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# **Museums in the Digital Era**

Museum popularization and the New Cultural Consumer

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## **Abstract**

Since the dawn of the digital era, museums, like all institutes, found themselves in the midst of constant changes. Rules from the past ceased to be effective, and the roles and relationships between museums and their audience no longer the same. In the age of participatory culture, global connection and high and popular cultural convergence, the power of the united fans has brought about obvious impact on the world of popular culture and potentially pervading into the art world; while trends and market demands from cultural tourism also influencing the museums' direction.

This study borrows the theoretical viewpoint of fandom and participatory culture from current media and popular culture studies, while incorporating conversations from cultural tourism, glocalization and effects of Diasporas. This thesis seeks to uncover the current museum engagement strategies and the fan activities on Facebook and one user-generated content project on Twitter.

10 museums Facebook pages randomly sampled from a list of top 500 museums Facebook presence (20 posts per museum), as well as 3 best practice museums (40 posts per museum) were analyzed qualitatively to understand the museums' strategies on Facebook. Comments and wall postings by fans from the 3 best practice museums' FB pages were also qualitatively analyzed. To supplement the lack of UCG projects on FB, this thesis has also included one UCG project on Twitter, hosted by one of the best practiced museums.

Results from the study indicate that "localism" and "popular culture reference" are both prevalent strategies among museums; however, the advertised attempts at "open dialogues" by the museums seldom take place. Effects of "the Digital

Diasporas” could be the main reason behind one museum’s online success. And lastly, museum Facebook pages are becoming open spaces for artists’ self-promotion.

Keywords: museums and social media, participatory culture, cultural tourism and social media, digital diasporas.

## **Introduction**

Museums, along with art critics, dealers and other traditional art intermediaries have long held the expert role in the evaluation, dissemination and promotion of art (Arora & Vermeulen, 2013). However, with the level of connection and democratization of information brought on by the digital age, the role of art consumers and producers are beginning to blur. Audiences now have the power to make themselves heard, share their opinions (E-Word of Mouth) and even add their own creative spin on pre-existing cultural products (Prosumption); such practices are recognized by scholars as the “participatory culture”, which has casted tremendous influence in popular culture (Arora & Vermeulen, 2013; Lee, 2012; Jenkins, 2007; Nakajima, 2012), McCracken (2005) posits that with the shift towards consumer power, all there is to do is “to invite the multiplier (the consumers) to participate in the construction of the brand by putting it to work for their own purposes in their own world...the term ‘multiplier’ or something like it makes it clear that we depend on them to complete the work”. Such reality may be well-accepted or even utilized in the field of popular culture (Pearson, 2010); but when considered in conjunction with high culture institutions, such phenomenon seems to go directly against the exclusivity and elitism that’s deeply embedded in the constituents and the general perception of these organizations (Arora & Vermeulen, 2013).

Recent studies on popular culture have noted the rise of fans as the new cultural intermediaries. While carrying out the activities of word-of-mouth and prosumption, they seem to challenge the role of art professionals, and at a broader scale, potentially revolutionize the cultural industry with their own set of logic in the dissemination of cultural products (Lee, 2013). There are reasons to believe that influential trends within popular culture have infiltrated the art world. The MoMA Facebook page, for instance, was merged with the page created by a high schooler prior to the establishment of the official page. In fact, with the portrait of Francis Bacon inspiring the image of the Joker character in the latest Batman movie and the MoMA exhibition having film star Tilda Swinton sleeping in a box, there seems to exist a general trend towards the convergence of high and popular culture (Gans, 2008). With the trends of participatory culture and high and low cultural convergence, comes the pressing need to examine the reconfigured and shifting relationship between cultural consumers and the museums.

As a matter of fact, with the downsizing of public funds for museums in recent years, the need for seeking alternative revenue streams and expanding audiences has compelled museums to embrace the use of social media, and as a result, invite the masses to participate in the creation of the museums' online spaces and the opportunity to communicate their opinion on the curated cultural objects (Verboom & Arora, 2013). These new pressures potentially brings about novel shifts in the nature of the art audience and the role of museums as traditional custodians of art; as John Falk stated in 2010 at the American Alliance of Museum (AAM) conference, "The value of museums begins and ends with the relationship with our visitors. It's a contract that is renewed each and every time they engage with us, and if we don't live up to it, we will be usurped." Museums are now more dependent on their relationships

with the audiences, and thereby, more susceptible to audience taste, viewing behavior and emotive needs.

Research document by the Arts Council England, MLA and Arts & Business – “Digital audience: engagement with arts and culture online (2010)” has found that 53% of the online population (at the time of research) have used the internet to engage with arts and culture in the past 12 months (62% among 16 to 34 years-old); further research conducted by the same institutions also indicated that those who engage with arts online are also engaged in arts and culture offline. This perhaps further illustrates the importance of museum online engagement and begs the question of how museums are popularizing themselves in this age of participatory culture; moreover, in light of the rise to power of fandom and the blurring of high and low culture in the digital era, the impact of fans as the new cultural intermediaries in the museum world is also relevant question that needs to be examined.

Moreover, the rise of the digital era also puts into spotlight the effects of globalization, glocalization and Digital Diasporas. Since the internet is boundless in nature, the audience museums are trying to engage could potentially come from all corners of the world, such issues would be impossible to overlook in the analysis of this thesis. Additionally, the effect of Diasporas uniting through social media is also an important aspect for the art institutions, Crouch (2011) has noted that “for the most part, Digital Diaspora are using the tools [of social media] to create awareness of cultural events in their community” (p. 63). The emotional connection and romanticism projected to the homeland by Diasporas have been explored by commercial organizations, but for cultural institutions, the Diasporic sentiments could also mean additional channels for engagement and opportunities to expand audience

base.

Borrowing the argument of Dittmar & Dodds (2008), this thesis hold that the sentiment of Diasporas and religious identification can all be seen as forms of fandom, and thus, when placed within the context of museum online platforms, can all be seen as the new cultural consumers.

Perhaps also in relation to the down-sizing of public fund and the tourism trend of “cultural revival” (Tufts & Milne, 1999, p. 614), for the past decades museums have been accentuating the importance placed on cultural tourism (Tufts & Milne, 1999; Stylianou-Lambert, 2011). However, also due to changes in market preference, museums are increasingly faced with challenges in providing “experiential” tourist experience. With the enhanced emphasis on “authenticity”, museums are also finding themselves competing to be the provider of authentic cultural experience (Prentice, 2001). Since more and more visitors are now seeking to escape into the lives of the “locals”, what is perceived to be the “authentic experience” often outweighs other aspects of the tourist experience, such as the educational feature of a museum visit (Ramkissoon & Uysal, 2010). Such phenomenon in turn, possibly instigated a returning to “localness”, or rather, a reinstatement for “authenticity” currently prevalent in the world of museums; when seeking to translate such “localness” and “authenticity” online, museums are also faced with the dilemma of balancing between “global cyber processes and local circumstances” (Morbey, 2007, p. 2).

Hence, this thesis aims at investigating the practice of museum popularization through the lens of popular culture by borrowing the concepts of fandom (Jenkins, 2007), cultural tourism, and fan practices in online space (Soukup, 2006). Best practice examples are analyzed in order to identify the strategies that contribute to

their success, and hopefully provide insights for other museums looking to expand audience base on social media. Since Facebook is the most popular social media platform (in terms of the number of active users), as well as the most visited social media platform (Duggan& Smith, 2014; Beal, 2014); this study has chosen to focus on the use of Facebook as a platform for museums to reach out to its audience and for the audience to interact with the museums and with each other. However, to supplement the lack of user-generated content projects on Facebook, this thesis also includes one UCG project launched by one of the sampled museums on Twitter. The following research question and sub-questions are developed to facilitate the process of this examination:

RQ: How are fine art museums representing themselves and engage the audience through the use of Facebook?

Sub-question1: What are the most effective ways for fine art museums to engage with audiences through Facebook?

Sub-question2: What are the fan activities on these successful museum Facebook pages?

Sub-question 3: How are audiences responding to museum user-generated content project on Twitter?

Sub-question 4: How interactive are the museum and the audience on the Twitter user-generated content project?

## **Theory and previous research**



Museums have traditionally been seen as the “synonym of authority, authenticity and the project of ‘nation’” (Kidd, 2009, p. 64), as gatekeepers in determining the value of artworks (Arora & Vermeulen, 2012), or even “mythical imaginings of powerful ideals separated from the mundane world of everyday” (Hopper-Greenhill, 2000, p. 10). Such views were not only upheld by the general public, but also shared by many inside the museum world. Due to such beliefs, museums have historically subscribed to authoritative, one-way methods when it comes to communication with the audience (Arora & Vermeulen, 2012; Verboom & Arora, 2013; Kidd, 2011); as Hopper-Greenhill (2000) proffered:

This professional direction is one that looks backwards rather than forwards, and inwards rather than outwards. It is based on attitudes, values and perceptions that have developed in isolation from other social and cultural institutions, and from an assumption that the definitions of civilization, culture and communication that these values enshrine are absolute (p. 10-11).

Such practices and the roles of museums, however, are being questioned in recent years by both practitioners and the outside world. Changes in social structure, development in information technology and the intensified cultural exchange all contributed to the renewed scrutiny of the traditional value attached to museums. The traditional way is no longer sufficient for museums, as public funding started to tighten and society started to question the values museums serve (Hopper-Greenhill, 2000). Museums are forced to reevaluate their practices and opening up to new forms of audience relationships.

Questions have been asked on how museums could contribute to society on the economic sense, funding needs to be argued for and are often depending on whether

museums are able to clearly position their identities and values. Perhaps in part affected by the changing circumstances, the scholars have been advocating the “reassessment of the traditional audience/ visitor encounter and the demographic of that visitor” (Kidd, 2011, p. 64). Audience engagement no doubt has become one of the top goals in the museum world. And as everyday life grows more and more integrated with digital media, how museums are and can utilize on a digital extension have been the topic of interest in the field of museum studies.

The following literature review will attempt at providing an overview of the current conversation surrounding museum in the digital era and participatory culture. Topics on museum digital media practices, globalization and museums, museum and cultural tourism and lastly, popular culture, fandom and the art world will be discussed in the following sections.

### *Museums and Digital Media*

The advent of digital media undoubtedly presented unprecedented opportunities for museums in terms of audience engagement, marketing and education. However, in light of museums’ tendencies of “trying to do too much, too fast” (Hopper-Greenhill, p.10), research has questioned the rapid adoption of social media use and the potential pitfall of such a band wagon effect. Kidd (2011) seeks to explore the use of these mediums and the impact it has on the communication of traditional values, such as the museum as an authoritative figure in the evaluation of art or how to convey an “authentic” online presence. Both Kidd (2011) and Bernstein (2008) have pointed out that when the plethora of social media platforms overlaps and it is often unclear for the museum whether the voice should be a representation of specific departments or a construction of a new identity; thus resulting in a confusing and potentially deceiving

mess. Since the under and over representation of certain aspect of the museum's many aspect can be misleading at times. Indeed, there are ethical concerns involved when constructing a museum's presence online; in her study, Wong (2011) addressed the dilemma between online engagement and the compromise of integrity in terms of control, authority, ownership and responsibility. Through the case study of "Anne Frank House" Twitter account, she examined the fine-lines between capitalization and preservation of Anne Frank's memory.

Museums are faced with the challenge of finding a balance between commercialization and the traditional sense of authority and wonderment. When managing an online presence, the challenge only became more pronounced, since online audiences have often grown used to the stimulating entertainment and provocative content of today's media (Birkner, 2012).

Moreover, extensive studies have been done on the use of web 2.0 in the museum sector and have largely focused on the strategic use of websites, social media platforms and the creative integration of these channels; Kidd(2011) found that there still exists a "gulf between the possibility presented by social media, and their use by many museums " which leads to a 'misaligned' perception between the audience and the museums that would be extremely problematic to the formation and maintenance of relationships.

To avoid "misalignment", researchers have looked into the effect web 2.0 tools has on audience engagement and relationship fostering. Russo, Watkins & Groundwater-Smith (2009) conducted an exploratory research on the effects of social media on informal learning in museums, and the results indicated that through user participation activities, such as content sharing, and museum acknowledgement of the

user's voice, social media can be extremely beneficial to the engagement and encouragement of cultivating genuine interest and passion for informal learning among the audience.

Similarly, Marty (2008) found in his study on museum websites that the implementation of digital museums could significantly complement the physical one in engaging and fostering relationships with the audience. Studies by Lopez, Margapoti, Maragliano & Bove (2010), Pett (2012) and Fletcher & Lee (2012) have focused on the extent of web 2.0 website implementation in museums from around the world; similarly research conducted by (Padilla-Meléndez & del Águila-Obra, 2013) aimed at understanding the value creation process through social media and websites in the museum sector, as a way to comprehend museum strategies of digital tools, what these studies found, however, was that museums are mostly still adhering to traditional one-way communication, and uses these platforms as promotional channels, instead of places of engagement. Fletcher & Lee (2012), nevertheless, did discovered signs of museum social media presences moving towards multi-way communication, which is conducted through “stratificating” messages to specific audience group to solicit communication among group members. This is a unique finding in the literatures reviewed so far, as a result would be worth looking into how such efforts are incorporated on the museum Facebook pages.

Finally, research conducted by Hausmann (2012) attempted at exploring the opportunities of viral marketing in terms of response generated by online audience. Unsurprisingly, result of the study indicated that content is the utmost important element in determining the viral marketing potential.

*Globalization, Museum and Social Media*

To understand the power of social media on museums, and high culture popularization, the concepts of “Globalization”, “Localization” and the significant influence of “Diasporas” must be taken into account. For the fact that the internet in itself “leaves behind the prejudice and limitations associated with our bodies, to interact solely as minds in an unfettered environment” (Fernback, 2007, p.50). But the truth is our minds and beliefs or even our identities are oftentimes shaped by the location where we physically reside in, or the cultural or religious background we identify ourselves with. As such, the interplay between the globalized social media platforms and the localized beliefs is important in the analysis on this thesis.

The concept of globalization has been around for decades, it is built upon the premise that consumers from around the world are drawn towards the same types of lifestyle and product; hence multinational companies should operate as such (Zhou & Belk, 2004; Hannerz, 1990; Robertson, 1995). It emphasizes the “homogenization of international markets and an increasing similarity in the needs and habits of international customers” (Liu, Guillet & Law, 2014, p. 149). Research in the area of globalization has noted an increase in such convergence due to the rise of worldwide networks, the development in communication technologies and the growth in global media (Hjalager, 2007). With its accentuation on highly homogeneous world view, “some tend to see globalization as a brakeless train crushing everything in its path, others see benefit in getting on board the train towards economic growth and modernization” (Khondker, 2004, p. 1).

It is then not a surprise that on the other end of the spectrum, scholars have also reported a returned emphasis on “localness” (Giddens, 2000; Ayres & Bosia, 2011). Or rather, globalization has sparked the romanticization of an indigenous and authentic “locality”.

As stated by Khondker (2004): globalization opens up doubts about the originality and authenticity of cultures, [without the realization that] if one takes a long-term view of globalization, “locality” or “local” itself is a consequence of globalization. There are hardly any sites or cultures that can be seen as isolated or unconnected from the global processes. (p.4)

A larger debate in the field points towards the middle ground of “glocalization”, Ritzer (2003) defines glocalization as “the interpenetration of the global and the local, resulting in unique outcomes in different geographic areas” (p. 193). In the same study, it was further argued that the globalization of “nothing” (which he defines as standardized and homogeneous) would eventually take over the local “something” (defined as indigenous and unique). With the end result of either “glocalization”: homogeneity slightly adapted to local standards, or “glocalization”: a variety of local and heterogeneous reflection of globalization. Khondker (1994, 2004) argues the redundancy of “glocalization” and proffered that globalization or glocalization should be seen as an interdependent process of “simultaneous globalization of the local and localization of the globality” (p.4). The impact of globalization on cultural products has also been the topic of research for studies such as Achterberg, Heilbron, Houtman & Aupers (2011) and Kuipers (2011). The former looked into how the appreciation of popular music has globalized in the past decades across Europe and America; while the latter study focused on the “transnational” practices in television industries in Europe, and found that practices created by the transnational professionals are diffusing into national practices.

Studies such as Yahagi and Kar (2009), Matusitz (2011) and Alden, Steenkamp & Batra (2006) both looked into the prosperity of international corporations, and found their success to be highly dependent with localized strategies.

The dynamics of global-local issues have also been the center of research in Diaspora marketing (Barata, 2007), where emotional relationship is fostered through embracing local culture as a significant part of corporate culture (p. 278). Indeed, for many Diasporas, which are global audiences, the “localness” of their homeland embodies the strong emotional attachment and ideology that are missing in their foreign settlements (Kastoryano, 1999; Cohen, 1997). Ray (2012) explored Diasporas’ participation in legacy tourism and discussed the issue of self-identity in Diasporas’ motivation to seek out their roots. Furthermore, scholars have also investigated the motivation for Diasporas to invest in their homelands (Rojas Gaviria, 2010; Belk, 2010) and how the development of ICT influenced the Diaspora knowledge flows (Grossman, 2010). Moreover, a study conducted by Grishel (n.d.) looked into the effect Polish Diasporas have on the national branding of Poland, and confirmed the potential of Diasporic influences.

Research conducted by Kingston & Griffin (2009) how Web 2.0 helps facilitate Diasporas’ journey to self-identification through the theoretical lenses of “tribal groups” and found significant effect in terms of empowering Diasporas as well as the potential for marketing purposes. Similarly, study by Nancarrow, Tinson & Webber (2007) researched into the link between individual consumption and origins in the case of Scottish Diasporas. Their research includes analysis from both the connection of personal consumption and how marketers might physically and emotionally reach the target audience. What they found is a confirmed linkage between personal consumption and Diasporic backgrounds; however, such linkage seems to weaken as the generations stretch on: the more distant one is from their original root, the weaker the connection became.

### *Museum and Cultural Tourism*

The discussions in globalization and localization are not the only area of study where “localness” has been the center of attention. However, unlike the “local” discussed in the fields of globalization and localization where “local” symbolizes the indigenous and natural characteristics of one place; studies in the field of cultural tourism have noted the “localness” as a perhaps deliberate construction of “authenticity” created to cater to the desire of glimpsing into the lives of others (Prentice, 2001). There has long been a debate surrounding the definition of “authenticity” and what it means for cultural tourism (Cohen, 2007), “authentic” and “inauthentic” can no longer be defined as black and white, but rather deemed a fluid concept open for negotiation (Zhu, 2012; Cohen, 1988).

Research in the field of tourism has positioned authenticity in the following context: objectivism, constructivism and existentialism (Zhu, 2012, p. 1496). Cultural tourist experience has generally been placed under the category of “objectivism authenticity”, where expert assessments are basis of authenticity. However, scholars such as Prentice (2001) have noted the impact of tourism trend in which tourists seek a more “experiential” aspect of authenticity in their travelling experiences. And thus resulting in museums having to compete with other components of “localness” (markets, street vendors, etc.). Such “authenticity” is often highly dependent of the “interpretation of genuineness and our desire for it” (Spooner, 1986, p.200). Ramkissoon & Uysal (2011) conducted a study on the effect of perceived authenticity on cultural tourists’ behavior, and confirmed that “the notion of authenticity offers the basis for successful consumption of cultural offerings” (p.554). Research by Zhu (2012) on the authenticity of cultural heritage site rituals also explored the concept of “performative authenticity” where the performers themselves create authenticity



through acts of “meaning making” (p.1510). Study by Charitonos, Blake, Scanlon & Jones (2012) explored the influences of social media and mobile devices in museum learning through analysis of students’ Twitter posts during a museum visit. The result of the study indicated that social media does facilitate the “meaning making” process and learning of museum artifacts.

Furthermore, study by Chhabra, Zhao, Lee & Okamoto (2012) looked into the role “self-authenticated experience” play in the decision and loyalty for homeland travels in the case of Indian Diasporas in the United States. Self-authentication is defined as “the consumer’s desire for mixed experience associated with need to connect, be in control, self-actualization and achieve an exhilarated state of mind” (p. 430). The result from the study indicate that the such self-authentication often strive for a balance between the individual’s state of mind and an objectively authentic setting, and as such enhances psychological gratification, commitment and loyalty for future visits.

The importance of authenticity in cultural tourism can perhaps be partly attributed to the human desire to escape everyday life and live the lives of others, or rather, “be the self that you wanted to be” (McIntyre, 2007, p.123). It is then, the desire to “experience” that fuels the need to travel. Scholars in the field of experiential marketing have also made the linkage with cultural tourism.

Morgan, Elbe & de Esteban Curiel (2009) explored the concept of experience economy as a basis for management and marketing strategies in tourism destination regions, and found that the experience economy has indeed influenced tourism. Petkus (2004) also argued the importance of applying experiential marketing techniques in the field of art institutions. Through the framework of Pine & Gilmore

(1999), he proffered that art institutions can deepen the audience engagement through four realms of experience: entertainment, education, aesthetic and escapist; where the experiences of the audience range from passive participation to active immersion. Results from the study of Williams (2006) also endorse the importance placed on experiential marketing in the field of tourism, where innovative experience designs have found to become increasingly important in the core capabilities of tourism firms.

When considering the economic contribution museums have on the society, the linkage with cultural tourism is definitely an important one. Tufts & Milne (1999) in their study have argued such importance as well as pointing out questions on the shifting perception of traditional museum roles and ability to provide diverse tourism experience. Unquestionably, the roles of museums as well as the relationship between museums and their audience are changing, with social media; such changes in relationships can also be viewed through the lens of “participatory culture”.

#### *Expertise and Participatory Culture in the Museum World*

At this stage there’s no denying that social media has altered not only the way people connect with each other, but also the relationship we have with institutions such as art museums. Jenkins (2006) proffered that this shift in technology has created the “participatory culture”, which is defined as

A culture with relatively low barriers to artistic expression and civic engagement, strong support for creating and sharing one’s creations, and some type of informal mentorship whereby what is known by the most experienced is passed along to novices. A participatory culture is also one in which members believe their contributions matter, and feel some degree of social connection with one another” (Clinton, Purushotma, Robison, & Weigel, 2006, p.3).

This new reality of participatory cultural consumers have been the topic of research in terms of their potential impact on traditional expert roles in the art world, Verboom & Arora (2013) has found that the major players in the museum blogosphere consists mainly of amateur bloggers; research have also found signs of new voices being added to the world of art, such as art consumers online, who can potentially challenge the traditional hierarchy of art authority (Arora & Vermeyleen, 2012).

In fact, the study conducted by Trant (2007) on the project of “social tagging”, which has entered the museum world in recent years (major museums such as V&A and the Metropolitan Museum of Art have both carried out such project), could be seen as proof of the shift towards participatory culture. “Social tagging” is defined as the “collective assignment of keywords to resources”, which means allowing users to assign categorical information on the museum collections. Trant (2007) argued that such practices would facilitate and complement the traditional “expert” tagging in that users sometimes provides useful terms that professionals would never have included, and thus provide a different understanding to the collection. On top of that, through “social tagging”, users are given the opportunity to further engage with the collection, and thus bring art closer to the public; in truth, further engaging audience has been at the top of the agenda for museums (Murawski, 2013); as stated by Graham Black (2012):

The museum must work with its users and communities to unlock the stories its collections hold, responding to the choices its users make. As such, it must give up its traditional authoritarian voice so that users are free to question, debate, collaborate, and speculate — seeking out those issues that most concern them —

and are given the support and inspiration required to do so.

### *Fandom and the new cultural consumers*

Due to the shift towards participatory culture and the changing landscape caused by the advent of new media discussed in the previous sections; scholars, such as Jenkins (2007) have started advocating the adopting of a different perspective when considering cultural consumers. Jenkins (2007) noted in his book about the future of fandom, that with the advent of web 2.0, the definition between fans and prosumers (consumers that produce content) are beginning to blur. He pointed out that the new wave of commentators commenting on the power of cultural consumers in the age of web 2.0 never uses the term “fan” or “fandom”; “yet their models rest on the same social behaviors and emotional commitments that fan scholars have been researching over the past several decades” (Jenkins, 2007, p. 359). Study by Dittmer & Dodds (2008) further argued the expansion of the term “fandom” to include both nationalism and religion. The fact is, nationalism is long being deemed inseparable with sports fandom if not totally interchangeable, as researched by King (2000) in his study of European football fandom.

Furthermore, recent studies in popular culture have pointed out the impact of that collective cultural consumers has on the practice of cultural and media industries Lee (2013) found that these “participatory consumers, as new cultural intermediaries, challenge the cultural industries by developing their own logics of organizing the intermediation process” (p.2), more significantly, Lee (2013) observed that these fans are not only taking over jobs previously owned by industry specialist, but also responsible for the rapid expansion in overseas market (the study is based on the manga industry) In fact, the growing momentum of average consumers in the shaping

of “flow of media throughout our culture” and in “creating new context t through appropriating, remixing, or modifying existing media content” (Levy & Stone, 2006) has become the central focus of studies in fandom, fan community and what James Gee (2004) calls “affinity space”. The general consensus is that fans have become an indispensable part of the success of a cultural product, such statement may have always been true, but participatory culture made it impossible for industry-insiders to ignore.

To further understand the specific fan activities taking place online, Soukup (2006) in his study of fan sites, found three general themes of fan activities, which includes: a dialogue with the subject of dedication and the community members, controlling the representation of said subject, and lastly personal identification with the subject, which he argues contributes to the continued shift in the distribution and interpretation of popular culture, again testified the growing power of fandom.

In conclusion, with signs of cultural convergence between high and popular culture, as proffered by Gans (2008), and with the pressing question of museum engagement through social media, the question of how high culture institutions, such as art museums popularize themselves, how the concept of “fandom” or “new cultural consumers” unfolds in the museum setting and how museum practices are influenced by cultural tourism and globalized context is what this thesis aims to investigate. Since there are not much research done on the subject of the activities of cultural consumers in the high-culture sector, and with museum popularization becoming inevitable; this thesis would hopefully contribute in providing an understanding towards these subjects and bridge the void in current studies.

## Method

To systematically address the topic, this study has chosen to construct a two-part approach in understanding the incorporation of Facebook as a tool of popularization among popular museums. The first part involves a basic observation and analysis of ten museums randomly sampled from a list of 500 museums obtained from Museum Analytics (2014), so as to create a typology of museum usage of Facebook. The second part would include in-depth content analyses of three popular museum Facebook accounts and a user-generated content project on Twitter, where the postings by the museums, as well as content and reactions by fans would be analyzed. A more detailed description on the method of analyses, the logic behind the selection of the museums and the time period are included in the following paragraphs.

As stated in the earlier section, Facebook was specifically chosen for the fact that it is, and has been the most used social media platform in the world (Duggan & Smith, 2014). Aside from that, the layout and features of Facebook, which includes everything in the official timeline page, resembles more to traditional fan sites. Thus would allow for more overlap when comparing and incorporating findings from previous studies on museum engagement strategies on fan sites (Russo, Watkins & Groundwater-Smith, 2009) and fan activity (Soukup, 2006) in the analytical stages of this study.

Research by Ellison, Steinfield & Lampe (2011) has also noted that “Facebook supports a wide spectrum of possible connections” (p. 876), which includes connections through common interests and fan pages. As such enables more of community-based characteristics than other SNS platforms. Thus would allow for more valid comparison and incorporation of findings from previous studies on

museum engagement strategies (Russo, Watkins & Groundwater-Smith, 2009) and fan activity (Soukup, 2006) in the analytical stages of this study. Also owing to the larger sample adopted in this study, it is more practical to focus on one platform; and since Facebook is often used to refer audience to media content on other platforms, it seems to be the most logical choice to focus on this channel. However, as the research progressed, it became obvious that the museums sampled did not feature any user-generated content projects on Facebook, but rather promote through the use of Facebook. This thesis then proceed with adding the analysis of an UCG project launched by MoMA which used Twitter as the main platform, so as to compensate for the lack of similar initiatives on Facebook. The project selected was promoted on Facebook during the sampled period for the museum postings.

Twitter has especially been noted in recent studies for its capacity for data mining in terms of sentiment analysis (Pak & Paroubek, 2010), as well as its resemblance to news media for its low reciprocity and retweet mechanism (Kwak, Lee, Park & Moon, 2010). As a result, might make for an ideal platform for museums to gather sentiment and opinions from audience without active engagement and the time and resources such engagement requires.

Due to the fact that the research questions attempt at finding out the “ways” and “types” of strategies or activities happening on these Facebook pages and Twitter-sphere, the analyses of the data would focus on the recurring of “themes” or “patterns” perceived. Qualitative content analysis, which was defined by Hsieh & Shannon (2005, p.1278) as “a research method for the subjective interpretation of the content of text data through the systematic classification process of coding and identifying themes or patterns”, would be the main tool of analysis in this thesis.

Scholars have posited that the goal of a qualitative content analysis is “to identify important themes or categories within a body of content, and to provide a rich description of the social reality created by those themes/ categories as they are lived out in a particular setting” (Zhang & Wildemuth, 2009, p.12), as well as “attaining a condensed and broad description of the phenomenon, with concepts or categories describing the phenomenon” (Elo & Kyngäs, 2007, p. 108). In terms of sampling, “samples for qualitative content analysis usually consist of purposively selected texts which can inform the research questions being investigated” (Zhang & Wildemuth, 2009, p.2). The sampling design of this study, which includes random sampling, a selection of best practice case studies and an additional sample of user-generated project reflect such practice.

The contextual emphasis of this approach would indeed aid in the interpretation and analyses of the data, which is crucial to the understanding of how museums and audience activities are carried out online in the age of participatory culture.

Since the methods differ between part one and part two of the analysis, detailed descriptions on time period, and units and process of analysis would be included in the following sections.

*Part one- construction of the typology of general museum Facebook usage*

For the first part of the study, a sample of ten museum Facebook pages is selected to help construct a typology of general museum Facebook usage. A list of 3328 museums was retrieved from the webpage- Museum Analytics (2014), a site contributed to museum online presence analytics. To avoid sampling museums with no Facebook presence and minimize the case of language barriers, the top 500



museum Facebook pages in either English or Mandarin listed on the site was first produced. Afterwards, the list of 500 museums were assigned random numbers using the excel function “=RAND”, after rearranging the list using the “sorting” function, the first 10 museums were selected as sample for this part of the research (Johnson, 2012). Since the aim of this part of the study is to establish the general usage of Facebook among art museums, the sampling method should be able to represent the current status of Facebook usage by museums that are active on social media. The museums included in this part of the study are as follows: De Young Museum (San Francisco), South London Gallery (London), Art Institute of Chicago (Chicago), MOCA Taipei (Taipei), Museum of Contemporary Art Australia (Sydney), Philadelphia Museum of Art(Philadelphia) , The Frick Collection (New York), Lisson Gallery (London), Salvador Dali Museum (Saint Petersburg) and the Art Gallery of Ontario (Toronto). The data would consist of the most recent 20 posts from each museum, with the unit of analysis being post. A total of 200 posts were analyzed.

The analysis did not include the fan reactions and responses, since the purpose of part one of the research aims at establishing the Facebook usage of the museums alone so as to provide grounds for comparison for part two of the research. The coding of the posts was developed inductively through the process of observation, comparison and interpretation (Zhang & Wildemuth, 2009). Since the study wishes to examine the practices of general museum Facebook usage, and produce grounds for comparison with the practices of best practice museums, an inductive approach, which often used to in theory development is more suitable to a more deductive coding approach, which is commonly used for testing out or extending a theory (Hsieh & Shannon, 2005).

In the end the following codes were developed in the coding process to

categorize the postings, additional information such as the genre and artist of the artwork featured, links to other platforms and websites, popularity of the post (likes, comment and shares) are also noted down.

Codes for museum postings	
Promotion/ event	Promotion or information on museum events (may or may not be associated with current exhibition).
Promotion/ exhibition	Promotion or information on the museum's current or coming exhibition (may be conducted by the way of featuring a single piece at a time).
Announcement	Announcement on museum opening hours, black-outs, website going off-line and so forth.
Behind the scene	Relating to exhibition preparation, museum work and so on.
Promotion/ art piece	Promotion on a single art piece that's not part of a current exhibition (e.g. new installation art).
Career	Information on openings or programs for young artists.
Event look-back	Photos or recordings of museum events.
Fun	Fun fact on artists, art piece or posts that referenced to current event or popular culture.
UGC/ art project	Art project that replies on user submitted content.
Award	Information on museum awards.
Promotion city	Promoting other attractions in the city.
Museum memory	Sharing the museum's memories from years past (often through the share of old photos).
Promotion/ community	Promotion of the museum's community work (compared to events, might have less to do with art or the current exhibition).
Promotion/ shop	Promotion on the museum shop.
Promotion/ museum	Promotion on museum membership or other museum infrastructures (e.g. apps, new website design, renovation).

After gaining a general understanding on the usage of Facebook among popular museums, the second part of the study will focus on three of the most popular museums on Facebook. The museums included in this part of the study are as followed: The Museum of Modern Art (New York), The Saatchi Gallery (London) and The Greenbox Museum of Contemporary Art (Amsterdam). These museums are chosen due to the fact that they are the most successful museums in the world in terms of having “fans” to press the “like” button on Facebook, and thus through analyzing these museum Facebook pages, the study hoped to gain insight into how these museums are popularizing themselves on Facebook and how are the approaches different from the ones found in part one of the research.

According to Museum Analytics (2014), MoMA is currently the most “liked” museum in the world, and the Saatchi Gallery its counterpart in the UK. As for the Greenbox Museum, which due to being privately owned and extremely small, is not included in the ranking of Museum Analytics (2014), but has been featured in the CNN for its unexpected popularity on Facebook (Carrington, 2013).

The content being analyzed in this part of the study will include both the museum created content, as well as the audience created content. These different types of content will be analyzed and coded separately.

For this part of the analysis, a more in-depth observation and inductive categorization will be employed to enable new insights to emerge (Kondracki & Wellman, 2002). The categories developed in part one of the study then served as basis for part two analysis of museum postings. By analyzing the data using and expanding on codes developed in the previous part of the research, it is more convenient to spot the differences between the two parts of the study.

Considering the differences in posting patterns, 40 of the most recent museum postings from each museum is analyzed to avoid over and under representation. Unit of analysis is the posting created, with a total of 120 museum wall postings. Two additional codes were developed during the process of analysis part two:

Promotion/ artist	Promotion of a specific artist that is not currently featured in the museum's exhibition or events.
Promotion/ event (other)	Promoting art events that are not hosted by the museum.

Analysis on audience created contents also follows an inductive coding method to better understand the patterns of audience activities without the presumption of previous studies. However, since the audience created content on Facebook comes in the forms of comments, likes, shares and wall postings; this study will be separating the wall postings from comments, likes and shares. The latter type of content is in relation to the museum postings, and can be seen as reactions toward the museum posts, and thus will be analyzed in relation to the posts. In the end a total of 3050 audience comments were analyzed. In the occasion that the comment is posted in languages other than Mandarin or English, Google translate is consulted to help in the coding process, however, it must be noted that occasionally the results retrieved from Google translate would be ambiguous or nonsensical, in these cases, the comments were coded as “x” and excluded from the analysis. In regards to audience wall postings, the period of one month is sampled, and a total of 230 posts were analyzed.

Codes developed for fan comments are as follows:

Codes for audience comments	
Visit	Statements on impending visits (e.g. I'll see this next week!).
Negative	Negative statement toward the museum or art featured.
Memory/ identification	Personal memories with an art work, artist, the museum, etc. Or personal resonance with the art piece or artist.
Joke	Light hearted comment linked with current event, popular cultural reference, etc.
Appreciation/ aspiration	Expressed appreciation towards artist, art piece, event, the museum or the exhibition. Or the desire to visit and so forth due to the art piece.
Referral	The use of mentioning to invite their friends to notice the post or start a conversation on the post.
Opinion	Opinion shared on the artist, exhibition, and so on.
Self-promotion	Artists linking personal portfolio in the comment section.
Inquiry	Inquiry on museum opening hours, exhibition details and so forth.
Other	Greeting, punctuation, etc.
Unrelated	Completely unrelated response (e.g. link to 10 strangest places on Google Earth).
X	Undecipherable.

Codes developed for audience wall postings are as follows:

Codes for audience wall posting.	
Self-promotion	Artists, designers or writers self-promoting by providing link to personal portfolio, etc.
Promotion/ exhibition/ award	Information on other exhibitions and awards, often more obscure or smaller in scale.
Lewd	Sharing lewd content that may or may not be related to art.
Negative	Complaints or negative comments on the museum.
Positive	Expressing positive feelings towards the museum or the exhibition.

Media	Media or blogs mentioning the museum.
Unrelated	Completely unrelated promotion on services or others.
Greeting	Greetings, such as happy Easter.
Spam	Unrelated commercials, promotions and internet spam.

### *User-Generated Content Project*

Finally, a user-generated content project launched by MoMA is also included to supplement the lack of UCG project hosted on Facebook. The project, Art140, is a collaboration between the Museum of Modern Art and creativity firm POSSIBLE with the aim of generating conversations about art. For its first launch, Art140 featured 6 paintings on Twitter and asked the public what these paintings make them feel. The thesis has chosen to sample “the Starry Night” by Vincent Van Gogh, which was the most responded painting out of the six at the time of data collection. In the end a total of 320 tweets were analyzed.

For the analysis of Art140, an inductive coding method is again employed. The following are the resulted codes for the Art140 response:

Codes for Art140 response	
Descriptive imagery	Descriptive sentence to paint the scene where the painting took place.
Descriptive sensation	Description of a sensory experience. (e.g. fluffy, soft)
Philosophical interpretation	Using descriptive sentence to capture one's interpretation of the painting, often of a more abstract, conceptual nature.
Experience	Own experience or memorable story with the painting or the artist.
Descriptive emotion	Descriptive sentence outlining the emotion evoked by the painting; might also consist of description of images, but in this case descriptions on emotions are stressed.
Definition	A clear definition of what the painting is, or in some cases,

	using a term to define the work of art (e.g. this piece was a dreamscape).
Conversation	Directly addressing the museum in a conversational manner (e.g. what does it make you feel? @MuseumModernArt).
Appreciation	Expressing appreciation towards the artist or the artwork without sharing personal view on the piece.
Link	Providing a link blogs and articles, without further explanation.
Promote	Promoting the project without contributing an opinion.
Literature/music/other	Linking the painting with other works of art.
Negative	Negative views on the painting, the artist or the museum.
Rational	Rational analysis of the artist's mental condition or objectively questioning the life of the artist.
Comparison	Compared to the artist's other works.
Scientific	Scientific observation on the starry sky (e.g. astrology, physics).
Joke	Light hearted joke about the work, the artist or linking the piece to popular culture.
Referral	Referring others by tagging, without providing personal view on the artwork.

### **Findings and Analysis**

This study is built upon a two part analysis of museums and audience activities on Facebook. Through the analysis of Part I and Part II, several recurring themes have emerged and beg the attention of closer inspection. Therefore in this section, themes that have stood out will be discussed first, before going into details about strategies of the best practice museums and how audience activities differ.

The themes of Localism, Diasporas marketing, Fandom & Popular Culture and Museum in the age of participatory culture will be addressed with cases illustrating the argument.

#### ***The emphasis on localism***

One of the main topic of interests among museum studies in recent years has been the influence and unprecedented possibilities brought on by the advent of new media. For a lot of museums with visitors consists largely of overseas tourists (“Tourists...love museums”, n.d; “Numbers of Visitors”, 2014; “Attendance to the Louvre Museum Key Figures”, 2011), such connection provide the chance of engaging and perhaps expanding the overseas audience. It is thus quite a counterintuitive outcome to find that results derived from analysis part one (general museum usage of Facebook) indicates that museums worldwide seem to be adhering to the promotion of “Localism”.

The emphasis on “Localism” was displayed in several ways, one of which being the promotion of “local/ national” artists and artworks. Among the sampled museums, the Art Institute of Chicago is a world renowned museum hosting a diverse collection of international artworks, including works of some of the most celebrated artists, such as Vincent Van Gogh, Claude Monet and Paul Cézanne. However, coding results of 20 postings from the Art Institute of Chicago showed that American art was by far the museum’s most featured art pieces on Facebook. Out of the 20 posts analyzed, 12 posts featured specific art piece, of which 8 were works by American artists (5 were artists of Chicago origin). One can argue that this particular occurrence is the result of the museum’s current effort as one of the partaking museums in “ArtEverywhereUS” to put 50 American artworks on billboards across the nation. But in itself, the campaign of “ArtEverywhere” (in both the US and the UK) is inherently a promotion of “localness”, or better yet, “nationalism”.

Similarly, the Art Gallery of Ontario, one of the largest galleries in North America and home to a comprehensive international collection of Canadian,



European, African and Oceanic artworks, also displayed a penchant for “localness” in their selection of a “long list” of artists for their annual international photography prize- AIMIA/ AGO. Of the twenty two artists on the long lists, six of them are Canadian and one based in Canada.

Such practice may be linked to the dialogue in Museology during the past thirty years: museums, perhaps natural products for cultural tourism and an indisputable touchstone of cultural appreciation, have found themselves in need of competition for being the main providers of “authentic” cultural experience (Prentice, 2001).

Especially within the context of experiential cultural tourism, where tourism is marketed as the “offering [of] the ‘non-tourist’ experience which is the non-packaged, individual or more often discretely-packaged experience. It offers the evocation of the authentic- that is real and direct experience- to consumers...” (Prentice, 2001, p. 9) Museums are definitely no strangers to including the concept of “exploration” and “personal resonance” in their marketing strategies (McNichol, 2005; Prentice 2001), however, when tourists are “driven more by the desire for understanding as insight rather than for understanding as formal learning” (Prentice, 2001, p.7), the structured narrative and formal setting of museums could be counter-productive for tourists seeking to engage in the authenticity and romanticism of an off-track, localized experience. And thus scholars in the field of arts marketing and museum cultural tourism are starting to reinstate “localness” back to their core brand value (Moolman, 1996; Prentice, 2001), or rather, utilize the inherently “experiential” aspect of museum-visiting experience (Petkus, 2002).

Indeed, there seems to be strong emphases placed on the “experiential” aspect of museum experience among the museum Facebook postings. In fact, among the

museums sampled in part one of the study, almost all museums hold regular events or workshops opened for participation (with the exception of the Frick Collection which did not promote any participatory events during the time period analyzed). Few examples are the Art Gallery Ontario's "First Fridays", the Contemporary Museum Sydney's "Sun down sketch club" and the Philadelphia Museum of Art's "Art after five". These participatory events and programs relates back to the framework proposed by Pine and Gilmore (1999) of the four realms in experiential marketing, where the audience experience range from sensing, learning, doing to simply being (Petkus, 2002).

Audience participation in these museum experiential events might not only increase their enjoyment of the visit and deepen their connection and loyalty towards the institution, but also provide chances for additional revenue streams for the museums. According to Pine and Gilmore (1999), when the service offered became increasingly commodified, by making a transition towards providing memorable experience, the institution would then achieve competitive advantage and customer satisfaction. Furthermore, "the shift from a service-based to experience-based economy will inevitably involve charging a fee for what was once provided free" (Petkus, 2002, p. 54; Quensenberry & Sykes, 2010).

With the popularization of social media, it is possibly more likely to spread the word about these experiential events to casual or foreign visitors with more spontaneity and immediacy. In the face of decreased funding for cultural institutions worldwide, such practice would definitely be beneficial for museums, and thus explain the importance placed on event promotion and localness on the museums' Facebook postings. Moreover, among the sample, there are also examples of

museums using Facebook to promote tourist events tied with the city they reside in or representing the museum as a tourist venue. The Art Institute of Chicago, for instance, promoted the museum combo ticket with local attraction “Skydeck”, while, perhaps a special case; the Frick Collection dedicated around 50% of the postings sampled to the annual “Magnolia watch”. The intent for promoting the museums as tourist spots is thick, and perhaps a necessary and beneficial strategy. As mentioned, there are increased needs for museums to seek out ways to capture the attention of tourists (McNichol, 2005; Petkus, 2002; Prentice, 2001); and at the same time, by generating local goodwill, attain returning customers from surrounding neighborhoods. The latter is shown among the samples by museums’ effort in community outreach, the most obvious one being the South London Gallery’s extensive promotion on its community space- The Shop of Possibilities, which is described by the South London Gallery as “a play space for locals”, and a “space for afterschool and weekend workshops”.

Museums are often perceived as non-profit institution dedicated to the preservation and promotion of arts and culture, a bridge between the past and the future (McNichol, 2005). But in truth museums are also brands, and according to McNichol (2005), a value brand with an enduring core purpose and a desire for achieving a lasting future through customer allegiance towards the brand’s underlying value. Hence through community outreach programs such as “the Shop of Possibilities”, museums get to expand their customer base and create a long term bond with the local audience, who are more likely to become regular visitors to the museums.

It is quite obvious through the prominent cases listed above that museums are coping with the dilemma of balancing “localism” and “globalism” in their positioning.

To some extent, what the museums are faced with is similar to what international companies have to cope with once entering a new market: the question of whether to adjust their product to cater to the local taste, or up-holding the original formula that made them successful in their home countries. Of course, for museums the collections of artifacts already somewhat determined the narrative around the experience museums provide, but when representing themselves on social media, there's still the conundrum of deciding who the museums are addressing: the locals or the internationals? As a result, perhaps the positioning of a "localized" approach as shown in the findings is a direct reflection of "glocalization" strategy or "Diaspora marketing" (Barata, 2007).

However, one thing is for sure: due to the advent of new media, what was already a globalized world has become more and more connected; this has brought with it what Ritzer (2003) termed a proliferation of "nothing" (what is centralized, dehumanized and devoid of substance), and in turn has caused the renewed appreciation in the indigenous "something" (what is local, indigenous, relationship-driven) ; hence, again accounted for the "localism" emphasis found in the sampled museums' Facebook postings.

### ***Diasporas sentiment and marketing***

Indeed, it is extremely common for the projection of sentimentality and meaning onto a specific place. In the case of Diasporas, affinity felt towards the country of origin "provides emotional support and identity resources" (Kastoryano, 1999, p. 198). Such emotional connection is classified and identified by Cohen (1997) as the following range:

1. A collective memory and myth about the homeland.
2. An idealization of the putative ancestral home and a collective commitment to its maintenance, restoration, safety and prosperity, even to its creation.
3. The development of a return movement which gains collective approbation.
4. A strong ethnic group consciousness sustained over a long time and based on a sense of distinctiveness, a common history and the belief in a common fate.
5. A sense of empathy and solidarity with co-ethnic members in other countries of settlement.

The Diasporic sentiments and the impact and opportunities associated with such sentiments have been the focus of research, as mentioned in the literature review. In recent years, the effect of Web 2.0 has especially been noted for its capacity for providing the “togetherness” essential to the formation of online communities and emotional ties (Kingston & Griffin, 2009). Crouch (2011) discussed a range of potential implications brought on by Digital Diasporas for both the home country and the current country, he argued that finding ways for governmental organizations and the general public to have positive dialogues with these groups are extremely important, as what’s happening in these Diasporic communities might translate into action and cast influence onto policies and economies (p.64).

For the museums, taking into consideration the discussions taking place among Diasporas might lead to a more targeted engagement and insights into the dialogue that interests these groups. As pointed out in the previous section, the “authenticity” of a tourist experience is gaining momentum, for Diasporas, such authenticity is often the construct of their own romantic aspiration (Nancarrow, Tinson & Webber, 2007), and thus the “perceived authenticity” or “self-authentication” as argued by Chhabra, Zhoa, Lee & Okamoto (2012).

On a different note, the economic potential of Diasporas has also been noted in recent publications. The Harvard Business Review reported a trend among companies from emerging markets to focus on marketing in countries that host a sizable amount of immigrants from their homelands. Most notable: the 32 million Mexican-Americans in the US, the 4 million Turkish-Germans and 3 million South Asians in the UK. In the cases where the reception from Diasporas aren't as welcoming as expected, Diasporic groups are utilized as springboards for gaining recognition (Kumar & Steenkamp, 2013).

Such reports correspond to the findings from the study of Nancarrow, Tinson & Webber (2007), where individuals in the UK with Scottish roots are found to be consuming Scottish “products”-from mineral water to finance, due to a desire of comfort seeking, romanticism and nostalgia (p.60). Diasporas often recreate new identities from memories borrowed from the former generations and imaginings induced by the consumption of media (Bouchet, 1995). While research have certainly picked up on the trend in Diaspora marketing and tourism, this study hopes to add to the current scholarship an angle of Digital Diasporas in the museum world. As the emotional bonds of Diasporas have, perhaps, contributed to the extraordinary popularity of one of the best practiced museum sampled in part II of the research – The Greenbox Museum of Contemporary Islamic Art.

#### *Greenbox Museum – Diasporas and a window to Islamic culture*

Greenbox Museum is a small, privately-owned museum located in Amsterdam. Founded just 5 years ago by a Dutchman, the motivation for opening up the museum came from the “Islamophobia” he believed was insidious in the Netherlands following

the 9/11 attacks and the assassination of a Dutch filmmaker and journalist, Theo Van Gogh (“Dutch lawyer opens Saudi art gallery in Amsterdam”, 2013). The museum has since been featured on mainstream media news outlets for its outstanding popularity on Facebook. With over a million “likes”, the museum is easily the most popular Dutch museum on Facebook, and just a few months prior to the thesis, more popular than the world’s most visited museum- The Louvre (Carrington, 2013). According to an interview conducted by CNN, Greenbox owner Aarnout Helb wasn’t surprised by the online popularity the museum received, “A lot of the fans are basically young Muslims that perceive Saudi as a country relevant to their culture, because of the historical and ritual position of Mecca” (Carrington, 2013). Indeed, the results from in-depth content analysis of audience comments and wall postings indicate that active members of the Greenbox Museum Facebook page post notably in Arabic.

Discussions on Islamic culture and the meaning of the Koran often took place in the comment section of the museum postings. Though this study cannot determine whether the commenters are indeed all overseas Muslims, the description provided by Helb fits perfectly with the sentimental attachment recounted in literatures on Diasporas. Especially in the face of social tension caused by terrorist association, as described by Helb, it is perceivable that young overseas Muslims would seek recognition in terms of cultural identity and self-expression through contemporary Islamic art, which sometimes deals with topics such as the nuanced implication of the Koran and the outlook of a Muslim on society. Of the museum postings analyzed, there are really no surefire patterns which determine the popularity of each posting, but in the comment section, heated discussions on topics relating to religion often take place. One example is the comment section of a post featuring artist Abdunasser Gharem’s “The Road to Makkah”, which showcase the signs of “Muslims only” seen

at the “Hajj” (an Islamic pilgrimage to Mecca). This particular piece attracted negative comments from both Islamic and non-Islamic audiences; most comments were uttered from preconceived notion without making any effort in learning about the context. For non-Muslims, this piece attracted remarks that criticize the Islamic culture of segregating and antagonizing non-Muslims, all the while ignoring the fact that the purpose of the piece lay in helping the world to better understand the “Hajj” phenomenon, and that the “passport into Makkah” does not depend on race or gender, but simply “belief” (Greenbox Museum of Contemporary Art, 2013). On the other hand, while around half of the Islamic audience appreciates the art and the museum’s effort in promoting it, the other half either attacked the museum for taking part in “a propaganda” against Muslims, criticized the westerners or simply dismissing the piece with a “so what?” response.

Tibi (2010) has mentioned in his research on Islamic Diasporas in Europe that due to the “self-victimization” of the Islamic Diasporas and the “accusations” coming from the Europeans, the Islamic ethnicity has the potential to turn more and more into “the ethnicity of fear”. Greenbox Museum, in this instance, serves as a window into the mystery that is Islam. As Helb put “I thought if you have artists from Saudi Arabia, they may help you navigate in the darkness, you know, show you who they really are” (“Dutch lawyer opens Saudi art gallery in Amsterdam”, 2013). In fact, the Helb himself discovered the world of Islamic contemporary artwork whilst seeking to have a little more understanding of the Koran, “I was looking at what the religious significance of the story would be, but instead of that I found that the Saudi artist Ahmed Mater had made an artwork about this” (Helb, 2013).

Islamic contemporary art is definitely blooming in recent years, and as the



largest user of YouTube per capita and the most active on Twitter, Saudi Arabian artists are pushing the limit of a traditionally strict and conservative society, and are finding support through social media (“Saudi Arabia’s Art Scene”, 2013; Maktabi, Jensen & Davies, 2012), the Greenbox Museum’s online success can perhaps be accounted as a result of the phenomenon. In fact, the currently highest grossing Saudi artist - Abdunasser Gharem also started his career as an artist through the internet:

He poured over it, discovering galleries, artists, ideas. He then took what he found and has created his own, Saudi Arabian take on contemporary art, probing, questioning, he sees his mission to create a spark so that people will talk, and decided what they want the future to look like (“Meet Saudi Arabia’s leading artist”, 2013).

The growing interest and demand coming from the western market in recent years have also made those within the country notice Saudi Arabian native artists (Carrington, 2013). Now the kingdom has founded institutions, art fairs and digital art guides (Harris, 2014; Carrington, 2013), which the Greenbox Museum dedicated most of its postings to the promotion of.

Putting together the fact that most fans of the museum are overseas Muslims, that buyers are mostly coming from Europe and America and that Saudi buyers are mostly buying for their “London or New York homes” (Wecker, 2013), the support Saudi contemporary art received through Diasporas can be one of the deciding factors contributing to its growing popularity in recent years. Dittmer & Dodds (2008) outlined the perspective of attributing “nationalism and religion as forms of fandom” (p.437), which in this case relates back to the study of Lee (2012) on the distributing and promoting power of fandom.

### *Fandom and the Integration with Popular Culture in the Art World*

As mentioned in the literature review and introduction, there are signs of integration of high and popular culture as well as reasons to believe that fans and amateurs are gaining power through new media. What this research was able to identify from the analysis of both part one and part two was that there's indeed an infiltration of popular culture, and that voices of fans and amateurs are perhaps louder than ever before. The following are two examples of signs of amateur and popular culture permeation in the art world.

#### *Nicolas Cage is God and the Borrowing of Viral Content*

It is one of the Saatchi Gallery's Facebook practice to feature the gallery's blog post updates, a total of 13 posts from the 40 posts analyzed were dedicated to the promotion of the museum blog entries. The blog itself seems to focus on reporting light-hearted, "fun" content related to the art world (or in a few cases, completely unrelated viral content); though the specific usage and Facebook strategy of the gallery will be further discussed in the coming sections, two cases observed through the analysis of the promoted content on Facebook will be used to illustrate the phenomenon of fan power and integration of high and low culture.

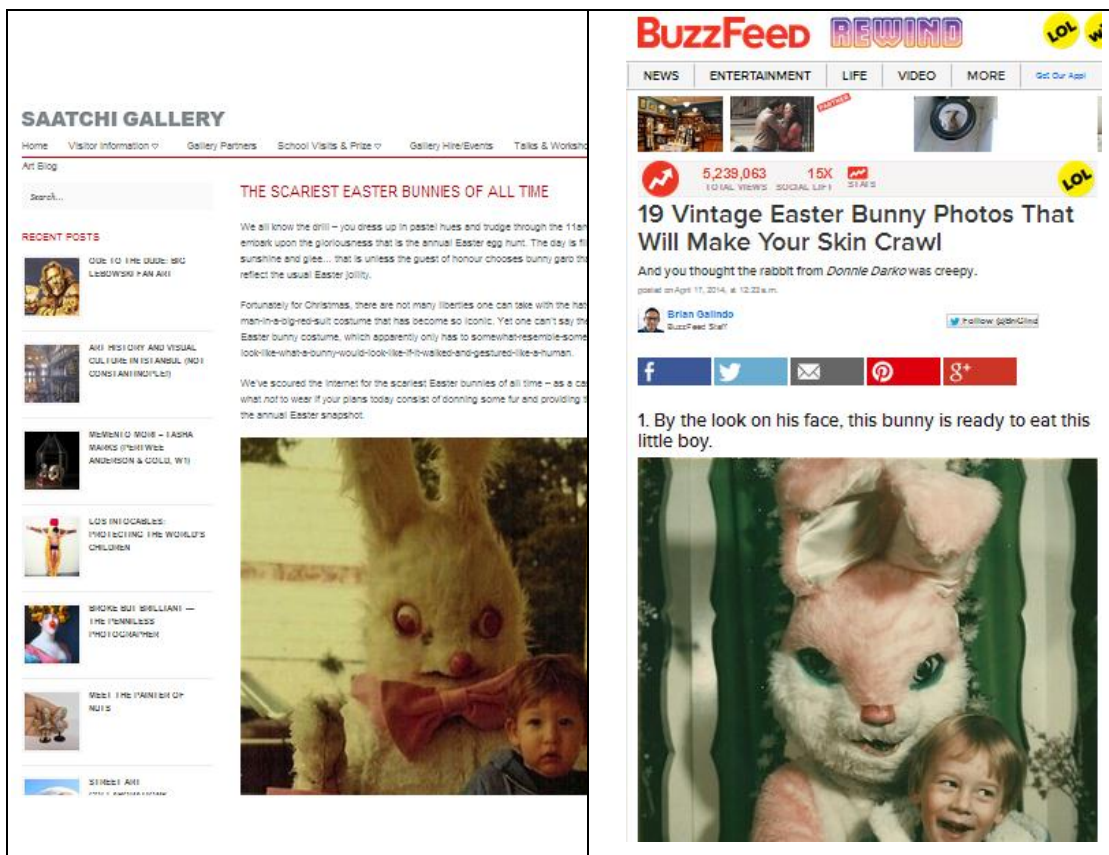
Nicolas Cage has long been one the internet's favorite film stars to turn into memes, perhaps due to his dramatic facial expressions and sometimes questionable personal life (Duca, 2013). Cage's online popularity, in fact, has come to the point where he is often referred to as "The Internet God"; it is obviously an undeniable fixation that fans have on the actor and the fan art dedicated towards him, perhaps more of an inside joke than admiration, have resulted in an exhibition named "Nicolas

Cage is God” solely dedicated to the actor’s fan art. The gallery’s art blog, in turn, devoted a blog post along with a Facebook posting to highlight and promote the event.

Such cases reflect the findings and arguments of current literature on the changing roles of fans in the digital era and how the lines between producers and consumers are becoming harder to define (Pearson, 2010; Lee, 2011; Jenkins, 2007). In truth, the fans that participated in the makings of Nicolas Cage memes and fan art are also in a way participating in the shaping of the actor’s public and online persona. It is an identity building for both the fans who took part and for the actor, as mentioned by Marshall (2010) in his study on the self-representation of celebrity on social media: the building of identities is often achieved through choice of consumption. In this case, what is traditionally a celebrity PR job has now been influenced by fans that create and disseminate the fan-created internet persona of the actor. And through the creation and dissemination of memes and fan art, the fans have also identified themselves as a devotee of either the actor or the parodies that surround him. As such relates back to Soukup’s (2006) study on fan activities on celebrity fan sites, where fans’ desire to control celebrity’s image were identified.

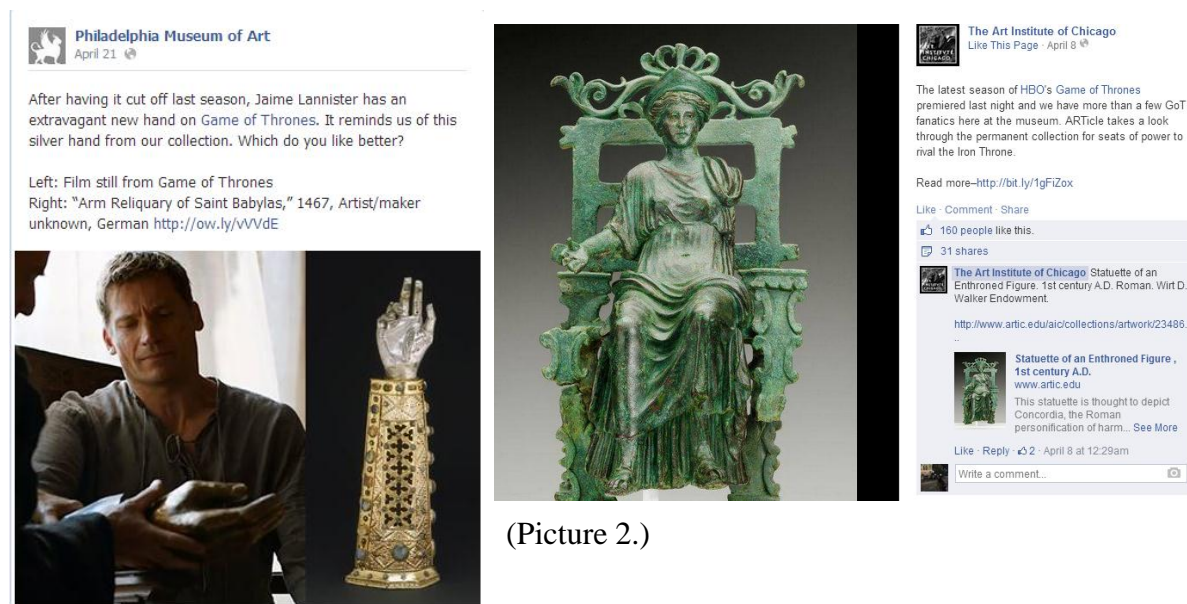
Furthermore, the gallery has also borrowed viral content from BuzzFeed<sup>[1]</sup> to feature in its art blog, for instance the vintage Easter bunny post is almost identical to the one posted on BuzzFeed a few days prior to the post on the blog (picture 1.). Through featuring viral content and content related to popular culture, the gallery might find it easier to connect and gather the attention of casual art fans, but it might not work as well for serious art aficionados: for blog posts such as these, the gallery seems to receive more negative comment from fans than other posts featuring art of

the more traditional sense.



(picture 1.)

The Saatchi Gallery is definitely not the only case where museum incorporates popular culture into their Facebook postings. The popular HBO series Game of Thrones has also been used as a way to connect with the audience: the Art Institute of Chicago made a blog post and Facebook post on “throne chairs” to celebrate the return of the series, while the Philadelphia Museum of Art dedicated a post to an ornate golden hand in its collection due to the appearance of a similar golden hand on the show (see picture 2.)



(Picture 2.)

These cases proved that museums' willingness in using fan-generated content and popular culture referencing in their Facebook posting, while the main reason for this phenomenon perhaps lies in the fact that such posts generate higher interest for casual art fans (or viewers with little to none interest or knowledge in art), the integration of high and popular culture, as well as a more pronounced presence for fans are definitely taking place. These examples reflect the study of Hausmann (2012), where museum's success at viral marketing is found to be determined by the appeal of the content.

As it happens, there is a growing amount of projects dedicated to user-generated content that utilize social media as an outlet for the public to share their views on art, have discussions or even connect with others that share the same enthusiasm. Across the sampled museum, there are several attempts at engaging the public through calls of submission on personal views and preferences. One of the best practice museum samples- the Saatchi Gallery even has a platform called "Pictify" (with a Pinterest-like layout) which is dedicated entirely for the sharing and discussing of art.

However, this thesis has chosen to go deeper into another user-generated content project initiated by MoMA, to find out whether there are indeed conversations about art taking place between this world-renown art museum and common art fans.

#### *MoMA's Art140 project*

In March 2014, the Museum of Modern Art announced a new collaborative project with the creative firm POSSIBLE which would allow the public to share and discuss what art means to them. The project uses Twitter, which limits the word count to 140 characters. According to the museum and its partner, this project aims at opening up the conversation around art, David Stocks from POSSIBLE explains “there’s a wall that separates the art world from the people who might appreciate art but are too intimidated to express their own interpretation” (Eltomey, 2014). Victor Samra from MoMA has also said that the museum will “do [their] best to respond to people’s opinion on Twitter and try to get more conversation going that way” (McMains, 2014).

As a means to compensate for the lack of user-generated projects taking place on Facebook, this study has decided to include an analysis of one of the six paintings launched by Art140 to gain insight into whether there are indeed dialogues between the museum and common users. Even though the user-generated content produced through the project is not on Facebook, Facebook was indeed the channel through which the museum promoted the project. As such, this part of the analysis can be viewed as an extension of part two, where MoMA was selected as one of the best practice museums.

For the initial launch, MoMA and POSSIBLE have selected six paintings from

late 19<sup>th</sup> century to early 20<sup>th</sup> century Europe. The selection of paintings consists mostly of world renowned pieces of art, which are likely to evoke personal memories of. Out of the six, this study has chosen to analyze the response to Vincent Van Gogh's "Starry Night" which has received the most reaction from fans at the time of data collection.

This painting has received a total of 320 responses, including three promotional tweets from the museum and one participatory tweet from the museum's subordinate account- "MoMAteens". The users participating responded mostly in English with only 4 tweets were written in Spanish or Portuguese. Disappointingly, there seems to be no dialogue between the museum and the fans, the only instance where interaction there seems to be interaction was when the museum asked a certain user to share their view using the correct hashtags (possibly because the user has forgotten to include the project hashtag and only directed the tweet to the museum, and thus was not included in the project's Twitter stream).

Interaction among participating users is limited as well; the only case showcasing interaction among users was when one tweet shared by user "yourdamnnews" was retweeted several times by other users. In terms of content shared, the majority of the users provided philosophical interpretations (e.g. @treester13: "there's beauty in darkness if you let your eyes adjust") or expressed appreciation towards the artist's talent, second most shared content involves descriptive imagery or an association with personal memories and experience (e.g. @Pencil\_tucky: "'starry night' was my first 'favorite' painting. I used to draw reproductions in my elementary sketchbooks.")

Other than that, there are also a great amount of tweets that only promoted the

project by retweeting the museum’s original tweet without adding any personal view on the piece. This could possibly be accounted for the fact that fans are hoping to be associated with the project, as part of the construction of their online personas (Marshall, 2010).

All in all, this project did succeed in the sharing of personal views on art pieces; however, the aimed “conversation” did not take place as planned, which reflects the findings of the low reciprocity as identified by Kwak, Lee, Park & Moon (2010). Nor were there any valuable interaction between the museum and the common public. It is therefore ironic that conversations about art and the sharing of fan art are happening organically in the comment sections of Facebook. For instance, there were several instance where fan posted their own rendition of the artist or the painting featured (photo 3.), photos of their visits, and discussions on their favorite arts and art pieces. It is possible that the framed nature of Art140 has somehow prevented the natural flow of conversation, and could maybe be improved by engaging audience in a more casual manner, which the Museum of Modern Art, though being the most popular museum on Facebook, seldom engages in.



(Photo 3.)



### *Fan Activities on Museum Facebook Pages*

Through the analysis of fan activities on three best practice museums, this thesis has been able to identify several trends. First of all, perhaps unsurprisingly most comments in the comment section fall into the category of appreciation towards the museum or the artist. MoMA albeit being the most popular museum on Facebook, receives markedly fewer comments and likes per post when compared to Greenbox and Saatchi Gallery. When comparing the three museums' wall posting from fans in the span of one month, the Saatchi Gallery stood out again with roughly 140 postings, MoMA with around 50 and the Greenbox with only 10.

Such difference can perhaps be attributed to the nature of the audience and the content of the museum posting as well. The audience of Greenbox, for instance, mainly consists of overseas Muslims, as such displayed a different posting behavior from audience of the Saatchi Gallery or the Museum of Modern Art, where a more diverse group of audience consists of their audience base. Such results reflect the findings of Zhou (2011), where social identity and group norms are shown to have significant effect on the use and participation of online communities.

One of the most surprising findings, however, will have to be the self-promotion of less-known artists on these museums' Facebook wall and comment sections. Such behavior is not limited to one museum, or even one type of artist. Greenbox museum receives these self-promotions mainly on the comment section of the museum posting comment section, where a large amount of spam written in Arabian also troubles the museum. For the Saatchi Gallery and MoMA, however, most self-promotion were posted directly onto the museum wall, where if common users don't deliberately click

to view, they wouldn't be able to see. Such difference perhaps indicates the intended audience these artists seek to reach, for posting self-promotion directly in the comment section would definitely allow more common users to see the post, while posting on the museum wall would possibly make it more obvious for the museum to see. Either way, these artists rarely get any reaction from either museum fans or the museums themselves. Some artists even started "liking" the comments posted by fans to grab some attention. It is indeed an interesting phenomenon, and perhaps not entirely far-fetched, given the fact that museums such as the Saatchi Gallery are known to be the springboard for young aspiring artists (the gallery even has a platform- "Saatchi Art" where artists and buyers can set up accounts and proceed to "discover or get discovered"), it is perceivable that artists would seek out such outlets. However, from the lack of reaction, the "high jacking" hijacking of museum space might not be extremely useful for these artists, or perhaps in some ways "cheapens" their work.

It is outside the scope of this study to predict the effectiveness of self-promotional activities; however, such behavior does reinforce the impression of a more "demographic" art world in the sense that anyone could present their work for the museum fans and museums to see with ease.

### ***Age of Participatory Culture and the Phantom Dialogues***

From analysis part one of general museum Facebook practices indicated that museums generally uses Facebook as a means to promote and inform the audience about up-coming events, exhibition, specific artist or artworks, which reflects the

findings of previous studies by Padilla-Meléndez & del Águila-Obra(2013); in terms of the efforts towards “multi-way communication”, as mentioned by Fletcher & Lee (2012), this study did not detect a pronounced effort from the museum’s part (except for the Greenbox Museum, which will be discussed later), when such communication does occur, it seems more like an organic-development; furthermore, the interaction and debates happening between the users does not share the same traits as traditional “brand communities” (Laroche, Habibi, Richard & Sankaranarayanan, 2012), where value creating practices such as shared rituals and traditions are found. The only instance where museum Facebook pages were found to resemble online brand communities was when audience answered basic questions on behalf of the museums.

Such result perhaps can be accounted to the fact that museum and art experiences are more intimate and abstract than experience of consuming other products from traditional brands, such as buying a cup of coffee.

This is not to say that museums don’t generally seek to engage audiences, in fact most museums (with the exception of a few) regularly posts “fun” postings that are not intended for the promotion of exhibitions or events. Examples demonstrated in the above popular culture integration section are good illustration of the museums’ effort. One type of “fun” posting that is universally employed, however, is the “anniversary” post, where artists born or died on the day would be featured along with a selected artwork from the artist. Nevertheless, often the dialogues just never seem to set off, conversations between the museums and the public often resembles phantoms in old castles: virtually unseen, but speculated existing, considering the gesture of engagement set forth by the museums and multiple reports on how audience participation are beginning to take central stage in the museum world (Murawski,

2013; Russo, Watkins, Kelly & Chan, 2010).

Nonetheless, when comparing the best practice museum sampled, the cases of the Greenbox Museum and the Saatchi Gallery really stood out from the rest. MoMA, on the other hand, displayed more or less the same pattern as the museums sampled in part one of the analyses.

The Saatchi Gallery posts mostly “fun” postings (36 out of the 40 sampled) with only a few cases where the gallery actively promoted a featured artist or event. What’s more, the artworks and artists featured in the “fun” postings are not even part of the museum’s collection or represented artist from the past. They were generally interesting facts and news happening in the art world. Perhaps due to the lightheartedness of its postings, the posts posted by the museum are normally quite popular. The museum posts one to two posts per day, and never seems to reply to any of the audience comments or inquiries. However, the discussions and sharing of personal viewpoints somehow happens far more frequently than MoMA.

It might be that the Saatchi Gallery only post contents that they know will be interesting for the audience (renowned paintings, quirky art news) but have nothing to do with the gallery’s own exhibitions or collection. As such, the gallery successfully secured a stable amount of online audience, but whether such popularity actually translates off-line is still questionable.

The Museum of Modern Art also posts around 2 posts per day, the posts, as mentioned, generally centered on the promotion of up-coming events, exhibitions or projects, which highly resembles the general museum practice sampled in part one of the analysis. In terms of reaction solicited from the audience, MoMA receives

significantly fewer “likes” and “comments” when compared with the Saatchi Gallery and the Greenbox Museum. Furthermore, there is also no interaction or efforts to engage with the audience. All in all makes one wonder whether the popularity was simply due to the international fame of the museum, and the “likes” mostly acts of “clicktivism” (Rotman et al., 2011) instead of genuine interests. Either way, the museum still claims to value the voice of the audience (Erin, 2013), so perhaps in the near future there will be more obvious interaction with the audience from MoMA in the near future.

Lastly, the Greenbox Museum is the least frequent poster out of the three best practice museums sampled. However, it is the only museum that actively engages and converse with audiences. Due to the scale of the museum, there are no featured exhibitions that the museum promotes; only the fixed collection that is permanently on display. When the museum does post promotional posts, it is generally the promotion of the museum on a whole, or more often, the promotion of Saudi art weeks, the new art guide, contemporary Islamic art exhibitions or artists featured at other museums.

In terms of audience activities, the viewers Greenbox often actively engage in conversations among themselves, or ask the museum what a specific art piece mean. For the museum, which provides personal guided tours to all the physical visitors, Greenbox seems to manage the engagement online quite well. There are several cases, such as the example given in the above section, where the museum served as a gentle mediator and joined in on the discussions.

Through actively participating in the discussions, explaining the artworks featured on Facebook and sharing content such as Arabic soap opera with English

subtitles, the museum is certainly endeavoring to bridge the mutual understanding between Muslims and non-Muslims. However, according to the interview with the museum founder conducted by CNN, the online popularity of Greenbox does not translate into physical visitors (Carrington, 2013), which hopefully will change with the growing recognition for Islamic contemporary art.

All in all, the general museum Facebook practices seem to resemble the engagement model of Watkins et al. (2007), where the following dimensions are proposed:

1. Participation: rapid publication, personalization, content sharing and co-creation.
2. Incentive: knowledge sharing, voice, education, acknowledgement.
3. Communication: one to many, many to many and hybrid.

What this thesis found was that museums generally only opt for the shallower end of these engagement dimensions. For instance, in the “participation” dimension, museums mostly employ rapid publication and content sharing without reaching personalization and co-creation, where actual interaction is required. As a result, perhaps museums should focus on providing quality over quantity in terms of initiating engagement; or perhaps, going through with the initiatives, instead of pushing out multiple initiatives in the name of further engagement, and letting them fall through with phantom dialogues.

## Conclusion

The current landscape of museum social media platform is indeed multi-faceted. Concepts ranging from cultural tourism to fandom all influence the museums. In terms of self-representation of museums on Facebook, the prominence in the promotion of “localism” and “authenticity” have been found to be the most universal strategy among the sampled museums. Museums often seek to provide “experiential” engagements through events and activities, promoting the local artists and local tourist attractions, which are all highly linked with the discussions happening in the field of cultural tourism. Facebook is often used as a place for promotion and announcement, with limited interaction between the museums and the audience. However, it is also found that the premised convergence between high and popular culture are used to engage audience, and perhaps grasp the interests of casual fans.

Out of the three best practice museums sampled, MoMA displayed more or less the same Facebook strategies as the general museums analyzed in part one of the study, with comparably low reaction from audience and non-existent interaction. As a result it is perhaps possible that the museum’s high popularity in fact has more to do with its offline prestige than social media practices. The Saatchi Gallery and the Greenbox Museum, on the other hand, both displayed unique social media strategies: the former being highly adaptable to popular culture and viral content and the latter being highly interactive and distinct in terms of content. Moreover, the Greenbox Museum also takes part in the larger conversation of Diasporas and overseas Islam; which is identified by the founder of the museum as the main reason for the museum’s online success.

Such cases support the argument of the rise of the new cultural consumer and

concept of fandom in the art world, for that nationalism and religion has been recognized by scholars as comparable to fandom (Dittmer & Dodds, 2008). Audience activities on museum Facebook pages also points to the premise of “participatory culture”, unknown artists take over the museum Facebook walls with self-promotion, while avid fans share fan arts and start discussions on their favorite art pieces.

However, user-generated content project launched by the museum which seeks to engage have been found to be extremely barren of interaction. Even though the audience is willing to partake, the aimed dialogue never took place. It is then unclear whether such outcome is due to the nature of the response, the lack of dedication of the museum or the framed nature of a project.

All in all, this thesis has found supporting signs to the premise high and low cultural convergence and the power of the new cultural consumers in the museum world. Themes influencing the museum Facebook postings have also been identified. As such the thesis hopes to contribute to the current studies a combined viewpoint worthy of further inspection. Adding to the existing research on the influence of the new cultural consumers, this thesis has also found new evidence of aspiring artists’ practice of self-promotion and the prevalence of fan-art on these platforms. .

However, there are limitations cause by language barriers and the restriction in terms of the scale of the study. As a result the content of audience activities could not be better understood and a larger sample cannot be included; there are also cases where specific postings can be fit into more than one code, thus might have influenced the analysis and finding of this study. Also due to time restrictions, an inter-coder reliability test was not possible, which might influence the objectivity of the research.



Future research should look into other social media platforms, such as the use of Instagram and investigate whether the content and strategies employed by the museums differ due to the nature and main user of the platforms. A combined take on an overview of certain museum's social media strategies across platforms would also be interesting. User activities on museum-developed platforms like the Saatchi Gallery's "PICTIFY" and "Saatchi Art" could also provide valuable insights into the activities of the new cultural consumers. An analysis dedicated to regional differences and smaller-scale museum practices might also be worthy of examination. Future study could also investigate the phenomenon of self-promotion on the museum Facebook pages, the profile of the artists as well as the effectiveness of the practice would surely make for an interesting direction. Lastly, the influence of Digital Diasporas, as found by this thesis, could also be an enlightening angle for future studies to focus on.

*Note*

[1] BuzzFeed: a news and entertainment company dedicated to the dissemination and creation of viral content.

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