Glossary of New Media Terms

by *Dana Allen-Greil and Ellen Snyder-Grenier*

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The digital world has its own language. We hope that this glossary—made up of terms related to new media and exhibitions found within this issue—will be a brief but helpful guide for those new to new media.

Application Programming Interface (API): an interface that enables a computer application to interact with another computer application. APIs save time because programmers can use predefined functions to make the programs talk to one another rather than having to write them from scratch. A common use of an API is to retrieve data from one system for display or use by another system. An organization will release its API (either publicly or in a controlled fashion to approved developers) so that other software developers can design new services and products. For example the Twitter API allows other applications and organizations to search, collect, and send tweets. The Brooklyn Museum Collection API can be used to display collection images and data in your own applications.

App: short for "application." Often used to refer to a small, specialized program downloaded onto mobile devices.

Augmented reality (AR): a version of reality enhanced by digital information (sound, images, video), often displayed as a visual overlay through a device (e.g., smartphone camera, AR headset). AR is information overlaid on the real world while virtual reality (see below) replaces the real world with a simulation.

BYOD (Bring Your Own Device): refers to the practice of visitors using their own smartphone or mobile device. Museums develop apps and mobile websites for use with BYOD, often as an alternative to providing equipment for rent.

Hashtag: a word or combination of characters preceded by a pound sign (#) that is used on Twitter and other social networks (Facebook, Instagram) to group messages on a specific topic. Commonly used museum-related hashtags include #musetech, #musesocial, and #museumed.

Millennial or "digital native:" people in the demographic Generation Y (born 1980s-2000s). A digital native is a person who has used digital technologies from an early age. These terms are sometimes used interchangeably to refer to tech-savvy people.

Mobile technology: refers to devices (e.g., smartphones, tablets) and infrastructure (e.g., wifi, cellular service) that allow for interaction with digital content on the go, without needing to be plugged ("wired").

Multiplatform: refers to the use of digital media across different devices or operating systems. Often used to refer to mobile applications that are developed for iOS (Apple) and Android devices.

Multitouch: a touch surface (e.g., touchscreen, track pad) that recognizes two or more points of contact at once. Required for gestures such as pinch and zoom. Some multitouch surfaces (e.g., touch table) can be used by more than one person at a time.

New media: a 21st-century catchall term used to describe digital information such as data, text, images, video, and sound as well as the interactive experiences developed to access that digital information. The

definition of new media is constantly changing.

Operating system: system software that manages technology hardware, such as computers and smartphones. Unix, Linux, OS X, iOS, MS-Windows and Android are common operating systems.

Pinch, zoom, and swipe: gestures that users have become accustomed to in using their own tablets and smartphones. Users often expect this functionality from touchscreens.

Platform: a technological or structural form that supports interaction or processing. This term can be used to describe computing platforms (e.g., Mac or PC), social networks (e.g., Facebook or Twitter), or software technologies. Related term: multiplatform.

QR code (Quick Response code): a type of barcode that can be scanned by a user with a QR code scanner (e.g., an app) and a smartphone. Scanning a code can bring up a webpage, a video, or any other web-enabled content. QR usage has not yet become widespread in the United States; short URLs are a good alternative for exhibit labels.

Responsive design: a web design approach that takes into account different viewing sizes across devices (e.g., smartphone, tablet, laptop, desktop) and presents an optimal viewing experience based on the device being used to view content.

Slideshare: an online service for sharing presentation slides and other documents.

RFID (radio-frequency identification): like a barcode, RFID is used to transmit information between a transponder or tag and a processing device or reader. RF tags can be embedded in all kinds of things (e.g., cards, wristbands, stickers, signs, and other surfaces) and RFID systems are used in many different ways in museums (e.g., to inventory collection items or to build personalized visitor experiences by swiping an RF card near readers at exhibition kiosks).

Smartphone: a cell phone that includes additional software functions (such as e-mail, an Internet browser, or MP3 player), essentially making it a mobile personal computer.

Social media: a way for people to come together on the Internet, where they can share ideas, opinions, and information. Examples include Twitter, Facebook, Tumblr, YouTube, Instagram, Flickr, and message boards.

Storify: an online service that allows users to organize and create "stories" by importing and displaying social media content such as Tweets, Facebook posts, and other media. For example, a Storify of a Twitter chat might serve as an archived summary or transcript for users who were unable to participate in real time.

Tablet: a touchscreen mobile computer such as Apple's iPad or Android-powered devices such as Samsung's Galaxy.

User-Generated Content (UGC): Content (e.g., text, photos, video) that is produced by users (e.g., visitors, non-experts) and published, often via the web or social media. When displaying or collecting UGC in exhibitions, care is often taken to be clear about what content is generated by the museum vs. by users.

Virtual reality: an experience that projects the user into an artificial 3-D space generated by the computer. Some virtual reality systems use stereoscopic goggles that provide the 3-D imagery and some sort of tracking device, which may be the goggles themselves for tracking head and body movement, or a "data glove" that tracks hand movements. ✳

For a more exhaustive list of terms related to mobile technologies in particular, see the excellent glossary compiled by Titus Bicknell, Nancy Proctor, and Ted Forbes at: http://mobileappsformuseums. wordpress.com/2013/08/08/ glossary/.