ONLINE COMMUNITIES: POSSIBILITIES FOR MUSEUM EDUCATION

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ABSTRACT

The objective of this study is to determine how museums might incorporate the use of online publishing and communication technologies as a tool to initiate and foster connections with their audiences. This research is designed with the expectation that it will contribute to knowledge regarding how such communication technologies are understood and received. The ultimate goal is to help museums and cultural institutions develop comparable interactive capacities that encourage dialogue and more deeply engage the communities they serve.

In this study, a review of literature and extant online communities will be used to inform the development of a prototype online museum community that demonstrates how such an interface might extend an institution’s education, public relations, and community outreach capabilities. A refined online museum community prototype based on this research may be of use to museums aiming to construct an online museum community that both reflects the institution’s character and furthers its educational objectives.
To my parents.
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CHAPTER 1

INTRODUCTION

“It is only our ongoing engagement with works that keeps them alive”
(Burnham & Kai-Kee, 2005, p. 75).

When the programs, lectures, and discussions are over, what keeps people engaged in the museum community? Traditionally, museum educators have fostered the construction of meaning through contextual experiences extended by person-to-person contact. Docent tours and lectures, for example, shape each visitor’s experience, narratives that help create understandings relevant to both individuals and collectives. Programs and workshops help participants apply that knowledge and cultivate their own interpretation. For those who seek a more in-depth depiction, museum publications, including pamphlets, signage, catalogs and participatory displays provide supplementary information about the artwork’s history, meaning, and cultural significance. Museum educators must be well versed in a variety of interpretive methods, as each one extends the relevance of visitor encounters in a different capacity. This master’s project
explores how Internet communication technologies might be employed to address a wide range of goals regarding the museum visitor’s engagement with the institution.

The Internet is "the primary means by which many people get key information" (Horrigan & Rainie, 2002). Since most American Internet users have the expectation of finding satisfactory information online, the importance of implementing a web interface that increases public awareness and acts as a resource for constituents is clear. Many thousands of museums have recognized the enormous potential of using the World Wide Web to reach out and educate new audiences by implementing their own domains (Kravchyna, 2004). Typically, these websites index hours, directions, admission, contact details and other data that may be pertinent to a museum visit. An effective museum website will also be periodically updated with information regarding upcoming programs, exhibitions and special events. Descriptions of additional institutional initiatives, such as research, acquisition, conservation and outreach may also be articulated.

Many museums have extended their capacity for involvement by providing more participatory online educational resources. Such features may be configured for individual use and/or be employed as a method to strengthen partnerships with other institutions. These tools may include, but are not limited to: research databases, oral history archives, online collections, interactive activities, web-based art projects and downloadable media. By utilizing these resources, museum constituents move towards more active engagement in museum activities.
While the aforementioned online resources provide valuable educational benefits in their own right, they do not appear to address the social context of learning (Falk & Dierking, 2000), where meaning is constructed through person-to-person contact and mutual exchange; interactions like those we might find within a museum. Some institutions, however, are at the forefront of modern innovation in the development of online communities. As this technology gains status in educational institutions, these museums’ initiatives can serve as frameworks for further inquiry. They also act as precedent and background for my project’s design and study.

Need for the project

“We must be well versed in interactive learning techniques. But we must think of such knowledge and such techniques not as ends in themselves, but as tools to be used for the larger purpose of enabling each visitor to have a deep and distinctive experience of specific artworks” (Burnham & Kai-Kee, 2005, p. 67).

In recent years, new technologies have emerged to enhance interpersonal connectivity. The rapidly growing numbers of people utilizing the Internet as a medium for self-expression and social networking has resulted in a proliferation of weblogs and online journals, profile and portfolio sites, discussion forums and other collaborative virtual environments. The use of online communities, in particular, has surged since their advent in the late 1990’s, revealing opportunities for creatively inclined individuals to interact, share ideas, provide support and encouragement, and intensify their connection to local and global communities (Horrigan, 2001). Moreover, there is evidence that this kind of community engagement is particularly appealing to young adults (p. 2).
In the digital age, people “are likely to enjoy a much richer panorama of options because the pursuit of intellectual achievement will... cater to a wider range of cognitive styles, learning patterns, and expressive behaviors” (Negroponte, 1995). Learning that takes place in online environments shares certain fundamental attributes with the learning that occurs in a museum. As inquiry based learning environments, both museums and online communities allow for collaboration between individuals that may support the exchange of interpretive dialogues and strengthen interpersonal relationships. Such use reveals how these environments can assist with the transformation of passive audiences into active participants (Dowling, 2005). Expanding the capacity of traditional approaches to inquiry based learning through the use of these modern phenomena is a possibility that begs to be explored.

“Museums... are in an ideal position to focus on moving towards using the Internet to develop outreach and a web-based relationship with individuals, communities or sectors. This enables a continuing dialogue with users, a closer relationship with audiences and user bases, and is importantly a way of bringing together specific groups and knowledge chains across boundaries” (Beler et al., 2004, p. 1).

Attuned to the ubiquitous impact of visual culture, museums have a unique obligation to respond to emerging cultural trends. A review of interactions within existing online museum communities may support efforts to strengthen institutional capabilities and support further growth of online communities. As these sites promote the museum’s public presence, they may also serve to increase public accessibility and democratize the museum experience.
Today’s computer-savvy young adults represent a largely untapped demographic for museum institutions. As new generations emerge, an increasing number of people will become accustomed to online environments and practiced in their range of possible uses. Studying the popularity of their online communities might inform future approaches to reaching audiences online and identifying their ways of learning and communicating through the Internet. This study seeks to investigate how an online community participates in and perceives a model site; findings that might inform the development of an online museum community that both interests and engages audiences.

Written structure

The written portion of this master’s thesis is structured to divulge the theory, development, implementation, and assessment of my online research. Directly following this (1) introductory chapter will be (2) a developmental history of online museum communities, (3) an overview of project methodologies, (4) a review of extant online museum communities, (5) implementation rationale for the online community prototype and related surveys, and (6) an assessment of research findings. The final chapter (7) will summarize the research and provide recommendations for future development.

I will initiate the research by reviewing the literature on online communities, museum education, and the Internet writ large. Following a review of relevant research methodologies, I will interpret established online museum education initiatives and popular online communities in terms of each site’s design, objective, and rationale. Topics will include how user needs and
expectations are addressed, what methods the institution employs to facilitate exchange, and how each site is governed and situated within its respective context. Examples will also be extracted to illustrate how each site is utilized and received in accordance with the implied or expressed goals of the host institution. These observations will then be used to inform my development of an explicatory prototype.

In Chapter Five, I will describe the prototype online museum community I have developed in response to accumulated research. In this chapter I will illustrate the site’s configuration and provide supporting rationale for my design decisions. I will then elaborate on a series of survey questions that were administered to the volunteers.

In Chapter Six, I will document the project’s survey results and ethnographic findings. First, I will review the participants’ typical online behaviors by outlining their response to the initial survey, and by theorizing about user interests, needs, and expectations based on those results. Qualitative content and discourse analysis will then be used to explore the data collected from dialogue generated within the prototype online museum community. In the course of investigation, themes reflecting the range of opinions, attitudes, and values of participants will be identified. Online discussions will be collected, coded, and categorized for concept frequency, and analyzed for patterned ways participants speak on the site. The concluding contextual analysis may then be used to shape future refinements of the prototype. A second survey, administered after the completion of the site implementation process, will conclude the survey
portion of the study. This section will communicate the participants’ experiences with the prototype in terms of relevance and usability. The research will then culminate with an assessment of the site’s construction and recommendations for further development.

**Objectives and goals**

The objective of this study is to determine how a museum might employ the use of online communication technologies as a tool to initiate and foster connections. This research is designed with the expectation that it will contribute to knowledge regarding how such technologies are understood and received by museum visitors. The ultimate goal is to help museums and cultural institutions develop their interactive capacities and encourage dialogue that more deeply engages their audiences.

Information from this study may be used to inform the development of an online community interface that extends an institution’s education, public relations, and community outreach capabilities. Beta testing this interactive website in a limited environment, while not promising repeatable results, can help identify potential problems, unforeseen possibilities and other issues pertinent to its potential implementation on a larger and/or more inclusive scale. By interpreting and disseminating this research, I aim to support museum education professionals who, in turn, can help themselves and others make more informed decisions regarding the construction of publicly accessible online environments that attend to the specific needs and expectations of their respective audiences. The refined online community prototype will hopefully be
of use to museums with the aim of constructing an online museum community that both reflects the institution’s character and furthers its educational objectives.

**Researcher subjectivity**

The year I finished my B.F.A. in graphic design, I left the small college town of Athens, Ohio and moved to the city of Columbus. Since I had just relocated, I needed to build my social network from a few tenuous connections. Having never lived in a population dense urban area, however, I found it difficult to form and sustain meaningful relationships. I attempted to start a zine as a way to connect to like-minded people in the vicinity. My modest call for submissions yielded only a few responses. However, the effort did not prove to be futile. One response I received via email contained a link to the sender’s online zine community, hosted by a relatively new journaling site. Intrigued, I explored the domain, which at the time hosted just under two hundred thousand journals. Soon enough, I started my own account. Within the site, I was able to follow a seemingly endless string of personal narratives, including some accounts that resonated with my own situation, and form online relationships with several people. Many of these friendships extended into real-life interactions with these individuals and their established friends. As our network grew, the site provided an easy and consistent way for all of us to stay connected. One acquaintance started a community for the city of Columbus, which I joined within a week of its inception. Eventually, the moderator responsibilities were passed on to me and another friend. Today, the community is highly active, with over a thousand
members. While I occasionally respond to issues and concerns, the community itself is largely self-sustaining. Most of my responsibilities are relegated towards archiving common inquiries so that the site can serve not only as a space for interaction, but also a valuable resource of knowledge about the area and its inhabitants.

Over the past five years that I have maintained an online presence, the general awareness of online communities has grown. As a relatively early adopter, I have followed the development of this phenomenon with great interest. Through my research and personal experience, I have witnessed not only the rise of online communities, but also how they provide a unique, accessible forum for communication and exchange. Just as the use of online communities has influenced my own life, I see its potential as a tool to enhance the reach of both individuals and organizations.

Over the course of my life, I have also been drawn to causes that promote open minded and inclusive cultures. This passion is a theme that has manifested itself repeatedly in the array of topics I have chosen to pursue within my graduate coursework in museum education. My interest in using online communities to help museums and cultural institutions connect to their audience is, to me, a natural progression. As I complete my master’s studies art education at Ohio State, I will continue to explore innovative ways to apply my interests towards the development of creative educational initiatives that benefit the local community.
Between the artist’s intent and their works’ ultimate interpretation is a transmission of meaning forged through a recipient’s own understanding of the world. From this exchange, a virtual relationship is formed. The simple act of self-expression, I believe, holds tremendous potential in its capacity to create meaning, form connections and build networks. My research centers on facilitating online expressions, in their various incarnations, as a way to promote citizenship and build inclusive societies. In advancing this process, I seek to identify and promote ways to extend the audience of visual art in a gallery, and encourage new art forms online.
CHAPTER 2

HISTORIES OF ONLINE COMMUNITY DEVELOPMENT

To navigate through the vast amount of theory and research related to online communication can be a complicated task, as there are innumerable avenues for exploration. In channeling these resources, I have only begun to approach the full range of issues and possibilities. While the following discussions are not comprehensive, they undergird my continuing effort to integrate this field of knowledge within the development of online museum education initiatives.

In this chapter, I will explore the general phenomenon of online communities and discuss some of the sociological, cultural, and epistemological concerns that surround their use. I will also discuss challenges to access and inclusion such as commercialization, homogenization, and the digital divide. Finally, I will address how this information might be used to inform the development, implementation, and assessment of online museum communities.
The phenomenon of online communities

Currently, the World Wide Web offers a broad range of opportunities for interacting with other individuals in creating and disseminating online content. The design and function of these content applications can include text, images, audio and videos that meet the criteria of specific users and contexts. Online journals, for example, can exist as a record of progress, a site of memory, or a place to confirm one’s thoughts or opinions on topics ranging from everyday life to global events. Often employed interchangeably with the term ‘online journal’, the ‘weblog’ label more often describes a site that concentrates on a specific subject or topical issue. Profile sites, primarily used for socialization and networking, can also be utilized to showcase and exchange creative output. Online portfolio communities, specifically designed to host artwork for public review, feedback, and commentary, are also prevalent. On each of these websites, hyperlinks connect users to online locations with similar themes, genres and subjects. Each of these examples’ purposes, structures, and suitability can be explored, and their individual elements extracted and reconfigured to fit the context of an online museum community.

As Internet technologies advance, web sites support more modes of interface and accessibility. In 2006, Internet penetration among adults in the United States reached an all-time high of 73% (Madden, 2006). Earlier studies indicate that 84% of Internet users have made contact with an online group (Horrigan, 2001). In younger generations, Internet use is even more prevalent. Recent studies show that 87% of American teenagers (ages twelve to seventeen)
use the Internet, and 44% of those get online daily (Lenhart, 2005). Age
distribution statistics on the popular online journal site, Livejournal.com, lists
the vast majority of their over 2.5 million active users as being between fifteen
and twenty-five years old (http://www.livejournal.com/stats).¹ The profile site
MySpace (http://www.myspace.com) which was initially launched in 2003 to help
musicians promote their work, was one site quickly taken over by teens as social
networking channel. Today, the site hosts over one hundred million accounts
(2006). In 2005, nearly half of the site’s users were between the ages of twelve
and twenty-four (Hempel, 2005).

“Members of the net generation may well be more literate, creative, and
socially skilled than earlier generations because of their early familiarity with
the Internet” (Katz and Rice, 2002, p. 225). In an age of connectivity, more and
more people are essentially growing up online. Given the growing prevalence of
online communities, their use as an approach to connect museums with emerging
young adult audiences holds great potential. The vitality of the modern museum
may lie within how it responds to innovative online outreach opportunities that
address the new ways people learn and communicate.

**Sociological and cultural perspectives**

“In [a] sense, the Internet allows us to become ever more ourselves while
also creating social capital for the benefit of individuals and communities. It
enables people to use cultural attributes to recognize themselves and construct

¹The Children’s Online Privacy Protection Act (COPPA) requires online communities to obtain the consent of
parents and guardians in for children under 13 years of age. Misrepresentation may occur because users may
not accurately state their age in order to use the site without disclosure.
meaning” (Skog, in Katz & Rice, 2002, p. 13). Social interaction, personal expression and community involvement are three central domains that are currently being shaped by our online communication endeavors (Katz & Rice, 2002). Online communities, in particular, exceed the limitations of traditional media by serving as a venue for participatory interaction. As repositories of personal stories and shared concerns of everyday people, these sites encourage individuals to capitalize on their knowledge and more fully contribute to the creative life of a culture.

Collectively, online communities facilitate interaction between individuals, increase social bonding, and provide a venue for civic engagement. Within these environments, users can make a contribution to public information, increase innovative potential, or simply provide encouragement and mutual support. As a result, contributors may remain actively engaged in the creative process and increasingly connected to communities of learners.

Decentralization, globalization, and empowerment are also powerful qualities of the digital age (Negroponte, 1995). These attributes promote understanding across boundaries (p. 230), and provide people with a greater capacity to effect change. Negroponte describes the Internet as a “place without space” (p. 165) where “intelligence is not found in some central processor, but in the collective behavior of a large group of more special purpose, highly connected machines” (Minsky, as paraphrased in Negroponte, 1995, p. 157). Not governed by the tenets of an overriding faction, this type of power distribution is resilient, sustainable, and progressive. Hine (2000) posits this phenomenon, which she
refers to as the “space of flows” (p. 85), is a way to subvert conventional hierarchical:

“Connectivity becomes the vital factor that structures inclusion. Much social experience is still tied to place, but the space of flows provides an alternative way of conducting social relations that is increasingly the site of the exercise of power by the elite (Hine, 2000, p. 85).

The Internet, according to Hine, is a “cultural object that is socially shaped in production and use” (2000, p. 14). Learning that comes from online exploration employs an inquiry-based approach that emphasizes “street-smarts” (Negroponte, 1995); that is, reaching out to find knowledge and meaning from situated interactions as opposed to static texts. Seeking out affiliations, a process that is linked to mental stimulation, self-esteem, and identity construction, provides a source of motivation for the Internet user (Hogg & Abrams, in Joinson, 2003). When positioned in a public forum, self-expression automatically provokes some type of response from which extended communication may ensue. The longer this dialogue is sustained, the greater the potential for building rapport between users. Furthermore, making regular and high quality contributions to a group can support an individual’s self-image by confirming their self-efficacy (Bandura, 2000). Thus, the self-interest that compels online expression may not only lead to personal fulfillment, but also the development of mutually rewarding relationships (Hine, 2000).

The online environment may be conducive to interaction because it elicits anonymous self-disclosures. “Under the protective cloak of anonymity users can express the way they truly feel and think” (McKenna & Bargh, in Joinson, 2003, p. 34) and “try out new roles or ways of relating to others” (Jazwinski, in Wolfe,
2001, p. 246). However, reduced accountability for one’s actions can also have negative implications. These repercussions may include aggressive, antagonistic, deceptive, or otherwise deviant behavior (Joinson, 2003). While occasional misconduct is inevitable, the general expectation is that users will act in accordance with established social norms and thus maintain a collective regulatory order (Spears & Lea, 1992).

**Epistemology**

Before I continue with the developmental theory of online communities, it is important to clarify certain terms that recur throughout my investigation. Data, information, knowledge, and wisdom (Bellinger et al., 2004), namely, are all terms that relate to intellectual content; yet vary in degree and complexity. As a hierarchy, each cognitive resource supports the development of the next (Sharma, 2005). At the foundation is data, which typically refers to raw facts comprised of signs and symbols (Dervos & Coleman, 2006). These units have no objective significance unless they are processed as information (McCrank, in Dervos & Coleman, 2006). Information may be defined as data that has been processed for a specific purpose (Dervos & Coleman, 2006). Knowledge can be seen as the interpretation of a body of information towards understanding (Bellinger et al., 2004). While not explicitly addressed in the context of this study, the concept of wisdom calls upon all these levels of cognizance to help us discern a timely and relevant application of their fundamental principles (Bellinger et al., 2004).
From data to wisdom, conceptual development occurs as processes are mediated through social interactions within particular settings and for specific purposes (Gee & Green, 1998; Lapadat, 2000; Roschelle & Pea, 1999; in Lapadat, 2002). The interactive textual environment of online communities may facilitate the social and cognitive construction of meaning because the nature of online interactive writing itself is backed by constructivist pedagogies (Lapadat, 2002). “Expressing oneself via a written medium holds the promise of writing one's way into understanding. As an individual tries to formulate an idea in writing, he/she constructs or clarifies a personal meaning along with the written text” (Lapadat, 2002).

Critical constructivism and social constructivism are two widely accepted learning paradigms associated with the use of online forums. According to these theories, we construct knowledge by sharing and comparing observations and understanding developed from prior experience. Learning thus becomes a social activity where our interactions with others expose us to challenges and confrontations of these convictions (Carson, Butcher & Coleman, 1988; Schmidt in Belkin, 1982; Mezirow, 1990; in Kanuka & Anderson, 1998). In these circumstances, subjectivity is allowed to operate online as users interpret events, objects, and perspectives on the real world and situate them in a way that is individually relevant (Jonassen, 1991, in Kanuka & Anderson, 1998).

Given the personally and ideologically self-serving tendencies of online communication, there may be no way of knowing whether information submitted by users is accurate. The public nature of online communication, however, can
serve as an informal peer-review process. In these situations, the logic of a personal statement or argument can be checked, analyzed and countered by other contributors until a consensus is reached (Brady, 2005).

Even with this system in place, however, there is no guarantee that the information will be cogent. Devoid of context in terms of who is contributing information, to whom, and to what end, a posting cannot be immediately read and understood. Instead, the focus might be on the construction of collaborative base of information from which individuals can form their own assessment and interpretation of meaning and truth.

**Access and inclusion**

In a culture dominated by capitalist ideologies, online communities can provide a channel that is less subject to acquisitive marketing interests (Katz & Rice, 2002). As a result, the perspectives shared within are more indicative of a population than those manifested in mass media. Presumably, creative people are drawn to venues that allow for the free expression of ideas because the spaces constructed are diverse, not homogenized. Instead of advocating a certain mindset, these spaces value the individuality of their contributors.

While the benefits of online communities can be significant, they may not be fully realized until access is equitable. Postman (1992) cautioned us that “those who cultivate competence in the use of a new technology become an elite group that are granted undeserved authority and prestige” (p. 9) over those who have no such competence. Evidence suggests that there are broad discrepancies between users and non-users in terms of income and education (Rainie et al.,
2004), both of which reduce the medium’s democratizing potential. While Internet use appears to be growing across populations, there remains a constant gap between bandwidths of users in rural and urban or suburban communities. Additionally, studies done by the Pew Internet and American Life Project have determined that there is a clear difference in access among those with fast broadband connections, slower dial-up connections, and no connections at all to the Internet (Fox, 2005). Older Americans are also more reluctant to go online because they are unfamiliar with the medium or don’t believe it can bring them any benefits (Lenhart, 2000). With respect to gender and race, however, the ‘digital divide’ appears to be decreasing (Katz & Rice, 2002).

Currently, the potential for equal access to the Internet, also known as “net neutrality,” is being challenged by broadband carriers who are petitioning policy makers for greater control over the transmission of content. Critics of this bid for regulation contend that if consumer rights are not protected, their access could be relegated to an inferior status in the interest of corporate gain (Backof, 2006). “The danger is that discrimination will result based on one’s ability to pay, meaning the Internet will no longer be neutral for creative innovation. Instead it will be biased toward big businesses that can afford space on a high-speed Internet” (Backof, 2006).

While net neutrality continues to be contested, future implications of the debate remain to be seen. This matter raises concerns about the increasingly commercial motivations of the Internet at large. According to Gandy (as paraphrased by Katz & Rice, 2002), “access to information is no longer a central
presumption of human needs central to citizenship; rather, consumer interests have become the fundamental criterion for evaluating the performance of social systems” (p. 24).

When individuals are perceived only as consumers, the consequences can be detrimental to online communication. The drive for media outlets to satisfy a broad range of people, for example, can lead to the simplification of content and the decline of user expectations (Gandy, in Katz & Rice, 2002). Beyond simple access, Gandy refers to a “real digital divide” (Gandy, in Katz & Rice, 2002, p. 24) where content may marginalize minority users in order to serve the needs and interests of a wealthy and educated consumer class. To avoid perpetuating embedded exclusionist practices, museums should carefully assess how well their services value and promote the public good.

While conclusive determination of digital demographics is beyond the scope of this paper, it is important for museums to understand that access is not evenly distributed. Due to these discrepancies, this study would best serve museums that seek to engage audiences who meet the general criteria of Internet users, and hope that this range may expand in coming years.
Using online communities in the museum

“Museums mediate among and between social groups by offering tangible means for the production and delivery of experiences according to standardized patterns and practices. Responsibility for standardizing these patterns and practices does not rest with museums alone, however, but reflects their place within a civic order that varies and changes over time” (Hein, 2000, p. 37).

The construction of civic order described by Hein lies within how people integrate what is learned with what is already known and how they apply their new understanding to other aspects of their experience (Hein, in Fukushima, 2000). The user confidence in making these decisions, coupled with their motivations to control their environment, are of the most important variables in determining successful learning (Falk & Dierking, 2000). Both museums and online environments are model venues for this manner of self-guided exploration. Comparably, their respective constructs contain inherent opportunities for choice, control and ownership. These variables allow participants to follow tangents that pertain to their own lived experience, empower them to take an active role in the construction of meaning, and affirm the singularity of their contribution to collective consciousness.

Falk and Dierking’s (2000) contention that learning is about affirming self posits that understanding emerges from interacting with others and determining how one’s values fit within a larger societal context. For the museum to be inclusive, the construction of supportive environments must encourage the exchange of ideas. According to Hein, “meaning does not emerge from the sheer presence of multiple voices, much less from their enforced unison, but from the careful cultivation of the habit of discerning and learning from their difference”
Thus, implications for facilitating the construction of new knowledge in an online environment include the provision of learning opportunities that capitalize on inconsistencies and contradictions between participants, and the incorporation of activities that help participants articulate their own understanding by having opportunities to compare them with that of other participants (Kanuka & Anderson, 1998).

Socialization, information exchange, and recreation are three primary types of online activities and services (Hamburger & Ben-Artzi, in Joinson, 2003) that are also manifested in the museum (Falk & Dierking, 2000). Conceivably, the same compulsion that compels individuals to seek meaning in one context may draw them to the other. Potentially, an interactive virtual environment will offer the museum an extension of its capabilities as a public service institution.

On a fundamental level, online communities can expand the museum’s public presence, increase accessibility to the institution, keep people aware of current programs and exhibits, and provide opportunities for feedback. On a more profound level, an interactive virtual presence can act as a forum for non-hierarchal, non-linear community participation. This technological capacity for response can position the museum as a multilateral and inclusive environment. By democratizing the museum’s mediation between object and reality, museums recognize that “the proliferation of voices and cultural pluralism of American society [are] primary forces of social change” (AAM, in Hein, 2000, p. 44). The utilization of online communities in connection with museums thus may be one
approach to achieving a commonality by creating permeable boundaries between the institution and the outside world.

**Building an online museum community**

Scholarly research has identified a number of principles for building an online museum community that cultivates cooperative interaction. Kollock (in Pribeanu, 2003) pinpoints the capacity for self-identification as a significant factor. While complete anonymity can be an option for users of online environments, it is the familiarity one establishes with other users that helps foster sustained rapport and engagement within a site. Visible social cues allow people to acquaint themselves with the interactive context and draw inferences about what is happening. In striking an appropriate balance between privacy and visibility, an interface can support the development of mutual awareness, promote accountability and facilitate coherent discussions between individuals while still maintaining user confidentiality (Erickson et al., in Pribeanu, 2003).

Another quality that is unique to both online communities and museums is they create spaces that appear insular and private, yet retain a connection to the outside world. This duality allows for participants to express themselves freely, while still taking cues from external culture. However, in his description of the panoptic gaze, Foucault cautions us that while dialogue in societal mechanisms (like the Internet) may provide a degree of privacy in the moment, the perception of ultimate privacy is illusive (Foucault, in Katz & Rice, 2002). As data collected online can exist indefinitely, its availability can be subject to revelatory inspection at a later time (Katz & Rice, 2002). Therefore, museums
that seek to implement online communities should maintain clearly defined privacy policies, and terms of use that guard against the release of socially identifiable information.

The personalization of online environments, initially utilized in the construction of single-use interactive tools and functions, is at the foundation of user engagement. These tools, which may include customizable calendars, bookmarks, galleries, newsletters, alerts, and other interactive functions, can be tailored to meet each user’s specific needs, interests and expectations. By providing these services, “the community website becomes an attractive permanent home base for the individual rather than a detached place to go online to socialize or network, thus strengthening the relation between the user and the institution” (Case, in Beler et al., 2004). By connecting the user with the institution, these features facilitate communication and underpin the development of a dynamic learning community (Case, 2004).

In general, the popularity and stability of an institution, service, or product promotes confidence in its use. In online environments, social capital develops not only from the trust that develops between individuals, but also assurance of the purpose and rationale of the service itself (Pribeanu, 2003). This credibility can be achieved by clearly established parameters, shared objectives, steady and sustained activity, and a positive reputation (Preece, in Pribeanu, 2003). Over time, larger numbers of visitors bring with them a higher chance of comments and feedback, increasing potential for social interaction and the
shared construction of knowledge. These interactions may, in turn, lead to comparative increases in social capital and broader accessibility (Brady, 2005).

Noting the social interactions that take place in public spaces, Whyte stresses the importance of evocations that stimulate conversation amongst strangers (Whyte, in Pribeanu, 2003, p. 4). According to Whyte, the educational capacity of a network correlates with the extent of its proliferation. In this context, opportunities for engagement in the form of people and spaces extend socialization by transforming a de facto base of constituents into a larger, more diversified audience. While Whyte may not have conceptualized the application of his theories to a virtual setting, the processes that occur therein correspond to the physical context thus described. Online learning environments, for example, are compounded via networks of discourse and contacts within a cooperative setting. As an extension of internal channels, users can also exchange hyperlinks to online locations where additional content may be explored.

The following summary, based on Pribeanu’s (2003) general recommendations for the design and evaluation of online social spaces, pinpoints key elements that may contribute to the construction of a successful and thriving online community. As knowledge in this sphere continually unfolds, these directives may provide a heuristic framework for ongoing development.
1. Provide means to attract people
   1.1. Connect people to the social life in the community.
       1.1.1. Acknowledge and comment on important events.
       1.1.2. Provide links to individuals in the community.
   1.2. Create an attractive social space.
   1.3. Find partners able to foster the social interaction.
   1.4. Provide a record of collective interaction.
2. Allow people to establish an identity.
3. Provide clear membership conditions.
4. Clearly explain policies and rules of conduct.
5. Provide shared assets and stimulate individual contributions.
7. Find appropriate social moderators.

Figure 2.1. A sample set of sociability heuristics (Pribeanu, 2003), edited for clarity.

Many of the ideologies and standpoints explored in this chapter have been
instituted as elements within extant online museum communities and related
initiatives will be discussed in Chapter 4. But first, in Chapter Three, I will
discuss the research methodologies I will employ in conducting my research.

Assessment of online museum communities

Online communities have existed in some form for decades. The earliest
manifestations of the technology, such as listservs and bulletin boards, were
primarily used as tools for research collaboration between experts, military
professionals, and scholars. Typically, these communities were highly specialized
and insular. Over time, technological advances increased access, which in turn
led to dramatic changes in demographic constituency. The medium as we know it
today continues to reinvent itself at an astounding rate. Researchers from many
fields have responded in kind to this groundswell of explorative opportunity.
Currently, a wealth of knowledge is available concerning the impact of online communities on contemporary culture. There is also a significant amount of theory aligned with the potential use of online communities in conjunction with the education efforts of museums and social service institutions. However, as the current manifestation of this technology in the museum sector is relatively new, the amount of published research concerned with its evaluation appears insufficient. Knowledge in the field may benefit from the further production of quantitative data, surveys, polls, and analysis of automated site tracking and statistics. Presumably, museums perform these analyses internally in the interest of self-assessment, but the release of such data could inform qualitative researchers’ understandings and benefit studies such as mine.
CHAPTER 3

METHODOLOGIES

Since the emergence of Internet technology – particularly in the last decade of its widespread accessibility – researchers have been presented with the unparalleled challenge of how to organize the studies of online interactions. In recent years, action research, virtual ethnography, content and discourse analysis, and survey research have been among the leading approaches (Mann & Stewart, 2000). As action research is a holistic methodology, its implementation may encompass other analytic approaches I will be utilize within the context of this study.

Using these exploratory techniques to address the circumstances and distinctions of online environments, research experts have forged paths that, at times, are specifically address the disparity between offline and online life. This chapter outlines how researchers contend with the discrepancies between traditional research methods and their integration with the virtual realm. I will
begin with a review of research methods and description of how I will be employing it within my online methodological approach.

**Action research**

What distinguishes action research from other methodologies is that it is carried out within, and applied towards, real-life situations (O’Brien, 2001). Use of this methodology is ideal when the input from members of a specific population is crucial to understanding their needs and expectations within a particular context.

Also known as collaborative inquiry, action research espouses a multilateral approach. In particular, this project utilizes the action research methodology’s interpretive paradigm, which contends that reality is both individually and socially constructed (O’Brien, 2001, p. 9). Principles of action research demand researchers forefront their subjectivity and how that might shape the investigation. As research results are contingent upon the exchange of knowledge, the capacity for open communication between researchers and subjects is imperative. In such circumstances, participants and researchers convene to generate data from which to draw an analysis. Discursive texts generated by participants help researchers conceptualize divergent themes and complex relationships.

Among the roles of the researcher is to facilitate dialogue and reflection among said participants in a way that affords them responsibility for those processes (O’Brien, 2001, p. 14). The range of perspectives that are documented
and assessed in the course of research will ultimately construct a foundation for ongoing discussion and action, not a static conclusion (O'Brien, 2001, p. 6).

The process of action research is cyclical. Once an issue has been identified, a set of implementation principles are derived from the theoretical foundation constructed with available knowledge. This strategy includes selecting an appropriate plan of action based on construed evidence. Stages of praxis are analyzed in terms of the success of their directives, as well as issues in need of further resolution. This continuum of theory, practice, and revision can be repeated indefinitely, until all matters are duly addressed (MacIssac, Susman & Winter, in O'Brien, 2001).

Implementing action research methodologies online raises a set of challenges analogous to those that surface in the physical environment. While the basic principles are comparable, there are extra measures to be taken within the planning process. For this project, the production and preliminary assessment of a fully functioning virtual interface replaces the selection of a material test site.

Virtual ethnography

“[Computer mediated communication]...not only structures social relations, it is the space within which the relations occur and the tool that individuals use to enter that space. It is more than the context in which social relations occur... for it is commented on and imaginatively constructed by symbolic processes initiated and maintained by individuals and groups” (Jones, in Hine 2000, p. 39).

Applying traditional methodologies to a virtual setting requires a re-contextualization of those conventions. Ethnographic research, for instance, has
typically entailed immersing oneself within a specific human culture to gain an understanding of the population as situated within its established context. This methodology incorporates participant observation, field notes, discourse analysis, genealogy and other techniques to examine mores, beliefs, perceptions, and constructs in relation to the society that establishes and sustains them (Genzuk, 2003).

Identifying cues and patterns in study data, researchers can make a comparative synthesis of the specific culture, as well as tap into its unique base of knowledge. By admitting both researcher and participant subjectivity into the research frame, ethnography may additionally provide a depth of understanding lacking in other approaches to investigation (LeCompte & Goetz, 1982). Ethnographic conclusions are then qualified by the situation, including the investigator’s social role in the research site (LeCompte & Goetz, 1982). By extracting these findings, ethnographers may inform others of their discovery with an attempt to derive policy decisions or instructional innovations (Genzuk, 2003). Virtual ethnography, by contrast, reorders this approach within an entirely different system, set of challenges, and issues.

The Internet was first imagined as a way to increase connectivity. Since its inception, the technology has manifested an inherent capacity to reconstruct intricate webs of social relationships. The World Wide Web, as we know it today, encases “multiple temporal and spatial orderings which crisscross the online/offline boundary” (Hine, 2000, p. 11). To comprehend the web’s multi-
faceted configuration, Hine (2000) posits that we look to online environments, such as online communities, as both cultures and cultural artifacts.

The concept of Internet as culture designates computer mediated communication as an “engine of social relations” (Jones, in Hine 2000, p. 39) where individuals assume virtual identities to conduct various online interactions. Hine (2000) emphasizes the capacity of the Internet to produce “meaning in context” (p. 39) though the development of personalized social spaces. Within these spaces, each user constructs a “locally defined version of ‘reality’” (p. 39) that yields to their continuing input. The way users choose to present themselves, and to whom, prepares the way for relevant and engaging discourse. According to Hine, “the Internet... has complicated relationships with diverse organizational and domestic settings” (p. 39). In terms of its potential for identity development, group affiliation, and socialization, a virtual environment retains many of the same characteristics of its real-world counterpart. As socially produced entities, online communities are especially suitable for ethnographic analysis. Using these ethnographic principles, I will analyze both established online communities, as well as subjects’ responses to the model online museum community I developed in the context of this study.

Content and discourse analysis

Conceptualizing the Internet as a cultural artifact is significant to the virtual ethnographic approach. For the purposes of this study, I am applying my review of the Internet as cultural artifact to the category of content and discourse analysis; as this reading will underscore how online interactions construct
dynamic texts. My analysis of this synthesis will allow me to trace complex relationships among users and the information they produce, just as a standard ethnographer would trace patterns and genealogies.

The asynchronous nature of online communication constructs an environment where texts can exist outside the immediate circumstances in which they are produced (Hine, 2000). In online communities, for example, transient conversations become broadcast content. Like any published information, the initial discourse can be archived indefinitely and accessed by the public. Content analysis helps the ethnographer develop an understanding of the meanings that underlie and are enacted through these textual practices (Hine, 2000, p. 50). Understanding these texts, however, requires not only reading the content, but also observing the way the way it is produced and used (Thomson, in Hine, 2000). Knowledge of the audience and the expectations of its members is a key part of the interpretive process (Hine, 2000), as this information underpins the community's meaning-making processes. Once the parameters are set, the content is analyzed, categorized into units, and interpreted mindful of research objectives and established protocols. Resultant data must then meet the criteria of reliability and validity so that it may be used to corroborate or dispute the findings of parallel studies (Mayring, 2000).

To clarify, reliability is concerned with the replicability of scientific findings, while validity pertains to their accuracy. While absolute reliability or validity may be unattainable objectives, researchers may be able to conscientiously balance the various factors that enhance their study's credibility.
within the context of particular research protocols (LeCompte & Goetz, 1982).
Establishing validity requires determining the extent to which conclusions effectively represent empirical reality and assessing whether constructs devised by researchers represent or measure the categories of human experience that occur (Hansen; Pelto & Pelto, in LeCompte & Goetz, 1982).

Scholars have developed strategies to address potential threats to the credibility of ethnographic research findings. One method involves the inclusion of primary data for the purpose of facilitating collaborative and peer review processes (Wolcott, in LeCompte & Goetz, 1982). Overlapping subjective and objective data may further substantiate to these results (LeCompte & Goetz, 1982). This protocol may, in turn, help ensure that the data-drawn conclusions have been carefully examined, rather than assumed, by the primary investigator. Multimodality also enforces “disciplined subjectivity” (Erikson, in LeCompte & Goetz), or researcher self-monitoring. This awareness promotes the suspension of preconceived notions and exposes all phases of the research activity to continual questioning and reevaluation. The ultimate end is not to purge the subjective experience of the researcher, “but to draw on it for insight as well as to provide information regarding its predictions, biases, and possible influences” (Wax, in LeCompte & Goetz, 1982, p. 42).

Survey research

Survey research entails the administration of surveys, interviews and/or questionnaires to a sampling of individuals (Scheuren, 2004). Information acquired from survey results may be used to catalog the demographic profiles,
behaviors, opinions, and values of anonymous participants (http://www.thcu.ca, 1999). The quantitative data that is gleaned from surveys indicate the constituency of that particular group. If a sampling is broad, the data is considered more reliable. Surveys are beneficial because they can be structured and standardized in order to ensure consistency. Resulting data can be used to identify issues that might surface in the implementation of an action model (Ornstein, 1998).

The option of conducting survey research online is generally not ideal for collecting accurate results because it excludes those without reliable Internet access. However, since access is a requirement for participation, this drawback seems irrelevant to this particular study. When appropriate, an online survey provides an easily modifiable format and immediate results (Ornstein, 1998). Furthermore, as my subjects have already consented to their participation, it is more likely that they will feel compelled to respond.

The methods described in this chapter are complementary. Together, action research, virtual ethnography, content and discourse analysis, and survey research constitute my multifaceted approach to the study of online museum communities. Using these methods, I will analyze participant’s interactions within online museum community prototype to determine how one might be implemented to benefit museums and their audiences.
CHAPTER 4

ONLINE TECHNOLOGY DEVELOPMENTS

A limited number of art museums have already begun to extend their education capabilities by incorporating the use of online communities. Exploring their sites can provide insight into how institutions use Internet communication technologies and manage the challenges and opportunities that emerge with implementation. After exploring the range of potential institutions I could identify, I have selected six representative examples based on the reputation of the institution and apparent professionalism demonstrated by the site. The diversity of these initiatives, five across the U.S. and one in the U.K., provides a range of possible approaches that might inform the development of future online museum initiatives.

Museums that have been selected for the purposes of this study include the Victoria and Albert Museum (http://www.everyobject.net) in London, the Smithsonian American Art Museum (http://www.eyelevel.si.edu) in Washington D.C., the Walker Art Center (http://blogs.walkerart.org) in Minneapolis, the
Art Institute of Chicago (http://www.artic.edu/arthistorian), the deYoung Museum in San Francisco, and its partnering institution the Legion of Honor (http://www.thinker.org), and the New York Museum of Modern Art (http://redstudio.moma.org). Architecture, content and usability of these sites will be individually and comparatively assessed to determine how each site serves the respective institution’s mission.

The following discussion of each institution describes the ways that museums are using online communities, or other comparable devices, to extend learning opportunities to their constituents. Further on in this chapter, I will also look at online communities of general interest to ascertain how their structures might further our perspective.

**The Victoria and Albert Museum: Enabling input**

*Every object tells a story* (http://www.everyobject.net), a site maintained by the Victoria & Albert Museum of Decorative Arts in Great Britain, is one noteworthy example of an online museum community. Launched in 2002 as “an archive of stories about objects that people value” (http://www.everyobject.net/static.php?page=aboutus), the site invites members of the community to submit personal narratives using audio, video, image and text. While organized within a template and moderated by V&A staff, the site is essentially self-governing. Under a variety of themes and categories, registered users may tell their own stories in response to both museum objects and personal possessions. Museum educators and staff may contribute subjective reflections on objects, as well as scholarly analyses. Notably, the content is structured in such a way that both
methods of storytelling and categories of objects are given equal status within the site’s visual hierarchy.

In prizing everyday objects as highly as rare masterpieces, the site creates a welcoming environment where everyone’s contributions appear equally valued. A random upload of the front page illustrates one person’s response to a priceless work of art positioned directly below another person’s ruminations about a cherished gift.

![Stone Boddhisattva](image)

**Stone Boddhisattva from India, 11th century. © Birmingham Museums & Art Gallery. Museum number 1885A1472**

**Through Western Eyes**

*by Varshali Patel*, on September 6, 2005, 1:01 pm

Although this relief forms part of my cultural heritage as a Hindu, as a child I remember watching films such as James Bond and Indiana Jones and being fascinated by scenes of India and ancient temples. It seemed so mysterious and magical. I was so excited watching my favourite hero’s beating baddies in surroundings that I knew were linked to my family’s culture. The whole family would watch as there were always Bollywood actors who my parents recognised and to see them in a Western context was always enjoyable for them.

![Yellow](image)

**Yellow**

*by Ayr College*, on September 14, 2005, 10:49 am

Yellow being my favourite colour, every little sentimental object I have seems to be yellow. My girlfriend gave me the lighter and told me to keep it forever and that I intend to do. I have had it since November 2003 and since then it has been my prized possession and has been great use to my filthy habit. The lighter has been left on a bus before it being returned in my pocket. It has traveled with me all the way from Kilmarnock, to Orlando and back over Christmas whilst on holiday and it never seems to run out. I treasure this lighter and although so simple it means the world to me.

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Figure 4.1: Examples from *Every Object Tells a Story.*
In figure 4.1, for example, a contributor's personal narrative about a bodhisattva stone relief sculpture (http://www.everyobject.net/story.php?uid=3923) from the Birmingham museum (another U.K institution) was initially positioned below a story that accompanies the user submitted image of an inexpensive cigarette lighter (http://www.everyobject.net/story.php?uid=4473).

“Many of these stories bristle with vitality and offer new perspectives on the significance of objects, enabling a non-specialist to approach the collected objects with a sense of connection and understanding, and to develop a relationship to the stories' authors, who would otherwise appear as remote figures of expertise” (Coldicutt, 2005).

The site’s comment response capabilities further the possibility of exchange. Whether they are motivated to contribute their own story or not, users can still explore the site and leave comments for other users. Registered users can also keep track of their contributions on a separate page. At every level of participation, the ensuing dialogue helps participants make connections between personal possessions and public treasures in terms of why we collect them, how they are valued, whom they belong to, and what they represent.

The V&A initiative represents one approach to incorporating online communities into a museum’s education program structure. As a forerunner in museum education, the museum has developed a workable site that reaches a broad public audience. While appropriate for their purposes, however, their interactive model is not necessarily ideal for use by other institutions. Each museum, using the V&A and other successful examples as a point of reference, must evaluate their own needs in terms of their unique objectives.
The Smithsonian Institution: Sustaining dialogue

“After trying open houses, audio tours and other traditional methods for engaging visitors, some museums are starting to use weblogs to attract interest. Museum officials say that these blogs, which offer views of installations in progress, chatty stories about staff members and links to the art community, are an effort to make their institutions seem more approachable and less stuffy” (Jurgensen, 2005).

The Smithsonian American Art Museum in Washington D.C. has used the online community format in a somewhat different capacity that the V&A site. On its recently established site entitled Eye Level (http://www.eyelevel.si.edu), a team of contributors from within the institution maintains a connection to the museum’s audience by posting informational dialogue about exhibits, performances, lectures, and other events. Reporting on the many happenings in the realm of American art on a variety of levels, the creators encourage users to leave comments, suggestions, and feedback about the topic at hand. This opportunity allows for inquiry into the museum’s cultural perspective and evaluative discourse about how their opinions are presented. However, the information provided is not limited to the objects contained within the museum’s physical domain. Instead, it primarily calls attention to external museum exhibitions, cultural phenomena, and trends in the world of art that influence our ways of thinking and perceiving.

The name Eye Level, according to the site “refers to the physical experience of viewing art, but it also plays on the many roles and perspectives that make a museum a reality” (http://www.eyelevel.si.edu/about.html). As indicated by the description, the site recognizes the importance of a diverse exchange of opinions and how it contributes to greater understanding. This
exchange includes receipt of the valuable insight imparted by other institutions, experts and community members. As stated on Eye Level’s ‘about’ page (http://www.eyelevel.si.edu/about.html):

“Using the museum’s collection as a touchstone, the conversation at Eye Level will be dedicated to American art and the ways in which the nation’s art reflects its history and culture. The discussion will extend beyond the walls of the Smithsonian American Art Museum’s collection to include other collections, exhibitions, and events. Eye Level will also document the extraordinary collaboration between curators, conservators, handlers, historians, enthusiasts, critics, exhibition and new media designers, and of course bloggers that has motivated the past and present of American art history”

One particular example that reflects the hallmark of the site’s mission is a post that has Smithsonian staff writer Kriston Capps listing several hyperlinks to chess-themed artwork in reference to the Noguchi Museum’s show The Imagery of Chess Revisited (http://www.eyelevel.si.edu/2005/11/game_of_kings_a.html). In his post entitled “Game of Kings Artists,” Capps encourages the audience to leave a comment about their favorite artwork related to the theme of chess or suggest other examples that have been overlooked. A note on the page promotes “lively discussions and different opinions” but warns against questionable, off-topic and offensive language. The page also indicates that comments are reviewed for relevance and suitability before appearing on the site.

While most of the respondents on this specific post answer Capps’ inquiry directly, others diverge into a discussion about their experiences or personal opinions, accentuated by additional hyperlinks to pertinent museum and artist’s websites and other appropriate information. Figure 4.2 shows three of several examples of comments left on Capps’ post. Bold text indicates where the author
of the comment has added a hyperlink to another online location, including museum homepages, artist’s sites, or the respective author’s personal domain.

| The Fuller Craft Museum had an exhibition last year featuring different contemporary designs of chess sets. What made it especially fun was that they had set up several tables amidst the gallery with boards and sets for visitors to play as well. And so we did. | Posted by: JL | Nov 30, 2005 3:58:01 PM |
|---|---|
| The Waugh might be interesting in that it depicts two young ladies at summer leisure, one posed at a moment of indecision. Chess historically has been a very sexist community. I swear I have a pre-Renaissance painting around somewhere that I found remarkable. | Posted by: bob mcmanus | Nov 30, 2005 4:44:32 PM |
| I’ve always been a fan of Yoko Ono’s all-white chess set, ‘Play it by trust’. | Posted by: john k. | Dec 4, 2005 7:23:20 PM |

Figure 4.2: Examples from *Eye Level*.

Users on the Smithsonian site may choose to leave a link to their own weblog, personal website or electronic mailbox. This option serves the dual purpose of promoting the person’s online presence while allowing respondents to contact each other for further dialogue. While the site is moderated for inappropriate content, it capitalizes on its potential for enabling discourse by allowing for an exchange of perspectives. As stated in their introductory post, the Smithsonian hopes to bring to the blogosphere “the kind of conversation you have in a museum — that unique social space that a museum provides” (http://www.eyelevel.si.edu/ 2005/11/opening_day.html). Using *Eye Level*, the institution creates a casual environment for conversation while making itself
more accessible to its audience. Moreover, the feedback the museum receives helps it to better grasp the public’s interest and how to better meet its needs in the physical museum context.

The Walker Art Center: Connecting disciplines

The Walker Art Center for contemporary art in Minneapolis, Minnesota is noted for its unique approaches to audience engagement and ability to link concepts from different fields of interest to create its innovative museum model (http://info.walkerart.org/about/history.wac). Like the Smithsonian, the Walker capitalizes on the blogging concept to cultivate deep and lasting connections with its audience. However, the latter site goes one step further by hosting multiple communities that weave together and interrelate. In this manner, users with diverse skills and perspectives can approach the museum from different points of entry and enrich their understanding with complementary ideas from other disciplines. Under the headings of education and community programs, film and video, new media initiatives, performing arts, visual arts and “off center” (referring to events happening outside the institution), the Walker blogs (http://blogs.walkerart.org/index.wac) can be viewed at their separate locations or managed as a syndicate on the main page.

Subscribing to the Walker Museum’s rich site summary (RSS), also referred to as really simple syndication, is also an option. Designed for sites with continuously changing information, an RSS feed aggregates the first few lines of all the new content at a user designated online location in descending chronological order. Each front-page truncated introduction is followed by an
ellipsis that indicates a continuation of the text (See Figure 4.3). If drawn in by the headline, readers can click on the respective heading to reveal the complete post, review related articles, or examine the archives. By following periodic updates as illustrated in the figure below, the general public can monitor current trends and events in the museum community and remain engaged in its operations throughout every phase of development.

| Ang Lee and James Schamus backstage at Walker | Waiting backstage with film curator Sheryl Mousley, Ang Lee and James Schamus plan the Regis Dialogue and discuss the wonderful news of seven Golden Globe nominations for their film Brokeback Mountain [...] |
| Watch your back, Betty. | Visitors to House of Oracles over the next few days will notice unusual behavior from the blood red-legged tarantula—dubbed Betty by our gallery monitors—in Huang Yong Ping’s installation The Wise Man Learns from the Spider How to Spin a Web (she’s enclosed in the cage above the table in this photo); the spider has flipped [...] |
| Behind the site for Some Assembly Required | We recently launched a site for the design exhibition Some Assembly Required. We put it together a bit differently than most of our sites. Here are some of the details of the products and tech used for it. We started the site with a design concept already defined by the design department (Andrew Blauvelt, Design Direction [...] |

Figure 4.3: Examples from the Walker Blogs aggregate.

The Art Institute of Chicago: Providing spaces

The Art Institute of Chicago employs a different approach to the online community. As both its museum and school are located on a single expansive domain, the Institute has created an environment that duly reflects their multi-
faceted role. This space, entitled *Art Explorer* (http://www.artic.edu/artexplorer), is one of many online resources offered by the Institute. However, *Art Explorer* is the only section in which the audience is allowed to construct their own space.

Essentially, *Art Explorer* allows users to search for images and other resources within the museum’s impressionist and post-impressionist collection and compile them in a virtual scrapbook. There, participants are able to arrange and annotate each image accordingly. Posting their own observations, users can interpret the chosen art one by one, or compose a more comprehensive narrative that addresses their entire anthology. The scrapbook, while not searchable by other site visitors, is given a separate link for the user to access or disseminate. The site is primarily geared towards teachers and students to facilitate class projects and lesson plans, but can be used for a variety of purposes. For example, users can post the link on their online journal or email it to their peers for personal or educational purposes.

*Art Explorer* participants have the option of browsing representative samples of four possible site uses. These explicatory portals are ordered under the headings of teacher, visitor, student and docent scrapbooks (http://www.artic.edu/artexplorer/browsesb.php). Clicking on the “student scrapbook” link (http://www.artic.edu/artexplorer/viewbook.php?vbook=abm pklvblisk&page=6) reveals an exemplary school collaboration where six groups of classmates have each chosen a work of art and composed a collaborative poem based on the image. Figure 4.4, for example, shows one classroom group’s interpretation of Picasso’s *The Old Guitarist*. On the “visitor scrapbook” link
http://www.artic.edu/artexplorer/viewbook.php?vbook=oszjblhjwetf&page=4, a museum visitor has archived several paintings from the collection and accompanied with a subjective descriptions. In figure 4.5, for example, she elaborates on her appreciation of Monet’s *Still Life with Apples and Grapes*.

**Picasso, Pablo** (Spanish, 1881–1973)
The Old Guitarist, 1903/04
Oil on panel
Helen Birch Bartlett Memorial Collection
gallery 234b

“The old guitarist ancios grandpa guitar, sing and play sad, blue, alone, unhappy the ancient man”

Figure 4.4: Example from *Art Explorer*: Student scrapbook.

**Monet, Claude** (French, 1840–1926)
Still Life with Apples and Grapes, 1880
Oil on canvas
Mr. and Mrs. Martin A. Ryerson Collection
gallery 203

“I love Monet's treatment of the tablecloth and background in this image. The comparison of brushwork between the large, broad background strokes and the tighter brushwork on the fruit makes interesting tension in this still life image.”

Figure 4.5: Example from *Art Explorer*: Museum visitor scrapbook.
The docent and teacher scrapbooks function similarly, but are more preoccupied with research and pedagogy. Pages in these two sections use a slideshow reminiscent format to ask leading questions about each piece and elicit the viewer’s personal interpretation. Site visitors can also examine details by using an interactive function to adjust or enlarge the image.

The construction of a virtual gallery echoes the museum’s presentation model where curators present a visual thesis from which the audience can draw meaning. While Art Explorer lacks interactive comment and discussion capabilities, its features enable users to reposition the conversation in another location. By allowing participants to have control and ownership over these spaces, the museum can extend the potential for dialogue beyond the physical or virtual realm of the institution.

“A good medium of communication permits the participant to seek the level of engagement and understanding appropriate for that individual” (Falk & Dierking, 2000). Likewise, the spaces created within Art Explorer can be constructed from multiple entry points. This inquiry-based dynamic keeps people engaged in meaningful educational experiences because it relies on their internal motivation. Furthermore, this capacity allows people to access a virtual environment that is both personal and situated. In lieu of direct discourse, users can locate themselves within a larger context and encounter a sense of community independent of person-to-person contact. While enabling actual conversation might further facilitate learning in this context, Art Explorer is patently more constructive than a site that lacks its personalization capabilities.
The deYoung Museum/Legion of Honor: Allocating authority

The deYoung Museum in San Francisco, and its partnering institution the Legion of Honor, expands on the previous model by maintaining a similar, yet enhanced setup at their dual purpose website, *The Thinker* (http://www.thinker.org). By this design, *The Thinker* site relinquishes curatorial authority over its collection, and defers to the singularity of the subjective response. There, site visitors are able to explore a vastly more comprehensive collection of art from the two museums than that offered by the Art Institute of Chicago (more than 85,000 images). More organizational features are offered, as well. Under an all-encompassing array of topic headings (including people, places, things, artists, periods, media, styles and themes) galleries can be constructed in an assortment of unique ways, each potentially reflecting the individual user’s distinct personality and interests. Most significant, however, is the option for registered users to make their collections searchable by title, date, username or category by other site visitors. Invited to be their own “virtual curator” (http://www.thinker.org/gallery/index.asp), users can annotate images and order them in a personal gallery for private use or public display. In Figure 4.6, a general search at of the site reveals diverse and sometimes esoteric interests. Each title, emphasized in bold, is hyperlinked to the appropriate virtual gallery within the site’s infrastructure.
<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Gallery Title</th>
<th>Username</th>
<th>Date</th>
<th>Category</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Nudes in sculpture</td>
<td>jcooper</td>
<td>7/9/05</td>
<td>Media</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>African Art</td>
<td>mcstuf9</td>
<td>11/26/05</td>
<td>Things</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Retratos españoles</td>
<td>maria martin</td>
<td>10/5/05</td>
<td>People</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>19th Century Still Life</td>
<td>mcstuf9</td>
<td>11/29/05</td>
<td>Things</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Mortal Combat</td>
<td>joeliu</td>
<td>11/29/05</td>
<td>Themes</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Monkey Pictures!</td>
<td>monkeyboy</td>
<td>2/13/04</td>
<td>Things</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>My Favorite Artists</td>
<td>mtennille</td>
<td>3/24/05</td>
<td>Artists</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Yoshimitsu</td>
<td>shomo009</td>
<td>11/28/05</td>
<td>Cultures</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Old Weird Photographs</td>
<td>artboy</td>
<td>4/14/05</td>
<td>Media</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Figure 4.6: General search results at *The Thinker*.

Most participants choose to forgo commentary and allow their gallery to stand on its own. Some, however, use the space provided to point out details, talk about the subject matter, reflect on the meaning of the piece, and convey their assessment to a specific or general audience. In Figure 4.7, for example, Three 16th century engravings are the impetus for a dialogue about Christianity, compiled for a California church-based youth group (http://search2.famsf.org:8080/my gallery/gallery_viewonly.shtml?gallery=247).
### God in the World

3 works found

Art for Youth-Group at Good Shepherd Lutheran Church in Burlingame

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Artist</th>
<th>Title</th>
<th>Comments</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td><strong>Anonymous</strong></td>
<td>Copy after Dürer's <em>Ecce Homo</em> (from the series, <em>The Large Passion</em>)</td>
<td>Note the fellow searching Jesus' face and lifting his garment out of the mud. So Christ's suffering delivers us from sin.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Albrecht Altdorfer</strong></td>
<td><em>The Madonna With the Blessing Child in a Landscape</em></td>
<td>Note the Madonna and Child blessing nature &quot;as is&quot; along with the artist's interest in modern technology of levers/pulleys.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Andrea Andreani</strong></td>
<td><em>The Christian Hero</em></td>
<td>Note our call to follow Christ into the world, confronting despair and evil. (Serpents surrounding tree: Original sin of pride.)</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Figure 4.7: Example from *My Gallery.*

### The New York MoMA: Guiding exploration

While the Smithsonian's site appears to be targeting the connoisseurs of the art world, MoMA's online community, *Red Studio*, is effectively geared towards younger minds. According to the site, the concept of *Red Studio*, was “developed by MoMA in collaboration with high school students, [and] explores issues and questions raised by teens about modern art, today's working artists, and what goes on behind the scenes at a museum” (http://redstudio.moma.org/about). In many ways, the mission of the site echoes *Eye Level*'s intent to incite...
community dialogue. The straightforward language of Red Studio, however, presents teens and young adults with concepts that might inspire their appreciation of art and introduce new possibilities for self-expression.

Some options offered by the extensive Red Studio site include interactive activities, teen-conducted interviews, articles, and links to further information. Most pertinent to the topic of online communities, however, is the domain’s survey and message board features. These sections allow students to respond to multiple choice and open-ended questions posed by administrators within MoMA’s museum education department. Submissions to the “talk back” (http://redstudio.moma.org/talkback) page go through an approval process before they are posted, but like the Smithsonian site, differences in opinion are encouraged. Figure 4.8, for example, shows that range of opinions received in response to an inquiry regarding the work of Marcel Duchamp. On a separate page, thoughtfully phrased poll questions (http://redstudio.moma.org/polls) allow users to share their aesthetic sensibilities and awareness of personal politics, as well as introduce them to the possibility of pursuing art as a career. Results from one of the survey questions are quantified in figure 4.9.

Unlike the Smithsonian, however, contributors cannot contact each other offsite. This additional limitation has been most likely instituted to protect the safety and privacy of young participants. However, quantified results from this interface can help the museum characterize their audience for the purpose of developing programs that are in touch with their needs and interests.
Bicycle Wheel, by artist Marcel Duchamp, is on view at The Museum of Modern Art. Some people consider this to be a great work of art. What do you think?

"I consider the Bicycle Wheel a piece of art. I think more people would be open to it being called art if they knew the story behind it."  
Christine, 17, Batesville, IN

"I don't know that I would call it a great work of art but it sure is interesting. It's hard to appreciate something that looks so plain at first glance, but you can always find out what it means to you (personally) if you give it time and think about it."  
Cole, 17, Batesville, IN

"...the simplicity of it and that pompous air of superiority that it seems to emit, as if it was saying 'you hate this piece only because you didn't think of it first,' are huge factors, if not all of them, that seem to bother me. I also comprehend that some might argue that it IS art because it leaves you wondering about its meaning, but, for me, it leaves me wondering if the artist had to meet a deadline."  
David, 17, New York, NY

Figure 4.8: Responses to a question posed on Red Studio.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Which career interests you most?</th>
<th>23%</th>
<th>23%</th>
<th>18%</th>
<th>11%</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Artist</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Filmmaker</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Architect</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Critic</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Figure 4.9: Results of a poll posted on Red Studio.

The rationale behind MoMA’s Red Studio is apparent in its design. As issues are raised to elicit contemplation about the nature of art and how it is presented, readers are challenged to form their own value judgments, and not simply accept the knowledge the museum has constructed. The definition of art itself, as well as what makes someone an artist or art authority, is continually called into question. Using Red Studio, MoMA motivates young people to think deeply about what they believe, and why. In this manner, the site affirms each user’s subjectivity and encourages his or her contribution to the museum community.
Small museums: Issues, economics, and opportunities

While education, communication and public relations vehicles are important to a museum’s success, they may be perceived as secondary to basic operating needs like human resources, public utilities, maintenance and security. Operating budgets may place limits on an institution’s ability to develop compelling, educational and accessible web resources (Filippini-Fantoni & Bowen, 2005). All of the museums I have identified as forerunners in the use of online communities had the resources to make huge institutional investments. But if smaller agencies are to develop instruments comparable to the institutions discussed in Chapter Four, they must secure and allocate resources accordingly.

Typically, for a museum to be able to develop and sustain a workable and effective virtual interface, it must either employ an individual or team that possesses a high degree of competency with the technology, or endure the persistent expense of outside service providers. For many institutions, this option is not considered feasible. Use of online communities, however, can provide an inexpensive, user-friendly alternative. Original templates can either be outsourced to an expert site developer, embedded with support from a separate host domain, or downloaded for little to no cost from online publishing services such as Moveable Type (http://www.sixapart.com/movabletype), 21Publish (http://www.21publish.com), Wordpress (http://www.wordpress.org) or TypePad (http://www.sixapart.com/typepad). While it may take some time for designated museum staff members to familiarize themselves with a system, there are many forms of online content management software that do not require
specific knowledge of programming to customize the space or generate content. If necessary, there is also an abundance of detailed problem solving strategies that can be obtained from online resources.

Investing in the development of compelling and educational multimedia resources can help small museums acquire greater visibility in their communities by helping them cultivate a reputation of competency and experience (Filippini-Fantoni & Bowen, 2005). While online communities are currently the charge of larger institutions with global appeal, they are also well suited for local engagement. Locally associated online communities have been cited as venues that promote involvement in neighborhood activities (Horrigan, 2001). Presumably, the social connections between users in the same vicinity will be easier to initiate and maintain due the local sharing of knowledge and experience.

**A sampler of popular online communities**

As an extension of my discussion of online museum communities and virtual interactivities, I will now explore independent online journaling and blogging communities, social networking sites, and other virtual environments that might contribute to an understanding of Internet possibilities in the museum. While these sites are designed for purposes outside of my focus, there are certain key elements that can be adapted and incorporated into my online museum community prototype.

*Livejournal, MySpace, Wikipedia,* and *Flickr* are four online communities that have informed the development of my model. Collectively, these sites are
significant because they provide egalitarian opportunities for engagement by affording users equal rights and privileges (provided they abide by the terms of service). Often, these domains illustrate an aspect of cultural evolution where one mind transmits information to another in a continually replicating sequence, or “meme” (Dawkins, from http://www.en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Meme, 2006). Like genes, memes are mutable units of information that can develop and expand with each new application. In the following sites, memes are employed by users to extend dialogue, construct knowledge, and inspire creativity. While all of these sites overlap in aspects of design and function, I have selectively drawn out and will discuss their most notable capabilities; attributes that could be applied in the development of online museum education initiatives.

**Livejournal.com: Confirming identities**

“Our sense of self, our intimate being – are they not shaped by means of expression and communication?” (Lejuene, in Sorapure, 2003, p.3)

Today, there are a vast amount of journaling communities on the World Wide Web. For the sake of clarity, I have chosen *Livejournal* to illustrate their use. Established in 1999, *Livejournal* (http://www.livejournal.com) is one of the oldest, most widely used domains of its kind, and is highly recognized for its exceptional community building capabilities (Chonin, 2005). The following discussion will situate general online journal communities by analyzing them against the standard of *Livejournal*.

Kitzmann (2003) asserts that diaries are “important as sites of memory [and] essential for constructing and preserving both individual and cultural
identity” (p. 53). Traditionally private, this method of autobiographical storytelling experienced a renaissance as a public entity via the World Wide Web. Writing in an online journal is a form of personal reflection where users can construct, filter and edit the texts that represent them. Such spaces can thereby be read as assertions of identity, and arguments for the importance of an individual's life (McNeil, 2003, p. 26). In empowering users to express themselves publicly, the online journal validates their contribution to a collective identity of citizens.

The experiences one accrues through the use of weblogs and online journals can be further enhanced by an individual's web-based affiliations. In the context of Livejournal, users have the option to perform interest or location based searches, aggregate and peruse personally designated journals, join online communities, leave comments, engage in discussion, or even converge with other users with in real life. These opportunities classify the once private diary as a meeting place and starting point for further discourse among previously disconnected readers (McNeil, 2003). Here, users can align their values, goals and discourse with a community to construct an identity that reflects their association with that group (Ivanic, in McNeil, 2003).

A significant aspect of museums' reputation is the role they play in the construction of identity (Newman & McClean, 2000). By providing vehicles for personal expression, institutions can enable the individual to negotiate a sense of identity within a citizen collective (Newman & McClean, 2000). As an interface that authorizes individual voices, online journal and weblog communities provide
insight as to how that capacity might be achieved through the implementation of an online museum community.

MySpace: Defining social networks

On the enormously popular social networking site MySpace (http://www.myspace.com), each individual’s representation occupies a “virtual bedroom” (Reid-Walsh & Mitchell, 2004, p. 173). Just as one might decorate their walls at home, users can embellish their space by choosing from an unlimited array of design elements, colors, type styles and compositions. Inspired by the interests, personality and characteristics of the user, this “idealized space” (p. 173) can be imbued with biographical information, journal entries, interest lists, personal photographs, and media. These features allow users to personalize the space from which they initiate dialogue. As established, the capacity to situate oneself in a familiar context makes an environment more conducive to interaction.

While these spaces share some of the same features as Livejournal, its interface is more inclusive of one’s personal sphere of social connections, and thereby places greater emphasis on the conservation and extension of these relationships. Specifically, each individual’s profile incorporates an expanding section of designated contacts that consists of thumbnail-sized photos and names that link to their respective spaces. As each profile is connected to another, these pages visibly reconstruct a user’s network of online and offline social and professional associations. Social networking sites like MySpace can provide some insight as to how online museum communities might help institutions facilitate interaction.
Flickr: Democratic indexing

*Flickr* (http://www.flickr.com) is a site that advertises itself as way to store, search, sort, and share photos (*Flickr*, 2006). However, this description fails to encapsulate the site’s collaborative potential. A more in-depth review of the site reveals a range of unique organizational systems.

As a virtual portfolio or gallery, *Flickr’s* interface is enhanced by its exchange capabilities. On the site, professionals, amateurs and enthusiasts alike can exchange ideas with other users and receive feedback on their work. Registered members can also leave comments beneath an image or add virtual mouse-over notes directly on its surface. Public and private view settings can be applied to individual images and browsing sets according to user discretion. Site registration also entitles users to create individual image filters for friends, family, acquaintances, and other site contacts so that they have control over who can see which collections. Users can also join groups that specialize in certain subjects and techniques in order to share creative work and interact with like-minded people. Many bloggers also use *Flickr* as their primary image hosting service.

One particularly notable characteristic of *Flickr* is its unique tagging capability. Text based tags, which help users organize individual and shared content, can be selectively applied within the site in order to construct easily navigable clusters of associated images and themes. Since these tags are user-defined, their categories reflect the familiar, shared, and accessible vocabulary of the site’s population, or “folksonomy” (Wright in, Hidderly & Rafferty, 2006).
Flickr’s democratic indexing approach differs from traditional authoritative models because it considers that community members play an active role in determining meaning by constructing their own interpretation of images (Hidderly & Rafferty, 2006).

Despite their potential, these unmediated retrieval systems have limitations (Wright, 2004). Difficulties with the precision and recall capacities of independently applied tags can yield search results that are irrelevant or inappropriate—especially if the language used by participants is too general or specific, false, codified, or otherwise ambiguous (Hidderly & Rafferty, 2006). Furthermore, “purely democratic classifications could lead to groupthink behavior which favors conformity and marginalizes dissent” (Wright, 2004b).

Institutions that require more exacting indexing approaches may prefer a system that allows for individual liberties yet improves retrieval performance. Wright (2004), for example, suggests a scenario where users could freely create, adopt or reject terms stored in a distributed repository administered by a representative authority. Such a system may serve to normalize terms by identifying and mapping their semantic relationship (Wright, 2004).

**Wikipedia: Constructing a collective base of knowledge**

In many online environments, the principle of self-governance is well articulated. Sites like Wikipedia (http://wikipedia.org) demonstrate how a community of individuals can edit and construct mutable educational articles by allowing each other to submit information to a public consensus that either
accepts or rejects its veracity. The purported accuracy of ‘wiki\textsuperscript{2} sites has been widely disputed, since the articles within can be written or edited by anyone with access, regardless of subject expertise (Goldsborough, 2006). One could argue, then, that virtual communities are better suited towards exchanging interpretations than they are towards presenting factual information. In such situations, deployment of the intelligence, knowledge and experiential acumen of individual members of the audience is key. This insight is significant because it is not so much taken from researched accounts as it is drawn from personal experience.

Towards the development of an online museum community

The examples of online museum education initiatives discussed in this chapter have focused on key principles that govern their implementation. Each site’s schematic illustrates a different way to approach online developments that engages constituents in communal functions. These approaches involved enabling input, sustaining dialogue, connecting disciplines, providing spaces, allocating authority, guiding exploration, confirming identities, defining social networks, democratizing ontologies, and constructing collective bases of knowledge.

Together, these sites demonstrate how Internet communication technologies may be employed in ways that reinforce a user’s commitment to the museum by allowing them to define their own spaces outside museum walls. The

\textsuperscript{2} A wiki is “a type of website that allows users to easily add, remove, or otherwise edit and change some available content, sometimes without the need for registration” (http://wikipedia.org).
strategies described previously gave audience members license to customize their encounters with the museum and its collections and initiate informal engagements with others. By retaining their autonomy in a cooperative scenario, users exercised a sense of freedom and control characteristic of online communication in general (Markham, 1998). This capacity, developed as individual contributors coalesced into a community of learners, is essential towards engagement in learning processes (Khourey–Bowers, 2005).

Another means by which the outlined methods supported exchange was by focusing the reader's attentions to social bonds and interdisciplinary connections. These features might be refined in ways that increase interest in museum programs and operations; strengthening community affiliations, institutional partnerships, and awareness of cultural trends. To capitalize on these qualities, online museum communities might seek out ways to facilitate person-to-person dialogue, network with compatible institutions, and respond to current events. In this manner, the sites described show how online communities might be used to encourage civic engagement.

My analysis of popular online communities and social networking sites detailed in this chapter suggests how these public forums could be used to build webs of artists, activists, students, experts and cultural enthusiasts. The framework provided by these sites support individuals in organizing, sustaining, networking, responding, and ultimately advancing the creative life of society; advancements that are seemingly independent of any institutional authority.
How these sites respectively engage audiences by assigning them the power to effect outcomes is a notable consideration.

In addition to increasing cultural capital, audience members may also influence institutional policies — supporting forms of progress that might only transpire from their unconventional assessment of museum operations. “If a physically based virtual community with forums to foster communication between members exists, then over time, networks, norms, and trust will be strengthened and social capital in this community will increase” (Blanchard & Horan, 1998, p. 13).

In the following chapter, I will utilize the combined theories, researched sites and analyses I have shared thus far in constructing and beta testing a prototypical online museum community. After presentation of this model site and users’ activities within it, I will discuss its usefulness and make recommendations that might be of use to the field of museum education.
CHAPTER 5

RESEARCH PROJECT DESIGN

In the following discussion, I will describe the rationale for designing my online museum prototype, recruiting participants, and developing survey materials. Furthermore, I will approach the project’s development using principles accrued from my collective assessment. This prototype will respond to my earlier discussions of associated theories, published research reports, and qualitative analyses of extant online communities. This information also provides a context for my account of survey data and participants’ site reception comments that are detailed in the next chapter.

Site development

Before I discuss the general structure and principles that framed my development of the model site, there are a few qualifications to address. First, as I informed my research participants, this project was not an attempt to create a fully operational online environment as much as it is as a simulation of a generic site. True communities grow and develop over time through mutual contacts and
word of mouth; they cannot be forcibly imposed. Likewise, the space I designed was not expected to reach fruition in the brief span of time allotted for its implementation. What I did anticipate, however, was an approximation of how such a site might be utilized and received. Through analysis of participant responses and interactions within the site, I expected to be able to assess the site’s effectiveness as an educational tool.

I decided to utilize the traditional weblog format, best described in the Smithsonian’s Eyelevel (http://www.eyelevel.si.edu) site, as the nucleus of my site. This arrangement was chosen because I felt that it was vital for me, as moderator, to initiate the opening discussions and establish the full range of site objectives. Furthermore, I felt that a chain of dialogue would not proceed as readily without the initial support of an informed intermediary. In general, however, I maintained a hands-off attitude so as not to interrupt the natural flow of dialogue or intrusively insert my own opinions.

While I had experience in the design of virtual environments, I was not adequately versed in the particular database driven applications that were required to build an operational infrastructure. As an alternative, I incorporated the use of an online community management service to facilitate the site’s construction. After comparing several cooperative publishing applications’ structures and suitability, I decided to utilize the 21Publish service. With customizable features, templates, functions, design elements, and privacy settings, the service provided a centralized hub from which to build, manage, and deploy an autonomous community network (http://www.21Publish.com, 2006).
The fundamental structure of the site featured aspects that would be pivotal in the construction of an online museum community. In addition to the maintainer-led weblog, there was also a space on the home page reserved for hyperlinks to other relevant resources, a page for general site info and contact information, and another page for administrative and technical support. Additionally the site also hosted spaces for individually maintained and personalized member blogs (accessible from a drop-down list on the homepage) where users could post their own links, images, contacts and journal entries.

Since I was not affiliated with any museum institution, I used the city of Columbus, Ohio as a site giving rise to the range of topics covered in the weblog entries. I entitled my community “614” in reference to Columbus, Ohio’s local area code, and added the concise descriptor – “Art in Central Ohio”– to denote the subjects on which I had planned to concentrate. Accordingly, the topics I chose to include addressed not only a variety of local museums and exhibitions, but also involved issues relevant to the local art scene. This pragmatic approach allowed me to attend to current events and opportunities, and report on them in an informal, first person voice. As per the Smithsonian site, multiple topics and standpoints were presented to the audience so that they would have a better grasp of the art world at large. Beyond my unilateral perspective or that of a hypothetical sponsoring institution, this approach appealed to a broader range of constituents.

While this site is described as a model, it does not purport to be the quintessential solution for the development of an online museum community.
Rather, the site represents an attempt to construct an environment that could be adapted in most any hypothetical cultural situation. In this specific approach, using the city of Columbus as the foundation for discussion both involved multiple museum audiences and focused participants’ engagement within their local communities. My site represents one possible application of research, a location-based initiative that was unencumbered by any sponsoring institution.

**Recruitment and grounding of participants**

In total, eleven subjects were enrolled in the study. Selections were based on potential participants’ already being actively engaged in weblogs and/or online communities and demonstrating an interest in contemporary art. The self-identified participants were recruited from posts and bulletins placed on popular online social networking and weblog communities of which I was already a long-standing member. As an established presence in these communities, I felt that the users would be more willing to assist than if I appeared to be an interloper with dubious motivations. Since all of the participants were recruited from online communities, they could reasonably represent a cross-section of the users of such sites, and not the general population.

While the topics I chose were specifically related to Columbus, they were also written to be meaningful to audiences outside of the community. Most of my recruiting for this project was focused on the central Ohio area, however, there were no stipulations regarding a participant’s place of residence. Some of those who responded were therefore from other parts of the country.
Initial recruitment took place over email, so that potential participants could read over research protocol materials and consent forms at their leisure with no outside pressure. From there, they could contact me via email or telephone to ask questions and clarify what their participation would entail. Once the consent forms were reviewed, signed and returned, I simultaneously sent participants the URL to the site via a blind cc mass email. An introductory post on the site provided preparatory information and a link to the first survey.

In the site’s introductory post, I reiterated the site’s purpose, provided the participants with access codes and use instructions, and clarified the procedures they were to follow. Once the entry was published, participants were given two weeks to create an account, acquaint themselves with the site, or contact me for troubleshooting any problems encountered. Figure 5.1 on the following page displays the introductory entry’s verbatim content.

Each contributor was asked to indicate his or her general location and choose an anonymous identity to be used exclusively on the site. The purpose of this appeal was to instill a sense of group familiarity amongst users and to allow each person to establish a sense of identity without divulging personally revealing information. Once everyone’s presence was established, participants’ were allowed to browse the site at their leisure and conduct interactions as they would under normal online circumstances. In light of the project’s limited duration, there were features (such as the individually maintained member blogs) that I expected would remain underdeveloped. As expected, most participants did not have the occasion to make much use of these extended
opportunities. Nonetheless, I will call attention to these features and will discuss how they might serve users.

Welcome!
As you can see, the site is finally up... thanks again to all of you for being so responsive over the last few weeks. Before we get started, I just wanted to elaborate on a few things.

As you may already know, this site is part of my thesis project about how museums and their audiences might benefit from using online communities. For the record, this site is not so much a fully functional online community as it is a simulation. I realize from my own experience that true communities take time to grow and can’t be built overnight. Instead, I’m interested in seeing how people use and interpret the site as is. Your participation will help me assess how well the design works and where improvements can be made.

I won’t be posting any entries this week because I wanted to give you guys some time to sign up and get acquainted with the site. When the first post goes up the week of July 17th, I’ll send you all a reminder email. A new post will be put up each day around noon, for the duration of one week. After that, I shouldn’t be bothering you with any more emails. However, you are always welcome to contact me if you have any other questions.

In the posts, I will talk about various exhibits and items of interest going on around Columbus, Ohio. I know that some of you aren’t from the area, but I’ve tried my best to make the information accessible to everyone. Most of the posts contain a question or two to which you can respond. However, please feel free to comment about anything that’s related to the topic, even if it’s not addressing the question. I don’t expect you to feel compelled to answer every post, but hopefully I’ll hear from you enough to know that you’re reading. Differences in opinion are encouraged. If you have a chance, check out what the other participants are contributing.

In order to see and comment on the posts, you’ll need to take a couple minutes to make an account. So you know, the accounts are free, and you can delete them at any time. Each person who signs up gets his/her own personal blog space to play around with, but given the duration of the project I don’t expect you guys to do anything with that. Also, when you sign up, it will ask you if you want to receive the newsletter. I honestly don’t think I’ll be using that feature, but please leave that checked just in case.

Before you get started, please go here to take a short survey about your use of online communities. The first half of the survey addresses journal communities, and the second half addresses social networking communities. If you’re involved with one type and not the other, just skip the portion that doesn’t apply to you. This is the first of two surveys I’ve created for this project. The other will be a short questionnaire I’ll administer at the end.

Whew... I hope I didn’t lose you. I promise the other posts won’t be this long-winded. I just want to make sure I address everything. Please feel free to email me if you have any questions.

Back to entries Comment on this entry

Figure 5.1: Introductory entry.
With the exception of the introductory post, the site implementation process took place from Monday through Friday, July 17 – 21, 2006. During this time, I posted a new entry each day. I also allowed participants two additional weeks to make their contributions after my final entry had been published.

Surveys

As earlier described, there were two surveys that I administered in the context of this study. Responses to the initial survey were used to assess the participants' existing Internet behaviors and engagement with online journal and social networking communities. Responses to the concluding survey were used to explore participants' perceptions of the prototype. Both surveys were administered online.

The preliminary survey hyperlinked to the community's introductory post followed my earlier distribution of a demographic profile questionnaire that documented participants' age, gender, residence and ethnicity. Once completed, participants proceeded to the series of questions concerning their use of online communities. For clarity, I divided these questions into two parts; the first part addressing the participant's purported use of online journaling/blogging sites, and the second their use of social/creative networking communities. Participants were advised to ignore those questions that were not relevant (in the event that they did not utilize both formats).

As a whole, the information gathered from the initial survey and demographic form was designed to help me determine which aspects of an online
community would most deeply engage participants’ involvement, how often they utilized these features, and to what end. Collected results were then used to help assess which components of my model the participants might find most valuable.

Following the project’s closure, an exit survey was administered. Participants were able to access this survey from a link provided in my final post. This survey was used to help me assess the effectiveness of the online community prototype in terms of facilitating user engagement. Figures 5.2 through 5.5 that follow delineate the contents of each survey.

In the next chapter, I will review the participants’ responses to the following surveys. I will also evaluate the project’s design by analyzing their employment and reception of the prototype.

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**Survey of Internet habits**

Please fill out this survey to provide us with some information about your online habits. If a section of the survey does not pertain to you, just skip it.

For the purposes of this survey, **online journaling/blogging communities** include such domains as Livejournal.com, Blogspot.com, Yahoo 360º or Xanga.com. **Social networking communities** include domains like Myspace.com, Orkut.com or Friendster.com. **Creative networking communities** include such domains as Deviantart.com, Youtube.com and Flickr.com. These lists are representative, not exhaustive.

If you are not interested in completing this survey, you may opt out at any time. Please contact Melissa Bontempo at bontempo.9@osu.edu if you have any problems or concerns.

| 1. Age   | ________ |
| 2. Location | City _______________________________ | State ________ |
| 3. Sex | □ male □ female |
| 4. Ethnicity | □ African-American/black □ Native American |
|  | □ Asian American □ other |
|  | □ Caucasian □ decline to answer |
|  | □ Hispanic/Latino |

Figure 5.2: Demographic profile survey.
Part I: Online journal/Blogging communities

1. Do you maintain an online journal/blog?  yes  no
   1a. If yes, how many?

2. How many online journals/blogs do you read regularly?
   None  1-5  6-10  11-25  25-50  50+

3. Do you participate in any online communities? If so, how many?
   None  1-5  6-10  11-25  25-50  50+

4. How active is your participation in online communities?
   • I read frequently sometimes rarely never
   • I post entries frequently sometimes rarely never
   • I respond to entries frequently sometimes rarely never
   • I respond to threads frequently sometimes rarely never
   • I maintain/moderate frequently sometimes rarely never

5. How often do you use your online journal/blog to initiate, develop or maintain offline relationships?  frequently  sometimes  rarely  never

6. What would you say are the main reasons you participate in online journal or blogging communities? Check any that apply.
   To share personal thoughts, opinions or narratives.
   To share your creative work for critique, interpretation or appreciation.
   To obtain news, reviews or other information.
   To keep abreast on cultural trends.
   To share or receive advice and/or support.
   To generate criticism, commentary or analysis.
   To engage in discourse or debate.
   To stay informed about events and/or activities.
   To network with others in your field.
   To keep in touch with friends.
   To meet new people.

Figure 5.3: Survey of Internet habits; Part I.
Part II: Social/creative networking communities

1. Do you maintain a profile on a social or creative networking site?
   yes  no

2. If so, how often do you utilize the following features of social networking sites?

   • I log into my profile. frequently sometimes rarely never
   • I post public journal entries. frequently sometimes rarely never
   • I use the calendar/to-do list. frequently sometimes rarely never
   • I send messages. frequently sometimes rarely never
   • I post bulletins or classifieds. frequently sometimes rarely never
   • I post topics in communities. frequently sometimes rarely never
   • I post comments on profile pages, blog posts, images and/or videos.
     frequently sometimes rarely never
   • I maintain or moderate an active online community.
     frequently sometimes rarely never
   • I respond to community postings, bulletins or classifieds
     frequently sometimes rarely never

3. For what reasons do you maintain an online profile? Check any that apply.
   To meet new people.
   To keep in touch with friends and acquaintances.
   To network with others in your field.
   To display, share, promote or disseminate your own creative work.
   To stay informed about shows, exhibitions, and other cultural events.
   To discover new music, film, art, literature, cultural trends, etc.

4. How often do you use your online profile to initiate, develop or maintain offline relationships?
   frequently sometimes rarely never

5. How often do your online social networking activities contribute to your attendance at shows, exhibitions, and other cultural events?
   frequently sometimes rarely never

Figure 5.4: Survey of Internet habits; Part II.
Exit survey: Response to online community prototype

Please fill out this survey to provide us with some information about your response to the online community prototype.

If you are not interested in completing this survey, you may remove yourself at any time without penalty. Please contact Melissa Bontempo at bontempo.9@osu.edu if you have any problems or concerns.

| 1. Did this experience increase your knowledge of contemporary art? | yes | no |
| 2. Did your experience with the site make you more aware of/interested in shows, exhibitions, or other cultural events in your area? | yes | no |
| 3. Do you feel that you are more likely now to attend shows, exhibitions or other cultural events as a result of this experience? | yes | no |
| 4. Do you feel that you were able to establish a rapport with the other site users? | yes | no |
| 5. Did you feel comfortable using the site to share your opinion? | yes | no |
| 6. Did you do additional research on the topics presented? | yes | no |
| 7. Do you encounter any issues or problems with using the site? | yes | no |
| If yes, please elaborate. | |

| 8. Do you have any other suggestions for improving the site? | yes | no |
| If yes, please elaborate. | |

| 9. Any other comments you’d like to share? | yes | no |
| If yes, please elaborate. | |

Figure 5.5: Exit survey.
The data I have accumulated throughout this project will be presented here in the order that instruments were delivered to the research participants via the 614 community site. First, I will describe my subjects’ demographics, and then I will analyze user expectations, reviewing their aggregated response to the preliminary survey questions. Next, I will systematically display the original content of each post, followed by participants’ comments. Each series of subjects’ responses will be discussed, and the original posts assessed for their impact in stimulating user engagement. Finally, I will examine participant exit surveys to determine my participants’ overall appraisal of the prototype. Considering all this information, I will interpret my findings and make recommendations for further research and site development.

Demographics

The project began with eleven participants, including three who removed themselves from the study prior to its completion, and one who did not complete
the initial survey. Of the total participants, six were male and five were female, with ages ranging from twenty to forty years. The average participant was in their late twenties. Nine of the participants were White, one was Black, and one was Asian American. Eight of the participants lived in Columbus, Ohio, and the remaining three were widely dispersed across the United States, residing in Chicago, New York, and Durham, North Carolina.

**Internet habits**

The participants that responded to my online request for assistance were already involved in other online communities. Their responses to my initial survey affirmed that most were, to some extent, engaged in online journaling/blogging communities, social networking communities, or both.

The first part of my preliminary survey focused on participants’ use of online journaling/blogging sites. Of the eight participants that maintained a journal/blog in the context of an online community, most were slightly more inclined towards reading others’ content than producing it. In general, these participants were about as apt to post entries of their own as they were to comment on the posts of other users. On average, most reported that they were more inclined to read personal journals than communities. All of the users followed between one and five communities on a regular basis. About half of the respondents noted that they used their online journal to help maintain offline

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3 Personal online journals are typically understood as being maintained by an individual user, as opposed to online communities, which allow collaborative posting access.
relationships. Only one of the participants had previously assumed the role of a maintainer or moderator.

In response to question 6 (Part I) of the initial survey, most of the participants identified several reasons why they were drawn to participate in online journal/blogging communities. These responses seem to support my earlier assumption that the study volunteers would be more likely to read content than to contribute their own. In general, the participants indicated that they used online journal/blogging communities as a way to stay informed about a variety of topics and events. The following series of responses also suggest a general interest in using their online presence as a tool to communicate and socialize, primarily with people they already know. Aggregated results to the survey question under discussion are listed in figure 6.1 below.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>What are the main reasons you participate in online journal or blogging communities?</th>
<th></th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>To share personal thoughts, opinions or narratives.</td>
<td>86%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>To obtain news, reviews or other information.</td>
<td>86%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>To keep abreast on cultural trends.</td>
<td>86%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>To engage in discussion or debate.</td>
<td>86%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>To keep in touch with friends.</td>
<td>86%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>To stay informed about events and/or activities.</td>
<td>71%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>To share or receive advice and/or support.</td>
<td>71%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>To meet new people.</td>
<td>57%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>To generate criticism, commentary or analysis.</td>
<td>43%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>To network with others in your field.</td>
<td>29%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>To share creative work for critique, interpretation or appreciation.</td>
<td>14%</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Figure 6.1: Response to question 6 in Part I of the initial survey.
In Part II of the survey, seven of the participants specified that they maintained an online profile on a social networking site that they access with varying frequency. The features the participants indicated they used most often are those that allow one-to-one communication between registered site users, such as posting comments on profile pages and sending private messages. In general, the participants showed significantly less interest in using features that allow them to broadcast content to multiple users, such as bulletins, communities, and classifieds. Most of the participants responded that they use their profile to help initiate, develop or maintain their relationships. Three replied that their online social networking activities contribute to their attendance at shows, exhibitions, or other cultural events.

In question 3 (Part II) of the initial survey, users were asked to identify their reasons for maintaining an online profile. All seven active users indicated that they used their profile to keep in touch with friends and acquaintances. Most of these users also expressed an interest in using their online presence to stay informed about cultural events and trends. About half of the participants indicated that they use their profile to meet new people, network, or host their own creative output. Aggregated results to the survey question under discussion are listed in figure 6.2 on the following page.
For what reasons do you maintain an online profile?

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Reason</th>
<th>Percentage</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>To keep in touch with friends and acquaintances.</td>
<td>100%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>To stay informed about shows, exhibitions, and other cultural events.</td>
<td>83%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>To discover new music, film, art, literature, cultural trends, etc.</td>
<td>83%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>To network with others in your field.</td>
<td>67%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>To display, share, promote or disseminate your own creative work.</td>
<td>50%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>To meet new people.</td>
<td>50%</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Figure 6.2: Response to question 6 in Part I of the initial survey.

The participants' motivations for accessing communities like those referenced in the survey are presumably different from the reasons why one might be drawn to the use of online museum communities. However, results from this survey may offer a glimpse into my participants' overall use, reception, and expectations of online communities. Furthermore, the assessment of participant response may provide a basis for comparison when aligned with their use of the prototype.

Site implementation and response

The bulk of the posts displayed herein have several unifying characteristics. First, they all present content for consideration. Second, they all utilize resources from other Internet sites to encourage further community member investigation into the topics and themes addressed. Finally, each article concludes with questions that implore participants to submit commentary, interpretation, personal narratives, or supporting information about the topic at hand. The following articles have been scaled down in physical size from their
original format and represented to accommodate the spatial restrictions of the thesis format. Boldface type indicates that the original text had been hyperlinked to another online location that I will subsequently discuss in the description.

**First entry: Heroic Works**

In the first official community entry, entitled *Heroic Works*, I elaborated on two consecutive exhibitions at the Columbus Museum of Art. One collection, Richard Avedon’s *In the American West*, was currently in rotation, while the other, Kehinde Wiley’s *Columbus*, was scheduled for exhibition a later date. For both artists, I provided basic background information and hyperlinks to sites that displayed more examples of their work. I used these two exhibitions to initiate a conversation about the multiple interpretations and judgments that can be extracted from a single artist’s work, or the side-by-side comparison of two artists that explore distinctive, yet comparable, styles and themes.

Of the key entries posted in the 614 community, *Heroic Works* received the most responses. While the entry’s reception may have been influenced by its chronological position, the discussions are worthy of note. Since two artists were presented, many of the participants expressed or implied their inclination for one over the other. Others explored the works further by interpreting a collection or providing supporting information. A few also ventured to compare the two artist’s approaches, with insightful commentary.

Their discussion of the two artists, and the entry itself, can be reviewed in figures 6.3 and 6.4 on the following page. In the body of the entry, boldface text directed the participants to the emphasized topic’s official website. The images
were hyperlinked to an informative video (http://www.nytimes.com, 2006) and an online gallery (http://www.deitch.com, 2006), respectively.

### Heroic Works

**In the American West: Richard Avedon; 6/23 - 9/17/2006**

**Columbus: Kehinde Wiley; 9/9/2006 - 1/7/2007**

Some might argue that the term 'heroic' is a bit overused these days. However, it’s a word you might hear in conjunction with the work of both Kehinde Wiley and Richard Avedon. This year, a collection of larger-than-life portraits by each artist will be on display at the Columbus Museum of Art. Avedon’s exhibition is going on now, while Wiley’s debuts in September.

**Richard Avedon** (1923-2004) is most probably most noted for his fashion photography. For years he worked with such magazines as *Harper’s Bazaar* and *Vogue*, taking striking photos of public figures. His *In the American West* series (1979) may be a departure in theme, but his signature style prevails. In these photographs, a stockyard worker, an unemployed drifter, a teenage fairgoer, or a truck driver receives the same treatment as a movie star.

*Roberto Lopez, Oil Field Worker; Lyons, Texas* (1980) by Richard Avedon.
Click on the photo to see a brief video by Mr. Kimmelman of the New York Times.

According to Art in America magazine: Los Angeles artist **Kehinde Wiley** “renders casually dressed African-American men standing in the postures of prophets, saints and angels, [inserting them] in a painting tradition that has typically omitted them or relegated them to peripheral positions.” In doing so, Wiley hopes to make a statement about how black men are portrayed in media and culture. Interesting note: Wiley hand picked all the models for this particular collection from the streets of Columbus, and based their poses after old master paintings in the museum’s collection.

Both of these collections are open to interpretation. In the video linked above, the narrator mentions how some people view Avedon’s photographs as exploitative, while others see them as reverential. Likewise, while Wiley’s subjects exhibit exaggerated masculinity, he often titles them with feminine names and surrounds them with a florid backdrop. I know these images don’t do justice to seeing the art in person, but just looking at the links, what’s your take?

**Passing/Posing: Female Prophet Anne, Who Observes the Presentation of Jesus on the Temple** (2003) by Kehinde Wiley. Click on the image to view a gallery of Wiley’s work.

Back to entries  Comment on this entry

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Figure 6.3: First entry.
7 Comments

**disco** on July 17, 2006 at 1:12 PM
If Kehinde Wiley was simply portraying african americans in situations that are outside of the common negative stereotypes I don't think it would be very controversial, or as interesting. The fact that they are wearing hip-hop style street clothes contributes to the viewers need to consider and interpret what they're seeing. If the artist put white guys in business suits or tennis sweaters in there you'd get a lot of the same class of effect, in my opinion.

**brandienaked** on July 17, 2006 at 3:10 PM
I think that Wiley's work could be commentary on how some black folks tend to worship common people and entertainers, rather than typical WASP gods. The words of Notorious BIG can sometimes be much more meaningful and inspirational to a kid on the streets than the words of Matthew or St. Theresa, thus, perhaps the treatment of these cultural icons as saints isn't so far from reality. Perhaps it's causing us white people to step back and reevaluate our standards for sainthood and prophets.

**smweaver** on July 20, 2006 at 7:28 AM
Both artists seem to relish the juxtaposition of a disenfranchised person with the glamorous trappings of the upper class. I'm not sure that either caused me to reevaluate anything, except how sad it is that we are all striving for some type of privilege.

**kraftastic** on July 22, 2006 at 4:18 PM
now I have to go to the museum to see this. I've heard good things about the first exhibit, people saying it was a 'must see'. Out of the two, I prefer Avedon's. It's either because it's more traditional, or because the close ups are a little more visible on my computer.

**anjalig** on July 23, 2006 at 1:13 AM
Both artists are subverting representations of people who are generally portrayed as subordinate in society, in this way privileging the status of "the other." By doing this, they are giving power to those that have been traditionally disenfranchised.

**pgdurica** on July 24, 2006 at 1:57 PM
Shortly before his death, Avedon produced a wonderful series of portraits taken at both the Democratic and Republican Conventions in 2004. Some of these pictures later appeared in the NEW YORKER. Like the photographs posted here, the convention portraits represent a broad spectrum of American personalities in a style that grants equal respect to all—a sort of pictorial equivalent of the literary approach taken by Studs Terkel in DIVISION STREET: AMERICA.

**brownsugar** on July 30, 2006 at 11:14 PM
I've been meaning to check out the Avedon exhibit. I had never heard of Kehinde Wiley before. I'll have to see the work in person before I can reach an opinion on it. I don't really care for what I saw in the thumbnails.

Figure 6.4: First entry discussion.
Interpretation of first entry responses

My analysis of community discussions centered on the work of Avedon and Wiley yielded some prominent and pervasive themes. Many of the respondents appeared to be stimulated by issues of power, class, identity, and representation. The first two responses, from “disco” and “brandienaked,” for example, were particularly focused on the assessment of Wiley’s work; specifically, its depiction of Blacks/African-Americans. In the initial comment, disco expounded on certain qualities of Wiley’s collection that he felt contributed to the viewers’ need to “consider and interpret what they’re seeing.” Brandienaked proffered a supplementary consideration by noting how some aspects of Wiley’s work might challenge audiences to reevaluate the standards they use to determine where they find meaning or inspiration.

Two of the participants chose to draw a distinction between the artists’ collections to identify their correlative aspects. Both “smweaver” and “anjalg” constructed an analogy between the work of Wiley and Avedon that alluded to the work’ supposed neo-Marxist ideologies. For example, smweaver focused on the artists’ “juxtaposition of a disenfranchised person with the glamorous trappings of the upper class.” Similarly, anjalig called attention to the subverted representations of people who are generally portrayed as subordinate. Despite their parallel interpretations, the two respondents emerged with two different conclusions. While anjalig saw the works as a form of empowerment, smweaver was disconcerted by the perceived artist’s struggle for privilege.
“Pgdurica” approached the discussion somewhat differently from the other participants by contributing information derived from prior knowledge. By mention of another series of portraits by Avedon, he corroborated the assessment of his work as representative of “a broad spectrum of American personalities in a style that grants equal respect to all.” The participant also added mention of the literary work *Division Street: America*, by Studs Terkel, whose approach might be considered equivalent to Avedon’s depiction.

The remaining participants, “kraftastic” and “brownsugar” made statements that indicated their preference for Avedon’s work based on what they could perceive from the digitized reproductions of both artists’ work. The opinions of these two users suggest an inclination for names they found more immediately recognizable.

Participants multiple interpretations’ and appropriate connections seemingly substantiates the strength of this entry. Furthermore, the entry allowed participants to apply their personal context to the discussion and communicate their own value judgments.

**Second entry: The Thurber House**

A challenge I encountered when composing entries for the 614 community was in how to maintain a somewhat objective position without forfeiting my own voice. Since fostering dialogue depends in part on one’s ability to relate to other individuals, it is vital for a facilitator to be sincere and receptive. In addition to keeping a factual, yet informal tone throughout the project’s execution, I decided to write an entry that purposely revealed my own subjectivity. Specifically, this
entry relayed an actual experience I had at the Thurber House museum in Columbus, Ohio. In submitting this narrative, my intent was to inspire readers to contribute their own accounts of memorable museum experiences.

One contentious aspect of this method of presentation is how it may unintentionally attribute more distinction to the museum representative’s point of view, thus inadvertently ascribing its eminence over any audience generated content. Conversely, it may prove advantageous to allow the moderator’s perspectives as an envoy of the museum to surface, if only to give the institution a more genial public face. While absolute objectivity may be an illusory notion, it may benefit an initiative’s facilitator to be mindful of the potential for projecting personal attitudes, feelings and suppositions onto audience members, and equally important, not to marginalize or discourage their potential contributions.

In spite of my concerns, however, The Thurber House (figure 6.5) example yielded some of the most introspective responses (figure 6.6) of all the entries posted. Those that commented on this entry appeared to be especially motivated by the opportunity to share their own experiences. Particularly remarkable was how the interests and personality of each participant were revealed by both what they chose to write about and how their entries were articulated. The following pages illustrate the entry and participants’ subsequent responses.
The Thurber House

posted July 18, 2006

Upon entering the restored Victorian house at 77 Jefferson Avenue in downtown Columbus, I immediately felt comfortable. As I wandered around the ground floor, an old woman came up and offered to show me around. Leading me from room to room, she pointed out photographs and objects, telling stories about the former residents and recounting the history of the home itself.

The woman’s name was Julie Hadley, daughter of a good friend of renowned writer, illustrator, and Columbus native James Thurber. Home to Thurber and his family during his college years (1913-1917), the house has been set aside for use as a public museum and literary center. Built in the 1870’s, it survived several years of neglect before it was donated to the Jefferson Center for Learning and the Arts in 1976. By 1984, the Thurber House was restored to reflect the period when James Thurber lived there with his parents, brothers, and their dogs. As a setting for many of his stories, the place is both a monument to Thurber’s legacy and a living example of literary history.

The museum upholds an open-house policy by encouraging visitors “to experience Thurber's life by becoming a guest of the Thurber family.” For example, guests to the museum are welcome to sit on the dining room chairs to watch a video, chat with friends in the living room, play a song the piano, or read quietly in the adjacent garden. Visiting authors are invited to stay the night in Thurber’s bedroom, and the third floor is reserved as a private living space for quarterly authors-in-residence. As a gathering place for local writers, the Thurber House also offers educational workshops, visiting author readings, and discussion groups.

Personally, I like the unassuming attitude the place gives off. The whole time I was there, it felt like I was visiting an out-of-town relative, not a museum. It probably also helped that I went on a slow day. Have any of you had a particularly memorable museum visit, either good or bad?

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Figure 6.5: Second entry.
6 Comments

smweaver on July 20, 2006 at 7:35 AM
I visited the Santa Fe Museum of Art when they had given each artist a room to display their works, with the artist to construct what they felt was the perfect environment to display their art. May [sic] favorite room was the simplest - paintings displayed on white walls, with a small bronze bell suspended in one corner. Somehow just have [sic] the 3 dimensional, potentially kinetic presence of the bell in a room that was otherwise so still and peaceful really sharpened my attention for the paintings and the atmosphere they conveyed.

jenniferbee on July 21, 2006 at 2:59 PM
The first time I went to the Smithsonian I spent almost an entire day in the Hirschhorn sculpture garden. In Houston, there is a chapel designed by Mark Rothko that absolutely blew me away -- I've always had a spiritual resonance from his work, but the chapel was almost overwhelming. It was one of the few times that the phrase "communing with art" didn't seem cliché to me.

anjalig on July 23, 2006 at 1:28 AM
I was in Chicago for a small literary conference last year, and escaped all of the people I'd been spending time with the whole weekend to go to the Art Institute. It was exactly where I needed to be, where I could be surrounded by people and looking at artwork and be completely anonymous at the same time.

pgdurica on July 24, 2006 at 1:52 PM
I've been to the Thurber House. I exactly made a short documentary about the place while I was an undergraduate at Denison. The House is believed to be haunted (Thurber himself has written about his encounter with the supernatural there). Whenever I visit a home transformed into a museum, I always ask if any strange stories are attached to the place. Rutherford B. Hayes's [sic] mansion is apparently haunted by the ghost of his son, Webb, who contracted syphilis while serving in the navy and, in his last mad years, insisted upon transforming each of the thirty rooms into a representation of a different region (the Peking suite, the Siberian salon, etc.).

brownsugar on July 30, 2006 at 11:17 PM
I spent an entire day at the V&A museum in London a few years back. Being surrounded by so much history and being by myself was a bit overwhelming. I stood looking out at the grecian columns for what felt like hours.

anjalig on August 1, 2006 at 2:43 AM
M, I thought of another one, I hope you don't mind... I went to the Brooklyn Museum of Art for a retrospective on Basquiat last year or the year before. It was insane, it was the last weekend it was exhibiting, and there were lots of people. It was the most comprehensive thing I've ever seen, and it took me over three hours to get through the whole thing. The experience was exhausting, but the retrospective was still compelling all the way to the end. After, my friend Chetan and I escaped to this gallery that was completely empty. It was South Asian Art and there was a window in the corner of the room that looked out over the Brooklyn Botanical Gardens. We stood there, just looking up around, totally silent, and then I said how this was really nice, nicer than Manhattan, there was something more regal and charming about it than the Met even in a way, maybe because there were no people. And Chetan said, "Yeah, this is a really chill spot." Anyway, it was a moment. I keep thinking about wanting to go back so that I can feel that silence again and that moment after the crowds and the rush.

Figure 6.6: Second entry discussion.
**Interpretation of second entry responses**

One particular theme pervaded the dialogue resultant from the *Thurber House* entry. In their recollection of memorable museum visits, many participants contemplated the environment as a way to divert themselves from commotion and achieve a sense of composure. While my own affinity for solitude was referenced in the original entry's last paragraph, I am not confident I could determine whether that admission had any influence on the participants’ response.

While the participants’ statements were varied, they repeatedly addressed a search for spaces of reflection in and through the exhibition space. Smweaver, for example, noted how the “still and peaceful” qualities of a white walled gallery offset the “potentially kinetic” tension of the sculpture it contained. Jenniferbee mentioned the overwhelming “spiritual resonance” she felt within a chapel designed by Mark Rothko. In both comments contributed by anjalig, several days apart, she refers to each of her experiences as a form of escape. Describing a time when she separated from her associates to attend a museum, she writes: “it was exactly where I needed to be, where I could be surrounded by people and looking at artwork and be completely anonymous at the same time.” Recalling another experience in her later comment, she concludes by stating her desire to return so that she might “feel that silence again and that moment after the crowds and the rush.” Likewise, brownsugar described her solitary experience at the V&A as a moment of overwhelming reverence.
More texture was added to the discussion by pgdurica’s salient commentary. In lieu of responding to my question, he afforded some supporting information about the Thurber House itself. He also elaborated on his personal interest in house museums, and the stories that accompany them, by providing an appropriate example. Overall, pgdurica’s comment indicates his unique interest in history, novelty, and exploration.

Regardless of the participants’ responses to the Thurber House entry, each openly shared a richness of personal experience. Collectively, these distinct, yet convergent narrative perspectives suggest that participants had some expectations of what qualities a museum should epitomize. Museums audiences might benefit from opportunities to share their perspectives, while museums might gain greater knowledge of their audiences through those narratives.

**Third Entry: Diptych**

A single exhibition at the Wexner Center for the Arts, entitled *Diptych,* provides the impetus for the third community entry. In this post, which features the work of contemporary artists Jockum Norström and Mindy Shapero, I presented a brief biographical sketch of each artist and a descriptive summary of their respective collections. Each artist’s name was hyperlinked to resources that hosted more examples of their studio work and, if applicable, their collateral poetry. I also provided links to encyclopedic articles that elaborated on the visionary and symbolist approaches associated with at least one of the artists under discussion. Finally, I asked the participants to comment on any notable
similarities between the two artists. The original entry is displayed in figure 6.7, followed by participants’ comments in figure 6.8.

Diptych: Jockum Nordström and Mindy Shapero  posted July 19, 2006
4/7 to 8/13/06: Wexner Center for the Arts

Among the three exhibits showing at the Wexner this summer is a show entitled Diptych that features the work of two otherwise unrelated contemporary artists, Mindy Shapero and Jockum Nordström.

Shapero, who is based in Los Angeles, constructs large, abstract sculptures made of wood, metal, plastic and paper (sometimes papier-mâché), accompanied by stream-of-consciousness prose. From the exhibition catalog: "[Shapero] uses simple arts and crafts materials that are associated with childhood play to create works that comment on the creative process itself."

Nordström, a former children's book illustrator, hails from a very different background. Born and raised in Sweden, Nordström finds his inspiration in symbolist and visionary approaches. Curator Claudine Isé describes Nordström as a satirist/storyteller who "weaves bits and pieces of paper into pictorial fables about the modern world."

The work pictured above, made by Shapero in 2004, is called Burnt Rainbow. The link takes you to more of Shapero's work, with accompanying poetry. It's hard to see in such a small image, but this work, like most of her collection, is in human scale; that is, if you could imagine standing on the multi-colored impasto base, the metal rods (which resemble the ones you might use to assemble a tent) would be just above your head. (Or my head, at least. I'm pretty short.)

Nordström's The Coachman (2001), pictured on the right, is a vibrantly arranged collage of cut-outs interlaced with remnants of handwriting and doodles. This particular work isn't featured in the Wexner's show, but it's pretty indicative of his approach.

Apparently, the curator had a grand idea in mind when she decided to pair these two artists together, but just looking at the links – do you notice any similarities?

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Figure 6.7: Third entry.
4 Comments

brandienaked on July 19, 2006 at 11:39 AM
One similarity I notice is that both seem very childlike in the materials and style or approach. Nordstrom's approach looks like something I might've made as a child -- somewhat of a much darker, more monotone version of a child's collage project. Back at Work seems to be drawn much like a child draws a family portrait. It also focuses on scenes a child might even see. Shapero seems to focus on the actual experience of being a child and crawling inside their mind to recreate experiences for adults.

smweaver on July 20, 2006 at 7:37 AM
I agree on the childlike aspects of both works. I wonder what the purpose of this is for each artist?

jenniferbee on July 21, 2006 at 2:55 PM
They both take natural forms and somehow, almost render them scientifically. There is a great deal of symmetry. It's so hard to get a real sense of the work on a screen -- the Nordstrom pictured, for instance, read to me as textile-like at first. It does incline me to check out the show!

pgdurica on July 24, 2006 at 1:48 PM
Childhood hardened and rendered uniform by the industrial age. These works both seem sort of sad to me; the whimsy in both is undercut by the smooth metallic lines in each piece, which to me at least, suggest a kind of commodification. I don't know what I'm saying.

Figure 6.8: Third entry discussion.

Interpretation of third entry responses

While this entry’s request for comparing artists’ works generated some diverse insights, there appeared to be a relative decline in the level of user engagement. This diminished response might be ascribed to the limitations posed by my line of inquiry. For example, my question may have relied too much on the assessment of works that were difficult to perceive in an on-screen format. Moreover, the specificity of the inquiry may have inhibited the potential for free association. A more amenable approach, such as seeking a general interpretation of visionary and symbolist art, might have been more conducive to response. However, as jenniferbee demonstrates by her comment, the absence of palpable
content might impel an online audience member to actually examine the works in person.

This study depends on discernable response to the artwork and other postings to provide content for analysis. However, I do not consider a lack of response necessarily implying a lack of interest. While slightly disappointed at the scant replies, I also recognize that I had assumed that it would not be constructive to continually prod the audience to participate. Such inducement to discourse, while possibly appearing patronizing, could, however, have presented the audience with relevant or interesting information that might have sustained or facilitated their deeper engagement.

Despite the entry’s limitations, comments in figure 6.8 reveal an emergent discussion that centers on the systematic, yet childlike aspects of the artists’ technique. Brandienaked, for example, described the work of Shapero as focused on “crawling inside” the mind of a child “to recreate experiences for adults.” Smweaver stated her agreement with brandienaked’s assertion and then posits a question about the artists’ intent. Both smweaver and pgdurica expressed some uncertainty over the artworks’ purported meaning, which left their contributions open to further expansion.

Pgdurica’s admission aside, he interprets the work’s theme as “childhood hardened and rendered uniform by the industrial age.” His mention of whimsy processed as commodity seems to parallel jenniferbee’s assessment of the work as “natural forms... render[ed] scientifically.” Likewise, a collective comparison of
all four comments seems to suggest that corresponding conclusions can be achieved through various sites of reference.

**Fourth Entry: A Tour of Short North Murals**

For the fourth entry in the 614 community, I took a slight departure from my established focus on museums and their exhibitions. I broadened my scope to explore those controversial concerns regarding gentrification and urban renewal in the Columbus, Ohio area – specifically referencing the recent promulgation of city-sanctioned murals in a popular Columbus metropolitan area called the Short North.

As part of the city's sustained revitalization efforts, the murals are designed to increase the area's aesthetic appeal and impact the local economy. In my 614 community post, entitled *A Tour of Short North Murals*, I provided several photographic representations of the murals with brief descriptions. For the last image, I referenced a quote from a local publication that offered an analysis of the mural in question, thus implying that this critique could be applied to the mural corridor in general. My intent was to challenge the audience to critically assess the murals' representation of Columbus.

Overall, the entry was successful in that it presented an opportunity for participants to exercise their critical thinking skills in a way that contributed to the collective's understanding. An examination of this entry (in figures 6.9 and 6.10) and its ensuing discussion (in figure 6.11) provide the raw data explored in my forthcoming assessment.
A tour of Short North murals

In this post, I thought I’d take a break from the museums and focus on public art, namely the crop of murals that has popped up in the Short North over the last several years. For those of you not familiar with Columbus, the Short North is a formerly blighted area that has come to be the most recognized arts districts around.

Here’s a retrospective:

**Trains by Greg and Jeff Ackers, 1989.**

Arranged on opposing walls in a parking lot alcove, this mural pays homage to the Union Station rail depot that was controversially demolished in 1976.

**Cafe Terrace at Night**


The two overlapping walls of this mural compose a faux cityscape backdrop.

Figure 6.9: Fourth entry; part A.
Although it is tucked away behind the main drag, the sideways Mona Lisa on Pearl has become an emblem of the Short North.

American Gothic (after Grant Wood), Steve Galgas and Mike Altman, 2002.

The area’s most prominent mural continues the tradition of putting an irreverent twist on a famous painting. Looks like they’re in the process of cleaning this one.

Cliff Dwellers (after George Bellows), Michelle Attias and Curtis Goldstein, 2004

Bellows (1882-1925), the artist whose work inspired this most recent addition to the mural corridor, was born and raised in Columbus. Associated with the Ashcan School, he is recognized for paintings that documented everyday life in poor urban neighborhoods. The Short North Gazette had an interesting commentary on the image:

"This milieu is filled with immigrants’ dreams of escaping crushing poverty... This was the stuff of German, Victorian, and Italian Villages before they became what they are today - real estate investment schemes for the upwardly mobile urban elite."

These murals are just one part of the ongoing effort to make the neighborhood a cultural center. Today, the strip is teeming with restaurants, coffee houses, shops, and local businesses. While some like the change, others find it ironic that the artists and galleries that helped make the Short North what it is may no longer be able to keep up with the rising cost of living there. For better or for worse, the transformation is remarkable.

As a whole, how well do you think these murals represent the area? Have I left any out?

Incidentally, I was just reading the Other Paper a couple weeks ago where they profiled local graffiti artists. That’s an interesting topic for another day.

Back to entries  Comment on this entry

Figure 6.10: Fourth entry; part B.
5 Comments

smweaver on July 20, 2006 at 1:22 PM
I don’t know Columbus well - do the murals represent what the city has, or what it is lacking? The faux cityscape, the no-longer-existent train depot and immigrant communities, the recreation of extremely famous works of art - are these painted on the buildings to demonstrate something about Columbus now, or to add a texture that the city doesn’t otherwise possess? (No offense to you Colombians [sic]. I’ve really only been there on day trips now and again.)

jenniferbee on July 21, 2006 at 2:50 PM
I am familiar with all except the Bellows mural. Since they are mostly re-creations of artwork, they seem more like marketing efforts (a la the infamous Nationwide spot now sporting Wexner's face just south of Spring!) to me rather than random public art like one might see in L.A., for instance.

Wasn't the Mona used in quite a bit of advertising? I always associate it with my volunteer days at the now closed rape crisis center that was nearby in the early 90's.

anjalig on July 23, 2006 at 2:02 AM
The older mural with the trains seems representative of what the neighborhood had lost. It implies to me some sort of public statement about what had happened to the neighborhood—the existence of a train station suggests that the area was a hub of activity, while the demolishing of it seems indicative of the area becoming an undesirable place to live/be. The Bellows mural, though much more recent, follows up on that cycle as a reminder of the neighborhood’s humble beginnings before being gentrified.

The use of the other murals in marketing the area post-gentrification is possibly to help those "upwardly mobile urban elite" feel that they are living in a culturally literate space long after the immigrants, and later, local artists and galleries have been driven out.

pgdurica on July 24, 2006 at 1:41 PM
As far as I’ve been able to determine, Chicago (my current place of residence) isn’t engaging in a similar practice—although various creative uses for hundreds of obsolete water towers are now being debated. I guess what I'd like to know is why many of the murals merely recreate well-known masterworks rather than showcase the original visions of Columbus-based artists. The sites don’t feel like a part of the Midwest but rather the generic result of gentrification. Who exactly lives/lived around here? Who is gentrification driving out?

brownsugar on July 30, 2006 at 11:21 PM
I would have liked to see more original work in these murals. I've recently moved from Austin where there is a wealth of original murals, especially near the main drag of the university. These are nice and catch your eye. I especially liked the train and the cafe at night, but I would like to see more original work around town.

Figure 6.11: Fourth entry discussion.

Interpretation of fourth entry responses

In general, those who participated in the *Mural* entry’s discussion raised many relevant and provocative questions. Smweaver laid the groundwork for the
discussion by asking if the murals “are meant to represent Columbus as it is
now, or to add a texture that the city doesn't otherwise possess.” Some
participants responded to this question indirectly by contributing their own
opinion. Those from outside of the area were able to compare the circumstances
in Columbus to their local context. As the discussion progressed, a consensus
began to develop. From these layered responses, we might draw conclusions
about the participants’ value structures, and how well these murals as subjects
served as foils for participants’ to reflect on their standards for judgment.

In effect, the comments submitted by the participants weave a
conversation that critiques the motivations for selection of these murals. For
instance, jenniferbee notes that “since [the murals] are mostly re-creations of
artwork, they seem more like marketing efforts... than random public art...”
Anjalig built upon jenniferbee’s comment by adding that the murals’ use in
marketing is perhaps “to help those ‘upwardly mobile urban elite’ feel that they
are living in a culturally literate space long after the immigrants, and later, local
artists and galleries have be[en] driven out.” Pgdurica continued the discussion
by questioning why the murals “merely recreate well-known masterworks rather
than showcase the original visions of Columbus-based artists.” Brownsugar
concluded the discussion by stating she “would like to see more original work
around town.”

Of all the discussion elicited by the site, this example appears to be the
most productive. While the progression may have been unintentional, its content
appears to follow a linear succession comprised of an exposition, analysis, and
conclusion. In this circumstance, the participants appear to arrive at a single corresponding resolution. Contradictory viewpoints, however, might not have been unwelcome, and could have challenged the participants to ponder the inconsistency of their remarks and reevaluate their position. As it stands, the entry was effective in inciting the participants’ qualified opinions. Its outcome demonstrates how audiences construct knowledge from available information, personal experience, and group interaction.

**Final entry**

In the closing entry, I extended my appreciation to the project participants and provided them with a link to the final survey. As seen in figure 6.12, this entry also addressed a formatting problem that required me to replicate and re-post a portion of the initial survey. I also issued one final participation deadline email reminder to those involved in the research.

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**Thank you**

This is the last post for this project. Thanks to all who've participated so far. There is still time to contribute, so please look back over the posts if you haven't done so yet. If each of you responded even once, it would be a great help. If you are still planning on commenting, please do so by the end of the month.

The final survey is [here](#). Please note that there are two questions at the end that were also in the preliminary survey. Those responses didn't get recorded the first time because I didn't format them correctly. If you took the survey within the last few days, the questions will be new to you.

I really appreciate all of your help. To those who are interested, I'll keep you posted on my progress.

-Melissa

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**Back to entries**  **Comment on this entry**

Figure 6.12: Final entry.
Participant blog entry

Given the constraints of project, I did not expect the users to be interested in using the personal blogging feature. However, their willingness to do so was encouraging. Those who utilized their individual weblog space, for the most part, posted a single entry that contained either an informal introduction or casual remark. However, one participant chose to write about a series of cultural excursions she had attended or was planning to attend, as excerpted in figure 6.13 below.

Free art is good... posted July 21, 2006

I have two free tickets to the B-movie marathon and was thinking of going to tonight's show. My partner is a big Cary Grant fan, and one of the offerings is a 1936 film of his. There's a fascinating biography out about him that said partner received for a birthday gift. We also have two free tics to the Capa film series -- yes, we missed seeing the Cary Grant starring film earlier in the summer -- I screwed up the date and we almost saw Mary Poppins instead. We were seated and wondering why so many parents decided to bring their kids to a Hitchcock film... good times... And free music tomorrow at the jazz and ribs fest. I don't know much about jazz, so live is the way to gain more experience! I know I like ribs, but those aren't free...

Overall, I was pleased with the level of community involvement. The participants’ diverse contributions provided adequate data from which to analyze the 614 community site. By examining participants’ employment of the site and exit surveys, I was able to discuss the 614 community’s performance relative to the project’s intended outcome.
Final survey response

The final survey completed by participants included a total of nine questions. For clarity and ease, I will divide my analysis of participant replies in two discussions. The first discussion considers participants’ assessment of the site’s content, relevance, and usability, as quantified in questions one through six below. The second discussion will analyze the participants’ responses to open-ended questions seven through nine, covering their insights into the process and assessment of the site as a whole.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Exit survey</th>
<th></th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1. Did this experience increase your knowledge of contemporary art?</td>
<td>100%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2. Did your experience with the site increase your interest in shows, exhibitions, or other cultural events in your area?</td>
<td>100%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3. Do you feel that you are more likely now to attend shows, exhibitions or other cultural events as a result of this experience?</td>
<td>88%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>4. Do you feel that you were able to establish a rapport with the other site users?</td>
<td>38%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>5. Did you feel comfortable using the site to share your thoughts/opinions?</td>
<td>100%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>6. Did you do additional research on the topics presented?</td>
<td>38%</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Figure 6.14: Exit survey response; questions 1–6.

A total of eight participants completed the exit survey. All of the respondents indicated that the experience had both increased their knowledge of contemporary art and their interest in local shows, exhibitions, and cultural events. A significant majority of the participants indicated that they were more likely to attend local arts events as a result of their participation in the project.
Furthermore, all of the participants specified that they felt comfortable using the site to share their thoughts and opinions.

Only one-third of the participants indicated that they were able to develop a rapport with other site users. The same percentage of participants professed having conducted additional research beyond what information was presented. These figures suggest a latent potential for deeper participant engagement if, hypothetically, the site were refined and developed beyond this initial study.

Responses to the next three survey questions capture participants’ opinions regarding the 614 community prototype. Below, I have divided each question and its aligned participant response into a separate figure.

7. Did you encounter any issues or problems with using the site?

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Response</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>I was a little confused at first as to how to log in and then find the</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>posts. It took a while to find that link at the bottom of the page -</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>might be good to make it more obvious for the slower kids like me.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>I found it a bit difficult to navigate and get to the main entries.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>This may have been user unfamiliarity!</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>hard to find survey links</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Figure 6.15: Exit survey response; question 7.

8. Do you have any other suggestions for improving the site?

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Suggestion</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>After logging in, it should take you back to the main blog, rather than</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>your own personal blog, which isn't the point of the site. Also, probably</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>shouldn't have to log in to view the postings.</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Figure 6.16: Exit survey response; question 8.
In questions seven and eight, all of the respondents focused their critical commentary on the site’s design, and not its content. Most took issue with the navigational dimensions of the site, asserting that it generated some confusion. For instance, one participant noted that when logging in, they were directed to their personal blog instead of the main page. I too had reservations about this configuration prior to its implementation. However, since I was using a pre-designed template, I found this design flaw too complex to resolve in the time available. For this reason, I conceded to the incongruity. In order to meet an audience’s usability expectations, such technical matters merit further consideration. Museum community developers would be advised to extensively beta test their proposed online initiatives, conduct focus groups, experiments, and response solicitation well before executing a live site.

Furthermore, one participant indicated some difficulty locating the survey links, a problem that might easily have been avoided had they been arranged more prominently. Another participant questioned the necessity of “logging in” to see the entries, a condition stipulated by research protocol in order to protect participants’ confidentiality. Despite this situated requirement, such access limitations should not be necessary in a real museum or community setting.

The final question encouraged participants to contribute any other remarks or observations that might have been overlooked in the construction of the survey. Responses to question nine, shown in figure 6.17 on the following page, articulate a holistic valuation of the site’s content. These comments provide additional support for findings derived from comprehensive site activity.
9. Are there any other comments you’d like to contribute?

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>comments</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>I thought the essays were extremely well-written and thought-provoking.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>The accompanying pictures and links were very helpful. If this type of</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>site existed in my town, I would definitely use it frequently.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>This is a really fascinating approach -- I’d love to see it continue</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>and thrive!</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Even though I do not live in Columbus, I found the topics of discussion</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>told from a personal angle to be thought-provoking and interesting, as</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>well as helping me to be informed of what the city has to offer in</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>terms of arts-related events and exhibitions. I also found that being</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>able to read comments by others helped me to gain new perspectives on</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>the pieces that were profiled and added to my experience as a viewer.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>nice job</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Figure 6.17: Exit survey response; question 9.

In general, the responses to this question were affirming. One participant
found the posts, images and links to be well written and thought provoking.
Another participant expressed appreciation for the range of perspectives
presented. All of the respondents, which represent fifty percent of the total
participants, provided positive assessments.

**Cumulative assessment**

When compared to the results of the preliminary survey, the 614
community’s activities seem to be closely aligned with the participants’ typical
online behaviors. In general, the content was successful in engaging participants
across various points of entry. Despite the time constraints and technical
challenges posed, many of the participants seemed willing to contribute to the
community in substantive ways.

For the participants involved, these findings seem to indicate an interest
in sharing personal knowledge and experiences for the benefit of the group. The
questions they appeared to respond to most enthusiastically were those that allowed them to contribute original narratives or assessments. Their singular understandings became an asset to the site by expanding the group’s collective base of knowledge. To capitalize on this potential, it may be more productive to present the topics of discussion in a manner that allows broad interpretive possibilities. It may also support community development to somehow validate user contributions, either by acknowledging them directly or providing some form of participatory incentive or site-sponsored feedback.

In terms of the site’s design, there are some areas that merit further consideration. For instance, in lieu of providing a personal blog space, it might be better to simply host user-generated profiles. Hypothetically, each personalized space could include a list of interests, selected bookmarks, an adaptable events calendar, and other relevant tools. This provision would effectively allow users to maintain an identity on the site while safeguarding the sponsoring institution from accountability for unauthorized, offensive, misleading, or off-topic content. Blogging capabilities incorporated in the site might also seem superfluous to some users, given many already maintain a journal/blog elsewhere online.

The community’s interactive features might also be enhanced for greater efficacy. For example, while participants in the 614 community had the agency to respond to the main entry and make reference to the ensuing comments, they were not enabled to initiate or sustain threads that emanated from the other participants’ responses. The lack of comment reply functionality impeded direct contact between community members, which may have hindered their ability to
interact. In future manifestations of online museum communities, it might therefore be beneficial to promote dialogue by simply developing a site’s communicative channels.

While the potential for online museum community development persists, this project served its intent to contribute to knowledge regarding how such technologies are understood and received by a targeted group of subjects. The enduring aim of this research was to help museums and cultural institutions recognize the potential for developing online communities. Building on this study, institutions might develop comparable initiatives for their own agencies and create new ways for audiences to more deeply engage in an institution’s collections or community initiatives.
CHAPTER 7

CONCLUSION

“New technologies alter the structure of our interests: the things we think about. They alter the character of our symbols, the things we think with. And they alter the nature of community: the arena in which thoughts develop” (Postman, 1992, p. 20).

The objective of this study was to look towards the recent promulgation of online communities, both affiliated with and independent of museums, and to analyze their potential use and development as an integral extension of the institutions’ educational outreach efforts. In Chapter Three I reviewed the methodologies I would be using in executing this research. My Chapter Two review of relevant literature and Chapter Four investigation of established initiatives contributed to my realization of the prototype community I discuss in chapter Five. This community was, in turn, evaluated for its capacity to engage participants and generate a collective base of knowledge in Chapter Six.

In advocating for the use of online communities, museums can expand their presence amongst dedicated audiences and make themselves more accessible to largely untapped demographics. Making space for the individual is
one aim of museums that is reflected in the principles that govern exchange within the Internet community. Within the formal structure of the museum, online communities can be used to help people make connections between personal experiences and prior knowledge. Exchanging these insights can contribute to meaning-making processes and forms of perceptual awareness that may also help others interpret an exhibit on display.

While the application of online communication technologies demonstrated in this study may reap considerable benefits, their use within the museum sector is not without its challenges and limitations. What role, if any, such technologies might play in the development of museum education capacities is a worthwhile consideration. However, the application a museum develops may not be universally appropriate. Each museum must consider how its particular set of circumstances might impact an initiative’s potency. If the museum’s means and purposes are to be accommodated, the institution must also carefully assess how its online technologies will be applied to advance its mission and those communities it serves. Ideally, in the future such online environments will require less moderation from museum educators and more involvement from the community.

The introduction of any new technology is a complex venture. Building a sustainable online environment requires ongoing investments of time, effort and capital. Maintenance responsibilities, service terms, expectations, and accountability structures must be clearly defined from the online endeavor’s
inception. Like any museum-led initiative, its design should be indicative of the institution’s ideological positions, yet receptive to extrinsic influences.

As institutions shift their interpretive role and allow for self-governed discussions, they must be prepared to contend with both positive and negative repercussions. The inclusive framework of an online museum community will continue to be dependent on an institution’s willingness to relinquish some degree of curatorial control over discourses and collections. A reduction in authoritative influence challenges museum educators to reorganize interpretive content and concentrate on facilitating negotiations of meaning. In this extended capacity, museum educators are compelled to reevaluate their responsibilities to the museum and its publics – working towards an appropriate balance between these two commitments. Exactly how they might apply their expertise towards coordinating cogent conversations is a matter still open to exploration. In that exploration the discretion of art educators and sponsoring institutions will continue to be at the core of the online community’s development.

Moderation of openly accessible content is a concern for any entity that maintains a public presence. Just as institutions often implement internal systems of checks and balances to safeguard their reputations, there is also a need for careful screening and vetting of online user contributions. Designated moderators should, however, be instructed in what criterion would constitute questionable material, lest their attempts at community management marginalize users by censoring constructive, but controversial contributions.
Again, the design of such a system must be at the discretion of the sponsoring institution’s governing bodies and their agents.

Online privacy and safety are concerns that continue to acquire considerable media attention. Young people may be regarded as especially vulnerable to unscrupulous intent. There are, however, ways that online environments can reduce participants’ exposure to predators and other risks. For example, online communities can be used as a way to extend museum workshops and programs to homes and schools; closed or limited access networks where people have already acquired a level of orientation and security. Secure log-in registration procedures can also ensure open interactions between designated community members and protect their speech from any censuring scrutiny of the general public. If an appropriate consensus is reached, an online community could also allow for observation and input from parents and teachers, as well as students and museum educators — helping to ensure that all feel safe in being involved in the learning process.

While an open community might enable more voices to be heard, an exclusive environment can still provide an important and viable alternative. Such emergent ventures could be developed as commercial enterprises, or be used as vehicles for driving a museum’s future expansion. Online environments as extensions of the museum experience can instigate, deepen, and prolong participant dialogues. Like museum objects, transcripts of these conversations could be archived indefinitely as cultural artifacts. Such electronically stored data could help future researchers understand current audience perception
The essence of a museum is still its physical presence, from the auras of the objects it contains, to the informal spontaneous conversations they generate. An online museum community is only a nominal substitute for the provocative encounters one might experience in the actual museum environment. Online museum communities might be more appropriately conceived as an extension of museum exhibitions, events, and programming; not a museum by proxy. The aim of the virtual environment might be to incite dialogue among people in a way that engenders a deeper understanding of their experiences, and increased interest in the situated concrete exploration. “Just as museums seek to inspire hypothetically shareable sentiment and sensibility... they might succeed... in designing ways to activate a collaborative cognitive capacity, potentially present in everyone” (Hein, 2000, p. 49).

This study revealed how online communities as museum tools can facilitate the exchange of ideas and narratives and generate new understanding. While computer mediated communication is not the same as the reciprocity experienced via face-to-face conversation, the online interaction may potentially connect us to the museum experience and serve as a constructive media in itself. As knowledge of the potential for online media progresses, so too can the technology. While the initiatives examined herein have provided some of the groundwork for those advancements, the need for further research and development of online communities in the context of museum institutions persists.
REFERENCES


SITE REFERENCES


APPENDIX A1
Co-Investigators

Complete this form to list OSU co-investigators on the research study. Signatures are required of all co-investigators. Do not list external co-investigators on this form; use question 12 of the main application. Activities performed by non-OSU personnel may require a Letter of Support or another IRB’s approval.

PI Name: Dr. James H. Sanders III

**CO-INVESTIGATORS**

As Co-Investigator, I agree to comply with all policies and procedures of The Ohio State University, as well as with all applicable federal, state, and local laws and regulatory guidance regarding the protection of human subjects in research. I agree to comply with all generally accepted good clinical research practice guidelines (as applicable), as well as with all other applicable professional practice standards regarding human subjects research.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Name (Last, First, MI):</th>
<th>Bontempo, Melissa A.</th>
<th>Degree(s):</th>
<th>B.F.A.; M.A. (in progress)</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>University Title:</td>
<td>Student</td>
<td>College:</td>
<td>Graduate School</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Department Name:</td>
<td>Art Education</td>
<td>Phone:</td>
<td>614 886 6506</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Department #:</td>
<td>02 0255</td>
<td>E-mail:</td>
<td><a href="mailto:bontempo.9@osu.edu">bontempo.9@osu.edu</a></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

OSU ID Number (8 digits):

Signature of Co-Investigator

Date

Melissa A. Bontempo
Printed name of Co-Investigator
APPENDIX B
Expedited Review

Complete this form to request expedited review of the proposed research. If the research meets the conditions for expedited review, the review of the protocol will be carried out by the IRB chairperson or by one or more experienced reviewers designated by the chairperson from among members of the IRB.


PI Name: Dr. James H. Sanders III

Conditions required for expedited IRB review:

1) The Federal Regulations establish two main criteria for an expedited review:
   a) The research may not involve more than "minimal risk." "Minimal risk" means that "the probability and magnitude of harm or discomfort anticipated in the research are not greater in and of themselves than those ordinarily encountered in daily life or during the performance of routine physical or psychological examinations or tests." (45 CFR 46.102(i) and 21 CFR Part 56.102(i)).
   b) The entire research project must be consistent with one or more of the federally defined categories.

2) The categories in this list apply regardless of the age of the subjects, except as noted. The expedited review procedure may not be used where identification of the subjects and/or their responses would reasonably place them at risk of criminal or civil liability or be damaging to the subjects financial standing, employability, insurability, reputation, or be stigmatizing, unless reasonable and appropriate protections will be implemented so that risks related to invasion of privacy and breach of confidentiality are no greater than minimal.

3) The expedited review procedure may not be used for classified research involving human subjects or research involving prisoners as subjects.

4) Investigators and IRBs are reminded that the standard requirements for informed consent (or its waiver, alteration, or exception) apply regardless of the type of review (i.e., expedited or convened) utilized by the IRB.

Select the category that best describes the research project.

☐ (1) Clinical studies of drugs and medical devices only when condition (a) or (b) is met.
   (a) Research on drugs for which an investigational new drug application (21 CFR Part 312) is not required. (Note: Research on marketed drugs that significantly increases the risks or decreases the acceptability of the risks associated with the use of the product is not eligible for expedited review.)
   (b) Research on medical devices for which (i) an investigational device exemption application (21 CFR Part 812) is not required; or (ii) the medical device is cleared/approved for marketing and the medical device is being used in accordance with its cleared/approved labeling.

☐ (2) Collection of blood samples by finger stick, heel stick, ear stick, or venipuncture as follows:
   (a) from healthy, nonpregnant adults who weigh at least 110 pounds. For these subjects, the amounts drawn may not exceed 556 ml in an 8 week period and collection may not occur more frequently than 2 times per week.
   (b) from other adults and children (defined as "persons who have not attained the legal age for consent to treatments or procedures involved in the research, under the applicable law of the jurisdiction in which the research will be conducted." 45 CFR 46.402(a)), considering the age, weight, and health of the subjects, the collection procedure, the amount of blood to be collected, and the frequency with which it will be collected. For these subjects, the amount drawn may not exceed the lesser of 50 ml or 3 ml per kg in an 8 week period and collection may not occur more frequently than 2 times per week.
(3) Prospective collection of biological specimens for research purposes by non-invasive means.

   Examples: (a) hair and nail clippings in a non-disfiguring manner; (b) deciduous teeth at time of exfoliation or if routine patient care indicates a need for extraction; (c) permanent teeth if routine patient care indicates a need for extraction; (d) excreta and external secretions (including sweat); (e) unstimulated saliva collected either in an unstimulated fashion or stimulated by chewing gumbase or wax or by applying a dilute citric solution to the tongue; (f) placenta removed at delivery; (g) amniotic fluid obtained at the time of rupture of the membrane prior to or during labor; (h) supra- and subgingival dental plaque and calculus, provided the collection procedure is not more invasive than routine prophylactic scaling of the teeth and the process is accomplished in accordance with accepted prophylactic techniques; (i) mucosal and skin cells collected by buccal scraping or swab, skin swab, or mouth washings; (j) sputum collected after saline mist nebulization.

(4) Collection of data through noninvasive procedures (not involving general anesthesia or sedation) routinely employed in clinical practice, excluding procedures involving x-rays or microwaves. Where medical devices are employed, they must be cleared/approved for marketing. (Studies intended to evaluate the safety and effectiveness of the medical device are not generally eligible for expedited review, including studies of cleared medical devices for new indications.)

   Examples: (a) physical sensors that are applied either to the surface of the body or at a distance and do not involve input of significant amounts of energy into the subject or an invasion of the subject's privacy; (b) weighing or testing sensory acuity; (c) magnetic resonance imaging; (d) electrocardiography, electroencephalography, thermography, detection of naturally occurring radioactivity, electroretinography, ultrasound, diagnostic infrared imaging, doppler blood flow, and echocardiography; (e) moderate exercise, muscular strength testing, body composition assessment, and flexibility testing where appropriate given the age, weight, and health of the individual.

(5) Research involving materials (data, documents, records, or specimens) that have been collected or will be collected solely for nonresearch purposes (such as medical treatment or diagnosis). (NOTE: Some research in this category may be exempt from the HHS regulations for the protection of human subjects 45 CFR 46.101(b)(4). This listing refers only to research that is not exempt.)

(6) Collection of data from voice, video, digital or image recordings made for research purposes.

(7) Research made on individual or group characteristics or behavior (including, but not limited to, research on perception, cognition, motivation, identity, language, communication, cultural beliefs or practices, and social behavior) or research employing survey, interview, oral history, focus group, program evaluation, human factors evaluation, or quality assurance methodologies. (NOTE: Some research in this category may be exempt from the HHS regulations for the protection of human subjects 45 CFR 46.101(b)(2) and (b)(3). This listing refers only to research that is not exempt.)
RECRUITMENT SCRIPT

Call for research participants

I am a master’s student in the Department of Art Education at The Ohio State University. Currently, I am conducting a study entitled *Online Communities: Possibilities for Museum Education*. The purpose of this study is to investigate online communities’ potential as a way to enhance educational capabilities, build communities of learners, and more deeply engage young adult audiences in contemporary art museums. Ultimately, the information gathered from this study will be used to develop an online community prototype site that may be used to help develop future museum education initiatives. As part of the study, I am looking for young adult volunteers who are willing to participate during the summer quarter of 2006.

The participants selected for this study will be asked to visit an online environment their leisure and interact with the site by posting comments and corresponding with other contributors. Afterwards, participants will be invited to respond to a questionnaire that addresses their reading of the site’s effectiveness, relevance and usability. Anticipated time commitment will be between two to four hours, but participants are free to leave the study at any time. Real-life and virtual communications will be recorded and/or transcribed solely for the purposes of the study, and participant’s anonymity will be protected.

If, in principle, you are interested in participating, please contact me by e-mail at bontempo.9@osu.edu by June 2006. If selected, we can arrange a day and time to meet and discuss the study. Identifying possible participation in the study does not imply any commitment. If you decide to participate, you will be asked to sign a consent form. If you have any questions, please do not hesitate to contact me, or my thesis advisor Dr. James H. Sanders III (sanders-iii@osu.edu).

Melissa Bontempo
Graduate Student, Art Education
The Ohio State University Consent to Participate in Research

Study Title: Online Communities: Possibilities for Museum Education

Researcher: Dr. James H. Sanders III

Sponsor: N/A

This is a consent form for research participation. It contains important information about this study and what to expect if you decide to participate.

Your participation is voluntary.
Please consider the information carefully. Feel free to ask questions before making your decision whether or not to participate. If you decide to participate, you will be asked to sign this form and will receive a copy of the form.

Purpose:
The purpose of this study is to investigate the potential use of online communities to enhance educational capabilities, build learning communities, and more deeply engage museum audiences. Ultimately, the information gathered would be used to develop an online community prototype site that may be used to inform future online museum education initiatives.

Procedures/Tasks:
After completing a brief survey of your Internet habits, you will be asked to visit an online environment at your leisure and interact with the site by posting comments and corresponding with other contributors. Afterwards, you will be invited to respond to a questionnaire that addresses your reading of the site's effectiveness, relevance and usability.

Duration:
Participation will take place online at your leisure. Approximate time commitment will be between one to two hours, but you may leave the study at any time.
**Risks and Benefits:**
There are no foreseeable risks to participating in this study. As a contributor, you may benefit by familiarizing yourself with the social and educational capabilities of online communities in terms of self-directed learning, peer-to-peer interaction, opportunity for creative collaboration, and real-life application of skills and knowledge.

**Confidentiality:**
Efforts will be made to keep your study-related information confidential. However, there may be circumstances where this information must be released. For example, personal information regarding your participation in this study may be disclosed if required by state law. Also, your records may be reviewed by the following groups (as applicable to the research):
- Office for Human Research Protections or other federal, state, or international regulatory agencies;
- The Ohio State University Institutional Review Board or Office of Responsible Research Practices;
- The sponsor, if any, or agency (including the Food and Drug Administration for FDA-regulated research) supporting the study.

**Participant Rights:**
You may refuse to participate in this study without penalty or loss of benefits to which you are otherwise entitled. If you are a student or employee at Ohio State, your decision will not affect your grades or employment status.

If you choose to participate in the study, you may discontinue your participation at any time without penalty or loss of benefits. By signing this form, you do not give up any personal legal rights you may have as a participant in this study.

An Institutional Review Board responsible for human subjects research at The Ohio State University reviewed this research project and found it to be acceptable, according to applicable state and federal regulations and University policies designed to protect the rights and welfare of participants in research.

**Contacts and Questions:**
For questions, concerns, or complaints about the study you may contact Melissa Bontempo at 614 886 6506 or via email at bontempo.9@osu.edu.

For questions about your rights as a participant in this study or to discuss other study-related concerns or complaints with someone who is not part of the research team,
you may contact Ms. Sandra Meadows in the Office of Responsible Research Practices at 1-800-678-6251.

If you are injured as a result of participating in this study or for questions about a study-related injury, you may contact Dr. James H. Sanders III at 614-292-0266.

**Signing the consent form**

I have read (or someone has read to me) this form and I am aware that I am being asked to participate in a research study. I have had the opportunity to ask questions and have had them answered to my satisfaction. I voluntarily agree to participate in this study.

I am not giving up any legal rights by signing this form. I will be given a copy of this form.

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<thead>
<tr>
<th>Printed name of subject</th>
<th>Signature of subject</th>
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<td>AM/PM Date and time</td>
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<tr>
<th>Printed name of person authorized to consent for subject (when applicable)</th>
<th>Signature of person authorized to consent for subject (when applicable)</th>
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<td>AM/PM Date and time</td>
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<th>Relationship to the subject</th>
<th>Date and time</th>
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**Investigator/Research Staff**

I have explained the research to the participant or his/her representative before requesting the signature(s) above. There are no blanks in this document. A copy of this form has been given to the participant or his/her representative.

Melissa A. Bontempo

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Printed name of person obtaining consent</th>
<th>Signature of person obtaining consent</th>
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<td></td>
<td>AM/PM Date and time</td>
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**Form date: 12/15/05**
APPLICATION FOR INITIAL REVIEW OF
HUMAN SUBJECTS RESEARCH
The Ohio State University Institutional Review Boards

Office of Responsible Research Practices (ORRP)
300 Research Foundation Building, 1960 Kenny Road, Columbus, OH 43210
Phone: (614) 688-8457 Fax: (614) 688-0366 www.orrp.osu.edu

OFFICE

DATE RECEIVED: DATE VERIFIED COMPLETE: OSU PROTOCOL NUMBER:

1. PROJECT TITLE
Online Communities: Possibilities for Museum Education

2. INSTITUTIONAL REVIEW BOARD
Select the Board to review this research: ☒ Behavioral and Social Sciences
Final Board assignment is determined by ORRP.
☐ Biomedical Sciences
☐ Cancer

3. PRINCIPAL INVESTIGATOR (or Advisor) - see Qualifications for service as a PI
Name (Last, First, MI): Sanders III, James H. Degree(s): Ph.D.
University Academic Title: Professor College: Graduate school
Department Name: Art Education Department #: 02 - 0255
Campus Mailing Address: 351 Hopkins Hall OSU ID Number (8 digits):
128 N. Oval Mall
E-mail: sanders-iii.1@osu.edu Fax: 614 688 4483
Phone: 614 292 0266 Emergency phone: 614 499 0757

4. CO-INVESTIGATOR(S)
Are there any OSU co-investigators on this protocol? ☒ Yes → complete Appendix A1
Original signatures of Co-Investigator(s) are required.
☐ No

5. OTHER KEY PERSONNEL
Are there any OSU key personnel on this protocol? ☒ Yes → complete Appendix A2
☐ No

Key personnel are defined as individuals who contribute in a substantive way to the scientific
development or execution of the project. At a minimum, include individuals who recruit or consent
subjects or collect study data.

6. ADDITIONAL CONTACT ☐ N/A
If further information about this application is needed, specify the contact person (other than the PI).
Name (Last, First, MI): Bontempo, Melissa A. Phone: 614 886 6506
E-mail: bontempo.9@osu.edu Fax:

Form Date: 01/18/06 Version 1.1

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The Ohio State University Institutional Review Boards -
APPLICATION FOR INITIAL REVIEW OF HUMAN SUBJECTS RESEARCH

7. FUNDING

☒ None
☐ Funding requested

Specify sponsor:

Is this a federal sponsor? ☐ Yes ☐ No

OSURF proposal number:

---

8. CONFLICT OF INTEREST

a. Does any OSU investigator (including principal or co-investigator, and immediate family members) have a significant financial interest (e.g., speaking and consultation fees, travel expenses, proprietary interest in the tested product, stock ownership or other equity or membership in the sponsor over $10,000 per year or representing greater than 5% ownership in the sponsor) with the entity supporting the research or any company that may benefit from the research? (See www.orrp.osu.edu/conflictofinterest/ for more information.)

If Yes, forward the investigator’s current OSU Financial Conflict of Interest Screening/Disclosure Form.

Each OSU investigator must have a current COI disclosure form filed before IRB review.

b. Does any OSU investigator (as defined above) have any other perceived or potential conflicts of interest that may impact the safety of the subjects or the integrity of the data?

If Yes, explain:

---

9. EDUCATION

Have all OSU investigators and key research personnel completed the required web-based course (CITI) in the protection of human research subjects? ☒ Yes ☐ No

If No, see www.orrp.osu.edu/humansubjects/citi.cfm for more information.

Educational requirements must be satisfied prior to submitting the application for IRB review.

---

10. EXPEDITED REVIEW

Are you requesting Expedited Review? ☒ Yes → complete Appendix B ☐ No

---

Form Date: 01/18/06 Version 1.1

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11. OTHER INSTITUTIONAL APPROVALS

Check all that apply and provide applicable documentation.

*IRB review cannot be conducted until other required approvals or exemptions are submitted.*

☒ None

☐ Institutional Biosafety Committee (IBC) – for research involving biohazards (recombinant DNA, infectious agents, select agents, toxins), gene transfer, or xenotransplantation (contact 688-8457, see www.orrp.osu.edu/biosafety)

☐ James Cancer Center Clinical Scientific Review Committee (CSRC) – for cancer-related research (contact 293-4976)

☐ Maternal-Fetal Committee – for research involving pregnant women and fetuses (contact 293-8736)

☐ Radiation Safety Committee – for research involving radioactive material (contact 292-1284, see www.ehs.ohio-state.edu)

12. LOCATION OF THE RESEARCH

a. List the specific site(s) at which the OSU research will be conducted (include both domestic and international locations).

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Location Name</th>
<th>Street Address</th>
<th>Suite #</th>
<th>City, State or Country</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Hopkins Hall</td>
<td>128 North Oval Mall</td>
<td></td>
<td>Columbus, OH</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

b. Will the research be conducted in or with any services be provided by the General Clinical Research Center (GCRC)? ☒ Yes ☐ No

*If Yes, GCRC Advisory Committee (GAC) approval must be provided to the IRB before you begin the research. For more information, contact 293-8750 or see www.gerc.osu.edu.*

c. Are all the sites named above on the OSU list of approved research performance sites? See www.orrp.ohio-state.edu/humansubjects/irb/researchsites.cfm ☒ Yes ☐ No

*If No, for each location, indicate what activities/procedures are to be conducted and who will perform each activity.*

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Location Name</th>
<th>Personnel Name</th>
<th>Profession/Job Title</th>
<th>Organization</th>
<th>Role in the project</th>
</tr>
</thead>
</table>

Research performed at non-OSU approved sites or by non-OSU personnel may require a Letter of Support and/or another IRB’s approval.
13. SUMMARY OF THE RESEARCH

Summarize the proposed research using non-technical language that can be readily understood by someone outside of the discipline. Explain briefly the research design, procedures to be used, risks and anticipated benefits, and the importance of the knowledge that may reasonable expected to result. Use complete sentences (limit 300 words).

The proposed research seeks to establish how online communities might be used to extend learning in museums to homes and schools by forging connections between the institution and its young adult constituents. Beta testing the system in a limited environment, while not promising repeatable results, can call attention to potential issues relative to its possible implementation on a grander and more inclusive scale. By interpreting the research, museum education professionals can make informed decisions regarding the construction of a more universally accessible online community that addresses the expectations of their eighteen to thirty-five year old audiences. The refined prototype can thereby be used to help construct a site that both reflects the character of an institution and furthers its educational objectives.

Research will commence with a review of relevant literature, analysis of comparable online museum education initiatives and popular blogging/social networking/creative networking sites, and a detailed assessment of interactions that ensue within these virtual spaces. Using virtual ethnographic methods (Hine, 2002), the co-investigator will be self-identified and situated within publicly accessible online communities where she will observe and interact with other users. Information collected from this analysis will be used to construct a virtual environment based on input from research participants. A qualitative analysis of documented activity, as well as participant response from survey and questionnaire data, will then be used to ascertain interest and identify concerns within the expository virtual environment. Participants will also be asked to evaluate the site in terms of content and usability. The researched site will be monitored and managed for content so that no personal information or inappropriate dialogue is shared. With documented comments coded and all personal identifiers removed, this approach to research will present minimal, if any, foreseeable risk to those involved.

14. SCIENTIFIC BACKGROUND AND LITERATURE REVIEW

Summarize existing knowledge and previous work that support the expectation of obtaining useful results without undue risk to human subjects. Use complete sentences (limit 300 words).

The rapidly growing numbers of people utilizing the internet as a medium for self-expression and social networking has resulted in a proliferation of weblogs and online journals, profile and portfolio sites, and other interactive computer environments. In the digital age, people “are likely to enjoy a much richer panorama of options because the pursuit of intellectual achievement will... cater to a wider range of cognitive styles, learning patterns, and expressive behaviors” (Negroponte, 1995, p. 220). Expanding the capacity of traditional approaches to free-choice learning, through the use of these modern phenomena to extend the museum’s public presence is a possibility that begs to be explored. Such research acts on Burnham and Kai-Kee’s contention that: “We must be well versed in interactive learning techniques. But we must think of such knowledge and such techniques not as ends in themselves, but as tools to be used for the larger purpose of enabling each visitor to have a deep and distinctive experience of specific artworks” (Burnham & Kai-Kee, 2005, p. 67.)

Aware of the pervasiveness of visual culture and how it shapes the aesthetic sensibilities of up-and-coming generations, museums of contemporary art have a unique opportunity to respond to emerging cultural trends that shape our everyday lives. A review of interactions within existing online museum communities will support efforts to extend institutional capabilities into the virtual realm, demonstrating that these environments “can assist with the transformation of passive surfers into active participants” (Dowling, 2005). Today’s computer-savvy young adults represent an untapped demographic for contemporary art institutions. Studying the popularity of their online communities must be considered when developing approaches to reaching youth-based audiences and identifying their ways of learning and communicating. This study seeks to explore existing online communities and how they might inform the development of an exemplary virtual community that interests and engages young audiences.
15. RESEARCH OBJECTIVES

List the specific scientific or scholarly aims of the research study.

The results of the research may help museums educators comprehend how online communities are conducted and received, as well as how they might be used to more deeply engage the institution's young adult audiences. Ultimately, the information gathered would be used to develop a prototype online community that can inform the development of future online museums education initiatives.

16. RESEARCH METHODS AND PROCEDURES

a. Identify all procedures that are experimental and are to be performed solely for the research study.

Analysis of online interactions, surveys, questionnaires, and online focus group response to the prototype online community are those procedures that are to be performed solely for the research study.

b. Check all research procedures that apply:

- Anesthesia (general or local) or sedation
- Audio, video, digital or image recordings
- Biohazards (recombinant DNA, infectious agents, select agents, toxins)
- Biological sampling (other than blood)
- Blood drawing
- Coordinating Center
- Data, not publicly available
- Data, publicly available
- Data repositories → complete Appendix C (including research databases)
- Deception → complete Appendix D & Appendix M1
- Devices → complete Appendix E
- Diet, exercise, or sleep modifications
- Drugs or biologics → complete Appendix F
- Emergency research
- Field notes/ Subject observation
- Food supplements
- Gene transfer
- Genetic testing → complete Appendix G
- Internet or e-mail data collection
- Magnetic Resonance Imaging (MRI)
- Materials that may be considered sensitive, offensive, threatening or degrading
- Non-invasive medical procedures (e.g., EKG, Doppler)
- Oral history
- Placebo
- Pregnancy Testing
- Program Protocol
- Radioisotopes or other sources of ionizing radiation
- Randomization
- Record review (which may include PHI)
- Specimen research
- Stem cell research
- Storage of biological materials → complete Appendix H (repositories)
- Surgical procedures (including biopsies)
- Surveys, questionnaires, interviews, or focus groups
- X-rays or microwaves
- Other

Specify:
17. DURATION

Estimate the time required from each participant. If more than one visit/session will be required, describe the time commitment in detail.

Participation is voluntary and no commitment is required. The responsibilities can be conducted online at the participants’ leisure. Estimated participation time is between two to four hours.

18. NUMBER OF SUBJECTS

a. Provide the maximum number of subjects (or number of subject records, number of specimens, etc.) needed to reach the enrollment goal of the study. 10

The total number of subjects must be based on sound research design and, when appropriate, the statistical analysis presented in the research proposal. The total number of subjects may not be increased without prior IRB approval.

By OSU investigators: ___________________________________________

b. Is this a multi-center study?  □ Yes → indicate the number of subjects to be enrolled in the entire study: __________

□ No

19. SUBJECT POPULATION

a. Specify the age(s) that may participate in the research.

Age(s): 18-35

b. Specify the population(s) that may participate in the research. Check all that apply.

□ Children (< 18 years) → complete Appendix I
□ Decisionally impaired
□ Female
□ Healthy volunteers
□ Male
□ Non-English speaking → complete Appendix J
□ OSU Students or employees
□ Pregnant Women/ Fetuses/ Neonates → complete Appendix K
□ Prisoners → complete Appendix L
□ Psychology Research Education Program (REP)
□ Student subject pool (other than REP)
□ Unknown (e.g., repository research, non-targeted surveys, program protocols)

Specify: ___________________________________________

c. Describe the characteristics of the population(s) and explain how the nature of the research requires/justifies use of the proposed population(s).

Selection will be based on potential participants' active engagement in weblogs and/or online communities, interest in contemporary art, and being between eighteen and thirty-five years of age. Their input will provide insight on creating museum based web-based communities specifically with their needs and interests in mind.

d. If pregnant women are to be excluded, explain how the nature of the research requires/justifies their exclusion. Address means of pregnancy screening.
20. SUBJECT SELECTION, IDENTIFICATION AND RECRUITMENT

a. Describe the method(s) that will be used to identify subjects (e.g., advertising, practitioner’s own patients/ clients, referrals). Explain how the process for identifying potential subjects protects their privacy interests.

Participants will be self-identified via their email response to public and online recruitment efforts. All correspondence between researchers and subjects will be confidential and destroyed after the study is complete.

b. State who (investigators and/or key personnel) will recruit subjects and/or what procedures will be used to determine subject eligibility.

The co-investigator will recruit participants based on potential participants’ existing active engagement with weblogs and/or online communities, interest in contemporary art, and being between eighteen and thirty-five years of age.

c. Explain how and where recruitment will take place.

Attach copies of proposed recruitment materials (e.g., ads, flyers, website postings, recruitment letters, oral/written scripts).

Recruitment will be achieved via email and online.

d. Explain how you will assure that selection and recruitment of subjects is equitable.

The general public will be able to access recruitment information online. Eligible participants will be recruited until the study’s enrollment capacity is reached.

21. INCENTIVES TO PARTICIPATE

Will subjects receive compensation or other inducements (e.g., free services, cash payments, gift certificates, parking, classroom credit, travel reimbursement) to participate in the research study? ☒ Yes ☐ No

If Yes, describe the inducement. Compensation should be pro-rated (e.g., per visit) and not contingent upon study completion.
22. INFORMED CONSENT PROCESS

a. Indicate type(s) of consent processes to be used in the research study.

b. **Complete relevant appendices and provide documents (using OSU templates) as needed.**
   See [http://www.orrp.ohio-state.edu/humansubjects/irb/consent.cfm](http://www.orrp.ohio-state.edu/humansubjects/irb/consent.cfm) for more information.
   - [x] Informed Consent Document
   - [ ] Parental Permission Form
   - [ ] Permission Form, Legally Authorized Representative
   - [ ] Assent Form
   - [ ] Waiver or Alteration of Informed Consent → complete Appendix M1
   - [ ] Verbal Assent (script)
   - [ ] Waiver of Documentation of Consent → complete Appendix M2

c. Describe the consent process and explain when and where it will take place.
   Explain how the consent process will be structured to enhance participant understanding and independent decision-making.

Researcher will comprehensively describe the research protocol and follow-up with a question and answer session. Once everyone’s concerns have been addressed, the researcher will allow time for personal discussion, contemplation, and review of the consent forms. If they do decide to sign, subjects will verify that they understand that participation in any aspect of the study is voluntary, that they are under no obligation to participate, and may remove themselves from the study at any time without penalty.

d. List the investigators and/or key personnel who will obtain consent from the subjects and/or their legally authorized representatives.

   James H. Sanders, III  (principal investigator)
   Melissa Bontempo        (co-investigator)

   [ ] N/A

e. Will any other **Consent forms** be used (e.g., for clinical procedures, consent forms from other institutions)?
   - [x] Yes → provide copies of these forms
   - [ ] No

f. Will any other tools (e.g., quizzes, visual aids, information sheets) be used during the consent process to assist comprehension?
   - [x] Yes → provide copies of these tools
   - [ ] No

23. CAPACITY TO CONSENT

Will adult subjects who lack the capacity to consent be recruited in this research study?
   - [ ] Yes
   - [x] No

If Yes, describe the likely range of subject impairment and explain how, and by whom, the capacity to consent/assent will be determined.
24. PRIVACY AND CONFIDENTIALITY

a. Does the research require access to personally-identifiable private information? ☐ Yes ☒ No
   If Yes, describe the steps you will take to ensure protection of the subjects’ privacy.

b. Will personal or sensitive information (e.g., relating to illegal behaviors, alcohol or drug use, sexual attitudes, mental health) be accessed or collected from subjects? ☐ Yes ☒ No
   If Yes, list type(s) of information:

   c. Could disclosure of information be potentially damaging to subjects’ financial standing, employability or reputation, or place the subjects at risk of criminal or civil liability? ☐ Yes ☒ No
      If Yes, explain:

      d. Explain how you will protect the confidentiality of identifiable data, including where data will be stored, what security measures will be applied, and who will have access to the data.
         Data will be stored on the co-investigator's personal computer, with no outside access. Information will be backed up on a secure server, stored on a data CD, and kept in a private location.

      e. Will you be obtaining a NIH Certificate of Confidentiality? ☐ Yes ☒ No
         If Yes → Provide a copy to the IRB before you begin the research.

      f. Explain any circumstances where it would be necessary to break confidentiality. ☒ N/A

      g. Indicate what will happen to the identifiable data at the end of the study. Check all that apply:
         ☒ Identifiers separated or permanently removed from the data
         ☐ Identifiable data is retained
         ☐ Other, specify: ________________________________

      h. Indicate how study results might be disseminated. Check all that apply:
         ☒ Conferences / Presentation
         ☒ Dissertation / Thesis
         ☒ Publication / Journal article
         ☐ Other, specify: ________________________________
25. HIPAA RESEARCH AUTHORIZATION

Will individually identifiable protected health information (PHI) subject to the HIPAA Privacy Rule requirements (45 CFR Parts 160 and 164) be accessed, used, or disclosed in the research study?  

☐ Yes ☒ No

If Yes → answer the following:

Will a written authorization be used to access the data?

☐ Yes →

a. Describe the PHI involved in the research (e.g., demographic information, health history, diagnosis, test results).

b. Provide the source(s) of the PHI (e.g., OSUMC Information Warehouse, physician’s records, hospital/medical records, data previously collected for research purposes).

☐ No → Indicate the type of waiver or alteration requested and complete Appendix N. Check all that apply.

☐ Partial Waiver

☐ Full Waiver

☐ Alteration

26. RISKS, HARMS, AND DISCOMFORTS

a. Does the research involve greater than minimal risk? (i.e., will the participants experience harm or discomfort beyond what is ordinarily encountered in daily life or during the performance of routine physical or psychological tests)

☐ Yes ☒ No

If Yes, explain:

b. Indicate all risks/ harms/ discomforts that may apply to the research study:

☐ Breach of confidentiality ☐ Psychological stress

☐ Discovery of previously unknown condition ☐ Risk to reputation

☐ Economic risk ☐ Social or legal risk

☐ Invasion of privacy (subjects or other individuals) ☐ Other

☐ Physical injury or discomfort Specify: _______________________

Not applicable.
### 27. MINIMIZING RISKS

Describe the specific protections that will be used to minimize risks or harms identified in #26.

Not applicable.

### 28. MONITORING

a. For greater than minimal risk research, describe the plan to oversee and monitor the research study to ensure subject safety and/or data integrity (i.e., investigator, sponsor or independent monitoring committee).

Not applicable.

b. Describe provisions in place to stop the research study for unanticipated problems/complications.

If problems arise within the online environment, the site can be suspended, edited or removed according to the researcher's discretion. Once problematic issues have been addressed and resolved to everyone's satisfaction, the site may be restored. Any temporary interruption will not be considered in any way to jeopardize the data's integrity.

### 29. REASONABLY ANTICIPATED BENEFITS

List the potential benefits that subjects, society, and/or others may expect as a result of this research study. State if there are no direct benefits to individual subjects. *Compensation is not to be considered a benefit.*

The study will allow for interaction between individuals, extend meaningful dialogue, aid the development of interpersonal communication skills, and empower eighteen to thirty-five year olds in the local community to gain deeper appreciation for artworks within a museum context. Museum educators may use the information to expand their educational outreach capabilities. The field of art may benefit by the development of an interface that facilitates the exchange of dialogue and construction of knowledge that may result. This capability may, in turn, help reveal the community building possibilities of museum web-based interaction.

### 30. ASSESSMENT OF RISKS AND BENEFITS

Discuss how risks to subjects are reasonable when compared to the anticipated benefits to subjects (if any) and the importance of the knowledge that may reasonably be expected to result.

Expected risks are minimal. The knowledge gained is expected to contribute to the museums’ development of online communities and how effectively they engage eighteen to forty year old audiences.

### 31. ALTERNATIVES TO STUDY PARTICIPATION

Other than choosing not to participate, list any specific alternative procedures or treatments available which may be advantageous to the subject.

Not applicable.

### 32. SUBJECT COSTS/REIMBURSEMENTS

a. List any potential procedures subjects (or their insurers) will incur as a result of study participation (e.g., parking, study drugs, diagnostic tests).

Not applicable.

b. List any costs to participants that will be covered by the research study (e.g., study drugs, diagnostic tests).

Not applicable.
# 33. APPLICATION CONTENTS

Indicate what documents are being submitted for this research project. Check all appropriate boxes and provide the version number and date, if available.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Document Description</th>
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<th>Date</th>
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<td>HIPAA Research Authorization Form</td>
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<td>Recruitment Materials (e.g., ads, flyers, scripts for TV or radio)</td>
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<td>Test Instruments (questionnaires and surveys to be completed by the subject)</td>
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The Ohio State University Institutional Review Boards - APPLICATION FOR INITIAL REVIEW OF HUMAN SUBJECTS RESEARCH

34. ASSURANCES AND SIGNATURES
PRINCIPAL INVESTIGATOR

I verify that the information provided in this Application for Initial Review of Human Subjects Research is accurate and complete. I understand that as Principal Investigator I have ultimate responsibility for the ethical performance of the research, the protection of the rights and welfare of human subjects, and strict adherence to any conditions imposed by the IRB. I agree to comply with all generally accepted good clinical research practice guidelines (as applicable) as well as with all other applicable professional practice standards regarding human subjects research, including, but not limited to, the following:

• The research will be performed under the direction of the Principal Investigator (or Advisor) by appropriately trained and qualified personnel with adequate resources to carry out the IRB-approved research;
• The research will not be initiated until written notification of IRB approval has been received;
• Informed consent and HIPAA research authorization from human subjects (or their legally authorized representatives) will be obtained and documented (unless waived) prior to their involvement in the research using the currently IRB-approved consent form(s) and process;
• Serious, unexpected adverse events, unanticipated adverse device effects, and unanticipated problems involving risks to subjects or others will be promptly reported to the IRB;
• Significant new findings that develop during the course of the study which may affect the risks or benefits of participation will be reported;
• The IRB will be informed of any proposed changes in the research or informed consent process before changes are implemented, and no changes will be made until approved by the OSU IRB (except where necessary to eliminate apparent immediate hazards to subjects);
• An Application for Continuing Review of Human Subjects Research will be completed and submitted before the deadline for review at intervals determined by the IRB to be appropriate to the degree of risk (but not less than once per year) to avoid expiration of IRB approval and cessation of all research activities;
• Research-related records, including IRB review and decisions, source documents and documented evidence of informed consent will be maintained in a manner that supports the validity of the research and integrity of the data collected, while protecting the confidentiality and privacy of subjects;
• The Office of Responsible Research Practices will be contacted for assistance in amending (to request a change in principal investigator) or terminating the research if I leave the University;
• A final report will be provided to the IRB when all research activities have ended (including data analysis with individually identifiable private information), and records will be retained and available for audit for a period of at least 3 years after the research has ended (or longer, according to sponsor or publication requirements); and
• All co-investigators, research staff, employees, and students assisting in the conduct of the research will be informed of their obligations in meeting the above commitments.

I agree to comply with all policies and procedures of The Ohio State University, as well as with all applicable federal, state, and local laws and guidance regarding the protection of human subjects in research.
The Ohio State University Institutional Review Boards -
APPLICATION FOR INITIAL REVIEW OF HUMAN SUBJECTS RESEARCH

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Signature of Principal Investigator (or Advisor)</th>
<th>Date</th>
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<tr>
<td>James H. Sanders III, Ph.D</td>
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Printed name of Principal Investigator (or Advisor)

DEPARTMENT CHAIR

As Department Chair (or signatory official), I acknowledge that this research is in keeping with the
standards set by our department and that it has met all departmental/College requirements for
review.

If the PI or any co-investigators are also Department Chair, (s)he shall obtain the signature of the
Dean or other appropriate signatory official, such as the Associate Dean for Research.

<table>
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<th>Signature of Department Chair</th>
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<td>Patricia L. Stuhr, Ph.D.</td>
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Printed name of Department Chair
Research Protocol:
Online Communities: Possibilities for Museum Education

Principal Investigator: Dr. James H. Sanders III;
Co-investigator: Melissa Bontempo

I. Objective
The objective of this study is to determine how a museum of contemporary art can employ the use of online communication technologies as a tool to initiate and foster connections with young adult audiences. The aim of this research is to contribute to knowledge regarding how such technologies are understood and received by targeted subjects, and help museums and cultural institutions develop comparable interactive capacities that encourage dialogue and more deeply engage their audiences. Information from this case study will ultimately be developed into a prototype online community that can be adapted to multiple museums, configured to target their specific audiences and address their respective needs, and potentially extend their educational and community programming.

II. Background and rationale
The rapidly growing numbers of people utilizing the Internet as a medium for self-expression and social networking has resulted in a proliferation of weblogs and online journals, profile and portfolio sites, and other interactive computer environments. In the digital age, young people “are likely to enjoy a much richer panorama of options because the pursuit of intellectual achievement will... cater to a wider range of cognitive styles, learning patterns, and expressive behaviors” (Negroponte, 1995). Expanding the capacity of traditional approaches to free-choice learning through the use of these modern phenomena to extend the museum’s public presence is a possibility that begs to be explored. Such research acts on Burnham and Kai-Kee’s contention that: “We must be well versed in interactive learning techniques. But we must think of such knowledge and such techniques not as ends in themselves, but as tools to be used for the larger purpose of enabling each visitor to have a deep and distinctive experience of specific artworks” (Burnham & Kai-Kee, 2005, p. 67).

Aware of the pervasiveness of visual culture and how it shapes the aesthetic sensibilities of up-and-coming generations, museums of contemporary art have a unique opportunity to respond to emerging cultural trends that shape our everyday lives. A review of interactions within existing online museum communities will support efforts to extend institutional capabilities into the virtual realm, demonstrating that these environments “can assist with the transformation of passive surfers into active participants” (Dowling, 2005). Today’s computer-savvy teens and young adults represent an untapped demographic for contemporary art institutions. Studying the popularity of their online communities must be considered when developing approaches to reaching
youth-based audiences and identifying their ways of learning and communicating. This study seeks to explore existing online communities and how they might inform the development of an exemplary virtual community that interests and engages young audiences.

III. Procedures

A. Research design

The proposed research seeks to establish how online communities might be used to extend learning in museums to homes and schools by forging connections between the institution and its young adult constituents. Beta testing the system in a limited environment, while not promising repeatable results, can call attention to potential issues relative to its possible implementation on a grander and more inclusive scale. By interpreting the research, museum education professionals can make informed decisions regarding the construction of a more universally accessible online community that addresses the expectations of their eighteen to thirty-five year old audiences. The refined prototype can thereby be used to help construct a site that both reflects the character of an institution and furthers its educational objectives.

Research will commence with a review of relevant literature, analysis of comparable online museum education initiatives and popular blogging/social networking/creative networking sites, and a detailed assessment of interactions that ensue within these virtual spaces. Using virtual ethnographic methods (Hine, 2002), the co-investigator will be self-identified and situated within publicly accessible online communities where she will observe and interact with other users. Information collected from this analysis will be used to construct a virtual environment based on input from research participants. A qualitative analysis of documented activity, as well as participant response from survey and questionnaire data, will then be used to ascertain interest and identify concerns within the expository virtual environment. Participants will also be asked to evaluate the site in terms of content and usability. The researched site will be monitored and managed for content so that no personal information or inappropriate dialogue is shared. With documented comments coded and all personal identifiers removed, this approach to research will present minimal, if any, foreseeable risk to those involved.

B. Sample

In total, up to ten subjects will be enrolled in the study. Selection will be based on potential participants’ already being actively engaged in weblogs and/or online communities, having an interest in contemporary art, and being between eighteen and thirty-five years of age. No other stipulation will be specified or required. Self-identified participants will be recruited from posts and bulletins placed on popular online social networking and blogging communities. Consequently, they will likely represent a cross-section of the users of such sites, and not the general population.
C. Measurement/Instrumentation
The category of measurement/instrumentation is irrelevant to this particular study because the conclusions will be based on opinion, observation and qualitative analysis.

D. Detailed study procedures
1. Analysis of existing sites
A limited number of art museums have already begun to extend their education capabilities by incorporating the use of online communities. These existing sites can provide insight on how institutions use internet communication technologies, as well as how they manage the challenges and opportunities that emerge with their implementation. Museums that have been selected for these purposes include the Victoria and Albert Museum (everyobject.net), the Smithsonian American Art Museum (eyelevel.si.edu), the Walker Art Center (blogs.walkerart.org), the Art Institute of Chicago (artic.edu/artexplorer), the deYoung Museum in San Francisco, and its partnering institution the Legion of Honor (thinker.org), and MoMA (redstudio.moma.org). Architecture, content and usability of these sites will be comparatively assessed to determine how each site attends to the mission of its respective institution. Furthermore, this study will explore popular online journaling, blogging, social networking and creative networking communities to analyze properties that may affect their success. These sites will include livejournal.com, myspace.com, and deviantart.com, respectively. Additional sites within the aforementioned categories may also be analyzed in this study if they are determined to be relevant to the study's intent. Analysis will begin with a descriptive overview of each site's overall structure, with particular focus given to how each site is governed and situated within its particular context. Research will address user responses in how users interact with each other and in their affiliation with the site itself. These observations will then be used to inform development of an explicatory prototype.

2. Recruitment and grounding of participants
Initial recruitment will take place online, so potential participants can read over research protocol materials at their leisure with no outside pressure. From there, they can arrange to meet the researchers virtually or in person to ask questions and clarify what their participation will entail. All subjects will verify that they understand that participation in any aspect of the study is voluntary, they are under no obligation to participate, and may remove themselves at any time without penalty. Once subjects have consented to these terms, they will be introduced to the features of the site and different ways it can be utilized. Users will not be coached, and every effort made to avoid shaping their expectations or participation, or otherwise influence their involvement in a way that might affect the outcome of the study.

3. Beta testing of online museum community prototype
Participant responsibilities will entail interacting with the site and other users as they would customarily, and conducting their online participation at their leisure. Approximate time commitment will be between two to four hours.
Subject evaluations will be conducted within two weeks of the initial study. If problems arise within the online environment, the site can be suspended, edited or removed according to the researcher’s discretion. Once problematic issues have been addressed and resolved to everyone’s satisfaction, the site may be restored. No compromising information will be collected in this study, only opinions based on the participants’ interests and attitudes. Data will be stored on co-investigator’s personal computer, with no outside access. Information will be backed up on a secure server, stored on a data CD, and kept in under lock and key.

4. Survey of participant response to prototype
The survey portion of the research will explore participant values and perceptions, behavioral practices, and expectations of the prototype. As per the rationale of the recruitment selection process, participants may be inclined to use their own experience with online communities to inform their opinion of the site. A general survey of participant’s previous engagement with online communities will provide some evidence of their familiarity with the medium. This portion will seek to discover how often participants engage in online interactions, how often their online interactions lead to real-life encounters, and if these encounters lead to additional creative pursuits. Subsequently, the line of questioning will move towards more opinion-based responses, exploring how online interactions have/have not helped them construct meaning, develop confidence, or strengthen interpersonal relationships. Finally, participants will be asked to assess their experiences with the online museum community prototype. Questions in this portion will address how their engagement with the site has/has not helped them understand contemporary art, and if the site has encouraged a continued interaction with other users and/or attendance at museum programs and exhibitions. Other questions may arise and be explored based on participants’ interests.

E. Internal validity
The category of internal validity is irrelevant because this study is not attempting to establish a causal relationship.

F. Data analysis
Qualitative textual analysis (Hine, 2002) will be used to explore the data collected from dialogue within the provisional online community. Surveyed on relevance and usability based on participant experience, findings will suggest possibilities for further interface developments. In the course of investigation, themes reflecting the range of opinions, attitudes, and values of participants will be identified. Online discussions will be collected, coded and analyzed for frequency and patterned ways of speaking about the site. This contextual analysis will then shape future refinements of the prototype.
IV. Bibliography


Art Explorer (The Art Institute of Chicago) Retrieved December 2005 http://www.artic.edu/artexplorer


June 12, 2006

Protocol Number: 2006B0160
Protocol Title: ONLINE COMMUNITIES OF LEARNERS: POSSIBILITIES FOR MUSEUM EDUCATION, James Harry Sanders, Melissa Boninemo, Art Education.
Type of Review: New—expedited
Date of Review: June 09, 2006
IRB Staff Contact: Cheri Petrey
(614) 292-0526
Petrey.6@osu.edu

Dear Dr. Sanders,

The Behavioral and Social Sciences IRB REQUIRES MODIFICATIONS to the above referenced protocol:

1. Question #16b and Consent form—revise the consent form to inform participants that they will be audio or video taped as indicated in question #16b. If question #16b "audio, video, digital or image recordings" was marked by mistake, please revise accordingly.
2. Confirm that the questionnaire will be submitted by amendment for IRB approval once it is developed and prior to using the instrument with subjects.

Modifications should be submitted to the Office of Responsible Research Practices as follows:
- Provide a cover letter with a detailed, point-by-point response to each of the requested modifications.
- Revise all applicable documents and submit the following:
  - One copy of each applicable revised document with changes underlined
  - One copy of each applicable revised document with changes incorporated (clean)
- Submit a copy of this letter with the Principal Investigator’s original signature and date in the spaces provided.

Continuing Review revisions should be returned within one week of the date of this letter. Initial Review and Amendment revisions need to be returned within two weeks of receipt of this letter. Failure to respond will result in the withdrawal of the submission.

All forms and procedures can be found on the ORRP website—www.orrp.osu.edu. Please feel free to contact the IRB staff contact listed above with any questions or concerns.

Date: ____________________________ Signature(s): ____________________________

Principal Investigator(s)
June 14, 2006

Protocol Number: 2006B0160
Protocol Title: Online Communities: Possibilities for Museum Education
Type of review: New — expedited
Date of review: June 9, 2006
IRB Staff Contact: Cheri Pettrey
   (614) 292-0526
   pettey.6@osu.edu

To Whom It May Concern:

This letter and the attached survey have been compiled to address modifications to the protocol referenced above.

1. In question #16b, I indeed checked off the “audio, video, digital or image recordings” by mistake. I have unchecked the box in the revised version.

2. In the time since I submitted the original application, I developed the survey I will be giving to the subjects. I have attached the survey for your review, and checked off the appropriate box in the appendix in the revised version.

3. Additionally, I have extended the permitted age range of participants from 18–25 to 18–35. These changes are reflected in questions #19a, 19c, and 20b.

Hopefully, these amendments will satisfy all of your concerns. Please contact me if there are any problems. Thank you for your time and consideration.

Sincerely,

Melissa Bontempo
June 16, 2006

Protocol Number: 2006B0160
Protocol Title: ONLINE COMMUNITIES OF LEARNERS: POSSIBILITIES FOR MUSEUM EDUCATION, James Harry Sanders, Melissa Boetemps, Art Education.

Type of Review: New - expedited
IRB Staff Contact: Cheri Petney
(614) 292-0526
Petney.6@osu.edu

Dear Dr. Sanders,

The Behavioral and Social Sciences IRB APPROVED the above referenced protocol BY EXPEDITED REVIEW. The Board was able to provide expedited approval under 45 CFR 46.110(b)(1) because the research presents minimal risk to subjects and qualifies under the expedited review category(s) listed below.

Date of IRB Approval: June 16, 2006
Date of IRB Expiration: June 09, 2007
Expedited Review Category: Category # 7

If applicable, informed consent (and HIPAA research authorization) must be obtained from subjects or their legally authorized representatives and documented prior to research involvement. The IRB-approved consent form and process must be used. Changes in the research (e.g., recruitment procedures, advertisements, enrollment numbers, etc.) or informed consent process must be approved by the IRB before they are implemented (except where necessary to eliminate apparent immediate hazards to subjects).

This approval is valid for one year from the date of IRB review when approval is granted or modifications are required. The approval will no longer be in effect on the date listed above as the IRB expiration date. A Continuing Review application must be approved within this interval to avoid expiration of IRB approval and cessation of all research activities. A final report must be provided to the IRB and all records relating to the research (including signed consent forms) must be retained and available for audit for at least 3 years after the research has ended.

It is the responsibility of the investigator to promptly report to the IRB any serious, unexpected and related adverse events or potential unanticipated problems involving risks to subjects or others.

This approval is issued under The Ohio State University’s OHRP Federally Assured #00006378.

All forms and procedures can be found on the ORRP website – www.orrp.osu.edu. Please feel free to contact the IRB staff contact listed above with any questions or concerns.

Thomas Nygren, PhD, Chair
Behavioral and Social Sciences Institutional Review Board

Expeditied Approval
Version 04/2006
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Figure A.1: Demographic profile of participants.
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<th>7</th>
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<td>0</td>
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<td>1</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>1</td>
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<tr>
<td>No. of blogs read</td>
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<td>0</td>
<td>0</td>
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<td>1-5</td>
<td>25-50</td>
<td>25-50</td>
<td>11-25</td>
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<td>1-5</td>
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<tr>
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<td>1-5</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>1-5</td>
<td>1-5</td>
<td>1-5</td>
<td>1-5</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>0</td>
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<td>rarely</td>
<td>never</td>
<td>frequently</td>
<td>sometimes</td>
<td>frequently</td>
<td>frequently</td>
<td>frequently</td>
<td>never</td>
<td>n/a</td>
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<tr>
<td>Post entries</td>
<td>rarely</td>
<td>rarely</td>
<td>never</td>
<td>frequently</td>
<td>never</td>
<td>sometimes</td>
<td>sometimes</td>
<td>sometimes</td>
<td>never</td>
<td>n/a</td>
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<td>Respond to entries</td>
<td>sometimes</td>
<td>rarely</td>
<td>never</td>
<td>sometimes</td>
<td>rarely</td>
<td>frequently</td>
<td>sometimes</td>
<td>sometimes</td>
<td>never</td>
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<td>Respond to threads</td>
<td>sometimes</td>
<td>rarely</td>
<td>never</td>
<td>rarely</td>
<td>never</td>
<td>frequently</td>
<td>never</td>
<td>sometimes</td>
<td>never</td>
<td>n/a</td>
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<tr>
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<td>never</td>
<td>never</td>
<td>never</td>
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<td>sometimes</td>
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<td>never</td>
<td>frequently</td>
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<td>sometimes</td>
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Figure A.2: Response to Part I of the preliminary survey.
## SOCIAL NETWORKING SITE HABITS

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<th>7</th>
<th>8</th>
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</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Log in</td>
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<td>sometimes</td>
<td>frequently</td>
<td>frequently</td>
<td>frequently</td>
<td>sometimes</td>
<td>n/a</td>
<td>rarely</td>
<td>frequently</td>
<td>frequently</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Post entries</td>
<td>n/a</td>
<td>never</td>
<td>rarely</td>
<td>never</td>
<td>never</td>
<td>rarely</td>
<td>n/a</td>
<td>never</td>
<td>never</td>
<td>sometimes</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Use Calendar/To do list</td>
<td>n/a</td>
<td>never</td>
<td>rarely</td>
<td>sometimes</td>
<td>never</td>
<td>rarely</td>
<td>n/a</td>
<td>never</td>
<td>rarely</td>
<td>never</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Send messages</td>
<td>n/a</td>
<td>sometimes</td>
<td>frequently</td>
<td>sometimes</td>
<td>sometimes</td>
<td>frequently</td>
<td>n/a</td>
<td>rarely</td>
<td>sometimes</td>
<td>sometimes</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Post bulletins/classifieds</td>
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<td>never</td>
<td>rarely</td>
<td>rarely</td>
<td>rarely</td>
<td>rarely</td>
<td>n/a</td>
<td>never</td>
<td>rarely</td>
<td>rarely</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Post comments</td>
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<td>never</td>
<td>sometimes</td>
<td>sometimes</td>
<td>sometimes</td>
<td>sometimes</td>
<td>n/a</td>
<td>rarely</td>
<td>sometimes</td>
<td>sometimes</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Maintain community</td>
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<td>never</td>
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<td>never</td>
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<td>rarely</td>
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<td>rarely</td>
<td>frequently</td>
<td>sometimes</td>
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<td>rarely</td>
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</tbody>
</table>

Figure A.3: Response to Part II of the preliminary survey.