Social Media and Museum Brands as Networks:  
An Actor-Network Theory Study of the Manchester Art Gallery

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Abstract

Branding has ontological roots in commercial disciplines and is heavily tied to marketing to differentiate one organisation from another in the mind of the consumer. Museums, as (for the most part) non-commercial organisations, have adapted this concept to consider the role of visitors and other stakeholders in creating brand value through their shared experiences within these institutions. In this sense, museum brands are thought to be created in the mediated relationships between particular sets of individuals and the physical aspects of these institutions (such as the architecture and the collection). However, when social media technologies were introduced in museums, they effectively helped them transcend their physical spaces to engage with online communities and to communicate their brands digitally. Due to their technological and participatory nature, social media challenged the ‘passive’ role of online audiences and highlighted their capacity to create and share their own cultural narratives. Still, social media tend to be considered largely as broadcasting communication tools that help museums communicate to their audiences, rather than engage with them.

This thesis questions this passive and limited perspective of social media (technologies and audiences) in relation to museum brands. Accordingly, the thesis is driven by two main aims: to critically discuss a reconceptualisation of museum brands as actor-networks that result from the mediated and performative relationships between heterogeneous actors (including human and non-human, as well as digital and physical actors); and to explore the potential role of social media (including technologies and users) within these networks. This investigation is developed around a single case study, the Manchester Art Gallery, as it was embroiled in a mediatised debacle about its institutional purpose following an artist takeover event in 2018 — where Twitter users drove the online conversation that would later be informally dubbed ‘Nymphgate’. Using a longitudinal approach to its methodological framework of Actor-Network Theory (ANT), and drawing on a critical analysis of secondary literature, Twitter data and interviews with Gallery staff, the thesis examines the events that led up to the takeover event, and the impact that the event, its subsequent online conversation, and its legacy had to the Gallery brand network.

The examination provides evidence of a mode of ordering that prioritises decision-making human actors and physical non-human actors as they mediate the Gallery brand in their relationships. Despite social media not being considered as an actor in the Gallery brand network, the Nymphgate Twitter event demonstrated that online audiences used the technological affordances of the platform to challenge the symbolic value of the Gallery brand. The impact of social media to the Gallery brand is thus the result of various relationships between human and non-human actors over time, as well as the perceptions of these continuous performances. In this sense, these perceptions and renegotiations simultaneously co-produce as well as limit the impact of social media to the Gallery by continuously delineating the brand network. The thesis goes on to argue that museum brand networks are organised in the contextually dependent and performative relations between specific actors and, therefore, social media have a limited potential to decentralise and destabilise the structure of these networks. In this sense, the brand network is a medium in and of itself and, therefore, that museums and museum brands can only be ‘recoded’ (or
reshaped and redistributed) inasmuch as digital technologies, particularly social media, are perceived to be mediative.
Declaration

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1. Introduction

This thesis intertwines three core themes: museum brands, social media in cultural institutions, and Actor-Network Theory. Throughout this work, I will propose for a reconceptualization of museum brands away from commercial frameworks that limit this concept to transactional relationships and graphic design symbols. Similarly, I will call for a frank acknowledgement of the inherent potential of social media to create and transform new meanings, as well as to distribute narratives amongst different individuals, groups, and spaces. Furthermore, I will advocate for the use of Actor-Network Theory as a theoretical and methodological approach in digital museology research. Together, these themes drive the main aims of this thesis: first, to consider museum brands as complex relational networks where those involved are continuously negotiating their roles, perceptions, and attitudes within these networks. Second, to examine the role of social media (technologies and users) within the participatory paradigm of cultural institutions and the issues of power and authority they raise — does participation through social media platforms equal empowerment that can affect the Gallery? Or is it as Pam Meecham (2013, pp.37–38) suggests that “empowerment is less easily achieved within the historic gallery” where, traditionally, art and heritage narratives are created and interpreted by authority figures (e.g., curators) and broadcasted to audiences (on site and online)?

The aims of this thesis are brought together under the tenets of Actor-Network Theory (ANT) that recognise the agency of different types of actors (regardless of who and what they are), that encourage researchers to observe the contextually dependent relationships between these actors, and that provide a framework to understand how these actors (their agency and relationships) organise the networks they belong to. As I will detail throughout the following chapters, these aims and themes will be explored within the context of a single case study, the Manchester Art Gallery and the mediatised debacle they were embroiled in following an artist takeover event in 2018 (now informally known as ‘Nymphgate’). I will show how Twitter users, enabled by the platform’s technology, drove the online conversation to question the Gallery’s institutional purpose and the decisions made by staff members. I will then explore the influence of this Nymphgate event and conversation to the working relationships between staff, their perception of the permanent
collection on display, and the potential role of social media technologies within the institution. I will demonstrate how we can consider the brand of the Manchester Art Gallery as a network and how, despite the lasting effects of this online debacle, social media is not considered as an actor in this network.

The purpose of this introductory chapter is to establish the aims of this project within an interdisciplinary academic context of museological literature, media and communications literature, as well as within the practical contexts of the Manchester Art Gallery. In the following sections I will discuss the research context wherein this research is situated, followed by a summary of the arguments I propose in this study (therefore exploring the significance of this work). I will then move to discuss a few key terms, before moving on to explore how the research was designed and conducted. Finally, I will close with a brief description of how the thesis is laid out and what can be expected within each of the remaining chapters.
1.1. **Research Context**

When asked to describe the brand of the Manchester Art Gallery, many participants of this study were confused as to what I meant by ‘brand’, whilst others were reluctant to comment as they felt such matters did not concern them. However, when asked to describe the Gallery to someone who had never heard of it, participants provided a variety of narratives identifying the Gallery through its collection, to its physical attributes and location, to the role it plays in the city of Manchester. This confusion to describe the brand of the Gallery is not unusual and I would say it is a residual effect of the traditional (often marketing- and commercial-based) approaches that influenced how museums and galleries perceive this term to connote. This includes understanding brands as a reflection of three interrelated aspects of an institution — function, values, and purpose (Johnson, 2016, p.51) — that are then communicated through a series of tangible and intangible narratives (such as products and services, as well as mission and vision statements). Such narratives are often discussed as brand outputs that help institutions communicate their different *internal* aspects, *externally*, using a variety of communication means.

In defining brands as a set of processes that define an institution’s aspects, there is a resulting dichotomy between those who produce or make decisions about these processes, and those who do not make decisions but none-the-less experience or perceive these processes. In other words, the commercial roots of brands creates a distinction between groups of people who are within the brand and those who are outside of it — that is, a dichotomy that distinguishes between active participants (those who can create the brand from within) and passive participants (those who can perceive or consume the brand from the outside). Museum branding centres on the identity and purpose of the institution, which often is communicated in a narrative format (e.g., ‘about us’, ‘who we are’, ‘what we do’) and through a wide variety of media. In fact, Margot Wallace (2016) suggests that it is easier to discuss museum branding in terms of touchpoints (communicative outputs), rather than in relation to the individuals involved in branding processes. In this sense, museum brands share this commercial understanding of brands as a process that is created by a handful of participants and communicated outwardly using various means (such as exhibitions and social media platforms).
I believe this approach is limiting for two reasons: first it restricts our conceptualisation of museum brands to their (communicative) outputs and in doing so it demotes the role of, and relationships between, individuals who use these media. In this sense, this approach restricts the conceptualisation of museum brands to an asymmetric (one-way) set of relationships between (from) ‘internal’ and (to’) external’ stakeholders. The second reason stems from my agreement with Ross Parry’s (2007, p.11) argument that museums are simultaneously full of media and a medium in and of themselves; as well as Celia Lury’s (2004) argument that brands are object-ive inasmuch as they are relational and contextually dependent. In this sense, museum branding is not only reflected in these media as communicative outputs, but it is the result of the processes and relationships enabled by these media, as well as those between media and individuals. To this end, I believe that it is more purposeful to conceptualise museums’ brands as networks that are composed of heterogeneous actors and that are, therefore, organised in the mediative (two-way) relationships between these actors. Doing so, allows us to reconsider the potential role of social media technologies (and their users) as a mediative actor, rather than an outward-looking communication technology.
1.2. Research Argument

Actor-Network Theory (ANT) offers a framework through which we can understand the relationships between human and non-human actors in a reflexive manner. It attests that the ties between actors (whoever and whatever they may be) are “mutually constitutive and generative relations [...] which give the constituent entities themselves their qualities, identity, significance and meaning” (Nimmo, 2016, p.xxiv). In this sense, a network is situated within a particular context where actors emerge and are characterised by their relationships with one another; methodologically-speaking this understanding requires the researcher to let the actors speak for themselves and to approach their relationships without prejudice. A ramification of this concept is that agency is distributed and “relationally generated” (Nimmo, 2016, p.xxvii) between actors, human and non-human. In a museum brand network, distributed agency recognises the mediative power of the communication tools in their relationships with their users (such as artworks or social media platforms), and vice-versa of the mediative power of users in their use of these tools. Similarly, in a museum brand network we abandon the dichotomy between ‘internal’ and ‘external’ participants (or stakeholders), in favour of a distinction between human and non-human actors.

The characteristics of ANT lend a purposeful lens to study museums’ brand networks and the role of social media and social media users within it. ANT’s recognition of the mutually constitutive ties between actors is parallel to the transcoding characteristics of social media (as a category of new media) in that “both the technology and the culture are codified (given meaning) by the presence and influence of the other” (Parry, 2007, p.117). In this context we can assume then that the role of social media in brand networks is affected by the contexts of its use both by the Gallery and the constituents it tries to reach and engage with through this tool. Furthermore, by aligning with ANT’s understanding of agency we can also assume that any changes in the role of social media (or of its properties) can “radically affect both the agency of the other actants and the efficacy of the network as a whole” (Nimmo, 2016, p.xxvii). Meaning that social media users have a potentially pervasive role in museum brand networks not only in how they shape the technologies they use, but also in
distributing and extending the brand network to unimaginable (and uncontrollable) levels.

The heterogeneity of actors, their generative relations, and their distributed agencies call into question the structure and order of the brand network, as well as the authority (or decision-making capacity) of the actors involved. Actor-Network Theory suggests that “order is an effect generated by heterogeneous means” (Law, 1992, p.382), meaning that the structure of the network is dynamic and dependent on the ties between its components. As John Law (1992, p.389) suggests, to question the mechanics of an organisation (in this case the Manchester Art Gallery) through Actor-Network Theory is to explore its character as “the effect of interaction between materials and strategies of organisation”. From this perspective we can then see how the transmuting and distributing properties of social media technologies, as well as the participatory paradigm of museology, may resist and contest the mediative power and decision-making authority of other actors within the brand network. In this sense, to study a museum brand network is to explore how this network is organised in the relationships between its constituting actors, rather than to explore who these actors are in and of themselves.

At this point we can reframe the research questions to ask: who are the decision-making actors in the Manchester Art Gallery brand network? And to what extent can social media platforms decentralise and destabilise the structure of the Manchester Art Gallery brand network? To answer these questions, I propose that we not only re-conceptualise museums’ brands as networks, but to consider them as processes based on the continuous negotiation of decision-making authority between actors. In other words, museums’ brands are the result of a series of interrelations between decision-making actors and are reflected in a series of tangible and intangible outputs (such as Wallace’s ‘touchpoints’ (2016)). In taking an Actor-Network Theory framework I am approaching my case study, the Manchester Art Gallery, from a perspective that places an emphasis on the effects of relations or associations between actors than on the actors themselves. To this end, I will need to employ a methodological strategy where I can treat the Gallery brand’s constituting actors within the same analytic plane (regardless of who or what they are) and where I can follow their narratives as expressions of their continuous performances. Doing so,
will enable me to explore how the Gallery brand network is organised and how a sudden change to the Gallery’s broader systems of operation (social, cultural and technological) affects the way actors relate to one another.
1.3. Defining Terms

Throughout this introduction I have used a particular language and terminology that I intend to carry over the rest of the thesis, as such it is worthwhile to pause here and expand on a few of these terms to avoid confusion and to expand on the linguistic choices I have made.

Stakeholders

Traditional branding literature maintains that brands are created and maintained in the actions and relationships between several stakeholder groups, which are largely divided into ‘internal’ stakeholders and ‘external’ stakeholders (Chernatony and Harris, 2000). This divide implies a division along operational roles of the branded institution in question, as such ‘internal’ stakeholders are those who have a seat in the organisational diagram (so to speak) — including staff, volunteers, managers, board members, and the like. ‘External’ stakeholders, on the other hand, are individuals and groups who have implied relationships with internal stakeholders but are not listed in these organisational diagrams — including visitors, audiences, partners, local authorities, and so on. In considering museum brands as networks, I propose a different conceptualization of these ‘stakeholders’ or human actors, where the distinction between these individuals and groups is made on the basis of institutional authority to make or not make decisions in relation to the brand (as well as certain non-human actors, as I will discuss in more detail in Chapter 4).

Instead of thinking about ‘internal’ and ‘external’ stakeholders, I propose we think of these human actors as ‘decision-makers’ and ‘non-decision makers’. The former group encompasses those who are institutionally-enabled to make decisions and thus have a direct impact on the organisation and its brand. This group encompasses staff, volunteers, managers, board members, partners, local authorities, and any group or individual who are empowered in one way or another to make decisions within (and for) the organisation. ‘Non-decision makers’, on the other hand, are those who are considered as essential and influential for the institution but who are not empowered to make decisions within (and for) the organisation. This group encompasses visitors, audiences, members of the public, and any group or individual who despite
having access to the institution, are not authorised to have a direct impact due to their lack of decision-making ability.

From an ANT perspective this dichotomy becomes more fluid as decision-making authority and mediative agency are part of the relational ties that bind actors together and structure the brand network. The participatory paradigm in museums is an example that has resulted in a variety of hybrid decision-non-decision makers as individuals take part in different activities, such as consulting, testing, and co-creating (McSweeney and Kavanagh, 2016). This hybridity through participation, however, comes with a caveat as success is “built on mutual trust, shared understanding of the project’s goals, and clear designation of participant roles” (Simon, 2010, p.201). In this caveat the role participants is ‘activated’ or given authority by an institutional body that has invited them to consult, test, or co-create — participants could be new staff members who up until signing a contract were visitors; or they could be members of the public who without an invitation to test an exhibition would not otherwise engage with the institution.

**Users**

The key for success in the participatory paradigm is that participants are invited by the institution to share its authority, which often results in co-creating information; what happens, however, when participants do not need to be institutionally sanctioned to create relevant information? Such is the case for social media users. Users, in this case, refers to actors who, through their use of social media technologies, are enabled to create institutional information or institutional-related narratives without having a formal invitation (and therefore formal authority). It is for this reason that social media platforms provide an opportunity and a threat to museums’ authorial authority; and the reason for choosing them (the technologies and their users) as the subjects for this research study.

**Takeover**

A takeover is an example of an artist’s intervention in a museum or gallery. It is a “genre of art that becomes an interlocutor within the discourse of museum
collections. It has the additional sense of alignment with the potential for inciting change in the museum” (Robins, 2013, p. 2). Often, interventions become a medium for institutions to discuss aspects of their collections with audiences, such as curatorial choices, ideological positions, and interpretive approaches. These interventions are usually temporary, which afford institutions a liminal space to be more playful and critical — thereby demonstrating that they are indeed not neutral organisations. As I will demonstrate in the following chapters, the takeover event at the Manchester Art Gallery did indeed incite change in the institution and influence how the Gallery brand network is organised.
1.4. Research Design

To address my research aims and driving question, I used the Manchester Art Gallery as a case study. This decision was deliberate. At the beginning of my programme, my aim was to engage in a comparative case analysis between the institutions that fall under the Manchester Museums & Galleries Partnership (or ‘the Partnership’): the Manchester Art Gallery, The Whitworth, and the Manchester Museum. Half-way through my first year, however, the Gallery suddenly found itself in the middle of a controversy. So, with the support of my supervisors, I updated my aims and decided to focus on the Gallery as a single case study. Doing so allowed me to act quickly and start collecting social media data as it was produced in the (aforementioned) Nymphgate conversation, thereby allowing me to create a synchronous archive of this online conversation. Furthermore, this focused approach allowed me to delve deeper with this mediatised debacle as well as with the intricacies of the Gallery over a long period of time. This decision enabled me to test my proposed concept of museum brand networks and to assess a hypothesis I had framed using the aforementioned literature themes as well as the ontological implications of ANT.

My hypothesis for this thesis suggests that the Gallery brand network is composed of decision-making human actors who prioritise certain non-human actors (such as the collection and its building) for their capacity to represent the symbolic aspects of the institution (such as its value and purpose). This hypothesis is based on a series of existing literature (that I will explore in more detail in the following chapter) that discusses the way that social media have been used and valued in cultural organisations and the relationships between social media and branding. Despite the potential for social media to help create and disseminate the symbolic value of brands (that is, “an idea, image, or story – constituted through processes of visual imaging, narration, and association” (Bookman, 2016, p.579)), cultural institutions often undervalue these platforms and are not, therefore, a priority in resource allocation. In this sense, social media are often considered as a tool for one-way communications between organisations’ internal and external stakeholders. My hypothesis suggests, therefore, that social media are not considered as an actor of the
Gallery brand network and as such, can only influence the brand if decision-making actors have a relationship with it.

To study the relations and organisation of the Manchester Art Gallery brand network, as well as the disruption of the Nymphgate conversation and the takeover event mentioned earlier, I employed the methodological approach of Actor-Network Theory described as the sociology of translation (Callon, 1986a; Law, 1999; Latour, 2005). Translation is a central theme of ANT, it “refers to techniques or practices that establish connections through equivalence” (Baiocchi et al., 2013, p.330) and so it is the basis through which we can ‘flatten’ or equate actors, processes, and relationships. Translation, however, does not mean that the research subjects become identical, rather it is a way of enacting generalised symmetry through agnosticism. In this sense I find ANT at its most relativist in the way that translation seeks to do away with dualisms such as human/non-human and agency/structure, and instead argues for “hybrid assemblages” (Nimmo, 2016, p.xxxi) composed of mediated relations. At the risk of reducing ANT to ‘simple’ labels, I will opt for using human and non-human actors in my research and for making a distinction between them, whilst still recognising their equal agency in an agnostic approach.

There are three main ways in which translation will be essential in this thesis. First, from a theoretical perspective, translation refers to the processes of meaning-making that take place in the mutually and contextually negotiated relationships between actors. In this sense, I intend to understand how the actors involved in the Gallery brand translate their relationships with one another — for example, in their descriptions of their relations, their perceptions of each others’ roles, and their understanding of how the brand is organised. Similarly, this thesis aims to produce a “good ANT account that traces a network” — meaning “a description or a proposition where all the actors do something and don’t just sit there” (Latour, 2005, p.128, original emphasis). Secondly, from a methodological perspective, translation is a stepped process where the researcher can make particular observations about the actors (such as speaking for others or defining others) (Callon, 1986a). These steps are referred to as ‘moments of translation’ where actors negotiate their identities, their interactions, and their influence over one another as they delineate the boundaries of their network (Callon, 1986a). Although I will cover these steps in
more detail in Chapter 4, it is important to highlight them here in their relation to controversies and ‘treason’ or betrayal.

The third way in which translation is important for this thesis is the way that it involves actors’ subjectivity and agency, including that of the researcher in their observations of the network or reality in-the-making. Law (2003) argues that translation often involves betrayal on two levels: from one actor to another as they modify their performances and negotiations; and within the research process as the researcher strives to make sense of actors’ similarities and differences between actors. In some cases, this betrayal takes place when actors face a ‘controversy’ in their negotiations — meaning a situation where the negotiated roles and relationships are “questioned, discussed, negotiated, rejected” (Callon, 1986a, p.15). In this sense, when actors contest others’ narratives (including negotiated allocations of power and authority) they betray the translations that had taken place up until that point. Researchers, therefore, are tasked with tracing not only moments of translation between actors, but also any controversies that betray these translations and their effect on the continued negotiations.

From this perspective, this thesis aims to be an ANT account — or a “set of little stories” (Law, 2003, p.8) — collected from particular actors in an attempt to understand and translate the Manchester Art Gallery brand network, as well as the consequences of the takeover event to this network. For this study I will rely on different types of data from human and non-human actors; specifically, I will rely on documents and literature about the Manchester Art Gallery; interviews with thirteen individuals; and social media data collected from Twitter. These sets of data will enable me to understand the historical context of the Gallery and whether the current brand network is influenced by existing or previous relationships. Doing so will also allow me to respond to the criticisms of ANT that it ignores “historic modes” of ordering (Ausch, 2000, p.319). Similarly, in an effort to account for the dynamic aspects of the Gallery brand network, I am applying a longitudinal approach to my study. In this sense, I aim to observe and understand how a particular cohort (Bryman, 2012, p.63) is influenced over time. To this end, I will collect interviews at two points in time in an effort to understand the effect of actors’ relationships over a twelve-month period.
Lastly, collecting quantitative and qualitative social media data through an E3 methodology (Hine, 2015) will enable me not only to bring social media technologies and users ‘into the picture’, but also to discuss their effects and relationships through an embedded, everyday, and embodied framework. In this sense, I will be able to discuss the Nymphgate conversation as a product of the Internet and, therefore, how it acquires or ascribes different meanings as the conversation became embedded in different contexts. Although I will discuss this in more detail in Chapters 4 and 6, it is important to highlight that for this thesis I will ascribe to the notion that social media are “a technology can be construed as a component of dynamic cultural circumstances which give meaning and identity to the technology” (Hine, 2015, p.37). Therefore, I acknowledge that social media enable ways of being that are socially-, culturally-, and technologically-situated. In this sense, the relationships between social media and the Gallery brand network are not only mediated between the actors involved in the brand network, but also mediated through broader systems of organisation that need to be accounted for.
1.5. Conclusion and Thesis Outline

Actor-Network theory considers the interactions between actors as the building blocks that construct a ‘reality’, which in this case is a useful framework to understand museums’ brands as networks — that is, as the relationships between decision makers and non-decision makers (human actors) and their outputs (non-human actors). ANT has two main implications, one theoretical and one methodological: theoretically-speaking, it proposes that actors are constantly negotiating their roles and those of others, thereby constantly defining and redefining the boundaries of their network and the way this network is organised. In doing so, actors negotiate their authority against those of others (as well as that between others) and legitimise the extent of their power through objects, actions, and behaviours.

Methodologically-speaking, ANT asks the researcher to remain open to the actors (human and non-human) and not censor them in their definition, organisation, and perceived influence, and levels of agency. ANT aims to ‘flatten’ the way networks are analysed, proposing that individual actors may be influenced in their actions and perceptions of ‘reality’ by their individual contexts and by other portions of the network. In this sense, there is no difference between macro- and micro- levels of analysis, instead it asks to consider the level of influence (of perceived authority) between different contexts (within the network and individually) and how this shapes the relations between actors and the constitution of the network overall.

In ANT terms, this thesis argues that museum brands can be conceived as networks that exist in and are constructed by the associations between a variety of human and non-human actors. As such, this notion suggests that brands are simultaneously conceptualised in as many ways as there are actors, bound and stabilised in time through objects and processes, and legitimised by each actor’s narratives (of roles, order, and authority). In taking this integrated approach, it will be possible to analyse how social media affect museum brands by questioning actors’ narratives of association with these media. For example, through this approach it will be possible to question the existing prescribed roles to social media such as museum communication and promotional tools, or as means visitors use to mediate cultural
experiences; as well as to explore the extent to which museum’s strategic processes lead to these prescribed associations.

**Thesis Outline**

I aim to reassemble the Manchester Art Gallery brand network through various actors’ narratives and their perspectives of their roles, influence, and authority, focusing on social media and their users. By studying the Manchester Art Gallery as a case study, I can investigate these narratives of authority on a longitudinal case and assess how time, or any unforeseen mechanisms, affect these narratives on an individual basis or as a whole. This thesis is structured in a relatively traditional manner (Lempriere, 2019) where it starts by providing contextual information at the start (including theoretical and methodological framework), followed by a presentation and discussion of the results before concluding the work in a reflective fashion. I deviate slightly from this approach to include a brief discussion at the end of each chapter, therefore creating slightly longer conclusions with critical analysis rather than summative reflections.

Below are short summaries of the following nine chapters of this thesis.

1. **Introduction (this chapter):** provides an overview of the research (argument and design).
2. **Literature Review:** provides an extensive context to the concepts of branding and social media, in general and in museological literature.
3. **Theoretical Framework:** focuses on the sociological turn in museum studies and how we may borrow from Actor-Network Theory to develop on this theoretical trajectory.
4. **Methodological Approach:** discusses the implications of Actor-Network Theory to the research design, including the methods used for data collection and analysis.
5. **A Brief History of the Manchester Art Gallery:** uses existing literature to explore the history of the Manchester Art Gallery leading up to the takeover event in 2018.
6. **Nymphgate**: explores the online conversation that took place following Sonia Boyce’s takeover at the Gallery, as such it relies on the analysis of social media data collected from Twitter.

7. **From Takeover Network to Six Acts**: explores the different ways in which the takeover event impacted some of the Gallery’s actors and their relationships with one another; it relies on the narratives collected through the first round of interviews.

8. **A Ripple in Time**: explores the resonating (long-term) impact of the Nymphgate network and the takeover event on the Gallery brand network; it relies on the narratives collected through the second round of interviews.

9. **Social Media and the MAG Brand Network**: brings together the analysis and discussions of the previous chapters in order to understand how the Gallery brand network is organised and whether social media are a part of this network. I will argue that although social media may not be considered as a mediating actor of the Gallery brand network, they may influence the brand through their relationships between its human actors and the historically-recognised influential non-human actors (such as the collection and the building).

10. **Conclusion**: provides closure for this thesis and reflects on the research presented; it describes my contribution to knowledge in a theoretical and practical way, assesses the limitations of my framework and observations, and identifies possibilities for further research.
2. Branding and Social Media in Museums

In this chapter I aim to provide a contextual framework for my research, based on existing literature, that will influence my analysis of the Manchester Art Gallery brand and the potential influence of social media within it. As such, the following narrative is divided into three main sections. First, I will outline how ‘branding’ as a concept took shape out of the commercial needs of growing economies and will highlight its relationship to marketing discourses. The second section will focus on the way museums and galleries have adopted ‘branding’ concepts from their commercial and marketing-based roots. The third section will explore the role of social media (technologies and users) in museums and within these branding discourses; it will focus on the paradigmatic shift to the potential roles of audiences (as consumers) within museums and galleries. My intent with these sections is to provide an overview of how three complex concepts (with their own disciplinary discourses) evolved over time and how my research is located at their intersection. To this end, I will discuss how branding, museums, and social media share particular relational qualities to broad organisational systems (such as cultural, economic, and political frameworks) — as individual concepts and intersectionally.

In this sense, another aim of this chapter is to discuss the limitations of the existing relationships between these concepts, particularly in the dichotomies they create — such as those between ‘internal’ and ‘external’ actors in museum branding, as well as those between ‘physical’ and ‘digital’ spaces enabled by the use of digital media technologies like social media. To this end, I will state the need for a different conceptualisation of museum brands that accounts for the complexities of their relational qualities and that addresses their existing limitations. I will use works by Celia Lury (2004) and Ross Parry (2007) to propose a new media approach for the relationships between museum brands and social media, and to serve as a link to the following chapter that focuses on my analytic framework based on Actor-Network Theory. Through this approach, I propose that museum brands are best understood in the way they are organised as a set of relations between various actors that can vary from staff members and visitors, to collections and social media. This conceptualisation allows for an analytic framework to understand the potential influence of social media (technologies and users) to museum brands. To build this
framework, however, I must first explore how ‘branding’ evolved as a practical commercial notion from identifying factors to organisations’ symbolic representations.
2.1. Branding

The evolution of ‘brand’ and ‘branding’ is traced on the social, political, and economic lines of history; with a growing population, new technologies, and increased competition brands seem to have come ‘full circle’ to a utilitarian role as a distinguishing factor between products, services, and people. Focusing on branding as the demarcation of property (animal, human, and otherwise) allows us to trace its history to ‘ancient times’ with examples that range from Indus Valley seals (2250 – 2000 BCE), to Chinese “zu” crests and products (2000-1500 BCE), and to Greek pottery (825-336 BCE) (Moore and Reid, 2008). These “proto-brands” (Moore and Reid, 2008, p.26) are markings and products that had utilitarian and transaction-based purposes in order to convey information about the ‘branded’ object. Focusing on branding as a “way to affect the perception [of a product or service] beyond its function” (Shaw, 1995, cited in Bastos and Levy, 2012, p.352), however, inevitably frames its evolution as part of the history of marketing ideologies and the development of ‘Western’ economies and societies. This history can roughly be divided into four periods: pre-1900s, 1915-1945, 1950-1989, 1989-2000s (Low and Fullerton, 1994; Bastos and Levy, 2012; Levy and Luedicke, 2013).

2.1.1. Historical Overview

Before the twentieth century, economic growth was marked by mercantilism — that is “a system with strong government control, monopolies, high tariffs, search for exotic substances to serve elites, and exploitation of colonial resources” (Levy and Luedicke, 2013, p.58). During this time ‘good’ merchants were God-fearing men who aimed to keep an upstanding reputability by paying bills on time, and national wealth was measured on colonial acquisitions. In his article, Educational lessons from the past — marketing textbooks during the Age of Enlightenment (16th to 18th Centuries), Shaw (2015) describes how these early writings focused on ethical practices and finds a parallel between trading/tradesmen to market/marketing. Merchants were responsible for the exchange of goods and consumers based their decisions, not on the quality of the good itself but on the reputation and identity of its tradesman (Shaw, 2015). The technological changes promoted during the Industrial
Revolution led to a social climate positively based on a “strong economic upswing” (Levy and Luedicke, 2013, p.59). During this time improvements to transportation and communication, as well as the introduction to trademark laws, changed the way consumer goods were produced and sold. Branding became a tool to visually differentiate products as well as a key driver for marketing campaigns based on ‘new’ media (magazines and newspapers) (Low and Fullerton, 1994, p.175; Bastos and Levy, 2012, p.353).

Levy and Luedicke (2013, p.59) note how the changes and growth in the (Western) market following WWI and WWII “sparked the emergence of marketing practice, science and technology” as evidenced by the creation of the American Marketing Association and the Journal of Marketing. This early marketing ideology was pragmatic and service oriented, mixed with profit motivations where products were no longer for subsistence-only, but also meant to symbolise a competitive advantage. The ‘Consumer Revolution’ that followed the Second World War engendered an economic environment where consumers were spending at unprecedented rates, which paired with newly available technologies (TV and radio) practitioners and researchers turned their attention to consumer behaviour (Bastos and Levy, 2012, p.355; Levy and Luedicke, 2013, p.60).

In 1955, Gardner and Levy (1955, p.118) published a highly influential article titled The Product and the Brand, where they state “people buy things not only for what they can do, but also for what they mean”. In this article, Gardner and Levy (1955) coined terminology and ideology that are still in use today — they proposed the term “brand image” to encompass a product’s personality and a reflection of the company’s long-term strategy. With this term, brands could then be differentiated by appealing to consumers on a psychological basis (Bastos and Levy, 2012, pp.355–356). Along with the changes to the way goods were manufactured, perceived, and sold to consumers, companies were also undergoing shifts in managerial approaches that responded to and affected the evolution of branding and marketing. Low and Fullerton (1994), for example, note a positive correlation between company growth and specialisation of roles. They describe how in the mid-1900s brand management passed from company owners or entrepreneurs to “functionally specialised middle and upper-level managers”, who had strong relationships with advertising agencies.
By the early 1980s practitioners and researchers shifted their focus from the seller’s perspective to the customer’s perspective, and product-based organisations adapted their management structure to create fully integrated roles that focused solely on brand management (Low and Fullerton, 1994, p.181).

The fall of the Iron Curtain introduced a free flow of Eastern European consumers to Western markets, and of Western consumers to Eastern European markets. With new communication technologies and open markets, consumers were more empowered than before to share their experiences with brands and each other (Levy and Luedicke, 2013, p.61). Branding and marketing ideologies became more ubiquitous, as was their language. The ‘new’ importance of branding had evolved from having a trademark or a logo to the ability to foster “a complex network of social discourses” (Levy and Luedicke, 2013, p.61). Over a short period of time, the brand concept had evolved from a utilitarian purpose to a symbolic purpose. Bastos and Levy (2012, p.357) discuss a shift in branding research where studies explored the potential of brands to foster relationships and therefore to create emotional or symbolic associations with their consumers. This shifting attention to the brand’s psychological impact and intangible factors gave rise to research of consumers, which resulted in “Consumer Culture Theory (CCT)” and the creation of the Journal of Consumer Research (Bastos and Levy, 2012, p.357).

Levy and Luedicke (2013, p.61) note that at the turn of the twenty-first century the use of ‘brand’ and ‘branding’ became commonly used and associated with the idea that “everything and everyone has a brand image”, to the point where commodities, non-commercial organisations (such as museums and universities), and consumers alike were becoming brands in and of themselves. This growing adoption of branding as a form of identity, following the previous trend towards consumer research, gave way to further academic marketing studies to understand how individuals used brands to create their identities and, in turn, how consumers actively participated in ‘co-creating’ brands (Muniz and O’Guinn, 2001). In this sense, the evolution of branding has come ‘full circle’ as it is tied to identity-marking and identity-making processes; a brand is both a sign and a symbol that helps a person, product, or organisation differentiate itself from others. The history and application of the
concept is entangled with its contemporary cultural, economic, and political frameworks. I would argue that this evolution is also intertwined with its associated academic research, which not only expands the vocabulary we use to understand aspects of the concept (such as ‘brand image’) but also highlights particular frameworks (such as ‘the market’ or ‘the economy’) or groups (such as ‘merchants’ or ‘consumers’) involved in its definition.

2.1.2. What is a Brand?

Whereas the previous section focused on the evolution of ‘brand’ as a concept within broader organisational systems (such as economic and academic frameworks), this section focuses on the definition of ‘brand’ and its variations as they relate to different groups of people or different aspects of the concept. On one hand, a brand can be defined by the role and purpose of those who are involved in creating and maintaining it; on the other hand, a brand can be defined by those who come into contact with it (without necessarily being involved in its creation or maintenance) and therefore frame their own perspectives based on their own knowledge and experiences. Understanding what a brand is, of who is involved in its processes, how it is managed, and its relationships to marketing, is a crucial step in order to have a clearer perspective of why branding is important for museums and galleries.

Paul Temporal (2015, p.12) defines a brand as a relationship, highlighting that “as with the building of any relationship, brand building is only as good as every experience encountered in that process” therefore implying that a brand’s success lies in the positive interaction and engagement of more than one party. In commercial or private sectors, brands emphasise the tangible outputs of products or services, for example the efficiency of a laundry detergent. In public sector brands, such as arts and cultural organisations, brands are focused on “the building up of strong intangible thoughts, feelings and perceptions” (Temporal, 2015, p.16) — in other words, public sector brands emphasise the experiential value for the user as they engage with the brand.

Michael Johnson (2016), however, describes the difficulty in defining the term ‘branding’ so he compiles a series of definitions, from a variety of sources, into seven
categories — it can be said that these categories also correspond to the different ways in which brands can be adopted by individuals, such as adopting visual symbols or endorsing particular values and actions. In a broad sense, Johnson (2016, p.14) argues that branding refers to “how an organisation looks, how it ‘feels’ and how it wants others to feel about it”. He suggests that a brand is the result of five and a half-interrelated processes (or steps), these are: locating the organisation in the market, planning and describing what the organisation stands for, designing what the organisation looks like, implementing the visual/verbal/non-verbal narratives, and continuously engaging and testing the brand for its effectiveness. Johnson (2016) devises these processes as cyclical, which is why he argues that it requires a ‘half’ step, where the strategies are translated into tangible outputs, and why the last step can bring an institution to the beginning of the process requiring a re-brand. From this perspective, it can be said that a branding is a strategy, a tangible and intangible narrative, and a valuable and measurable resource.

A brand reflects the functional aspect of an institution (what it does and how it is done), its personality and values (what it believes in), and its purpose (why it exists and why it matters for the future) (Johnson, 2016, p.51). In order to encompass these interrelated and complex elements, the institution must rely on a branding strategy that is based on research and that will act as the basis for how the brand looks, walks, and talks, as well as how it hopes to be perceived by its audience and publics. Johnson (2016) argues that this research must encompass a variety of aspects from understanding where the brand fits within its market and how it is perceived by the public, competing organisations, and peer organisations alike; to understanding how the brand’s functional and symbolic aspects are perceived by its staff members. To do so, Johnson (2016, p.56) suggests that the brand undertakes a series of audits (such as a SWOT — strength, weaknesses, opportunities, threats — analysis) to map out its various aspects and to uncover whether there are any discrepancies between how the organisation “feels about itself” and “how it is seen externally”.

1. Defined by visual identity, symbol or trademark; 2. Defined by the tangible and intangible; 3. Defined by customer perceptions; 4. Defined as a holistic system; 5. Defined by a promise or contract; 6. Defined by vision, values and actions; 7. Defined by a sense of social grouping (Johnson, 2016, pp.16–17).
Although it is out of scope for this thesis to undertake these types of analyses, it is worthwhile mentioning the dichotomies that are created in this definition of a brand as a cyclical process of research between its ‘internal’ processes and how these processes are perceived ‘externally’. This distinction separates groups of people between those who are within the brand and those who are outside of it — meaning, it assigns particular roles to specific individuals based on their relationships with the brand between those who can create it and those who can consume it. In other words, this dichotomy between ‘internal’ and ‘external’ aspects makes a distinction between active participants (those who can create the brand from within) and passive participants (those who can perceive or consume the brand from the outside). From this perspective, a brand strategy results from the successful negotiation between different types of participants (or actors, as I will describe in the following chapter) and therefore, create different types of outputs — such as tangible and intangible narratives.

A brand defines the institution in functionality and purpose and communicates these elements through a visual and verbal identity (Johnson, 2016, pp.85, 180). It is often the case that organisations define themselves through a mission and a vision, or their purpose and ambition for the future; Johnson (2016, p.85), however, argues that “these ‘high’ statements aren’t often grounded in the day-to-day of what a brand/organisation/company could and should stand for”. Instead, he argues that when people can emotionally connect to a brand, they are more likely to assimilate its purpose and therefore define their own roles within it. In this sense, Johnson (2016, p.92) suggests that the narratives created about the brand will be more effective when the process is shared between its ‘internal’ participants (such as staff members). These narratives are often translated into visual or verbal outputs, such as logos or tone of voice, which are used to communicate the brand with its ‘external’ participants through communicative outputs, such as social media posts. These outputs are often used to measure the effectiveness of the brand, which can be tied to how particular organisations are valued and how successful they are in their respective markets (Temporal, 2015, pp.177–185).

Although I am not interested in evaluating the effectiveness of brands — either from an ‘internal’ or an ‘external’ perspective — it is worthwhile to note how the
relationships between different participants (or actors) can determine how a brand is communicated, what its outputs are, and how it is evaluated. In this sense, it can be suggested that a brand should be thought of as the DNA of an institution (V&A, n.d.), as an element that permeates the entire organisation and an element that is both self-constituting as well as the sum of many parts. It can be useful to think of a brand in a compartmentalised fashion as it allows for an evaluation framework for its effectiveness and value; by doing so it is possible to assess the various ways in which the institution can portray its identity through tangible and intangible narratives. However diverse the brand ‘molecules’ are, they work together towards the same goals, towards fulfilling the same values, and towards supporting the same strategy.

Understanding how ‘brands’ and ‘branding’ evolved conceptually, and how these are defined within their academic disciplines, is an important first step towards exploring the potential influence of social media to museums’ brands. In doing so, I can frame these concepts within their commercial roots so as to discuss how they are adapted and adopted in non-profit organisations such as museums and galleries. Understanding how brands are dichotomous but unified concepts, a reflection of the functional aspects of an organisation, and the result of the various relationships between its constituting participants (or actors) is an important aspect to better assess how museum brands may be influenced by social media. For example, it leads me to question whether social media are considered a constituting part of museum brands or whether they are considered as part of their outputs. I will start answering this question in the following section where I discuss how museums have adopted ‘branding’ concepts from their commercial and marketing-based roots. I will expand on this question, however, throughout the rest of the thesis in my analysis of my case study, the Manchester Art Gallery.
2.2. Branding in Museums

Museum brands have been defined in a similar way as Temporal (2015) and Johnson (2016) have approached ‘brand’ as a general concept. Museum brands can also be conceived as a relationship between its stakeholders, as a strategy that shapes the purpose and activities of the institution, as visual, verbal, and intangible narratives conveyed through communication outputs, and as a way to resource often used to measure the value of the institution in a competitive market. There are, however, certain aspects that differentiate (and problematise) museum branding from ‘general’ brand theory and practice. These aspects revolve around the purpose of museums and their histories as spaces where identities can be shaped and re-shaped, the recognition of the active role of visitors and audiences, and the complexities in assessing the value of museums as social and cultural entities. Although it is not my intent to provide an overarching history of the development of museums, I think it is important to highlight a few key historical moments that influenced the adoption of branding in these non-profit organisations. To this end, this section starts with a focused discussion on the impact of commercialisation and globalisation to museums. I will then discuss how museums have adopted ‘branding’ within marketing frames and, lastly, I will close with a proposal to re-consider museum brands as networks that will be expanded on from a theoretical perspective in the following chapter.

2.2.1. Why Brand Museums?

Just as brands’ conceptual development was influenced by contemporary social, economic, political, and cultural frameworks; the conceptual development of museums has been heavily influenced (and continues to be) by similar broad organisational systems. In this sense, museums have changed over time in several aspects, such as their physical attributes (e.g., architecture and collection), the people that are involved (e.g., staff and visitors), and their intangible aspects (e.g., their social purpose and cultural value). Museological research has followed these changes

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2 For a definition of ‘stakeholder’, see Chapter 1.
and, according to Peter Vergo (1989), can be split into two ontological frameworks: “old museology” and “new museology”. Vergo (1989) argues that museology shifted from an emphasis on museums’ ‘practical’ aspects (such as their administration) to more ‘theoretical’ aspects that questioned museums’ conceptual assumptions. Sharon Macdonald (2011, p.2) identifies three strands within this point of departure: a growing understanding that objects’ meanings are contextual; a novel interest in discourses and disciplines like commercialism and entertainment; and an awareness that visitors have different perceptions of museums and exhibitions than those of staff members.

The novel strand of research that included new interdisciplinary and intersectional studies was part of a broader trend that sought to understand and explain “the museum phenomenon” (Fyfe, 2011, p.40). This “phenomenon” refers to the significant growth and diversification of museums, as well as an increase in visitor numbers, following the end of World War II (Fyfe, 2011, p.39). Gordon Fyfe (2011, p.39) argues that the “museum phenomenon” established the operation of contemporary museums within the “mediated world of digital networking, of rapid flows of images and artifacts, of marketization of culture, and of mass tourism” — which led to debates on the relationships of professional power and authority with the development of a consumer society. Museums gained new reputations as commercial enterprises with corporate identities as they produced different types of exhibitions (e.g., ‘Blockbuster’ shows) and as research was influenced by organisational studies/theories (Fyfe, 2011, p.40). Here we see a parallel in the rise of ‘branding’ research and ideologies (as described in the previous section) and museological research that focused on consumer/visitor relationships, organisations'/museums' symbolic representations, and the role of communications outputs to mediate these relationships and representations.

Mark Rectanus (2011, p.385) attributes the growth and diversification of museums to an accelerated phase of globalisation in relation to “shifts in the production of culture and social meaning”. Rectanus (2011) argues that museums, particularly exhibitions, became mediators for the symbolic exchange of culture, an instrument of local cultural politics, and centers where education and outreach was merged with consumption and entertainment. In this sense, museums faced an operational shift
where they had to simultaneously serve multiple functions to an increasingly diverse audience base, whilst at the same time offer unique value to differentiate themselves from other cultural and commercial entities. This corporatisation of museums and their competition in broader markets led to an adoption of “market rationales as primary indicators of success” (Rectanus, 2011, p.386) — which became key for publicly-funded institutions; as well as to an adoption of branding ideologies through the application of marketing frameworks (Tobelem, 1997).

2.2.2. Branding Museums through a Marketing Frame

Marketing, as a discipline, has undergone two simultaneous changes: an increased emphasis on the central role of the consumer and the application of marketing frameworks to the non-profit sector (Tobelem, 1997, p.338). In an effort to meet these changes, Tobelem (1997, p.339) argues that museums adopted two marketing frameworks: the first tasked curators with “improving the quality of the individual visit”, shifting away from a concentrated responsibility based on collections. The second was the museum’s adoption of “communications and public relations in order to raise its profile” (Tobelem, 1997, p.339), a shift which Tobelem notes is an approach to marketing as a means of communication.

Tobelem (1997, p.340) argues that “in order to transpose the marketing concepts from the world of profit-making organisations [to non-profit institutions], the notion of exchange was used to characterise the nature of the relationship which is established between the consumer and the institution”. In this ‘exchange’ economy, institutions must balance their own achievement of strategic goals and their consumers’ satisfactions and demands. He notes that museums adopted marketing concepts as a way to meet an increased number of competing institutions, a change in funding opportunities, and as an effort to better know their audiences and visitors (Tobelem, 1997, p.341-344). More museums in the market required differentiating tools for both consumers (audiences and visitors) and financing institutions. At the same time, museums needed to be proactive in their approach to consumers by researching their behaviours and needs. Rising to these demands, through marketing concepts, meant a potential increase in visitation and a more favourable position to receive public funds from administrative organisations — in other words, a
marketing approach could then enable museums to reach their cultural and financial aims more efficiently.

As marketing ideologies shift historically in a response to global social, political, and economic changes — it can be argued that Tobelem’s (1997) ‘marketing concepts’ adopted by museums stemmed from an “intensified interest in the human aspects of the marketplace” that followed the end of WWII (Levy and Luedicke, 2013, p.60). As discussed in a previous section, this time period saw the growth in available media technologies and willing consumers. At the same time branding was increasingly being used as a means to tap into consumers’ needs by more institutions and in more diverse sectors, including arts and culture organisations. Branding became a means to differentiate institutions on a deeply personal level. To this end organisations sought the use of consumer segmentation approaches that could “lead to the establishment of differentiated strategies (...) using distinct communication channels and addressing different target groups” (Tobelem, 1997, p.351). Two interrelated trends become apparent by adopting a marketing approach to museum branding: first it is clear that museums have a large array of available communication channels at their disposal, and second, museums evaluate these channels as a means to assess the congruity of their brand and therefore the value of the institution as a whole.

In line with Tobelem’s (1997, p.339) assessments, Temporal (2015, p.38, added emphasis) makes a distinction between branding and marketing, he states

“**Branding** is the strategic foundation regarding what the brand stands for, its values and positioning; it is very inwardly focused and inclusive in its formulation with respect to stakeholders, and concentrates externally on long-term image and reputation. [...] **Marketing**, on the other hand, is the implementation of brand strategy, is much more short term and tactical in its focus, and mainly consists of communications and engagement activities with respect to all target audiences” (added emphasis)

Indeed, in her volume *Museum branding: how to create and maintain image, loyalty, and support*, Margot Wallace (2016, p.x) identifies museum branding as “the result of constant strategizing by all parts of the museum” and it consists of “creating and maintaining a body of programs and attitudes that convey a clear promise, encourage familiarity, and generate ongoing support” (2006, p.1). From this perspective, branding and marketing are mutually sustaining, where branding is the
backbone that guides targeted marketing activities that continuously elevate the institution in its purpose and value.

As museums have a variety of channels through which they communicate their brand (including exhibitions, boards of trustees, education departments, volunteers and members, fundraising activities and corporate partnerships, digital elements such as websites, e-mails, and social media, as well as shops, restaurants/cafes, and the structure’s architecture (Wallace, 2016; 2006)) — it is increasingly relevant that long-term and short-term strategising is necessary in order to maintain a cohesive narrative. Wallace (2016, p.x) argues that this cohesion, the longevity of the brand, is “earned and shared and made successful by the people involved”, adding that “branding is everyone’s responsibility”. It can be suggested that a marketing approach to museum branding enables the institution to compartmentalise their approach to their brand through a series of communication channels and therefore, through their organisational structure. The brand ‘works’ when all ‘internal’ stakeholders are involved and when they all share the same perception of it.

Branding museums through a marketing frame highlights the need for a research framework that considers the various relationships such institutions foster — from those with broad organisational systems and value systems borrowed from other sectors, to the relationships between institutional outputs and groups of people with different types of agency. My aim with this thesis is to propose such a framework, where there isn’t a distinction between ‘internal’ and ‘external’ spaces/peoples but one where there is a focused attention to these various relationships. Furthermore, my aim with this type of framework is to account for the ways that museum brands are defined — from a practical sign to differentiate one organisation from another, to a symbol of prescribed values and beliefs.

2.2.3. What is a Museum Brand?

Anne-Marie Hede (2007, p.152) suggests that a museum’s “brand is symbolic of what the organization represents and is informed as a result of internal and external forces on the organization” — here she refers to ‘internal forces’ as the brand identity, or the institution’s purpose and values, and the ‘external forces’ as the brand image, or
consumers’ mental construct based on institutional communication outputs. Hede (2007) argues that museums have a variety of tools at their disposal to communicate their brand identity, and that these tools vary in their degree of manipulation and control — for example a museum’s building architecture and decor is rather difficult to change, whereas retail areas like the cafe or shop can be more flexible. Hede (2007, p.157) goes on to suggest that “to be successful, however, the tools used by the museum need to be competent with each other”; adding that the tools must also be flexible enough in order to respond to changes in the market and consumers’ behaviours — echoing Temporal’s (Temporal, 2015, p.177) suggestions that a museum’s communication strategy ought to be simultaneously consistent as well as flexible.

In parallel to Temporal’s (2015, p.12) assessment of brands as relationships, Falk and Sheppard (2006, p.131, original emphasis) argue that a “museum’s brand is the space [it] captures in the minds of customers, [including] all the expectations they have, when they hear the word XYZ museum”. They equate a museum’s brand with its identity, which includes “both internal matters of vision and values [as well as] issues of how the institution presents itself to the outside world such as its mission, its products, and its services” (Falk and Sheppard, 2006, p.130). From this perspective, it can be argued that the museum’s brand is a relationship of perceptions, the result of a circular transaction between the quality of the promise and its reception by audiences. This analysis implies that the museum’s sustainability and competitiveness rests on the ability of the museum to keep their promise to all of their ‘internal’ and ‘external’ stakeholders. Considering the ties between museums and their relationships to different markets, it could also be implied that museums’ sustainability and competitiveness relies on how others perceive the value of this type of institution — not just that of individual organisations.

To this end, Hede (2007) discusses branding as a tool to positively position not only museums, but the sector as a whole (particularly regarding funding). She argues that “the concept of the museum is a brand in itself” (Hede, 2007, p.157) — a concept she calls “brand museum”. Hede (2007, p.157) suggests that “brand museum” evolved over time in response to contemporary consumer culture, including their values, attitudes and preferences. Also, she senses that the “brand museum” has evolved to
become an attraction, rather than an educative institution, which factors how the sector is perceived by funding bodies. Similarly, Carol Scott (2007, p.169) argues for the role of branding as a tool to “positively position the overall museum sector” in the market and for funding; adding that museums face two main challenges for their sustainability: competing for audiences in a leisure market and facing government reforms to the public sector. In addition to these challenges, Scott (2007, p.170) is critical of the way museums are asked to demonstrate their worth, which she argues is the result of the political-economic trends that evolved from the 1970s that require quantitative approach to performance appraisal and a need to respond to mounting social pressure for inclusion.

To this end, Scott (2007, p.176) argues that the museum sector needs to reconsider how its brand is communicated so that it “resonates with those with whom we want to engage” — such as consumers (audiences and visitors) and funders alike. She suggests that museum brands should be evaluated, mainly through audience research as a way to understand consumers’ mental construct of the brand (such as their experiences and understandings of the brand’s values). In doing so, museums can better understand consumers’ associations with their institutional “extrinsic and intrinsic” values (Scott, 2007, p.173). In addition to these brand aspects, Scott (2007) argues that museums are particularly exceptional in that they foster experiences based on object-centred engagement, on physical connections to art, culture, history, and heritage to which visitors can attribute personal meaning to. She further argues that museums are distinct as they offer a place for human relationships, a space for sociality between visitors and between communities (distant and present) — offering spaces for visitors to realise values of identity, belonging, and social bonding (Scott, 2007, p.181).

It can be argued that a marketing approach, in conjunction with Hede’s (2007) and Scott’s (2007) arguments, would require museums to balance their missionary purpose, with their financial obligations, as well as their audiences’ and visitors’ varied needs. In a crowded market, branding is beneficial for museums not just at the single, institutional level, but also on a broader, sector level. Branding the sector on the unique values museums offer, allows for a better understanding of their purpose in and for society and for a more competitive edge in crowded markets such as
leisure and entertainment. On an institutional level, branding is beneficial as it helps museums meet their aims and to stay true to their relational contracts with ‘internal’ and ‘external’ stakeholders; branding is reflected in all aspects of the museum, starting with their organisational strategy and identity. To this end, I propose that museum brands are best understood from an organisational perspective as a way to account the complexities of the arts and culture sector, as well as their intrinsic relational aspects and attributes. I propose that museum brands are best understood as networks.

2.2.4. Museum Brands as Networks

As discussed above, branding in museums is a complex concept as it can be understood as both a process and a product, it must account for the intrinsic and extrinsic goals of the institution, and it is the responsibility of all the involved stakeholders. Baumgarth and O’Reilly (2014, p.5) summarise the complexity of brands in the arts and culture sector in a variety of reasons:

First, the arts have a tendency to bring different sensory modes more clearly into play in the production-consumption circuit. [...] Second, the nature of the brand referent needs careful attention. After all, an arts brand can be an artefact, an artist or group of artists, an organisation, an event, a venue, a performance, a song, or an exhibition. Third, art brand thinkers and practitioners need to be knowledgeable about the artistic traditions and innovations in their areas or genres of work. Fourth, the cultural codes which shape the production of, consumption of, and engagement with, arts need to be understood clearly. Fifth, technologies of production and consumption are continually changing and require factoring into any theory of arts branding. Sixth [...] artists, performers, specialists in production, as well as curators, art historians, gallery owners, and so on, are all playing a role in arts and cultural brand development, so we need to conceive somehow of arts brands being in shared ownership, as a kind of artistic commons (morally, if not financially), or at least something in which many stakeholders have different stakes or interests [...]. Brands in the arts and cultural sector are often based on networks and their contributions to the brand. Seventh, [...] arts brands can be seen as developing within complex value generation systems or chains which require careful analysis. Finally, at the macro level, art can be a contextual influence on a wide range of political, social, and cultural trends as well as being itself embedded within them.

In this passage, the authors have succinctly summarised the difficulties of theorising and problematising brands and branding in the arts and culture sector. Of interest is the various ways in which brands can ‘manifest’ in museums, the role of each individual that comes into contact with the brand, and the effect of broader frameworks of understanding. Following this summary, I suggest that brands in the
arts and culture sector, specifically in museums, are the result of a complex network of actors — each of which can impart or take value from the brand (and therefore the institution) either passively or actively. Although this concept is not formally articulated in existing literature, three examples below point to how branding affects different aspects of an arts and culture organisation — as a means to add value to the institution.

In the first example, Vaux Halliday and Astafyeva (2014) studied the potential role of millennial cultural consumers to create and add value to brands, wherein branding is used as a means to differentiate institutions in a saturated market and helps consumers make informed decisions on how to spend their time (and money). The authors argue that MCC (millennial cultural consumers) are a distinctive segment as they are both market/brand savvy as well as technologically savvy. As such, MCCs value institutions that can provide them with an ‘experience’ — either online or offline (Vaux Halliday and Astafyeva, 2014, p.123). By applying brand community principles to their study, the authors found that MCCs form and participate in brand communities (online and offline) that closely meet their visiting motivations. In these communities MCCs fulfil their needs for interaction and recognition, entertainment and education, and self-development. In this framework, the authors argue that MCCs are more likely to invest their time and resources in brands that can offer them a venue for participation where they can feel as part of a community and where their contributions will be valued and legitimise them as members.

In the second example, Rentschler et al. (2014) applied brand architecture theory to a comparative case study project of temporary ‘blockbuster’ exhibitions; they argue that this type of exhibition is influenced by three brands: the ‘host’ institution brand, the ‘home’ institution brand, and the artist’s brand. In this study, the authors found that ‘blockbuster’ exhibitions functioned as a sub-brand of the museum, rather than as a product, in an effort by the galleries to respond to changing market demands (Rentschler et al., 2014, pp.55–56). In this way, ‘blockbuster’ exhibitions fulfil these new demands by bridging the institutions’ “curatorial and commercial foci” as well as satisfying “not only audiences but also fractious government funders within a formal brand architecture approach” (Rentschler et al., 2014, p.60). Furthermore, the authors suggest that the partnering institutions and artists help co-brand the sub-
brand by “shifting the focus from objects in a collection to a direct emotional connection to the audience” (Rentschler et al., 2014, p.61) — thus, accruing intangible values not only for the exhibition but also for the stakeholders involved.

In the third example, Rodner et al. (2014, p.102) argue that it is crucial to understand branding in the arts and culture sector from the perspective of “social, cultural and symbolic capital”. To do so, they draw from Rodner and Thomson’s (2013, p. 68, cited in Rodner et al. 2014, p.103) metaphor of an “art machine”. The authors argue that the art market can be conceptualised as “an interlocking framework of legitimation made up of several functional cogs including arts schools, galleries and dealers, art critics, auction houses, fairs and art events, (private and public) collectors, and lastly museums, each of which acts as an essential tastemaker in the cooperative construction of value in the arts” (Rodner and Thompson 2013; p. 63, cited in Rodner et al., 2014, p.103). Here, the authors argue that the agency of each ‘cog’ adds or detracts value to the brands interlocked in this mechanism by accruing “symbolic” or cultural capital that legitimises the ‘cog’ within its framework.

These examples show how branding frameworks can be used for different aspects of arts and culture organisations. Each study shows how branding was used as part of the institution’s strategy — whether to understand influential market segments or to discern the roles of various stakeholders (or actors) as they work together between or within institutions. Furthermore, these projects are significant as they, in one way or another, use branding mechanisms to understand how value can be conceptualised in arts and culture organisations — beyond the economic context. In this sense, branding is capable of adding intangible values to institutions and to the network of stakeholders (or actors) that are involved with it. Importantly, it can be suggested that these values are only created and accrued when relationships are developed and sustained between the different actors in these networks — whether that is between ‘internal’ and ‘external’ individuals or communities, and whether the relationships are formed online or offline.

It is useful to consider museum brands as networks not only because it allows for a conceptual framework that encompasses the intricacies of the sector (Baumgarth and O’Reilly, 2014) and of the various relationships that may be involved, but also
because it transcends the ‘traditional’ dichotomies that divide people (as either ‘internal’ or ‘external’) as well as spaces (between online and offline). In this sense, considering brands as networks allows for a reconceptualisation of museum brands that takes into account various types of actors, their relationships with each other, and their potential influence to define or alter the brand. I will explore this idea further in the following chapter through an application of Actor-Network Theory and later in this chapter with a discussion of new media frameworks in branding (Lury, 2004) and social media (Parry, 2007). To consider museum brands as networks provides a research framework in which to test the potential influence of social media to museum’s brands — to do so, however, I must first explore how these technologies have been used in and by museums.
2.3. Social Media in and for Museums' Brands

Social media can be powerful tools for arts and culture institutions as they mirror in many ways how brands are theorised within this sector. As communication technologies, social media have evolved in response to social, cultural, political, and economic shifts, to become spaces where institutions and online communities converge. From a branding perspective, implementing social media is a useful strategy that can differentiate organisations within their markets, and as communication tools, social media reflect the intrinsic and extrinsic values of the institution. It can be argued then that social media also reflect the relationships that form between the organisation’s varied stakeholders, thus helping build a loyal following (see for example (Hajli et al., 2017)). To this end, this section starts by defining social media and contextualising its use within museums, both by the institution and its ‘external’ stakeholders (visitors and online audiences). This discussion is followed by a reflection on how social media technologies have been conceptualised as communication tools, within museums’ marketing and branding efforts. Here, I will also discuss the parallels between the discourses of how museums use social media and their approaches to branding (as discussed in the previous section). Lastly, I will discuss how museums integrate social media as part of a strategic use of digital technologies and how this relates to their organisational structures. This chapter provides a focused contextual framework to better understand the existing relationships between museums and the various aspects encompassed in the term ‘social media’ (such as: technologies, users, and mediated behaviours). To this end, I have made a concerted effort to specify which aspect of social media I am referring to throughout this chapter (and this thesis) — however, where there isn’t a specific attribute, it should be understood that I am considering all interrelated aspects of these media.

2.3.1. What are Social Media?

Social media have been defined as “a group of Internet-based applications that build on the ideological and technological foundations of Web 2.0, and that allow the creation and exchange of User Generated Content” (Kaplan and Haenlein, 2010,
This definition is based on two main components: the participatory and collaborative frameworks enabled by Web 2.0 and the various media content that is produced and shared within these frameworks. Social media have been evolving thanks to technological, economic, and social drivers to a point where the sociality and connectivity experienced through these platforms has become ubiquitous. Along with the historical drivers for change, social media technologies have also “co-evolved with the public that uses them” (van Dijck, 2013, p.6) — meaning that these technologies have simultaneously mediated people’s everyday lives, whilst at the same time users have “negotiated whether and how to appropriate them in their quotidian habits” (van Dijck, 2013, p.6). Along with the mutually constitutive relationship between user behaviours and the networks and technologies that facilitate them, it is important to understand that social media are also “automated systems that engineer and manipulate connections” (van Dijck, 2013, p.12) — meaning that these technologies, platforms, and frameworks have a significant agency in online social and cultural networking.

In social media networks, users can “opportunistically interact and selectively self-present, either in real-time or asynchronously” (Carr and Hayes, 2015, p.50) as well as collaborate “around affinities of interest” (Drotner and Schröder, 2013, p.3), and form relationships around “everyday togetherness” (Lomborg, 2011, p.65, in Drotner and Schröder, 2013, p.3). In considering these affordances, along with the disruptive effects on the “text and user dimensions” (Drotner and Schröder, 2013, p.3), social media can be considered as Internet-based tools that mediate communication between people, as well as between people and institutions; tools that are always active even when users are not online; and tools that offer users the potential and space to create and share large amounts of information. With these tools, users who interact with content determine the direction of such interactions and therefore the value of its message, in a so-called ‘democratic’ virtual space.

The continuous growth of social media use has created what van Dijck (2013, p.19) calls the “culture of connectivity” — the by-product of the collaborative production of

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3 Web 2.0 is understood “as a platform whereby content and applications are no longer created and published by individuals, but instead are continuously modified by all users in a participatory and collaborative fashion” (Kaplan and Haenlein, 2010, p.60).
content as part of Web 2.0 frameworks that “evolved as part of a longer historical transformation characterised by a resetting of boundaries between private, corporate, and public domains”. Whilst online networking enabled a seemingly democratic space for collaboration and participation (Iversen and Smith, 2012; Kidd, 2014), it also provided new ways of conceptualising connectivity as the accumulation of economic capital (under the guise of social capital). In this sense, profit and non-profit markets had to adopt new economic models where organisations were compelled to share authorial power with networked communities, and at the same time were able to leverage profiling (profiting) information produced as part of the functionalities embedded into these social technologies. To this end, museums and galleries adopted social media technologies as communication tools and, therefore, a means to share their brands ‘externally’.

2.3.2. Social Media and Museums

Arts and culture organisations have paid particular attention to social media as these technologies have also been theorised as “[both] sites and contexts for identity performances” (Hull and Scott, 2013, p.131), as well as cultural artefacts evidencing “history in the making” (Weller, 2016, p.61). From a user perspective, social media platforms “enable open-ended and reflexive forms of value production to emerge” (Carah, 2014, p.137), which simultaneously register and link social relationships as well as experiences with material cultural spaces. Content shared through social media platforms, as a by-product of experiences with cultural spaces, can be particularly important for institutions such as museums as these not only affect its producer’s memory of the visiting experience, but also influence the producer’s network as a form of peer recommendation (Lydon, 2016). Working as “electronic word of mouth” (Erkan, 2015) or promotional tools, social media technologies are often evaluated in correlation to engagement and brand reputation. For museums in particular, social media-driven reputation positively affects the decision-making process of potential and high-propensity visitors, resulting in increased visitation numbers (Dilenschneider, 2015).

Jenny Kidd (2011) argues that the way museums have adopted social media technologies, fall within three organising frames: the Marketing Frame (promoting
the ‘face’ of an institution), the Inclusivity Frame (related to notions of real and online ‘community’) and the Collaborative Frame. These frames take into consideration the technological affordances of social media and the mutually constitutive relationships between these platforms and social practice (van Dijck, 2013). In other words, Kidd (2011) creates an overview of the way museums use social media technologies to discuss three ways in which these tools mediate audience engagement that could challenge museums’ institutional authority. For example, Kidd (2011, p.70) suggests that when museums use social media within a ‘collaborative frame’ they allow people to “co-produce the narratives of the museum”, whereas if these institutions use social media within an ‘inclusivity frame’ they are enabling “communities of interest” to build around the museum (Kidd, 2011, p.69). On the other hand, when museums use social media within a ‘marketing frame’, they do so with the intent to promote the organisation to a wide audience and to provide the institution with a personality or a ‘face’ (Kidd, 2011, p.67).

Kidd’s (2011) three organisational frames create a dichotomy in the relationship between museums and their online audiences that is mediated through social media. On one hand, museums enable online audiences to be ‘active’ participants in institutional processes (co-creating narratives or building communities); whereas, on the other hand, museums render online audiences to more ‘passive’ roles (as recipients of institutional communication). In this sense, and from a branding perspective as described in the previous sections, the way museums use social media technologies further entrench the dichotomies between ‘internal’ and ‘external’ stakeholders. From this perspective, online audiences are always ‘external’ to the museum brand and only invited to participate within a limited remit created by the institution. Locating online audiences in this manner is complicated further by the behaviours mediated through social media’s technological affordances, such as creating new visual media and associated metadata to create new narratives or taking ‘digital’ ownership of museum objects (Weilenmann and Hillman, 2016).

The turn towards visuality is an example of the ways that social media technologies have diversified how museums connect with their visitors and audiences, as well as the ways in which these groups converge with cultural objects. In other words, social media technologies have not only changed the way a museum can be accessed, it has
also changed the visiting experience and the way we engage with tangible history and heritage. Taking photographs in museums (for the purpose of sharing them through social media platforms) has garnered the attention of researchers and practitioners in museums and other sectors alike, as well as drawn criticism ranging from the motivations to the influence of this practice as part of the visiting experience. For example, this type of visual social media has been used as a way to physically manifest online engagement in galleries by using photographs shared online as exhibition objects (Dornan, 2016). More often, however, visual social media in museums is used as a way to understand and rationalise the re-distribution of authority and as a research tool to assess visiting patterns, memories, and experiences.

Analysing photographic behaviours and using images in research has resulted in identifying common spaces for civic discussions (Bayans and Meyer, 2016), created simultaneous online and onsite spaces where museum experts and members of the public collaborate on public memory projects (Heffley, 2016), and used to address the effects of taking photographs during a visit on personal memory (Henkel et al., 2016; Kirk, 2016). Most recently a series of studies have used photographs shared online to analyse trends of visitors’ experiences and how these trends may affect and inform museum decision-making — such as strategies, exhibition design, programming and overall planning (Budge and Burness 2017; Budge 2017; 2018; Arias 2018; Villaespesa and Wowkowych 2020). These examples suggest that the effects of social media use in museums can be measured in a variety of ways, adding methodologies to show the value of these participatory technologies to the museum. Furthermore, these diverse projects are examples of the value of social media beyond their traditional marketing and communication roles, particularly in terms of the value that active participation can have on museums’ reputation and ways of working.

2.3.3. Social Media and Museum Brands

For the most part, social media technologies have been conceptualised as communication tools, as such organisations have adopted their use as a strategic part of their marketing and communication efforts. From a branding perspective, social
media are then understood as both products of the institutional identity and values, and as conduits for sharing the brand with networked audiences. In this framework, social media require a strategic approach that helps the institution reach their goals, whilst enriching the relationships between the organisations and its various stakeholders. As discussed in the previous section, when museums adopt social media technologies as part of their marketing and communications efforts, they mainly use social media to promote the organisation to a wide audience and to provide the institution with a personality or a ‘face’ (Kidd, 2011, p.67). As promotional tools, social media are often evaluated in correlation to engagement and brand reputation.

One way that museums stay true to their purpose and drive reputation on social media platforms is by adopting a personality, which helps in maintaining a cohesive ‘look and feel’ as well as providing a relatable way to conceptualise the institution’s identity and values. By asking “if the museum was a person, who would it be?” (Merriman, 2017) as part of a branding or re-branding exercise, it provides an easier way for both ‘internal’ and ‘external’ stakeholders to describe what the institution does and what it stands for (Johnson, 2016). In social media platforms, the brand’s personality shines through the use of imagery, text, and tone of voice (Temporal, 2015, p.176); these elements, however, also portray the personality of the person(s) responsible for managing these networking sites — as Russell Dornan (2017, original emphasis) so aptly put “the people who manage social accounts for museums are those organisations”.

Using social media technologies resemble the holistic approach of branding towards building trust within the institution, which then positively affects the perception and trustworthiness from a public perspective. Allen-Greil et al (2011) suggest that “to build trust with our audiences, we need to foster trusting relationships within the institution”, starting with a strategic approach of how social media help fulfil the mission of the organisation. Once a social media (and indeed a branding) strategy has been established, communicated, and embodied throughout the institution through collaborative practices, trusting relationships form within and are reflected in the institution’s communications and actions towards its visitors and audiences. It is useful to be mindful then, that social media can be a reflection of how the
museum’s brand is perceived by its ‘internal’ stakeholders as well as that of its networked (‘external’) audiences. Although the benefits of adopting social media technologies are widely accepted, which range from driving communications, enabling accessibility, and ‘democratising’ knowledge and authority, two trends become apparent: the first is a recognition that a digital strategy that works alongside (or is incorporated to) overall institutional strategies is essential, and the second is that museums often lack a supportive organisational infrastructure.

Ryan Dodge (2016) argues that digital technologies (including social media) should be integrated to museum’s overall strategies and not merely regarded as “add-on to traditional gallery/exhibition experience[s]”; in doing so the museum would be recognising that the value of digital engagement is as important as the value of onsite engagement. Dodge (2016) argues that to fully integrate digital technologies to the strategies and operation of the museum, the institution needs to support these initiatives through proper resourcing (by training staff) and by providing frameworks for interdisciplinary collaboration. In this sense, an integrated approach places the emphasis on people and on the value of engaging all stakeholders. One way to consolidate the museum’s digital efforts within its overall strategies is to build ‘internal’ trust by demonstrating and measuring the value of these technologies towards achieving the museum’s missionary goals (Stein, 2012). For example, by having clear metrics museum leadership can use specific methodologies to build future budget plans, therefore weaving the value of the technologies throughout the organisation — not just in relation to one or two departments.

One example of a semi-integrated digital strategy within a museum is the approach taken by the San Francisco Museum of Modern Art (SFMOMA) where the digital strategy is married to the museum’s content strategy (Coerver, n.d.; MuseuWren, 2017). This approach was taken as a result of research undertaken leading up to SFMOMA’s reopening in 2016 (which included a new building and a refreshed brand). The results from this study pointed to the need of storytelling from visitors as an authentic way to engage and relate to the museum’s objects. The reopening of SFMOMA sought to use digital technologies throughout the institution to help create these authentic connections that their visitors were looking for, which translated to the collaborative work of five departments within its Content Strategy and Digital
Engagement Division. This Division, however, does not encompass social media (a role that is relegated to Marketing) which seems counter-intuitive as these platforms are inherently collaborative spaces where visitors and audiences can digitally engage with the museum and its objects.

Presently a ‘best practice’ approach does not exist towards implementing digital technologies in museums (Tallon, 2017). This lack is attributed to the ad hoc means by which digital departments have been added to organisational structures with the task of digitally transforming non-digital institutions. In such cases, it is presumed that the individual(s) responsible for these technologies also bear responsibility for leading change and transformation throughout the institution. As human-centred service organisations museums tend to be fierce advocates of collaboration, ironically however, most museums do not have organisational strategies and structures that foster collaboration between departments (Butler, 2017). When museums work in silos, digital transformation and adoption is stagnated due in part to an imbalance of knowledge and skills, a lack of transparency, and a lack of support from leadership. It is argued that a multidisciplinary and integrated approach is more suitable for the “interconnectivity of the web and the omnipresence of digital technologies” (Tasich, 2014). This approach starts with organisational change based on digital leadership, skill building, and strategic resourcing.

Social media is often tasked to a group of staff members led by a manager, or in some cases it is tasked to a single individual within a museum. Given the immense responsibilities and the genuine impact that social media has within an institution, it is shocking and distressing that these roles are often not properly accounted for. Social media managers work in fast-paced environments where they “convey the institution’s voice to the public and deliver the audiences’ voice to the museum top management” (Magro, 2018). Social media managers foster long-term relationships with audiences and with fellow colleagues, whilst consistently driving mission-focused dialogue. Overall social media managers “hold the museum’s reputation in [their] hands” (Dodge, 2017). Yet when museums do not have a social media or a digital technology strategy that is aligned or embedded within its overall strategy, the value of the work of social media managers and the outcome of their work is
misrepresented and mis-valued — as was the case for the Web Manager in the Manchester Art Gallery (see Chapter 7).

When digital strategies are integrated throughout the organisation and are supported by knowledgeable staff and leaders, museums create a digital engagement framework that outlines where value is created, with whom, and how these efforts accumulate towards fulfilling the mission and goals of the museum. Jasper Visser (2013, p. 3) notes “the social museum is a place where all individuals involved work together to maximise the value of the institution and that has the strategies, technologies and processes in place to facilitate this” — this statement rings particularly true when social media are considered an integral part of the institution and when a ‘human centred’ approach is taken. An inclusive and participatory framework that involves ‘internal’ stakeholders as much as ‘external’ stakeholders, through digital technologies, has the capacity to fulfill the museum’s mission effectively as well as the capacity to meet the ongoing changes in its social, political, economic, and technological environments.

Despite these acknowledgments that social media have the potential to create value in and for museums, and the examples of how these institutions use such technologies to communicate and share their brand — there is a distinct lack of reflections and discussions in the way that social media may influence museums’ brands — or, the way that these technologies, their users, and their mediated relationships may influence the institution. In other words, throughout the discourses of social media and branding in museums there is an emphasis on the ‘external’ aspects of these relationships. Such aspects include the communicative role of social media technologies as part of museums’ marketing efforts, as well as the way these tools enable visitors and audiences have different relationships with museums and their collections. In this sense, much of the discourse places social media in a ‘passive’ role despite their constitutive technological affordances that make social media ‘active’ mediators. I am interested in exploring this ‘active’ role of social media and, in doing so, whether they may have an influential role within museum brands. To this end, I will conclude this chapter by expanding on my proposition to reconceptualise museum brands as networks by taking a new media approach.
2.4. Conclusion

The literature examined in this chapter clearly demonstrates the need for an integrated and strategic approach towards branding and digital technologies — one that connects mission and social practices to create value for online audiences (Gates, 2012, p.104) and one that is open to the active participation of its networked users (Sollevanti, 2016). Although the symbiotic relationship between museums and its communities is recognised as a measure of success for branding efforts and social media engagement, it is not clear how these online groups or technologies may influence these efforts. To this end I am adopting a new media perspective, which influences how I use the contextual framework from this chapter and how I build my analytic structure in the following chapter. For this reason, I will start building this association here and continue in more detail in Chapter 3.

There are two main ways in which I will adopt a new media perspective in this thesis: by acknowledging that brands are relational and context dependent, as well as simultaneously concrete and abstract (Lury, 2004); and by acknowledging that museums themselves are a medium “full of media” (Parry, 2007, p.11, original emphasis), they are both sources and places of knowledge, as well as spaces of convergence. In the first instance I am adopting Celia Lury’s (Lury, 2004, p.2) arguments about brands’ “object-ivity” as these take shape in the information feedback processes between its constituting actors whilst maintaining a “controlled relation to its environment” — meaning, their broad organisational systems. In this sense, museum brands mediate information and value (an abstract symbolism) within these systems (such as the market) and also result in tangible outcomes (such as exhibitions). To consider museum brands as networks, is to encompass these simultaneous states as well as the different actors who produce and organise the brand through their relationships. Similarly, this approach takes into account the way new media (which social media are a part of) influenced museums by distributing its spaces and narratives — or as Ross Parry (2007) argues, ‘recoded’ these institutions.
The characteristics of new media have enabled new ways of communicating not only between individuals and communities, but also between individuals and communities, and organisations and institutions. Furthermore, these attributes have also empowered the different levels of society (namely individuals and communities) by blurring the lines between content creators and content receivers, effectively adding the potential of agency for meaning and value of information to non-traditional authoritative sources. Whereas van Dijk (2012) relates the effect of new media towards the rise of a networked society⁴, Parry discusses the effects of new media and their technologies in “rescripting the museum experience” and “recoding” the value, purpose, role and function of museums (2007, pp.96–97, 139). ‘New’ technologies enabled museums to reconsider their traditional processes of information management and structures, including the addition of new roles and skills in order to fulfill these new knowledge systems. This thesis ascribes to the characteristics of new media that facilitated changes in museums, which in turn recast the role and agency of visitors; it proposes that social media is currently pushing museums and their brands to recode once again.

In this chapter I have provided an overview of literature that inform the contextual framework of my research, which will influence my subsequent analysis of the Manchester Art Gallery brand and the potential influence of social media within it. To this end I have defined two key concepts: ‘brand’ and ‘social media’ and explored how they have been approached by museums. In this overview it is clear that the development of these concepts and how they are applied is closely intertwined with contemporary social, economic, and political frameworks (or broad organisational systems). These relationships are ongoing, therefore relevant studies (such as this one) require a flexible research design that will not only account for their conceptual history but also their contemporary applications and effects. To this end, this thesis will use an inductive approach and a variety of data (as will be detailed in Chapter 4) in an effort to reflect the relationships of these broad organisational systems with my case study, the Manchester Art Gallery.

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⁴ van Dijk (2012, p.24) defines a ‘networked society’ as “a modern type of society with an infrastructure of social and media networks that characterises its mode of organization at every level: individual, group/organizational and societal”.

In addition to these relationships, my aim with this thesis is to propose a reconceptualisation of museum brands as networks. One of the reasons for this proposal is to go beyond the dichotomies created by the existing discourses of brands and social media museums — mainly, the separation between ‘internal’ and ‘external’ spaces and people; as well as the divide between ‘physical’ and ‘digital’ relationships. As I will discuss further in the following chapter, I will be using a theoretical framework that allows me to ‘flatten’ these attributes and consider them within the same analytic plane. Another reason for my reconceptualisation proposal, is to create a framework where I can explore any and all types of actors that may be involved in museum brands — from broad organisational systems to other institutions, from specific individuals to groups and communities, and from other tangible and intangible actors such as architecture, collections, and social media. In this sense, I will be creating an analytic framework that not only ‘flattens’ spaces or divides, but also ‘flattens’ different types of actors regardless of who or what they are. To this end, I will be relying on Actor-Network Theory to shape my theoretical and methodological approaches as I will describe in the following two chapters.
3. Theoretical Framework: Re-Conceptualising Museum Brands as Networks

In this thesis, I argue for a re-conceptualisation of museums’ brands as a way to evaluate the role of social media with(in) this concept and associated processes. In the previous chapter I discussed the functional and symbolic aspects of museum brands as the results of the relationships between several stakeholders (who are often split into dichotomous groups such as internal/external and physical/digital). In this chapter, however, I will introduce a different dichotomy and terminology to explore museums’ brands as products of relational networks composed of human and non-human actors. Here, I will explore Actor-Network Theory as the guiding framework for this research — theoretically — and as the underlying conceptional foundation to understand museums’ brands as relational networks between various actors. In doing so, I will establish an analytic frame to understand the potential influence of social media (technologies and users) to museum brands through the lens of my case study, the Manchester Art Gallery.

This chapter is structured in four main sections. First, I will explore Actor-Network Theory (ANT) from its ontological foundations to its application in cultural sociology. Here I will rely on the writings of ANT’s central figures: Michel Callon (Callon 1986a; 1986b), Bruno Latour (2005), and John Law (1999). The second and third sections pick up from the previous chapter to discuss more in depth the new media perspective I am adopting in this thesis. Here I will rely on the writings from Celia Lury (2004), who uses a new media approach and ANT to understand brands, and from Ross Parry (2007), who uses a new media approach to discuss the implications of using digital technologies by museums. The last section will focus on the potential limitations of this theoretical framework by exploring criticisms to ANT and how I will try to overcome these in my analysis. By adopting these theoretical concepts, this thesis argues that museum brands can be conceived as networks that exist in and are constructed by the associations between a variety of human and non-human actors. As I will discuss throughout this chapter, this notion suggests that brands are simultaneously conceptualised in as many ways as there are actors, bound and stabilised in time through various relationships, and legitimised by decision-making.
actors. To better understand this concept of museum brand networks, I will start by discussing the ‘sociology of associations’ (Latour, 2005).
3.1. Sociology of Associations

Actor-Network Theory (ANT) was first developed by Michel Callon, Bruno Latour, and John Law at the École Nationale Supérieure des Mines de Paris in the 1980s (Almila, 2016, p.131). The term ‘actor-network’ was formulated by Michel Callon (1986b) who, at the time, was studying the development of electric vehicles within the socio-economic and technological contexts of 1970s France. ANT started as a branch of Science and Technology Studies (Almila, 2016); Callon’s (1986b) study, therefore, is an example of how ANT’s ontological roots stem from adopting sociological frameworks to understand the development of science (and technology) within the “social contexts of which they form a part of” (Callon, 1986b, p.20). The inter-dependency of the social world and the scientific/natural/technological worlds is one of the main tenets of ANT for it sets the stage to understand the dynamics (relations) and structure (networks) of heterogeneous actors. Interestingly, it also foregrounds some of the critique that ANT has received such as ignoring ‘historical modes of ordering’ (Ausch, 2000) and oversimplifying structures (Amsterdamska, 1990). I will return to these critiques in a later section of this chapter.

Another principle of ANT is the rejection of essentialism about the nature of actors, or as Callon (1999, p.181, original emphasis) states, ANT “assumes the radical indeterminacy of the actor”. From this perspective actors are not predetermined, their roles are not presumed, and their agency is not speculated upon; instead, ANT offers a flexible framework where actors may determine themselves in and through their relations with others. Such framework leads the researcher to consider actors of all kinds (human, non-human, and other networks) and to follow each one in their relationships and interactions with one another. In this sense, an actor-network (such as a museum brand) may be organised in the relations between heterogeneous actors with different kinds of characteristics (such as individuals, institutions, objects, or digital technologies). By approaching actors (whoever and whatever they may be) within the same analytic plane, ANT places more emphasis on the relations or associations between these actors than on the actors themselves.

Bruno Latour (2005, p.21), one of the main proponents of ANT, suggests that actors structure themselves and determine their roles in relation to other actors, as such
there is a “constant tracing of boundaries by people over some other people” — in doing so, groups are constantly forming and re-forming themselves. By focusing on movement and interactions, actors are therefore referred as “something that acts or to which activity is granted by others” (Latour, 1996, p.374). In this sense, actors determine themselves through their continuous relational performances — which in turn make networks durable (Law, 1999). An actor-network, therefore, “is simultaneously an actor whose activity is networking heterogeneous elements and a network that is able to redefine and transform what it is made of” (Callon, 2012, p.93). From this perspective, a museum brand network is discursively heterogeneous and dependent on the performed inter-connection between its constituting actors. A museum brand network may then be composed of a variety of materially heterogeneous actors at any given time, who in turn are defined as actors in the brand network through their associations with one another.

As actors constantly negotiate their roles and those of others (thereby setting and re-setting the boundaries of the network), they “engage in providing controversial accounts for their actions as well as for those of others” (Latour, 2005, p.47). Although this point may be more suitable for the next chapter (on methodology), it is useful to capture here the absolution of conscious action by abstracting the actor to their own definitions. When actors describe their performances and roles within their groups, they also describe the actions they take, how these affect others, and the actions others take and how these affect them in return. Latour (2005, p.57) reminds us to follow the narratives provided by actors and thus to follow their explanations of their agency and that of others, paying particular attention to whether or not these agencies are treated as intermediaries (without ability to transform meaning) or as mediators (with ability to transform meaning).

The seminal point of ANT is that by remaining open to the actors and not censoring them in their definition, organisation, and perceived influence, the researcher may also include non-human actors (such as digital technologies, objects and other networks) as active participants with their own levels of agency (Callon 1986a; Law 1986a; 1986b). Objects, in particular, bring us back to the beginning of this section in that they stabilise and legitimise the constructed social order, in this way objects may be used to explain power “not as a property or as a possession, but as [...] the overall
effect of a set of strategies” (Law, 1986a, p.16). In other words, with each performative definition of an actor, power and legitimacy is also performed and re-defined, thus making the tracing of a group an exercise of infinite possibilities. The complexity and inter-dependency of actors and their networks demand, therefore, that researchers simplify the actor-networks they study as a ‘snapshot’ at a particular point in time through a process called ‘translation’.

Callon and Latour (2014) adopted the concept of ‘translation’ from Michel Serres who “wrote about the borders of order and disorder, where translations happen across borders, linking, changing and betraying things” (Almila, 2016, p.132). In ANT, translation is part of the performance of actors who are continuously defining their roles and that of others, therefore negotiating the boundaries of their network (or organisation) through their relations. Although translation enables any actor (human and non-human) to communicate as equivalents (Law, 1999, p.8); the performative nature of this process means that the relations or communications are distorted from one actor to another, thereby betraying or modifying the meaning of their performances (Latour, 2005). In this sense, translation has a significant implication in the methodological application of Actor-Network Theory (as I will discuss in the next chapter). Here, however, this process implies that in a network of actors, it is more important to examine the effect of the relationships between actors (Latour, 1999), than the actors themselves and their relational intent.

Taking into account the seminal concepts of ANT (the heterogeneity of actors, translation, and performativity), this thesis argues that museum brands can be conceived as networks that exist in and are constructed by the associations between a variety of human and non-human actors. As such, this notion suggests that brands are simultaneously conceptualised in as many ways as there are actors, bound and stabilised in time through objects and processes, and legitimised by each actor’s narratives (of roles, order, and authority). In taking this integrated approach, it will be possible to analyse how social media affect museum brands by questioning actors’ narratives of association with these media. In order to assemble the Manchester Art Gallery brand network, and the potential role of social media within it, we must take a new media framework to understand not only the relational and performative aspects of brands, but also the implications of using these digital technologies by
museums. To this end, the next section explores Celia Lury’s (2004) arguments to consider brands as new media objects as a result of a process of relationality among the products/services it organises with its broader environment.
3.2. Brands as Media of Translation

Although ANT has ontological roots in Science and Technology, it found a ‘second wave’ of interpretation and application within management studies (Almila, 2016). This application was led by Michel Callon (Callon 1998; 1999) who adopted an actor-network theory framework to understand economic markets and to frame the agency of non-human actors within these. Following this adaptation, there are two works that are relevant for this thesis. First is Helen Rees-Leahy’s (2009) study of the sale of the painting *Diana and Actaeon*. In this study, Rees-Leahy (2009) used ANT to understand the social practices that are tied to the commoditisation of artworks — or, in other words, to explore the relationships and interdependencies of a work of art (non-human actor) within various broad organisational networks (cultural and economic). This study is relevant to this thesis as it provides a unique example of how ANT has been applied to understand the agency of cultural objects as non-human actors. In this sense, I will be able to explore my case study (Manchester Art Gallery) and an event that centred on the temporary removal of the painting *Hylas and the Nymphs*, which I will discuss in more detail in Chapters 4 and 6.

The second work that is relevant for this thesis, following Callon’s (1999) adaptation of ANT towards management studies and marketing, is Celia Lury’s (2004) analysis of brands as performative objects. In her volume *Brands: The Logos of the Global Economy*, Lury (2004, p.2) argues that a brand is an object — more specifically, a dynamic object that “is not fixed, but is in itself a process in time”. Additionally, Lury (2004) argues that brands are ‘object-ive’ as these are created and organised in the relations of specific aspects (or actors) within specific contexts (such as economic markets or political systems). In this sense brands are dependent on three factors: the human and non-human actors involved, the relationships between these actors, and the broad systems in place (social, economic, cultural, and political) that influence these relationships. A brand, therefore, is only as stable as long as these factors are kept balanced. For example, a brand may be altered if an actor is removed as this leads to a re-negotiation of roles between the remaining actors. On the other hand, a change in the socio-cultural system wherein a brand operates may also lead to a re-negotiation to how its actors relate to one another.
The object-ivity of brands is therefore relational and dynamic, resulting in a network that is a continuous process of negotiations and re-negotiations between its actors. For Lury (2004, p.4) it is these relations and negotiations that result in an object that is both “concrete and abstract” — meaning that brands are “instantiated” in tangible attributes (such as products) and through intangible attributes (such as how the brand is perceived and valued). In this sense, a museum’s brand may be understood in the dynamic and contextual relations between “all parts of the museum” (Wallace, 2006, p.1) in the symbolic representation of the institution (Hede, 2007), as well as in the broader perceptions of the museum sector (Hede, 2007; Scott, 2007).5 From an ANT perspective, brands are a medium of translation where the emphasis is on a relational manner of organising information and where heterogeneous actors are recognisable as part of a dynamic whole (or network). Lury’s (2004) adoption ANT framework is part of a pivot to new media perspectives in brand theory (Bookman, 2016, p.581), where brands are considered mediative objects with uneven informational flows and therefore managed as a communications interface.

Lury (2004) argues there are particular ways in which new media theory contributes to the understanding of the brand as a medium of translation. First, is the definition of a medium as a multi-layered and dynamic platform; and the definition of communications as an “exchange across disunified or disparate times and spaces” (Lury, 2004, p.5). In this sense, the brand is considered an interface that organises a two-way asymmetric exchange of information between its constituting heterogeneous parts. This interactivity leads to the second contributing aspect of new media: performativity. The brand is considered as a site of interactivity and “emerges through the mobilisation of a pattern of activity” (Bookman, 2016, p.581) between its constituting parts (actors), as well as with its broader environment. The brand, therefore, is “both an actor and a network, and it mediates the relations between human, non-human and non-individual actors” (Almila, 2016, pp.138–139); in other words, the brand network is object-ive as it is simultaneously organised in the asymmetric performances of its actors, as well as performative in its contextual social, cultural, economic and political frameworks.

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5 As was explored in the previous chapter.
Approaching museum brands through a new media lens and within an Actor-Network Theory framework, provides an opportunity to understand the potential impact of social media (platforms and audiences) to the brand. This approach enables researchers to re-assemble museum brand networks through the relationships between its constituting actors, which may include social media. From this perspective, an ANT approach with a new media lens frames museum brands as dynamic interfaces that are organised in asymmetric relations between heterogeneous actors. Although social media platforms may be considered simply as communication technologies, they are new media in and of themselves as they have enabled asymmetric exchanges (and creation) of information not only between individuals and communities, but also between individuals and communities, and organisations and institutions. This type of new media technology has the potential to “rescript” or “recode” the value, purpose, role and function of museums (Parry, 2007) — in turn, they have the potential to change the contexts within which museum brands are object-ive.
3.3. New Media and Museums

New media are described to have four distinct characteristics, they are: numerical, automated, variable, and involved in “a process of transcoding” (Manovich, 2002, cited in Parry, 2007, p. 12, original emphasis). Through these characteristics, new media are associated with reducing the material world into the ‘virtual’ world by means of processing (automating) data, they are liquid in the sense that they have a certain degree of modularity, and through this variable quality new media are involved in the mutually constituting process between technologies and culture. In 2012, van Dijk (2012, p.10) saw the proliferation and potential of new media as a communications revolution where several levels and factors of society were integrated into a single medium and where large units of information were broken up into items that are “liable to be perceived and processed in the order that the reader, viewer, or listener wants”.

van Dijk (2012, pp.11–12) concludes, then, that the attributes of new media have enabled an integrated communications structure that combines several information traffic patterns: allocution, consultation, registration, and conversation. These patterns indicate that through new media, not only is information created and shared simultaneously between source centres and audience units, but the selection of subject matter, time, and speed is also shared between sources and audiences. In other words, the characteristics of new media have enabled new ways of communicating not only between individuals and communities, but also between individuals and communities, and organisations and institutions. Furthermore, these attributes have also empowered the different levels of society (namely individuals and communities) by blurring the lines between content creators and content receivers, effectively adding the potential of agency for meaning and value of information to non-traditional authoritative sources.

Whereas van Dijk (2012) relates the effect of new media towards the rise of a networked society⁶, Parry (2007, pp.96–97, 139) discusses the effects of new media

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⁶ van Dijk (2012, p.24) defines a ‘networked society’ as “a modern type of society with an infrastructure of social and media networks that characterizes its mode of organization at every level: individual, group/organizational and societal”. 
and their technologies in “rescripting the museum experience” and “recoding” the value, purpose, role and function of museums. In his text, *Recoding the museum: digital heritage and the technologies of change*, Parry (2007, p.29) takes a historical approach to delineate the effects of new media technologies in museums — starting with collections management and the influence of contemporary theories on the production of knowledge. ‘New’ technologies enabled museums to reconsider their traditional processes of information management and structures, including the addition of new roles and skills in order to fulfill these new knowledge systems.

On a more ‘philosophical’ level, new media technologies (namely digitisation) brought about fierce debate on materiality, authenticity, and a dichotomy between ‘real’ and ‘virtual’ (Parry, 2007, pp.61–81). The actual debate, however, was the threat of a distributed authority. This threat was felt mostly in two ways: in the first instance, digitised reproductions were perceived to supplant the original object (losing its authenticity) and to replace the museum as the only space to experience the object (thus undermining the authority of the institution). In the second instance, curators felt threatened in their day-to-day work and in their authority as the ‘institutional’ voice of the collection. New technologies required different skills to translate curatorial methodologies to digital platforms, meaning that curators either had to acquire these skills or depend on new colleagues (persons who often had no previous experience with museums). New media, on the other hand, enabled visitors and audiences to use the same communication channels as curators, and to create their own content — meaning that curators had to revisit their protocols and to share narratives with visitors.

Overall, it can be seen that the characteristics of new media and new media technologies facilitated an ‘evolution’ or a ‘recoding’ of museums (Parry, 2007). As these new media were adopted museums sought help from fellow institutions, leading to partnerships, shared information, and to collaborative associations (such as the Museums Computer Group). It also led to the restructuring of museums by the necessity of new resources, including technical, technological, human, and capital. These needs provided grounds for changes in organisational structures, strategies, and policies. Although Parry (2007) focuses on the ‘internal’ (strategic and conceptual) effects of new media to museums, he also implicitly discusses the
‘external’ effects on new media — or how the effects of new media to museums affected their visitors and audiences.

Parry (2007, pp.71–72) argues that the adoption of ‘virtuality’ (as a defining attribute and as a concept) helped soften the dichotomy between the ‘real’ and the ‘virtual’; virtuality “opened the opportunity for ‘cognitive spaces’ where visitors could make their own meanings on their own terms”. In other words, new media (seen as virtuality) changed the way museum spaces could be conceptualised by adding another dimension to the physical and embodied places museums occupy. Parry (2007, p.95) argues that the new media broke down the manner of ‘consuming’ the museum, where the fixed spatiality and site-specificity of the museum was distributed through the Web and meeting visitors wherever they were. So, new media and digital technologies distributed not only museum narratives (by the inclusion of user-generated content), but also distributed the spaces where visitors could encounter and engage with the museum.

This thesis ascribes to the characteristics of new media that facilitated changes in museums, which in turn recasted the role and agency of visitors; it proposes that social media is currently pushing museums to recode once again. As Parry (2007, p.11, original emphasis) demonstrates, museums themselves are a medium that are “full of media” — they are both sources and places of knowledge, and they are spaces of convergence. Through social media, visitors, audiences, and non-visitors alike are challenging the agency of museums and the ‘set of associations’ or ‘personal and social consequences’ (Parry, 2007, p.9) that these institutions carry. Social media have allowed some unprecedented levels of participation from various communities, which have amplified the connections between audiences as well as between audiences and museums.
3.4. A Double-Edged Sword

Taking a new media lens and an Actor-Network Theory framework for this thesis, means acknowledging not only the potential to re-conceptualise museum brands, but also being aware of the limitations and criticisms that this theoretical concept may bring to my analysis. The flexibility afforded by ANT can be described as a double-edged sword as the same attributes that make this principle unique, are the same attributes that may limit its analytic potential. These limitations mainly stem from ‘translation’ or the methodological approach to ANT. Callon (1986a, p.203) describes translation as the process “during which the identity of actors, the possibility of interaction and the margins of manoeuvre are negotiated and delimited”. This description is categorically opposed to the main tenet of ANT: to follow actors without judgement or limitations. In this context ANT has been criticised of providing a simplistic view of ordering (Amsterdamska, 1990), which could temperate the interpretation of roles and relationships as described by the actors.

The indeterminacy of actors, however, also poses a question of relativism and subjectivity. The descriptions provided by actors limit the presence of other actors to who they interact with, effectively leaving in the dark potential ‘others’ who may be just as influential to the network as those immediately recognised or named (Kéfi and Pallud, 2011, p.277). By following the actors’ narratives, the researcher is limited to their experiences within a particular timespan, potentially ignoring the cumulative set of experiences of previous group members and fixating the capacities of the group to the contemporary set of available roles, thus limiting its potential for future adaptations. For this reason, ANT has been criticised for ignoring “historical modes of entering into relations with other individuals” (Ausch, 2000, p.319), such as political and economic categories like gender, class, and colonialism.

I argue, however, that approaching ANT through a new media lens may alleviate some of these potential limitations in acknowledging the relational ‘modes of ordering’ (Law, 1994) between actors and their specific systems of operation (social, economic, cultural, and political). Moreover, I argue that this theoretical approach is significantly appropriate for a study that concerns museums as media (Parry, 2007) and that are therefore ‘object-ive’ in the distributed relations between human and
non-human actors, as well as between spaces (physical and digital). Here, we may turn to Nick Couldry’s (2000) discussion of the asymmetric relations between ‘media and ordinary worlds’, as well as refer back to the aforementioned study by Rees-Leahy (2009) of the commoditisation of artworks. Doing so, enables me to approach the case study (Manchester Art Gallery) not with a simplistic view of ordering but with a necessary boundary to understand how the Gallery brand network is organised and legitimised in specific relations. Similarly, this approach enables me to acknowledge broader (and historical) organisational systems as networks in and of themselves, and actors within the brand network with particular relational influences.

Couldry (2000) explores the relationships between (new) media and the cultural world as a ‘symbolic division’ between those who can legitimately create cultural value and those who cannot. Although this thesis does not aim to explore issues related to cultural value, Couldry’s (2000) arguments are relevant as he is able to observe a division of human actors between decision-makers and non-decision makers in relation to the perceived spatial differences between physical and digital forms of presence. Couldry (2000, p.38) argues that, in a museum setting, decision-makers often draw valuative divisions (often in favour of physical spaces and presences) in their performances “through language and through actions”. Here, Couldry (2000, p.39) observes how decision-making actors rely on “the everyday practices through which knowledge and information are produced” that favour ‘physical’ performances of decision-making. These observations mirror Parry’s (2007) discussion of the perceived threat that new media technologies would result in a distributed authority beyond the physical boundaries of the museum and specific individuals (such as curators).

Couldry’s (2000) and Parry’s (2007) arguments are useful for this thesis as they are a reminder of the distributed modes of organisation that new media inherently enable. In this sense, museum brand networks cannot be ordered in a simplistic manner as their constituting actors may engage in modes of ordering that rely on different types of performances, that may favour different forms of presence, and that may be distributed in different networks with their own information flows (such as political systems). In other words, as Rees-Leahy (2009, p.139) argues, “the ‘outside world’ of
relationships and interdependencies is always present”, where “the process of disentanglement” of one actor from another or of one actor from its various corresponding organisational systems “is never tidy or complete”. I argue, that in research frameworks where the emphasis is on the relational effects between different actors, there needs to be a wholehearted acknowledgment of the temporal limitations on what can be observed in a case study. Although we may only be able to observe and account for the relations that are available at a given point in time, it does not mean that we can fully disentangle previous (individual or collective) experiences that influence the observable behaviours. Therefore, in a study based on an Actor-Network Theory framework and a new media lens, it is detrimental to ignore broader organisational systems (historic and current) as it will lead to a limited understanding of the network in question.
3.5. Conclusion

In this chapter I argue for a re-conceptualisation of museum brands as actor-networks that are composed of heterogeneous actors who are in a continuous negotiation with one another. In this sense, I argue that museum brands are the result of the relational performances between specific actors which are legitimised at particular points in time. In taking an Actor-Network Theory framework I am approaching my case study, the Manchester Art Gallery, from a perspective that places an emphasis on the effects of relations or associations between actors than on the actors themselves. To this end, I will need to employ a methodological strategy where I can treat the Gallery brand’s constituting actors within the same analytic plane (regardless of who or what they are) and where I can follow their narratives as expressions of their continuous performances. Doing so, will enable me to explore how the Gallery brand is organised and how a sudden change to the Gallery’s broader systems of operation (social, cultural and technological) affects the way actors relate to one another.

By taking a new media lens within an ANT framework, I am acknowledging that the Manchester Art Gallery brand is an object-ive medium of translation where actors engage in two-way asymmetric exchanges of information that result in symbolic divisions (such as between actors, spaces, and forms of presence). In this sense, I aim to observe the Gallery brand network as it emerges not only from the relational performances of its constituting actors, but also in the patterns of activity between the Gallery and its broader environment. As part of this aim, I further intend on exploring the role and relationships between social media and the Gallery brand network, in an effort to understand the potential influence this new media technology (and its mediated users) may have to the network. To do so, I will investigate the effects of an event that took place at the Gallery and that “took a life of its own” online as staff members would later describe — or, in other words, I will explore the potential effects of a Twitter event to re-distribute and re-organise the Gallery brand network.

Museum brands are problematic concepts to consider for re-assembly. Brands are at once a relationship between stakeholders and a functional aspect of an institution;
they are also compelling visual and verbal narratives, as well as a value measure; and they are suggested to be the backbone and building block of an institution, both an element and the sum of its parts (V&A, n.d.; Temporal, 2015; Johnson, 2016). From an Actor-Network Theory perspective, these different abstractions are the result of how different actors associate with the brand, which, in turn, convey different narratives of order and legitimisation. In other words, these varied narratives are different sides of the same coin — that is if the coin was multi-dimensional and capable of translating form between various ontologies. In order to explore the Manchester Art Gallery as this dynamic and relational object I will undertake a methodology based on ANT where I can follow actors’ narratives without judgements and consider how their performances (of role and relations) translate the ways in which information is organised — and therefore, how the Gallery brand network is assembled.
4. Research Methodology: Translating Actors’ Relationships and their Controversies

Where the previous chapter discussed ANT from a theoretical perspective, this chapter highlights ANT as a methodological approach that focuses on ‘moments of translation’ or the moments in which actors identify themselves against others (and in doing so, delimit their authority over others) (Callon, 1986a). In this sense, this chapter aims to provide a methodological link to the theoretical frameworks explored earlier — that is, exploring actors’ relationships with one another and understanding how these performances organise information; as well as examine how networks form through actors’ perceptions and patterns of activity within broad organisational systems. To this end, this chapter provides a discussion of how I will collect and analyse actors’ narratives in order to re-assemble the Manchester Art Gallery brand network and assess the potential influence of social media to this network. For the purposes of this thesis, an actor’s narrative refers to their descriptions and perceptions of particular instances (such as relationships or events), as well as in relation to others (such as other actors or networks).

This thesis relies on a single case study for analysis: the Manchester Art Gallery. I chose this institution, not only to take advantage of the existing relationships between my academic institution and the Gallery, but also because of a particular event that took place as I was setting out my research framework. Following an artist takeover event on January 2018, the Gallery found itself at the centre of a controversy thanks in part to the negative reactions of Twitter users. Here, the Gallery became the nexus of a mediatised debacle between social media platforms, online news articles, and in-gallery (physical) feedback (such as letters, postcards, and post-it notes). This event provided a unique opportunity to study the potential influence of social media platforms and their mediated audiences to the Gallery brand — both in the short term and long-term basis. From a methodological perspective, this event provides an opportunity to build a research project based on different types of data over a long period of time. In this sense, this thesis relies on a single case study and employs a longitudinal approach as well as mixed data, in an effort to observe the dynamic relationships of the Gallery brand network between heterogeneous actors.
This chapter is divided into a few sections. I will start by discussing Actor-Network Theory as a methodological approach and what this implies for the collection and analysis of data. The following sections, therefore, explore the different types of data I collected for this study and the types of narratives I aimed to collect in doing so. Similarly, I will then move on to the analytic methods I employed to understand these narratives in order to assemble the Manchester Art Gallery brand network and the impact of social media following the takeover event. In these sections, I will discuss how I ‘let actors speak’ (Callon, 1986a; Latour, 2005) — from human actors, such as staff members, to non-human actors, such as Twitter and the Gallery’s collection. Lastly, I will close this chapter by exploring potential risks and limitations of my research, including a specific reflection on the use of social media data for this project and the steps I took to minimise harm as a result of my chosen methodological approach.
4.1. **Moments of Translation**

As I mentioned in the previous chapter, one of the central concepts of Actor-Network Theory is translation. From a theoretical perspective, translation is the performative aspect of actors who are in a continuous process of defining their roles and relations against each other, as well as negotiating the boundaries of the network within broader organisational systems. In this sense, translation is about similarities and differences (Law 1999; 2003); it is a process of rendering actors to the same analytic plane in order to make connections. From a methodological perspective, translation is a stepped process where the researcher can make particular observations about the actors (such as speaking for others or defining others) (Callon, 1986a). Translation, therefore, often involves betrayal (or treason (Law, 2003)) on two levels: from one actor to another as they modify their performances and negotiations; and within the research process as the researcher strives to makes sense of actors’ similarities and differences. One of the primary examples of adopting an ANT methodological framework, is Callon’s (1986a) study where he refers to four moments of translation or the moments in which actors identify themselves against others.

In a study of scallops, fishermen, and marine biologists, Callon (1986a) is one of the first sociologists to credit operational agency to non-human actors and in doing so, attributes certain techniques of power to those previously ignored actors. Callon (1986a) argues that actors struggle to identify themselves and only realise doing so when they exert themselves over others. When actors exert themselves and their frameworks over others, they effectively assign roles to those they associate with and organise information within these relationships. Callon (1986a, p.203) argues that these processes of “simultaneous production of knowledge and construction of a network of relationships in which social and natural entities mutually control who they are and what they want”, can be captured in moments of translation where actors negotiate their identities, their interactions, and their influence over one another. These moments are: problematisation, ‘interessement’, enrolment, and mobilisation.

*Problematisation*
In the first step the principal actor identifies itself, identifies others, and identifies the relationships between itself and others. This performance is not only for self-assurance, but also for self-preservation; the act of identifying oneself and others, is to identify a structure where the principal actor’s role is unique to itself and, therefore, making it indispensable within the network.

**Interessement**
The second step is to stabilise the competitive relationships defined in the first step. Here an actor may disrupt associations between other actors as it is suitable for its personal relationships. In doing so, the disruptive actor uses interessement devices to maintain (and limit) its definition of others as the only possible definition. Law (1986a, p.15) argues that at this point the principal actor confines others as ‘authorities’, in the sense that in a power/knowledge framework an authority is one without power to make decisions.

**Enrolment**
In the third step, the roles assigned to others (to authorities) are tested and either accepted, denied, or negotiated. In this negotiation a series of agents become passive as spokespeople are assigned or chosen to speak on the authorities’ behalf. The principal actor then is organising itself and others through a representational handful, resulting in a structure that is not only subjective but also limited to the representativeness of the spokespeople.

**Mobilisation**
In the final step, spokespeople are mobilised through a series of intermediaries and equivalences that are chosen by the principal actor, these representatives in turn become passive as the principal actor recounts their roles and order. The principal actor has become, partly by self-appointment and partly due to the buy-in of others, a spokesperson for the entire structure.

Throughout these moments of translation, actors may find themselves in a ‘controversy’ — meaning, “any situation where the representativeness of the spokespeople is questioned, discussed, negotiated, rejected” (Callon, 1986a, p.15). As mentioned throughout the previous chapters, this thesis is mainly concerned with
the effects of social media on museum’s brands. It may seem like a ‘simple’ or ‘straightforward’ line of inquiry; however, it involves a wide range of actors, processes, and brings to the stage the recoding capabilities of social media. In effect, this controversy is concerned with the potential ways in which social media could distribute power to ‘networked audiences’ and how this distribution affects the Gallery brand network. In the next few chapters I will discuss how the Gallery found itself in a controversy in the events that led up and resulted from the mediatised debacle following the takeover event. I will explore how certain actors’ translations betrayed existing negotiations and led to questions of representation, particularly in the relationships between the Gallery and its audiences and between the Gallery and social media.

Callon (1986a, p.218) concludes that the resulting “constraining network of relationships” is highly dependent on the negotiation and the representativity of the spokesmen attained by the principal actor. These factors, however, can be contested at any moment by others’ narratives, their different allocations of power and authority, and others’ acceptance of their representative spokesperson. In other words, “translation becomes treason” (Callon, 1986a, p.219). In order to observe and account for these negotiations successfully, Callon (1986a) suggests three propositions, or methodological caveats: agnosticism, generalised symmetry, and free association. What Callon (1986a) asks the researcher to do is to be impartial to the actors’ narratives as they describe themselves and others, even in cases where identity or roles are still being negotiated. He also asks the researcher to use the same language to describe the viewpoints of both human and non-human actors, thus giving both types the same potential in order and affiliation. Finally, Callon (1986a, p.201) asks the researcher to “abandon all a priori distinctions between natural and social events” in order to follow actors’ narratives without censorship and to be able to consider the actors within the same descriptive plane.

Assuming a “radical indeterminacy of the actor” (Callon, 1999, p.181, original emphasis) and a dynamic understanding of actors’ ongoing translations, we come to understand that an ANT study cannot be told as a single narrative. Instead, as Law (2003, p.8) argues, an ANT study “can only - and best - be represented as a set of little stories, stories that are held together (if they are) by ambivalences and
oscillations”. It is in this sense that I aim to collect a series of stories (or narratives) from particular actors in an attempt to understand and translate the Manchester Art Gallery brand network, as well as the consequences of the takeover event to this network. In doing so, I aim to describe (where possible) how the brand network may be assembled in the moments of translation of its constituent actors. Similarly, I aim to understand the brand network’s various actors in their differences and similarities, as well as their relations with other related networks and organisational systems. To this end, I aim to collect a ‘set of little stories’ in the shape of mixed data such as documents, interviews, and social media data.
4.2. Collecting Narratives

In the following chapters, I will rely on different types of primary and secondary data to describe the associations between various actors in an attempt to assemble the Manchester Art Gallery brand network and to explore how different events (or controversies) may influence this network. In ANT terms, I collected a set of stories from human actors (primary data) and from non-human actors (secondary data). In this sense, I relied on three main sets of data: documents and literature about the Manchester Art Gallery; interviews with thirteen individuals;7 and social media data collected from Twitter. My aim with these different types of data was to account for the temporal aspect of my research. For example, to trace the history of the Gallery I’ve had to rely on a limited number of documents and literature that are available either publicly online or through the University of Manchester’s library databases. Doing so, allowed me to understand the previous relationships that shaped the Gallery to become the institution that I can observe now, not only between past and present actors, but also between other dynamic networks such as the Gallery’s social, cultural, and political networks.

In an effort to account for the dynamic aspects of the Gallery brand network, I am applying a longitudinal approach to my study. In this sense, I aim to observe and understand how a particular cohort (Bryman, 2012, p.63) is influenced over time. In other words, I aim to understand how the Gallery brand network is organised and the potential effects of the takeover event and its subsequent Twitter debacle to this network. To this end, I interviewed thirteen individuals at different points in time. Using semi-structured interviews, I approached a number of relevant stakeholders8 who were involved in the coordination of the takeover event, as well as those who were involved in the performances’ media aftermath. The interviews were recorded and transcribed, ensuring that not only the content of the responses were collected but also any inflection or manner of speaking are also noted. Capturing these details enables me to maintain a constructivist focus and to employ discourse analysis to study this data. In doing so, this thesis continues to ascribe to ANT’s tenet of the

7 See Appendix 1 for all interview questions.
8 For a definition of ‘stakeholder’, see Chapter 1.
performativity aspect of language and its simultaneous capacity to “establish one version of the world in the face of competing versions” and to “reflect the disposition of the person” in establishing and presenting their reality (Gill, 2000, p.176).

In contrast to the interviews, I collected social media data in a limited and synchronous manner in order to account for the platform’s affordances and account for the responses from my interviewees (as I will explore in the following section). Social media technologies are “digital platforms, services and apps built around the convergence of content sharing, public communication and interpersonal communication” (Burgess, Marwick, et al., 2018, p.1). This definition is significant because it represents the social media paradigm of bringing together separate technologies, behaviours and practices to “make new hybrid media systems” (Burgess, 2017, p.47). These systems transcend commercial, public, and personal spaces; the languages used in these spaces; and the different understandings of how these spaces operate and, thus, are organised. As social media users and consumers continuously negotiate and construct the boundaries of these spaces, they simultaneously combine different ways of communication within specific contexts (such as within single platforms like Twitter), as well as between contexts (such as between platform-mediated experiences and physically-mediated experiences).

The convergence of social media can thus be conceived as a translation, in the ANT sense, or as a process that relates two mediators. Herein lies the issue with social media in the context of a brand network, it is at once a network in and of itself that is full of mediators, as well as a space and a technology or an intermediary and a mediator — these qualifications entirely depend on the description and association with a human actor.9 In this section, social media is used as a short-hand for the platforms that enable users to engage with one another in a ‘network’, and as such it acknowledges the constitutive elements José van Dijck (2013, pp.29–41) assigns to these platforms: technology, users and their usage, content, ownership, governance, and business models.

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9 See for example Kéfi and Pallud (2011), whose research stems from an *a priori* assumption of social media as mediators.
In order to bring networked audiences to the Gallery brand network ‘picture’ I focused on aspects of the first three elements (without forgetting nor ignoring the latter three): technology, users, and content. Specifically, I collected publicly available data (including metadata) that trace users’ engagement on social media, as well as the content they produce during these engagements. I focused on one platform only, Twitter, for two reasons: to limit the amount of social media data to be collected as well as the constitutive attributes of the platform; and to take advantage of the platform’s flexible application platform interface (API) that can be used with automated tools to download data (Twitter Inc, 2018d). In this sense, I was able to collect Twitter data automatically and synchronously as the debacle was unfolding in real time. To do so, I used TAGS v6.1 (Twitter Archive Google Sheets) (Hawksey, 2016) to archive and display Twitter search results on a Google Spreadsheet. Because TAGS uses Twitter’s Search API, it is tied to the platform’s search limitations — meaning that TAGS can only collect from Twitter’s search index, which includes “6-9 days of Tweets” (Twitter Inc, 2018a) and archive “up to 1% of the total volume of tweets in the world at any one point in time” (Burgess, Bruns, et al., 2018). Despite these limitations, TAGS is a very useful tool to archive synchronous and automated searches that contain specific keywords, hashtags, or @mentions of users, which can then be exported and analysed for emerging trends.
4.3. Analysing Narratives

In order to comply with the methodological implications of Actor-Network Theory, I adopted its main principles at different stages of the research process. For example, to remain agnostic in this study (Callon, 1986a), I collected data without privileging a particular actor. From an analytic perspective, I employed an inductive approach in order to let concepts emerge from the data collected (Bryman, 2012, p.12). In this sense, I remained agnostic in the analysis and write-up process as I let actors speak about themselves and their own social environments, without judgement or censorship, and I used the same language these actors used in their narratives to create analytic categories. Doing so, allowed me to observe actors’ free association (Callon, 1986a) in their descriptions of their relations to one another and their delineations of the Gallery brand network’s boundaries. Similarly, this approach enabled me to retain general symmetry (Callon, 1986a) in my write-up of these observations and descriptions, therefore allowing me to describe the elements of the Gallery brand network in equal terms.

Although I do not intend to use grounded theory for this research project, I employed qualitative content analysis — which, similarly, to grounded theory, relies on a “repetitive interplay between the collection and analysis of data” (Bryman, 2012, p.566) through coding. As such, similar to grounded theorists (Charmaz 2011; 2006; Corbin and Strauss 2014), I coded the various narratives I collected into themes or categories that emerged from the stories themselves. This type of coding follows an iterative process of initial categorisation, focused categorisation, and re-evaluation (Bryman, 2012). In this process, the data is broken down into broad categories using initial impressions or readings of the information, then the resulting categories are evaluated for potential links (such as patterns of interaction or consequences). After these initial steps the data is re-examined using the associated categories looking for further insight or for further categorisation. The process is then repeated until theoretical saturation is reached, meaning when “emerging concepts have been fully explored and no new insights are generated” (Bryman, 2012, p.421).

In addition to content analysis, I am also using discourse analysis to explore the different types of data I collected for this thesis. Here, discourse is regarded as “an
interrelated set of texts, and the practices of their production, dissemination, and reception” (Phillips and Hardy, 2002, p.3). This is particularly relevant for an ANT methodology as it allowed me to study the collected narratives with a reflexivity that incorporates how actors’ relations and perceptions influence how information and knowledge is organised in the network. Similarly, it enables me to understand how actors use these narratives as means to legitimise their positions and actions within the network. Content analysis and discourse analysis take on new meaning in the study of social media data for a variety of reasons, all of which stem from the capabilities afforded by new media and their technologies. As we saw in the previous chapter, new media are involved in transcoding our experiences into virtual realities, languages, and spaces. The modularity of such media dramatically changed the way we communicate, namely in decentralising information and authorial power. From this perspective, a mixed analytic method enabled me to explore the different ways in which social media are conceptualised by the different actors of the Gallery brand network, as I will discuss in more detail in Chapter 9.

Using TAGS to collect Twitter data, meant that I collected information that can be analysed quantitatively and qualitatively. To understand how the Twitter debacle unfolded and to use the same language as the platform’s technology, I analysed the archived metadata quantitatively using the same categories (or metrics) that are predetermined by the platform (such as time and date; types of tweets; and hashtags). For example, as I discuss in more detail in Chapter 6, I was able to create a timeline of the Twitter debacle and to map on this timeline the different types of tweets that were most predominant at particular points in time, as well as to explore the different hashtags that were used and introduced in this online discussion. Similarly, to analyse users’ reactions and to use the same language these users utilised, I employed qualitative content analysis (as was described earlier) with a particular emphases of the “layering of different digital media” (Thurlow, 2018, p.137, original emphasis) that is in increasingly part of the complex multi-media formats of converging contemporary communication means. In this sense, I was able to explore the main types of accusations the Gallery received following the takeover event, which included different types of visual media that users utilised to illustrate their arguments.
It can be said then that my approach to studying social media data is inspired by Hine’s (2015, p.23, original emphasis) notion of an E3 methodology, that is an “ethnography for the Internet, not of or in the Internet”. This approach is based on the understanding that an ethnographic strategy to studying the Internet, and the tools and behaviours it enables, require a framework that is embedded, everyday, and embodied. Such a framework helps us understand how the Internet, and its consequences, acquire or are ascribed different meanings as it becomes embedded in different contexts, and where “a technology can be construed as a component of dynamic cultural circumstances which give meaning and identity to the technology” (Hine, 2015, p.37). Furthermore, E3 implies that online experiences are extensions of “other embodied ways of being and acting in the world” (Hine, 2015, p.41) – ways of being that are socially-, culturally-, and technologically-situated. Finally, E3 questions the ‘taken for granted-ness’ attitudes that are increasingly associated with using and accessing the Internet, for such attitudes create socially- and politically-ordering infrastructures as “they position some people as “normal” and marginalise others” (Hine, 2015, p.47).

The E3 methodology is compatible with Actor-Network Theory because E3 focuses on “following connections whilst reflecting on the circumstances and actors that bring these connections into being” (Hine, 2015, p.69). Without using the same terminology as ANT sociologists, Hine (2015) describes the principles of E3 as flexible and adaptive, where the researcher needs to take an open and exploratory attitude to their project. To this end, my aim with collecting and analysing social media data is to assemble various narratives, with varying attitudes and associations of the Gallery and of the takeover event in particular. By analysing social media data quantitatively as well as qualitatively, I aim to create a timeline of perceptions and experiences and to trace how audiences use different modes to construct their attitudes and associations. Furthermore, by tracing audiences’ associations with the Gallery, I aim to re-assemble their negotiations and construction of boundaries as a way to analyse their perceived roles within the Gallery brand network and in return, the purpose of the Gallery for networked audiences.
4.4. Associated Risks and Limitations

Like any research project, this study has some inherent risks that are mostly associated with the project’s structure — that is, ethical considerations and interpretive limitations inherent in the selection of analytic framework and methodology. Actor-Network Theory has particular limitations as an analytic framework and, although these have been described in detail in the previous chapter it is worthwhile here to note that its analytic limitations have methodological implications. For example, ‘to follow actors’ narratives without judgement’ could be interpreted as a specific way of sampling actors. Earlier, I described how I will implement generic purposive sampling to collect narratives from various actors. It could be argued, however, that a more appropriate sampling method for human actors is using snowball sampling as it practically implies questioning actors sequentially (Bryman, 2012, p.202); in other words, snowball sampling is like interviewing at the recommendation by word-of-mouth from one interview to the next. I argue, instead, that by using generic purposive sampling I can have a clear starting point and the flexibility of following actors’ recommendations, as needed. Furthermore, by rejecting snowball sampling I can then explore other potential actors that would otherwise be ignored (such as stakeholders not necessarily recognised by the Gallery).

Another limitation is the choice of using a single case study, as opposed to a comparative study between two or more institutions. As mentioned earlier in this chapter, the Manchester Art Gallery is an ideal setting for an ANT-based study because of the recent changes it is going through. Although the changes may be considered worrisome for stakeholders, as part of the ‘fear of the unknown or unexpected’, from a research perspective these changes are opportune and require a flexible approach that can respond to them and their consequences. On a practical level, this case study is also ideal as the Gallery has an ongoing relationship with the University of Manchester, thus potentially lessening accessibility issues. From an ANT perspective, this relationship can be seen as problematic as it adds a potential actor abstracted as ‘the University’. Ultimately, choosing a single case study may limit the potential of this research to be replicated and for its results to be generalised; I argue, however, that the analytic and methodological framework
chosen for this study is a critical addition to museological discourse as an alternative approach to approach branding and social media. I will expand more on this point in Chapters 9 and 10.

4.4.1. Ethical Considerations for Social Media Data

Using ANT, or indeed any qualitative research method, asks the researcher to be reflective about “the implications of the methods, values, biases, and decisions for the knowledge of the social world they generate” (Bryman, 2012, p.393). These implications are more so relevant for this project in its aim to study social media data, in which case care ought to be taken regarding users’ privacy and confidentiality, informed consent, and data protection. Earlier in this chapter I discussed the constitutive elements of social media platforms (van Dijck, 2013) focusing on technology, users, and content to discuss how to approach networked audiences and their narratives. In this section I turn to the latter three elements - ownership, governance, and business models – as these have heavily impacted ethical and legal frameworks for the use of social media data in research projects. As systems of production, social media platforms are considered “mediators in the engineering of culture and everyday life” (van Dijck, 2013, p.29, original emphasis), working to continuously overlap commercial and personal spaces between organisations and users, as well as between themselves (as commercial products) and their users. Our shifts in consumption habits reflect in the changes to social media platforms’ ownership structures and governing protocols, effectively shifting platforms’ business models and the ecosystems they live in.

These mutually constituting shifts impact the boundaries between private and commercial goals, which reflect “larger battles for control over personal and collective information” (van Dijck, 2013, p.19). Such battles for control imply that research with social media data has not only the ethical implications of research projects, it also has legal implications that span beyond discipline parameters. For example, Michael Beurskens (2014, p. 213) argues that “Twitter research is subject to legal uncertainty. Yet, the (legally appropriate) answer, “It depends . . .”, is insufficient for research practice” (Beurskens, 2014, p.123). Beurskens (2014) describes how the governing documents Twitter employs to protect itself and its
users (Terms of Service, Privacy Policy, and ‘The Twitter Rules’, see (Twitter Inc, 2018b, 2018c, 2018e)) may put researchers in legal grey zones, which includes content copyright.

Twitter’s Terms of Service (Twitter Inc, 2018e) states “all Content is the sole responsibility of the person who originated such Content”, thus seemingly attributing copyright and intellectual property to content creators. Beurskens (2014, p.125) argues, however, that to abide by copyright law (which “prohibits reproduction and distribution and not independent re-creation of a work”) would drastically change the way Twitter operates as re-tweets would essentially be illegal. As a result, Beurskens (2014, p.126) argues that the lack of a protective copyright law means that “there is no legal requirement to attribute tweets”, which strips Twitter users from their ownership of the content they voluntarily share on the platform. Content attribution impacts researchers who wish to publish their research as they are then forced to make a decision of whether or not sharing data is ethically sound.

The legal concerns Beurskens (2014) describes are not particular to Twitter only, they apply to researchers who wish to use data from other social media platforms too. To this end, Townsend and Wallace (2016) set out an ethical framework researchers may use when designing their social media-based research projects. They argue that with this framework researchers can effectively respond to, and make informed decisions about, four key areas of concern: privacy, informed consent, anonymity, and risk of harm. The framework is intended to guide the researcher in their practice, not as a set of rules nor a “‘one size fits all’ approach” (Townsend and Wallace, 2016), instead it leaves the ethical responsibility to the researcher and their corresponding ethics committee.

The framework consists of four steps. First, the researcher must become familiar with the terms, conditions and legalities of their selected platform(s) as well as of their research institution. Then, the researcher must determine whether or not the data they wish to collect and analyse is publicly available, and if so, how to proceed with it. Here the researcher must decide where to collect from, whose data to use, and acknowledge their role in these procedures; for example, Twitter conversations have less ethical implications than a closed group conversation on Facebook,
similarly data concerning illegal activities have more ethical implications than data about consumer preferences. Once the researcher has made these decisions, they can proceed with how to use the data in their research. For example, if the data is deemed sensitive, or if the researcher needs to gain access to a group, then they will need to ensure that data is paraphrased, and that the privacy of content owners is protected (such as through informed consent).

In order to be ethically compliant, this research is structured following Townsend and Wallace’s (2016) framework; as such my research is structured so that the data, I collected from social media platforms is publicly available, that is shared by public accounts and data structured using hashtags such as #MAGSoniaBoyce or #ManchesterArtGallery. It can be assumed that the users who posted with these hashtags or in a public manner, did so to engage in an open dialogue with strangers. As such, I did not seek informed consent from social media users whose data I used in this research project (for analysis and for illustrative purposes). Furthermore, at the risk of not being able to have a replicable research process, I do not aim to produce a publicly available data set and so all data collected (including social media and interview materials) will be privately stored for the purposes of this research project only.

In addition to these ethical considerations and the decisions I made for this project, I have also tried to the best of my abilities to strike a balance between minimising the risk of harm for any and all participants, and protecting their anonymity in a research environment where the data is publicly available. My aim was to collect as much data as possible that would accurately reflect the community of users who responded to the takeover event, their interactions between each other, and their public perceptions about the Gallery. In the analysis process and in the following chapters, I also aim to portray these users as accurately as possible and, in keeping with ANT, to use the same language these actors have chosen to describe themselves and fellow actors. To this end, the tweets I have used to illustrate this mediatised conversation have only been edited to anonymise their authors, the remaining text has been left as the author posted it online.
The only instances where I have chosen not to illustrate the conversation are those where the users were abusive or offensive with their comments — in an effort to be mindful of the ethics of amplification (Phillips and Milner, 2017). In this sense, I have opted to not illustrate these types of comments, and instead I chose to report the comments for abusive behaviour within the Twitter platform and muting similar content for my own account. By reporting these tweets and their authors I comply with Twitter’s user guidelines (2018e) to help make this online platform a more welcoming and safe space. In muting the content, I am protecting myself from seeing similar sensitive content, whilst still leaving open the possibility to collect such data for future research projects. More importantly, however, in choosing not to illustrate this type of content in my thesis and any future publication, I am breaking the cycle of abusive materials by not providing another platform for these users and their behaviours.

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10 This is because I used my personal Twitter account to conduct this research, as well as familiarised with the platform’s rules (Twitter Inc, 2018c) and user guidelines (2018e) — per Townsend and Wallace’s (2016) framework.
4.5. Conclusion

In this chapter I have described the methodological approach I am taking for this thesis that is based on Actor-Network Theory and, therefore, explored the links between this approach and my theoretical framework. In this thesis, I am proposing a reconceptualisation of museum brands as actor-networks and in doing so, I aim to explore the potential influence of social media to such networks. The basis of this research is my case study, the Manchester Art Gallery, and the controversies it faced in 2018. To this end, I designed my research framework acknowledging brands as dynamic media of translation and social media as new (media) technologies that have the capacity to recode museums. Similarly, I designed my research framework so I could observe without judgement, and reproduce without censorship, the narratives from human and non-human actors alike in order to assemble the Gallery brand network. In other words, I designed my research framework in order to observe how actors translate their relations, as well as to translate these observations into a coherent description of the network and its controversies.

Following ANT scholars, this thesis embraces “an art of describing the patterns and textures” (Law, 2003, p.8) that help us account for the similarities and differences between actors and their versions of reality. In this sense, this thesis aims to produce a “good ANT account that traces a network” — meaning “a description or a proposition where all the actors do something and don’t just sit there” (Latour, 2005, p.128, original emphasis). This thesis aims to produce a good ANT account about the Manchester Art Gallery brand network using mixed data and mixed analytic methods. This thesis seeks to understand whether social media is a mediator of the Gallery brand network or whether it ‘just sits there’. To this end, this thesis uses various types of narratives collected through documents and literature, semi-structured interviews, and social media data. Similarly, it uses particular approaches in order to account for the temporal aspects of a dynamic (object-ive) network — such as observing a cohort at different points in time to understand potential causal influence, as well as realities in the making.

Although ANT has been criticised for its analytic limitations, I believe that using these concepts are a particularly useful framework to understand museum brands
and the potential role of social media within them. In this chapter I have highlighted how these particular analytic limitations may be overcome with a flexible methodological approach (such as using purposive sampling) and, in turn, discussed the decisions I took to minimise the limitations and risk of harm from this methodology. Particularly, I highlighted the associated risks of using social media data and the decisions I took to protect this thesis so it would not be another medium that amplifies harm. My aim with this theoretical and methodological framework is that other researchers may adopt this approach in order to reassemble other cultural institutions’ brand networks and to be ethically mindful when using social media data for museological research. The following chapters follow the ‘set of little stories’ that eventually culminate in the assembling of the Manchester Art Gallery brand network, following the controversies caused by a takeover event and a mediatised debacle. The stories start, however, with a recounting of the development of the Gallery as a cultural institution in Manchester and the moments of impact that influenced the way the Gallery was organised (between certain actors and in relation to its sociocultural and political contexts) leading up to the takeover event in 2018.
5. Historic Modes of Ordering at the Manchester Art Gallery

Earlier in this thesis (Chapter 3), I described the use of an Actor-Network framework as a ‘double-edge’ sword — where the strengths of ANT, such as the indeterminacy of actors and their continuous performative negotiations, can also be seen as the limitations of this framework. For example, if actors determine themselves and others through their relationships, and if these relationships are continuously being performed, then networks are in a constant state of flux. Tracing networks through their actors and the relationships between them, then, becomes an exercise of capturing the network as it is organised in a specific point in time. Critics of ANT consider these characteristics as a constraint to the research of networks because they imply that such research ignores “historical modes” (Ausch, 2000, p.319) of organisation such as political and economic structures. I argue, however, that the way actors relate to one another is inseparable to their lived experiences outside the network — which includes their relations to their individual sociocultural, political, and economic contexts.

This chapter aims to provide context about the Gallery as a public institution and to highlight actors that had a particular influence to how the Gallery was organised in the past, and who, therefore, have influenced the Gallery brand network today. This chapter, then, provides an overview of the formation of the Gallery (rather than a complete history of the institution) and highlights two key moments from the last twenty years that had an impact on the current relationships within its brand network. This discussion is structured chronologically, starting with the development of the Gallery from its inception as the Manchester Institution for the Promotion of Literature, Science and the Arts to its acquisition by the City of Manchester in the nineteenth century. It then moves on to the two moments of impact: the expansion of the Gallery at the turn of the twenty-first century, and a restructure and rebrand in 2011.

This chapter relies on two types of sources: secondary and primary. To trace the history of the Gallery I’ve had to rely on a limited number of documents and

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11 Meaning, at the time of writing this thesis.
literature that are available either publicly online or through the University of Manchester’s library databases. Although the expansion project and the restructuring in 2011 are documented in news articles and some literature, I wanted to gain a first-hand account on the decision-making processes and of the actors that were involved in these events. As such, I am also relying on primary data from interviews with current staff members (who experienced the restructuring of 2011), as well as an interview with the Gallery’s (then) Director\textsuperscript{12} who was present and responsible during its expansion project. In using a variety of sources, I aim to highlight the inseparability of the Gallery’s history, including past actors and their relations, and its current brand network.

\footnote{Throughout this chapter I also refer to the (then) Director’s doctoral thesis (Tandy, 2018). To remain consistent with the rest of my participants, however, I will refer to her by this position only.}
5.1. A Brief History of the Manchester Art Gallery

In 1823, three Manchester-based artists went to the “Exhibition of Paintings and Works of Art of the Northern Establishment of Artists at Leeds” (The National Archives, 1821) and, upon returning, proposed to create an annual exhibition as a way to raise the cultural profile of the city of Manchester (Howard, 2002). By 1824, the Manchester Institute for the Promotion of Literature, Science, and the Arts\textsuperscript{13} was created and £23,000 had been raised through public subscriptions (Howard, 2002, p.4; Clifford, 1983, p.12). At this point, the Institute launched an architectural competition to create a new building in the city centre, whilst simultaneously began negotiations “to persuade George IV to grant his royal patronage” (Howard, 2002, p.6). Three architects entered the blind competition by submitting their designs for the Institute along with a motto — the winning design by Sir Charles Barry included the inscription “NIHIL PULCHRUM NISI UTILE”, which translates to “nothing beautiful unless useful” (Clifford, 1983, p.12) as seen in Figure 1.

\textsuperscript{13} Hereafter, the Institute.
Barry’s design incorporated Greek Revival style, as was the trend with “public buildings commissioned in the post-Waterloo building boom” (Stevenson, 2005, p.65) and had been seen so far in the design of the British Museum (Stevenson, 2005, p.65). By 1835, the building’s construction had been completed and George IV granted his patronage, along with the casts of the Elgin marbles to gild the entrance hall (Clifford, 1983; Stevenson, 2005) — so the Royal Manchester Institution\textsuperscript{14} officially opened to the public and began offering a series of events, from exhibitions to lectures (Howard, 2002, p.6). John Ruskin, for example, delivered two of his most celebrated public lectures in 1857, one of which was hosted at the Royal Manchester Institution (Clifford, 1983). Ruskin critiqued the political-economic value of art in light of Manchester’s industrialization (Whitworth Art Gallery, 2019) — thus,

\textsuperscript{14} This was the new name given to the Institute. Hereafter referred to as the Institution.
indelibly tying the newly formed Institution to organisational systems and discourses beyond the actors that gave shape to it.\textsuperscript{15}

By the mid-nineteenth century, the Institution was at the centre of a flourishing art and culture movement in the city of Manchester. During this period, a large portion of the Institution’s building was allotted to the newly formed Manchester School of Art, which hosted annual exhibitions and whose members contributed to the “cultural life of the city” such as providing designs for the city’s Town Hall (Manchester Academy of Fine Arts, 2015). Then, in 1857, the Institution held an exhibition titled \textit{Art Treasures of the United Kingdom} that was opened by Prince Albert and visited by Queen Victoria and over a million public visitors (Clifford, 1983, p.14). It can be said, then, that the Institution was continuously strengthening its relationships with actors at both local and national levels, as well as with actors from other sectors. These relations helped create not only the identity of the Institution (as a space for civic discourse and art education, for example) but also impacted the relationships between the Institution and its art collection.

In the period between the architecture competition and the building’s completion, the Institution began acquiring artworks for its collection — starting with their purchase of James Northcote’s portrait \textit{Othello, the Moor of Venice}, whose depiction of African American actor Ira Aldridge linked the Institution and the city of Manchester with the abolitionist movement in the United Kingdom (Howard, 2002; Clifford, 1983). From this initial purchase, the Institution continued their collecting efforts, including their acquisition of \textit{Hylas and the Nymphs} in 1896 from the artist John William Waterhouse (Manchester City Art Gallery, 1983, p.136) and instituting a collecting policy of fine and decorative arts in support of the newly founded School of Design — a policy that is “still in place today [and] is largely responsible for the richness and variety of the collection” (Howard, 2002, p.6).

\textsuperscript{15} In the spring of 2019, The Whitworth celebrated Ruskin’s 200th birthday anniversary with an exhibition titled ‘Joy for Ever’ (Whitworth Art Gallery, 2019). The exhibition, named after Ruskin’s lecture at the Royal Manchester Institute, aimed to revisit The Whitworth’s “use of art in a mission of social change” (Whitworth Art Gallery, 2019) and was one of the new (current) Director’s first signature projects upon taking the dual Director’s role at The Whitworth and Manchester Art Gallery.
By the late 1800s, the Institution could no longer physically accommodate an increasingly growing collection and its annual exhibitions, so a few of the existing rooms were demolished to increase display space (including the lecture theatre) (Clifford, 1983, p.14). Meanwhile, the Institution was also facing financial issues and it could no longer remain open to the public. So, in 1882 the Manchester Corporation¹⁶ (the then local authority body) agreed to take over the Institution’s assets and introduced a new policy to provide annual funds towards collection efforts, as well as determined a “new managing committee” with representatives from both the Corporation and the Institution (Clifford, 1983, p.14). Following this restructure, the Royal Manchester Institution was re-named as the Manchester City Art Gallery¹⁷ and plans were set in motion to expand its physical location to accommodate its collection.

In the 1890s the Corporation purchased the land between the City Art Gallery and the Athenaeum (a gentlemen’s club whose building was also designed by Barry) with the intent of expanding the Gallery (Howard, 2002; Clifford, 1983). Unfortunately, the expansion was stalled and instead, the Corporation purchased the Athenaeum and six other galleries¹⁸ within the city to use as temporary spaces for the storage and display of its collection (Clifford, 1983, pp.15–18). It wouldn’t be until almost a century later when the Manchester Art Gallery would fulfill its mission to expand its physical location, when an architectural competition was launched to merge the City Art Gallery and the Athenaeum using the vacant lot between the two as a link (Stevenson, 2005). Until then, the City Art Gallery would continue grow its collection and programming thanks in part to its donors (or ‘Friends of Manchester City Art Galleries’) and to organisations such as the National Art Collections Fund and National Art Council Lottery grants (Howard, 2002; Clifford, 1983).

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¹⁶ Hereafter, the Corporation.
¹⁷ Hereafter, City Art Gallery.
¹⁸ These temporary branches included: Queen’s Park Art Gallery in Harpurhey, Heaton Hall in Prestwich, Fletcher Moss Museum in Didsbury, Platt Hall in Rusholme, Wythenshawe Hall in Wythenshawe Park, and the Horsefall Museum in Ancoats (Clifford, 1983, pp.15–18). To date, only Platt Hall is still a branch of the Manchester Art Gallery, although it has been closed since 2017 due in part to low visitor numbers (O’Connell, 2019).
5.2. The Expansion Project

In 2002 the city of Manchester hosted the XVII Commonwealth Games and, in doing so, demonstrated the capability of the UK to organise complex events (which is attributed to “securing the 2012 Olympic Games for the city of London”) (Commonwealth Games Federation, no date). Leading up to the Games, the Heritage Lottery Fund (HLF 19) provided “2400 awards with a value of £520 [million]” (Tandy, 2018, p.24) to projects in Manchester and Salford — of which £35 million were awarded to the Manchester City Art Gallery for its expansion and refurbishment (Stevenson, 2005; Tandy, 2018). So, in 1998, the Manchester City Art Gallery Expansion Project 20 was approved by City Council and, at the same time, a new Director and Assistant Director were appointed (Stevenson, 2005, p.66).

To save on costs, the Council decided to undertake the project in a single phase (as opposed to two) and in doing so it required all City Art Gallery staff and assets to be relocated. Moira Stevenson (2005, p.66) — the newly appointed Assistant Director — wrote that the Council’s decision resulted in a “massive change for the organisation” during which a new staff structure was implemented, including the appointment of “a new Departmental Management Team and additional marketing and education staff”. This re-structure posed an opportunity (and a challenge) for the City Art Gallery to define a new mission, purpose and objectives — meaning that the Expansion Project became a catalyst for a re-configuration of the City Art Gallery brand network. For example, Stevenson (2005, p.66) notes how this change required new ways “to galvanize the new staff structure into effective teams to deliver the redevelopment of the Gallery”. In other words, the Project initiated a re-evaluation of which actors constituted the brand network (including new decision-makers such as the Director, Assistant Director, and department managers) and, therefore, how these actors relate to one another (for example, through team building activities).

One of the starting points that the City Art Gallery used to define its mission and objectives was a market research study done by Arts About Manchester (Stevenson,

19 Renamed to National Heritage Lottery Fund (NHLF) in 2019 (Murphy, 2019).
20 Hereafter, the ‘Expansion Project’ or the ‘Project’.
The study included quantitative and qualitative visitor research from both the City Art Gallery and the Athenaeum; it reported a “significant opportunity” for cross-visitation between the sites and visitors’ wishes for “a more welcoming atmosphere” (Stevenson, 2005, p.67). The report was given to all staff members and was used during a series of workshops where “curatorial, education, marketing and support staff” discussed the aims of the Project and the concerns that would be addressed with the physical and ideological redevelopment (Stevenson, 2005, p.67). Such concerns included “collections care and asset management, image of the Gallery held by the public, the council and staff, and the visitor experience including access in its widest sense” — which led to a new mission statement: to “become central to the creative and cultural life of Manchester by the engagement with people through art” (Stevenson, 2005, p.67).

To complete the Project, the City Art Gallery set up a project management structure that was headed by the Assistant Director and where members of the new Departmental Management Team partnered with an external firm that provided procurement support. This “hierarchy of responsibility” (Stevenson, 2005, p.67) divided the Project into seven main tasks, which ranged from maintaining a communications strategy in order to meet design objectives and the agreed deadlines; to create new strategies for “the interpretation and redisplay of the collections”, including exhibition and education programmes; to develop marketing and communications protocols in order to deliver the Gallery’s new brand (Stevenson, 2005, pp.67–73).

Other actors involved included Steers McGillan, a design agency, who were appointed to develop a new visual identity for the Gallery. The result was a visual strategy that sought to link people with art and in turn to link visitors’ experiences with the City Art Gallery itself (Design Week, 2000). Furthermore, the City Art Gallery made a conscious decision to separate itself from the local authority department. In doing so, the institution was renamed as the Manchester Art Gallery and the department as Manchester City Galleries (Stevenson, 2005, p.72). During the redevelopment process the grant provided by the HLF ran short, which was mostly

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21 Hereafter, the Gallery.
due to the level of interactive technologies the new interpretation strategy required. So, in 2001, the Gallery made a second application to the HLF and created a new staff role, Head of Development, to plan and deliver a new fundraising/income-generating strategy (Stevenson, 2005, p.73).

In 2002, the Gallery reopened having completed the majority of their tasks and in time for the Commonwealth Games. Most importantly, after a period of evaluation, the Gallery was able to deliver the outputs required by “the City Council, the Heritage Lottery Fund, sponsors and audiences” (Stevenson, 2005, p.74). During her interview, the (then) Director reflected on her tenure at the Gallery from 1998 to 2008 and described the Expansion Project mostly in terms of the relationship between the institution and the local authority (often remarking on the impact of the national government on this relationship). She said that galleries such as the Manchester Art Gallery “are inextricably tied to the local authority” and that in turn, “the local authority holds sway over [it] in different ways”. Her view on this relationship is what drew her to take the Director post to begin with, as she would be “able to get a bit more involved in the running of the city as a whole and see how the Gallery could be part of the city council’s own vision”.

When the (then) Director joined the Gallery, she became explicitly aware of her role in the Project noting that the Heritage Lottery Fund was a “source of money that came with conditions” and that as a Council employee she would not only represent the local authority and the Gallery, but also be “accountable to the HLF’s staff, trustees and monitors” who were involved in the Project (Tandy, 2018, p.25). Similarly, the (then) Director would have to be accountable to the Gallery and the Project, including the new strategies that the re-structured staff groups were developing. For example, she recalled how the original HLF grant was limited to capital investment, which meant that it could not be used towards interpretation- or education-related activities. This changed, however, in 1997 when the Labour Party took over the national government and one of the changes, they issued was to extend the ways of using HLF grants. With this extension, the Gallery applied for the second grant that was used towards the development of the ‘Manchester Gallery’ (a display
at the entrance of the Gallery with the history of the institution) and, in part, towards the Clore Interactive Gallery.

Reflecting on the reopening of the Gallery, the (then) Director quoted an article by Stephen Weil (1999) that she kept in mind throughout the re-branding and redevelopment process — she said that the ‘new’ Gallery should turn “from being about something, to being for somebody”. Meaning that, throughout the Project, her concern was to be mindful of “who [they] were working for” and that “[they] presented [themselves] as a place for people who were interested in art”. For example, she described bringing in Morris Hargreaves McIntyre (an audience research consultancy) to better understand their visitors, in an attempt to develop exhibitions that respects and understands visitors’ needs. In this sense, the (then) Director’s role throughout the project was to connect the Gallery with actors whose networks are influenced by national political and economic structures (such as the HLF) — and, in turn, to represent these external networks within the Gallery brand network. Her role was of dual representation and accountability due to the relationships she needed to maintain as the (ten) Director of the Gallery. Furthermore, whilst the (then) Director did not have a direct relationship to the Gallery’s visitors and audiences, her role within the institution influenced how these groups would be represented and accounted for within the network.

In 2008, the (then) Director moved on to work at Manchester City Council as Director of Culture and the Assistant Director succeeded her as Director of the Gallery. In this new role, the (then) Director still worked closely with the Gallery as it fell under what she calls her “spheres of influence”, which included “people who worked in the cultural economy, strategy and education”. In 2010, when the Conservative Party joined the Liberal Democrats in a coalition government, Manchester City Council made significant cuts to their budgets — which resulted in staff cuts across their departments. The (then) Director and left her post of Director of Culture for the City Council in 2011, but not before suggesting a way to move

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22 Although the ‘Manchester Gallery’ no longer exists, the Gallery has since created a new display titled ‘What is the Manchester Art Gallery’ that showcases objects that reflect the history of this institution (Manchester Art Gallery, n.d.d).

23 Interestingly, this dual role currently belongs to the Gallery’s Senior Operational Lead, rather than to the Director. I will come back to explore these current relationships further in Chapters 7 and 8.
forward to maintain the relationship between the City and the Gallery. She recalled that prior to her departure she’d been in conversation with the local authority and the University of Manchester to appoint a dual Director role that would look after the Manchester Art Gallery and The Whitworth. At this time however, according to the (then) Director, the University had a new chancellor who was not in agreement, so the plan did not move forward. Instead, the Council created a partnership between the Gallery, the Manchester Museum, and the Museum of Science and Industry\textsuperscript{24} (Merriman, 2017),\textsuperscript{25} in an effort to increase their chances to secure funding from the HLF and other national and international organisations.

The Expansion Project marked a period of significant change for the Manchester Art Gallery, it introduced new staff and a new staff structure leading to new ways of working. The redevelopment changed the Gallery physically (by joining the Gallery with the Athenaeum) as well as ideologically, by creating a new ‘people-centred’ mission. During this process the Gallery created new relationships with a variety of actors (such as the HLF and various consultants), some of which influenced the Gallery by changes within their own networks (for instance the implications to funding following changes in the national government). The Project is an example of the legacy that certain actors may have on the institution — from the collection policy of the late 1800s and the Corporation’s purchase of the land between the City Art Gallery and the Athenaeum; to the relationships the (then) Director developed with the HLF and the Council. All of these decisions, the actors involved, and the relationships between them, continued to influence the Gallery as it moved on to welcome Maria Balshaw as the first dual Director of the Gallery and The Whitworth.

\textsuperscript{24} Now known as Science and Industry Museum (Gowland, 2016).

\textsuperscript{25} Although the Manchester Museums and Galleries Partnership is still operating, it no longer includes the Museum of Science and Industry (Manchester Museum, n.d.). Hereafter, the Manchester Partnership or the Partnership.
5.3. New Governance

In 2006, Maria Balshaw became the Director of The Whitworth and in 2011, whilst The Whitworth was in its redevelopment process, Balshaw joined the Manchester Art Gallery as Director. When the role was announced, Sir Richard Leese (leader of the Council) said that the collaboration between the two institutions would add “significant social and economic benefits” as well as “significantly enhance the city’s cultural reputation” (University of Manchester, 2011). This new dual role aimed to represent a “unique partnership” between the two institutions, as well as their governing bodies: the University of Manchester and Manchester City Council. The dual directorship meant that the Gallery was now in a different relationship with other cultural and academic institutions, which could potentially influence its brand network. Meanwhile, Balshaw became representative and accountable to the networks of two distinct galleries and two different governing institutions.

“Inevitably”, as the (then) Director described in our interview, Balshaw had a significant influence to the Gallery brand in spite of undergoing another redevelopment in 2007.

Despite the significant increase of visitors following the Gallery’s expansion and rebranding, it started to experience a decline in visitation around 2005/6 and to note particular issues around its communication efforts and signage within the building (Gowland, 2013). To address these issues, the Gallery commissioned a graphic design agency to redefine the Gallery brand identity and wayfinding strategies — so, once again, staff members participated in workshops ran by Morris Hargreaves McIntyre to better position the Gallery as “an audience-focused organisation” (Gowland, 2013). The result was an audience segmentation strategy that led to the development of keywords and a tone of voice that would appeal to various segments — both in promotional materials (such as brochures and banners) and in signage throughout the building. The rebrand process influenced how audiences and visitors related to the Gallery physically, for example with a new visitor flow developed by the design

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26 It is worth noting, furthermore, that Balshaw was also appointed as Director of Culture for the Manchester City Council from 2013 to 2017 where she “played a leading role in establishing the city as a major cultural centre” (Clore Leadership, n.d.).
agency (Holmes Wood, n.d.) and involving visitor services staff as “face-to-face” access points (Gowland, 2013).

When The Whitworth reopened in 2015, it presented a new brand and visual identity created by a consultancy called Modern Designers — who, in the following years, would develop new brand identities for the Manchester Art Gallery and the Manchester Museum. The timing and choice of consultancy suggest that when the renovation of The Whitworth finished, Balshaw turned her attention to the Gallery so as to “put her mark on it” or to “interpret it the way she felt” as the (then) Director described in our interview. Modern Designers created a new brand identity for the Gallery including a typographic frame based on the Gallery’s three-letter acronym MAG, a marketing colour palette, new signage, and new design templates for exhibition promotional material (Modern Designers, n.d.). Along with these visual changes, Balshaw led the redevelopment of the Gallery’s programming that subsequently required a change to the tone of voice used throughout the institution. By the time I had the opportunity to first interview staff members, this brand had been in place for less than two years and already they’d “been finding that somethings don’t quite work” and needed continuous development with the help of the Graphic Designer for the Manchester Partnership.

During our interview, the Gallery’s Campaign Manager, mentioned that “during [Balshaw’s] time there was a sense in which we were very much focusing on the kind of ambitiousness of the Gallery” including its “international status” and its cultural role within the city. The Campaign Manager further added that during this period “the brand [was] being built very much [on] contemporary exhibitions” that “signposted” the Gallery within the city. These exhibitions were temporary and focused on contemporary artists and designers; they were meant to be “radical” according to the Campaign Manager or “playful” according to the Graphic Designer. For instance, the Graphic Designer listed exhibitions such as *Time Machine*27 and *Vogue 100: A Century of Style*28 as examples that reflect a “more contemporary”, “brave” and “original” vision that could attract a broader, younger audience to the

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27 An exhibition showcasing works of Portuguese contemporary artist Joana Vasconcelos that was open from February to June 2014 (Manchester Art Gallery, 2014).
28 An exhibition celebrating 100 years of fashion magazine *British Vogue* that was open from June to October 2016 (Manchester Art Gallery, 2016).
During our first interview, the Learning Manager: Lifelong Learning and Volunteering (a member of the Learning Team since 2005), described how the Gallery brand had changed from “being really good visitor attraction and being family friendly”, where the emphasis was on the building as a destination within the city; to following Balshaw’s vision of being “very much more about art” and emphasizing “encounters with art [...] at the heart of everything”.

In this sense, Balshaw’s influence to the Gallery brand network was not to change the organisational structure of the institution — as the (then) Director had done previously — but to change the relationships between staff and other actors within the network that had been previously established (such as audiences and the existing collection). Balshaw’s influence can be seen mostly in the new relations that emerged as part of her vision for how the Gallery should be perceived (as an international organisation and a cultural role model), which include different types of artists and artworks, as well as different exhibition and interpretation strategies for these works. Interestingly, there is one actor missing in the Gallery brand network during Balshaw’s tenure, which has otherwise been a prominent actor throughout the Gallery’s institutional and brand development — Manchester City Council. It could be said that, at this point, the Council is indirectly involved in the Gallery brand network and that it would most likely be influenced by the institution than being a driving force as in previous years. Instead, the relationships with the Council depended more on the extent to which Balshaw’s vision could fulfill the aims the Leader of the Council envisioned for the dual directorship — such as to “significantly enhance the city’s cultural reputation” (University of Manchester, 2011).

As the Graphic Designer said, Balshaw’s ambition has become her “legacy” for the Gallery and her influence was still palpable after she left Manchester and joined Tate as their first female Director on June 2017 (Whitworth Art Gallery, n.d.). The Gallery would have to wait until early 2018 to welcome its new Director and his own vision for the future of the Gallery brand. In the meantime, the (current) Senior Operational Lead became the interim Deputy Director and the programme that had been developed previously moved ahead — including, a retrospective exhibition of contemporary artist Sonia Boyce and a takeover event leading up to it. Although no one could have predicted the responses that the takeover would garner, the decisions
that led up to it and the actors involved were influenced by the historical development of the Gallery and its brand network. Balshaw’s tenure marked another period of significant change for the Gallery especially for the way actors (staff and visitors) would relate to non-human actors (collection and temporary exhibitions). This change, however, had not yet been fully assimilated within the institution when the new (current) Director arrived, and a brief period of uncertainty would fall regarding the Gallery brand.
5.4. Conclusion

During my first interviews with staff members between July and August 2018 I was met with a series of pauses, soft scoffs, and blank stares when I asked ‘What is the Gallery brand?’ Whilst some quickly followed with their opinions about the typographic design that uses the MAG acronym as a frame, others followed with a disclaimer saying that the brand was still being developed or that it was in a process of change. As the Campaigns Manager put it “we’ve not got a brand that is ‘that’s it.’” At this point, the new (current) Director had only just started and, although he had not yet initiated any changes to the brand, staff members were expecting him to do so. For example, the Data Manager mentioned that at the moment the Gallery was “working out who it is” as a reaction to the new (current) Director’s arrival and to his reputation for “considering the role and purpose of art and society, which is quite different from the prevailing management [of the] Gallery”. Like Balshaw, the new (current) Director brings to the Gallery his own network and collated experiences that are due to shape his dual directorship. In turn, he will represent and be accountable to the networks of both the Gallery and The Whitworth, as well as the Manchester City Council and the University of Manchester.²⁹

This chapter has sought to provide context to the Gallery brand network in an effort to dispel critics’ limitations of Actor-Network Theory. In turn, I have shown that the Gallery brand network has been a continuous development of relations between various actors whose histories influence their behaviours and decision-making within the network. I have also described two periods of significant change within the Gallery and how these made an impact to the brand network, specifically in the way that the institution is inextricably tied with broader organisational networks that are not actors within its brand network. As I will discuss in Chapters 7 to 9, the history of the Gallery favours the relationships that take place in its physical spaces, rather than its digital environments, which significantly influenced how the Gallery managed the mediatised debacle that followed Sonia Boyce’s takeover event in 2018. To this end, the following chapter explores the Nymphgate network (that is the Twitter responses

²⁹ At the time of data collection, it was impossible to predict the extent to which the new Director would influence and change the Gallery brand network.
to the takeover), including how it took shape and the main themes of this online conversation.
6. **Nymphgate Network: How Twitter Became an Actor in a Mediatised Debacle**

On January 26, 2018 under the watchful eyes of Sonia Boyce (contemporary artist) and the Gallery’s Curator of Contemporary Art, the painting *Hylas and the Nymphs* (Figure 2) was carefully removed from the Gallery’s walls and taken underground to its store. The removal was part of a ‘takeover’ event and one of six performative acts of that night, which were filmed by the artist’s crew and witnessed by a select group of staff members and visitors. The painting was replaced by a poster (Figure 3) that briefly explained its absence in two ways: first to “prompt conversation” about the relationships between historic works of art and contemporary social and cultural contexts; and second, as an action taken by “people associated with the Gallery” in relation to Sonia Boyce’s then upcoming exhibition.

![Figure 2. Hylas and the Nymphs by J.W. Waterhouse (credit: Manchester Art Gallery)](image)
Those invited to be present during this takeover event were encouraged to respond to this poster using post-its as well as engaging on social media platforms using the hashtag #MAGSoniaBoyce. Meanwhile, the Gallery\(^3\) used the same text from the poster to publish a blog post under the title “Presenting the female body: Challenging a Victorian fantasy” (Manchester Art Gallery, 2018d) — further encouraging users to participate in the comments section. All of these actions, from inviting an artist for a takeover event, to engaging visitors through online and offline activities, can be considered as part of a typical (almost mundane) repertoire of activities that museums and galleries rely on to use their collections to connect with audiences. For the Manchester Art Gallery, it certainly seemed like any regular day at the office until, that is, an unprecedented set of actors changed the tone of the conversation and the rate at which the dialogue was taking place.

\(^3\) At the risk of personifying and reducing the Gallery to a single voice entity, for the time being I am attributing these initial online actions to the institution rather to particular individuals. It will be seen in the following chapters that the decisions taken that led up to the removal were made between a group of Gallery staff members and Sonia Boyce.
In this chapter I will discuss and analyse the responses and reactions to the removal of *Hylas and the Nymphs* posted by Twitter users, from January 24 to February 10 2018, now known as ‘Nymphgate’. Tweets were archived with TAGS (as explained in Chapter 4) using 14 different keywords or phrases in relation to the Manchester Art Gallery and particular members involved in the event. These keywords were chosen to reflect the ‘official’ space created by the Gallery with their event hashtag (#MAGSoniaBoyce), as well as to capture as much of the unofficial conversation that took place outside this event hashtag. The resulting archives from these search terms were accumulated into a single dataset and cleaned so as to only include unique tweets; in total, the dataset used for this project includes 21,039 unique tweets posted from January 24 to February 10 2018 by 15,471 unique users.

The chapter is divided into three sections to create a successive narrative based on quantitative and qualitative analysis of the archived tweets. In the first section I explore the technological affordances of the Twitter platform by quantitatively analysing the metadata (Twitter Metrics) archived as part of the TAGS searches. Here, I will explore the timeline of responses and discuss the influence of traditional media as it rippled through the online reactions, explore the tweets that carried most weight throughout the conversation, and question the observed activity from the Gallery’s institutional accounts with their stated aims for the takeover event.

In the second section I explore the language used in these tweets in a qualitative analysis based on thematic coding. Here I will discuss the emerging themes derived from the Twitter conversation and illustrated using anonymised examples. Each theme corresponds to an overarching category of criticism that users made towards the Gallery in response to their removal of *Hylas and the Nymphs*. The themes ranged from blaming Gallery staff for ‘pushing a feminist-liberal agenda’, to criticizing the Gallery and the staff for stepping out of their institutional (read: custodial) roles, to condemning the removal as an act of censorship and encroachment of ‘traditional’ (read: Western) values.

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31 See Appendix 2 for a list of TAG keywords.
32 Except for Tweets that were offensive and/or abusive, as explained in Chapter 4.
The third section borrows the language and categorization from NVivo, the software I used for qualitative analysis of these tweets, to explore the ‘cases’ or ‘units of observation’ (QSR International, n.d.). Here, I will discuss the ‘cases’ or actors users identified in their comments and those that influenced the conversation, as well as those that are missing from this online space. I will also explore the relationships between actors and their perceived operational spaces as a simplistic dichotomy that equates activity and visibility with presence and influence. The chapter concludes with a summary of the quantitative and qualitative analyses to highlight the issues that emerged from the conversation — namely the potential influence of social media audiences to the Gallery brand as a reflection of its perceived value.

Throughout this chapter I use the terms ‘community’ to describe actors and ‘conversation’ to describe the relationships between them. This choice reflects Kozinets’s (2015, pp.11–12) description of ‘consociality’ where a group of people is temporally aggregated in a “contextual fellowship”. From an Actor Network Theory perspective, this community is composed by human and non-human actors that influence the flow of information in an online setting. I discuss the Twitter reactions to the Gallery’s takeover event as a network of its own — the ‘Nymphgate’ network — where the actors are a subset of the overall Twitter user base who share a ‘contextual fellowship’ in their responses to the Gallery’s actions.

The Nymphgate network, in turn, is an actor in the Gallery brand network that simultaneously expands and contracts the limits of the Gallery brand thanks to the activities of its online community. In this Nymphgate network we start observing how the relationships between users and the language they use is linked to nuanced instances of perception — for example between spaces (online versus offline) and states of being (absent versus present). These observations will be carried forward to the following chapters where I will question the influence of this event, and the Twitter reactions to it, to the Gallery brand as nuanced instances of perceived value (between what was said and who said it). For now, however, let’s start with a timeline of the reactions and the impact of traditional media in this online setting.
6.1. Twitter Metrics

Twitter’s temporal metrics can be used to describe live events as they unfold; they tell us what went on during an event and how users participated. In this case we can track how the online reactions to the removal of *Hylas and the Nymphs* developed and how users engaged with one another and with external sources (such as newspapers). It should be noted, however, that this timeline also includes tweets that are not part of the Nymphgate conversation, but were still collected and archived as part of the broader collection of Twitter data related to the Manchester Art Gallery.\(^{33}\)

The following graph (Figure 4) shows 21,039 unique tweets that were collected from January 24, 2018 to February 10, 2018, mapped by the hour.

![Timeline Graph](image.png)

**Figure 4. Nymphgate Timeline**

The timeline reflects the days leading up to the event, the day of the takeover (January 26), the day of the painting’s rehanging (February 2), and the day the Gallery’s Web Manager felt the Twitter discourse had returned to ‘normal’ (as

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\(^{33}\) See Appendix 3 for details about Twitter data aggregation and cleaning.
discussed during our first interview). The timeline also reflects six peak periods in which users were engaging with each other and responding to the event as it was reported in traditional media (Figure 5).

Notably, the sudden increase in activity correlate to two Guardian articles published on January 31: one titled ‘Gallery removes naked nymphs painting to ’prompt conversation” by Mark Brown (2018), and another titled ‘Why have mildly erotic nymphs been removed from a Manchester gallery? Is Picasso next?’ by Jonathan Jones (2018). Both articles were published within hours of each other, and each had a particular influence to the online conversation and to the perception of the online conversation by Gallery staff, respectively. I will explore the impact of the Brown article (2018) in this chapter first using a quantitative analysis of Twitter metrics and second using a qualitative analysis of tweets’ content. I will explore the Jones article in the following chapter as part of the analysis following various interviews with Gallery staff.
6.1.1. 'Prompting Conversation'

Mark Brown’s article (2018) had a deep impact in the way the conversation took shape, both in the language used by individual users, the language used in subsequent media articles, and in the overall rate at which the conversation grew. In it, Brown (2018) describes the painting and its removal, and includes a handful of images showing post-its left by visitors and the event’s hashtag promoting a continued online discussion. Pivotal, the article also includes two brief interviews: one with the Gallery’s Curator of Contemporary Art\(^\text{34}\) and another with one of the visitors who was present during the takeover event. The Curator’s comments provided further context to the removal, stating that the gallery in which the painting resides (Gallery 10 or ‘In Pursuit of Beauty’\(^\text{35}\) was a forgotten space and a source of ‘embarrassment’. These comments, which perhaps seemed innocuous at the time, were used to shape the discourse of the event and to inextricably link the work of the Gallery to broader social, cultural, and political discourses.

To unpack the effects of the article and the sentiments behind the Curator’s comments, we must first pause and consider the contemporary social and cultural contexts in which the takeover event took place. Mainly, we need to consider the (then) recent hype surrounding the Me Too Movement (2018) and the work of the (then) newly formed Time’s Up Organisation (2018). In brief, the aims of this movement and organisation are to support survivors of sexual harassment and to highlight inequalities in the workplace; aims that are deeply entrenched in social media platforms and in traditional media (Hutchinson, 2018). At the time of the Gallery’s takeover event, these movements had gained solidarity and popularity as Hollywood celebrities spoke of their own experiences and used their status and platforms to broaden their advocacy’s reach (Clark, 2018); and faced backlash as these movements influenced the decisions of the Professional Darts Corporation and Formula One to remove ‘walk-on girls’ and ‘grid girls’ (Saner, 2018).

In the Brown article (2018), the Curator commented how the Me Too movement and the Time’s Up organisation influenced the decision to reconsider Gallery 10 and thus,

\(^{34}\) Hereafter, the Curator.

\(^{35}\) Gallery 10 was renamed a few months after the takeover event from ‘In Pursuit of Beauty’ to ‘Whose Power on Display?’.
implicitly, influenced the decisions that led up to the takeover event, including removing the painting. One of the criticisms noted in the article was the accusation of censorship, or as the visitor interviewed put it: “the replacement and removal of art and being told ‘that’s wrong and this is right’” (Brown, 2018). This criticism would resonate online particularly as these initial reports included the Curator’s ambiguous remark about the removal: “We think it [the painting] probably will return, yes, but hopefully contextualised quite differently. It is not just about that one painting, it is the whole context of the gallery [In Pursuit of Beauty]” (Brown, 2018). The Brown article (2018) had a series of trigger points that were subsequently used in the tweets following its publishing, especially as criticism evolved from accusations of censorship alone to accusations of censorship as part of a political agenda that favoured liberal or ‘left-leaning’ views.

6.1.2. Expanding Reach

One way to examine the effect of the Brown article (2018) on the Twitter conversation is to use the platform’s affordances to study tweet types, users’ activity and visibility, users’ relationships (based on followers/followees), and emerging trends based on associated broader conversations (and networks) through the use of hashtags. These affordances give us an understanding of how the conversation took shape (for example by measuring retweets), the roles of different users (including the Gallery through their institutional Twitter accounts and staff members through their individual accounts), and how the ‘Nymphgate’ network ebbed between different spaces in association through various hashtags (and their networks). In these studies, the Brown article (2018) is a constant element threaded throughout the conversation, forming the most prominent media in the dataset and shaping comments users found most worthy of sharing.

Retweets

Any tweet seen on the platform can be retweeted, which means the information and any associated media can become visible to extended audiences beyond the original user’s. Retweets (RTs), therefore, are one of the most important mechanisms within Twitter commonly used as a measurement of successful engagement (Carter, 2018).
Retweets show what content carries weight in the community and they reveal how information moves in the conversation. In this case, retweets show that the Brown article (2018) is one of the most shared pieces of media in the conversation regarding the Gallery’s takeover event. From the most prominent tweets in this dataset, the top 20 are retweets (Figure 6).

A closer look at these retweets reveals that the majority (15/20) contain the Brown article (2018) as the basis of the user’s comment and as a Large Summary Twitter Card (Twitter Inc, 2019a) — meaning, a linked visual prompt for the article itself, which includes an image of the painting, the source’s logo (The Guardian), and the article’s title and subtitle. At the time of this study the top tweet (Figure 7) had been retweeted 858 times, however since then this number has decreased — which could be the result of users undoing their retweets or from deleting their accounts.36

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36 One of the issues of using social media data for research is that it loses its active qualities once captured and archived. This issue is an ethical concern that has been taken into consideration for this research, for more information please see Chapter 4.
Although we cannot assume that retweeting is the same as endorsing the original message, RTs are a good indication of interest and attention to particular information. The Twitter platform capitalises on these behaviours as retweets make posts more visible and therefore also more likely to be retweeted even further, thus creating an environment where a handful of messages get the vast majority of attention. In this case the Brown article (2018) was considered valuable currency, so much so that the top retweets that included the article amount to 18.87% of the total tweets in this dataset. This percentage indicates that the distribution of tweets associated with the Nymphgate conversation closely follows the ‘Pareto Principle’ (Poell and Borra, 2012; Shirky, 2003). This principle states that 80 percent of the effects come from 20 percent of the causes, which in this case it means that the majority of the Nymphgate conversation was influenced by a small selection of tweets containing the Brown article (2018) as its base.

By analysing the retweets of this dataset, we get an idea of the information that carried weight during the Nymphgate conversation, it is clear that the Brown article (2018) features prominently in the top tweets and was used by the majority of users to shape their opinions and perceptions of the takeover event. As a non-human actor, the Brown article (2018) has the potential of heavily influencing the Gallery brand thanks to users’ tweeting activities and its dominance throughout the online
conversati
on, as will be discussed at the end of this chapter. I argue however, that

despite its prominence, this article may not impact the brand network as its author
(Brown) is not recognised as a relevant actor by the Gallery’s decision-makers.37 I
will explore this argument more fully in Chapter 6. Still, by analysing Twitter users’
activity and visibility we can get an idea of which users were most active, what type of
activity they took part in, and who were the most visible users throughout the

6.1.3. Activity and Visibility

Social media platforms are considered to be de-institutionalised spaces as users with
different backgrounds and knowledge may have equal access to the production,
distribution, and use of content (Lomborg, 2011, p.65) — which is why social media
are considered to have the potential to recode museums (Parry, 2007). One way to
consider these spaces is as reflections of ‘produsage’ or “the collaborative and
continuous building and extending of existing content in pursuit of further
improvement” (Bruns, 2008, p.21). From this perspective, online conversations are
organised in an ad-hoc way based on users’ production and reproduction of
information, resulting in provisional communities with periodical shared interests. I
argue that online communities can also be organised as the result of users’
behaviours (and the perception of these behaviours) within conversations in
particular platforms. In the case of the Nymphgate community I am interested how
users interacted with each other, using the platform’s technologies (such as
retweeting and mentions), and how the aims of the takeover event translated into
this online space.

Activity

Twitter metadata allows us to see how users participate on the platform, for example
by distinguishing various types of posts. Users’ activity can then be divided into:
original tweets, @mention tweets, and retweets. In doing so, we can see whether

37 Alternatively, Jonathan Jones is perceived to be an influential actor as his article is mentioned in
various interviews and in other instances (such as presentations). This actor and their potential
impact will be discussed in the following chapter.
users are broadcasting their observations or opinions, whether they’re in a conversation with another user or trying to engage another user in a conversation, or whether they’re sharing someone else’s post. It should be noted that by only studying one end of this data (that is, from the perspective and at the discretion of the researcher), we may not be completely certain of the motive behind these behaviours or indeed whether or not the observed behaviour is true. For example, an @mention tweet may not be intended to start a conversation but instead it is intended to call another user’s attention to a post.

Although it is not the scope of this research to ascertain the true intentions of every user observed in the Nymphgate community, I argue that studying the different mixes of tweet types point to a matrix of users’ participation styles who were involved in this online conversation. Furthermore, I argue that in studying these participation styles we may have a better understanding of the online audiences the Gallery aimed to engage as part of the take-over event, therefore have a better insight of this actor group in the brand network. Figure 8 shows the top 100 most active users in the Nymphgate community, each represented by a multicolour bar according to their tweet type activity.
What we see from this graph is that the top users are mostly active by retweeting other users’ posts and by mentioning others in their tweets. The bottom third of this list shows a number of users whose activity is almost solely based on original tweets. This trend is another example of the Pareto Principle (as discussed in the previous section) and it corresponds to the overall distribution of the different tweet types throughout the time period of this study (Figure 9).

![Timeline by Tweet Type](image)

**Figure 9.** Timeline by Tweet Type

From this analysis we can see that the active users in the Nymphgate network were mostly those who prefer to share other users’ posts and those who were either in conversation with other users or were attempting to start one. Looking back at the most popular tweets in comparison to the most active users, we can see that the authors of the most popular tweets are not very active save for their original tweets. Meaning that this handful of users (authors of the most popular tweets) were more influential in the Nymphgate conversation than the most active users in the dataset. Unsurprisingly, these influential users are thus the most visible users in the dataset thanks to others’ retweets.
Visibility
In addition to users’ activities, we can also observe how other users engage with them. Visibility can be measured in @mention tweets and retweets within the overall dataset, this measure can give us insights into how visible are given users within the issues in the conversation. Unsurprisingly, the most visible users in the Nymphgate conversation are those who authored the most popular tweets — those who are made visible by other users’ retweets. One exception within this list is the user @mcrartgallery, the Manchester Art Gallery’s main account, which features as the most visible user in the entire dataset.

In fact, we see that the Gallery is most visible first as other users mention them in their posts and then as others retweet their posts. Interestingly, only one of the topmost popular tweets mentions the Gallery in their comment so their visibility is largely due to the cumulative action of single users’ @mention tweets — either in conversation with the Gallery or aiming to start one. Comparing the Gallery’s activity and visibility gives us further insight into their role within the online conversation and to a certain extent, to their role in the online space of the takeover event. I will come back to this point when I discuss the conversation cases in section 6.3.

6.1.4. Comparing Activity and Visibility
Comparing users’ activity and visibility is valuable as it gives insights to the potential level of impact and perceptions of particular users. Earlier, I discussed how the authors of the most popular tweets are largely the same as the most visible users within the dataset, which indicates that these users had a greater level of impact to the Nymphgate conversation than other more active users. In contrast, when we look at the most active users in comparison to the most visible users, we see almost no overlap between the two lists (Figure 10).
This pattern can tell us that these active users can be considered as disruptive participants — even as spammers — who are making no useful contributions to the general conversation. One user who overlaps in both lists is the Gallery (@mcrartgallery), which posted a small number of tweets and yet received a substantial number of @mentions. As Figure 11 shows, the Gallery was not an active member of the Nymphgate conversation (contributing only 26 tweets overall, or 0.124% of the dataset). Rather, the Gallery was a relatively passive actor made visible by the actions of other members of the community.
This pattern suggests that the Gallery was not in conversation with the Nymphgate community (as would be confirmed later in my interviews with staff members) — instead the Gallery was the subject of other users' conversations. It is difficult to reconcile the activity (or lack thereof) from the Gallery with the aims of the takeover event — that is “to prompt conversation” (Manchester Art Gallery, 2018d). This pattern resulted in a perception from some of the users that the Gallery asked for a conversation without the intention of actively participating in it, a feeling that was later confirmed by the Web Manager in an interview and during a presentation at the 2018 Museums Association conference (Arias and Grimes, 2018). Here we start seeing a trend emerge based on the interactions afforded by Twitter's technology and users' performed behaviours, one where the potential influence of certain actors (users) is based on whether or not their presence can be measured.
Such a view (of a dualistic value system of presence versus absence: influential versus non-influential) is reductive from the perspective of Actor-Network Theory. Nevertheless, it is a theme that is echoed in my interviews with Gallery staff members on their perspectives of the roles of various stakeholder groups — including online audiences. One way to explore the complexities of this seemingly simplistic view, is to consider the role of Mark Brown in relation to activity and visibility. From the previous section we see that the Brown article (2018) informed the most popular tweets and had a strong impact on the development of the online conversation in time. Mark Brown the user, however, is relatively inactive and invisible\(^\text{38}\) — which on Twitter terms, this user would be considered not very influential within the Nymphgate community.

Brown’s influence then cannot be measured on his activity and visibility alone, instead it should be considered based on the activity and perception of others within the community. Similarly, the influence of the Gallery to the online conversation should be considered based on the activity and perception of others — which in this case it is easier to measure as part of their visibility within the community.\(^\text{39}\) So, although both users were inactive in the Nymphgate Twitter conversation (measured as low numbers of tweets/activity), Mark Brown and the Gallery had the greatest impact on how the conversation evolved and how the takeover event was perceived by Twitter users.

Twitter offers two more metrics that can be used to examine the impact of users in particular conversations: by looking at users’ numbers of followers and by looking at hashtag trends in the conversation. In doing so, we can examine which users are most prominent in their communities regardless of their activity or visibility, and we can track the development of the conversation through time as topics and communities intersect one another. These metrics can be particularly useful for examining conversations that are not solely based on a single hashtag but rather are based on an issue — as is the case with the Nymphgate conversation.

\(^{38}\) Mark Brown the user tweeted only once during this time period, the post consisted a link to his article on The Guardian.

\(^{39}\) I will come back to this point towards the end of this chapter where I discuss the conversation cases.
6.1.5. **Followers and Hashtags**

To close this section focused on the quantitative analysis of the Nymphgate Twitter network, I would like to explore two concepts that add more detail and context to this community and to the development of their conversation. First, I examine the potential reach for each of the users involved as a way to understand the complexities of the network (beyond the dualisms of visibility/activity); and second, I examine the hashtags used as a way to start understanding the thematic trends throughout the conversation. In these two concepts, the Brown article (2018) is prominent as part of the medium that published it and by introducing existing communities and their issues to the Nymphgate network.

**Followers**

On Twitter, participating in conversations is not the only way to be visible; the technology’s affordances provide metrics that can be used to further understand who are the most prominent users that influence the evolution of an issue on this platform. One of these metrics is the number of followers each of the users have in a particular community. With this measure we can examine the theoretical reach of a tweet and thus understand who the most prominent users in the community are regardless of their activity or visibility. Here I explore the number of followers for the users in the Nymphgate community, keeping in mind that not all Twitter users will be online all the time, and not all accounts correspond to individual human users — some of them may be social bots.\(^{40}\) Meaning that there is no guarantee that any given post will reach 100% of its author’s audience. To account for this possibility, I have used a probability factor estimating that 10% of all Twitter users will be humans who are actively reading their incoming feeds (Burgess, Bruns, et al., 2018).

In the Nymphgate community the most prominent user is The Guardian (@guardian) with a maximum potential audience of over 14 million users (at the time of study) — even though, this user only contributed 4 posts to the Nymphgate

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\(^{40}\) Ferrara et al (2016, p.96) define social bots as “computer algorithms that automatically produce content and interact with humans on social media [platforms], trying to emulate and possibly alter their behavior”.
From this perspective, The Guardian user could have been very influential in shaping the Nymphgate conversation thanks to their large number of followers — as opposed to the author of the most prominent tweet who ranked number 43 in the most followed users. Accordingly, the Gallery user is not influential as their maximum potential audience is not as big as that of other users — meaning that their impact to the online Nymphgate conversation rests almost solely on the actions of other users (in @mention tweet and retweets).

Hashtags
Another way to influence Twitter conversation, and to increase the potential audience for certain content, is to use hashtags. Earlier in this chapter I described the takeover event and the aim of the Gallery to ‘prompt conversation’, partly by encouraging visitors and audiences to share their thoughts online through the hashtag #MAGSoniaBoyce. This way the conversation about the removal of Hylas and the Nymphs would reference the (then) upcoming Sonia Boyce exhibition as well as the artist’s agency during the event. Unfortunately, the ensuing Twitter conversation did not always contain this hashtag and very rarely referenced the artist and her role during the takeover. In fact, only 28.8% of all tweets collected included the #MAGSoniaBoyce hashtag (Figure 12). This small percentage highlights a methodological issue of using social media data in research, as well as a practical issue for the Gallery.

The #MAGSoniaBoyce hashtag is an institutional tag created by the Gallery for its users (including visitors, audiences, and staff) to share content in a specific and seemingly ‘contained’ space. In doing so, these users would be co-creating an institutional narrative in relation to the takeover event as well as any other activity related to the Sonia Boyce exhibition. From a methodological standpoint using data collected only through this hashtag would provide only a partial understanding of the Nymphgate network, its community, and their dialogue. Similarly, from a practical perspective, following or engaging only with the dialogue shared through this hashtag would give the Gallery a limited outlook on the effect of the takeover event.

41 During the studied Nymphgate conversation, from January 24, 2018 to February 10, 2018.
and its consequent reactions. For these reasons I advocate for a broader collection of data, using various terms and phrases, to gain a more thorough understanding of an online conversation — from a research and from a practical point of view.

Earlier in this chapter I briefly described the social, cultural, political contexts in which the takeover event took place and in which the Nymphgate network developed; in particular, the influence of the Me Too campaign and the Time’s Up organisation to the curatorial decision of the takeover event. It is not surprising then to see evidence of these contexts in the dataset, as users referred to the interview with the Curator of Contemporary Art (in the Brown article (2018), and later in an audio clip with BBC Radio 4 (2018)), by using relevant hashtags such as #metoo and #timesup. Both of which were the most used hashtags after #MAGSoniaBoyce as illustrated in below.

Figure 12. Top Hashtags

These hashtags indicate the presence of different, distinct communities whose interests and values intersect with the Nymphgate network. These shared communities create overlapping groups within the Nymphgate community that represent different perspectives on the main topic. In this case, however, these overlapping groups are formed as the central topic is affected by related events — such as publishing articles. Figure 13 shows the prominence of the top 20 hashtags in the dataset distributed on a timeline. Here we can see how the #metoo and #timesup
tags are used as part of the Nymphgate dialogue only after the Brown (2018) and Jones (2018) articles are published.

Figure 13. Top 20 Hashtags Timeline

Hashtags and user trends are useful ways of studying the development of the Nymphgate network, especially as a way to start understanding the thematic trends in the conversation. To continue exploring the dialogue that followed the Gallery’s takeover event, I will focus now on the content of users’ posts and the language of the responses as they shifted between outrage, accusations, and confusion. The next section carries forward the observations found on Twitter metrics about users’ perceptions, particularly those which are seemingly diametric.
6.2. Conversation Themes

To gain an understanding of the conversation beyond using Twitter metrics, I employed a coding software (NVivo) to study the content of each tweet collected as part of the Nymphgate network. Although in my research I had already started to note certain themes of the conversation (such as the inclusion of Me Too), I opted to employ an inductive approach to coding as a way to maintain an ANT framework. In this way, I remained relatively agnostic as users identified further actors (for example in mentioning other artworks or including links to other news sources) and as themes arose from their interactions. For each tweet then, I noted what was being said and whether any other actor was included in the conversation — through @mention tweets, visual media, and in plain text.

Taking advantage of the NVivo software, I was able to organise the resulting codebook into two main categories: thematic nodes and descriptive cases. These categories were further divided into their own structures of subcategories, which often overlapped with one another. Overall, the Nymphgate conversation is distributed between three main themes: Feminism and puritanism, Role Questions, and Censorship (Figure 14). These themes represent the most common accusations that users made against the Gallery’s removal of *Hylas and the Nymphs*, that is: of being an act based on feminist or antiquated moral ideologies (Feminism and puritanism); of being an act of incompetence or wilful ignorance (Role Questions); and of being an act of censorship often compared to totalitarian regimes (Censorship). A smaller theme represents less poignant accusations, including supportive and creative responses (Other); and finally, a small percentage represents tweets that were captured with one or more of the TAGS keywords but are in no way related to the Manchester Art Gallery (Bycatch).

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42 See Appendix 4 for the codebook.
The cases, on the other hand, were grouped according to their given human or non-human attributes (such as the role of particular individuals or the type of media added), which led to eight main case categories. Overall, users linked their comments and interactions to news and magazine articles (Article), some wrote their own blogs posts or linked back to the Gallery’s blog (Website or Blog), whilst others extended comparisons to popular artworks (Artwork), and drew parallels between historical figures and Gallery staff members (Person) (Figure 15). A minority of users linked their comments to videos, institutions, and books; whilst others made connections to other (then) concurrent or upcoming exhibitions at the Gallery.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Case Type</th>
<th>Number of Cases</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Article</td>
<td>139</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Website or Blog</td>
<td>46</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Artwork</td>
<td>45</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Person</td>
<td>43</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Video</td>
<td>18</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Event or Exhibition</td>
<td>13</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Institution</td>
<td>11</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Book</td>
<td>9</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Figure 15. Case Types
Although these categories and groupings may seem neatly organised, the reality of the conversation was much more complex. Users often made comments that bridged themes and cases together, whilst others made no comments at all (for example by using the “tweet button” on particular web43 pages) — making the analysis of sentiment nearly impossible. In this section I aim to trace the development of the Nymphgate conversation through themes and close with a reflection on using social media data for analysis from a practical and an ethical standpoint. The following section will focus on the case categories and their influence in the conversation, as well as a reflection of “absent” actors. For now, I will start by exploring users’ accusations of the Gallery’s actions as feminism or puritanism in action and their associations with contemporary social and political events.

### 6.2.1. Feminism and puritanism

Feminism is the most common theme found throughout the Nymphgate conversation and it ranges from accusatory statements to self-identifying descriptors (as a way to create distance between the takeover event and the users who identify as feminists). For the most part, users accused the Gallery and its staff (mostly the Curator of Contemporary Art) of pushing a contemporary ‘feminist-liberal agenda’ to question and remove a historical work of art. From this perspective, the Gallery was brought into a debate where ‘feminism’ is a trope for ‘the destruction of beauty’ — both in art and in society.

“Feminists attack feminine Beauty. This Waterhouse masterpiece of ‘Hylas and the Nymphs’ was removed from Manchester Art Gallery due to feminist pressure. Beauty is vanishing from our world because we live as though it did not matter. Beauty will always matter. [Link to image of Hylas and the Nymphs]” (Tweet 647, edited to remove link)

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43 The ‘Tweet Button’ is a tool that Twitter offers for website developers and users. The button serves as an easy way to share content from a website to Twitter. In many cases, the Tweet Button provides a text parameter that auto-populates a tweet with particular text, such as the title of the webpage (Twitter Inc, 2019b). For example, the Tweet Button included in the webpage that hosts Mark Brown’s article (2018), which prompts an auto-populated tweet with the text “Gallery removes naked nymphs painting to ‘prompt conversation’” and a link to the article.
“@MAGcurators @mcrartgallery Let’s take back our culture from the grip of the Left. Who put them into power anyway? We are in a culture war with curators who seem to hate beauty. #ManchesterArtGallery.” (Tweet 165)

In the examples above, we see how ‘feminism’ transects other aspects in the Nymphgate conversation, bringing together cases (such as a digital representation of the removed painting in the link) and themes (such as questioning the authority of the curators), as a way to undermine artistic and cultural beauty. In such accusations there is a trend where the Gallery is brought into a debate indirectly (as seen in the first example by the users’ lack of tags), and directly (as seen in the second example where the user tags two Gallery accounts) — adding further contention to the seemingly diametric question of activity versus inactivity in a Twitter debate.

‘Feminism’ polarised users in relation to the MeToo movement and (then) current events, such as the ban on darts walk-on girls and Formula One grid girls. On one hand some users blamed ‘feminists’ for pressuring organisations to change the way they work and who works for them; and on the other hand, users who identified themselves as feminists disapproved of the removal as a way to discuss the issues raised by Me Too and Time’s Up. The common thread between these instances was a criticism over the decision to remove the painting based on its subject matter — in that it depicted semi-nude women — giving way to accusations of puritanism and censorship.

“#MAGsoniaboyce. Defining this ‘an artistic act’ doesn’t disguise its authoritarian moralising as part of a rapidly spreading censorship championed by an increasingly puritanical, hectoring and intolerant feminism. It’s dangerous and a long way from the feminism I grew up with.” (Tweet 9284)

In the most extreme cases where feminism was linked to censorship, users adopted a derogatory term to describe those involved: feminazi. This term was invented by Rush Limbaugh in the 1990s and has since seen an increase in popularity, especially on social media platforms (Cohen, 2015). In the Nymphgate community, this term was most often used by users in Spain and Chile, showing the wide geographical spread of this network — and in turn, the potential reach of the Gallery brand network.

44 Tagging here implies that a user @mentions another user. The @mention then becomes a tag.
“Cuando ola fascista feminazi de la Manchester Art Gallery arribe a Chile habrá que saber defender nuestro derecho a ver, crear y exponer el arte con libertad” (Tweet 4992, edited for brevity)

“When the fascist feminazi wave from the Manchester Art Gallery arrives in Chile we will have to defend our right to see, create and exhibit art with freedom” (Tweet 4992, edited for brevity and translated by thesis author)

In not so extreme cases, the accusations of feminism, puritanism and censorship are conflated into a resentment for “political correctness”. In this case, Nymphgate users bemoaned the removal of the painting as a feminist, puritan act of ‘censorship’ — that is, an example of “PC culture” that ‘has gone mad’ or ‘has gone too far’. In these accusations we see again parallels to current events (grid girls and Me Too), criticism over curatorial and managerial decisions, as well as calls to action to fellow users — in the form of petitions and boycotting.

“A new low in PC madness! Manchester Art Gallery removed this Pre-Raphaelite classic to open a "debate". Please support this petition for the return of the painting. The curators responsible for this ignorant act of censorship should be fired - NS” (Tweet 4414, edited to remove links to visual media)

Out of all the sub-categories within the ‘Feminism and puritanism’ theme, ‘PR (Public Relations) stunt’ most often transects ‘Role Questions’. For example, some users were appalled that the removal was inspired by Me Too and many suggested instead that the Gallery give the painting to other ‘more suitable’ institutions. Similarly, users who were appalled at this ‘stunt’ demanded an inquiry or the dismissal of Gallery staff members involved (mainly the Curator of Contemporary Art and the Senior Operational Lead who was acting as the Deputy Director at the time).

“@ClareGannaway #MAGsoniaboyce A ridiculous publicity stunt. And revolting to tag together with #MeToo so abhorrent. Give the painting to @YorkArtGallery or anywhere that it will be respected. There is no debate apart from fact #MAG is run by bored, tedious eejits” (Tweet 13247)

Public relations is one of the tools organisations often use to build and maintain their brand, it is based on having good relationships between those that come into contact with the organisation (including staff members). In a traditional branding approach, efforts that are perceived as ‘cheap’ or ‘attention grabbing’ (as many of the

45 To be ‘politically correct’ is to avoid language, behaviours, and actions that could be deemed offensive by other, particularly marginalised groups in relation to sex and race (Cambridge English Dictionary, 2019).
Nymphgate users commented) would reflect a failed public relations strategy and therefore have a negative impact on the organisation’s reputation (a factor of its brand). I would argue, however, that approaching brand-building and maintenance through an ANT framework requires a re-thinking of who is entering these transactional relationships that may affect the institution’s brand. I question whether the Gallery considers Nymphgate users as viable actors whose relationships can impact or affect the Gallery brand in any manner.

Two of the ways that we may consider the impact of the Nymphgate community is by looking at the density of their conversation (as noted in the previous section) and by assessing whether or not these themes (especially the varied and intersectional accusations based on feminism and contemporary social-cultural issues) resonate with the Gallery’s decision-making actors. Would users’ questions about the curator’s role, management decision-making, and calls for dismissals have a stronger impact on the relationships between the Gallery and its actors? I will come back to these questions in Chapter 7 as part of my analysis of interviews with a variety of Gallery staff members, where I assess their perspectives on the takeover event. For now, I will turn to explore the second-most popular theme in the Nymphgate network: Role Questions.

6.2.2. Role Questions

In this second-most coded theme users’ comments were critical of the Gallery and its staff members (mainly the Curator of Contemporary Art) and the roles they enact — not only in relation of the takeover event and the ensuing online conversation, but also in broader terms — such as the role of the Gallery in society. Other users commented on the role of the artwork temporarily removed, and of artworks in general, with relative passivity (i.e., objects that are meant to be looked upon); whilst others still, commented on their own capacities to make decisions (such as to be or not be offended by an artwork). As with the previous theme, ‘Role Questions’ intersects with other themes and various cases throughout the conversation — weaving the Nymphgate narrative with contemporary as well as ‘historical’ political and social contexts.
One of the effects of the takeover event is that users were not able to reconcile the removal of *Hylas and the Nymphs* and their understanding or perception of what an art gallery does. Many users considered the Gallery as a space for the display and custody of artworks, so removing the painting seemed like an affront to cultural heritage. From this perspective, the removal was seen as a way to re-write history and as the gateway to further censorious acts similar to ones committed by authoritarian regimes.

“When an art gallery censors art, we need to look closely at what the point of a gallery is...” https://t.co/I3JDip0i3D” (Tweet 7486)

Others were disappointed by the Gallery’s ‘lack of responsibility’ as a publicly funded organisation tasked with a publicly owned collection — pointing to a mis-management of the institution and of their cultural assets. In some instances, users commented on the Gallery’s hiring policies as a way to try to understand why the decision to remove the painting was taken, resulting in similar debates as in the previous theme around ‘PC culture’ and a ‘pushy liberal agenda’.

“@mcrartgallery As a public art museum your role is to make masterpieces available to the public, not to remove them from public display, using them for purposes that have nothing to do with art. This is censorship, no matter how you try to disguise it as an invitation to debate. #freethenymphs” (Tweet 6681)

Users questioned the role of the Curator of Contemporary Art more than any other Gallery staff member or representative, which stands to reason as she became the spokesperson for the takeover event and as the voice of the Gallery in the media. Users were critical of her proficiency as a curator and accused her of not respecting or understanding art history, of utilizing the Me Too movement for her personal gain, and for meddling with artworks outside of her range of expertise. Mostly, users demanded the Gallery and Manchester City Council to review her position or to terminate it altogether.

“I’m sorry, what? And why exactly does the "curator of contemporary art" get to dictate the display of pre-Raphaelite works? This is absurd. A popular 19th c. piece based on a myth from antiquity is not problematic, FFS. https://t.co/Ue4WnqbVB9” (Tweet 5256)

“@mcrartgallery A public debate and face to face conversation with your curators is needed ASAP at Manchester City Galleries to address your poor and arrogant management of this stunt. You have severely underestimated your collection and the depth of feeling people have for Hylas and the Nymphs” (Tweet 12218)
One of the most troubling aspects of this conversation is the lengths to which some users went to defend their positions to discredit or mock the Curator of Contemporary Art. For example, some found images of the Curator at a political rally and used these to further their claim that she is a ‘socialist’ with an ‘agenda’. Others trawled her Twitter timeline and found comments she had made about the unnecessary sexualisation of children’s toys, which were then posted in the Nymphgate network as an example of her ‘double standard’. One particular user took the Curator’s likeness and created their own version of *Hylas and the Nymphs* where, instead of nymphs, several versions of the Curator were seducing and abducting Hylas into the water.

Despite the lengths and ‘creative’ responses that users had towards the Curator of Contemporary Art, it is clear that users within this community showed contempt and mistrust towards her and the Gallery. Moreover, such criticism highlights the self-awareness of the Nymphgate community in their potential roles and agency in relation to the removal. For example, some users were not only concerned with misguided decision-making by the Gallery, but they were also concerned that the Gallery took away their own ability to make decisions about the painting (literally and figuratively).

“@mcrartgallery You’ve made a terrible misstep with this. You’ve broken trust with the public over curating these pictures and drawn into serious question your fitness to continue to hold them @ClareGannaway #MAGSoniaBoyce” (Tweet 1692)

“@mcrartgallery If you think that art can be better appreciated and understood by turning your gallery into a ‘safe space’, that’s up to you; it’s your gallery. But Personally, I’d rather be allowed to make my own mind up and I’m not going to do that by looking at a blank wall.” (Tweet 9529)

The comments in this theme question not only the Gallery’s function within society and the professional adequacy of its staff, they also jeopardise the institution’s reputation — which, in a traditional branding approach would signify a break in the transactional relationships between the organisation and its stakeholders. I argue, however, that in approaching the Gallery brand through an ANT framework such questions about reputation and competence would only carry transactional weight in a relationship where decision-making actors are involved. In this case, the Gallery would have to acknowledge the Nymphgate community as an influential actor within
their brand and then, they would need to acknowledge the level of influence this actor group has.

Consider the tweet examples in this section — I question whether these comments would have a different impact to the Gallery if the authors were not just any member of the public, but local government representatives. Presuming that such individuals are recognised as influential (perhaps even decision-making) actors within the brand network, comments that condemn the Gallery of elitism and censorship would presumably have a stronger impact than if it had been authored by a visitor. I argue that the impact of the Nymphgate conversation to the Gallery brand depends not only on the weight of the comments (in quantity and content/theme), but also on the Gallery’s perception of its online audiences (including the Nymphgate community). Unfortunately, I cannot assess this argument by examining social media data only, so I will return to this point in Chapter 7 where I question Gallery staff members on their perceptions of who is involved and may influence their institutional brand.

6.2.3. Censorship

One of the common threads in the accusations of ‘feminism gone mad’ and of the suitability of the Gallery’s curators to manage public property, is that users viewed the physical removal of the painting as an act of censorship. In this theme users considered the removal as a political act similar to ones perpetrated by authoritarian regimes, often referring to the painting as ‘degenerate art’ or as a step towards ‘burning books’. Mostly, comments of censorship seem to be an expression of fear and confusion — fear that ‘Western’ and ‘traditional’ principles are losing value, and confusion over whose extreme political beliefs to blame. As a researcher, this theme was one of the most difficult to manage as users made racist and homophobic remarks to denigrate the takeover and the artists involved.

“Militant puritanism is slowly encroaching on every aspect of our lives. Nothing is safe: freedoms are limited, history erased, national heroes turned into villains, art censored, books banned, all that doesn’t suit puritanical narrative is deemed offensive https://t.co/TeQRcSRLyM” (Tweet 12846)

“@mcrartgallery Just like the Nazis prompted conversation by burning all those books, right? #MAGSoniaBoyce” (Tweet 12928)
The examples above reference the Brown article (2018) and the Gallery’s blog posts (Manchester Art Gallery, 2018d) that explained the takeover event as a way to ‘prompt conversation’ with their visitors. In the article, Brown (2018) writes twice “Gannaway said the removal was not about censorship” — suggesting that the Gallery had already received criticism and accusations of censorship before the article was posted (five days after the painting had been removed). Although it is difficult to assess, I would argue that the comments that the Curator of Contemporary Art made in her interview with Mark Brown (2018) stirred the online conversation to include further comments of censorship and reproach of her association with Me Too and Time’s Up. I will return to this issue in the next section where I explore the cases that influenced the conversation and those which users brought into the discussion — such as past dictators and current terrorist groups.

Similarly to the Feminism and puritanism theme, some users’ comments included language that has gained popularity on social media and that is used to represent a specific group of people. In this case, users referred to those responsible for the removal as ‘SJW’ (‘Social Justice Warriors’) and their acts as an example of ‘Cultural Marxism’. Often referred to as a conspiracy theory, Cultural Marxism is an idea adopted by radical right groups that is roughly based on the ‘Frankfurt School of Critical Theory’ (Oliver, 2017). It is a belief that those who founded this school of thought infiltrated certain aspects of ‘Western’ culture (such as academia and popular culture) in order to dilute this white, Christian lifestyle. In other words, references to ‘SJW’ and ‘Cultural Marxism’ are parlance of anti-Semites and commonly found in popular radical right media such as Breitbart and InfoWars (both of which are present in the dataset).

In the Nymphgate community, users who adopted this type of language and referenced such media outlets are in the minority. These users, however, are solely responsible for all of the homophobic remarks in the Nymphgate conversation and represent a sub-section of online communities that the Gallery managed to reach with their takeover event. It is questionable whether or not the Gallery intended to reach such groups or whether they would be considered as actors within the brand network (let alone as influential actors), nevertheless the presence of this radical
community within the Nymphgate network points to the ‘knock-off’ effect that social media can have with the right trigger words and a broadcasting algorithm.

On the less radical end of the ‘Censorship’ comments spectrum, users turned to more mainstream (even fictional) examples or more generalised ways to accuse the Gallery of sympathising with movements and historical figures who specifically targeted artworks as a form of censorship. Users’ examples varied from comparing the Gallery with the ‘Big Brother’ and the ‘Ministry of Truth’ (references to George Orwell’s novel 1984), to comparing the removal as a modern version of the Catholic Church’s ‘Fig Leaf Campaign’. Most of these accusations were based on a general parallel to the Nazi regime and their book burning campaigns, as well as Hitler’s ‘degenerate art’ exhibition.

“@MAGcurators @mcrartgallery It’s not Big Brother from 1984 we need to worry about, it’s the Politically Correct state run by SJW’s we are meekly being led into. “Who controls the past controls the future. Who controls the present controls the past.”” (Tweet 18903)

One of the most difficult aspects of this theme was managing the racist remarks users made towards the Gallery and those involved in the removal (which were in the minority at <1% of the overall dataset). Such comments were decisively Islamophobic and ranged from verbal abuse and expletives, to comparing the Gallery with the Taliban and ISIS, as well as suggesting that the removal was an act of ‘bowing to pressure’ from the Gallery’s Muslim audiences. Not only was the content of such accusations difficult to read (as a person who strongly objects to racism and discrimination based on religion), it was also difficult to manage as a researcher as many of the tweets in this sub-category included broken links — some leading to unavailable pages and others to a notice that the Twitter user had been suspended. Dealing with abusive content and deciding what to do with collected data that is no longer available online, are some of the ethical (and moral) issues we must face when using social media data for research (as I described in Chapter 4). My aim with this thesis is to protect others (and myself) from any potential harm that may result as part of this study — which includes these abusive comments. So, in not reproducing these comments (as I have been doing throughout the previous sections with the other conversation themes) I am able to break the cycle of abusive materials by not providing another platform for these users and their behaviours.
6.2.4. Other

The last overall category in the thematic analysis of the Nymphgate conversation is composed of tweets that are not overwhelmingly accusatory of censorship, or competence, or of ‘mad feminism’. The comments in this ‘Other’ category reflect tweets that are more conversational, that were ambivalent or positive, or that were collected as part of the research period but are not related to the takeover event. Here we see users comment on the subject and style of the artwork removed, post images of themselves and others within the Gallery space, and respond to the takeover with their own artwork or in other ‘creative’ ways. Moreover, we see the influence of other media articles to the conversation after the painting was reinstated, whose authors were in favour of the takeover event.

In this group of comments we still see the influence of other themes, though not as explicitly as previously discussed. Here, those who were critical of the removal were also politically ambivalent or, at least, had lukewarm political reproofs — stating that the Gallery should not be influenced by ‘politics’ nor should its staff impose a ‘political agenda’ onto its visitors (see Tweet 14024 below). Maybe these users had similar opinions as those exemplified in previous themes, but chose to use different language to express them. Unfortunately, by analysing tweets alone (without contacting their authors and asking them for their motives) it is nearly impossible to understand with certainty what users meant with their comments and to disambiguate their language. This lack of perspective from the Nymphgate community is a limitation in this research and perhaps the subject for future study.

“@mcrartgallery Regardless of any political or social climate, the removal of art is extremely troubling, temporary or otherwise. I don’t see how this is a move to be celebrated when the preservation of the arts has been paramount in understanding cultures, time periods, and artistic techniques.” (Tweet 14024)

One of the issues that generated much contention was the subject matter of the painting and the style in which it was achieved. Users discussed various reasons relating to the subject matter as an excuse to disregard the curatorial decision and/or to challenge the curators’ competence. For example, some users based their comments on the mythology that inspired Waterhouse (the painting’s artist) to point
out the main subject’s (Hylas’) homosexuality. Others discussed the immortality of water nymphs to suggest that these creatures are supposed to be age-less rather than pubescent. Others still, focused on the nymphs’ actions in the myth and in the painting as they drag Hylas into the water, suggesting that this is an act of power where the nymphs are in control (and thus not relevant to a discussion of the female form as passive and decorative).

“Removing art because it’s "offensive" is against the very purpose of museums. Your job is to contextualise and educate, not to censor! Not to mention that this particular painting shows women with agency and independence. #MAGSoniaBoype” (Tweet 20629)

On the other hand, users discussed the painting as a classic example of Pre-Raphaelite art and so suggesting that its style is meant to be beautiful and erotic. In doing so, these users rejected the comparisons to pornography as a legitimate excuse to remove the painting — yet again, calling in to question the curators’ competence as well as that of some of the authors of media articles that responded positively to the Nymphgate conversation (see (Tawadros, 2018)).

Despite the overwhelmingly negative (and often abusive) responses in the Nymphgate conversation, a fraction of the comments were discernibly positive (1%) and yet, this tiny group of supporters use almost the same reasons as those who oppose it. Some are happy that the painting was removed as a way to re-contextualise the female form, others applauded the Gallery’s move as a bold way to ‘start a conversation’, and others questioned their own fascination with Hylas and the Nymphs after reading about the takeover event. Interestingly, some users who regarded the removal as a publicity stunt were positive about it stating that both the painting and the Gallery received much needed and welcomed attention.

“Interesting convo about female bodies in Victorian #art as #decorative or #femmefatale. Waterhouse nymphs was a favourite as a little girl, maybe I should let go? Then again, if this is in light of #metoo, this conversation is wayyy broader! #MAGsoniaboyce https://t.co/JABCM45Qvz” (Tweet 3609)

“To me it looked like #manchester Art Gallery had pulled a very successful publicity stunt https://t.co/EEVSGDeAJh” (Tweet 14589)

In fact, the majority of positive comments on Twitter were posted after a series of articles were published in favour of the takeover event — namely two opinion pieces published in The Guardian, one written by journalist Gilane Tawadros (2018) and
another by the takeover artist Sonia Boyce (2018). Both articles had mixed reviews on the Nymphgate conversation, yet more users showed their support for the Gallery and for the Curator of Contemporary Art after they were published. Up until this point, Boyce had been all but invisible in the Nymphgate conversation, even though she was integral and intrinsic to the event and to the removal — a fact that did not go completely unnoticed in the conversation. Moreover, users posted positive tweets after visiting the Gallery and seeing visitors interact and respond to the removal through post-its and in person with each other.

“It’s not amazingly well reported, though: it’s only down temporarily and the (BAME) artist who selected it for removal isn’t being discussed at all (on Twitter & the guardian anyway) - which kind of highlights the point about what voices/perspectives we promote. #MAGSoniaBoyce” (Tweet 2320)

“Wasn’t quite sure what to think of the #MAGSoniaBoyce fiasco until visiting the gallery yesterday; I don't think I've ever seen it so busy - nice to see the wider public contemplating and debating art. https://t.co/AXSnuBy0k1” (Tweet 8431)

The perceived absence of an actor and of the different mood/tonality between online and offline spaces, offer another insight to the potential influence of an online community to the Gallery brand. I argue that as the event took place in different spaces it took different forms based on the actions and activity of the actors that came into contact with it. In other words, the event morphed into different versions of itself at the hands of actors (online and offline) and in their interactions (or lack thereof) with each other. Actors, then, would have a different association and a different perspective of the event (and those involved in it) based on where they encountered it and whom they shared this encounter with.

Similarly, the Gallery brand takes different shapes based on its actors’ spatial and relational attributes through time. In this understanding we see how the brand is affected by different actors at various points in time, whose influence depends on who they are in relation to the Gallery and where they are trying to enact their impact. The Nymphgate conversation offers an opportunity to analyse actors who operate online and offline, and how their relationships (between and within these spaces) may influence the Gallery brand. In the next section I explore the actors identified within the Nymphgate conversation and their impact on how the event and the Gallery was perceived by this online community.
6.3. Conversation Cases

In this section, I am interested in the actors users identified in their comments and those that influenced the conversation. Borrowing from NVivo, the software I used to qualitatively analyse these tweets, I refer to these actors as ‘cases’ whilst still referring to the tweets’ authors as users. Here I explore who and what are the cases in the conversation, what role (if any) they had within it, and their potential influence to the Gallery brand. Furthermore, I look into which cases are missing (and where), as well as those cases that transcend online and offline spaces.

As I mentioned earlier, cases were grouped into eight categories based on their given human or non-human attributes; they range from articles and blog posts, artworks and exhibitions, to persons and institutions. One of the main differences about these categories is the way in which the case was brought into the conversation, either as a source of information or as an example to illustrate or compare another actor. In most instances users based their comments on articles by providing a link to them; in other cases, users compared the event to historical episodes and those involved in it to contemporary and historical individuals. Only a minority of cases were not related to the takeover event, but still relevant to the Gallery — such as all events and exhibitions, and half of the artworks (Figure 16).

46 See Appendix 5 for the list of all cases.
Unsurprisingly, the topmost referenced cases are those that have featured prominently in the conversation themes: the Mark Brown article (2018), Clare Gannaway, the Me Too movement, J. W. Waterhouse, and the removed painting *Hylas and the Nymphs*. These are followed by the most referenced articles, the Gallery’s blog post where they published their public statements about the event, and one painting (Whispering Eve) unrelated to the takeover (Figure 17). These cases’ popularity mirror not only the themes in the conversation, but also the most popular tweets as discussed earlier in this chapter.
I argue that the most influential actors in the Nymphgate conversation are those who bridge the event’s online and offline spaces, including people and institutions who are not necessarily active online but were instrumental to the event. Individuals such as Sonia Boyce, Family Gorgeous (who performed during the event), the Gallery’s Web Manager, any other staff member who participated during the event, as well as the Manchester City Council. On the other side of this coin, I argue that the Nymphgate community’s absence in the Gallery’s physical spaces can erroneously be mistaken as a lack of influence — for the perception of absence or inactivity (online and offline) leads others to fill and shape this gap with their own conclusions.
6.3.1. **Online Influencers**

The influence of the Brown article (2018) to the Nymphgate network is palpable — not only in the volume of users who reference this article, but also as a resource for further information that was not available on the Gallery’s website. Most notably, the article provided a platform for the Curator of Contemporary Art to provide details about the event, the reasons for it, and to place the Gallery within a socio-cultural debate. Unfortunately, the article was mostly used to kindle criticisms towards the Curator and the Gallery — as opposed to quell any concerns of censorship. It wasn’t until sympathetic articles were published after the painting was reinstated, that some users questioned whether or not Brown had accurately reported the event.

“Gallery removes naked nymphs painting to 'prompt conversation' [Link to Brown article (2018)] Either the curator makes little convincing sense here, or the journalist has done a very poor job of representing the curator's views.” (Tweet 4721, edited to remove link)

“[…] @mcrartgallery On the news a young woman from the gallery has just said that "the story it is allowed to tell" is "problematic". Read those words again and consider exactly what she is saying. Art only allowed to tell a story that serves a political or ideological imperative?” (Tweet 2424)

The Curator of Contemporary Art became the spokesperson for the event and for the Gallery (at this time) for better and for worse. She was invited to participate in other interviews and to further explain the motivations for the removal. Yet again her comments on further outlets, such as during her interview with BBC Radio 4 (2018), were used to kindle and shape the conversation online — drawing more criticism and abuse towards her and the Gallery. Critics (and the minority of supporters) who were keen on ensuring that the Gallery and the Curator saw their comments, opted for @mention tweets tagging the Gallery’s institutional accounts (@mcrartgallery, @magcurators, and @MAGGallery cafe) and the Curator’s account (@ClareGannaway). Such tweets, as we saw earlier, compounded to make the Gallery’s primary account (@mcrartgallery) as the most visible user in the Nymphgate network.

“[…]#soniaboyce and @mcrartgallery have raised a debate which needed to be had. I hope @ClareGannaway has been well supported by both the artist and the Gallery as much of the misguided contempt & vile comments have been directed at her.” (Tweet 15390)

“@MAGcurators @mcrartgallery Fire Clare @ClareGannaway” (Tweet 15739)
Despite the Gallery account’s visibility, it remained fairly inactive throughout the Nymphgate conversation — a detail that did not go unnoticed by users. Some of the criticism the Gallery received was in part for their lack of activity online and in part for their ‘selective’ activity. Users accused them of only retweeting and liking a handful of posts that had comments that supported the event, furthering users’ concerns of censorship. The Gallery’s Web Manager runs the Gallery’s social media platforms — including their Twitter account (@mcrartgallery). In our first interview, the Web Manager admitted being overwhelmed by the online responses they were receiving, not only through Twitter but also through the blog and other social media platforms. His decision to step back from the online conversation the Gallery actively sought to have with the event, was as influential as the Curator’s comments in the media.

“@mcrartgallery It's actually very provocative and infuriating that you keep spinning what happened, or that you RT the tiny number of tweets from people who, naively I would say, support you.” (Tweet 3421)

“@mcrartgallery You crow that this act sparked, 'a wider global debate about representation in art and how works of art are interpreted and displayed'. Yet almost all the 771 comments were about your curator's act of censorship. You are still transmitting but not receiving.” (Tweet 5784)

Stepping back from the online conversation effectively turned the relationship between the Gallery and the Nymphgate community into a one-way affair — where the Gallery puts something out to the world and expects someone else to run with it. In this case, it is difficult not to side with the Gallery’s critics when the Gallery’s lack of activity (at least online) was diametrically opposed to their stated purpose for the takeover event. I argue that the Gallery was not only not prepared for the amount of feedback they would receive, but also that its staff (particularly those managing social media accounts) are in general not used to participating in an online environment. Perhaps Gallery staff are more comfortable to host debates (such as their follow-up events ‘Manchester After Hours / Museums at Night’ (Manchester Art Gallery, 2018c) and ‘Voicing the Naiads: Women, Classics and the Victorians’) (Manchester Art Gallery, 2018b) within their physical environment, whose attendance is inherently more limited and in these cases more controlled (as ticketed events).

The Gallery’s Twitter posts about the takeover, in its lead up and during the event, were just as sparse as that during the ensuing conversation. These few tweets,
however, provide small evidence of the other performative acts that took place that evening, as well as its performers and the participating crowd. One tweet in particular shows a video of the painting being wheeled away surrounded by Boyce and her recording team; this video is the only portrayal of Boyce in action during the event in the dataset. It is indicative of her artistic practice (that is “all about bringing people together in different situations to see what happens” (Manchester Art Gallery, 2018d)) and her perceived absence in the online conversation.

### 6.3.2. Offline Influencers

*Hylas and the Nymphs* was removed for 7 days and, during this time, the Nymphgate community flooded their conversation with digital versions of the painting. So, although it was absent in its physical environment, this artwork was still able to influence the conversation through the actions of those who tweeted its image. This was not the case, however, for Sonia Boyce or for the drag collective, Family Gorgeous, who joined her for the takeover event. These artists were integral for the takeover and yet, they were all but absent in the online conversation — save for a tweet from the Gallery’s main account, another from one of the performers (Figure 18), and two homophobic articles. I argue that as the Nymphgate conversation took shape, and the Gallery became overwhelmed with the Twitter responses, the takeover event was overshadowed by the removal of the painting to the point that the removal itself became the event *online.*
Similarly, as the Curator of Contemporary Art became the spokesperson for the Gallery and for the event, her presence online overshadowed any other staff member who may have been involved in the takeover event. When I interviewed the Curator, she repeatedly assured me that the decisions made leading up to the takeover, as well as those during the event and in its aftermath, were made as a group inclusive of members from different departments. This sentiment was briefly echoed, and quickly criticised, when the Gallery hinted at the process that led up to the event and to the removal in a tweet (Figure 19). Again, the Gallery’s efforts for a more participatory and inclusive way of working may have been a good strategy if we only consider their actions (and their relationships) within their physical environment.
One actor that is ‘missing’ from both the online and offline spaces is the Manchester City Council (MCC hereafter), the local government entity that “sets the budget for the Art Galleries and is involved in major decisions about the city’s galleries” (Manchester City Council, 2016). It can be assumed, then, that MCC is a very influential actor in their relationship to the Gallery and one that plays an operational role in the Gallery brand network. MCC, however, is not active in the Nymphgate conversation and so their inactivity may be construed as absence. Alternatively, MCC appears in users’ demands to dismiss the Curator’s and the Gallery’s leadership, as well as to reconsider their allotment of public funds. More importantly, MCC is brought into the conversation in a BBC (2018) report stating that they “announced that the painting would return to the wall”, leading users to believe that the Gallery was mandated to reinstate the painting.

“And it's back. Most interestingly, reading between the lines, it seems that Manchester City Council, as owners of the gallery, have overruled @mcrartgallery management. Well done everyone. This time, we won, cultural elitism lost. [Link to newspaper article]” (Tweet 13226; edited to remove link)

In the same way that we may consider MCC ‘absent’ in the Nymphgate conversation, we may also consider the Nymphgate community ‘absent’ outside of their online environment. Unfortunately, without facilitating technologies or ways of knowing that visitors are also Nymphgate users, this online community was not represented in the space where the takeover took place. This perceived absence, however, does not imply that the Nymphgate community was not able to exercise influence to the Gallery — for the online community’s impact is enacted in the actions and relationships of influential (decision-making) offline actors.
6.4. Conclusion

In this chapter I have explored the Nymphgate network — that is, the resulting Twitter conversation and community that took shape following the takeover event at the Manchester Art Gallery in January 2018. To analyse this network, I used mixed data collected synchronously over a ten-day period. The data was aggregated using a series of keywords and phrases associated with the takeover, which, following an extensive cleaning process, was analysed in two parts. First I explored the Nymphgate conversation using Twitter’s technological affordances that are made visible and collectible through metadata — which helped me understand the role of the technology itself in shaping and organising the Nymphgate network. The second part of my analysis sought to understand the themes of the conversation using the same language that users utilised (per my ANT framework). To do so, I implemented an inductive qualitative content analysis approach to the content of the posts and found three main themes of the Nymphgate conversation.

Through these analyses, we can see that there are certain actors who heavily influenced the Nymphgate conversation — from the rate at which the conversation took shape, to the inclusion of certain hashtags, and the language that users adopted in their criticisms. One of these influential actors is the Brown article (2018) where the Gallery’s Curator of Contemporary Art was interviewed about the takeover. After this article was published, we see a correlating spike on the timeline of the conversation, as well as the inclusion of two hashtags that had not been present before: #metoo and #timesup. Both of these hashtags refer to a comment made by the Curator as she explained how the contemporary socio-cultural environment influenced their decisions for the event. Here, the Curator became a spokesperson for the Gallery in the Nymphgate network and as a result, became a target for many of the criticisms users had. The Curator, like the painting, is one of the actors who transcended the Gallery’s spaces and forms of presence (Couldry, 2000).

I argue that the Nymphgate network took shape not only in the relationships mediated by the platform’s technological affordances, but also in the relationships between actors who transcended the Gallery’s spaces and forms of presence. In this sense, the Nymphgate network is organised not only in the relationships between
Twitter users, but also between these users and actors who are not actively participating in the platform (either as non-active users or because they do not have an account). For example, the Gallery’s presence is mediated as other users tag the institutional account (@mcrartgallery) in their comments, resulting in making this account the most visible user in the Nymphgate network.

Furthermore, the Nymphgate network also took shape within a specific socio-cultural and political organisational system that had opposing influences on the actors involved. For example, whereas the Curator and the actors involved in the takeover event took cues from this broader context to reconceptualise the Gallery’s collection (and physical spaces); online audiences did not think that the Gallery should be influenced by this environment. In this sense, there are certain actors who are implicit in the Nymphgate network without being Twitter users — such as this shared socio-cultural and political organisational system and the artist who led the takeover event (Boyce). In ANT terms, the Nymphgate network is formed in the performed relations by heterogeneous actors and in their translations of similarities and differences — not only in their perceptions and relations to particular actors, but also in their perceptions of forms of presence.

Overall, the Nymphgate network recoded the takeover event by distilling it to one performance only: the temporary removal of Hylas and the Nymphs. In this sense, as I will explore in more detail in the following chapters, there are three aspects of the Nymphgate network that had an impact to staff members and, subsequently, to the Gallery brand network. The first aspect is a result of users mediating the Gallery’s role in the Nymphgate conversation — meaning that, by tagging the Gallery’s account in their comments the Web Manager was suddenly overwhelmed by the amount of feedback. The second aspect relates to the first one, as the Nymphgate network made clear that the Gallery’s relationships with online audiences are legitimated by only one staff member (the Web Manager). Here, the Nymphgate network highlighted a resourcing issue that had historical roots to previous Directors and organisational systems. The third aspect relates to the second most prominent theme in the Nymphgate discussion, Role Questions, as it highlighted a discrepancy in the perceived value that the Gallery offers as a cultural institution.
Studying the Nymphgate network through social media data alone gives us a limited perspective on the potential influence of social media to the Manchester Art Gallery brand network. This chapter enabled me to explore the Nymphgate community as it took shape as a network in and of itself; the following chapters, however, will aim to understand the potential influence of this mediated online community as an actor in the Gallery brand network. To this end, the following chapters explore the relationships between several staff members and the Nymphgate network at two different points in time. Relying on semi-structured interviews, first I will explore how the events leading up to the takeover event (resulting in a new artwork titled *Six Acts*) and the subsequent Nymphgate network influenced how the Gallery organises knowledge and information; and second, how the Gallery brand network was renegotiated following these events.
7. Asymmetric Relationships Between ‘Digital’ and ‘Physical’

“So, let’s start from the beginning” said the Curator of Contemporary Art, when I asked her to describe the conversations that led up to the takeover event, before embarking on a description of group workshops and Sonia Boyce’s artistic process, and exploring the relationships between the event and the Gallery’s human and non-human actors. The Curator’s account is one of twelve interviews I conducted with staff members,\(^{47}\) who were chosen because of their role with the takeover event — or, in other words, because of their roles and relationships with the controversy (Callon, 1986a) I aim to explore. These individuals hold different positions within the Gallery and will be referred to as such in order to protect their anonymity:

- The Director\(^ {48}\)
- The Senior Operational Lead (then acting as Deputy Director)
- The Campaigns Manager
- The Curator of Contemporary Art\(^ {49}\)
- A Volunteer
- The Data Manager
- The Graphic Designer
- The Development Manager
- The Web Manager
- The Learning Manager of Lifelong Learning and Volunteering\(^ {50}\)
- The Head of Learning and Engagement\(^ {51}\)
- The Learning Manager of Communities

The interviews took place at the Manchester Art Gallery between August and October 2018, with the aim of gaining individual understandings of the takeover event and its

\(^{47}\) Boyce unfortunately did not reply my invitation to participate in an interview. See Chapter 10 where I address this issue further.

\(^{48}\) In Chapter 5 I refer to this individual as the new (current) Director. From this chapter onwards I refer to this individual as the Director.

\(^{49}\) Hereafter, the Curator.

\(^{50}\) Hereafter, Learning Manager of Volunteering.

\(^{51}\) Hereafter, Head of Learning.
relationship with the Gallery brand. In keeping with ANT, the interviews were semi-structured so as to let each individual speak for themselves about their roles and perspectives, and of their relationships to others who were involved in the takeover event. The interview questions were split into three parts so as to understand individuals’ perspectives on the Gallery brand, to explore who they think is involved in the brand (and to what extent), and to gain a better understanding of the takeover (including how it came about, perceived outcomes, and the potential impact of the online feedback it received). I will come back to the responses regarding the Gallery brand and those involved in it in the following chapter; here, however, I will focus on the responses regarding the takeover event as shared experiences throughout the event’s timeline.

Although each individual shared their own perspectives towards the event, a few common threads formed between these accounts. First, the description of the event varied between those who were involved as decision-makers (either leading up to the event or afterwards) and those who were not, which resulted in conversations that justified the takeover and conversations that shied away from the event altogether. Second, the interviews highlighted the perception that the Gallery operates in two spaces (physical and digital) where different types of actors have different types of relationships with one another. Such a distinction reflects the value attributed to each space and, therefore, to the actors and the relationships that take place in such spaces. The paradox of the takeover event is in its disruption of working practices in the physical space and ‘business as usual’ approach to the digital space, which resulted in unexpected and unintended outcomes (especially those concerning the existing relationships with particular actors).

The chapter is structured in four parts and, because the interviewees were involved at different stages of the takeover event, I will rely more on specific individual accounts in some of the sections. I begin with a discussion of the workshops that led up to the takeover and the implications of these group activities in terms of decision-making and key actors. From the list of interviewees, only the Campaigns Manager, the Curator of Contemporary Art, the Learning Manager of Volunteering, and the

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52 See Appendix 1 for the list of interview questions.
Learning Manager of Communities participated in these workshops; however only the Curator and the Learning Manager of Volunteering provided details about the conversations that took place in these workshops (including decisions made and who participated). As such, for this first section, I will focus on the responses from these two interviewees primarily to explore and analyse the processes that led up to the takeover event.

I will then follow with a discussion of how the Gallery managed the event’s outcomes, mainly in relation to audience’s reactions and the reinstatement of the painting, as a way to explore the event’s potential for disrupting existing relationships. At this point I will use a broader range of voices (including the Senior Operational Lead, one of the Gallery’s Volunteers, the Web Manager, and the Learning Manager of Communities) to discuss how audience feedback to the temporary removal resonated beyond the takeover network within ‘large scale ordering patterns’ (Law, 1994) of the Gallery’s local authority. The next two sections focus on the responses that the Gallery received after the event, mainly through social media platforms and the Gallery blog, as reported in news outlets, and in person. Most interviewees reflected on these reactions as an unanticipated aspect of the event, especially those which called into question the role of the Gallery and of the curators.

The third section, then, explores the perceived role of social media and online audiences from the Gallery’s perspective in relation to the takeover event, noting the tension between existing working practices and future directions. Here, I will rely primarily on the responses from the Web Manager (as he was, and still is, responsible for managing the Gallery’s social media platforms and website) and from the Head of Learning (who reflected on the dichotomy between physical and digital audiences in relation to the Gallery’s control over these spaces). Finally, I will conclude the chapter with a discussion of the potential impacts of the takeover event to the Gallery brand, as described by various interviewees. At this point I will explore the differences in perceptions from those who are full-time staff members at the Gallery and those who share their workload between the institutions of the
Manchester Museums & Galleries Partnership\(^{53}\) (such as the Data Manager, the Graphic Designer, and the Development Manager).

In this chapter I explore the themes that arose during my conversations with individuals involved with the takeover event through the lens of Actor Network Theory. In particular I will use Law’s (1994) writings of ‘modes of ordering’ and ‘patterns of deletion’ to argue that the impact of the takeover event lies in the asymmetric value perception the Gallery assigns to the physical and digital spaces in which it operates. To do so, I will adapt Couldry’s (2000) argument of how media power is legitimised in the asymmetric relations between ‘media and ordinary worlds’ through silencing particular actors. In this sense, I will explore the Gallery’s separation between spaces and types of engagement as a way to legitimise the actors involved in creating, maintaining, and influencing its brand.

\(^{53}\) The Manchester Museums & Galleries Partnership (or ‘the Partnership’) is composed of the Manchester Art Gallery, The Whitworth, and the Manchester Museum.
7.1. Organising Six Acts

The Manchester Art Gallery invited Sonia Boyce to exhibit a range of her artworks in a retrospective exhibition, which would open to the public from Friday 23 March 2018–Sunday 22 July 2018 (Manchester Art Gallery, n.d.c). As part of this exhibition the Gallery commissioned a new artwork that not only reflected Boyce’s artistic process but that also responded to the Gallery’s existing displays. As such, the resulting piece — titled *Six Acts* — aimed to bring the audience “as an integral part of the artwork” (Royal Academy, n.d.) and to “explore ‘gender trouble’ among the gallery’s 19th century painting displays and wider culture” (Manchester Art Gallery, n.d.c)

The Curator of Contemporary Art was Boyce’s main point of contact with the Gallery and so she was responsible for organising the retrospective exhibition as well as for coordinating the commissioned work. So to plan for the new artwork the Curator and Boyce hosted three workshops with various Gallery staff members to discuss how they could work together, which proved essential to set the tone not only for the artwork but for the responses and outcomes it engendered from the public and within the Gallery alike.

When we knew we wanted to work with Sonia she was very keen and I was very keen to do something new to start the process, because her work is all about bringing people together. It's exciting because this could be really impactful. Had no idea of course what it was going to be, so it just felt right to just literally get some people together in a room with Sonia. At the beginning of that relationship just to kind of to say "ok just come and join conversation". So that was just internally to start with, that was just me and some of the curators and learning. It was really just feeling my way, you know, in terms of the starting point it was just really sort of intuitive in terms of what felt right in thinking about Sonia's practice. (Curator of Contemporary Art)

As the Curator describes above, one of her principal aims was to nurture a relationship with Boyce that was guided by her artistic process, so the workshops she organised intended to ‘bring people together’ and to discuss as a group how the artwork would take shape and who would be involved in its creation. Significantly, the Curator invited colleagues to ‘join a conversation’ about curatorial decisions, so the workshops became what the Senior Operational Lead described as “an
opportunity for people who don’t necessarily get to have their voices heard or to make decisions”. Through these workshops, as I will discuss in more detail later in this chapter, we see a point of departure (or a disruption) in the Gallery’s existing working practices and in the Curator’s own role — for where she would normally be individually responsible for making curatorial decisions regarding contemporary art, she now needed to share her authoritative (and authorial) role with others.

The Learning Manager of Volunteering recalls the first workshop with Boyce, which was only attended by some members of the curatorial and learning teams, where the group walked around the different gallery spaces whilst discussing their feelings and perceptions. When the group reached Gallery 10, then called ‘In Pursuit of Beauty’, Boyce said "it’s really fleshy in here[ ]...[ ]it’s very sensory, it’s a very sexualised space" — to which the group responded in surprise "I guess it is". The group’s response to Boyce’s comment is another point of departure, this time as seen in the disruption between the existing relationships between staff members and the collection on display. During this first workshop the group was asked to renegotiate their interpretations of the works exhibited through the lens of new visitors (or with “fresh eyes” as the Learning Manager of Communities described) and to reflect not only on individual pieces but on the entire space. So during the walk-through with Boyce, the group was surprised to realise how accustomed they each had become to the space and the subjects of the works on display, which, in conjunction to the room’s title, became what the Curator called a “wake up call” to revise what “the Gallery is saying in the twenty-first century”. In other words, the group was asked to question the existing relationships between non-human actors (the collection), human actors (visitors and staff), and the environment where they interact — that is, the Gallery’s physical space as part of its contemporary social, cultural, and political contexts.

For the second workshop, the group grew to also include a few members from the visitor services team; at this point the group had already decided to work within Gallery 10 and Boyce had decided on the format for her new artwork — a live set of

54 As mentioned in the previous section, only four out of the twelve interviewees attended these workshops: the Campaigns Manager, the Curator of Contemporary Art, the Learning Manager of Volunteering, and the Learning Manager of Communities.
six performances (or six acts) in the style of a takeover event. Here, the Curator notes that although Boyce had taken on a facilitating role during the workshops, she made a “directorial decision” to bring Family Gorgeous (a collective of drag artists) and Lasana Shabazz (performance artist) to perform during the event. Whilst the drag artists were invited to respond to artworks within Gallery 10, Boyce invited Shabazz specifically to respond to the painting *Othello the Moor of Venice* by James Northcote. These performances were aimed to not only “queer those spaces” as the Curator mentions, but also to question the Gallery’s interpretative frameworks within contemporary social and political environments.

The third workshop was the most attended with around 20 participants including members from various staff teams and a few volunteers the Learning Manager of Volunteering had invited. During this last workshop, the group decided to temporarily remove *Hylas and the Nymphs* knowing that it is a popular artwork within the Gallery and with the expectation that its removal would garner some attention (although they admit they did not anticipate the amount of responses). The removal was intended to be temporary (though no one was able to specify exactly how temporary) and to “make visible” the conversations that were taking place ‘internally’. In other words, the removal was aimed to be a mediator that extended the dialogue taking place between decision-makers (workshop’s participants) and non-decision makers (visiting public).

These workshops are significant in that they trace the formation of an actor-network in and of itself — that is, the takeover — through the relationship of various actors: performance and contemporary artists; the Gallery’s collection, staff members, and physical space; and audiences. Throughout the workshops we see a series of individuals get together to ‘solve a problem’ by joining in a conversation about how the commission should take place. As the network evolved to include more and more diverse actors, the conversation shifted to negotiate and re-negotiate the different relationships between the Gallery’s human and non-human actors. The takeover network eventually achieved its goal and produced a new artwork, *Six Acts*, which was performed and recorded on 26th January 2018 and displayed to the public in Boyce’s retrospective a few months after. From an ANT perspective, these workshops...
represent the takeover network's moments of translation and so they provide a framework to understand how the event impacted the Gallery brand network.

7.1.1. Moments of Translation in the Takeover Network

As discussed in Chapter 3, Callon (1986a) describes four moments of translation in the formation of an actor-network, these are: problematisation, interessement, enrolment, and mobilisation. In these moments, actors identify themselves against other actors, including their roles and influence each may have over others. In doing so, there is a simultaneous production of knowledge in the negotiated relationships between the actors and a hierarchy may be formed. These moments of translation are evidenced in the workshops and conversations that took place leading up to, during, and after the event. Although the takeover network successfully created a new artwork, it was marred with controversies once the event was broadcasted to a broader public (through newspapers and social media platforms). Before looking at how “translation becomes treason” (Callon, 1986a, p.219) for the takeover network and its actors, let’s begin with how the network was established.

The first moment of translation is problematisation and it involves the creation of a network as a response to a ‘problem’ — that is, commissioning Sonia Boyce for a new artwork and working in a way that respects her artistic methodology. During the first workshops, staff members started to assemble the network when they ‘joined in conversation’ as the Curator describes at the beginning of this chapter. In doing so they negotiated their roles as human actors, in sharing curatorial decision-making, and with non-human actors, in questioning the physical environment of Gallery 10 in relation to current social and political contexts. During these negotiations, three individuals emerged as key actors and one became the network’s first ‘obligatory passage point’ (Callon, 1986a) — marking the second moment of translation (interessement).

The Learning Manager of Volunteering, the Curator, and Boyce were key influencers in the workshops as they each helped define actors’ roles within the takeover network. The first two are significant as they used their influence and individual roles to invite groups of actors who are not normally involved in making curatorial
decisions within the Gallery. For example, after the first workshop the Curator emailed all staff members with an open invitation to join the conversation and be a part of the takeover, which resulted in a larger group for the second workshop that included members of other teams such as Visitor Services. The Learning Manager of Volunteering, on the other hand, is significant because she used her influence as part of her institutional role to invite and include a group of actors who are not seen as decision makers within the Gallery in general — the volunteers. I will expand more on this point in the next chapter where I discuss on the perceived role of volunteers within the Gallery brand network.

Sonia Boyce is significant because her artistic practice and perceived status as a “high profile artist” catalysed a series of conversations based on the embodied experiences within the Gallery’s physical spaces. Her intervention resulted in an event that questioned the ‘physical relationships’ between the collection and the institution, and those who make decisions about these non-human actors. Boyce is also significant as she is recognised as an important and influential artist, which makes her input valuable and actionable. For example, the majority of interviewees mention how the questions Boyce posed during the workshops had already been taking place within the Gallery (about the works on display, what they represent, and how they may be re-interpreted), but had not yet been acted upon. As the Learning Manager of Volunteering said, Boyce challenged them in a way that other artists, who had interventions in the same space, had not — resulting in a wish “to change these spaces for [the] everyday visitor coming in”. Boyce’s intervention, then, is a tipping point that reflects her perceived influence within the Gallery and thus her ascribed role as a decision maker in the takeover network, as well as her potential to influence the Gallery brand network.

Finally, the Curator is significant not only for her ongoing involvement throughout the workshops, but also in becoming a link between this newly formed decision-making group (the takeover network) and the rest of the Gallery’s staff members, as well as the media and the Nymphgate network (as was explored in the previous chapter). From an ANT perspective, the Curator became the network’s ‘obligatory

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55 Such as Risham Syed (Manchester Art Gallery, 2017c) and Joanna Vasconcelos (Manchester Art Gallery, 2014).
passage point’ (Callon, 1986a) — meaning, she became an indispensable mediator between the actors involved in the takeover event by using a range of ‘interessement’ devices. For example, by emailing and inviting staff members to share her curatorial authority through workshops (devices), the Curator successfully disrupted the existing relationships between the Gallery’s human actors and limited decision-making to those who participated in the workshops.

At this point, the takeover network shifted to the third moment of translation (enrolment) as the actors involved accepted and embodied their newly defined roles as decision makers until the live performance. During this moment a few actors became the intermediaries (or spokespeople) for “the masses” (Callon, 1986a, p.214), which in this case are: Sonia Boyce (representing the performance and drag artists), Hylas and the Nymphs (representing the Gallery’s collection), the Curator (representing staff members), Gallery 10 (representing the Gallery’s physical spaces), and event invitees (representing the Gallery’s audiences). These masses formed a network that is not only contingent on their relationships with one another, but one that is also limited to the representativeness of their intermediaries. If the intermediaries are suitably representative, then the network is legitimised in the final moment of translation (mobilisation). In this case, the takeover network successfully achieved its goal of creating a new artwork that respected Boyce’s methodology and that explored the Gallery’s collection on display in relation to contemporary social and cultural contexts.

7.1.2. Moments of Treason

Unfortunately, as I discussed in the previous chapter, the takeover event was heavily criticised in the media and on Twitter as audiences called into question the motives for the temporary removal of Hylas and the Nymphs. In other words, the Gallery found itself in a controversy — more specifically, the takeover network faced a series of controversies in the representativeness of their intermediaries. I argue that this ‘dissidence’ (Callon, 1986a) stems mostly from the mis-translations in the relationships between the Gallery and its audiences and between the Gallery and social media. I question the extent to which a handful of selected invitees were representative of the Gallery’s audiences, as well as the way that the event was
related to online accusations as a misunderstanding of something that was ‘business as usual’.

As the takeover was going to be documented (to be made into the resulting artwork *Six Acts*) the Gallery needed to take certain ‘practical’ steps for the night of the event — primarily, to ensure that participants were accounted for with consent forms and controlled with a sign-up process. For example, the Learning Manager of Communities explains that those who attended the event had been invited through existing means, such as her mailing list for the Gallery’s Philosophy Café; meanwhile, the Volunteer explains how attendees had their names checked from a guest list prior to being admitted into Gallery 10. These processes are interesting to note because they demonstrate a selection process that prioritised attendees who already had an existing relationship with the Gallery (such as through the Philosophy Café) and who were therefore more valued than ‘passive visitors’.

The Development Manager makes a distinction between the Gallery’s “active audience” and “visitors” in that this former audience group are “the doers” who choose to take part in Gallery activities, mostly through those set up by the learning team. The latter group are, for example, “a member of the public who comes in and just walks around the Gallery and doesn’t interact or engage with anybody” — which the Development Manager recognises form the majority of the Gallery’s audiences. In making this distinction, the Development Manager explains how the Gallery needs to pay particular attention to their active audiences and to ensure that they keep building an active relationship with them through dialogue. So in inviting attendees to the takeover event, who had existing relationships with the Gallery, the network created a controversy not only in the representativeness of the attendees but also in the aim of the event.

The Curator describes the aim of the event as a way “to just push this [the conversations] a little bit more in terms of opening it up” to include the Gallery’s audiences and visitors, which is consistent with Boyce’s aim for her commissioned piece. However, due to practical issues with the space and the artwork (filmed

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56 Philosophy Café is a programme run by the learning team and managed by the Learning Manager of Communities.
performance), as well as with existing value systems for audience types, the resulting event and artwork only included a small group of attendees who do not represent the majority of the Gallery’s audiences. In this sense, the success of the event was partly due to the silencing of the masses that the attendees were meant to stand for and to the upholding of existing asymmetrical relationships between actors in the Gallery’s network. This success can also be attributed to the way audiences were represented within the takeover network and the ‘treason’ in how their relationship was translated in the workshops.

Although the event’s attendees were considered ‘active’ audiences within the Gallery, they were not regarded as such during the takeover workshops. For example, the Learning Manager of Volunteering mentions that during these conversations the group discussed audiences only in relation to their potential reactions and “the impact of taking down a very popular painting”. In other words, the network considered these audiences as passive actors, rather than active decision-makers. Instead, the Gallery’s audiences were represented by the Learning Manager of Communities via a select group of active audiences, who had previously participated in the Philosophy Café she hosts. So by the time the event took place, and the painting was replaced by the poster,57 audiences were unknowingly brought into a space where their role had already been assigned and where their relationship with the Gallery’s collection had already been negotiated.

As we now know, removing the painting was met with vehement criticism and varied accusations, however, from the interviewees’ perspectives this act was likened to other instances when paintings are removed temporarily to “go off on loan [...] go off on conservation” as the Learning Manager of Volunteering exemplifies. So even though the interviewees describe the workshops as an innovative way of working, they consider the temporary removal as a ‘business as usual’ activity — thus betraying the aim of the takeover to renegotiate the existing relationships between human actors and the collection. Similarly, the Gallery considered including the exhibition’s hashtag (#MAGSoniaBoyce) to the poster as a usual promotional activity. Unfortunately, however, the takeover network did not consider the role of

57 See Figure 3 in Chapter 6.
social media as an actor nor the potential impact of such tools (like Twitter) as ‘interessement devices’ to mediate their relationships with visitors online. This omission, the Web Manager describes, is the main “flaw [he] look[s] back on” and as such, constitutes one of the biggest outcomes from the takeover event (aside from the new artwork).

Omitting the role of social media and online audiences follows a ‘pattern of deletion’ (Law, 1994) that the Gallery enacts towards digital spaces (and its actors and their relationships). In this sense, the workshops maintained an existing asymmetric value system the Gallery had in place for their audiences, where those enacting on its physical spaces through controlled interactions (such as learning activities) are regarded more valuable than those who choose not to participate or those with digitally mediated relationships. The workshops are significant because they showcase that even when audiences are considered active and valuable, they are still not regarded as decision-makers. In this sense, then, we need to take into consideration the attitudes towards social media, rather than their role, within the Gallery brand network in order to assess the impact of online audiences in relation to it. Before exploring this concept further, I will first assess the ways in which the takeover network mitigated their moments of treason, as a way to understand how the event displaced the network to a digital space.
7.2. Managing Dissidence

Five days after the performance ended, the Guardian published two articles related to the event: one by Mark Brown (2018) and another by Jonathan Jones (2018). In the previous chapter, I discussed in detail the impact of the Brown article (2018) to the Nymphgate network and how it helped catalyse a Twitter community that, for the most part, criticised the removal of *Hylas and the Nymphs*. Eventually other media outlets picked up on this activity and used it to create more hype on Twitter around the removal. As the Senior Operational Lead describes, “the unexpected nature and the ferocity of the response[s]” created an atmosphere of chaos that needed to be managed and a feeling that the Gallery had lost control of what the takeover was supposed to achieve. This feeling was shared amongst most interviewees who reflected on the responses the Gallery received, but it was most poignant in relation to the reactions on social media (especially Twitter) and on the Gallery’s blog as the Web Manager describes below.

It was about nine o’clock at night and I had been on social media since seven o’clock that morning and on the website trying to answer things. And I saw a Twitter message from ABC News Australia, and I think, it was sometime, I don’t know what time of the night that was, at that point. I mean I knew that things, that everything was going wrong, but at that point, it was ABC News Australia saying we want an interview with the curator, I thought “No, this has gone beyond any conceivable thing that we could manage” and there was a literal moment where I just pushed myself away from the computer, said “there’s nothing I can do here” (Web Manager).

Throughout the takeover event, the Gallery’s blog had become a space where users (audiences and visitors, staff members and members of the public) could leave a comment about the event — which in some instances would turn into an online written conversation between users, including the Web Manager and the Curator (Manchester Art Gallery, 2018d). The blog consists of three posts from the Gallery: a copy of the poster text inviting users to join in a conversation; a copy of the press release that followed the reinstatement of *Hylas and the Nymphs*; and a final post summarizing the event, thanking users for their contributions, and a further invitation to continue this dialogue through a “series of public and live streamed events” (Manchester Art Gallery, 2018d). The latter two blog posts represent two
ways in which the Gallery had to manage the dissidence created by the takeover’s controversies, resulting in renewed negotiations in the relationships within the takeover network and between it and the broader Gallery network.

At the time I interviewed the Volunteer, she was tasked with aggregating and analysing the responses that the Gallery received after the event from a variety of sources, including the blog, letters and emails, tracking media articles, and the post-its left by visitors. Her analysis showed similar patterns as my analysis of the Nymphgate network, where the comments she was reading through included “a lot of rhetoric around Nazi Germany and fascism”, as well as “people asking for [the Curator’s] qualifications”, and accusations of censorship. However, it was not just the Gallery receiving such feedback, the Manchester City Council58 was also receiving complaints from their constituents who were “demanding their intervention” and for “people to get sacked over it [the removal]”, as the Senior Operational Lead recalls. The mounting pressure to the Gallery and the Council, from constituents, visitors, and both physical and digital audiences, eventually led to the painting’s reinstatement as the Curator describes below.

The decision was really taken out of our hands, the decision was taken away from the people who’d made the decision to remove it. So yeah. It was back after a week because of the extent of the reaction and a sense of, I think, not wanting to damage the Council’s reputation, the Gallery’s reputation. (Curator of Contemporary Art)

Just as the takeover network had negotiated the role of audiences and their representative — without their consensus, so did the Council negotiate the role of the painting without passing through the network’s obligatory passage point (the Curator) and without the consent of the rest of the network. In other words, the hierarchy that was created through the takeover network disrupted other existing relationships that each actor had outside of this network — thus breaking the ‘relational effects’ that framed and contextualised the takeover network within ‘large scale ordering patterns’ of the Gallery as a civic branch of its local authority (Law, 1994). From this perspective, then, we can consider the Senior Operational Lead’s statement in the second blog post/press release as a way to re-establish the

58 Hereafter the Council.
relationship with the Council through a legitimate (previously mobilised) Gallery representative, as well as a way to re-establish the hierarchy within which the takeover network was assembled. Furthermore, we can consider the Council as an influential actor within the Gallery brand network through their relational effects on reputation as the Curator describes in her comment above.

The third blog post was published only five days after the Senior Operational Lead’s official statement, and it signals a change in tone that is more similar to the first invitation the Gallery extended to its audiences. This post recounts the temporary removal and attempts to justify the action by describing the event and Boyce’s methodology; it further acknowledges the responses to it and proposes to encourage more debate by inviting users to register their interest to attend a future “series of public and live streamed events” (Manchester Art Gallery, 2018d). Those who registered, however, would have to wait until May 17, 2018 to participate in the first of these events in person, or to watch the conversation unfold on a live stream feed through Facebook (Manchester Art Gallery, 2018c). Titled ‘Whose Power on Display?’ this event took place within Gallery 10, under the auspices of the reinstated Hylas and the Nymphs and featured a brief conversation between the Curator and the Director before ‘opening the floor’ to participants to pose questions, provide comments, and enter a discussion not only with these two staff members, but with other participants present in the room.59

I would argue that this event is a reflection of the Gallery’s attempt to re-gain control of the takeover narrative in a space that is not digitally mediated, by recreating the first moments of translation of the takeover network — only this time, involving audience members in the conversation. The Volunteer describes this event as “a platform for people to have a discussion […] because there was a feeling from the online comments that people weren’t able to have that discussion”. Although the Volunteer and other interviewees view this conversation in May a success for the Gallery in the way they created a space where people “felt that they were being listened to” as the Director commented — the event still did not involve online audiences in the conversation. In this way, the Gallery continued to operate with

59 This conversation has since been archived in the Gallery’s YouTube account (Manchester Art Gallery, 2018c).
asymmetric relationships that silences social media platforms and their users, in favour of prioritising their relations with actors in a physical space and with those with more relational influence such as the Council.

This dissonance between the Gallery’s relationships in its physical and digital spaces bears further analysis, more so when these asymmetries influence aspects of the Gallery brand (such as reputation). As such, the next section focuses on interviewees’ perceptions of social media in relation to the takeover event, where I will highlight the existing patterns of deletion towards such tools and the relationships they mediate. I will then follow with a section focusing on the potential influences of the takeover to the Gallery brand by following the chain of actors from the takeover network to the brand network, including the arrival of the Director.  

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60 The Gallery announced the arrival of this Director on October 2017 (Manchester Art Gallery, 2017a), succeeding Maria Balshaw. The Director, however, would not start in this new role until February 2018 — shortly after the takeover and its mediatised debacle.
7.3. Of Social Media and the Takeover

All of the interviewees singled out the Web Manager when I asked them questions about social media and about the Gallery’s online audiences. Also, when I asked about the online feedback they received after the takeover event some would share their opinions freely, whilst others would instantly caveat their responses by distancing themselves. The Campaigns Manager, for example, is the Web Manager’s only full-time colleague in the Audience Development department and she made sure to tell me that she was “not the best person to answer that [question about social media responses]. Although [she] did see one or two things and the conversation around it but wasn’t directly involved with it”. Others, like the Curator, the Head of Learning, the Senior Operational Lead, and the Director, shared very strong opinions about social media and the role it played in the takeover event, particularly in association with traditional media and contemporary socio-political issues (such as Me Too and Time’s Up). Although the social media feedback the Gallery received was mostly negative, most of the interviewees considered these reactions as a positive outcome of the event and, instead, highlighted the difficulties of managing the volume of feedback as future actionable item.

Part of the Web Manager’s responsibilities is to look after the Gallery’s social media platforms, such as the @mcrartgallery Twitter account, and other digital tools, such as the blog. To this end, the Web Manager is the spokesperson for social media and online audiences and the mediator between these tools, their users, and the Gallery network. It is difficult not to empathise with the Web Manager as he had to “deal with quite a lot of abuse and negative comments” as the Graphic Designer described and particularly after analysing Twitter feedback for the previous chapter. As the Curator describes below, the Web Manager’s singular responsibility for managing the Gallery’s relationships with digital tools and online audiences highlights an issue within the organisation of the Gallery’s network. I would argue, however, that this issue is the result of a naturalised historical mode of ordering (Couldry, 2000) within the Gallery where asymmetric relationships exist in favour of its physical spaces and the relationships that are fostered within these spaces.
My colleague [the Web Manager] was quite shaken by the whole process, [...] I think because of that curatorial role that he played in terms of managing social media activity. And I found that really interesting too, what I think to reflect on the fact that someone feels they have all of that responsibility something they’re supposed to be open and democratic and actually he's the person who's micromanaging that. So, that's really revealing too and we've talked quite a bit about that stuff which has been good. (Curator of Contemporary Art)

Earlier in this chapter I explored the Development Manager’s perceptions about the Gallery’s audiences and how she makes a distinction between ‘active’ audiences and visitors. In this divide there is more value ascribed to ‘active’ audiences because they take part in activities organised by the Gallery, which, for example, correlates to the Learning Manager of Communities’ description of the “nuanced conversations” she is able to have with attendees to the Philosophy Café workshop she hosts. When I asked the Development Manager, however, about her perception of online audiences she describes them as “different” from either audiences and visitors, because online audiences are “that one step removed” and because “they have different reasons for engaging with us and they have that separation that the online world creates”. In effect, the Development Manager distances and separates online audiences from the Gallery in her perception that such actors operate outside the Gallery’s physical spaces. This distinction is shared amongst interviewees, along with a belief that these spaces operate in “two different time streams” as the Senior Operating Lead describes below — where decisions, engagement, and relationships are much slower between actors in the physical dimension than in the digital.

I felt like there was two different time streams. There was the one that we used to deal with the Gallery, where you do have five or six days to respond to somebody and when you do something which is sort of being framed as part of a long-term ongoing conversation [...] we’ve got loads of time because it’s a gradually evolving rolling thing with our physical visitors within the Gallery space. And then there’s the way that time exists in the digital world, the social media world, where it’s ‘respond now’ and by not responding it feeds it. (Senior Operating Lead)

In the quote above, the Senior Operational Lead describes what it felt like to be away from the Gallery at the height of the online responses, when her colleagues were inundated with media requests from local and international media outlets and the Council was fielding demands from their constituents. Her description of the Gallery’s relationship with audiences in the physical space as “gradually evolving”
and “rolling” points to a long-term strategic engagement and to a habitual type of behaviour with such actors. Such strategies further my argument that the Gallery ascribes more value to these types of relationships from a practical point of view — for such tactics require conscious and recurrent use of resources, including staff time and expertise, that could be used instead towards fostering similar relationships with online actors. This discrepancy may be attributed to the Gallery’s historical mode of ordering, or in other words, to the legacy of decision-making by previous directors and the local authority.

7.3.1. Past Decisions in the Present

The Manchester Art Gallery is a branch of the Manchester City Council and, as such, is financed through this local authority; similarly, most of the Gallery employees are Council employees. The only individual who is not a Council employee is the Director, who is instead employed by the University of Manchester as part of his shared responsibilities through the Manchester Museums & Galleries Partnership (or ‘the Partnership’) as a dual director for the Gallery and The Whitworth. This structure means, then, that the Gallery is considered as a public institution and its collection as a publicly owned collection. It also means, that the Gallery and the Council are financially responsible towards one another — meaning that the Gallery is expected to, and legally bound to, “deliver a balanced budget” as the Senior Operational Lead explained. Similarly, the Council is responsible for setting the budget for the Gallery through their ‘Art Galleries Committee’ (Manchester City Council, 2016) — which, in recent years has been significantly reduced.

From this perspective, the Gallery has a very strong relationship with the Council, one that has the potential to drastically alter the number of human actors (staff members) within the Gallery network and the relationships between them — some of which may be decision-makers. In this sense, the Council is an influential actor in the Gallery brand network, whether or not other actors in this network recognise it as such. As the Web Manager mentions below, when the Council cut the Gallery’s budget his department was directly and deeply affected, which has resulted in a heavier workload for him and the Campaigns Manager. I would argue that the impact of these cuts are one of the reasons that led to not only the divestment of resources
from those who manage the relationships with online actors, but also to the
divestment of value from digital spaces and those involved with them. Such resource
asymmetry may well be one of the causes that led to the perception of losing control
over the online reactions and, in doing so, putting at risk the reputation of the
Gallery and the Council alike.

We also as part of Manchester City Council. City Council itself has social media
guidelines, behaviours as well, so we obviously adhere to those as much as we can […]
Our previous director aligned with the central government austerity programme,
which has made ongoing cuts to local government which has meant that this particular
Council has had to cut £350 million of budget in the last five or seven years,
thereabouts. Which has had a direct effect to staffing levels here, our comms team,
when I joined it was six, and six and half at times, sometimes more with freelancers —
there's now two. (Web Manager)

Prior to the Director’s arrival, the Gallery was directed by Maria Balshaw⁶¹ who, as
the Development Manager explained, was the first director to head both the Gallery
and The Whitworth as part of the Partnership deal. Balshaw led both institutions
from 2011 to 2017, before moving to the Tate, whilst maintaining a very close
relationship with the Council as the Director of Culture for Manchester City Council
(Whitworth Art Gallery, n.d.). During her tenure, Balshaw was instrumental to the
Gallery as she initiated a re-branding of the institution with a “vision” that was “more
about art, art in terms of spectacle, that kind of extraordinary thing you could come
and look at” as the Learning Manager of Volunteering explained. At the same time,
however, Balshaw “was never very keen on diverting resources and energy to digital”
as the Senior Operational Lead mentioned. In this sense, when the takeover event
took place there was already a historical mode of ordering and an asymmetrical value
and resource allocation system that silenced online spaces — therefore legitimising
actors and their relationships within the Gallery’s physical spaces.

Throughout the takeover network we see social media and their users silenced in
favour of ‘active audiences’, which in fact was the “flaw” that the Web Manager saw
looking back to the event. He goes on to explain that:

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⁶¹ As discussed in Chapter 5.
The error was in not stopping and saying: ‘no we’re not just going to do this, we are actually going to sit down and we’re gonna think this through and we’re going to see the role social media will play in this’. Whereas what in effect happened was that through omission, a lack of clear understanding, maybe some misunderstanding of hierarchy, and a lack of listening to our gut instinct I think fundamentally I think is absolutely key. (Web Manager)

In this comment, the Web Manager highlights an issue with the takeover network and their representative within the broader Gallery network. From his perspective it was not clear who should be responsible for risk management and for representing the Gallery amidst the criticism. This misunderstanding is another example of dissonance, this time between the takeover’s obligatory passage point (the Curator) and the Gallery network. As the Web Manager describes below, they were caught in a “perfect storm” for, at the height of the online reactions, media requests, and constituent demands, the usual chain of actors that he would go through to publish an official response was not in place. As he explained,

[the] previous director had moved on to the Tate, our new director was not yet in position, our acting director who is our deputy director was away on a course at the Lake District, totally off grid, and I think there were a number of other senior managers who were variously not around. And so it was like the perfect storm in a way, there was, there was no alternative or channel. (Web Manager)

In this case, I would argue that the Web Manager was his own ‘traitor’ and that this “misunderstanding of hierarchy” could have been solved if he had participated within the takeover network from the beginning. In doing so he could have represented social media and online audiences throughout the workshops and he would have had clarity about the Curator’s role as the spokesperson for the takeover. From the interviewees’ perspectives, however, the volume and content of social media responses highlighted a mix of issues that stem from the mis-interpretation of the Gallery’s relationship with their online audiences. Primarily these issues are rooted in the legacy of asymmetric hierarchies between actors that are related with more than one network. To this end, one of the outcomes from the takeover event is a re-evaluation of the role and relationships between particular actors in terms of control and oversight — primarily that of the Council, social media tools, and staff members responsible for these tools.
7.3.2. **Looking Forward**

Despite the overwhelming negative reactions to the temporary removal of *Hylas and the Nymphs*, the majority of interviewees have a positive outlook on the comments they received. The Director and the Development Manager, for example, appreciated that the online debate got the Gallery “talked about” and “put on a map”. The Head of Learning, on the other hand, explained that from these reactions it was clear that “people cared passionately about the [Gallery’s] historic collection” and that the removal provoked a good debate where people “questioned [the] Gallery’s role in what is shown and what isn’t”. This debate, however, was healthy and appreciated until it "moved to a place where that debate couldn’t take place because everything just became vitriol", as the Head of Learning described, and where users were no longer having nuanced discussions as the takeover network had originally envisioned. These online responses prompted the Web Manager to stop responding to comments on all social media platforms and to work with the Council to produce press releases they could publish instead.

Once the painting was reinstated and the feedback died down, the Web Manager started to consider what he could take away from this experience and apply it towards the future. Particularly he considers the role of social media from a strategic point of view and for the future of the Gallery.

So I've been thinking about this quite a lot recently, especially since hylasgate or Nymphgate or whatever you want to call it, about strategy and about the fact that we don't really have one anymore. [...] I would say we're definitely at the moment in a place of not having strategy, and I'm quite comfortable with that. I don't think that, I just don't think that having had strategies in the past, a fair few of them, I just don't know what their relevance is right now. [...] I mean that we have, obviously, habitual and understood behaviours, and activities and processes, that are guided by that brand guidelines. But in terms of their [social media] long-term strategy, we're in a place where we're really thinking: 'What is this really for? Why are we doing this? Who is it for?' you know fundamentally, 'is it for us?' or 'is it for our visitors?' (Web Manager)

In this sense, the Web Manager has the potential to deeply impact the Gallery and its brand network in his re-evaluation of the role of social media as communication
tools and as mediators with online audiences. The Web Manager’s key role is particularly significant if he continues to be the spokesperson for these audiences within the brand network. It may be possible in the future, however, that online actors have multiple relationships with more than one actor within the brand network — which depends, of course, on the outcomes of more re-negotiations of these relationships and how well represented these online actors are in the network. These re-negotiations have already started to take place between staff members, as the Curator described earlier, and between the Gallery and the Council.

Another outcome from the take-over event is a re-negotiated relationship with the Council, particularly with members of their communications and public relations (PR) teams. This re-negotiation started when Manchester constituents demanded action from their councillors, which eventually led to the reinstatement of Hylas and the Nymphs. The ‘new’ relationships impacted the Campaigns Manager in particular who, instead of looking after media requests as she had been doing up until the takeover, now needs to follow a process where all requests go through the Council’s PR team. The Senior Operational Lead also hints at another re-negotiation where the Web Manager could potentially “be joining up with the social media team across the road”, further adding that the Gallery needs “a much wider buy in across the organization so everybody needs to be much more social media savvy, especially me”. In saying so, the Senior Operational Lead recognises the need for a re-evaluation of using social media platforms as a shared responsibility between the Web Manager and individuals across the Council and the Gallery. In other words, the takeover event has been a catalyst for a re-negotiation of the role of social media across the Gallery’s broader organisational systems, thus involving hierarchies that may not be immediately recognised within the brand network.

Another outcome of the takeover event is a clarification of the Senior Operational Lead’s responsibilities as a ‘dual’ spokesperson — both within the Gallery and within the Council:

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62 See quote from Curator of Contemporary Art at the beginning of section 7.3.
63 The Manchester Art Gallery is physically adjacent to the Manchester City Council.
I’m a senior Council officer within the Gallery obviously because [the Director] is a University employee who is seconded as a Director. So I have ultimate responsibility for the safeguarding of the collection, the buildings, the asset side. But also, as I found in February, also directly accountable in terms of reputation and comms and impact. [...] there’s a sort of an underlying strong risk management element to what I do, which is about bridging the curatorial, programming, vision sides with corporate responsibilities. (Senior Operational Lead)

As the Senior Operational Lead explains, her responsibilities lie at the intersection of the relational issues between the Gallery and the Council. For example, as the Council’s spokesperson she is tasked with safeguarding and managing public assets (such as the building and the collections); on the other hand, as the Gallery’s spokesperson, she is tasked with reporting and matching curatorial and programming decisions against the Council’s scopes. In doing so, the Senior Operational Lead needs to balance how the Council and the Gallery are perceived by one another, thus simultaneously managing the reputation of both institutions through her communication efforts. In this sense, the Senior Operational Lead is a key actor within the Gallery brand network as she represents the Gallery’s broader organisational systems which the institution is a part of. Her actions may determine whether or not the Council intervenes with the Gallery’s network in the future by making decisions on behalf of certain actors, such as they did in this case by re-instating the painting after the takeover event.

It is clear, then, that the event and the network that assembled for it had particular effects on the Gallery’s existing relationships. When I asked the interviewees, however, whether or not they thought the event had an impact on the Gallery brand their responses became less direct. Most of the interviews took place a couple of months after the event, so my participants had to rely on their memories of what had taken place and in what order. As a result, most of the responses about the relationship between the event and the Gallery brand revolved around the arrival of the Director — and with him a new way of thinking and a new language to describe the institution’s human actors. In other words, the Director’s arrival signalled not only a new actor mix within the network, but also a new framework through which to negotiate actors’ roles and relationships.
7.4. The Takeover and the Gallery brand

One week after the event took place, the Director joined the Manchester Art Gallery and one of the first tasks he had upon arrival was to “deal” with the event and with the effects on responses the Gallery and the Council were receiving. He described the situation that the Gallery was in as an “induction to the place” and in that it exposed “all the flaws in how people saw it, how it worked, how the thinking process internally, the thinking process externally, how the Council regards the museum”. For the Director, the event was a way to understand who the actors are involved with the Gallery and what their relationships are, which provided the framework of how the institution is organised and where his role lies within this system. Furthermore, he considers the situation that greeted him at the Gallery as a “big help in thinking through how we might approach a project [in the future]”. In this sense, the event provided a starting point for the Director to re-assemble the Gallery’s actors around him and his ideology of Arte Útil.

The Director is the co-director of the Asociación de Arte Útil along with contemporary artist Tania Bruguera (Arte Útil, n.d.a). This organisation promotes the development of the concept of Arte Útil, which is translated into English as ‘useful art’. The ideology behind this concept suggests that we can use “artistic thinking to imagine, create and implement tactics that change how we act in society” (Arte Útil, n.d.a) — in other words, useful art promotes the idea that art can be used as a tool in our daily lives and in doing so it creates an impact in our social, cultural, and political environments. Useful art was initially developed by Tania Bruguera and formalised in partnership with several institutions, such as Grizedale Arts, the Middlesbrough Institute of Modern Art, and most recently The Whitworth (Whitworth Art Gallery, 2017). The constant link between these institutions is the Director who has taken senior positions in all three, acting as Deputy Director for the first and Director for the second, before moving to Manchester as the new joint leader of The Whitworth and the Manchester Art Gallery.

It would seem that everywhere the Director goes, useful art is adopted. For example The Whitworth recently won a £150,000 Transformative Grant from Outset Partners as part of a joint project with Van Abbemuseum in Eindhoven, the Netherlands,
called ‘The Constituent Museum’ — whose aim is to “turn their museums into engines of social change through Arte Útil” (McGivern, 2019). Prior to this, the Director opened the Office of Useful Art in Middlesbrough Institute of Modern Art in 2015 when he was their (then) Director (Arte Útil, n.d.b). Although there are no official indicators that the Manchester Art Gallery is legitimising this concept further through specific projects, some of the interviewees described the Director’s arrival as a turning point for the Gallery brand. The Data Manager, for example, explained that

The Gallery's at a point where it's working out who it is ... because there's a new Director who is so, you know, they're Arte Útil and all of that work. So [the Director] is a kind of international thinker in that, or leading thinker in that particular way of considering the role and purpose of art and society, which is quite different from the prevailing management Gallery I would say. (Data Manager)

At the time of these interviews the Gallery had not yet undergone any specific changes that could be directly attributed to the Director’s arrival, yet some of the interviewees opted to use the language of useful art to describe existing projects within the Gallery or to describe some of the outcomes of the takeover event. The Web Manager, for example, discussed how the Gallery’s current programming around health and well-being, including the exhibition ‘And Breathe...’ (Manchester Art Gallery, 2018a), are part of a general direction where art is “in some sense, and I am going to use one of [the Director’s] words, useful”. From this perspective, the Director is a key actor in the Gallery brand network as he not only can have a deep impact in the roles and relationships between existing actors, but he can also have an impact in how these actors perceive actions that have both already taken place and have yet to take place. I would speculate that the timing between the takeover and the Director’s arrival will muddle the perception of the event’s impact to the Gallery brand — particularly if the brand is to be considered as a network of decision-makers.

None of the interviewees believed that the takeover event had an impact to the Gallery brand. The Data Manager, for example, suggested that the event did not have an effect because “people have short memories”; the Volunteer agrees with this saying that she does “not think people have dwelled too much what's happened”. These, and similar types of comments, point to an understanding of the Gallery
brand as a perception held by its audiences and visitors — or in other words, to a belief that the brand is its reputation. At this point we have a discrepancy between particular actors, for as I explored earlier in the chapter, the reputation of the Gallery and of the Council is an issue that mobilised the Council to intervene. This dissonance may stem from the different roles of these actors, on one hand the Curator and the Senior Operational Lead had strong relationships with the takeover network (directly and indirectly), whilst on the other hand the Data Manager and the Learning Manager of Communities do not have the same type of relationship with the takeover nor with the Gallery’s broader modes of ordering.

When describing the feeling of chaos that online comments created for the Gallery, the Development Manager noted how this scenario led to a realisation that the Gallery does not have control of the brand in these spaces “because the story is shaped by multiple voices in a way other formats aren’t”. She also considers the nature and content of the Gallery’s collection in comparison to other similar institutions that may have “contentious material [such as] human remains”, saying that these institutions may be better prepared for a scenario where its audiences and visitors challenge their aims. In her comments, the Development Manager furthers the argument of the discrepancy between actors, and their relationships, in the Gallery’s physical and digital spaces. To her, in the physical environment there are less actors that can be involved to “shape the story” and so the narrative can be more controlled — in this sense, the Gallery brand is a reflection of the relationship between actors and, although it may be shared by a multitude of actors, the brand is only validated by a limited number whose relations take place in the physical environment.
7.5. Conclusion

Throughout this chapter, I have explored the different ways in which the takeover event has impacted some of the Gallery’s actors and their relationships with one another — from the first moments of translation in planning a new artwork, to managing dissidence as official statements. One of the issues that is consistent in the interviewees’ responses is the existing asymmetric relationships that exist between physical and digital spaces, which is part of historical and ‘large scale ordering patterns’ (Law, 1994) based on the silencing of social media as a digital actor. This continued pattern of deletion is manifested in the takeover by the lack of consideration of the role of social media as part of the event, which led in turn to a sense of chaos and to a temporary break in communication with online audiences. In choosing not to take part of the Twitter community that assembled following the event, the Gallery silenced themselves and other actors who were not part of the takeover.

At the height of the negative online feedback, the Gallery was getting ready to close an exhibition by contemporary artist Mehreen Murtaza (Manchester Art Gallery, 2017b). In this project, Murtaza “explore[d] plant communication and consciousness” through a narrative that “blur[red] the boundaries between plant neurobiology, science fiction, philosophy and spirituality” (Manchester Art Gallery, 2017b). The Web Manager mentions how usually, he would “go all out” to promote the exhibition and the artist’s aims, however because of the chaos of the Nymphgate community he decided not to broadcast the exhibition fearing that the Gallery “would have been torn to pieces”. In choosing to be silent on the Gallery’s social media platforms, the Web Manager not only ‘deleted’ the Gallery from the Nymphgate network but also deleted other relationships and actors from this online space. In this sense it is possible to see the effect of the takeover network beyond the limits of the relationships between its mobilised actors, and the spaces they value most, to include other networks and spaces these actors may also occupy — such as the Gallery brand network.

One of the issues that became clear in my conversations with the interviewees is that, despite not being responsible for managing the Gallery’s social media accounts,
everyone had an opinion of how these tools should be used for communication, including what type of language to use and who should be involved with them. The Curator, for example, suggests “there's a sense of tiredness of that, that sort of broadcast mode” that gives “a sense of kind of mythical institutional voice” in its messaging. Here, the Curator is referring to using social media as a marketing tool to merely share information about Gallery events (such as opening or closing exhibitions) and as such, undermining the relational capacity of these platforms. When social media tools are used within marketing frames they provide institutions a “recognisable face” or “an extension of their branding activity” (Kidd, 2011, p.68) that is based around a single narrative point of view — what the Curator described as ‘the institutional voice’. This sense is shared amongst the interviewees, which is why some made a connection between ‘losing control of social media’ as losing control of the Gallery brand.

The Head of Learning for example explained that “if you consider the brand was our voice and what we do, we had to stop that for a period of time, because it was just attracting all that vitriol” — from this perspective, being silent on social media platforms was an act of risk management to protect the brand. The issue is, however, that being inactive will not stop other actors from continuing to enact their relationships or to communicate their perceptions — either in the physical or the digital environments. For example, as I discussed in the previous chapter, the Nymphgate network assembled regardless of the Gallery’s participation on Twitter and so, the narrative that evolved on this platform did so at the hands of other actors.

If we are to understand that the Gallery brand is a network of decision-makers, then the biggest impact of the takeover network is the renegotiation of roles that took place during its assemblage and as part of the re-evaluating of social media and online audiences following the online feedback. If the Curator fully adopts her renegotiated role to share curatorial authority with others, then these negotiations will reverberate throughout the rest of the networks she belongs to — such as the brand network. Similarly, the takeover clarified the Senior Operational Lead’s role as spokesperson for both the Gallery and the Council, bearing the responsibility of safeguarding the reputation of both institutions. The Senior Operational Lead’s role transcends the takeover and as such should have an impact on the brand network.
Similarly, the Council’s influence became clear in their response to their constituents’ complaints of the event, regardless of whether or not they were considered as decision-makers within the takeover network. All of these instances demonstrate that the Gallery operates within large scale ordering patterns as a civic branch of its local authority — an issue that will influence the brand network and the relationships within it.

The takeover further highlighted particular patterns of deletion that are entrenched in the Gallery’s actors as the legacy of former decision-makers, which resulted in ordering frameworks that distinguish two spaces where actors relate. This classification of spaces and actors is reproduced and legitimated in the “everyday practices through which knowledge and information are produced” (Couldry, 2000, p.49), and if such practices take place in asymmetric relationships, then these asymmetries are also legitimated. The takeover network is significant for the Gallery brand in the way it disrupted these naturalised patterns, especially in encouraging a re-evaluation of the role of social media and their audiences, the language used in these digital platforms, as well as their representation within the Gallery’s network. The takeover took a particular toll on the Web Manager, which did not go unnoticed by his colleagues, so any decision he takes regarding social media (such as working in close association with the Council or finding an answer to his question of “who is it for?”) will also have an effect to the Gallery brand network.

Finally, the arrival of the Director and his ideology of useful art will most likely trigger a re-negotiation of roles not only of the Gallery’s human actors, but also its non-human ones. A few interviewees, for example mentioned that the new director had already “changed narrative from what he wants the Gallery to do” as the Campaigns Manager described, and that one of his “big idea is that [they] really sort of work more closely with all the teams”, as the Graphic Designer described. In discussing his plans for the future, the Director was not yet certain of how his role would develop, he mentioned however that he had “started to introduce the question of should [the Gallery] not do exhibitions? What would happen?” — effectively introducing questions to re-negotiate the role of the Gallery’s collection which will decidedly impact the brand network. At the time of these interviews, the effects of the Director’s arrival and the takeover event had not yet been mobilised, so it remains to
be seen yet to what extent these re-evaluations and renegotiations will disrupt the Gallery brand network and its large-scale ordering patterns.
8. The Legacy of the Nymphgate Network to the Manchester Art Gallery Brand Network

Fast forward to the autumn of 2019 when I approached Gallery staff members for a follow-up interview to reflect on our previous conversation and to discuss any potential long-term effects of the Nymphgate network on the Gallery brand. This time, however, I was only able to interview eight of the original twelve participants as the Campaigns Manager and the Graphic Designer individuals never replied to my follow-up invitations, the Volunteer had left the Gallery, and the Data Manager declined altogether. As such, this chapter is mostly based on my conversations with:

- The Director
- The Senior Operational Lead (then acting as Deputy Director)
- The Curator of Contemporary Art
- The Development Manager
- The Web Manager
- The Learning Manager of Lifelong Learning and Volunteering
- The Head of Learning and Engagement
- The Learning Manager of Communities

The interviews took place at the Manchester Art Gallery, and over the phone in one instance (with the Web Manager), between July and December 2019. As with the first round of interviews, these conversations were semi-structured in order to comply with the methodological implications of Actor-Network Theory: agnosticism, free association, and general symmetry (Callon, 1986a). In other words, I employed a technique to allow each individual to describe their perspectives and relationships with other actors on their own terms. The questions were split into four parts following the most prominent themes from our previous discussions: the Nymphgate network, the Director’s arrival, participants’ perspectives on social media, and their views about the Gallery brand. Although these questions and themes were posed as an introspection of the time since our first conversations, all participants spoke about

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64 As was discussed in Chapter 4.
65 See Appendix 1 for the list of interview questions.
ongoing changes within the Gallery and their potential impact (and wishes) for the future of the institution.

Throughout this second round of interviews, one of the key ideas that underpinned these staff members’ responses was the notion that they are ‘working differently’—not only with one another, but also in relation to the Gallery’s physical spaces and collections, as well as its visitors and audiences. To this end, this chapter is structured into three parts to explore the reasons that staff members attribute to their new working relationships and how these are manifested in the Gallery and its brand network. In ANT terms, this chapter explores a “set of little stories” of the “ambivalences and oscillations” (Law, 2003, p.8) as certain actors translate their roles and relationships between three networks: the Nymphgate network, the takeover network, and the Gallery network. In this sense, this chapter discusses how actors’ relationships with other actors in these different networks (for example with social media, contemporary artists, and local authorities—respectively) influence how they relate to other actors in the Gallery brand network. As such, the first section focuses on the influence of the Nymphgate network to the ways that staff members ‘work differently’, which resulted primarily in the creation of a new working group titled ‘Whose power’—a play on the new name of Gallery 10 following the takeover, in which *Hylas and the Nymphs* and *Six Acts* currently hang. The second section will explore how the Director’s arrival has impacted staff working relationships by instituting a ‘new vision’ for the Gallery that is based on four guiding principles: social impact, good housekeeping, art school for life, and civic think tank (Manchester Art Gallery, n.d.b).

The third section brings together the themes from the first two parts to discuss how the Nymphgate network and the Director’s new vision are influencing the Gallery’s renegotiations with social media. Unfortunately, one of the limitations of this chapter stems from my follow-up interview with the Web Manager who only agreed to speak with me if we limited our conversation to a project he had been involved in called ‘Let’s Get Real’. Led by Culture24, ‘Let’s Get Real’ (LGR) is a “collaborative action research programme [that] supports arts and heritage people and organisations to become more relevant, resilient and responsive to digital cultural changes” (Malde, 2018). The Web Manager participated in the 7th LGR iteration (LGR7) where the
driving theme was “developing deeper human connection across digital channels” (Clarke, 2019), as such our conversation centred on his participation and learning outcomes from this project. Despite the limitations on this follow-up interview, the Web Manager described his experiences with LGR7 as a renewed way to ‘work differently’ with digital tools (including social media) individually and institutionally.

In this chapter I argue that the Gallery is currently undergoing a period of renegotiation of its brand network. In Actor-Network Theory terms, I argue that the Gallery is in a period of *interessement* (second moment of translation)66 where actors are attempting to stabilise the network through their associations with one another (Callon, 1986a). I will further argue that in order to get to this point, the actors of this brand network have deemed both the Nymphgate network and the Director as indispensable actors for these negotiations. In other words, both of these actors became ‘obligatory passage points’ (Callon, 1986a) through which tacit knowledge is legitimised and used to formalise actors’ roles within the brand network. Although it may seem that some of the interviewees are enrolled and mobilised, for example by championing the new vision for the Gallery, some questions still remain about the potential for certain actors to be mediators or intermediaries in the brand network — such as the Web Manager in relation to online audiences.

This second round of interviews highlighted the continuity of the Gallery brand network in the (re)negotiations of actors’ roles and relationships, as well as in the history and lived experiences of these actors. As such, the discussion in this chapter picks up threads from previous chapters — particularly on the potential influence of past directors to decision-making processes (Chapter 5), of contemporary social and political events (Chapter 6), and of the takeover as a disruptive event to existing ordering patterns and behaviours (Chapter 7). Similarly, this chapter closes the sections of this thesis that focus on the data collection and analysis, before moving on to Chapter 9 where I will discuss these various sets of data together in light of the theoretical framework to argue how we may re-assemble the Manchester Art Gallery brand network and the role (and impact) of social media within in. To this end, this chapter discusses the effects of the Nymphgate event (what was thought of as a one-

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66 See Section 4.1 for ANT’s ‘moments of translation’.
time event with limited influence to the institution) as a moment in time that is simultaneously imbued with the history of the Gallery and entrenched in its future as its effects ripple through actors’ relationships and across the institution.
8.1. New Working Relationships

The objectives of the takeover and the temporary removal of *Hylas and the Nymphs* was to challenge the relationships between ‘beauty’ and the (naked) female form presented in Gallery 10, and to question how the historic collection is displayed and interpreted across the institution. As we now know, the aim of the Gallery was to involve its visitors and audiences in a conversation to address the takeover objectives — and therefore, involving these actors in a negotiation about the Gallery’s spaces and collections. Because the conversation itself did not go as expected, it left a resonating effect to staff members on the need to review, what the Learning Manager of Volunteering calls, the Gallery’s “historic spaces”. In this sense, one of the lasting influences of the takeover and the Nymphgate network is the perceived need to have different relationships with the Gallery’s non-human actors and that, in order to negotiate these relationships, human actors need to redefine their own roles and relationships (as seen below).

Internally we formed a working theme in the gallery because one of the big questions that came from the whole Hylas period was people questioning as to who made decisions in the Gallery. And so we’ve got a working group set up under the title of ‘Whose Power’ because one [of the] things we wanted to discuss internally and externally [is] how do decisions get made? How do voices get shown? How do some of these debates that might run in programming, beside the artworks, but might take place in discussions and events, how they can be reflected in what visitors come and see? (Head of Learning and Engagement)

As I described in Chapter 5, the second most prevalent theme in the Nymphgate conversation was a line of questioning of the roles that the Gallery and staff members had in the takeover and during the Twitter discussion. This criticism included comments about the Curator’s involvement, after becoming the takeover and Gallery’s spokesperson, and about the role of the Gallery as a cultural institution and publicly funded organisation. As the Head of Learning describes in the quote above, these comments were perceived as a questioning of how decisions are made within the Gallery, who is involved in these processes, and how these decisions are manifested. In this sense, the Head of Learning suggests that only those who make decisions are represented institutionally (or ‘get their voices shown’) and that this
representation may differ depending on the circumstance. The Head of Learning’s comment is reminiscent of the distinction the Development Manager makes between ‘active’ and ‘passive’ audiences (Chapter 7), in that these decision-making processes may be perceived differently when visitors are ‘actively’ engaged during events, to those who ‘passively’ visit to see the displays. To alleviate these concerns around representativeness, the Gallery formed a new working group titled ‘Whose Power?’.

8.1.1. Whose Power?

After the Hylas time, the only changes we made in that gallery space where to re-write the text panel and to re-label the gallery. So it’s [now] called ‘Whose Power on Display’. And now [Boyce’s] film is installed in that space as well. So that sort of title ‘Whose Power on Display’ became a bit of a title for the internal working group. (Learning Manager of Lifelong Learning and Volunteering)

Sonia Boyce’s aim with the takeover was to create a new artwork for the Gallery, the end result is titled Six Acts and it includes a six-screen film and wallpaper installation that is displayed in direct opposition to Waterhouse’s Hylas and the Nymphs. This new artwork sits alongside two labels: a small one providing a short context to the creation of the work, including the names of the performers involved and the event’s hashtag #MAGSoniaBoyce; and a large label that briefly addresses the relationships between the themes explored in Six Acts and the rest of the artworks displayed in the gallery (Figure 20). This latter label reflects the outcomes of the Nymphgate network — meaning, the perceived need for a “redisplay” that is more representative of contemporary society and therefore based on an ongoing conversation between the Gallery and its users.
A group of Manchester Art Gallery staff, artists, collaborators and gallery users worked with artist Nicola Tozzi to start a process of change. We are exploring how the period of colonialism, gender, race and sexuality in the gallery’s historic collection display can be reconsidered for today. Six Acts is part of an ongoing public conversation asking what we might mean if we contemplate works of art solely for their aesthetic or narrative qualities.

Works on display in this gallery often use artistic myth to perpetuate Victorian myths of gender and power. They can expose power relationships at play in art and society and reveal some of the stereotypes and inequalities that shape people’s lives. The current thinking could be seen in this gallery as there are many different ways to understand these works of art.

The gallery is a place where we question the present as much as the past. Art shapes as well as reflects society, so how we redisplay this gallery is important and needs to be discussed.

Figure 20. Gallery 10 (credit: Maria Paula Arias)
The aim of the Whose Power? working group is to question the Gallery’s “institutional procedures and practices”, as Learning Manager of Volunteering described, and, at the time of these interviews, it had only convened once. To address issues of representation, the group focused its inaugural meeting to discuss a series of questions — such as “who has power? Well, who makes decisions? Who tells the history? Whose history is told? Who gets to tell what art is?”, as Learning Manager of Volunteering described. In order to involve a ‘broad’ range of voices in this discussion, the group is composed of the Exhibitions and Collections team (curatorial group), the Learning team, and some individuals from the Visitor Services and Operations team. In this sense, the group is starting to renegotiate the relationships between human and non-human actors within the physical space of the Gallery. These negotiations also include the role of visitors in relation to the collection and an acknowledgement of the Gallery’s broader organisational systems to which it belongs.

The Curator describes the Whose Power? group as a “really positive way forward” because it represents an “open democratic way” to develop the Gallery’s programme. The Director echoes this sentiment when he compares this “new direction” to the “traditional” way of working where the curatorial department would have the sole responsibility of developing the programme and once finished, the learning department would “respond to it” separately. Instead, the group will be using the same processes that Sonia Boyce used during the workshops that led up to the takeover; as the Curator describes they will be “sitting together in those galleries and looking around and thinking [and] breaking into little groups, having discussion, looking at the artworks, looking at how they’re interpreted.” Another way that the group is broadening their interpretive scope is by inviting “other people to be a part of the conversation”, such as Contact Young Company, as the Head of Learning described. In this way, the Gallery’s future programming decisions will carry forward the legacy of other temporary projects, as seen through the lens of the takeover and the Nymphgate network.
8.1.2. Legacy Projects

In the months between the two rounds of interviews I conducted, the Gallery hosted a variety of events and opened a series of temporary exhibitions. Some of these were particularly influential to the new ways of working the Gallery is adopting, they include: ‘Old Tools > New Masters’, a takeover by Contact Young Company and Young Identity\textsuperscript{67} (Contact, 2019); ‘School of Integration’, a series of workshops in partnership with artist Tania Bruguera for the 2019 Manchester International Festival\textsuperscript{68} (Manchester International Festival, 2019a); and ‘Get Together and Get Things Done’, a temporary exhibition (Manchester Art Gallery, 2019a). Each of these projects represent the types of renegotiated relationships that the Gallery would like to move forward with, particularly between human actors (such as visitors, artists, and Manchester residents) and non-human actors (such as the collection, Manchester City Council, and social media). Moreover, these projects also represent the broader organisational systems in which the Gallery operates in — including its historical and contemporary socio-political frameworks.

Contact is a theatre in Manchester whose ethos is to “redefine theatre for the twenty-first Century” by empowering young people (aged 13 to 30) to “work alongside staff in deciding the artistic programme, making staff appointments and act as full Board members” (Contact, 2016). Contact Young Company (Contact’s young ensemble) and Young Identity (a youth arts organisation focused on poetry and spoken word (Young Identity, 2018)) developed a takeover at the Gallery with the aim “to explore what it means to decolonise public culture” (Contact, 2019). So, from February to April 2019 a group of young performers led audiences in “alternative tours” of the Gallery and invited them to “think differently, ask questions and dismantle the gallery experience” (Contact, 2019). These performances were the result of a series of conversations between staff members and the performers that were structured in the same way that Boyce did for her takeover workshops.

As the Head of Learning mentioned, staff members “started them off [by] asking them to look around the historical galleries and to look at some of the messages that

\textsuperscript{67} Hereafter, Contact.
\textsuperscript{68} Hereafter, MIF.
are coming out” such as the “predominantly male curated curatorial style” and whether these “young people [could] see anything that they find relevant to their lives in the Gallery”. The resulting performances then, aimed to not only address the relationships between audiences, the Gallery’s collection and its physical spaces; but also to question whether young people are currently being represented within the institution. When their takeover ended, the group went back to the Gallery for a debriefing session with staff members, including the Head of Learning and the group’s director, where they were asked: “Do you see yourselves in the galleries?” — to which the group responded that “they didn’t originally but when they had worked in the spaces, under their own productions, that made them have a sense of identity and ownership”.

The feedback that the Gallery received was encouraging, so much that they are currently looking for similar ways of working and of “opening up to other voices”, as the Head of Learning mentioned. In this sense, the legacy of the Contact takeover is owed to the mediating role that the performers had in the physical spaces of the Gallery. As mediators, this young collective enabled a brief moment where visitors could question their roles within gallery spaces and, in turn, challenge the relationships between the objects on display and a specific audience demographic (young people). Another project that enabled visitors to explore their relationships with the Gallery, and particularly to question the role of the institution in society, was a new work commissioned by the Manchester International Festival and the Manchester Art Gallery titled ‘School of Integration’.69 Produced by Tania Bruguera, the project asked audiences and participants “Why is integration always the responsibility of the immigrant?” (Manchester International Festival, 2019b).

The School ran in July 2019 and offered a classroom-based curriculum taught by “104 Manchester residents, hailing from 53 countries” (Manchester International Festival, 2019b). Each class was unique to the experiences from the individual teacher and ranged from cooking and language lessons, to hair braiding techniques and flower arranging. As Bruguera explains in a promotional video: “the teachers in this artwork are everything. They are the author of the work, they are the content of

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69 Hereafter, the School.
the work, they are the metaphors of the work, they are the documentation of the work” (Manchester International Festival, 2019c). From this perspective, in ANT terms, Bruguera was an intermediary and therefore a conduit between the School’s teachers, visitors, and the Gallery. In other words, Bruguera did not help visitors renegotiate their relationships with the Gallery’s spaces; instead, the teachers mediated these negotiations through their classes.

Similar to the Contact takeover, the School of Integration was led by an organisation independent of the Gallery — meaning that the projects were not necessarily developed for the Gallery’s principal (active) audiences but rather for those of Contact and MIF. In this sense, both projects also helped the Gallery expand their audience reach and potentially, expand the variety of voices that could be represented within the brand network. For example, the Director mentioned that “the people who got involved in School of Integration were on the whole new users” who, in conjunction with the “network of teachers”, are part of a “new resource” that the Gallery could use for future programme development. In this sense, the legacy from the Contact takeover and the School stem from the mediating role of human actors (performers and teachers, respectively) in the relationships within the Gallery brand network, as well as from their potential to expand the range of actors represented within this network.

The third project that the Whose Power? group will be taking into account is a temporary exhibition titled ‘Get Together and Get Things Done’ that ran from May to September 2019. The exhibition was “part of a city-wide programme in 2019 to commemorate the bicentenary of the Peterloo Massacre” and it aimed to explore “how an art gallery can be shaped by the crowds that use them” (Manchester Art Gallery, 2019a). In addition to the exhibition, Get Together also provided resources and two spaces — Studio One and the exhibition gallery — for non-profit groups to “get together and get things done” (Manchester Art Gallery, 2019a). For example, these spaces were used by Streetwise Opera to create new songs ahead of their performance Protest Music at the Royal Northern College of Music (Streetwise Opera, 2019); as well as by Better Buses for Greater Manchester — a campaign that

70 Hereafter, Get Together.
seeks public support to lobby Manchester City Council to regulate its bus network (Better Buses for Greater Manchester, 2018).

Get Together, then, was an opportune exhibition that linked the Gallery with the civic past, present, and future of the city. It provided a space where visitors could reflect on the use, role, and perceptions of crowds through the objects on display, as well as through the exhibition’s relationship with the bicentenary commemoration of Peterloo. This exhibition incorporated a display approach where objects (mostly artworks, photographs, and videos) were placed above a shallow shelf, which, in turn, was used for the interpretation of the works as it provided a space where visitors could leave comments on yellow cards similar to the objects’ labels (Figure 21). This interpretation approach is part of the legacy of Get Together, particularly as it addresses the Whose Power? group intent to add and represent more voices within the Gallery — or the Director describes it, “crowdsourcing the information of the collection” as part of its “social history”.
For the Curator, Get Together is “all about collective action, collective agency, which was exactly what that process of Six Acts was about”. The Learning Manager of Volunteering further adds that the exhibition is an example of how the Gallery is moving from an “object centred approach” to a “people centred approach”, which
includes negotiating the Gallery’s narrative ‘authority’ and its role as part of the city’s local authority. On one hand, the exhibition provides a carefully curated space where visitors can share their interpretation of the collection on display and thus, inserting themselves as part of the (hi)stories told at the Gallery. On the other hand, providing space for “collective action” effectively opens up the Gallery to be challenged as a representative of the City Council — which, after their experience with the Nymphgate network, there is still a “huge culture of fear around particularly of comms” as the Curator described. In this sense, through Get Together, the Gallery is still negotiating the role of the local authority within its network, as well as its relationships within broader organisational systems.

Acknowledging new ways of working and the re-negotiated relationships with the Council are some of the aims of the Whose Power? group. As a way to achieve a more transparent way of working, the Director brought a new vision for the Gallery that is underpinned by its potential for “social impact” — for example, by sharing what is going on “behind the scenes” (as the Head of Learning said) not just within its physical spaces, but online as well. In this sense, the legacy of the Nymphgate network is carried forward by staff experiences with other temporary projects (such as the Contact takeover, School of Integration, and Get Together). To develop and implement his new vision, the Director introduced all-day events to discuss his objectives for the Gallery, which are divided into four value pillars, and how these aims will guide future decision-making processes throughout the Gallery.
8.2. New Mission

So the new mission vision is much more around our civic role. So, what we stand for, what we offer for our public to whom the collection and the gallery belongs. So, Manchester City Council, and therefore the people of Manchester, are the sole trustee of Manchester Art Gallery. [...] But also [the Director] comes from the background of Arte Útil. So the idea of art being useful for multiple purposes and being a vehicle if you like to follow social change. And the exhibition that’s on the top floor at the moment, Get Together and Get Things Done, that’s really the first iteration of that mission and vision. (Development Manager)

Aside from the temporary projects that staff members have been involved with, the Gallery is currently undergoing a shift in response to a new vision that the Director brought to the institution. Although none of the interviewees could say exactly what the new vision is, they all described it in terms of four thematic value pillars and how these are manifested in a variety of relationships — such as that of the Director and the staff team, as well as that between the Gallery and its audiences, the Council, and the collection. In fact, the Gallery has since updated their website to include a page about the new vision, it states: “Mission statements are usually laboured over, announced with a fanfare then are often more or less forgotten about. We don’t do that kind of vision. Our mission is different, it is evolving, it’s not always sparklingly clear. We can live with ambiguity and trust that you can too” (Manchester Art Gallery, n.d.b). After speaking with staff members about their understanding of the vision, it is clear that the changes it is bringing are part of the history of the Gallery and reflected on the actions (the work and behaviours) of those who represent the institution.

The main way that staff described the new vision is in the way that it is “translated into change practice” as the Senior Operational Lead mentioned — meaning that in order to implement the vision it needed to be structured “in terms of [its] aims, objectives, values and principles”. As such, the vision is structured into four thematic value pillars: Social Impact, Good Housekeeping, Art School for Life, and Civic Think Tank (Manchester Art Gallery, n.d.b). As I mentioned earlier, these tenets are underpinned by the civic role of the Gallery — or, in other words, by its usefulness to society. In this sense, the vision stems from the Director’s application of Arte Útil to the institution and retrofitting it to its history and relationship with the City Council. To this end, the new webpage describes the Gallery as “the original useful museum”
based on its “founder’s intentions”, coupled with the contemporary strategies of Manchester City Council⁷¹ and funding body Arts Council⁷² (Manchester Art Gallery, n.d.). The aim of the Gallery is that, moving forward, its decision-making processes reflect the institution’s usefulness and that it fulfills all four main aims.

8.2.1. Four Pillars

The first one is social impact. So basically the idea is everything we do should subscribe to all four of the principles. Some might have more emphasis in one area or another, but doing projects and things that will have some kind of social impact is key. (Director)

The first aim of the new vision is Social Impact and it involves caring for “societal health” (Manchester Art Gallery, n.d.b) through a programme of art and education, which involves exhibitions as well as health programmes. An example of this type of work is a project titled ‘Baby Clinic’. The Head of Learning describes this programme as a series of “art activities for babies and their parents or carers” where they are joined by “health visitors” doing “health checks for babies” whilst having a “discussion with the parents about how they’re coming on”. The Head of Learning further mentions that the Baby Clinic represents the ways that the Gallery is using its collection and “art practices” to enable social impact — therefore “bringing [the Gallery] closer to the City’s agenda”. To this end, the Head of Learning adds that with programmes like the Baby Clinic “councillors and the higher offices can say ‘yeah, there are other reasons now why we have an art gallery’”. In this sense, the first aim of the new vision is enabling specific instances where the Gallery can renegotiate their relationships with the local authority, which could influence how the Council values the Gallery and in turn, what resources it ‘deserves’.

The second aim is Good Housekeeping. The Director describes it as:

a slightly more softer way to talk about economics. So good economics, is good housekeeping. So that means that the institution by principle, you know, we have to make best use of our resources, very pragmatic way. So internally that’s around budgets and value for money and all that sort of thing. But it also means we’re thinking about better operating systems for society. [Director]

⁷¹ Specifically, the Council’s ‘Our Manchester Strategy’ (Manchester City Council, n.d.).
⁷² Specifically, Arts Council’s 10-year strategy (Arts Council England, n.d.).
In a way, this aim is a reconciliation with and acknowledgement of the fact that the Gallery is a branch of the Manchester City Council and therefore an extension of the local authority. As I described in Chapter 5, the Gallery’s assets have been a part of public domain since the Manchester Corporation took over its management in 1882 and, in doing so, the Gallery became responsible for the maintenance of public goods. For the Head of Learning, Good Housekeeping also represents the Gallery’s responsibility towards its “environmental footprint”, which includes questioning the impact that “doing international [art] shows” may have on the environment. The Head of Learning further adds that this aim helps the Gallery not only consider its own processes, but also how they may “contribute as well to [current] trends”. In this sense, Good Housekeeping will influence how decisions are made about the Gallery’s human and non-human resources, not only as a representative of the local authority but also within the context of contemporary socio-political contexts (broader organisational systems).

The history of the Gallery further influences the last two aims of the new vision, starting with the establishment of the Manchester School of Art and the School of Design in the late nineteenth century\(^{73}\) — as such, the third aim is Art School for Life. One of the important aspects of this aim is “the role of art and artists in broader society” (Manchester Art Gallery, n.d.b) that includes enabling (mediating) what the Director describes as “aesthetic” and “visual literacy”. During our conversation the Director described a new initiative that he is involved in with a youth organisation in Harpurhey — a “tough” neighbourhood in the north of Manchester. He mentions how young people in this area are often recruited as “drug mules” and how children use social media “for the exchange of sexual imagery” — to a point where “send[ing] naked photographs or to redistribute them or to harass somebody on your phone” are normalised behaviours. For the Director, this is an example of a “cultural issue” and a lack of “visual literacy” in “the education system”. To this end, the Director has also joined the board of the Manchester Cultural Education Partnership (Curious Minds, n.d.) to help “reinvent what arts education is” and how the Gallery “could take lead on how you’re taught aesthetics, politics, [and] visual literacy”.

\(^{73}\) As discussed in Chapter 5.
The fourth aim is to be a Civic Think Tank. The Director describes this notion as a place where “people come together to use creative thinking, to imagine the city in here [the Gallery] and start to make new decisions”. The website describes this objective as follows:

We nurture diversity and value nuance and complexity, with artistic and social programmes offering an antidote to polarised debates, promoting intergenerational and intercultural working, embedding democratisation and decolonisation across the institution, developing co-curation models with ‘social making’, and piloting new forms of philanthropy based on the renewed public value of the institution (Manchester Art Gallery, no date[b]).

The statement reflects the conversations that staff members have had about new working relationships (particularly on representativeness and transparency) between staff, visitors, and the collection. It further hints at the effects of the Nymphgate network and the current political climate as ‘polarised debates’ to the future development of the institution. For the Director, being a Civic Think Tank means that visitors are welcome to use the Gallery for “creative thinking, to imagine the city and start to make new decisions”. He adds that examples of this type of use include the Better Buses for Greater Manchester campaign and the programme around the (then) upcoming exhibition titled ‘Trading Station: How hot drinks shape our lives’. In this sense, the fourth aim reflects the ongoing negotiations of visitors’ roles within the Gallery — on one hand, the Gallery can act as an intermediary (as a space) where visitors can negotiate their relationships with the local authority by organising their own events or campaigns, for example. On the other hand, the Gallery can act as a mediator of these relationships through programming and exhibition development where visitors can make decisions alongside staff members.

The Gallery’s new vision is an ongoing process of re-negotiation of the role of the institution in society and therefore, of the different relationships that are embedded in this process. As their website admits, the new vision “is a work in progress” (Manchester Art Gallery, n.d.b) and the first examples of the new vision in action are Get Together and the School of Integration. Despite being at ‘the early days’ of the new vision, staff members were already using it as a way to negotiate their individual roles within the institution (particularly the Senior Operational Lead and the Development Manager), as well as their relationships with the City Council and their collection. Furthermore, they were using the new vision to reconsider how they could
be more transparent about their new working relationships and values with their audiences (particularly in relation to social media), as well as to reflect on how the Director influenced these new ways of working (especially in comparison to previous directors).

8.2.2. Leadership

It’s funny actually because [the Director] has now been here what a year? So it still feels like you’re having to check yourself, new Director, new vision or [the Director’s] vision on all these other things, which actually in terms of the way that we talk about it now, we sort of need to move beyond that, that it’s our vision. It has been articulated, by [the Director], now it’s everybody’s responsibility to really grasp the opportunity in that and make it happen. (Senior Operational Lead)

When I concluded the first round of interviews in 2018, it was unclear the extent of the impact the Director would have to the Gallery brand network. At that moment, however, staff members had already started using the language of ‘useful art’ in reference to some exhibitions (such as And Breathe...74) and to describe the future of the Gallery in relation to the “role and purpose of art and society” as the Data Manager mentioned. One year later, after the second round of interviews, staff members discuss the Director’s influence to the Gallery as ushering a different direction for the institution and encouraging a different way of working. Particularly, staff members shared a feeling of being legitimated in their decision-making and discussed the Director’s leadership style in comparison to previous directors. In this sense, the Director’s influence to the Gallery brand network is to mediate the relationships between its human and non-human actors, on the basis of a new vision for the institution.

The Senior Operational Lead and the Curator both described the Director as a “hands off” director. For the Curator, this means that the Director “doesn’t particularly want to dictate what [they] do” and instead, he encourages “people to use [their] agency” and experiment with their ideas. For the Senior Operational Lead, “hands off” means that although the Director articulated the vision, he is not “involved in the delivery side”. This approach is particularly evident in the Whose Power? group as it

74 See Chapter 7.
represents a “more democratic way” of developing the programme, as the Curator mentioned, by encouraging (allowing) members of the Learning team and Visitor Services team to make programming decisions along with the Exhibitions and Collections team (the curators). The Learning Manager of Volunteering, for example, feels “more involved with decision-making” as the Director “legitimised” the way the group worked towards Get Together. She adds that the Director has a “deliberate leadership technique” where “he’s present in all the programming meetings and he has ideas and [...] a strong ethos and theory that is influencing [them]”, yet the Director encourages the group to “work together in terms of decision-making”.

Despite feeling positive about these new ways of working, staff still felt that they are still in a period of “transition” or “adjustment” (as Learning Manager of Volunteering and the Senior Operational Lead mentioned, respectively) because the Director’s leadership style is very different from that of previous directors. The Learning Manager of Volunteering, for example, described how the Gallery is “getting to a point because [the Director’s] voice isn’t as dominant as Maria [Balshaw’s] voice [was] as a leader”. The Senior Operational Lead further adds that “people are much more used to being given clear direction, being told to ‘do this’ and then absolutely having to deliver that”, which is different to the Director’s approach as he is “much more receptive to counter arguments” and encourages discussion. As an example of this difference, the Senior Operational Lead describes a new initiative for staff members where they are offering “leadership team coaching” that encourages people to “think creatively and work collaboratively”. To this end, the Director is deliberately not involved in these sessions because they “are about delivery” and “not about looking to the director to answer all the questions”. In this sense, then, the Director’s influence to the negotiations between human actors, has led to a broader decision-making group that will further negotiate and define the roles and relationships of the other actors within the brand network.

8.2.3. **Roles and Values**

Aside from the members of the Whose Power? Group, the Senior Operational Lead, the Development Manager and the Director also reflected on how their individual roles are influenced by the new vision and the negotiations that are taking place in
response to it. The Development Manager, for example, is considering how to reflect the new vision as part of her fundraising responsibilities; the Senior Operational Lead is no longer the Deputy Director; and the Director is now responsible to liaise with the Council. The values instilled with the new vision emphasise a different relationship audiences and visitors, with the Council, and with the collection—which has encouraged staff members to have more conversations with one another, so their work reflects their aims to be “for and of the people”, as the Curator described.

During the interim period between directors, the Senior Operational Lead was the Deputy Director of the Gallery when the takeover took place. As I described in the previous two chapters, the Senior Operational Lead became responsible for maintaining and continuing to develop the relationship between the Gallery and the Council; however, when the Director arrived the Senior Operational Lead “formally changed” her position towards “operational responsibilities” only. In this sense, the Senior Operational Lead now looks after things like “budgets and staffing”, therefore “freeing the Director up as a creative Director”. She adds that this change provides “clarity and transparency in terms of who does what and who’s responsible for what”, which is different from with previous directors as it used to be “a bit of a fudge before” and because the Director is “much more open to things and more flexible in terms of what his expectations are”. From this perspective, the Director and the Senior Operational Lead have successfully renegotiated their roles and relationships with one another, and are now starting to ‘mobilise’ other actors as a result — such as the Council, as the Director mentions below.

One of the jobs to do is to change [the Council’s] understanding of what this place is [the Gallery]. So there are people in the Council who really get the Gallery — Richard Lees, who’s the head of the City, really gets culture and understands it and knows its importance. Councillor [Luthfur] Rahman, who oversees our work at the Council, he gets it and is very supportive. But there are people in the Council who still say ‘Why are we funding an art gallery?’ [...] Because they only see pictures on walls. So this is also about communicating to the Council, and also the residents of Manchester, that this place is much more than Hylas and the Nymphs on a wall. It’s an education space. It’s a civic think tank. It’s about creativity and imagination and in economics, all this stuff, this is the place where it happens. It won’t happen anywhere else. So therefore you have to fund it. Therefore you have to resource it as the City. (Director)
As the main point of contact between the Council and the Gallery, the Director is tasked to continuously mediate the relationship between the two institutions and to be a representative for one another. From the quote above, it is clear that the Director believes that there are vast differences in how members of the Council value the Gallery — therefore affecting how resources are allocated. Similarly, the quote above echoes the criticism that the Gallery received from the Nymphgate community, where users perceived the Gallery’s role to simply be a repository of cultural objects and that, therefore, *Hylas and the Nymphs* does indeed belong on a wall. As the Director is responsible to “lobby government and appease stakeholders”, it was important to demonstrate that the mission of the Gallery, or its purpose as a branch of the Council, is focused on what the institution “can actually deliver for the residents of the city in the social change programme” — rather than simply “show[ing] the best artists”. Furthermore, after the Gallery’s experience with the Nymphgate network, some fear and nervousness remained in their relationship with the Council’s communications department. From this perspective, although the “vision on paper is great” — as the Learning Manager of Communities mentioned — “how it actually materialises and happens, does have challenges [...] and therefore there could be conflicts with Council agendas”. For the Senior Operational Lead, one of the issues with the vision is that the way it is currently described is “in fact an internal shorthand” and therefore “most people will just not understand that at all”. For her, the next hurdle is to consider how they will communicate the vision “more widely” and how “people outside” will understand what it means for the Gallery.

### 8.2.4. Communicating the Vision

So if you asked anybody about what the vision is, they would mention those four things [aims]. So when we start to think about how we communicate that more widely, particularly talking to people outside. [...] These banners outside — [the Director] sort of wanted to put something out there that signals change. (Senior Operational Lead)

Whilst staff members are undergoing a process of adapting to the Director’s new vision, some have started to take steps to communicate the vision and to put it into practice. For example, one of the ways that the Gallery is showcasing their aims is by placing four new banners to the façade of the building as the Senior Operational Lead mentions in the quote above (Figure 22). Each banner has a phrase that represents
the four aims of the new vision, they are: ‘For and of the people’, ‘Art School for everybody and for life’, ‘Free and open to all’, and ‘Nothing beautiful unless useful’. The last one is a nod to the Gallery’s history as it references the Latin phrase that the Gallery’s architect used in his design when he entered the architectural competition: ‘NIHIL PULCHRUM NISI UTILE’ (Clifford, 1983, p.12).\textsuperscript{75} In this sense, the banners not only ‘signal change’ as the Senior Operational Lead described, but also ties these changes to the history of the institution as well as the Director’s ‘theoretical’ approach to his vision.

![Figure 22. Gallery’s New Banners (credit: Maria Paula Arias)](image)

For others, the banners represent the transparency and values that they want to operate in moving forward. The Curator, for example, mentions how the banners “were a very interesting decision” because they signal “a really positive aspiration” that the Gallery is currently working with — rather than reflecting their current state of working. The Learning Manager of Communities further adds that the banners symbolise “the transparency that this is what we’re about, our values” and in particular, that they highlight the Gallery’s aim of “working with people”. In this sense, the banners represent the process of change that the Gallery is undergoing and the direction that they are moving towards. As the Director mentioned, “it takes a while for people to adjust to it” and that this new direction takes shape when people “go beyond language and start doing stuff, through that process”. To this end, the Gallery has two new projects that reflect the vision, new ways of working, and the

\textsuperscript{75} See Chapter 5
legacies from previous projects, as well as their experiences with the Nymphgate network; they are: the rehanging of the historical galleries and a new exhibition titled ‘Trading Station: How hot drinks shape our lives’ (Manchester Art Gallery, 2019b).

Hylas was, in a way, a catalyst for how we rethink that room and then also as a template for how we rethink all the galleries. So, in April next year we’re going to start the rehanges in the first gallery. It’s going to be like a domino effect. So the first room will be an exhibition display, whatever it is with the collection around the history of the institution. Why it started, what it was for. Just going back to the fundamental principles. Like ‘welcome to Manchester Art Gallery. This is why it’s here. This is what it’s done in its past. It was an art school, it was a design school, it was a social engineering, it was education, it was civic imagination’, all that stuff. (Director)

One of the driving forces for the rehanging of the historical collection is the Whose Power? group. Their aim is to “think about the power relations within the display”, as the Learning Manager of Communities said, and also “to be more vocal and tell people more about what [the Gallery is] doing”. In this sense, one of the drivers to the rehang is to be more transparent about how they are making decisions, who is making them, and what this means for the collection on display. For the Director, the rehang is an opportunity to relate the collection with “social history and social presence and social future”; for the Head of Learning it is an opportunity to work with “people in groups”, which means that “it won’t just be Gallery staff team getting together and making decisions”, as the Curator described.

The second project is a (long-term) temporary exhibition that “traces the history of how [hot] drinks arrived in the UK” such as tea, coffee, and hot chocolate, “revealing their global histories, connections to slavery and colonisation and contemporary ethical issues” (Manchester Art Gallery, 2019b). Similarly to Get Together, Trading Station also includes a gathering space designed to host a variety of activities (such as workshops and performances); the space, however, is unique in that it was “shaped and co-designed by a group of 24 people from groups who regularly use the gallery” (Manchester Art Gallery, 2019b). The development of Trading Station illustrates how past experiences are leading staff members to negotiate the roles of (and relationships with) specific visitors, as well as the relationships between these user

76 Hereafter, Trading Station.
groups and the Gallery’s collection and physical spaces. In particular, this exhibition showcases how the takeover influenced these relationships and also how the Nymphgate network impacted the potential role of social media in the exhibition.

The Learning Manager of Communities led the development of Trading Station. She worked with “a group of people who are involved in Gallery programmes”, which included volunteers and participants from their ESOL programmes (Manchester Art Gallery, n.d.a), Philosophy Café, and Young Creatives initiative (Manchester Art Gallery, 2015). The Learning Manager of Communities mentioned that it was “quite hard to work” with the group, because it meant working with “a group of residents from really mixed backgrounds [and] different opinions” on what was going to be “quite a large part of the exhibition”. She adds that this way of working is one of the effects from “things like *Hylas and the Nymphs*”, which led them to consider the “practical things” of “opening up” their discussion beyond the staff team. For instance, the Learning Manager of Communities now had to consider “what sort of mechanisms [and] format structures” to provide the group to have their discussions — as well as to consider the ‘mechanisms’ and ‘structures’ that visitors would need to engage with the exhibition once it opened.

Where the takeover network impacted the roles and relationships between human actors (staff and specific visitors) in the development of Trading Station, Get Together influenced the relationships between human actors and non-human actors (the collection). For example, as the Learning Manager of Communities mentioned, one of the renegotiations that took place in these discussions is the role of the curator and of their authoritative voice to interpret objects or artworks. Influenced by Get Together, the Learning Manager of Communities worked with the group to create space where the exhibition could reflect a multitude of voices, therefore creating space for a shared authorial power. In this way, Trading Station is another legacy project that continues to enable the negotiation of actors’ relationships in the Gallery’s physical spaces — including the legacy from the Nymphgate network. So whilst staff members are now “working together in a new collaborative way” with visitors, as the Learning Manager of Communities described — they are limited to only certain types of visitors (those that have continued relationships with the
Gallery, or ‘active visitors’ as the Development Manager describes them) and as such do not yet know how to work in online spaces or with online audiences.
8.3. Social Media

We just had a really good session with [the Web Manager] and [the part-time Audience Development Assistant] who are actually thinking about what does it mean to campaign, for example, with Get Together. What presence do we have online within for example the hot drinks exhibition and other parts of the themes within the historic galleries. I think we need still really work on that. What is our online presence and what is our voice. [...] So I need to talk more to [the Web Manager] about it. Sometimes I feel I feel like it's when you don't quite know what something is, it's hard to know. (Learning Manager of Communities)

Since the last round of interviews the Gallery hired a part-time Audience Development Assistant (hereafter the Assistant) in order to help the Web Manager work with digital tools — including social media. The Web Manager and the Assistant were mentioned by some of their colleagues during our interviews in relation to social media and its potential new role in light of the Gallery’s new vision. The Nymphgate network had a particular influence on how this role is negotiated and whether it can help the Gallery beyond being a tool for marketing or broadcasting information. The Director, for example, mentions how he is “becoming less convinced by social media because [he is] not sure it communicates”. Others, like the Learning Manager of Communities in the quote above, question what type of voice or presence the Gallery could have online — particularly within the context of the Get Together campaigns and the socio-political frameworks that are influencing their rehanging efforts. To this end, the Web Manager got involved with an organisation called Culture24 to renegotiate the role of and relationships with social media — which, in turn, could impact the Gallery brand network.

Culture24 is an organisation that aims to connect arts and heritage organisations with audiences through a variety of events ranging from research projects, conferences and workshops, festivals, and websites (Culture24, n.d.a). One of their research aims is to “work collaboratively” with these organisations “to tackle challenges around adapting to digital change, remaining relevant to audiences and social impact” (Culture24, n.d.b) — to this end, they’ve created a programme called

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77 Unfortunately, the part-time Audience Development Assistant did not reply to my invitation to participate in an interview, as such the only information I include about her involvement is that provided from her colleagues.
'Lets Get Real' (LGR). The LGR programme “encourages practical action research” that is structured as a series of workshops, mentored research periods, and ongoing online collaboration that result in a published report (Malde, 2018). The Web Manager participated in the programme’s seventh iteration, LGR7, where the theme was “developing deeper human connections across digital channels” (Clarke, 2019). He describes their participation as follows:

‘Generating stronger personal connections and more meaningful relationships through that digital work’. That was the general question and it seemed to us that, given the way that the programme had and is beginning to manifest as [a] slightly different way of understanding how this place might work or be or be understood, specifically around the exhibition Get Together and Get Things Done and also around School of Integration. These were physical and visible manifestations of the mission and vision if you like. But there was a kind of gap between that manifestation and our digital work more broadly. So that’s what probably sort of sparked us sparked our thinking and made us think that it was worth taking part in it. (Web Manager)

When I spoke with the Web Manager, LGR7 was still in progress, so our conversation was focused on his motivations to participate in the programme and what the process had been like up until that point. He mentioned how the Gallery had not been able to translate the new vision to its digital work, particularly regarding the ‘new’ potential role for the Gallery in its broader socio-political and cultural contexts. This limitation was most felt with Get Together as staff questioned whether or not to use social media as part of the exhibition — particularly in light of their experiences with the Nymphgate network and the potentially contentious discussions that could arise as part of the exhibition. In describing Get Together, for example, the Curator mentioned that “you have to come and experience [the exhibition] and see it to understand it” and, as such, that “it is quite a difficult thing to put on a webpage”. From this perspective then, it seems that the limitations of Get Together were placed by design as its development did not take into consideration how the exhibition aims could be achieved on an online space as well as on a physical space.

There is a tension between the Web Manager’s aim to move away from using social media as a tool for marketing and broadcasting, and the Gallery’s needs for a publicity tool that can work with the institution’s limited budgets. The Curator mentioned how Get Together is the “kind of project that [the Gallery] want[s] to be
doing and thinking about” because of their conversations of “how the Gallery is used and how [they] use the collection” — however, they struggled on “how to publicise” the exhibition. She added that for Get Together, they “deliberately moved away from having big banners” on the building’s façade and also decided not to have a press launch for it — as a result, unfortunately, the exhibition “was not picked up by critics”. The Learning Manager of Volunteering, on the other hand, mentions that although she is “still a bit cautious around social media” (following her experiences with the Nymphgate network), she recognises the need to use social media as a publicity tool “as part of having very limited marketing budgets”. From this perspective, negotiating the role of social media and its relationships with staff members is also an issue of institutional resources with potential implications to the brand network.

The Senior Operational Lead mentioned that one of the outcomes stemming from the new vision and the legacy of the Nymphgate network, is questioning how the Gallery may communicate its new aims and values using digital tools. To this end she mentions that they are in a “process of looking at a redesign for the Gallery [as well as] for the staffing structure” — particularly that of the Audience Development team, where the Web Manager is situated. For the Senior Operational Lead, the aim of this restructure is for the team to “be much more self-sufficient and self-reliant” in order to deliver “continuity and consistency across everything, from exhibition design and publications and messaging within the building [and] outside the building including social media”. To do so, the Senior Operational Lead is in the process of hiring an in-house designer and for a “social media post”. Meanwhile, the Web Manager is looking to apply his experiences and learnings from his research with LGR7 to ensure that the new aims and values are carried forward throughout their work — particularly in a way that the Gallery’s multi-vocality is represented.

8.3.1. Voices and Values

I think we need to be much more confident about finding our voice. But also I think it’s also about just being clearer about when we say finding our voice, [is] the difference between it being an individual's voice and an organizational voice. Cause there are still difficulties with taking a certain position as an organization because of the fact that we are the City Council because that is who we are as an organization. (Senior Operational Lead)
The Web Manager is solely responsible for managing the Gallery’s social media platforms and as such, it not only highlights the resource issue that the Senior Operational Lead described (above) but also calls into question how a single person can represent the Gallery as an institution and as a multi-vocal network. To this end, part of the Web Manager’s work with LGR7 was to test experimental ideas to “get [staff members] to think about what [they] might do individually and collectively”, which resulted in a series of presentations and workshops held on Monday mornings titled ‘Whose voice is it anyway?’. As the Web Manager describes, these sessions aim to have “an open and honest attempt to provoke discussion and provoke debate and to unsettle things by asking questions that would make people think really carefully about where the power actually lay in an institution like this, which is significantly funded by the local authority”. From this perspective, the Web Manager’s Monday sessions are closely linked to the discussions that led to the creation of the Whose Power? group, and yet neither him nor the Assistant participated in this group’s meeting.

In one of these Monday sessions, the Web Manager led a discussion based around Get Together and how the Gallery “facilitates, through the provision of a meeting space”, a way for visitors to campaign as well as “challenge power and take on power” — some of which could be from the Council. During the session the Web Manager asked whether the Gallery “should facilitate such debate in the digital arena?” and if so, how? Although the debate had “real energy”, the Web Manager had yet to fully consider “where [the Gallery] could go next” before adding that he was not ready to share with me the full outcomes of this meeting. He did mention, however, that part of the results of their session is an acknowledgment to “being open to operate in a way that means heading in a slightly different direction than” he previously thought.

In my discussions with other staff members, they mentioned how the Nymphgate network still resonates as part of their discussions about social media. The Senior Operational Lead explains that there is a leftover “degree of nervousness” that permeates the relationships between the Gallery and the Council’s communication network.

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78 When the Gallery opens at 11:00 am to the public but staff members are expected to arrive at 10:00 am.
The Gallery’s insecurity further influenced its decision to use social media very cautiously as part of Get Together and the School of Integration. As the Learning Manager of Volunteering described, on one hand there were concerns about being perceived as a “campaign organization”; whilst on the other hand, there were concerns about making political statements by supporting an artist (Bruguera) who is critical of the Cuban government. In this sense, this nervousness is centred on the Gallery’s paradox between their acknowledgment that they are not a neutral organisation (as Learning Manager of Volunteering and the Learning Manager of Communities explained) and their questioning of the extent to which they could have a “political take or point of view” as Learning Manager of Volunteering mentioned.

I argue that this paradox is influencing not only the conversations within the Whose Power? group but also the discussions during the Web Manager’s sessions. In both instances, staff members are gathering to question how the Gallery operates and how these processes influence decision-making as well as representation. Furthermore, both instances are discussing how the new vision and new ways of working can be communicated to visitors and audiences — one for the Gallery’s physical spaces (Whose Power?) and the other for the Gallery’s online spaces (Monday sessions). In this sense, staff members are having similar, simultaneous, and yet separate conversations about the Gallery’s values. The Web Manager, for example, mentioned that “one of the most powerful [sessions with LGR7] was a presentation from a guy […] from an organisation called Common Cause [Foundation]” — which focused on how to conduct “value mapping” within organisations.

During one of his Monday sessions, the Web Manager led fellow staff members in a workshop for value mapping as he had learned at LGR7. In this session the conversation shifted to “where the collections came from and the processes and power that [are] involved” and on how the Gallery could “introduce a degree of transparency and the fraught nature” of such processes. In doing so, their session of value mapping led the group to discuss new ways of working with digital means that are inward looking. For example, the Web Manager mentioned how one of the participants in this session described these working relationships as “in-reach” (as

79 As part of the School of Integration.
opposed to outreach), meaning “starting with the staff and with the assets and [the
Gallery’s] space and its history and its values”. For the Web Manager, these value
mapping sessions “have been absolutely pivotal in trying to understand what it is
[the Audience Development team] should be doing” — particularly in making a
difference between “the operational functions in a marketing format” and “behaving
in the same way as in [the physical] spaces”.

In previous chapters, we saw how the Web Manager reacted to the Nymphgate
network. For example, in Chapter 6 it was clear that the Gallery was receiving an
overwhelming amount of feedback to their online channels (through their Twitter
account and blog), which are wholly managed by the Web Manager. Here we also saw
how in the Nymphgate conversation, the Gallery’s Twitter account was the most
visible yet one of the least active actors — resulting in a perceived distancing from the
conversation itself. In Chapter 7 it was clear that this distancing was intentional as
the Web Manager was not able to get help from the actors he perceived were
authorities (the Senior Operational Lead who was acting as Deputy Director at the
time), instead of going through the Nymphgate network’s obligatory passage point
(Callon, 1986a) — the Curator. In this chapter, however, we see how the long-term
effects of the Nymphgate network are captured in the narratives of all the actors who
were involved, except for the Web Manager. In this sense, we see the impact of the
Nymphgate network as it permeated through the Gallery and leaving an indelible and
intangible mark.

Maria Paula Arias: To what extent has the temporary removal of Hylas and the
Nymphs affected you in the long term?

Development Manager: Well, it definitely has made us think internally about both how
we deal with issues of that sort, but also how we display our collection. So we’re
thinking more about redisplaying with some partial reaction to that situation that came
about with Hylas and the feedback that came from multiple masses — more feedback
than we’ve ever had on anything! It’s also been a quite a strange time because obviously
the new Director came in just over a year ago now and so actually the new mission and
vision is very different anyway. And so I think that if you were looking at this maybe
ten years down the line, it will be hard to determine what was driven by new mission
vision and what was driven by those things that happened around Hylas.
All of the negotiations that have been taking place in the Gallery have been influenced to different degrees by the Nymphgate network and its ‘rolling’ effect onto other projects (such as Get Together, School of Integration and Contact takeover). On an individual basis, it could be said that the Web Manager has been influenced the most by this network because of his role in managing and mediating social media (tools and audiences). As such, the Web Manager has the potential to be a point of disruption, and perhaps future obligatory passage point, for the relationships between the Gallery brand network and social media. His experiences with LGR7 are already proving to be grounds for ongoing negotiations as the Gallery continues to develop and implement the Director’s new four-tiered vision. These conversations of how to communicate the Gallery’s values and aims, both online and offline, have further led to parallel discussions about the Gallery brand and whether or not it reflects the negotiations that have been taking place. To this end, the Senior Operational Lead has entered “a formal process of reviewing [the Gallery brand]” and has invited Modern Designers (brand consultants) to help with this undertaking once again.
8.4. Conclusion

Earlier in this thesis I discussed how Actor-Network Theory argues that actors are constantly tracing the boundaries of the networks they belong by continuously performing their relations with one another (Law, 1999; Latour, 2005; Callon, 2012). In other words, actors are involved in processes of translation where their performative relations are based on their similarities and differences between one another (Law 1999; 2003). From a methodological perspective, Callon (1986a) argues that networks take shape in four moments of translation where actors negotiate their identities, their interactions, and their influence over one another. The second moment of translation is *interessement* and it is a period where actors attempt to stabilise the relationships they started to negotiate following a problematisation (1986a). Here, actors define and limit each other as ‘authorities’ (Law, 1986a)— which results in some actors being able to make decisions and mediate on behalf of others in relation to the particular ‘problem’ or controversy that set them on this process of negotiations. In this chapter, I argue that the Gallery is currently undergoing a period of re-negotiation of its brand network (*interessement*) following two controversies: the takeover event and the arrival of the (then) new Director.

Where in the first round of interviews it was unclear what the long-term effects would be of the Nymphgate network and the takeover network, my conversations with participants in the second round of interviews made clear that the negotiations in these networks had a resonating effect to the Gallery network. For example, following the artistic practice that Sonia Boyce implemented prior to the takeover event, particular human actors were invited to negotiate their relationships with particular non-human actors — mainly the Gallery’s physical spaces and the collection on display. This practice and ways of translating these relations resulted in the creation of the Whose Power? group where staff members could continue to address their relationships with the Gallery’s non-human actors. In this sense, the takeover network influenced the Gallery in the way that knowledge and information is organised literally (in the rehanging of galleries with new interpretative materials) as well as ‘strategically’ (in the working relationships between different teams).
The influence of the takeover network can be seen in the way that the legacy projects that the Gallery hosted between the two rounds of interview I conducted. Here, we can see how different human actors are brought in with a specific mandate to mediate the relationships between visitors and the Gallery’s spaces and collections. For example, Contact’s takeover (‘Old Tools > New Masters’) was organised following the same process that Boyce put in place for her event; the result was an event that invited visitors to “dismantle the gallery experience” (Contact, 2019). The School of Integration, on the other hand, utilised the Gallery as a space for translation rather than a medium of translation (where visitors were asked to negotiate their own relationships with broader organisational systems (socio-cultural and political frameworks)). Lastly, Get Together was curated and presented as an opportunity for human actors to renegotiate their relations with non-human actors — including the Gallery’s spaces and collections, as well as its broader organisational systems. This exhibition is an example of the Director’s authority as a legitimating role within the Gallery network as he ratified the ‘democratic’ way the exhibition was organised.

The Director’s influence is also seen in the language that he established through the Gallery’s new mission and that he brings as the co-director of the Asociación de Arte Útil. From an ANT perspective, this influence is critical to the translations that are taking place at the Gallery because they impact how actors describe their associations with one another and therefore, how they organise themselves in these relations (Latour, 2005). As the Senior Operational Lead stated, the Director’s new vision is being “translated into change practice” following its four thematic pillars. In this sense, as the language of the new vision is implemented to describe the relations between staff and the Gallery’s spaces and collection, it is also implemented to describe how the Gallery (as an institutional ‘whole’) relates to its broader organisational systems and the role it may play within these broader networks.

The aim of the new mission effectively responds to the criticisms that the Gallery received through the Nymphgate network — specifically the accusations that questioned the role of the Gallery and its staff members as a public institution. Moreover, the mission and the legitimised working relationships also respond to the initial reactions that staff members had following the Nymphgate network, where they felt they needed to be more transparent in the way they operate and make
decisions about the Gallery’s spaces. Similarly, the mission triggered the Web Manager to enlist in a programme (Let’s Get Real) in an attempt to translate the language and negotiated relationships from the Gallery’s physical spaces to digital spaces. In this sense, one of the effects of the Nymphgate network (in conjunction with the language of the new mission) is to renegotiate the Gallery’s forms of presence (Couldry, 2000) and the authority of actors in these different forms. Similarly, following the Nymphgate network, the Web Manager is now in a process of renegotiating the role of social media (as a technology) within the Gallery and therefore, his own role as a mediator between the Gallery and its online audiences.

Because of the Nymphgate network, the Gallery’s decision-makers sought ways to work differently with one another and to review the way that the collection on display was exhibited — resulting in the Whose Power? group and a series of physical signs indicating the conversations taking place within this working group (Figure 23). This effect further influenced the way that other events were organised (from Contact’s takeover to the Get Together exhibition), including the ‘mechanisms’ and ‘structures’ that could mediate the relationships between visitors and the Gallery’s physical non-human actors. Furthermore, because of the Nymphgate network, the Gallery sought to have more transparency in the way the institution is perceived (and valued) by visitors and the City Council. In this sense, the Nymphgate network triggered a series of renegotiations that revolve around issues of reputation and resourcing — two aspects that characterise the value of brands (Tobelem, 1997; Temporal, 2015) and of social media managers (Dodge, 2017). Above all, because of the Nymphgate network, the Gallery’s decision-makers entrenched the valuative divisions of the past, in favour of physical spaces and forms of presence, in their performances “through language and through actions” (Couldry, 2000, p.38).
As the Development Manager says in the quote above, the Nymphgate network had a rippling effect throughout the Gallery. It is unclear, however, from these
conversations exactly how the Nymphgate network influenced the Gallery brand without first re-assembling this network in the roles and relationships of its constituting actors. To this end, in the following chapter I will first re-assemble the Manchester Art Gallery brand network in order to discuss how social media (technology and audiences) are perceived in this network as a result of other actors’ negotiations. In other words, I will discuss how museum brands “can be seen as developing within complex value generation systems” (Baumgarth and O’Reilly, 2014, p.5) that involve an asymmetric exchange of information between its constituting heterogeneous parts (Lury, 2004). In turn, I will further explore whether the Nymphgate network impacted the Gallery brand network as an actor within it, and by providing context to other actors’ negotiations as I’ve discussed throughout this chapter. To close, I will examine the potential of Actor-Network Theory for future studies of cultural and heritage organisations’ brands and the role that social media may play in them — before moving on to conclude this thesis.
9. Social Media and the Manchester Art Gallery Brand Network

One of the driving aims of this thesis is to understand the potential influence of social media (platforms and audiences) to the Manchester Art Gallery brand network. To do so, I explored the Gallery brand history leading up to the takeover event that took place on January 2018 and its ensuing Twitter discussion. I collected social media data from this online event and, through staff interviews, I collected individual perceptions of how the takeover took shape and how the online discussion influenced the institution over time. The purpose of this chapter is to discuss the results from these different sets of information together in order to understand how the Gallery brand network is organised and whether social media are a part of this network. In this sense, this chapter refers to and highlights some of the discussions developed in previous chapters. Throughout this section, I will argue that although social media may not be considered as a mediating actor of the Gallery brand network, they are nonetheless influential as an intermediary between the Gallery and a broad online audience. I will further argue that, in the instance of the Nymphgate event, the influence of social media was compounded by a series of disruptions to the Gallery brand network — particularly to the relationships between its human actors and the historically-recognised influential non-human actors (such as the collection and the building).

Another aim of this thesis is to advocate for the use of Actor-Network Theory (ANT) to study cultural institutions’ brands, using the Manchester Art Gallery as an example. Like most museums and galleries, this case study is in a state of flux and it has been in this condition since its inception. Throughout its institutional development (starting as the Manchester Institution for the Promotion of Literature, Science and the Arts in the nineteenth century), the Gallery has seen periods of stability that have been punctuated by moments of disruption — such as its Expansion Project, changes in leadership in the last two decades and, most recently, an online debacle resulting from an artist intervention.\(^\text{80}\) I argue that this fluidity can be best explained (and explored) by considering the Manchester Art Gallery brand

\(^{80}\) At the time of writing, the Gallery was closed as a result of the spread of the COVID-19 pandemic. Although, this closure certainly poses a new disruption to the Gallery, it is out of scope for this thesis to explore its implications to the relationships between the brand network and social media.
(or indeed any cultural institution brand) as an actor-network (or ‘network’ for brevity).

In this thesis, I use Actor-Network Theory (ANT) as a theoretical and methodological framework. Here, the term ‘network’ denotes a set of actors who are continuously renegotiating their roles and relationships — thereby setting and re-setting the boundaries of the network (Latour, 2005). As Michel Callon (2012, p.87) wrote “an Actor-Network is simultaneously an actor whose activity is networking heterogeneous elements and a network that is able to redefine and transform what it is made of”. In this sense, the Manchester Art Gallery brand network is as fluid as the actors that define it and the relative stability of their relationships at particular moments in time. The methodological implications of ANT asks that researchers allow actors to speak for themselves and, in doing so, to follow actors’ narratives in order to understand how the network is assembled (Callon, 1986a). These implications, however, do not limit the researcher to propose a hypothesis prior to conducting the research.

My hypothesis for the Manchester Art Gallery suggests that its brand network is composed of decision-making human actors who prioritise certain non-human actors (such as the collection) for their capacity to represent the symbolic value of the institution. This hypothesis is based on existing literature that explores the roles and value of social media in cultural organisations (e.g. Russo 2012; Hede 2007; Dodge 2017) and the relationships between social media and branding (e.g. Rodner et al. 2014; Wallace 2016; Hajli et al. 2017). These sources suggest that social media are often considered as a tool to communicate organisations’ brands ‘externally’ and therefore act as a ‘touch point’ between audiences and the institution (Wallace, 2016). Despite the potential for social media to help create and disseminate the symbolic value of brands (that is, “an idea, image, or story – constituted through processes of visual imaging, narration, and association” (Bookman, 2016, p.579)), cultural institutions often under value these platforms and are not, therefore, a priority in resource allocation.

I argue that social media is an influential factor to the Gallery brand even if they are not regarded as an actor within this network. The takeover event and its resulting
Nymphgate network offer a unique set of circumstances to explore the influence of social media to the Gallery brand as a series of disruptions in the relationships between (and roles of) particular actors. To this end, this chapter is structured in three sections: first I will start by re-assembling the Gallery brand network as it was prior to the takeover event — meaning, I will explore how this network is organised based on who are the actors involved and what are their relationships. Then, I will explore the disruptions to decision-making roles and relationships created by the takeover event and the arrival of a new director; and lastly, I will explore the disruptions in the relationships between human and non-human actors in relation to the Gallery’s symbolic brand value. Throughout these sections, I will highlight the influence of social media in how they are perceived to ‘fit’ within the Gallery’s organisation, the value and purpose that decision-makers attribute to them, and the way that their technological affordances contribute to these perceptions and evaluations.
9.1. Re-assembling the MAG Brand Network

In order to re-assemble the Gallery brand and to understand where within this network are social media (if at all), I took into consideration the complexities that Baumgarth and O'Reilly (2014) listed for brands in the arts and culture sector\(^8\), as well as the complexities that social media inherently have (such as their capacity to create mutually constitutive relationships between their technological affordances and user behaviours (van Dijek, 2013), as will be discussed later in this chapter). To do so, I noted how human actors related to one another and how such individuals referred to non-human actors in my interviews with staff members and analysis of secondary literature (regarding the history of the development of the Gallery). For example, one of the main ways that social media was referred to was as a broadcast communication tool rather than to foster reciprocal relationships. Although social media has the potential to create ties between other actors within the network and with their broader organisational systems (with ties to political, social, and cultural trends); social media is merely referred to as a technology of production and consumption.

In my interviews with staff members the Gallery brand was often described in relation to tangible referents, such as the collection and the physical building, and the human actors that came into contact with them. In Chapter 5, for example, I discuss the re-branding efforts that the Gallery undertook at various points in time. All these instances required a re-evaluation of the relationships between staff members and visitors with the Gallery’s physical building (for example during the Expansion Project), as well as the relationships between visitors and the collection (for example by emphasising temporary exhibitions that showcased contemporary artists during Maria Balshaw’s directorship). When the Director took over, he began to institute changes to highlight the collection as belonging to the people of the city of Manchester and to “rediscover the origins of the institution” as a ‘useful’ organisation (an art school, think tank, and a pragmatic branch of the local authority). In this sense, whenever the brand’s non-human actors are discussed, it is in their relationships to a variety of human actors (such as staff members and visitors) and

\(^8\) See Chapter 2.
other non-human actors (such as the Manchester City Council). These relationships, in turn, produce the symbolic value of the brand that is driven by the re-negotiations and decision-making of particular human actors (such as those in the director role, as will be discussed in the following section).

Throughout the Gallery’s history, the renegotiations between actors were used to create, maintain, or update the institution’s identity — which, as Hede (2007, p.152) argues, is the symbolic value of the brand and involves a continuous balancing process between the “internal and external forces of the organisation”. The Gallery, for example, was created with the intent to raise the cultural profile of the city of Manchester and so this aim was reflected in the architectural design of the building, the collection that was acquired, as well as the celebrations and events that took place when it opened (including George IV’s patronage and Ruskin’s lectures). These starter internal forces legitimised the Gallery as Manchester’s cultural centre and the relationships it fostered externally, such as with the Manchester School of Art, further validated the Gallery’s symbolic value as a space for civic discourse and art education. This cyclical pattern (between renegotiated relationships, the brand’s symbolic value, and legitimising forces) is why Rodner et al. (2014) argue for the importance of understanding brands within their social and cultural frameworks and an example of the complexities Baumgarth and O’Reilly (2014) asks us to consider. So, whilst Actor-Network Theory may be criticised for neglecting “historical modes” of organisation, I argue that its application towards museums’ brands necessitates the inclusion of these frameworks and an acknowledgment of the cyclical patterns that shape the current brand network organisation.

Other instances of this cyclical pattern showcase the role of the local authority in the Gallery brand network where at times it performs as an actor (such as during the Expansion Project) and at other times it is only considered as part of the Gallery’s socio-political framework (such as during Balshaw’s directorship). In the first instance, Manchester City Council performed as an actor in the network when it approved the Expansion Project in 1998 and made the decision to undertake the project in a single phase — therefore resulting in a re-structure physically (by

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82 See Chapter 5.
adjoining two buildings) and organisationally (by implementing a new staff structure). At this point, the Council performed not only as an actor in the Gallery brand network but also as the network’s legitimating framework that repositioned the Gallery’s symbolic value to emphasise a ‘people-centred’ mission. The changes to the national government in 2010 had a trickle-down effect to the Council and the Gallery, where funding cuts resulted in staff cuts across the institution. When Balshaw joined the Gallery, she led a redevelopment of its visual identity (such as the logo), programming and tone of voice in favour of contemporary exhibitions. Balshaw’s influence to the Gallery brand network were legitimated not only by fostering new relationships with contemporary artists, but also by the leader of the Council who announced her dual role (as director of the Manchester Gallery and The Whitworth) in its potential to benefit the institution’s reputation (value) and economic circumstances.

Prior to the takeover event, the Manchester Art Gallery brand network consisted of a series of human actors and non-human actors whose roles and relationships resulted in the symbolic value of the brand. Although this value changed over time as the network faced disruptions resulting from the re-negotiations between actors; it remained closely associated to the reciprocal relations between physical non-human actors (the collection and the physical building), decision-making actors (the director and curatorial team), and other networks (national and local governments). In this sense, the Gallery brand is “object-ive” in the way that it “emerges out of the relations” between its actors and its controlled organisation within its specific (political/economic) environment (Lury, 2004, p.2). The brand, however, is not the result of a reciprocal and dynamic exchange between the actors listed above and the Gallery’s audiences and visitors. These groups (audiences and visitors) are taken into consideration insofar as their experiences within the Gallery’s spaces and their levels of participation in programmed events. This consideration helps explain the discrepancy that the Development Manager makes between ‘active’ audiences (those who take part in activities), visitors (those who go the Gallery but do not participate in events), and online audiences (those who are ‘removed’ in an online world).

Re-assembling the Gallery brand network points to an asymmetrical and naturalised historical mode of ordering (Couldry, 2000) that results from the renegotiations
between the network’s constituting parts. The brand’s organisation places a particular emphasis on actors that can either physically interact with one another, or whose relationships have an influence to the Gallery’s physical spaces (such as resource allocation). This physical performativity gives new meaning to Lury’s (2004) argument about brands’ object-ivity as simultaneously concrete and abstract objects. In this sense, the Gallery brand is concrete in its preference to its physical attributes and processes, as well as abstract in the symbolic value that stems from this physicality. This continuous asymmetric performativity leads to decision-making processes that perpetuate and legitimise the roles of the network’s actors, whilst simultaneously entrenching a value system that differentiates audiences.

From this perspective, it is not surprising that prior to the takeover event the Audience Development department was downsized from six to two staff members (as the Web Manager described) and that resources were not divested to digital tools (including social media). The takeover, however, took place at a moment where the brand network was in a period of transition. So, whilst the processes that were put in place were still ongoing, the Gallery was waiting for a new director to arrive and to inevitably restructure the brand network. During this transition, the Gallery faced a series of disruptions that centred on (and challenged) its existing asymmetric performativity. To this end, the following sections will focus on these disruptions and how they impacted the way that social media is considered within the Gallery. First, I will discuss the disruptions created by human actors as part of the takeover network, particularly regarding decision-making roles and relationships. Then, I will discuss the disruptions created by non-human actors, focusing on the technological affordances of social media and how these contributed to an online dissonance about the Gallery’s symbolic value.

83 See Chapter 7.
9.2. Human Disruptors

Throughout this thesis I have made references to a variety of ‘networks’ that are constantly re-shaping around each other, these include: the Gallery network, the Takeover network, the Nymphgate network, and the Gallery brand network. Although, I am mainly concerned with the latter, it is important to acknowledge that although each system is individual in their organisation, there are a handful of actors that appear in each of these networks whose roles and relationships are mediated differently — thereby, giving shape to these individual but interrelated networks. For example, the Curator of Contemporary Art is an actor in all these networks, albeit in different capacities. The Curator is a staff member within the Gallery network with various relationships across departments; as a curator of contemporary art, she was one of the main organisers of the takeover and the primary liaison between Sonia Boyce and the takeover team; following the event, the Curator became a spokesperson for the takeover through interviews with media outlets, leading Twitter users to recognise her as a representative of the Gallery in their online discussion. The Curator has a unique position to mediate and re-structure the relationships between the Gallery’s collection and physical space, as well as between these non-human actors and a variety of human actors (including fellow staff members, audiences, and visitors). In other words, the Curator is in a decision-making position that influences how the Gallery brand is organised and therefore, its symbolic value. In this sense, any changes or renegotiations about the Curator’s role and her relationships with others, will have a reverberating impact throughout these various networks.

The Gallery brand network was impacted by a series of disruptions in the reciprocal flow between decision-making and the brand’s symbolic value. For, as it was discussed earlier, the brand network was organised following an asymmetric performativity that prioritises physical actors whose relationships determine the brand’s abstract aspects (such as its purpose). The disruptions to the brand network stem from: the renegotiated roles during the organisation of the takeover network, the legitimating power of the Gallery’s (then new) Director, and from the comments
made about the Gallery’s purpose by the Nymphgate network. The disruptions not only introduced new actors to the brand network (such as the Learning department in their new decision-making role towards the Gallery’s exhibitions), they also challenged the value of the Gallery as perceived by its online audiences — thereby further problematising the role of audiences and social media platforms within the brand network. I argue that social media were an influencing factor in these disruptions because of the unique circumstances created by the takeover; in other words, social media had an active role in challenging the symbolic value of the Gallery brand because of the renegotiations within the takeover network. Despite social media’s mediating role in the Nymphgate network (which I will discuss in the following section), they are not valued highly by the human actors in the brand network — instead they are discussed as a broadcasting ‘touch-point’.

Margot Wallace (2016) argues that museums communicate their brands to a series of ‘stakeholders’ through a variety of ‘touchpoints’ that, collectively, reinforce the museum’s ‘core values’. Some of these touchpoints include digital and social media, as well as events, architecture, and exhibitions. From a brand theory perspective, these touchpoints can be considered as the “interface of the brand” where actors ‘meet’ to produce and consume the brand in a dynamic yet asymmetric exchange (Lury, 2004). The interface is therefore performative in and of itself, and “may be seen as both promoting or inhibiting ‘exchange’” between the actors involved (Lury, 2004, p.42) — thus leading to continuous negotiations in their roles and relationships. From this perspective, the takeover event can be understood as an interface of the Gallery brand as it is the result of a network whose processes are as performative as the brand network. The takeover network and the event itself are examples of renegotiations between actors that are constantly tracing the boundaries of their roles and delineating their relationships to one another. The processes that were in place prior to the takeover limited the decision-making relationships between human actors and non-human actors to a select few (such as curators vis-à-vis the collection). The renegotiations within the takeover network disrupted these existing processes by challenging their asymmetric exchanges and ‘promoting’ new decision-making roles thereby influencing the brand network by introducing actors

84 See Chapter 6.
in different capacities — for example, by creating the Whose Power? group\textsuperscript{85} to include members of the Learning and Visitor Services teams in programming and interpretation decisions.

The goals and new ways of working instituted with the new working group were legitimised by the new vision (symbolic value) that the Director has for the Gallery. The Director’s legitimizing role is important because the renegotiations within the takeover network and the comments made by the Nymphgate network are part and parcel. As I discussed earlier, one of the main themes in the online conversation centred on questions about the purpose of the Gallery (as a public and art institution), as well as the roles of certain staff members (mainly the Curator of Contemporary Art). This type of criticism links the Gallery’s decision-making processes and the brand’s abstract aspects with the roles of visitors within institutional spaces, as well as the Gallery’s broader organisational contexts as a branch of the local authority. In the first instance, users were critical about the temporary removal because (from their perspective) the role of the visitor is to view or ‘come into contact’ with such historical objects. Without the painting visitors are cast adrift and have no reason to be in the Gallery. Similarly, these types of comments highlight the other end of this relationship, where it is the Gallery’s duty — as a publicly funded institution — to make objects available for visitors to enjoy and by removing the painting the Gallery is not only failing its stakeholders, but also ceasing to have a function as an art gallery. This criticism, therefore, challenges the Gallery’s symbolic brand value by questioning the relationships between a variety of actors, such as those between visitors and the collection, the collection and staff members, as well as those between the Gallery, visitors, and their shared local government network.

From this perspective, online audiences were able to influence the Gallery brand network \textit{because} of the unique circumstances that were created by the takeover network and subsequently legitimised by the Director. Up until the takeover, the Gallery brand network was organised in “its own (recursive) logic or performativity” (Lury, 2004, p.6) based on the relationships between certain human actors (curators

\textsuperscript{85} See Chapter 8.
and director) and non-human actors (collection, physical building, and governmental networks). The takeover network disrupted this looping mechanism by introducing new actors to the decision-making processes, which resulted in an event that encouraged visitors and audiences to renegotiate their own relationships with the Gallery. As I argued earlier\(^\text{86}\), however, that even though visitors and audiences were invited to participate in a conversation, or to enact a different role, the Gallery did not adjust their relationships with these actors accordingly. For example, the Gallery did not participate in the online conversation and did not have a system in place to manage any potential feedback (due in part to a lack of resources). In other words, despite providing space to renegotiate the relationships between audiences/visitors and the collection, the Gallery brand network maintained its asymmetric performativity. The Nymphgate network was able to disrupt the brand network because of the ‘size’ of the online community and the effect that this scale had on the Gallery’s social media manager.

\(^{86}\) See Chapters 6 and 7.
9.3. Non-human Disruptions

The Gallery’s Web Manager is responsible for managing the Gallery’s online spaces, including its social media accounts. It makes sense, then, that whenever I asked questions about the role of these platforms within the institution, all my interviewees mentioned the Web Manager and suggested that I speak with him. The most surprising of these responses was from the Web Manager’s colleague (and second-half of the Audience Development team) the Campaigns Manager, who was reluctant to discuss any issues related to social media because she did not think she was “the best person” for such questions.\(^87\) I was surprised by the Campaigns Manager’s reluctance because she declined to speak about social media altogether and not just in relation to the takeover event. Although I cannot attest to the factors that influenced the Campaigns Manager for declining my questions, her lack of involvement is interesting because it suggests that within the Audience Development team there is a distinct division of labour between the Campaigns Manager and the Web Manager regarding physical and online audiences. This distancing further implies that the Web Manager is the only spokesperson for online audiences not only within his department, but also within the Gallery network.

The Web Manager’s role and responsibilities reflect the previous organisational processes and asymmetric performativity of the Gallery brand network that were legitimised by Maria Balshaw. As a mediator between online audiences and the Gallery network, the Web Manager has a difficult task of simultaneously representing and translating the institution within digital spaces, as well as representing and translating networked audiences within the tangible relationships of the Gallery network. This mediating role, however, is mitigated by an asymmetry in these relationships in the way that the Web Manager uses social media to communicate with online audiences — that is, as a marketing and broadcasting tool\(^88\) or, as Jenny Kidd (2011) argues, within a marketing frame. In this sense, information is shared online by undermining online audiences’ interpretation of the content, as well as by undermining the technological affordances of social media platforms. After all, these

\(^{87}\) See Chapter 7.
\(^{88}\) See Chapter 8.
platforms are mediators in and of themselves that “shape the performance of social acts instead of merely facilitating them” (van Dijck, 2013, p.29). I argue that this limited approach to social media platforms and audiences is one of the reasons that the Nymphgate network made an impact to the Gallery brand network.

Using the metadata collected from the Nymphgate network, I explored how this community developed over time and how the conversation was influenced by Mark Brown’s article published in the Guardian days after the takeover event (2018). The article itself focused on the temporary removal of *Hylas and the Nymphs*, as such it included details about the painting and highlighted information from the takeover event that were directly associated with the removal. Crucially, the article included an interview with the Curator of Contemporary Art, which provided a ‘face’ for the Gallery, as well as contextual details about the decision-making processes that led up to the takeover. Although it is impossible to trace whether the article was a direct influence for every single actor in the Nymphgate network, there is strong evidence that correlates the article and the development of this online conversation thanks to Twitter’s capability to create “online sociality” (van Dijck, 2013). To account for the article’s influence on, and the development of, the Nymphgate network we need to consider Twitter’s technological affordances as well as users’ agency and the content shared.

The Nymphgate conversation was composed of three types of tweets (@mentions, original posts, and retweets), following three patterns of activity that users can have within the platform. Using Twitter’s technological dimensions (van Dijck, 2013), Nymphgate users organised their relationships into a consocial community (Kozinets, 2015) that rallied against the Gallery’s actions, mostly by using Brown’s article (2018) as the cornerstone of their criticism. The top tweet mentioned in Chapter 6 can be considered as a representative example of the conversation not only as a reflection of the relationship between users’ agency and the platform’s technological affordances, but also as a reflection of the relationship between users’ agency and content shared.

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89 See Chapter 6.
90 Section 6.1.2.
The Nymphgate conversation can be divided into three types of criticisms towards the Gallery’s decision-making processes that resulted in the temporary removal of *Hylas and the Nymphs.* Users associated these processes with the interplay between individual roles, institutional purpose, and contemporary social and political contexts. By analysing Twitter data quantitatively and qualitatively, I was able to observe how the Nymphgate network organised through ‘implicit’ and ‘explicit’ participation in the relationships between technological affordances and user agency (van Dijck, 2013). In this sense, I was able to observe how the Nymphgate conversation was inscribed in the platform’s design (through metadata) and how actors in this network interacted with the platform (through their content, types of activity, and inclusion of existing communities/users with hashtags and tagging).

When the Web Manager invited online audiences to participate in a conversation on Twitter, he did so without first reconsidering the role of social media within the Gallery network. By using Twitter as a broadcasting or marketing tool, the Gallery neglected the platform’s own performative nature as a “techno-cultural construct” (van Dijck, 2013). From an ANT perspective, the Gallery failed to account for the ‘betrayal’ that is often intrinsic to translation (Callon, 1986a). So, when the takeover was broadcasted online, it was under a marketing guise and with a neglect towards the existing relationships between users and the technology. It makes sense then, that participants were surprised by the discussion that the takeover had engendered online, not only by its size but also by their challenging criticisms. Similarly, this marketing approach helps explain the Gallery’s inactivity throughout the conversation and why the Head of Learning and Engagement described this lack of response as a reflection of the Gallery brand. Using social media as broadcasting tools is the result of an asymmetric performativity, a historic precedent that prioritises tangible actors, that was legitimised by decision-making processes (such as divesting resources from digital engagement).

An example of this precedent is the Web Manager’s description of the onslaught of responses to the takeover event as “getting caught in the perfect storm” — meaning

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91 See Chapter 6.
92 See Chapter 7.
being in a moment of transition when certain human actors were physically not present at the Gallery and, therefore, not able to make decisions about the feedback. At this time, Balshaw had already departed from the Gallery and the Director had not yet arrived; meanwhile, the day after the Brown article (2018) was published (and the Gallery was receiving an extraordinary number of comments online) the interim director (now Senior Operational Lead) and the takeover spokesperson the Curator of Contemporary Art were not in the office. The Web Manager, therefore, could not ask for help about the feedback he was receiving either from the previously established decision-making processes, nor the newly renegotiated ones by the takeover network. These absences, and the perception of a lack of decision-makers, help explain further why the Web Manager was silent throughout the Nymphgate conversation and instead, waited to have ‘official’ announcements to share in the Gallery’s blog. These absences and perceptions provide further evidence about the objectivity of the Gallery brand and its asymmetric performativity in favour of physical/tangible actors.

The Nymphgate network disrupted the Gallery brand because of its online sociality and the way that human actors perceived this conversation. Twitter users took advantage of the platform’s design to build a discussion amongst each other, including calling out certain users (such as the Gallery, the Council, and the Curator) as well as intersecting with existing communities (through hashtags). The Brown article (2018) was one of the main sources that users adopted to mediate their understanding of the temporary removal and thereafter, to criticise the Gallery’s symbolic brand value (such as challenging its decision-making processes and existing relationships with broader organisational systems). The Gallery’s marketing approach for social media and existing organisational patterns placed the Web Manager as a sole mediator between two networks (the Gallery and online audiences) — one of which was in a period of transition. I argue that the influence of the Nymphgate network to the Gallery brand is based on how it was organised and the way its conversation was perceived by the Gallery’s human actors, as well as the contemporary contexts during which it took place. From this perspective, Actor-Network Theory is a useful framework to understand how the Gallery brand is assembled and disrupted, in the continuously delineating relationships between decision-making actors.
9.4. The Role of Social Media in the Manchester Art Gallery Brand Network

I started this chapter discussing my hypothesis about the Manchester Art Gallery brand. By considering the mixed data I collected, I’ve been able to find evidence to assert this proposition. Using Actor-Network Theory I was able to observe that the Gallery brand is the result of a dynamic exchange between decision-making human actors whose relationships with non-human actors determine the Gallery’s symbolic brand value. Prior to the takeover event, the brand network was composed of the curators, the director, the collection, the building, and the local government network. The organising and legitimising processes that were in place prior to the takeover (which considered social media as broadcasting marketing tools) were disrupted in the organisation of the takeover network and the perception of the Nymphgate network by the brand’s human actors. The influence of these disruptions can be seen in the punctuated (yet reverberating) changes within these overlapping networks, compounded by the period of transition that the brand network was in when the takeover event took shape.

By re-assembling the Gallery brand network, after these disruptions, it is evident that audiences and visitors, as well as staff members in other roles (such as the Web Manager), are not actors within this network for they do not have reciprocal relationships with the brand’s decision-making actors. Similarly, despite the disruptions from the Nymphgate network, social media and its users are not actors within the current Gallery brand network. Instead, thanks to the legitimising role of the Director, the only perceived change in the brand network is the addition of the Learning team as an actor thanks to their role as part of the Whose Power? group. Regardless of the new vision, working relationships, and strategic language that is championed by the new Director — the current Gallery brand network retains a structure that continues to follow the institution’s historic modes of ordering where digital media are not prioritised or considered to be mediative.

Although social media are not considered an actor in the Gallery brand network, they became an actor in the Nymphgate network. Here I was able to observe how online audiences used the technological affordances of the platform to challenge the
symbolic value of the Gallery brand. Such actions would not have taken place if the takeover network had not renegotiated the roles of and relationships between the existing actors of the brand network. I was also able to observe how the Nymphgate conversation sent shockwaves through the Gallery as staff members were surprised to find that online audiences had a different perception of the Gallery’s purpose than the one what was being broadcasted. This surprise would have been mitigated if the Gallery did not under-value social media, both in resource allocation and in understanding its innate online sociality (as was discussed in the previous section). The impact of social media to the Gallery brand is thus the result of various relationships between human and non-human actors over time, as well as the perceptions of these continuous performances. In this sense, these perceptions and renegotiations simultaneously co-produce as well as limit the impact of social media to the Gallery by continuously delineating the brand network.

Using Actor-Network Theory to understand museums’ brands gives renewed meaning to Ross Parry’s (2007, p.11) argument that “media define the museum”, wherein museums are simultaneously full of media and a medium in and of themselves. From this perspective, those that come into contact with media have individual sets of association, or meaning-making, that shift with their experiences as well as their relevant contemporary contexts. Here, the medium and the individual engage in a relationship that is mutually and contextually negotiated, thereby producing meaning or information that further influence how they relate to others. In ANT terms, these associations are called translations and what Parry (2007) describes as media and individuals are called non-human and human actors (respectively). Indeed, Parry (2007, p.86) makes his argument in a discussion about the ways that digital technologies disrupt museums as “knowledge made spatial” — that is, discourse as a result of the relationships between individuals (human actors) and tangible media such as collections and architecture (non-human actors). ANT provides a useful framework to understand such relationships, how they are perceived and negotiated, and how they are disrupted. In other words, ANT helps us understand not only which ‘media’ define the museum, but also how such ‘media’ is organised and therefore how these construct and limit the brand.
Although this thesis is limited to a single case study\(^{93}\), I believe the findings and arguments I’ve presented so far complement Parry’s (2007) argument that digital technologies have ‘recoded’ museums. Whereas he mainly discusses the different ways that museum discourse has been mediated by these technologies, I argue that museums can only be ‘recoded’ (or reshaped and redistributed) inasmuch as digital technologies are perceived to be mediative — particularly in the case of social media. For example, one of the ways that Parry (2007) describes the influence of digital technologies is in the way these relocate museums beyond their physical dimensions to encompass a multitude of asynchronous digital spaces; reaching out to varied audiences who can create their own institutional narratives that occupy the same (digital) spaces as ‘authoritative’ or curatorial narratives. For the Manchester Art Gallery, the Nymphgate network is an example of how different narratives are layered in an online space through user-generated content and (a lack of) institutional content. Effectively, the Nymphgate network relocated the Gallery’s spaces and redistributed its narratives beyond its physical performances — not the Gallery itself. Because social media are not considered in their mediative capacity, they have a limited potential to ‘recode’ the Gallery as an intermediary actor. Therefore, the influence of social media to the Gallery brand is dependent not only on its technological affordances, but also on how these digital technologies are perceived as a result of the continuous renegotiations with as well as within this network.

\(^{93}\) I address limitations to this study further in Chapter 10.
10. Conclusion

Actor-Network Theory (ANT) was first developed as a ‘sociology of translation’ by Michel Callon, Bruno Latour, and John Law at the École Nationale Supérieure des Mines de Paris in the 1980s (Almila, 2016, p.131). It borrows the concept of ‘translation’ from the philosopher Michel Serres to suggest that in relationship processes, something always changes or is ‘betrayed’ — for example, in the production of knowledge or in negotiating roles (Almila, 2016, p.132). Law (1999) developed this concept further to suggest that translation is always performative, meaning that actors in a network are always involved in reality-making. An ANT framework requires researchers to heed certain methodological implications (such as agnosticism, generalised symmetry, and free association (Callon, 1986a)), as well as to be reflexive of their own translations in recounting their observations. Researchers who use ANT, therefore, need to be aware that what they are observing and describing is not only a reflection of their subjects’ performativity, but also a result of their own translations (based on previous knowledge and experiences) in their attempts to ‘settle’ realities in-the-making. This chapter, therefore, serves two purposes: to provide closure for this thesis and to reflect on the research presented thus far. As such, the following sections will examine the aims that I set for my project, describe my contribution to knowledge in a theoretical and practical way, assess the limitations of my framework and observations, and identify possibilities for further research.
10.1. Research aims

One of the primary aims of this thesis is to provide a new conceptualisation for museums’ brands as a way to reconcile the implications of a commercial concept (branding) to non-commercial organisations (cultural institutions). To this end, I propose that cultural brands are best understood using Actor-Network Theory because it allows for a flexible framework that encompasses the complexities borne from the relationships between ‘cultural’ and ‘brands’. Through this framework it is assumed, then, that brands are social constructs and are therefore the product of social interactions. Critically, it assumes that brands are organised in the continuous renegotiations between heterogeneous actors that are legitimised at specific points in time. In this sense, brands are actor-networks that reflect the experiences, attributes, and histories of the actors involved — factors, which influence how these entities relate to one another. These relationships, therefore, simultaneously construct (or organise) the brand as well as limit its organisation. The concept of cultural brands as actor-networks bridges the arguments made by Celia Lury (2004) and Ross Parry (2007) in their application of new media principles (after Manovich, 2001) to understanding brands and museums (respectively).

Lury (2004) argues that brands are the result of relational and context dependent patterns of activity between a series of entities. From a new media perspective, a brand is a medium that unifies disparate exchanges across time and space; it is an interface that connects ‘inner’ and ‘outer’ environment; and a site of asymmetric performativity. Here, Lury (2004, p.38) makes a distinction between those that produce the brand (internal actors) and those that consume it (external actors), thus following a traditional marketing approach to define a brand. Museological literature criticises this approach because it commercialises cultural institutions beyond their purposive identities (e.g. Kotler and Kotler 2000; Rentschler 2007) and in doing so, it problematises the notion of visitors as mere consumers and institutional outputs (such as exhibitions or events) as products. Similarly, further literature argues that such outputs form the basis of museum brand communication and that, taken together, frame the identity of the institution as a ‘united front’ for external stakeholders (such as visitors and audiences) (e.g. Stallabrass 2014; Wallace 2016). In my proposed concept of museum brands as actor-networks, I adopt Lury’s (2004)
definitions based on new media principles, whilst rejecting the dichotomy of spaces and entities in favour of ANT terminology.

Parry (2007, p.11), on the other hand, contends that museums are a “social medium in which knowledge is given spatial form” and uses new media principles to discuss how digital technologies have influenced the way these institutions create knowledge. This discussion includes a dichotomy between virtual and physical spaces, which raises questions about the authenticity of digital objects, as well as of institutional authority when user-generated narratives converge with curatorial discourses. Although I am not concerned with issues of materiality and authenticity of digital or digitised objects, I adopt Parry’s (2007, p.117) definition of the museum as a social medium that is subject to transcoding processes. In this sense, museums are shaped (transcoded) by society and digital technologies, as well as by the relationships between society and digital technologies. Together with Lury’s (2004) definitions, I argue that museum brands — as actor-networks — are the result of asymmetric performativities of heterogeneous actors, whose relationships are mutually constitutive. These networks may then include actors in various spaces (virtual/physical) who may be influenced by their relationships and constitutive attributes of their relevant cultural and technological dimensions.

Another primary objective of this thesis is to explore social media as one of these digital technologies that have the capacity to shape museums. To this end, the driving research question for this project aimed to examine the potential influence that social media may have to museum brand networks. In this thesis, the term social media encompasses the technology, behaviours, users, and content that are involved in communication exchanges through specific social media platforms (such as Twitter). These social digital technologies have the potential to ‘democratise’ knowledge creation by relocating engagement to ‘de-institutionalised’ spaces and destabilising text creation in dynamic instantaneous dialogue (Lomborg, 2011). From a branding perspective, social media are often described as communication tools or touch-points where cultural institutions can portray their identity and personality to networked audiences (Wallace, 2016). From a museological perspective, social media have been framed in a variety of ways: from enabling visitors to articulate their identities as part of their experiences within these cultural institutions (e.g.
Burness 2016; Kozinets et al. 2017), to shifting participatory and engagement models to ones that are distributed and networked (e.g. Kidd 2011; Kidd 2014; Russo 2012; McSweeney and Kavanagh 2016). Although these examples are not exhaustive, they reflect the wide range of applications and roles that social media have within museums — which, in turn, may have different implications and effects to the brand networks of these cultural institutions.

To address my research aims and driving question, I used the Manchester Art Gallery as a case study. As I discussed at the beginning of this thesis and in Chapter 4, this decision was deliberate. I chose this institution, not only to take advantage of the existing relationships between my academic institution and the Gallery, but also because of a particular event that took place as I was setting out my research framework. Following an artist takeover event on January 2018, the Gallery found itself at the centre of a controversy thanks in part to the negative reactions of Twitter users. Here, the Gallery became the nexus of a mediatised debacle between social media platforms, online news articles, and in-gallery (physical) feedback (such as letters, postcards, and post-it notes). This event provided a unique opportunity to study the potential influence of social media platforms and their mediated audiences to the Gallery brand — both in the short term and long-term basis. This decision enabled me to test my proposed concept of museum brand networks and to assess a hypothesis I had framed using the aforementioned literature themes as well as the ontological implications of ANT.

To this end, my final primary aim for this thesis was to examine whether the Manchester Art Gallery brand network was composed of decision-making human actors and highly valued non-human actors, whose relationships determine one another’s role. In this sense, I opted to use ANT terminology to create a dichotomy between human and non-human actors (Callon 1986, 1998; Law 1999; Latour 2005), rather than ‘internal’ and ‘external’ actors (Hede, 2007; Kidd, 2011; Johnson, 2016). Doing so enabled me to assess what role social media perform within the Gallery, whether they are considered valued non-human actors in the brand network and if not, what relationships they have with the Gallery brand network actors. Although this hypothesis may be criticised as a misunderstanding or misapplication of ANT, I argue that it does not contradict the methodological or ontological implications of
this framework. For example, I collected data through interviews and social media mining in an agnostic manner, in my analysis I used the same language used by participants to describe my observations, and I was impartial to the narratives that emerged from the datasets. The only instance where it could be said that I did not observe ANT methodological caveats was in my analysis of social media data that contained abusive or offensive content.\textsuperscript{94} Instead, I prioritised my ethical and moral frameworks so as to minimise the potential to cause further harm by reproducing this type of content, unnecessarily, within my thesis.

\textsuperscript{94} See Chapter 4 and 6.
10.2. Contribution to knowledge

Looking back at this thesis I can confidently say that I was able to meet my research aims. This positive outlook is due in part to the framework I built by intersecting three complicated concepts (social media, branding, and museums) within my own translation of Actor-Network Theory. Although the thesis is based on a single case study, and therefore limited to a certain degree, I believe my work can contribute to the museological field in its current discussions about social media and existing relationships with ‘commercial’ disciplines such as branding. I argue that my contributions to knowledge lie particularly with providing a critical and conceptual approach to museum brands; as well as providing a renewed understanding of social media as a relational digital technology. Furthermore, I actively contribute to the application of Actor-Network Theory in a museological case study and further advocate for its consideration in discussions about cultural brands. Finally, I provide an ethically conscious methodological framework for the use of social media data in museological research. Whereas I have already discussed my conceptual approach to museum brands and to social media as relational digital technologies,95 in this section I will focus on the latter two contributions to address contextual background and any potential challenges to my claims.

Actor-Network Theory is not a popular ontology within museological discourse and the existing literature that utilises this approach tends to be disparate. Notable examples include case study evaluations from Light et al. (2018), Kèfi and Pallud (2011), and Macdonald (2002). These authors utilise ANT (respectively) to: discuss narratives of visitor participation in a digital engagement project; examine the role of Information and Communication Technology in French museums; and to explore the complexities of knowledge production and consumption in the development of a science exhibition. Further relevant literature includes Farkhatdinov and Krzys Acord’s (2016) brief discussion in their chapter Witnessing Culture: Museums, Exhibitions and the Artistic Encounter; Harrison’s (2013) introduction to his co-edited volume Reassembling the collection: ethnographic museums and indigenous agency; and Rees Leahy’s (2009) article Assembling art, constructing heritage.

95 See ‘Research aims’ of this chapter, as well as Chapter 9.
Although these examples are disparate, they have in common a few main ontological threads: the subject of the study is recognised as a networked medium; an acknowledgment that knowledge production is the result of the relationships between human and non-human actors; and the agency of non-human actors (be they tangible materials or other networks) within these networked media and production of knowledge.

My thesis contributes another perspective and application of ANT to museum studies. Similar to the aforementioned literature, I consider my subject of study (the Manchester Art Gallery brand) as a networked medium that is organised as a result of the negotiations between human and non-human actors. Knowledge produced in these relations feeds back into the organisation of the brand network in a continuously performative loop, which becomes legitimised or disrupted at particular points in time by certain actors’ roles and relations (such as highly valued decision-makers or an online ‘community’). Although social media is not considered as an actor within the Gallery brand network, its potential influence hinges on how other actors perceive its agency or its online sociality. In this sense, my thesis contributes to an existing range of studies that utilise ANT to develop museological discourses from a techno-cultural perspective and that use its ontological framework to describe how knowledge is co-produced (and organised) in the relationships between heterogeneous actors. My thesis can be considered as a different perspective of the participatory paradigm in museums that discuss the experiential relationships between visitors and audiences with collections and museum spaces. I believe, however, that my contributions are unique from the examples above because it intersects this discussion by exploring the mediative role of social media within this paradigm and shifts perspectives of knowledge-production to focus on brand production (and organisation).

When I started planning my research framework, I knew that my objectives would be best achieved by collecting data from social media mining as well as from interviews with staff members. Doing so would enable me to understand the online conversation that followed the Gallery’s temporary removal in a quantitative and

96 As was discussed in Chapters 2 and 9.
qualitative manner, and to understand how staff related to this conversation (both individually and with regard to the Gallery brand). As a researcher who has used social media data in previous projects (e.g. (Arias, 2018)) and as an advocate for the ethical considerations of using this type of information in museological contexts, it was imperative that my methodological approach was ethically conscious. To this end, I developed a framework following Townsend and Wallace’s guide (2016) and the arguments posed by Phillips and Milner (2017, 2018) on doing fieldwork on the Internet. Along with the methodological implications from ANT, I believe my approach to using social media data for this thesis can be considered as a contribution to museological research and practice. Furthermore, if I may so bold, I argue that this approach could also be regarded as a contribution beyond research, where these ethical implications may help individuals be more considerate social media users.

The methodological framework I used is based on two interrelated principles: the affordances of digital mediation and the ethics of amplification. As mediative technologies, social media have certain affordances that allow and limit users to create and share content; these features can be divided into four categories: modularity, modifiability, archivability, and accessibility (Phillips and Milner, 2017, p.45). Users, therefore, have the ability to create and transform content within the (loose) confines of their platforms of choice “freely, easily, and immediately” (Phillips and Milner, 2017, p.52). Although these affordances cannot explain why users behave in certain manners, they provide a way to understand how these behaviours manifest. Often, these behaviours are wilfully destructive and so it is up to the researcher to ensure they take precautions not to amplify harm that can result from these behaviours. These principles expand on the key areas of concern that Townsend and Wallace (2016) describe in their guidelines: the extent that social media data can be considered public or private, seeking informed consent from users, and protecting users’ identity.

Taken together, these principles and guidelines helped me make decisions about the ‘lifecycle’ of the data I used in this research — from collection to analysis to

\[97\] See for example a conference I led in 2019 titled Ethics of Using Digital Media in Arts and Humanities Research (Researching Digital Cultural Heritage, 2018).
presentation of findings. For example, prior to collecting tweets I familiarised myself with the platforms’ terms and conditions and my university’s institutional requirements, and I ensured that the data collected reflected the specific conversation that followed the takeover by choosing targeted search keywords. In this sense I followed Townsend and Wallace’s (2016) guidelines and ensured that the information I collected was an accurate reflection of the Nymphgate network (thereby adhering to ANT methodological implications). During my analysis, however, I noticed a pattern in a small subsection of my dataset — where, unfortunately, users posted harmful or abusive content. Although ANT asks researchers to use the same language as the actors they observe, I decided not to reproduce these instances of hate in my thesis in an attempt to minimise their potential to cause harm. In this sense, I was mindful of the ethics of amplification (Phillips and Milner, 2017) and my role as a researcher. This decision may be regarded as an omission of data and therefore, methodologically problematic. I argue, however, that in my specific case study, reproducing this type of data is insignificant towards the analysis of the Nymphgate network (and towards the overall aims of the thesis). On one hand, my research did not aim to explore sensitive, harmful or abusive content; on the other hand, this type of data was less than 1% of the overall dataset — therefore statistically insignificant.

I believe that my methodological approach, one that was ethically mindful and informed by ANT ontologies, provides a contribution to museological knowledge — particularly as an example for future researchers who wish to use social media data in their projects. Furthermore, I argue that such a mindful approach would be beneficial for any individual who uses social media platforms in any capacity. This is because I wholeheartedly agree with Phillips and Milner (2018) when they stated that “ethics mean taking full and unqualified responsibility for the things you choose to do and say”. Such mindset asks social media users to be responsible and aware of the potential damage we can inflict through the technologies we utilise to enact our everyday behaviours, even if they seem innocuous (like sharing inside jokes). Social media cannot be dehumanised; the decisions we make online, with or without an ethical mindset, can be traced back to bodies (for the most part). As such, it is important to consider the effects that our decisions (as social media users and
researchers) may have in perpetuating systems of oppression and discrimination based on race, ethnicity, gender identity, and/or sexual orientation.
10.3. Limitations of the thesis

The contributions to knowledge and research aims described earlier are limited to a certain extent due to the research framework of this thesis, particularly in regards to making generalised claims resulting from a single case study project. I consider this type of argument in and of itself a limiting factor to conducting research; every project is reliant on its analytic framework, contemporary contexts, the researcher’s political and moral views, and so many other factors. I argue instead that what we can learn from single case study projects is therefore applicable to other projects that have similar disciplinary contexts and research interests. For example, this thesis will be most interesting to those who explore branding and social media within a museological context — it does not mean, however, that the outcomes of the thesis can be extended to the whole discipline. Instead of focusing on this perceived limitation, I will focus on more nuanced instances where my research framework could be improved, such as collecting a broader range of data through interviews and failing to represent certain actors.

Building a research framework based on the takeover and the influence of the Nymphgate network meant prioritising certain staff members for interviews and their relationships with others. Although the interviews covered a range of roles within the Gallery, it could be argued that these individual accounts do not represent a broader aspect of the Gallery network. In this sense, it could be argued that my analysis of the Gallery brand network lacks an understanding of other potential influential actors such as staff members who were not directly involved with the takeover event, policy documentation, and other online spaces (such as the website and other social media platforms). Similarly, it could be said that this shortfall may also limit my analysis of the role of social media in the Gallery network and its influence to the brand. Following an Actor-Network Theory framework, however, meant that I needed to follow actors’ narratives and to continue to make relational links with any actors they mentioned. Using the takeover as a ‘springboard’ and the Nymphgate network as a catalyst for my data collection, resulted in an analysis that reflects my understanding of ANT’s methodological implications as well as of my participants’ narratives. From this perspective, however, there are some actors’ narratives that I am missing within my analysis, even though their roles and
relations to the takeover emerged from my interviews. These actors are: artist Sonia Boyce and a representative of the Manchester City Council.

Despite making several distinct attempts at contacting Sonia Boyce, I was unable to reach her and to confirm her participation in my study. Similarly, I was unable to reach a representative of the Manchester City Council despite various attempts on my part as well as from their spokesperson within the Gallery (the Senior Operational Lead). It is clear that these two actors were influential throughout the events that took place as part of the takeover and temporary removal of *Hylas and the Nymphs*; without their narratives I have potentially limited my understanding of how the takeover was organised and the influence that the Council had in the Gallery’s response to criticism. To work around these absences I relied instead on the responses my participants had regarding these actors; I used these interviews to assess how Boyce and the Council were related to the Gallery, and how others perceived their influence throughout various networks. I acknowledge, however, that without their input I was unable to cross-reference others’ narratives or to confirm their roles from their own perspectives. Future additional research could help cover these gaps of information by interviewing Boyce, a representative of the Council, and other relevant actors they may mention throughout the conversation.
10.4. Recommendations for further research

I believe my research could be used as a starting point and alongside further research to create a body of work about museum brands and their relationships with social media that can potentially influence museological discourse more broadly. First, I suggest that my methodological approach is replicated in other institutions (including those who have also experienced a mediatised debacle and those that have not) so as to create a growing body of work. Doing so, would enable us to explore different approaches to the role of social media within varied organisations and under different circumstances. In this sense, it may be possible to understand whether special circumstances (such as those of the Nymphgate network), ascribed roles (such as marketing purposes), or symbolic brand values have a different influence to the way social media are perceived within different brand networks. Such research would contribute to broader museological discourse that is based on social media research — conceptually, practically, and ethically. These works could create a broader evidence-based ‘best-practice’ research frameworks for researchers and practitioners alike who are interested in the overlapping discussions between museums and social media.

My second suggestion for further research argues for the application of my ‘brand network’ concept within other institutions as an alternative to brand audits and as a starting point to understand the relationships between varied brand networks and broader organisational systems. Brand audits are exercises that organisations can utilise to examine what an individual brand sounds or looks like, how it is perceived by its stakeholders, and how it compares to competitive or peer institutions (Johnson, 2016). I argue that using my ‘brand network’ concept would enable an institution to understand how their brand is organised by exploring what actors take part in it, how they are related, and what attributes or factors may influence them. For museums, in particular, this approach would be beneficial as a way to perceive and implement ‘commercial’ concepts (such as branding and marketing) within their non-profit frameworks. Furthermore, this type of research could contribute to a body of work that may enable us to see trends of how different types of museums organise their brand networks and, in turn, how these brand networks influence broader understandings of what museums are (what Hede (2007) calls ‘brand museum’). In
other words, we may be able to observe whether the renegotiations of certain types of actors (such as decision-makers and collections) perpetuate our current understanding of what museums are, as well as the cultural and market values that are ascribed to them.

I hope that this thesis provides future scholars with a useful case study about museums, branding, and social media. Here I sought to build a narrative about the Manchester Art Gallery at a time where they experienced a series of disruptions following an event they had organised. In this sense, the results and observations throughout this thesis stem from a scenario that the Gallery had (relative) control of. I cannot help but reflect on how unprecedented and unplanned circumstances would influence the Gallery and other museum brand networks, particularly when such situations would force these institutions to rely solely on their digital technologies, online spaces, and networked audiences. My final suggestion for further research, is to adopt my brand network concept and ANT-inspired methodology to explore how the COVID-19 pandemic is influencing these cultural institutions. Doing so may enable us to see how a ‘forced’ renegotiation between physical and digital actors influences the way museum brand networks are organised, as well as how the roles and relationships with social media change through time. In this sense, we may be able to observe whether social media are valued differently and, therefore, whether these changes are legitimated beyond current brand networks.
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Appendices

Appendix 1. Interview Questions

Appendix 1.1. First Round of Interviews

The following questions were created for the first round of interviews, which were hosted between August 2018 and December 2018 according to participants’ availabilities. The questions were split into three main themes.

Manchester Art Gallery Brand

1. Would you please describe the Manchester Art Gallery brand? How is the Gallery brand communicated?
2. In your opinion, to what extent are audiences and visitors involved in the Gallery brand?
3. In your opinion, to what extent does using social media platforms, and engaging with its users, influence the Gallery brand?

Social Media

1. Would you please describe to what end does the Gallery use social media?
2. Who is responsible for using and maintaining the Gallery’s social media platforms?
3. In your opinion, to what extent do those responsible for the Gallery’s social media platforms influence the way social media users perceive the Gallery?
4. In your opinion, in what ways do social media users influence the Gallery?

Six Acts

1. How did this performance come about? Who was involved? In what capacity were (you) (these people) involved?
2. When did you become aware of the reactions to the temporary removal?
3. What were your initial reactions to the comments the Gallery received?
4. From your perspective, why do you think the temporary removal of *Hylas and the Nymphs* caused such strong reactions?

5. Would you please describe the decision-making processes that led up to the re-hanging? Who was involved? In what capacity where (you) (these people) involved?

6. How has the temporary removal and the reactions to it affected your role at the Gallery?

7. How has the temporary removal and the reactions to it affected the relationships within the Gallery? // the relationships between the Gallery and its audiences and visitors?

8. From your perspective, how has the temporary removal and the reactions to it affected the Gallery brand?

9. If you could go back in time, what would you do differently for this performance overall?

**Appendix 1.2. Second Round of Interviews**

The following questions were created for the second round of interviews, which were hosted between July 2019 and September 2019 according to participants’ availabilities. The questions were split into three main themes.

**Six Acts**

It has been a little over a year since *Hylas and the Nymphs* was temporarily removed, in your opinion has this event had a long-term impact?

- [If yes]
  - In what ways?
  - Any relationship in particular?

- [If not]
  - Why not?
New-ish director

- It has also been a little over a year since the Director joined the Gallery as director, what would you say has been the biggest impact he has had so far?
- One of the concepts that the Director brought to the Gallery is the notion of ‘usefulness’ – in your opinion, what is a ‘useful gallery’ or a ‘useful museum’?
  - What does this concept translate for your role?
- Another concept that the Director brought to the Gallery is the notion of ‘users’ and ‘usership’ – from your perspective, who are the Gallery’s users?
  - How has the concept of ‘usership’ changed the relationship between the Gallery and its audiences and visitors?
  - Are social media audiences considered as users?
    - Why / Why not?

Social Media

- In your opinion, is social media a valuable asset for the Gallery?
  - Why / Why not?
- Who is responsible for social media within the Gallery?
- From your perspective, to what extent do those responsible for the Gallery’s social media influence the way online audiences perceive the Gallery?

Manchester Art Gallery Brand

- Would you please describe the MAG brand as it is today?
- In your opinion, to what extent are audiences and visitors involved in the Gallery brand?
- From your perspective, to what extent does using social media and their users influence the Gallery brand?

Appendix 1.3. Interview with Previous Director

The following questions were prepared for an interview with the Gallery’s previous Director who worked at the Gallery from 1998 to 2008 and who oversaw the Gallery’s Expansion Project (as described on Chapter 5).
- What was your role at the Manchester Art Gallery?
  - Who were your predecessors?
- How would you describe the Gallery brand prior to the expansion?
- Can you describe the decisions that led up to the expansion?
  - Who were involved?
- Can you describe the branding exercises and other similar workshops that took place during the expansion period?
  - Who were involved?
- How would you describe the Gallery brand after the expansion?
- What was the relationship like between the Gallery and the City Council?
  - Did this change with the expansion?
- How would you describe the Gallery brand today?
Appendix 2. TAGS Keywords

TAGS relies on a set of keywords or phrases to search and archive tweets. The Manchester Art Gallery sought to create an ‘official’ Twitter space for the online conversation by asking visitors and audiences to share their comments using #MAGSoniaBoyce. By archiving these tweets alone, however, would have resulted in a potential loss of a significant part of the conversation. As such, I aimed to create an archive with as much data as possible by using the following 14 different keywords and phrases in relation to the Gallery and to the takeover event. Please note that due to the limitations from the Twitter API (and therefore of the archiving tools TAGS), it is acknowledged here that the resulting archives for each keyword or phrase are a reflection of the online conversation and not a 100% true archive of every single tweet posted during this time period (as was discussed in Chapters 4 and 6).

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Search word</th>
<th>Category</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>ClareGannaway</td>
<td>Account</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>MAGCurators</td>
<td>Account</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>magwagdirector</td>
<td>Account</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>mcrartgallery</td>
<td>Account</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>#hylasgate</td>
<td>Hashtag</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>#MAGSoniaBoyce</td>
<td>Hashtag</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>#nymphgate</td>
<td>Hashtag</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>#objectsofobsession</td>
<td>Hashtag</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Clare Gannaway</td>
<td>Phrase</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Hylas and the Nymphs</td>
<td>Phrase</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Manchester Art Gallery</td>
<td>Phrase</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>nymphgate</td>
<td>Phrase</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Sonia Boyce</td>
<td>Phrase</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Appendix 3. Twitter Data Cleanup

I employed Tableau Prep to aggregate and clean the data archived separately through each key term search. In doing so I was able to create a single archive that ignored duplicate tweets, as well as data with a null ‘date’ value. This process resulted in a single data source for analysis, for which I employed Tableau Desktop (for quantitative analysis) and NVivo (for qualitative analysis). Furthermore, a single data source allowed me to focus on a specific date range (January 24 to February 10) in order to study the ‘eye of the (Twitter) storm’ following the removal of *Hylas and the Nymphs* — whilst at the same time, not losing sight of the larger network in which the take over reactions took place.

In Tableau Desktop I used a couple of calculations to draw out details from this data. For example, I was able to separate tweets by type using an ‘if/then’ calculation. Here, tweets that contained characters ‘RT @’ indicated a retweet, an ‘@’ indicated a mention, and if it did not contained either of these characters then the tweet would be coded as an ‘original tweet’. It should be noted that this calculation is run consecutively, meaning that it searches for the aforementioned characters in a tweet text starting with ‘RT @’, then ‘@’, and if none of these are found then it considers the tweet as an ‘original’. Unfortunately, this means that some error could be attributed to the data as a single tweet could be both a retweet and @mention at the same time.
Appendix 4. Twitter Qualitative Analysis Codebook

The following table represents the codes that arose in my qualitative analysis of the Nymphgate conversation (as mentioned in Chapter 6).

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Name</th>
<th>Description</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Feminism and puritanism</td>
<td>The removal was considered as an act based on feminist ideologies - in a negative way, or as an act based on antiquated moral sensitivities. Aggregates from child nodes.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Feminism and puritanism\Feminism</td>
<td>References to feminism or feminists, including self-references from users. For example “I am a feminist”.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Aggregates from child nodes.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Feminism and puritanism\Feminism\Feminazi</td>
<td>Feminazi is “a pejorative term for feminists, popularized by politically conservative American radio talk show host Rush Limbaugh.” Ref <a href="https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Feminazi">https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Feminazi</a></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Feminism and puritanism\puritanism</td>
<td>Where users considered the removal as an act of puritanism and those involved as Puritans or Neo-Puritans.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Feminism and puritanism\PR stunt</td>
<td>Where users consider the removal as a ‘PR stunt’ or marketing/publicity ploy. Includes references to ‘click baiting’ and ‘attention seeking’.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Feminism and puritanism\Victorian</td>
<td>References to the Victorian period, for example viewing the removal as a reflection, and return to, of ‘Victorian values’.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Feminism and puritanism\Political correctness</td>
<td>Where users describe the removal as an act of political correctness, includes the abbreviated instances (“PC”).</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Feminism and puritanism\Grid Girls</td>
<td>References to grid girls, dart girls, or F1 girls. Aggregates child nodes.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Feminism and puritanism\Grid Girls\F1 girls</td>
<td>References to the F1 girls.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Feminism and puritanism\Grid Girls\Darts girls</td>
<td>References to the ‘dart girls’</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Role Questions</td>
<td>Where users questioned the competence of the curator (Gannaway) and of the Gallery. Often linked to concerns about public ownership and funding, as well as reputation for the institution and the city of Manchester. Aggregates from child nodes.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Role Questions\Decision making</td>
<td>References to decision making instances, by individuals or institutions.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Role Questions\Curate-or</td>
<td>References to curating or curators.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Role Questions\Role Questions</td>
<td>References where users question the professional capacity of the Gallery and its staff.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Role Questions\Publicly owned</td>
<td>References to the Gallery as a publicly owned institution and/or to the Gallery’s collection as a ‘public collection’. Aggregates from child nodes.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Role Questions\Publicly owned\Funding</td>
<td>References to public funding or taxes in relation to the Gallery.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Role Questions\Dismissal</td>
<td>References calling for individuals to be removed, fired, or sacked from their professional positions.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>-------------------------</td>
<td>--------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Role Questions\Put it back</td>
<td>References to users who ask for the painting to be reinstated, understood as telling the Gallery and its staff how to operate.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Role Questions\Ignorance</td>
<td>References of professional ignorance. For example, not knowing or understanding the painting’s theme or a general ignorance of art history. Includes references of ignorance as ‘stupidity’, understood as questions of professional competence.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Role Questions\Philistines</td>
<td>References to ‘philistinism’ or describing individuals as ‘Philistines’. Understood as questions of professional competence.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Role Questions\Patronising</td>
<td>References to the way the Gallery and its actions are perceived as ‘patronizing’.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Role Questions\Reputation</td>
<td>References to the reputation of the Gallery and/or its staff. Includes references to the reputation of Manchester as a city in relation to the removal. Aggregates from child nodes.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Role Questions\Reputation\Trust</td>
<td>References to loss of trust from the user of the Gallery.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Role Questions\Clare Gannaway personal image</td>
<td>Instances where users found personal images and/or tweets from Clare Gannaway and used them to criticise and insult her.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Censorship</td>
<td>Users associated the act of removing the painting as an act of censorship. Often contrasting or comparing to totalitarian regimes and cultural revolutions. Aggregates from child nodes.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Censorship\Censorship</td>
<td>References to censorship and all its derivatives as a noun and as a verb.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Censorship\Political regimes</td>
<td>References to authoritarianism or totalitarianism. Includes mentions of specific individuals (such as Hitler or Stalin), as well as particular groups (such as Pol Pot or Nazis). Aggregates from child nodes.</td>
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<tr>
<td>Censorship\Political regimes\Fascism</td>
<td>References to fascism.</td>
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<tr>
<td>Censorship\Political regimes\Burning books</td>
<td>References to burning books as part of the policies of totalitarian regimes.</td>
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<tr>
<td>Censorship\Political regimes\Degenerate art</td>
<td>References to ‘degenerate art’, ‘entarete kunst’, or ‘dangerous art’. In turn referencing the Nazi regime.</td>
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<tr>
<td>Censorship\Political regimes\ Nazism</td>
<td>References to nazis, Nazism, or Adolf Hitler.</td>
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<tr>
<td>Censorship\Political regimes\Maoism</td>
<td>References to Mao or to Mao Zedong.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Censorship\Racism</td>
<td>References to racism or instances of racist remarks.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Censorship\Fig Leaves</td>
<td>References to ‘fig leaves’ as a form of censorship, thus alluding to the Catholic Church’s “Fig Leaf Campaign”. Ref: <a href="https://www.artsy.net/article/artsy-editorial-fig-leaf-story-sin-censorship-catholic-church">https://www.artsy.net/article/artsy-editorial-fig-leaf-story-sin-censorship-catholic-church</a></td>
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<tr>
<td>Censorship\Homophobic</td>
<td>Instances of homophobic remarks.</td>
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<tr>
<td>Censorship\Marxism</td>
<td>References to Karl Marks and his ideologies.</td>
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<tr>
<td>Censorship\Orwellian</td>
<td>References to ‘George Orwell’ or to 1984 or where ‘Orwellian’ as an adjective. Understood as “describing a situation, idea, or societal condition that George Orwell identified as being destructive to the welfare of a free and open society.” Ref <a href="https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Orwellian">https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Orwellian</a></td>
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<tr>
<td>Censorship\Cultural Marxism</td>
<td>References to Cultural Marxism, an alt-right term often used on social media platforms. Described by vice as “an umbrella term variously responsible for such un-American and anti-Western ills”. <a href="https://www.vice.com/en_us/article/78mnnz/unwrapping-the-conspiracy-theory-that-drives-the-alt-right">https://www.vice.com/en_us/article/78mnnz/unwrapping-the-conspiracy-theory-that-drives-the-alt-right</a></td>
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<tr>
<td>Censorship\Cultural Marxism\SJW</td>
<td>References to ‘social justice warriors’ or ‘SJW’. Defined as “an often mocking term for one who is seen as overly progressive or left-wing. It’s often abbreviated as ‘SJW.’” Ref <a href="https://www.merriam-webster.com/words-at-play/what-does-social-justice-warrior-sjw-mean">https://www.merriam-webster.com/words-at-play/what-does-social-justice-warrior-sjw-mean</a></td>
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<tr>
<td>Censorship\Communism</td>
<td>References to communism.</td>
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<tr>
<td>Other</td>
<td>References to broader themes such as general politics and the painting’s subject matter. Also includes instances of broken links, creative responses, and social photographs. Aggregates from child nodes.</td>
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<tr>
<td>Other\Politics (general)</td>
<td>References to political agendas or politics in a general manner.</td>
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<tr>
<td>Other\Painting</td>
<td>Where users discussed the topic of the painting and/or the way the topic was depicted. For example, discussing the mythological aspect of the painting or calling out certain articles for calling the painting ‘pornographic’. Aggregates from child nodes.</td>
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<tr>
<td>Other\Painting\Mythology</td>
<td>References to the ‘Myth of Hylas’ or to the mythological aspects of nymphs. Includes references to Heracles, Hercules, and / or Argonauts.</td>
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<tr>
<td>Other\Painting\Pornography</td>
<td>References to porn, pornography, and/or smut.</td>
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<td>Other\Broken links</td>
<td>Nymphgate relevant tweets with broken links (such as ‘404 errors’ or suspended accounts’. Aggregates from child nodes.</td>
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<td>Other\Broken links\404</td>
<td>Links to 404 errors.</td>
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<td>Other\Broken links\Account</td>
<td>Links to Twitter accounts that have been suspended.</td>
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<td>suspended</td>
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<tr>
<td>Other\Positive tweets</td>
<td>Tweets that can be clearly identified as positive and in agreement with the removal of the painting and the takeover.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Other\Social photograph</td>
<td>Tweets with links to ‘social photographs’ - or non-professional images shared on social media platforms (includes Instagram posts).</td>
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<tr>
<td>Category</td>
<td>Description</td>
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<tr>
<td>Other\Creative response</td>
<td>Instances where users ‘creatively responded’ to the removal. Term comes from Martin Grimes (MAG social media manager) during a join presentation with researcher at the Museums Association conference in 2018. Includes photoshopped versions of the painting, drawings, gifs, and memes.</td>
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<tr>
<td>Other\Non-nymphgate</td>
<td>Tweets that were captured with the research queries and are relevant for the Manchester Art Gallery, but have no connection to ‘nymphgate’.</td>
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<tr>
<td>Other\Non-nymphgate\Alistair leaves @mimamodernart</td>
<td>References to Alistair Hudson making his transition from Middlesbrough Institute of Modern Art to Manchester Art Gallery/Whitworth.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Other\Non-nymphgate\Wedding</td>
<td>References to weddings hosted at the Gallery</td>
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<tr>
<td>Bycatch</td>
<td>Tweets that have nothing to do with the research query, includes tweets that have nothing to do with the Gallery in general and are considered ‘bycatch’. Terms comes from fishing and it means “a fish or other marine species that is caught unintentionally while catching certain target species and target sizes of fish, crabs etc.”. ref <a href="https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Bycatch">https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Bycatch</a></td>
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<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Aggregates from child nodes.</td>
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# Appendix 5. List of Cases in the Nymphgate Conversation

The following table represents the cases found in the analysis of the Nymphgate conversation, as discussed in Chapter 6.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Case Name</th>
<th>Description</th>
<th>Case Type</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>3Sat</td>
<td>Kunst ... oder Sexismus? <a href="http://www.3sat.de/mediathek/?mode=play&amp;obj=71489">http://www.3sat.de/mediathek/?mode=play&amp;obj=71489</a></td>
<td>Article</td>
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<td>a-n The Artists Information</td>
<td>In Brief: Tate marks centenary of women’s right to vote with Millicent Fawcett portrait; Arts Development UK to close <a href="https://www.a-n.co.uk/news/brief-tate-marks-centenary-womens-right-vote-millicent-fawcett-portrait-arts-development-uk-close/?platform=hootsuite">https://www.a-n.co.uk/news/brief-tate-marks-centenary-womens-right-vote-millicent-fawcett-portrait-arts-development-uk-close/?platform=hootsuite</a></td>
<td>Article</td>
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<tr>
<td>A.N. Wilson - Daily Mail</td>
<td>How long until the New Puritans stop us seeing all these treasures, asks A.N. WILSON as Manchester Art Gallery removes a pre-Raphaelite picture of naked nymphs <a href="https://www.dailymail.co.uk/news/article-5342349/Manchester-Art-Gallery-removes-picture-naked-nymphs.html">https://www.dailymail.co.uk/news/article-5342349/Manchester-Art-Gallery-removes-picture-naked-nymphs.html</a></td>
<td>Article</td>
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<tr>
<td>A’isha Raji - Events Chronicle</td>
<td>PAINTING OF NAKED NYMPHS REMOVED FROM MANCHESTER ART GALLERY <a href="https://eventschronicles.com/painting-of-naked-nymphs-removed-from-manchester-art-gallery/?+EventsChronicles+%28EventsChronicles%29">https://eventschronicles.com/painting-of-naked-nymphs-removed-from-manchester-art-gallery/?+EventsChronicles+%28EventsChronicles%29</a></td>
<td>Article</td>
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<tr>
<td>Adorján F. Kovács - Freie Welt</td>
<td>Entartete Kunst 2.0 <a href="http://www.freiewelt.net/blog/entartete-kunst-20-10073471/">http://www.freiewelt.net/blog/entartete-kunst-20-10073471/</a></td>
<td>Article</td>
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<td>AFD</td>
<td>Moralisierende Zensur erreicht Museen – Manchester Art Gallery hängte Gemälde ab <a href="https://afdkompakt.de/2018/02/02/moralisierende-zensur-erreicht-museen-manchester-art-gallery-haengt-gemaelde-ab/">https://afdkompakt.de/2018/02/02/moralisierende-zensur-erreicht-museen-manchester-art-gallery-haengt-gemaelde-ab/</a></td>
<td>Article</td>
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<tr>
<td>Author</td>
<td>Title</td>
<td>URL</td>
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<tr>
<td>Alexander Lucie-Smith - Catholic Herald</td>
<td>When does nudity in art become inappropriate?</td>
<td><a href="https://catholicherald.co.uk/commentandblogs/2018/02/01/when-does-nudity-in-art-become-inappropriate/">https://catholicherald.co.uk/commentandblogs/2018/02/01/when-does-nudity-in-art-become-inappropriate/</a></td>
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<tr>
<td>Alexander Menden - sueddeutsche</td>
<td>Wo vorher die Nymphen waren, hängt jetzt ein Zettel</td>
<td><a href="https://www.sueddeutsche.de/kultur/kunst-streben-nach-reinheit-1.3849687">https://www.sueddeutsche.de/kultur/kunst-streben-nach-reinheit-1.3849687</a></td>
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<tr>
<td>Alice Jones - inews</td>
<td>Manchester Art Gallery has removed a painting and replaced it with angry Post-its</td>
<td>Read more at: <a href="https://inews.co.uk/culture/manchester-art-gallery-removed-painting-replaced-angry-post/">https://inews.co.uk/culture/manchester-art-gallery-removed-painting-replaced-angry-post/</a></td>
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<tr>
<td>Amy Gordon - Daily Mail</td>
<td>'We can’t erase the past!': Fury as gallery removes Victorian Pre-Raphaelite masterpiece of pubescent naked nymphs seducing a man to ‘provoke debate’ after the #meToo movement</td>
<td><a href="https://www.dailymail.co.uk/news/article-5338919/Gallery-removes-Victorian-Pre-Raphaelite-masterpiece.html?offset=69&amp;max=100&amp;jumpTo=comment-279260853&amp;ito=twitter_share_comment_text#comment-279260853">https://www.dailymail.co.uk/news/article-5338919/Gallery-removes-Victorian-Pre-Raphaelite-masterpiece.html?offset=69&amp;max=100&amp;jumpTo=comment-279260853&amp;ito=twitter_share_comment_text#comment-279260853</a></td>
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<td>Antena 3</td>
<td>Retiran el cuadro 'Hilas y las ninfas' de la Manchester Art Gallery por cosificar el cuerpo de la mujer</td>
<td><a href="https://www.antena3.com/noticias/cultura/retiran-cuadro-hilas-ninas-manchester-art-gallery-cosificar-cuerpo-mujer_201802025a74b9a00cf20e2c8b4dd535.html">https://www.antena3.com/noticias/cultura/retiran-cuadro-hilas-ninas-manchester-art-gallery-cosificar-cuerpo-mujer_201802025a74b9a00cf20e2c8b4dd535.html</a></td>
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<td>Antonella De Gregorio - Corriere della Sera</td>
<td>Manchester, via le ninfe dal museo: «Erotismo offensivo». Ma è polemica</td>
<td><a href="https://www.corriere.it/esteri/18_febbraio_01/manchester-via-ninfe-museo-erotismo-offensivo-ma-polemica-59644ee4-0732-11e8-8886-a603f13b52a.shtml">https://www.corriere.it/esteri/18_febbraio_01/manchester-via-ninfe-museo-erotismo-offensivo-ma-polemica-59644ee4-0732-11e8-8886-a603f13b52a.shtml</a></td>
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<tr>
<td>Apollo Magazine</td>
<td>National Portrait Gallery appoints Jamie Fobert for £35.5m refurbishment Plus: Manchester Art Gallery takes down Waterhouse painting</td>
<td>and Iran court sentences art dealer to 27 years in prison</td>
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<td>Source</td>
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<td>Apollo Magazine 2</td>
<td>Berkshire Museum and attorney general take dispute to Supreme Court</td>
<td><a href="https://www.apollo-magazine.com/berkshire-museum-and-attorney-general-take-dispute-to-supreme-court/#Recommended">https://www.apollo-magazine.com/berkshire-museum-and-attorney-general-take-dispute-to-supreme-court/#Recommended</a></td>
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<td>Audrey Renault - Cheek Magazine</td>
<td>MANCHester: UN MUSEE DECROCHE UNE TOILE DU XIXÈME POUR QUESTIONNER LE SEXISME</td>
<td><a href="http://cheekmagazine.fr/societe/ce-qui-se">http://cheekmagazine.fr/societe/ce-qui-se</a> passe-ailleurs/manchester-musee-toile-sexiste/</td>
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<td>BBC - Rokeby Venus</td>
<td>Rokeby Venus: The painting that shocked a suffragette</td>
<td><a href="https://www.bbc.co.uk/news/blogs-magazine-monitor-26491421">https://www.bbc.co.uk/news/blogs-magazine-monitor-26491421</a></td>
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<td>BBC - Victorian nymphs painting back on display after censorship row</td>
<td>Victorian nymphs painting back on display after censorship row</td>
<td><a href="https://www.bbc.co.uk/news/entertainment-arts-42917974">https://www.bbc.co.uk/news/entertainment-arts-42917974</a></td>
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<td>BBC - World Service</td>
<td>Relief as South African Miners Rescued And the controversy which has followed the removal of a painting from 1896 from an art gallery. It depicts a Greek myth, and shows a man with naked nymphs.</td>
<td><a href="https://www.bbc.co.uk/programmes/w172vrot7jilhnn">https://www.bbc.co.uk/programmes/w172vrot7jilhnn</a></td>
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<td>BBC5 Live</td>
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<td><a href="https://www.bbc.co.uk/programmes/b09pkw7c">https://www.bbc.co.uk/programmes/b09pkw7c</a></td>
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<td>Belinda Grasnick - TAZ</td>
<td>Frauenbilder ändern sich</td>
<td><a href="https://www.taz.de/Britische-Galerie-haengt-Kunstwerk-ab/5481845/">https://www.taz.de/Britische-Galerie-haengt-Kunstwerk-ab/5481845/</a></td>
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<td>bijutsutecho</td>
<td>マンチェスター市立美術館がウォーターハウスの《ヒュラスとニンフたち》を撤去。非難が殺到</td>
<td><a href="https://bijutsutecho.com/magazine/news/headline/11562">https://bijutsutecho.com/magazine/news/headline/11562</a></td>
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<tr>
<td>Black Art Matters</td>
<td>Sonia Boyce views current interest in black British art through the life of Donald Rodney and the art he left behind after his early death, including a digital version of himself.</td>
<td><a href="https://www.bbc.co.uk/programmes/b08vzrth">https://www.bbc.co.uk/programmes/b08vzrth</a></td>
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<tr>
<td>Chloe Mayer and Carl Stroud - Sun</td>
<td>OUT OF THE PICTURE Victorian masterpiece of naked goddesses is pulled from Manchester Art Gallery in wake of Time's Up movement</td>
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<td>Chris Menahan - Information Liberation</td>
<td>Manchester Art Gallery Removes Nymphs Painting, Replaces It With Live Drag Queens</td>
<td><a href="http://www.informationliberation.com/?id=57914">http://www.informationliberation.com/?id=57914</a></td>
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<tr>
<td>Chris Menahan - Information Liberation - INFOWARS</td>
<td>MANCHESTER ART GALLERY REMOVES NYMPHS PAINTING, REPLACES IT WITH LIVE DRAG QUEENS</td>
<td><a href="https://www.infowars.com/Manchester-art-gallery-removes-nymphs-painting-replaces-it-with-live-drag-queens/">https://www.infowars.com/Manchester-art-gallery-removes-nymphs-painting-replaces-it-with-live-drag-queens/</a></td>
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<tr>
<td>Christopher Hooton - Independent</td>
<td>Painting of naked nymphs removed from Manchester Art Gallery to provoke debate about women in art</td>
<td><a href="https://www.independent.co.uk/arts-entertainment/art/news/manchester-art-gallery-removes-waterhouse-nude-naked-nymphs-painting-hylas-girls-times-upmetoo-a8190606.html">https://www.independent.co.uk/arts-entertainment/art/news/manchester-art-gallery-removes-waterhouse-nude-naked-nymphs-painting-hylas-girls-times-upmetoo-a8190606.html</a></td>
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<tr>
<td>Claire Levenson - Slate</td>
<td>Un musée anglais retire un tableau de nymphes nues pour lancer un débat sur le sexisme</td>
<td><a href="http://www.slate.fr/story/157105/musee-tableau-nymphes-nues-sexisme">http://www.slate.fr/story/157105/musee-tableau-nymphes-nues-sexisme</a></td>
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<td>Confidentials</td>
<td>Manchester Art Gallery to remove all paintings</td>
<td><a href="https://confidentials.com/Manchester/manchester-art-gallery-is-to-remove-all-paintings">https://confidentials.com/Manchester/manchester-art-gallery-is-to-remove-all-paintings</a></td>
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<th>Source</th>
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<td>Der Standard</td>
<td>#MeToo-Debatte: Galerie in Manchester hängt Gemälde ab</td>
<td><a href="https://derstandard.at/2000073467783-661/MeToo-Debatte-Galerie-in-Manchester-haengt-Gemaelde-ab">https://derstandard.at/2000073467783-661/MeToo-Debatte-Galerie-in-Manchester-haengt-Gemaelde-ab</a></td>
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<tr>
<td>Diogo Lopes - Observador</td>
<td>Este quadro é ofensivo? Há quem pense que sim</td>
<td><a href="https://observador.pt/2018/02/02/este-quadro-e-ofensivo-ha-quem-pense-que-sim/">https://observador.pt/2018/02/02/este-quadro-e-ofensivo-ha-quem-pense-que-sim/</a></td>
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<td>El Diario</td>
<td>Una galería inglesa retira un cuadro de ninfas desnudas para llevar el 'me too' al arte</td>
<td>Article</td>
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<td>El Diario - El Met</td>
<td>El Met se niega a retirar un cuadro criticado por &quot;sexualizar&quot; a una niña</td>
<td>Article</td>
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<td><a href="https://www.eldiario.es/cultura/arte/Met-retirar-cuadro-criticado-sexualizar_o_715329389.html">https://www.eldiario.es/cultura/arte/Met-retirar-cuadro-criticado-sexualizar_o_715329389.html</a></td>
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<td>El Español</td>
<td>Un museo de Manchester retira un cuadro de ninfas por el debate sobre el feminismo</td>
<td>Article</td>
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<td><a href="https://www.elespanol.com/cultura/20180201/museo-manchester-retira-cuadro-ninfas-debate-feminismo/28172170_0.html">https://www.elespanol.com/cultura/20180201/museo-manchester-retira-cuadro-ninfas-debate-feminismo/28172170_0.html</a></td>
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<td>El Mundo</td>
<td>La Manchester Art Gallery retira una obra maestra prerrafaelita para &quot;debatir&quot; la cosificación del cuerpo femenino</td>
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<td><a href="https://www.elmundo.es/cultura/2018/02/01/5a72f083268e3e1a5c8b4656.html">https://www.elmundo.es/cultura/2018/02/01/5a72f083268e3e1a5c8b4656.html</a></td>
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<td>El País</td>
<td>Una galería de Manchester retira un cuadro de ninfas desnudas</td>
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<td><a href="https://elpais.com/cultura/2018/02/01/actualidad/1517479506_099878.html?id_externo_rsoc=TW_MX_CM">https://elpais.com/cultura/2018/02/01/actualidad/1517479506_099878.html?id_externo_rsoc=TW_MX_CM</a></td>
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<td>El Periodico</td>
<td>Un museo de Manchester retira un cuadro por mostrar mujeres desnudas</td>
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<td>Ellen Mara de Wachter - Frieze</td>
<td>After the Nymphs Painting Backlash: Is Curatorial Activism a Right or an Obligation?</td>
<td>Article</td>
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<td><a href="https://frieze.com/article/after-nymphs-painting-backlash-curatorial-activism-right-or-obligation">https://frieze.com/article/after-nymphs-painting-backlash-curatorial-activism-right-or-obligation</a></td>
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<td>Fraser Nelson - Telegraph</td>
<td>Britain has been overwhelmed by a whole new moral climate, with new rules – and a lot of fear</td>
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<td>Frieze - 20180202</td>
<td>After #MeToo, UK Gallery Removes Nymphs Painting, Denies Censorship</td>
<td>Article</td>
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<td>Frieze - 20180206</td>
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<td>Removing nymphs from a gallery is provocative – but does not merit contempt</td>
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<td>Giving Offense ESSAYS ON CENSORSHIP</td>
<td><a href="https://www.press.uchicago.edu/ucp/books/book/chicago/G/b03631764.html">https://www.press.uchicago.edu/ucp/books/book/chicago/G/b03631764.html</a></td>
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<td>Arena Bombing</td>
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<td>Art of Wellbeing Tour</td>
<td>@mcrartgallery Escape the gloom of this morning's rain and join John for 'Art of Wellbeing' tour at 12.30. We explore the five pathways to wellbeing through historic, modern and contemporary art - including the wonderful Sylvia Pankhurst display. All welcome.</td>
<td>Event or Exhibition</td>
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<td>City Life Awards 2018</td>
<td><a href="https://www.manchestereveningnews.co.uk/whats-on/arts-culture-news/citylife-awards-2018-best-arts-14062769">https://www.manchestereveningnews.co.uk/whats-on/arts-culture-news/citylife-awards-2018-best-arts-14062769</a></td>
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<td>New North South</td>
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<td>Objects of Obsession</td>
<td>Objects of Obsession: A new digital series in partnership with the Royal Academy and The Space</td>
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<td>Sylvia Pankhurst Working Women Exhibition</td>
<td>Sylvia Pankhurst: Working Women</td>
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<td>BBCNWT Video</td>
<td>Do you find this Victorian painting offensive? Manchester Art Gallery has taken Hylas and the Nymphs down to &quot;prompt conversation&quot; on how the female form is displayed in galleries. The decision has been condemned by some as censorship. <a href="https://twitter.com/BBCNWT/status/959470292342108160/1">https://twitter.com/BBCNWT/status/959470292342108160/1</a></td>
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<td>CENSURA EN EL ARTE</td>
<td>CENSURA EN EL ARTE: ¿Sí o no? Una opinión <a href="https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=03KrVYKPLqc&amp;feature=youtu.be">https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=03KrVYKPLqc&amp;feature=youtu.be</a></td>
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<td>DAY 23 - Do you qualify as a NYMPH</td>
<td>DAY 23 - Do you qualify as a NYMPH? <a href="http://www.thaliatemuse.com">www.thaliatemuse.com</a> <a href="https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=d2bXJ1wnRIs&amp;feature=youtu.be&amp;t=4m22s">https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=d2bXJ1wnRIs&amp;feature=youtu.be&amp;t=4m22s</a></td>
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<td>Gender is a Pantheon</td>
<td>Gender is a Pantheon • Freeing Art from Feminism</td>
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<td>Indigo 45 min Boiler Room</td>
<td>Indigo 45 min Boiler Room DJ Set live from Manchester Art Gallery - Red Bull Music Academy Takeover <a href="https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=NIq-gqdeGQI">https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=NIq-gqdeGQI</a></td>
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<td>Inside the mystery of JW Waterhouse's The Magic Circle</td>
<td><a href="https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=LNxC7D-qLs0&amp;feature=youtu.be">https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=LNxC7D-qLs0&amp;feature=youtu.be</a></td>
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<td>Manchester Art Gallery Censors Female Nude</td>
<td><a href="https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=QkA6-Si5r-4&amp;feature=youtu.be&amp;a=">https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=QkA6-Si5r-4&amp;feature=youtu.be&amp;a=</a></td>
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<td>Manchester Art Gallery visitors call project 'stupid'</td>
<td><a href="https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=ILIFswxylJ8&amp;feature=youtu.be&amp;a=">https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=ILIFswxylJ8&amp;feature=youtu.be&amp;a=</a></td>
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<td>Monty Python - The hand</td>
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<td>Telegraph - Viewpoint</td>
<td>Viewpoint: Manchester Art Gallery's Waterhouse stunt is virtue signalling <a href="https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=JTCvguu29sk">https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=JTCvguu29sk</a></td>
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<td>TOIIAR MARTIRIO</td>
<td>&quot;TOIIAR MARTIRIO&quot; BY VINCENT CAPPELLI PERFORMANCE ARTE CONTEMPORANEA <a href="https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=lBA18BZk-5A&amp;feature=youtu.be">https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=lBA18BZk-5A&amp;feature=youtu.be</a></td>
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<td>Censored Art in times of #MeToo <a href="https://arsmomentum.wordpress.com/2018/02/02/censored-art-metoo/?utm_content=bufferee26&amp;utm_medium=social&amp;utm_source=twitter.com&amp;utm_campaign=buffer">https://arsmomentum.wordpress.com/2018/02/02/censored-art-metoo/?utm_content=bufferee26&amp;utm_medium=social&amp;utm_source=twitter.com&amp;utm_campaign=buffer</a></td>
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<td><a href="https://facesandvoices.wordpress.com/2018/02/03/silencing-the-naiads-why-the-manchester-art-galleries-performance-is-not-making-a-favour-to-women/">https://facesandvoices.wordpress.com/2018/02/03/silencing-the-naiads-why-the-manchester-art-galleries-performance-is-not-making-a-favour-to-women/</a></td>
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<td><a href="http://www.melonfarmers.co.uk">www.melonfarmers.co.uk</a></td>
<td>Manchester Art Gallery censors classic Pre-Raphaelite painting to prevent men from gazing on the naked female form <a href="http://www.melonfarmers.co.uk/me_art_18a.htm#PC_nymphs_tempt_society_to_its_doom_10394">http://www.melonfarmers.co.uk/me_art_18a.htm#PC_nymphs_tempt_society_to_its_doom_10394</a></td>
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<td><a href="http://www.museu2009.blogspot.com">www.museu2009.blogspot.com</a></td>
<td>These nymphs were taken from the Manchester Art Gallery. To make us think. - Estas ninfas foram retiradas da Galeria de Arte de Manchester. Para nos fazer pensar. <a href="http://museu2009.blogspot.com/2018/02/these-nymphs-were-taken-from-manchester.html">http://museu2009.blogspot.com/2018/02/these-nymphs-were-taken-from-manchester.html</a></td>
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<td><a href="http://www.printed-editions.com">www.printed-editions.com</a></td>
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<td>NEWLY-IMPOSED CENSORSHIP AT MANCHESTER ART GALLERY</td>
<td><a href="https://www.tfa.net/newly_imposed_censorship_at_manchester_art_gallery?recruiter_id=163">https://www.tfa.net/newly_imposed_censorship_at_manchester_art_gallery?recruiter_id=163</a></td>
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<td><a href="http://www.thecostumerag.com">www.thecostumerag.com</a></td>
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