AI in Museum Social Media Practice

Uses, Perceptions, and Future Directions

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RESEARCH CONTEXT

Cultural Communication, AI and Trust

Generative AI is reshaping content on social media platforms.

Museums are widely understood as trusted cultural institutions: 'bastions of reliable knowledge' (Black, 2020)

The Tension: Museums must uphold credibility whilst operating in digital environments increasingly shaped by AI-generated content.

RESEARCH CONTEXT

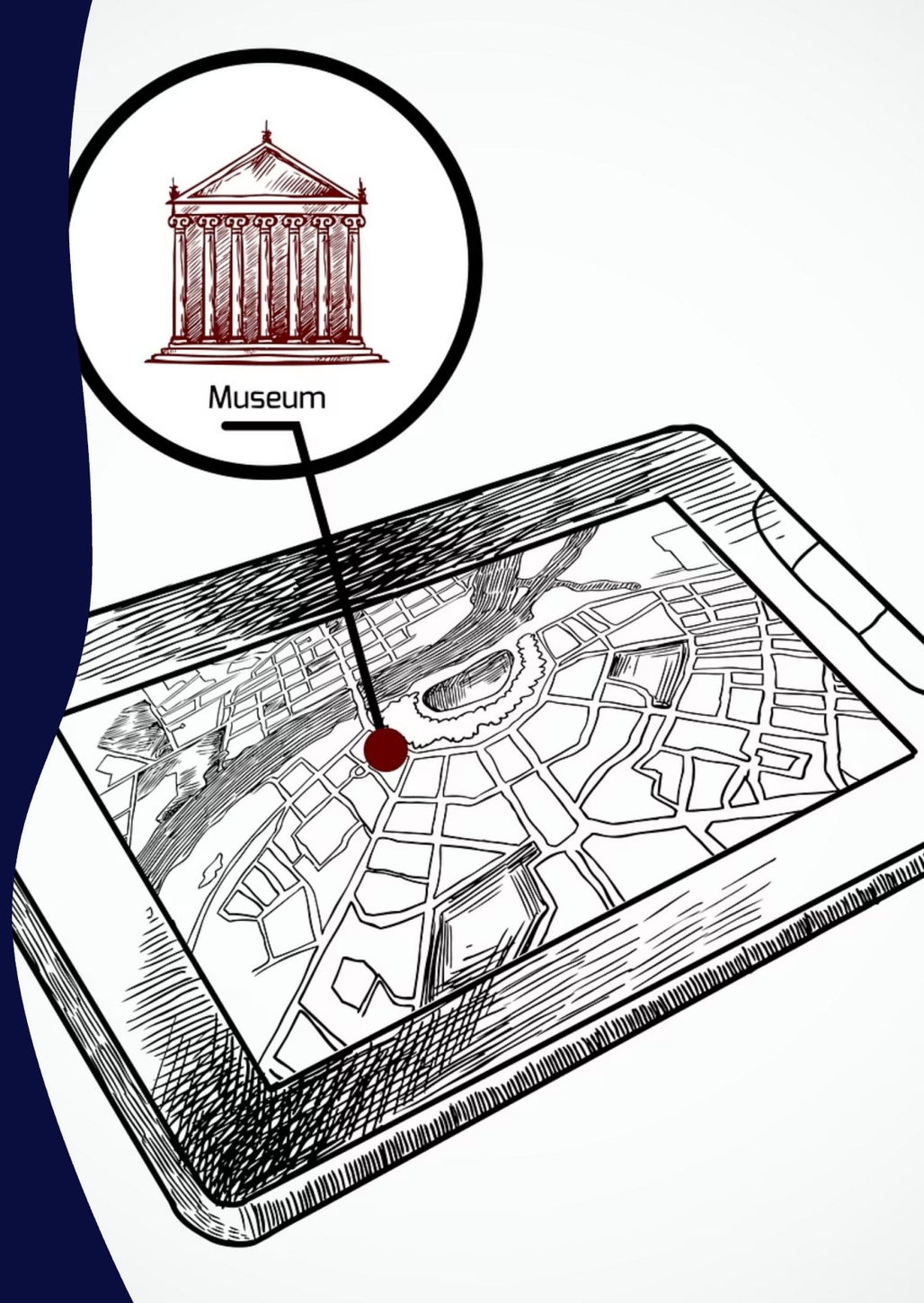
Expectations of Museums in response to AI

Public Values

AI not framed as a technical issue, but a matter of public values e.g., (CULTAI, 2025; Derda & Predescu, 2025).

Custodians of Knowledge

Cultural policies position cultural institutions as custodians of knowledge and meaning in AI-mediated environments (CULTAI, 2025; NEMO, 2024).



RESEARCH CONTEXT

From Expectations to Guidance

01

Strategic Translation

e.g., AI Museum Planning Toolkit (Murphy & Villaespesa, 2020), Museums Association Guide: an ethical approach to AI (Adu, 2024); Smithsonian (Dikow et al., 2023) and National Library Scotland (NLS, n.d.).

02

Core Principles

Emphasis on integrity, transparency, and human oversight in AI adoption.

03

Professional Responsibility

Museum professionals identified as key actors in shaping responsible practice.



From Guidance to Practice

- AI is framed as a matter of 'public values'
- Recognition of risk and opportunities for heritage
- Responsible AI adoption and use

The Gap

Attention is primarily 'high-level' - on leadership decision-making and organisational strategy.

What's missing: A grounded understanding of how these expectations play out in everyday social media practices.



RESEARCH FOCUS

Why Social Media Professionals

Visibility and Consequence

Feeling of 'high-stakes' - where institutions perform identities.

Platform Pressures

Social media professionals adapt to platform expectations.

Embedded AI

AI tools are being suggested for use in everyday communication workflows.

FRAMEWORK

Conceptual Framework

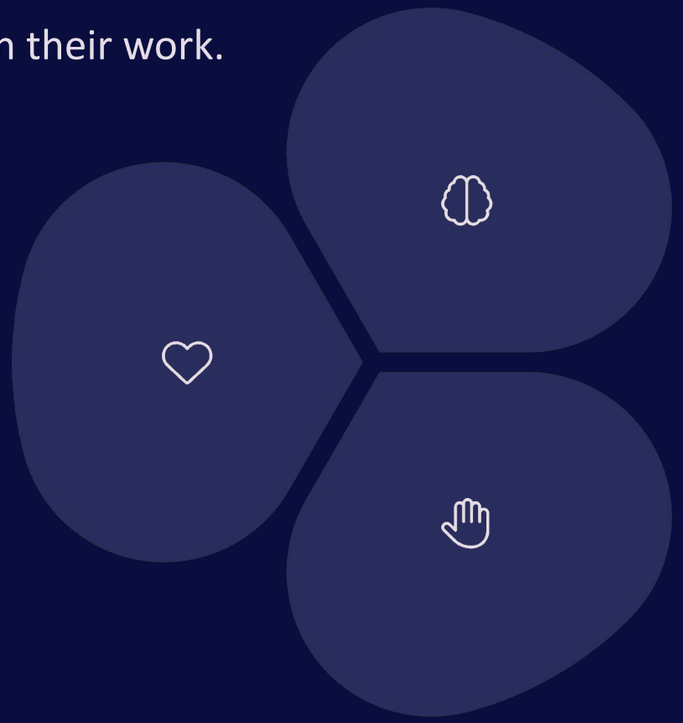
We draw on an experience-based analytical framework. Rather than focusing on adoption or tool performance, we focus on how museum professionals *experience* AI in their work.

Cognitive/Perceptual Dimension

How professionals understand and interpret AI - what they think it is, what they believe it can do, and how they assess its relevance or risks.

Emotional/Affective Dimension

How professionals feel about AI, including curiosity, confidence, anxiety, or discomfort.



Behavioural/Practical Dimension

What professionals actually do: how AI tools are used, adapted, or deliberately avoided in everyday workflows.

Together, these dimensions allow us to study AI as a lived and situated aspect of museum communication practice.

Research Focus

Perception

How AI is perceived in social media communication.

Feeling

How professionals feel about it.

Action

How it is enacted or resisted in practice.

Because social media is a public-facing space, these dimensions are closely tied to institutional voice, responsibility, and trust.





METHODOLOGY

Study Design

This is a mixed-methods study grounded in an experience-based approach.

At the time of this presentation, the study is pre-data collection and is currently undergoing ethical review at the University of Strathclyde.

Two-Stage Mixed-Methods Study

Stage 1: Online Survey

Museum professionals complete a survey structured around the three dimensions of experience: cognitive and perceptual understandings of AI, emotional and affective responses, and behavioural or practical engagement in social media work.

Stage 2: In-Depth Interviews

Participants may choose to share their email address to take part in interviews, allowing us to explore these experiences in greater detail and situate them within specific professional and institutional contexts.



SURVEY STRUCTURE

Survey Design

1

Use and Non-Use

Capturing both adoption and deliberate non-adoption of AI in museum social media communication.

2

Perceptions and Emotions

Exploring how professionals understand AI and how they feel about its presence in their work.

3

Practices and Judgement

Examining how AI is integrated into workflows, how boundaries are negotiated, and when human oversight is prioritised.

4

Authenticity and Trust

Examining how professionals think AI affects audience perception, disclosure, and ethical responsibility.

5

Future Directions

Reflecting on future directions, support needs, and willingness to participate in follow-up interviews.



ETHICS

Ethics and Care

Ethical Approval

Currently being sought. No data collection will take place prior to approval.

Voluntary Participation

Participation is entirely voluntary and self-selected. We do not evaluate individual performance or institutions.

Care and Protection

We focus on how professionals experience AI in public-facing communication roles, treating these accounts with care, anonymisation, and contextual sensitivity.

SIGNIFICANCE

Why This Study Matters

Social Media as Central Space

Social media has become a central space where museums' digital identity is enacted and interpreted.

AI's Transformative Role

As AI becomes embedded in communication workflows, it reshapes how institutional voice is produced and perceived.

> By focusing on professional experience, our study foregrounds the human work involved in sustaining credibility, authenticity, and trust in relation to AI.



Contribution and Next Steps

Experience-Based Framework

Contributes a conceptual framework for examining AI in museum social media communication.

Study Design

Presents a rigorous mixed-methods design focused on professional experience.

Feedback Welcome

We welcome feedback on the conceptual framework, focus on social media professionals, and overall research design before data collection begins.



Thank you for listening

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https://www.museumsocialmedia.com/aistudy

MUSEUM SOCIAL MEDIA CULTURES RESEARCH NETWORK

University of Strathclyde Science

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