

DIGITAL THINKATHON

TUESDAY, 30 OCTOBER 2018

Abstract:

Cultural institutions have been using social media as a promotional platform as well as a tool for engaging with their audiences. The easy accessibility of social media has made it a viable option, often serving as an alternative to websites that require considerable investment for development and maintenance. That being said, there is a lack of guidance in terms of social media strategizing and evaluation for cultural institutions. A study was carried out to understand the social media practices, objectives and strategies of 21 of Mumbai's cultural institutions. The findings of this research were studied to indicate the possible challenges faced by cultural institutions in Mumbai, and any incongruity between the goals set by the institutions and the practices adopted by them. Consequently the study presents an overview of social media usage in Mumbai's cultural landscape that can be used to make recommendations for development.

Introduction:

Social media has become one of the main pillars of functioning of any organization - be it a news broadcasting agency or a startup bakery. Right from being a platform to promote and sell one's work, to becoming a point of service for the consumer's queries, social media has proven to be a multi-purpose tool with easier accessibility as compared to other kinds of media. Cultural institutions have understood this and have employed efforts to create their presence on social media.

However due to the diverse nature of cultural institutions and the ever-changing digital environment, there are very few definitive strategies that have been common for all cultural institutions. Thus, a number of challenges arise based on various aspects such as trends, budgets, objectives and so on.

These challenges could be a defining factor in the kind of presence that Mumbai's cultural institutions occupy in the digital space. While an exciting cultural circuit exists in the physical space, there is no literature about social media practices of cultural institutions in Mumbai, possibly because of how young the field is.

This study is an attempt to understand how Mumbai's cultural institutions are using social media. The focus areas are platforms being used, objectives, and infrastructure employed for using and evaluating social media. We present the findings of a survey that enquired into these parameters along with observations about impediments that can be actioned upon to optimise the usage of social media by cultural institutions.

Methodology

To demonstrate how cultural institutions in Mumbai are using social media, this study analyses the findings of an online survey conducted to obtain quantitative evidence. Filled out as a Google form, the survey included questions that looked at three aspects - basic social media practices covering questions that inquire which platforms are being used, social media goal setting and planning, engagement methods, and evaluation practices; the infrastructure in place for execution of social media activities looking at the personnel hired solely for social media and funding allocated towards social media, and finally the objectives of the organization.

In order to understand the objectives of social media usage by Mumbai's cultural institutions, a rating system was adopted for a set of 5 objectives that were in accordance with the themes of the Culture24 Evaluation Framework. The participants were asked to rate them on a scale of 1 to 5, ranging from 1 being the least important to 5 being most important.

As the study was a precursor to a Digital Thinkathon hosted by the Godrej India Culture Lab, the number of participants were limited to the number of invitees, who were selected on the basis of having some sort of social media presence online. The survey was conducted through a Google form which was sent to the participants along with an invite to the Thinkathon.

A three-step analysis was carried out for the survey. First step was to analyse the results of each question individually. The second step included looking at overall practices by clubbing questions under the three parameters described above. The third was a finer analysis with the aim of threading any dissonance between the answers and finding areas that could be potential challenges.

Literature Review

While there is a lack of literature pertaining to social media usage of cultural institutions in India, there has been extensive research on social media growth in libraries and museums in countries like the UK and USA. It has been noted by scholars that while social media was initially seen as a branding tool, the discourse about participatory cultural institutions had a great impact on social media usage.

Nina Simon in her book *The Participatory Museum* notes that the surge of social media platforms has increased the consumers' expectations regarding the kind of interactions and experiences offered by cultural institutions due to the higher degree of accessibility on social web (Simon, 2010).

Thus consumers' expectations have made it imperative for cultural institutions to evaluate the effectiveness of their social media practices. Many analytics tools such as SWOT analysis for libraries (Fernandez, 2009) were developed in order to help with social media strategizing. Additionally, institutions began to adopt larger goals such as community building through social media (Grabill, Pigg, and Wittenauer, 2009).

Parallely, literature reflecting the challenges for cultural institutions was developed. Simon (2010) argued centering social media goals for merely the visitors' enjoyment "trivialised the mission-relevance" of the organisation's participatory efforts. The intangible and ephemeral nature of social media has made it both essential and difficult to evaluate social media practices; the foremost hurdle being the failure to understand the aim behind a social media strategy (Cadell, 2013). Strategies are essential because they help define the long-term vision of an organisation while evaluation helps justify strategizing (Universal McCann, 2014). A dissonance between the two could potentially be one of the biggest challenges for any organisation's social media practice.

Thus, not only has there been a shift in the focus of literature around social media usage by cultural institutions based on the utility of social media platforms but also in terms of the practices being adopted and how they're tackling the potential challenges. Using paid promotion, employing departments dedicated to digital operation as well as archiving social

media happenings are now seen as essential activities for many large cultural institutions across the world, such as The MET (Tallon, 2017).

There are frameworks that have helped cultural institutions align their goals and activities. Culture24's *Let's Get Real* project defined themes – Community, Content, Brand, Marketing, Interaction and Services, using which institutions can set targets as well as learn about the metrics used to evaluate them. Institutions can decide on the themes that they find fit for their vision.

This study outlines the existing social media practices so as to identify areas that need improvement institutionally and as a collective of institutions.

Evaluation

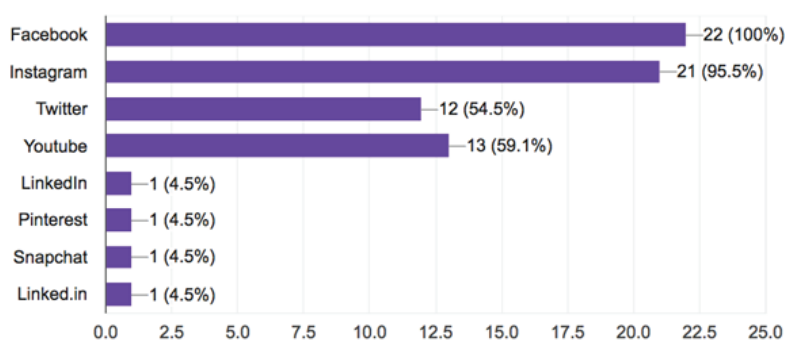
PARTICIPANTS:

A total of 27 cultural institutions based in Mumbai were invited to participate in the survey out of which 22 responses were obtained. The institutions were selected from among 169 cultural institutions in Mumbai on the basis of their social media presence, the minimum criteria being at least one active social media channel. All 22 responses were 100% complete. The survey included 11 main questions and 2 sub questions dependent on the response to a Yes/No regarding measurement of social media engagement through analytics.

The participating institutions range from museums, libraries, heritage projects, studios, culture festivals, art galleries, performance spaces, and cultural think tanks. The aim of having a variety of participating institutions is to understand the cultural scene of Mumbai from an inclusive lens and to study various aspects of what people consume to engage with culture on social media.

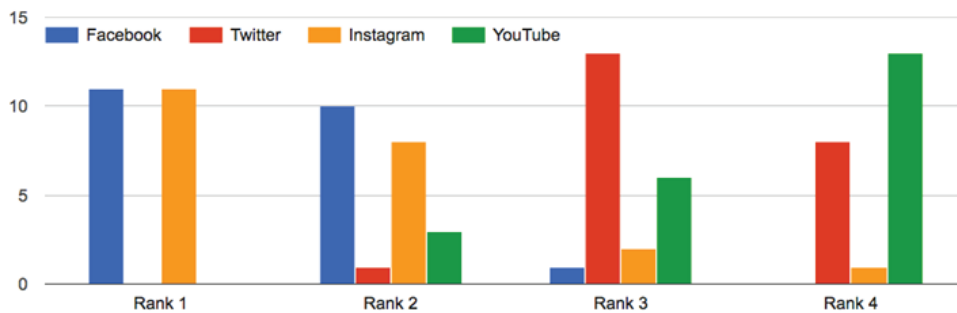
Which social media platforms do you use?

22 responses



The participants were asked about the platforms in use through two questions. The first question required them to list down all the platforms they use and the second question asked them to rank four popular platforms viz, Facebook, Instagram, Twitter and YouTube based on the engagement they generate on each.

Rank the following social media platforms based on engagement you generate:



The findings reflect that Facebook is used universally, with 50% of the participants ranking it as the primary platform for generating engagement. 21 out of 22 participants use Instagram, with 50% of them ranking it as their primary engagement generating social media platform. YouTube is used by 13 participants while Twitter is used by 12. Twitter was ranked as the third most engagement generating platform by 59.1% of the participants while YouTube was ranked as fourth by 59.1% of them.

Some other platforms being used included LinkedIn, Snapchat and Pinterest.

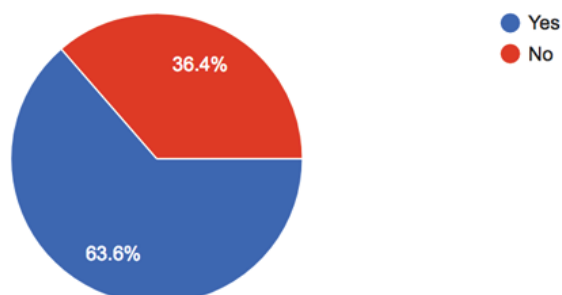
Cultural institutions from Mumbai have social media presence on an average of 3 platforms. A preference for image-based platform can be noted from the findings, over text-based platforms like Twitter and video platforms like YouTube.

PLANNING AND ENGAGEMENT:

A set of five questions inquired into how strategically cultural institutions plan their social media activities and engage with their audiences.

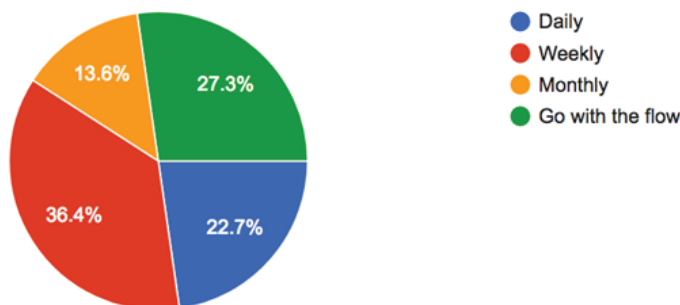
Do you define your social media goals and set targets?

22 responses



How often do you plan your social media posts?

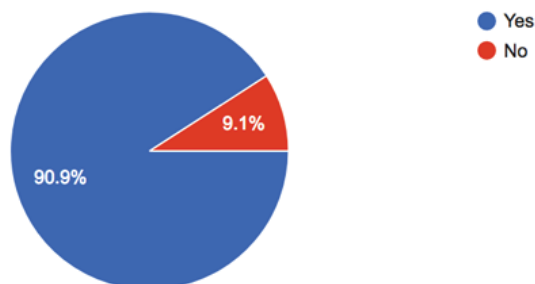
22 responses



Out of our 22 participants, 63.6% respondents define their social media goals and targets. 36.4% of the participating institutions plan their social media posts weekly, and make posts more than once a week, while 27.3% “go with the flow”. The informal approach reflected in the latter result does not seem to reflect in the number of institutions making posts infrequently. Only 18.2% of the total number of institutions make posts “as and when possible” while 45.5% of them post on social media every day.

Do you actively engage with your followers by responding to queries/comments?

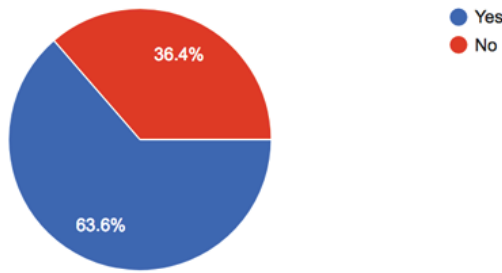
22 responses



While 90.9% of the participants engage with their followers by responding to comments on social media posts, only 63.6% of the them host social media campaigns to boost interaction.

Do you host social media campaigns?

22 responses

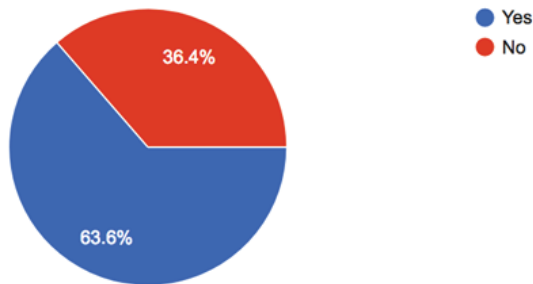


ANALYTICS:

A Yes or No question was posed to the participants in order to know if they measure social media engagement through analytics. 63.6% of them said Yes. However, this percentage does not correlate with the percentage of participants who set social media targets or those who host campaigns. 30.8% of those who define their targets do not evaluate social media through analytics. The same percentage of participants who host campaigns do not measure social media engagement either.

Do you measure your social media engagement through analytics?

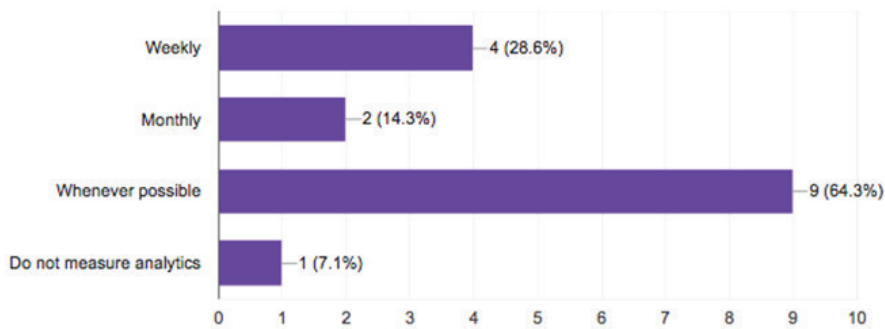
22 responses



Out of all the respondents, 28.6% define their social media targets, host campaigns as well as evaluate engagement. 61.9% have inconsistent responses among these three parameters while 9.5% of the participants follow none of the practices.

How often do you measure analytics?

14 responses



Inconsistent social media analysis was practised by 64.3% of the participants who evaluate social media through analytics as and when possible, while 28.6% measured metrics weekly. 14.3% of the participants evaluated metrics monthly.

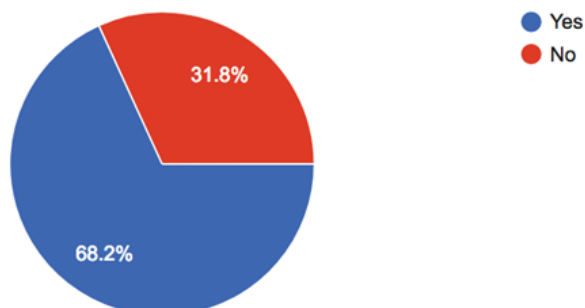
69.2% of those who evaluate social media engagement use inbuilt Facebook and Instagram analytics tools while 30.8% use Google Analytics either solely or along with inbuilt analytics tools. Other analytics tools in use were SumAll, Sprinklr, Buffer, Native and Hootsuite.

INFRASTRUCTURE:

Infrastructure, in the context of this study, refers to the provisions made for social media functioning of the cultural institution. We are looking at two aspects - paid promotion through boosting posts and hiring specialised personnel who manage social media of the institution.

Do you use paid promotion for your social media posts?

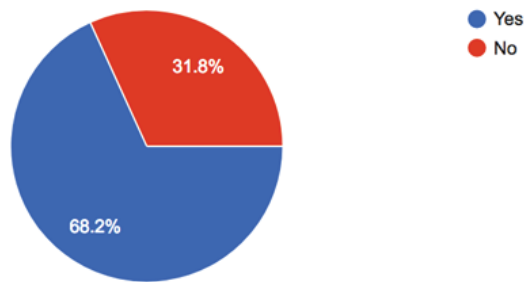
22 responses



68.2% of the participants used paid promotion. 35.7% of these do not define a social media strategy and 35.7% do not measure analytics, however these numbers are not reflective of each other.

Do you have a person assigned for managing your social media platforms?

22 responses



There were 68.2% of the participants who had dedicated personnel for managing social media activities of the institution. 71.4% of them define their social media targets and 71.4% evaluate social media through analytics, however it is interesting to note that there is no correlation between the people who do both.

OBJECTIVES:

In order to understand the institutions' social media objectives, we asked them to quantify a set of five common objectives, identified through the suggestions in Culture24's *Let's Get Real* framework. The participants had to rate the following on a scale of 1 to 5, 5 being of the highest importance:

Objective	Rating 1 (Not so important)	Rating 2 (Slightly important)	Rating 3 (Considerably important)	Rating 4 (Important)	Rating 5 (Very important)	Total	Mean
Maximizing offline audience	2	-	3	4	13	22	4.2
Engaging with audience that may not translate into offline attendance	-	5	8	4	5	22	3.4
Creating an online channel for publishing content	-	7	6	3	6	22	3.4
Providing a point of service	-	4	7	4	7	22	3.6
Documenting and archiving happenings	2	2	4	6	8	22	3.7

The table determines to what extent the mentioned objectives are important for the institutions who participated in the study. Evidently, there is considerable emphasis on offline translation of audiences. However, it is important to note that the most common response for the objectives was the rating of 5 signifying the objectives as "very important" for the institution. Of all the respondents, only 13.6% rated one or more objectives as "not so important". Indicatively, all objectives are relevant to most of the participating cultural institutions.

Conclusion

The study helped identify many interesting aspects of how social media is being used by cultural institutions in Mumbai.

Despite having a very challenging algorithm, Facebook continues to be the dominating social media platform for most cultural institutions, followed closely by Instagram. While Facebook events offer an ideal promotion tool for institutions who host physical events, many institutions have not explored the platforms of Twitter and YouTube, which could become gamechangers, if used creatively.

Inconsistencies in strategizing and evaluating social media goals and practices were found. This can be a huge challenge when it comes to defining the voice of the institutions which reflects in online promotion as well as justifying the infrastructure that needs to be provided for social media.

Similarly, a large majority of institutions either did not measure social media analytics or measured them infrequently. While there is no single strategy or framework that can be recommended for any institution because of the diversity in their programming and operation, having an evaluation strategy paired with the right metric tools can help institutions to identify what works for them and what does not, and how close they are to achieving their objectives.

There is a range of tools, platforms and frameworks available for understanding social media in India. However most of them are not designed for cultural institutions and many a times involve huge budget requirements. Cultural institutions in Mumbai thus need guidance regarding the best practices for social media so as to streamline their online presence with their institutional goals, as well as create an ecosystem that can reflect the exciting cultural scene of the city in the digital space.

Acknowledgements

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G5A
The Habitat
Harkat Studio
The Inheritance Project
Kala Studio
Matterden
OverAct Theatre
Piramal Museum
Studio Tamaasha

Tarq
Trilogy
True School of Music
Upavan Festival
WeWork

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