Using social media to curate digital artworks can lead to increased and more dynamic public participation and engagement

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*Many arts research projects have explored new ways of capitalising on the rich potential of social media to reach out beyond the gallery space and encourage audiences to participate and engage with digital artworks. **Claire Taylor** describes her recent experience of using Twitter galleries to promote engagement with an exhibition featuring the work of four leading artists from Latin America and the US. Twitter curation can provide an audience engagement that is less cumbersome – and more easily trackable – than traditional "exit surveys", as it allows for immediate feedback through likes and retweets. Moreover, it can help give a sense of the artwork as dynamic when used to encourage participatory artworks, with "spectators" contributing images and becoming active co-creators.*

During 2014-15, I held a Follow-On Funding for Impact and Engagement grant from the AHRC, which enabled me to hold a series of events, activities, and outputs based on my earlier AHRC-funded Fellowship, which looked at Latin American cultural production online. The AHRC's follow-on funding is intended to support engagement and dissemination activities arising from research, and it's a great funding scheme to consider if you have ideas about how you might engage audiences with your research in innovative and creative ways.

The various impact and engagement events held during my project included an artist in residence scheme, held jointly with FACT (Foundation for Art and Creative Technology), an exhibition held at FACT under the Liverpool Independents umbrella, the creation of an original artwork, participatory workshops with community media organisations, artist talks, and some experimental ways of using digital media for audience participation and engagement. Involved in the exhibition were four leading artists from Latin America and the US; Brian Mackern from Uruguay, Bárbara Palomino from Chile, Marina Zerbarini from Argentina, and Ricardo Miranda Zúñiga from the US.

At the end of the project, in conjunction with my then research assistant, Jordana Blejmar, I drew up a guidance document setting down our main findings and recommendations, grouped into three key areas:

- exhibition spaces for digital artwork
- uses of social media for curation and engagement
- future possibilities for Europe-Latin(o) American artistic collaborations.

In each of these cases, we identified a set of benefits and challenges, and then came up with some broad recommendations.

Of these three areas, I'll just talk today about one of most potential interest to Impact Blog readers – the use of social media for curation and engagement. One of the aims of our project was to explore ways of capitalising on the current boom in social media to encourage audiences to engage with the artworks. We saw social media as a possible way to develop feedback loops and help the artworks reach out beyond the gallery space, and we trialled some of our ideas using Twitter.

Image credit: This Too Shall Pass by Brian Mackern (2014). © Brian Mackern. Published here with permission.

To do this, we designed two Twitter Galleries that ran throughout two months of the project. The first of these was a retrospective of the exhibition, dedicating one week to each of the artists and the works they exhibited. The second was dedicated entirely to premiering images of the new artwork that our artist in residence, Brian Mackern, created whilst here in Liverpool. Entitled *This Too Shall Pass*, these exclusive images were shared for the first time and, since Brian was at that stage still working on the artwork, it gave the public a rare glimpse into an artwork as it evolved. We invited the public to comment on the images, share them, and even feed into the artwork themselves, by proposing other images to be incorporated. We also held a real-time Q&A Twitter chat with the artist, as a way of creating a particular "time window" of interest around the events, and also of combining face-to-face presence with virtual interaction.

We identified several potential benefits of Twitter curation: firstly, we found that it can provide an audience engagement that is **less cumbersome than the traditional "exit survey"**, as it allows for immediate feedback through likes and retweets. Secondly, this engagement is then much more **easily trackable**, as it allows curators to track these Twitter engagements and also to cross-check this against other data. Thirdly, we found that Twitter curation helped give a sense of the **artwork as dynamic**, since it could be used to encourage participatory artworks, with the "spectators" actually contributing images and becoming active co-creators. Finally, we noted the advantages in terms of **dissemination over time and space**, since Twitter enabled us to reach audiences not able to attend the exhibition in person, and so gave a greater temporal and geographical reach.

That said, we did identify several challenges of Twitter curation. The first of these was that of **telling a narrative**, since we didn't have any of the conventional paraphernalia that would usually surround an artwork, such as an

explanatory text or gallery catalogue; instead, we had to create a narrative that could be sustained over a month-long period, but that would also work if a viewer saw just one individual tweet. We also noted challenges related to the **limitations of the character length,** and we tried to approach this by taking inspiration from new electronic literary genres such as Twitter poetry and Twitter microfiction, which see the limitations as *creative* rather than restrictive. Thirdly, we also noted some issues regarding the **preparedness of the Twitter community;** although social media use is widespread, critical thinking and artistic engagement through Twitter is a new concept for many, so we had to find ways of ensuring the public was prepared for, and able to engage with, what the project was doing.

All of these findings, whilst coming specifically from a project on digital art, should be useful to anyone thinking of using social media for engagement in a variety of contexts. For more details, you can download a full copy of our guide here.

Finally, this work did not end there. In a new project, *Latin American Digital Art and Museum Policy*, my research assistant, Ailsa Peate, and I are looking at how the findings of this earlier project may be relevant in a museum context, particularly when exhibiting digital artwork and running workshops using digital media. In particular, we're working with museums focusing on memory, human rights, and conflict, and our guide has now been translated into Spanish and disseminated to museums, galleries, and action groups with a focus on military dictatorship, state violence, memory, and trauma in six Latin American countries. We're also contributing to refreshing the Federation of International Human Rights Museums (FIHRM) website through the addition of new case studies, based on the artist exhibitions held at FACT. In November we travel to Rosario, Argentina to present the policy document and other research findings at the annual FIHRM conference, where we'll be running a hands-on workshop to encourage discussion on the challenges of representing dictatorship-focused digital art.

Note: This article gives the views of the author, and not the position of the LSE Impact Blog, nor of the London School of Economics. Please review our comments policy if you have any concerns on posting a comment below.

About the author

Claire Taylor is Professor of Hispanic Studies at the University of Liverpool. She is a specialist in Latin American literature and culture, and has published widely on a range of writers, artists and genres from across the region. Her particular geographical areas of interest are Colombia, Argentina and Chile, although she also worked on literature, art and culture from other regions. Within Latin American cultural studies, she takes a particular interest in the varied literary and cultural genres being developed online by Latin(o) Americans, especially hypertext novels, e-poetry and net art. She has published numerous articles and book chapters on these topics, and is the co-author of the recent volume Latin American Identity in Online Cultural Production (New York: Routledge, 2012), and author of the recent monograph Place and Politics in Latin America Digital Culture: Location and Latin American Net Art (New York: Routledge, 2014).She recently held an AHRC Follow-On Funding grant for a project on Latin(o) American Digital Art, which included a series of impact and engagement events, and a book entitled Cities in Dialogue (LUP 2016). Her ORCID iD is: 0000-0002-8661-3910.