

# Using Social Media to Connect Users to Digital Archives

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## Research Question

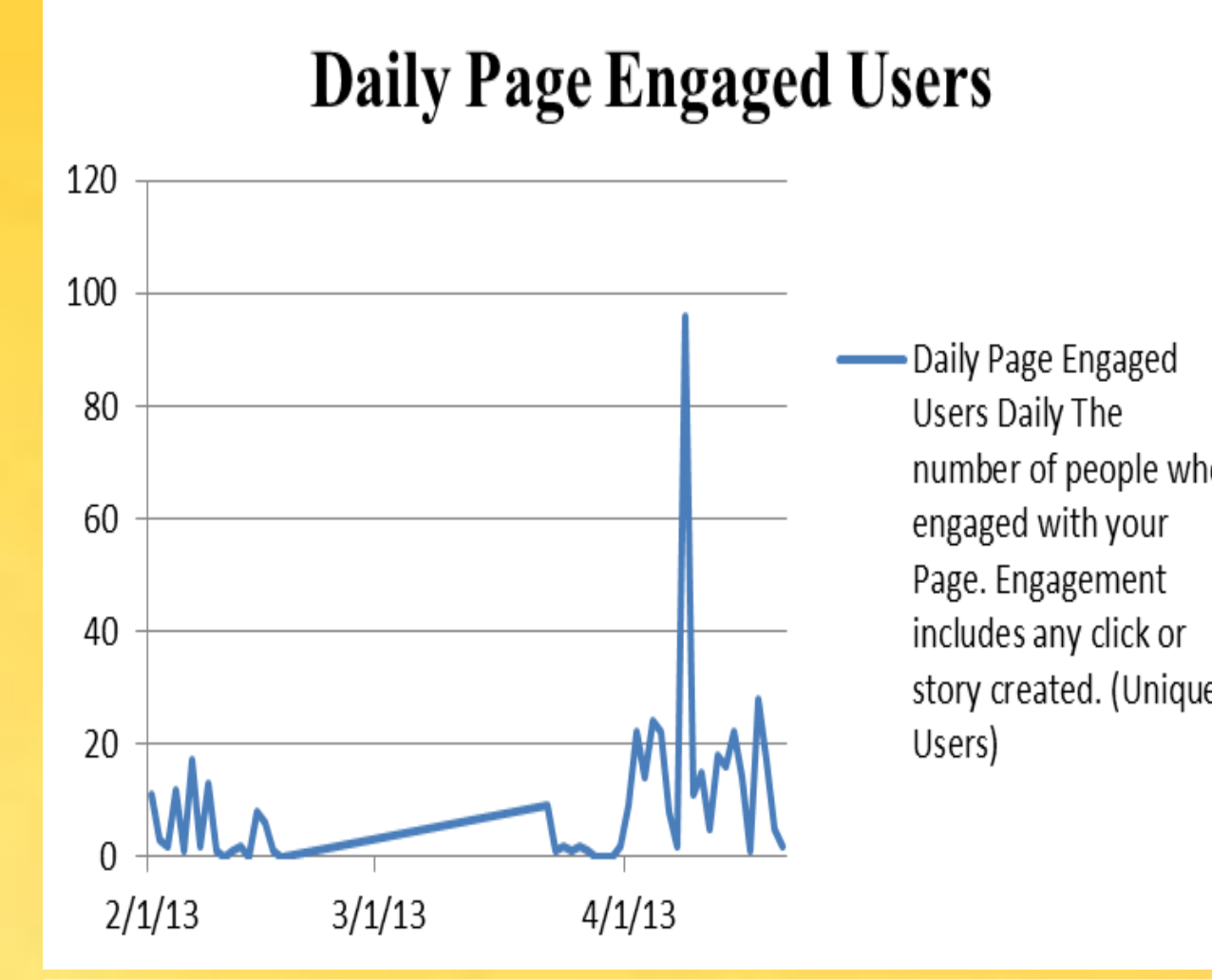
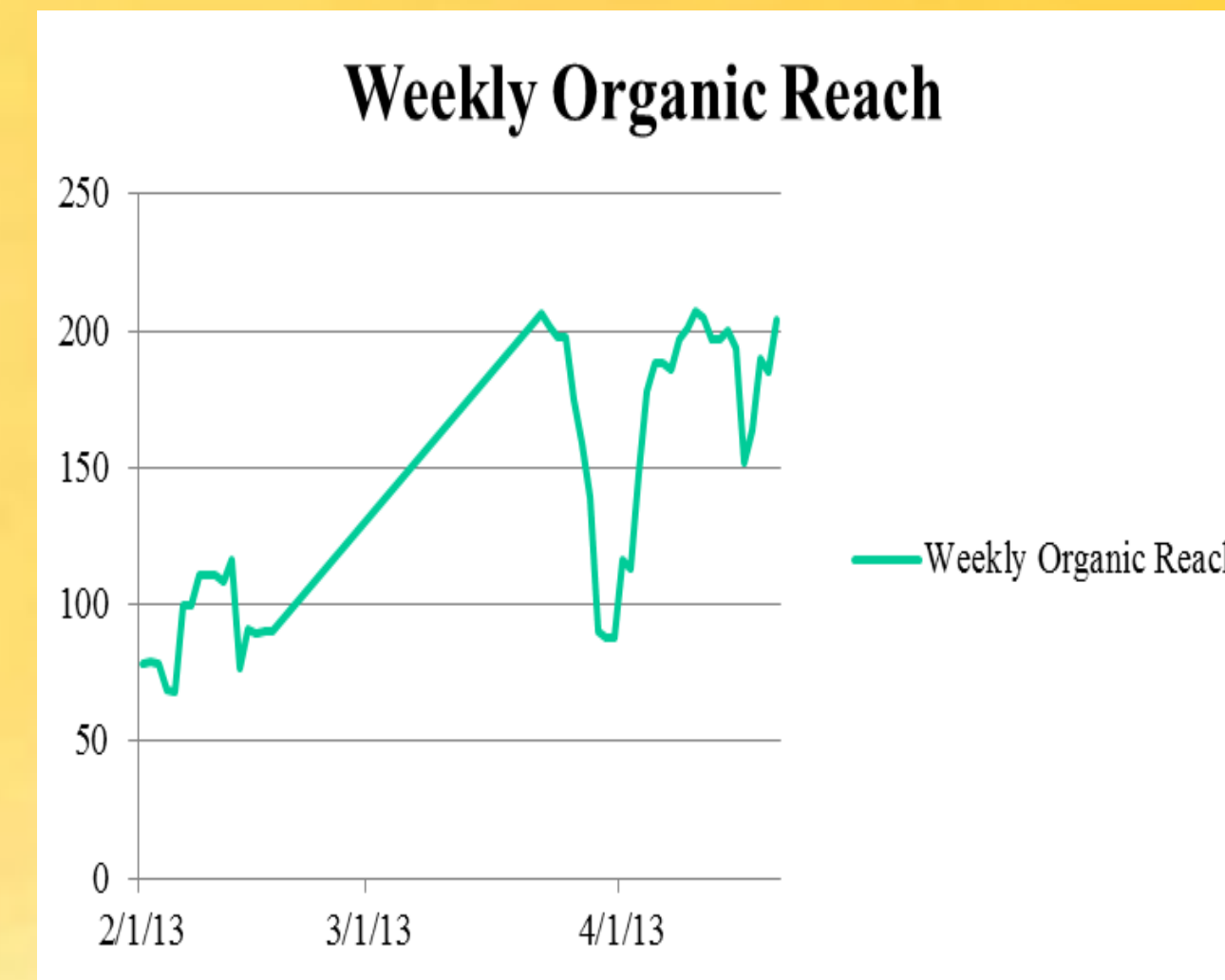
- What is the discovery process for users?
- How do archivists decide what to post?
- How do users engage with the archive and archivist?

### Background

There are few comprehensive studies that explain discrete outcomes and effectiveness of the social media incorporation in archives, specifically looking at the user end. Without this knowledge archives are unable to make targeted efforts whose benefits outweigh the costs, and to know whether online efforts are reaching as many people as we are led to think. More studies are needed to understand the hard evidence behind archival institutions who have implemented social media, and the cost benefit analysis of what the 'free' applications have accomplished.

## Methodology

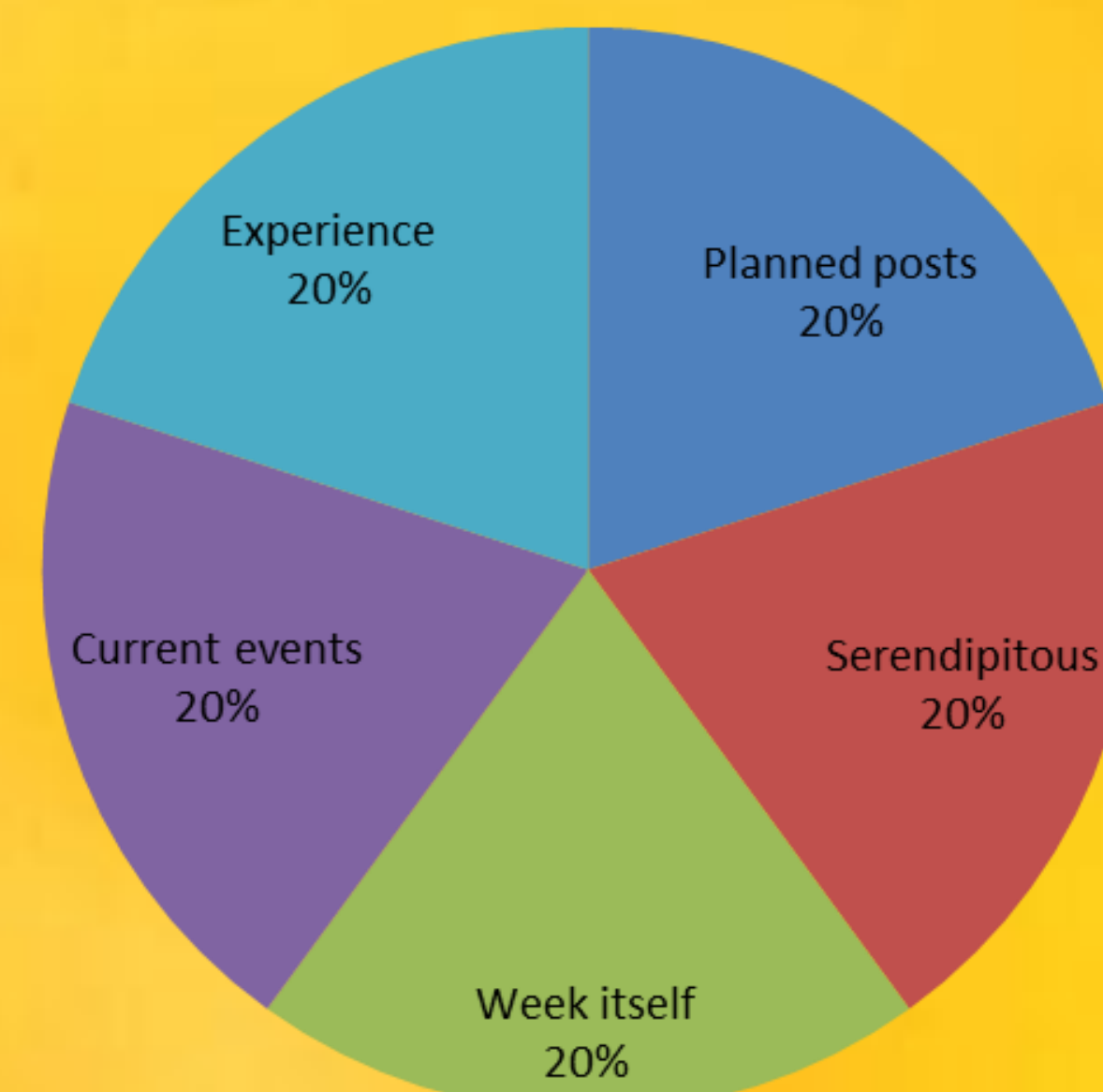
- The exploratory study provides insight into the methods employed by archivists in their use of social media applications, in conjunction with a quantifiable data set.
- Participants
  - Staubitz Archives, Carthage College
  - National Archive and Records Administration in Chicago
  - Parkside Archives & Research Center, University of Wisconsin-Parkside
  - Ward Irish Music Archives
- Data Collection
  - Observations
  - Semi-structured interviews
  - Quantitative data sets from social media usage of archive institutions



## Preliminary Findings

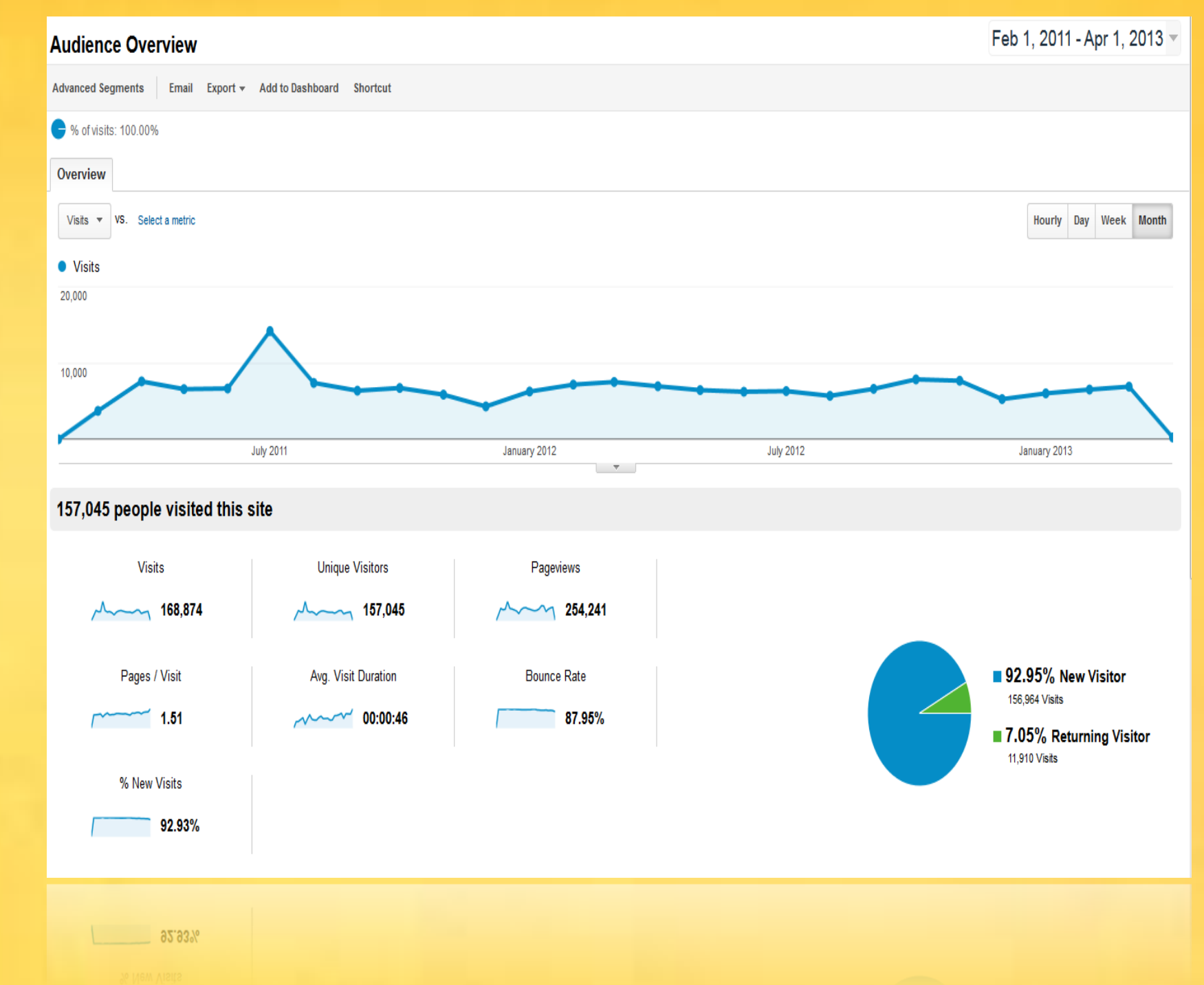
1. **Discovery process**
  - All institutions reported reference questions being asked through social media applications instead of using traditional methods.
2. **Archivists' posts**
  - Although no set evaluation tools were established by the institution, each archivist was self-evaluating what he or she was posting each week. The self-evaluation was able to develop as the archivist learned what bits of information were well received by their user base.
  - The decision of what to post had several variables, however the selection of what to post was divided equally amongst
    - Time of the archivist
    - Week itself
    - Pre-planning of posts
3. **User engagement**
  - Certain posts engaged more users than other posts. Due to unique nature of archival institutions involved in the study, the users likes varied to some degree.

## Social Media Posting



## Conclusion

- The results of the study revealed that archivists have incorporated social media use into their daily routine. Users engaged in a number of postings.
- The connectedness between the archive, archivist, and user were intertwined and thus the archivist felt as though the archive as able to remain visible to the user in new ways. As each time the archivist makes a post to a social media application, if a user has 'friended' or chosen to 'follow' the archive, the post will appear in the user's news feed. Consequently, the archive has the opportunity to be visible on a daily or weekly basis.



## Moving Forward

Social media makes it seem possible for an institution of any size to reach a potentially limitless number of users. However, the user's interaction and satisfaction with the social media tools need to be continuously re-evaluated.

Google Analytics is a client side tracking tool as opposed to a traditional web server log. Client side tools, such as Google Analytics, are able to provide much richer data about the user's behavior as they are run from the user's browser.

A continuation of usability studies from a log analysis and qualitative user analysis will both be needed in order to ensure the best social media use in archive environments to increase functionality for users and archivists.

Possible research questions include:

- R1: What is the user's query behavior?
- R2: How did users enter the [archive] website?
- R3: What was the movement of users once they had entered the site?

## Acknowledgements

I would like to thank the archivists who participated in this study.