I think that the points that everyone brings up about using social network analysis with data from service like Foursquare and Instagram are quite valid. And certainly I would say that the list of metrics to measure that Anderson created is quite exhaustive. I think though that Anderson’s list and mentality is honestly more like the*U.S. News & World Report*'s rankings of Universities and Hospitals. Though it’s unclear whether museums would pay any attention to their rankings or if those rankings would even be published or circulated, but if they did start paying attention to their rank or composite index based on this data, we have to ask if that would be actually a good thing for the museums in terms of satisfying their more intrinsic goals or if it would lead to manipulation of metrics for higher rank like what happens in some colleges. I also think that the index fails to account for the various different missions of museums. For instance a Museum like the Brooklyn Museum, my favorite art Museum in the city, and one that gives me great joy has an altogether different character and atmosphere than the MoMA or the Met.

Moreover the rankings would probably create a consolidation of donations and it would make the process by which benefactors might figure out how to “best spend” their money overly market-based. Though I am not in a position to endow and collections or donate much more money than a suggested entry fee to a museum, I imagine that there is an importance that a donor have some kind of personal connection the museum, some more intimate reason for donating as to make the donation somehow more legitimate.

Having articulated my discomfort with this idea of an index, I would like to focus now on some of the ways that I think methods in data science and machine learning might be useful for providing specific insights about user experience to help museum management enhance the enjoyment of their guests.

First I think it is important that internally as opposed to externally museum management and boards devise a set of metrics and indicators that they find to be important for their particular priorities. Once they do this they should maintain some kind of “dashboard” that is updated with at least some consistent frequency, as has become standard organizational practice so going forward, they can have sense of how various interventions they make in guest experiences effect the metrics that they deem important.

Second, I think that art museums (or maybe some new tech consulting firm that could specialize in art museums) should begin to leverage technology that has been used by retailers for a good amount of time now including motion tracking with web cams to better track guest interest in certain piece of certain kinds based on the among of time of the inferred position of units (the guests) within a map of the museum. This would allow the museums to make a number of useful interventions including feeding information and feedback to curators, better planning operations and queuing strategies to avoid lines and waits [basically what Disney IE/OR people do <http://www.nytimes.com/2010/12/28/business/media/28disney.html?_r=0>].

Finally, museums should try to experiment with new service like Art.sy and develop (or use a template for some kind of mobile app) to create mobile apps to scan QR codes associated with pieces of art to read descriptions and facts about the works they are viewing on their smart phones. These would be services presented under the auspices of providing enhanced information about works they are viewing, but that just as importantly for the museum management serve to create a rich click-stream-like dataset that can be cross referenced with the visual tracking of users and stored from one visit to the next to better understand how guests’ interaction with a museum’s collection (or multiple museums’ collections) varies over time.