Making Art at Home During the COVID-19 Pandemic: Instagram, Young Visitors, and Museum Collections

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Abstract: This paper examines how Canadian art museum education departments used Instagram during the COVID-19 pandemic, particularly for young virtual visitors. The study looks at this use of Instagram through a visual content analysis of ten Canadian museums' educational posts, *stories,* and IGTV videos in light of connectivism and sequence learning. The findings reveal that Instagram became instrumental in allowing museum educators to continue their mission of promoting meaningful engagement with collections for their visitors.

Keywords: Museum Education; Social Media; Instagram; Art making; Connectivism

C anada, mid-March 2020: most museums were closed for several months due to the pandemic, forcing cultural institutions to reimagine ways of connecting with their visitors. As a result, museums began to share works from their collections more regularly on social media. Also, they began to produce newer types of digital content, such as virtual visits, behind-the-exhibition videos, web conferences, and various activities to entertain people at home (UNESCO, 2020). Although many museums had already begun to have a broader presence on social media to promote exhibitions before COVID-19, the pandemic made these platforms essential in allowing visitors to continue to engage with these institutions from home. As an art teacher and museum researcher who follows many Canadian art museums on social media, I quickly noticed several museums shared arts and crafts activities. I wondered: Was Instagram previously used by museum educators to teach artmaking?

While Instagram was used in many ways during the lockdown in Canada, I explore some of the artmaking initiatives and approaches that art museum education departments put in place during the pandemic using this platform with an eye to connectivism and sequence learning (Siemens, 2004; Ritter & Nerb, 2007). Some of the questions guiding the study are: How did educators at Canadian art museums use Instagram? What kind of artmaking activities were offered to the public? What are the implications for museum educators?

The rationale for this study is that this increase in the use of digital technology by cultural institutions and, in particular, a new kind of content will most likely permanently impact the museum education landscape. Although this research is rooted in the pandemic—which keeps it within a limited timeframe—I hope it will serve as a record of this shift in using social media platforms by museum educators.

In the following paper, I present the theoretical framework and the surrounding literature on digital initiatives at museums during the COVID-19 pandemic (Agostino et al., 2020; Burke et

al., 2020; ICOM, 2020; UNESCO, 2020). Then, I consider a few studies addressing how visitors and museums have used Instagram to engage with museum collections (Budge, 2017; Budge & Burness, 2018; Suess, 2018). I also outline some general impacts of the pandemic on Canadian families. After the literature review, I outline my research design and method in approaching Canadian museums' Instagram artmaking initiatives. Finally, I present the findings.

I use specific terms throughout this study that are worth defining at the outset. Instagram *posts* are photographs and short videos that appear as a *gallery* on an account's page and in followers' news feeds. Photographic *posts* are the oldest application function and date back to 2010, when the app was launched (Leaver et al., 2020). Fifteen-second video posts became an option in 2013, with the time limit extended to one minute in 2016. An Instagram *story,* inspired by the ephemeral quality of the Snapchat application, is an image shared for 24 hours. Initially, these photos and short videos would disappear after this time limit, but Instagram added the option to save desired *stories* as *highlights*. These *highlights* become permanent *stories* that can be organized into categories accessed in different circles at the top of a user's page—museums used this function to save some of their artmaking activities. Lastly, I draw attention to IGTV (Instagram TV), one of Instagram's latest additions to its platform in 2018, allowing users to post videos up to an hour in length (Leaver et al., 2020). The first minute of the IGTV is accessed through an account's main page, and users can continue to view the full video in the IGTV section of the app. At the time of writing, Instagram has also recently launched its *reels*, a format of short-form videos, but I will not address them here because museums have not widely produced content in this format.

Other than the different formats of content that can be shared on Instagram, additional important terms are *tag*, *hashtag* and *geotag*. A tag is a way of identifying another account in the content a user is sharing. This tag usually consists of the symbol "@" followed by the specified account's name. A *hashtag* is a keyword preceded by a "#" used to state a subject, emotion, or context of the shared image or video (Highfield & Leaver, 2015). Hashtags on Instagram are used to build community and provide context for a picture, unlike Twitter, where they are more often used to categorize content (Laestadius, 2017). Finally, a *geotag* is a hyperlink that lets users know where the image or video was taken.

Connectivism and Sequence Learning

This study analyzes Instagram artmaking content produced by museum education departments by considering George Siemens's (2004) theory of connectivism which describes how learners can engage with learning opportunities outside of their physical environments and considers ideas of sequence learning.

Connectivism highlights the importance of information technology in learning networks and is rooted in social constructivism and network theory (Pettenati & Cigognini, 2007). In the case of museums using Instagram as a platform to teach art, learners are engaging with both the museum as a virtual learning space and with Instagram as a visual social networking platform. Instagram and the museum are each associated with specific communities of learners and users.

Sequence learning, described in the context of instructional science by Ritter & Nerb (2007), suggests that "the order in which material is presented can strongly influence what is learned, how fast performance increases, and sometimes even whether the material is learned at all" (p. 4). This format can be beneficial because it ensures learners build on a previous step.

Literature Review

<u>Museums, Digital Initiatives, and COVID-19</u>

At the time of writing, the research on museums and the pandemic is limited. It can primarily be examined through official reports and a few recent studies. The International Council of Museums (ICOM) report (2020) on the impact of COVID-19—which contains survey responses from 900 museums around the globe—states that 74,8% of museums have increased their digital offerings since the beginning of the pandemic. Specifically, 41,9% of museums increased their use of social media after the lockdown, with another 3,8% beginning their online presence on social media after the lockdown (ICOM, 2020). Similar statistics were presented in the United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization's (UNESCO) report (2020) on museums in the face of COVID-19, which lists the types of digital activities developed during museum closures. These activities include the use of previously digitized resources, the digitization of activities that had been planned before the lockdown, special activities designed for visitors in response to the lockdown, activities for professionals, and (of particular interest for this study) increased activity on social media (UNESCO, 2020). Although Instagram is listed, the report mainly mentions Facebook live events, SoundCloud, and YouTube as newer museum initiatives without explaining the novel ways Instagram was used. In terms of digital educational content for children, the report says that museum professionals developed educational games, quizzes, stories, and colouring activities to occupy families "through fun and instructive activities" (UNESCO, 2020, p. 16). There is no mention of social media art lessons.

Burke et al. (2020) specifically outline some of the global trends in museums' digital responses to COVID-19, trends that involve social media generally and, more specifically, Instagram. They note the appearance of virtual museum tours and live streams of exhibit installations, which are digital Instagram initiatives that can also be observed in the Canadian museum landscape. They also describe the viral activity called "The Getty Museum Challenge," which was adopted by some Canadian art museums such as the Musée National des Beaux-Arts de Québec which titled their version of this challenge "Défi MNBAQ." The challenges involved photographing re-creations of museum artworks using everyday objects, and clothing people had in their homes. Institutions shared these images on Twitter, Facebook, and Instagram. Apart from social media challenges, many Canadian museums also made their regular pedagogical teaching guides from their school programs available online for the public during the lockdown.

<u>Instagram and the Museum</u>

The previous literature on Instagram and the museum preceding the pandemic is not extensive. It can be divided into two main categories: the use of the application by visitors and the use by museums. Yet, more of the research focuses on the use of the application by visitors. This reality is perhaps because, initially, Instagram was considered a site for user-generated content rather than a social networking platform for museums (Van Dijck, 2013).

Primarily studies have covered how visitors use the application in the museum space (Budge, 2017; Budge, 2018; Budge & Burness, 2018; Chlebus-Grudzień, 2018; Suess, 2018; Suess, 2020; Weilenmann et al., 2013). Researchers have looked and what visitors communicate about their experience and their level of engagement with museum objects. Dr Kylie Budge (University of Western Sydney) has conducted many studies involving Instagram and has noted that the app "appears to serve as a reinforcement or validation of meaning-making through a lived

experience" (Budge, 2017, p. 82). Weilenmann et al. (2013) and their team have noted that visitors creatively engage with museum collections through the app and reframe their experience by "selecting a photo subject, deciding on how to shoot it, frame it, caption and hashtag it" (p.9). This type of use allows visitors to vary their interactions with museum objects and enable museums to reach broader publics in this digital space. Other scholars have examined what visitors' self-portrait photos (selfies) communicate about their experience in the museum (Chlebus-Grudzień, 2018). Suess (2018; 2020) recommends Instagram as a valuable tool for educators to use in the museum with their students. He argues that Instagram can be used as a tool for social pedagogy, as a way to promote reflection, as a method to position knowledge of spatial awareness about works, as a tool that can be used to discuss images post-visit, and as a vehicle for cross-curricular connections.

Within cultural and communications studies, the app has been assessed as a marketing and communication tool for museums (Koontz & Mon, 2014; Zingone, 2019). Koontz & Mon (2014) have written a complete social media marketing guide for libraries, archives, and museums that mentions Instagram; however, it is not extensively addressed given its publication date. Recent qualitative research on the use of Instagram by museums includes a case study of the Instagram content of the Louvre as well as that of the Metropolitan Museum of New York (Zingone, 2019). The research suggests that Instagram's central function for museums is informing through communicating and promoting, and sharing historical and scientific information about individual works from their collections or exhibitions. Additionally, the fact that visitors can contribute to creating content by participating in museum-driven initiatives using the app is also mentioned (Zingone, 2019).

COVID-19 and Canadian Families

Given that most museums indicated in their Instagram caption (the short text that accompanies a visual image on Instagram) that their artmaking content was addressed to families or children, it is worth briefly examining how the pandemic affected Canadian families.

Not many studies speak to the kinds of activities families took up during the lockdown. Most of the literature examines financial stress, food security and the labour market (Carroll et al., 2020; Lemieux et al., 2020; Prime et al., 2020). Yet, one study analyses the impact of COVID-19 on Canadian children's movement and play behaviours through a national survey that is of interest to my research (Moore et al., 2020). The study reveals that children were physically less active during the pandemic and increased indoor play. Leisure time on screen and, more specifically, on social media increased for children and youth after the disease outbreak. The same study also indicates that half of the survey's respondent families took up other new inside hobbies—arts and crafts are among the top three increased activities, followed by puzzles and games and video games.

Initially, I was not planning to investigate gender equality in this study, but the data collected from the museums' Instagram also led me to consider the impact of the pandemic on childcare (Bahn et al., 2020; Wenham et al., 2020). Although women did not exclusively care for children at home during the pandemic, these studies reveal that it was often the case.

Research Design

This research was qualitative and used a descriptive multi-case study approach. I chose this approach because my research questions "seek to explain some present circumstance," and this

method allows an "in-depth description" of a "complex social phenomenon"—social media being a remarkably multifaceted experience (Yin, 2014, p. 4). I then used Gillian Rose's (2016) four sites of production and the three modalities that influence these sites to develop a detailed coding scheme for a visual content analysis of the case studies. The four sites of an image are the site of production, the site of the image itself, the site of audiencing, and the site of circulation. Each of these four sites can be analyzed through the following three modalities: the technological, the compositional, and the social. These modalities "contribute to a critical understanding of an image" (Rose, 2016, p.25). In my study, I further broke down the modalities into subcodes specific to Instagram, such as single or multi-slide stories, filters, hashtags, stickers and emojis (See coding rubric in Table 1). This method of visual content analysis was judged appropriate because it is recommended by the *SAGE Handbook of Social Media Research Methods* (2016) and has been used in previous studies involving social media images (Barney et al., 2019; Marston, 2020).

Table 1: Instagram Coding Rubric

	Technological	Compositional	Social	Screen capture of the post
Site of Production	How was it made? In-app? Were they edited outside of the app?	Genre?	For whom and why?	
Site of the Image Itself	Image or video, Filters, Editing cuts, Alteration of the speed of video or audio, Overlays of other photos, Camera movements, Single slide story or multiple slide story.	Image/video format (dimensions and length), Main content/setting, People/no people, Background music/ no background music, talking/no talking, Titles and text overlays.	Museum practices, Art education practices, Teaching strategies, Hashtags, Post captions, Stickers or emojis.	
Site of Audiencing	Where is it displayed? Story, Post, IGTV.	Viewing position offered in relation to other posts.	How is it interpreted? (Number of likes).	
Site of Circulation	How did it circulate? On Instagram only or across other platforms?	How does the site of circulation change the image's composition?	Organized by who? The education department? The museum?	

Method

The cases examined in this study are those of Instagram posts, stories and IGTVs of major Canadian art museums and galleries from each province. The entire post, story and IGTV—the image and the accompanying caption, tags, and hashtags-- were considered the data (Laestadius, 2017). I only used Instagram content that involved artmaking published during March and June 2020. It is important to note that museums in the Norwest Territories, Yukon and Prince Edward Island did not use Instagram to share art activities during the pandemic. The Beaverbrook Art Gallery in New Brunswick only started sharing artmaking activities in December 2020, so this institution was also not considered. Every other province is accounted for, and the following museums' Instagram content was studied: Art Gallery of Nova Scotia (Nova Scotia), The Rooms (Newfoundland and Labrador), Musée d'art contemporain de Montréal (Québec), Musée des beaux-arts de Montréal (Québec), National Gallery of Canada (Ontario), Art Gallery of Ontario (Ontario), Mackenzie Art Gallery (Saskatchewan), Winnipeg Art Gallery (Manitoba), Art Gallery of Alberta (Alberta), and the Vancouver Art Gallery (British Columbia). The cases examined in

this study were selected because of their different geographic locations and diverse methods of using Instagram during the initial strict lockdown to facilitate artmaking initiatives in Canada between March and June 2020.

Data Collection and Analysis

The data for this study was manually gathered between December 2020 and January 2021. Manually collecting the data and examining each post allowed me to evaluate its relevance to my project and only select the artmaking content (Laestadius, 2017). More unrelated data would have been accidentally introduced into the data set if the process had been automated. I visited each museum's Instagram profile account. I systematically went through all the pages to identify every type of content that involved museums and artmaking activity posted during the first COVID-19 lockdown (March-June 2020). Each artmaking post was screened, captured and saved into an excel chart with its accompanying URL, account, caption, and number of likes or views. It was also classified as either a post, story, or IGTV. Screen capturing the data was an essential and recommended step because an account can choose to delete content (Laestadius, 2017).

Case Study 1: Instagram Stories

The National Gallery of Canada and Vancouver Art Gallery are the only two museums that regularly use Instagram stories to share their artmaking activities.[1] Each art activity was divided into a certain number of images per step of the project that built up the story. The National Gallery of Canada (Ontario) offered its stories as part of a series called "crafternoons," posted each Friday during April and May 2020. Different artists inspired the proposed activities in their collection, events such as Mother's Day, or specific art techniques such as colour mixing. Proposed crafts included marble paper, spring wreaths, paper puppets, stamps, and low-relief frames. All the stories indicate that more in-depth information was available on their Facebook page. The Vancouver Art Gallery (British Columbia) also shared art projects step by step. Each stage corresponds to one of the images making up the story as part of its series, "Art at Home." It proposed activities inspired by its collections ranging from abstract printmaking and upcycled sea creatures to wearable art and found object assemblages (See Figure 1). Nevertheless, unlike the National Gallery of Canada, which used Facebook to provide extra information about the project, the Vancouver Art Gallery used the "swipe-up option." Users can access a detailed art lesson description as a PDF through the link at the bottom of the story.

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[1] Le Musée des beaux-arts de Montréal did share one activity in this format; however, the story was not saved as a highlight. Nevertheless, a regular post was made with this unsaved activity, preserving that the story function was briefly used for teaching.
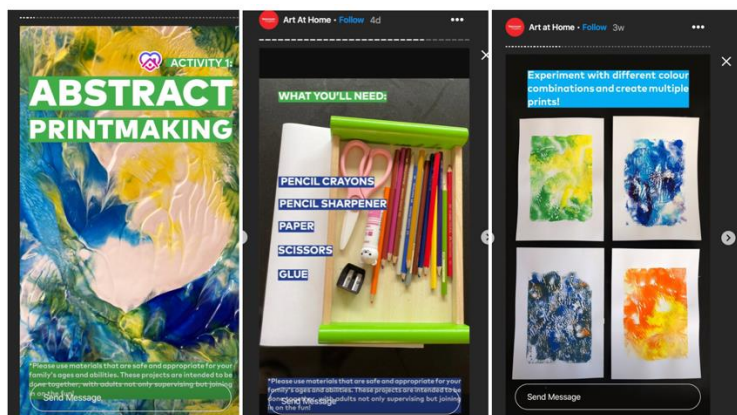
Figure 1: Art at Home "Abstract Printmaking" posted to Instagram Story in April 2020 by @vanartgallery, Courtesy of the Vancouver Art Gallery.

Case Study 2: Instagram Posts

Only the Musée des beaux-arts de Montréal (Quebec) used Instagram posts to share artmaking activities with its followers during the pandemic. The image that made up each post was the inspiration artwork from their collection, accompanied by narrated audio instructions. Every activity was linked to the art in the collection, and viewers were encouraged to take up a particular technique from the inspiration image. The post's caption provided a list of materials and a summary of the narrated instructions.

Case Study 3: IGTV

All the other museums included in this study opted to use IGTV to share their art activities. These videos range from ones that include the art educator on-screen (Art Gallery of Nova Scotia, Art Gallery of Ontario, Art Gallery of Alberta, Mackenzie Art Gallery) to videos that only show the educators' hands making a particular craft accompanied by narration and music (The Rooms, Winnipeg Art Gallery). Some museums also approached teaching their art lessons on IGTV with no educator on-screen or narration and only used images and text (Musée d'art contemporain de Montréal). It is important to note that some of the videos include more editing, with the museum's logo introduced at the beginning, text overlay with additional information, inspirational pictures and time-lapses, while other videos include minimal editing. All the IGTVs were developed as part of a series of videos with titles such as "Studio from Home," "AGO Makes," "Studio Sunday," or "AGA Education" (see Figure 2).

The data from these three types of Instagram content was then coded following the coding scheme I developed. I began by coding the posts with the most likes and views and went in descending order for each museum. I continued until I reached theoretical saturation, in other words, until "no new or relevant data seem to emerge regarding a category," or "the category development is dense," or "the relations between categories are well established and validated" (Strauss & Corbin, 1990, p. 188). As it is impossible to know how many views a story previously got after its initial 24 hours, they were all coded. The coding process involved five from the National Gallery of Canada and ten from the Vancouver Art Gallery. I then considered all the

codes and looked for patterns of regularities, which helped reduce the initial codes to themes discussed in the following section (Creswell, 2018).
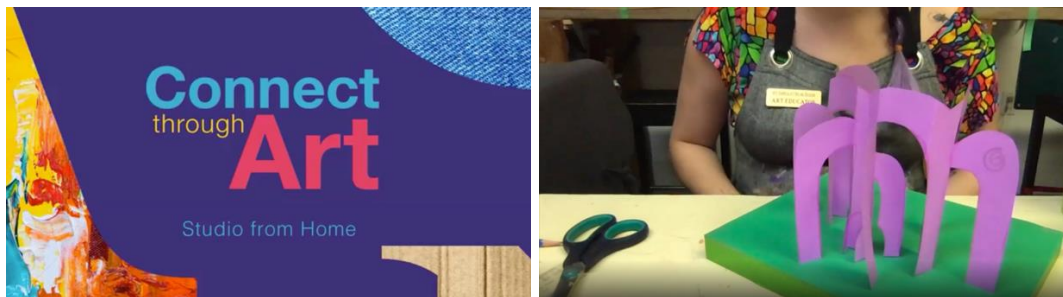
Findings and Discussion

A Teaching Tool

Before the pandemic, no Canadian art museum in this study had previously shared an art-making lesson using Instagram. In addition, apart from le Musée des beaux-arts, le Musée d'art contemporain, the Art Gallery of Ontario and the Vancouver Art Gallery, none of the museums had ever shared any type of IGTV posts before the pandemic. IGTV was the most popular format to share art lessons: seven of the ten museums in this study opted for this format. The activities can be compared to the post-visit activities often offered in museum programming.

The emergence of museums' IGTV teaching content follows the more general and popular pandemic trend of video tutorials and DIY activities. Many of the IGTV videos were also shared as YouTube videos on the museum's respective accounts. UNESCO's report mentions that museums produced more YouTube videos during the lockdown (UNESCO, 2020). In most cases, the YouTube video of the same content received fewer views than on Instagram. The higher count of viewers on Instagram suggests that visitors follow museums more closely on networking platforms, and if museums want to receive broader engagement with their content, Instagram is the better platform to use.

Moreover, museums choosing to teach art through an online platform aligns with Canadian families' more general trends in their choice of activities during the pandemic, including children doing arts and crafts (Moore et al., 2020). It remains to be seen whether museums will continue to use Instagram in this way post-pandemic. Certain museums in the study already stopped sharing artmaking activities at the end of the first lockdown (Musée des beaux-arts de Montréal, Mackenzie Art Gallery, Vancouver Art Gallery, The Rooms, National Gallery of Canada), suggesting that it was only a teaching tool used while their physical doors were closed. Other museums have continued to produce content or even started to produce content on Instagram after the initial stricter lockdown (Art Gallery of Alberta, Art Gallery of Ontario, The Beaverbrook Art Gallery). Museums can also consider some of Adam Suess's (2018) suggestions, previously mentioned, regarding how educators can use Instagram in the physical gallery space.

Sequential Teaching and Learning

Although Instagram stories and IGTV posts are different, the content generated by museums tends to have many similarities across both formats in terms of the teaching approaches employed—which were analyzed through the site of the image itself and the social modality. Every museum used a similar step-by-step approach to teaching. As previously mentioned in the case of Instagram stories, each step of the art lesson was displayed as an individual slide that was then strung together to make a story. At the same time, an IGTV allowed the steps to be shown more fluently because of the video format and editing. The design of the IGTV videos produced by museums resembles that of YouTube tutorials adopting a largely sequential teaching and learning approach. The steps often included introducing an object from the museum's collection or an art technique used in artwork from their collection. Then the material needed for the project was laid out on a table, followed by the presentation of the varying stages to complete the different suggested art projects.

In this way, museums simplify the complex online learning networks associated with connectivism by dividing them into simplified parts (Siemens, 2004). Consequently, connectivist theories of learning are merged with sequence learning theories through the delivery of museum Instagram programming. In addition, learners who follow the steps can choose to pause a video, rewind, skip ahead, or fast-forward through the steps giving them some agency. In fact, some museums, such as The Rooms, sped up the video before sharing it. The speed of the video also highlights that learners are not engaging with the content in real time and can choose to break down the content into smaller steps further if needed.

For example, the Vancouver Art Gallery (2020) offered an activity called "Collage Abstract Landscapes," inspired by works by Sewinchelwet (Sophie Frank) and Emily Carr in the form of an Instagram story. First, the material is presented (paper, pencil crayons, sharpener, scissors, glue). Then the various steps are listed, including drawing shapes, cutting them out, and imagining what they look like before arranging them into a landscape (Vancouver Art Gallery, Art at Home, Activity #5). In the case of the Art Gallery of Alberta's (2020) IGTV lesson on relief sculpture, first, the technique is briefly described. Then a few examples are mentioned before the art project is taught: such as the *Elgin Marbles* found at the British Museum and locally in Edmonton the *9 Figures in Motion with a Puck* by Al Henderson, *Counterpoise* by Carl Taçon and *Overflow* by Brendan McGillicuddy. The project's steps include the materials and tools displayed (plasticine, fork, skewer, inspiration images, marbles, buttons, rolling pin); then, different hand-building techniques are demonstrated before the steps are explained. These include pencilling the design and applying the plasticine to the cardboard. The finished example is shown at the end, and different ways of sharing the work are also suggested.

A Woman's Job

In examining the site of the image, through the compositional modality, most of the Instagram content involved women on screen. Only the Rooms and the Musée des beaux-arts de Montreal included a male voice narration. In some cases (Vancouver Art Gallery and Mackenzie Art Gallery), these female museum educators are also accompanied by their children making the suggested activity or even delivering the instruction of the action itself. Women, including their children in the delivery of their art activities for the museum, expose some of the challenges women had working from home during the COVID-19 pandemic (Banh et al., 2020). A few of the

Instagram lessons had disclaimers, such as an instruction to ask a parent for help or use materials appropriate for the age of your children. This also helps display the target audience for the activities, often children at home because of school closures.

Gendered discourse has been present in museum education since the early 21st century. Most notably, Kletchka (2007) has investigated the historical connection between art museums, education and women. She writes that art museum education is historically a "feminized field" that has impacted today's museum education landscape (Kletchka, 2007, p. 74). Kate Zankowicz (2014) has examined women's impact on museum education, specifically within the Canadian context. Women helped make Canadian museums' scholarship accessible to the public, resulting in specific museum teaching pedagogies such as object-based inquiry and craft-based children's art practices. Women in museums also helped build their institutions' partnerships with schools and communities. The Instagram content sheds light on the critical role of women in the field to this day.

Limitations

It is essential to remember that my research only involves the Canadian context, and the findings are not applicable everywhere. A detailed coding scheme was used, but one should still expect a margin of error. Moreover, only three themes are presented and discussed when many other patterns in the data could have been explored. Future research should examine users' engagement with the content by analyzing the comments and the artwork produced by visitors in response to the lessons and shared using the museums' hashtags. It would also be significant to interview the educators behind the content to understand their experience better utilizing social media as a teaching tool.

Conclusion

Through a visual content analysis (Rose, 2016) of museums' Instagram content involving artmaking, one can observe how museum educators tried to engage visitors with their collections while their physical doors were closed due to the pandemic. Instagram is a new educational tool for museums. Educators primarily used IGTV to deliver their artmaking lessons; sequential learning was a favoured approach to teaching, and women and children provided the activities. It is important to recall that museum educators were not using Instagram as a platform to share artmaking lessons before the pandemic. Every museum in the study began sharing this type of content after the COVID-19 outbreak. Instagram provided unique new opportunities for cultural institutions to share educational videos.

Reflections on using social media to teach art are not new (Castro, 2012). Yet almost nothing has been written about museum educators' use of social media to teach practical art lessons. Further research must be done to address this—especially post-pandemic to see if any of the methods or types of content using Instagram are adopted for the long term.

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