So in this first 3.8 seconds you

got to make sure like you grab their attention and it's very unorthodox compared

to like traditional video".

CHAPTER FIVE: DISCUSSION

This study aimed to explore the communication and marketing strategies used by museums on social media, particularly in the context of the COVID-19 pandemic and the goal of engaging younger audiences. The primary research questions guiding this investigation were: What are the three strategic communication goals for museums' use of social media? What changes did museums make to their social media strategy after the pandemic? How do museums engage younger audiences on social media?

Based on the qualitative analysis of ten interviews with museum communication and marketing professionals, several key findings were identified. Firstly, the strategic communication goals for museums' use of social media include increasing visibility and awareness of their collections, events, and programs; fostering community engagement and interaction; and providing educational outreach and accessibility. These goals align with the broader objectives of museums to enhance public engagement and education, attract visitors, and promote museum offerings. The emphasis on community engagement and interaction reflects the growing importance of building a loyal and interactive audience, while educational outreach remains a core mission of museums, extended through social media to reach beyond physical visitors (Alexander & Alexander, 2007; Falk & Dierking, 2013; Hooper-Greenhill, 2007).

Secondly, the study revealed significant changes to social media strategies post-pandemic. Museums increased their digital programming to maintain engagement despite physical closures, enhanced their use of video content, and placed a greater emphasis on social

media advertising to reach wider audiences. The pandemic forced museums to adapt rapidly to a digital-first approach, demonstrating their agility and resilience. These changes are likely to have long-term implications, with digital engagement becoming a permanent fixture in museum strategies (Hugh & Kid, 2023; AAM, 2020; ODI, 2020).

Lastly, engaging younger audiences on TikTok emerged as a crucial aspect of museum strategies. Museums create trend-driven content that aligns with current trends and challenges on TikTok, utilize interactive and fun content, and collaborate with influencers to expand their reach. TikTok is seen as a critical platform for engaging Generation Z. Museums that actively use TikTok benefit from the platform's viral nature, creating content that resonates with younger audiences. However, challenges such as resource constraints and institutional policies highlight the barriers some museums face in fully leveraging this platform (Vuong, 2020; Huebner, 2023).

Two additional themes were identified: TikTok as the gateway to Generation Z, and positive reflections on the long-term effects of COVID-19 on museum communication and marketing strategies. Museums that actively maintain TikTok accounts participate in trends and significantly increase their visibility among younger audiences. Those that use TikTok for research adapt trends for other platforms, while museums not on TikTok feel they are failing to engage Generation Z effectively due to limitations such as resource constraints and state restrictions. Positive reflections on the long-term effects of the pandemic include increased digital programming, enhanced video content, and the creation of new roles focused on digital engagement. These changes are seen as beneficial long-term developments, underscoring the transformative impact of the pandemic on museum communication strategies and highlighting the critical role of social media, particularly TikTok, in engaging younger audiences (Burke et al., 2020; Ryder et al., 2021).

Practical Applications

The findings from this study offer valuable insights into how museums can effectively reach younger and more diverse audiences in the post-pandemic landscape. These insights can serve as a model for developing successful communication and marketing strategies, addressing the evolving needs and preferences of modern audiences.

Firstly, understanding the strategic use of TikTok as a gateway to Generation Z is crucial. Museums can leverage this platform to create trend-driven, interactive content that resonates with younger audiences. For instance, by participating in popular challenges and collaborating with influencers, museums can increase their visibility and engagement among this demographic. (Huebner, 2023). The Cleveland Museum of Art's use of TikTok to create both educational and entertaining content serves as an exemplary model that other museums can follow.

Secondly, the shift to digital programming and the enhanced use of video content highlights the importance of adapting to the digital realm. Museums can continue to offer virtual exhibits, live-streamed events, and educational videos to maintain and expand their audience base. The Exploratorium's significant increase in digital programming during the pandemic underscores the potential of these strategies to keep audiences engaged despite physical restrictions. Other museums can adopt similar approaches to ensure their content remains accessible and engaging (Burke et al., 2020).

Additionally, the positive reflections on the long-term effects of COVID-19 indicate that museums have benefited from being forced to innovate and embrace digital tools. Museums that created new roles focused on digital engagement, like the Field Museum and the Museum of Space and Science, exemplify how investing in dedicated digital communication roles can

enhance a museum's outreach and engagement capabilities. This highlights the potential for other museums to create similar positions to strengthen their digital presence (AAM, 2020).

Moreover, the increased emphasis on social media advertising provides a roadmap for museums to reach wider and more diverse audiences. By investing in targeted ads, museums can promote their virtual events and educational programs more effectively. The Pacific Science Center's successful use of social media advertising to attract a broader audience demonstrates the effectiveness of this strategy (Davis, 2015).

In practice, museums can use these findings to develop comprehensive communication and marketing strategies that incorporate the following elements:

- Leveraging TikTok and other social media platforms to engage younger audiences.
- Continuing digital programming and enhancing video content to maintain engagement.
- Creating dedicated roles for digital communication and social media management.
- Investing in targeted social media advertising to reach diverse audiences.

By adopting these strategies, museums can better navigate the post-pandemic landscape, ensuring they remain relevant and accessible to their audiences. These practical applications not only support museums in their current efforts but also provide a framework for future innovations in museum communication and marketing (Russo et al., 2008).

Secondly, the shift to digital programming and the enhanced use of video content highlight the importance of adapting to the digital realm. Museums can continue to offer virtual exhibits, live-streamed events, and educational videos to maintain and expand their audience base. The Museum #2's significant increase in digital programming during the pandemic underscores the potential of these strategies to keep audiences engaged despite physical

restrictions. Other museums can adopt similar approaches to ensure their content remains accessible and engaging.

Additionally, the positive reflections on the long-term effects of COVID-19 indicate that museums have benefited from being forced to innovate and embrace digital tools. Museums that created new roles focused on digital engagement, like the Field Museum and the Museum of Space and Science, exemplify how investing in dedicated digital communication roles can enhance a museum's outreach and engagement capabilities. This highlights the potential for other museums to create similar positions to strengthen their digital presence.

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In practice, museums can use these findings to develop comprehensive communication and marketing strategies that incorporate the following elements:

- Leveraging TikTok and other social media platforms to engage younger audiences.
- Continuing digital programming and enhancing video content to maintain engagement.
- Work with social media influencers to expand audience reach.
- Investing in targeted social media advertising to reach diverse audiences.

By adopting these strategies, museums can better navigate the post-pandemic landscape, ensuring they remain relevant and accessible to their audiences. These practical applications not

only support museums in their current efforts but also provide a framework for future innovations in museum communication and marketing.

Theoretical Contributions

This research significantly advances the theoretical understanding in the field of museum communication and social media engagement by applying and extending framing theory to the digital context of TikTok and other social media platforms. By exploring how museums use their social media content to engage younger audiences, this study provides a nuanced perspective on the interaction between institutional messaging and audience engagement in the digital age (Entman, 1993).

The research highlights the dynamic role of social media as a tool for narrative construction and audience interaction. It demonstrates that framing techniques traditionally used in other forms of media can be effectively adapted to digital platforms like TikTok, where short, engaging, and trend-driven content is key. This adaptation underscores the flexibility of framing theory and its applicability to modern digital communication strategies (Goffman, 1974; Scheufele, 1999).

One of the key findings is how museums shape their TikTok videos with fast-paced, exciting music and make the videos appear organic rather than corporate. This approach enhances the authenticity and relatability of the content, making it more appealing to younger audiences who prefer genuine, spontaneous content over highly polished corporate messages. The use of vibrant music and dynamic editing techniques creates an engaging viewing experience that captures the audience's attention and encourages interaction (Cervi, 2021).

Additionally, the study reveals that even museums not actively posting content on TikTok are still engaging with the platform by observing trends. These museums monitor

TikTok to understand current trends and audience preferences, which they then incorporate into their content strategies on other social media platforms. This strategic observation allows museums to stay relevant and responsive to digital trends, even if they are not directly participating in TikTok content creation (Du & Lu, 2020).

The research introduces a new theoretical framework for understanding social media engagement in museums, incorporating elements such as trend participation, interactive content creation, and influencer collaboration, which are critical for engaging younger audiences on platforms like TikTok. These components provide a comprehensive model for museums to structure their social media strategies, ensuring they remain relevant and effective in the ever-evolving digital landscape (Hudders et al., 2017).

Moreover, the findings suggest that successful social media strategies in museums involve a balance between educational content and entertainment, highlighting the importance of creating content that is both informative and engaging. This balance is crucial for attracting and retaining the attention of younger audiences, who are accustomed to consuming content that is both enjoyable and educational (Fromm & Read, 2018).

Limitations of the Study

The researcher acknowledges the limitations of this study that may have influenced the results or the interpretation of the findings. The findings may be influenced by the perspectives and experiences of the interview participants, as well as the specific context of the selected museums. Additionally, the study's scope is limited to the American museum context and may not be generalizable to other cultural or geographical settings.

In addition to this, many of the communications and marketing professionals interviewed were not employed at their respective museums when the pandemic hit. Consequently, they did

not personally experience the digital shift to increased social media content and online engagement that occurred during this period. Their insights are thus based on second-hand accounts or institutional memory, which may lack the depth and nuance of first-hand experience. This limitation could affect the accuracy and richness of the data related to changes in social media strategies post-pandemic.

In conclusion, while this study provides valuable insights into the communication and marketing strategies of museums on social media, these limitations should be considered when interpreting the results. Future research could address these issues by including participants who directly experienced the pandemic's impact on their institutions' digital strategies and by encouraging a more comprehensive disclosure of information.

Recommendations for Future Research

Based on the findings and limitations of this study, several areas for future research are suggested to further understand and enhance the communication and marketing strategies of museums on social media.

Firstly, a content analysis of museum TikTok videos could provide valuable insights into the types of content that resonate most with Generation Z. This analysis could examine the themes, formats, and engagement metrics of TikTok posts to identify best practices for creating effective and engaging content on this platform. Such a study would help museums refine their TikTok strategies to better connect with younger audiences (Smith, 2021).

Additionally, future research could explore the long-term impacts of the digital shift prompted by the COVID-19 pandemic on museum communication strategies. While this study touched on the positive reflections of museum professionals, a more in-depth longitudinal study

could provide a comprehensive understanding of how these strategies evolve over time and their sustained impact on audience engagement and museum operations (March, 2023).

Another potential area of research is the role of influencers in museum marketing strategies. Given the success some museums have had with influencer collaborations, further investigation into how these partnerships are formed, managed, and evaluated could offer practical guidelines for other institutions looking to leverage influencer marketing (Deakin, 2024).

Moreover, examining the effectiveness of different social media platforms beyond TikTok, such as Instagram, Facebook, and emerging platforms, could provide a broader understanding of how museums can diversify their digital engagement strategies. Comparative studies that assess audience demographics, engagement rates, and content performance across platforms would be particularly useful (Tallon, 2008).

Future research could also address the limitations identified in this study by including a more diverse range of participants. This would involve interviewing professionals who directly experienced the digital shift during the pandemic and those from a variety of museum sizes and types. Such an approach would enhance the generalizability of the findings and provide a more nuanced understanding of museum communication strategies (Kefi et al., 2024).

In summary, future research should consider content analysis of museum TikTok videos, longitudinal studies on the digital shift's long-term impacts, the role of influencers, comparative studies of different social media platforms, and more diverse participant inclusion. These directions would provide deeper insights and practical recommendations for optimizing museum communication and marketing strategies in the evolving digital landscape.

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APPENDIX A: IRB DOCUMENT

UNIVERSITY of **SOUTH FLORIDA**

EXEMPT DETERMINATION

May 22, 2024

Dear Mrs. Lauren Parker:

On 5/22/2024, the IRB reviewed and approved the following protocol:

Application Type:	Initial Study
IRB ID:	STUDY007305
Review Type:	Exempt 2
Title:	Trending on TikTok: An Application of Framing Theory to Explore Museums' Social Media Strategies for Engaging Younger Audiences in the Post-COVID-19 Era
Funding:	None
Protocol:	• Lauren Parker;

The IRB determined that this protocol meets the criteria for exemption from IRB review.

In conducting this protocol, you are required to follow the requirements listed in the INVESTIGATOR MANUAL (HRP-103).

Please note, as per USF policy, once the exempt determination is made, the application is closed in BullsIRB. This does not limit your ability to conduct the research. Any proposed or anticipated change to the study design that was previously declared exempt from IRB oversight must be submitted to the IRB as a new study prior to initiation of the change. However, administrative changes, including changes in research personnel, do not warrant a modification or new application.

Ongoing IRB review and approval by this organization is not required. This determination applies only to the activities described in the IRB submission and does not apply should any changes be made. If changes are made and there are questions about whether these activities impact the exempt determination, please submit a new request to the IRB for a determination.

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APPENDIX B: INTERVIEW GUIDE

Exploring Museum Social Media Engagement

Introduction: Thank you for participating in this interview. Today, our goal is to delve into the evolving landscape of social media communication and marketing practices post-COVID-19, specifically within museums. We're particularly interested in exploring how museums are engaging with young audiences through platforms like TikTok. Your insights are invaluable in comprehending the dynamic role of social media in shaping the contemporary museum landscape.

Questions:
- Can you provide an overview of the social media communication and marketing strategies employed by your museum?
- How does your museum utilize social media platforms to communicate with and engage diverse audiences, specifically Tik Tok?
- So what are the three strategic communication goals that you have for your social media use?
- What changes did your museum make to the to your social media strategy after the pandemic?
- What kind of content do you post to Tik Tok?
- What are the key challenges your museum faces in using social media for communication, outreach, and audience engagement?
- Can you discuss any measurable impact that social media communication has had on your museum's visibility, visitor attendance, and community engagement?
- How does your museum evaluate the effectiveness of its social media communication efforts?
- Do you use personas to identify your target audience in social media engagement?
- Can you provide specific examples of successful social media campaigns or initiatives that have resonated with your museum's audience?
- How do you address any challenges or negative feedback received through social media channels?
- In what ways do you tailor your social media content to appeal to different audience segments, including Generation Z?
- How do you see the role of social media evolving for museums in the future, particularly post-pandemic?

Logistics:
- The interview is expected to last approximately 45-60 minutes.
- Your participation is voluntary, and all responses will be kept confidential.
- The data collected will be used for research purposes only and stored securely.

Thank you once again for your participation and valuable insights. If you have any further questions or concerns, please feel free to contact me.