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History in Crisis: Museum Programming during the COVID-19 Outbreak

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History in Crisis: Museum Programming During the COVID-19 Outbreak

A thesis submitted in partial satisfaction
of the requirements of the University Honors Program
of Loyola Marymount University

by

Lindsay McConnell

May 5, 2021

Introduction:

In recent years, museums have redefined what it means to learn history. They are more than places to talk about the past; they are places where the community can understand the present. Historians refer to the practice of bringing history out of academia and into public discourse as public history. Many museums have adopted more aggressive programming to foster an environment where people can gather. At the beginning of 2020, the COVID-19 virus spread rapidly through the world, creating a period of crisis. Everyday life changed overnight as schools, restaurants, workplaces, and virtually everything closed. Museums also closed and were forced to negotiate how to function without a physical space. Using the model of public history and accessibility programming through online platforms many museums attempted create a virtual community.

This paper will analyze how two museums in Los Angeles County shifted their programming to online platforms, including their websites and Facebook, Instagram, and Twitter profiles. These museums are the Wende Museum in Culver City and the Museum of Contemporary Art (MOCA) in downtown Los Angeles. I will analyze how their actions from March 2020 to August 2020 align with their mission statements. Although the circumstances are unfortunate, the onset of COVID-19 has allowed these museums to step up to lead their communities. While they attempt to do this in physical and virtual ways, there are inevitable shortcomings. For example, the reliance on online platforms excludes some members of the community. While most of their resources are free, some people do not have stable access to Wi-Fi or a computer. In addition, some people do not have the leisure time to engage with these activities. This is important to consider when discussing the success of these forms of online programming. On the other hand, virtual platforms provide access and engagement opportunities

to a broader audience. This broader audience includes people who do not have the ability to travel to the physical site of the museum.

The Wende Museum was founded in 2002 by Justinian Jampol. As of March 24, 2020 the [website](#) stated, “The Wende Museum is a collections-based research and education institute that preserves Cold War artifacts and history, making resources available to scholars and applying historical lessons of the past to the present.”¹ Its self-described mission is “to preserve Cold War art, culture, and history from the Soviet Bloc countries, inspire a broad understanding of the period, and explore its enduring legacy.” The collection is based on the period 1945-1989 and includes a wide range of artifacts, anything from old shopping catalogs to unopened chocolate bars. Originally the museum had a specific focus on artifacts from the German Democratic Republic (GDR), but as time went on, the collections staff and curators they realized many Soviet Bloc countries did not have a place where their artifacts would be fully appreciated. The museum recently moved to an old armory from World War II in Culver City. In this location, there is more room for exhibit space, a garden, and a venue for community events instead of just a collection room.

Before the closures brought on by COVID-19, the Wende stuck to a regular programming schedule. They had a monthly family night as well as a teen night. Oftentimes on the weekends, they hosted lectures, music events, and were a venue for community events at large. All its programming was free and open to all members of the public. To accompany the exhibition “Medea Insurrection” about female artists from the Eastern bloc during the Cold War, the museum hosted a Wikipedia edit-a-thon in conjunction with a lecture about the role of woman in the anti-communist revolutions. For example, they hosted a Wikipedia edit-a-thon in conjunction

¹ http://www.wendemuseum.org/?gclid=CjwKCAjwhMmEBhBwEiwAXwFoEeRgC1cSB21x5zv-qbzqKvmMZ-n9T9zWjAwGcty9cNEpWEU9ikenaBoC6uQQA_vD_BwE

with a lecture about the rebellion by Eastern European women during the Cold War. These events were held during its exhibit “Medea Insurrection,” highlighting female artists from the Eastern bloc during the Cold War. This shows how these exhibitions and events are not simply a means to bring visitors in. There are educational components to its programming alongside events such as the Wikipedia edit-a-thon. The Wende gives visitors the opportunity to be active participants during events. The museum also served as a venue for e-waste and hazardous waste drop-off spot working with the Sanitation Districts of Los Angeles County. Each Wednesday morning, they hosted a free yoga class in its outdoor courtyard. By hosting this range of events, and having free admission, the Wende provides an accessible space for community members to learn about the Cold War and build community. This is a good way to invite members of the community into space and hopefully intrigue them enough to come back. Hosting these events is not about bringing in tourists, it is about building up the local community. This is also an effective way to build community by having people meet who might not have met before. Many staff members from the museum also participate, introducing them to members of the community. While there are some exclusive events for donors, it does not appear that the Wende has an opportunity for visitors to buy any sort of membership.

The Museum on Contemporary Art (MOCA) was founded in 1979 by a group of artists and investors inspired to create a space truly dedicated to contemporary art, something they found lacking in the Los Angeles area. Unlike other Los Angeles museums such as the Los Angeles County Museum of the Arts (LACMA), MOCA receives a limited amount of county funding and relies heavily on donors. The collection comprises around 7,000 pieces of art, all created after 1940. There are three different locations: MOCA Grand Avenue and The Geffen Contemporary, both in downtown LA, and artist Michael Heizer’s piece Double Negative (1969-

1970) in the Nevada desert. As of March 24, 2020, the museum's mission is described in three statements on its [website](#), "we are a museum," "we are contemporary," and "we care." Under "we are a museum," MOCA states, "We present, collect, preserve, and interpret the art of our time." Under "we are contemporary" they state, "we question and adapt to the changing definitions of art." Finally, under "we care" they state, "we make the experience of art accessible, we embrace the inevitability of change, we support the multiplicity of perspectives, we encourage the urgency of contemporary expression."² Even though they are an art museum, MOCA engages with history in all of its exhibits by seeking to understand how a certain time period inspired a specific art piece.

The two downtown locations are under the same staff, which means its programming events work to complement each other. The third site in Nevada does not have programming events and functions as a stand-alone work of art. MOCA hosts frequent events for members, such as a behind-the-scenes tours of both downtown locations. But there are also a lot of events open to the public. For example, the Geffen Contemporary hosts the LA Art Book Fair each year. This event was started in 2013 and is one of the leading international gatherings for the distribution of artists' books and includes artists from around the world. Opening night tickets cost \$20, but for the rest of the weekend, the book fair is free to the public. MOCA hosts events about once a month that are open to the public. These include lectures from artists, movie screenings, and readings. Finding these programs is easy for visitors to access under the "Programs" tab on the website.

On a foundational level, the Wende is operating on the framework of applying its collection to the changing social and political landscape. MOCA is working under a different

² <https://www.moca.org/>

framework applying its collection to the events but on a delayed timeline. At the beginning of the COVID-19 outbreak when businesses were shutting down, both museums shifted its usual programming to online platforms in a relatively seamless fashion. They focused on family actives that involved showcasing items from its collections. As the pandemic has continued, each museum has adapted to cultivating a more permanent online space.

Before the age of COVID-19 museums worked in physical ways to foster community. Their exhibition spaces served as places for events of all kinds, some related to their focus and some not. With the onset of COVID-19, they were pushed into building a virtual community. Their websites and social media were previously underutilized, and they had to find a way to make them informative and interactive. As the lockdown continued, various social justice movements happened such as the Black Lives Matter movement. Museums were expected to take a stance and speak out in ways they did not have to before. COVID-19 makes virtual community more important than ever. The Wende and MOCA adapted their programming in different ways based on their missions. The Wende sought to build community by expanding their mission outside of Cold War history while MOCA stayed centered on contemporary art.

Literature Review:

In response to society's reliance on the Internet and social media platforms, museums were forced to translate their institutions into something compatible online. This shift was coupled with museums becoming sites for the community to connect. The relationship between museums and the internet and social media has evolved rapidly in the past decade. Many scholars have analyzed the most effective ways museums can communicate with their community. In their article "Efficiency of Web Communication Strategies: The Case of Art Museums," Carmen Camarero, María José Garrido, and Rebeca San José explore the features of

a museum's website that successfully engage with online users.³ They found that a few common elements were consistent with a higher percentage of internet traffic. These include emotional content based on pictures and videos, two-way communication by providing entertaining and educational interactive features, and options to make online transactions. The implementation of these interactive experiences makes it more likely that a visitor will return to the museum website. Instead of merely looking at a screen, patrons have the opportunity to create their own experience within the collection.

Another element to consider when analyzing the relationship between museums and their use of technology is the economic incentives. There are major economic incentives for museums who properly utilize technology. William B. Crow and Herminia Din discuss this in their article “The Educational and Economy Value of Online Learning for Museums.”⁴ From an economic standpoint, bolstering a website and social media pages taps into traditionally underutilized resources. By minimizing brick and mortar costs, a museum inherently benefits from adding additional content online. An online forum also fosters flexibility and the ability to rapidly change content. More collaborations and partnerships with distant institutions, digital marketing, and re-purposing old content allow a museum to grow outside of the physical building and into the digital marketplace.⁵

It is not easy for a museum to build strong online relationships with its visitors. Julian Hartley analyzes this dynamic in their article “Museums and the Symbolic Capital of Social

³ Carmen Camarero, María José Garrido, and Rebeca San José, "Efficiency of Web Communication Strategies: The Case of Art Museums., *International Journal of Arts Management* 18, no. 2 (2016): 42.

⁴ William B. Crow and Herminia Din, "The Educational and Economic Value of Online Learning for Museums," *The Journal of Museum Education* 35, no. 2 (2010): 161.

⁵ Crow and Din, "The Educational and Economic Value of Online Learning for Museums," 165.

Media Space.”⁶ Many museums fail to respond quickly enough to the shift in social structures. Hartley argues that most museums lack the proper knowledge about how to make the most of their online platforms. Museum websites and social media accounts often act “more like a newspaper than a gallery.”⁷ They fail to see how their collections adapt to present social circumstances or political events. There are some who disagree with Hartley about how slow museums are to adapt. In his article “Gramophones in the Gallery,” digital media developer and researcher Peter Pavement argues that museums are on the cutting edge of technology.⁸ He begins by exploring early audio guides and ends by looking at how museums integrate smartphones into guest experiences. Many museums have even started integrating augmented and virtual reality into their exhibitions. This opposing argument is important to consider in order to not rule out museums as places of innovation.

Online Presence Pre-COVID:

Before the age of COVID-19, museums generally fell short in their use of online platforms. To understand the changes made to their online platforms from March to August 2020 and why they were made, it is necessary to complete an analysis of each museum’s online presence before COVID-19. This analysis will start by looking at each museum’s website, then Facebook, Instagram, Twitter, and miscellaneous platforms.

Websites:

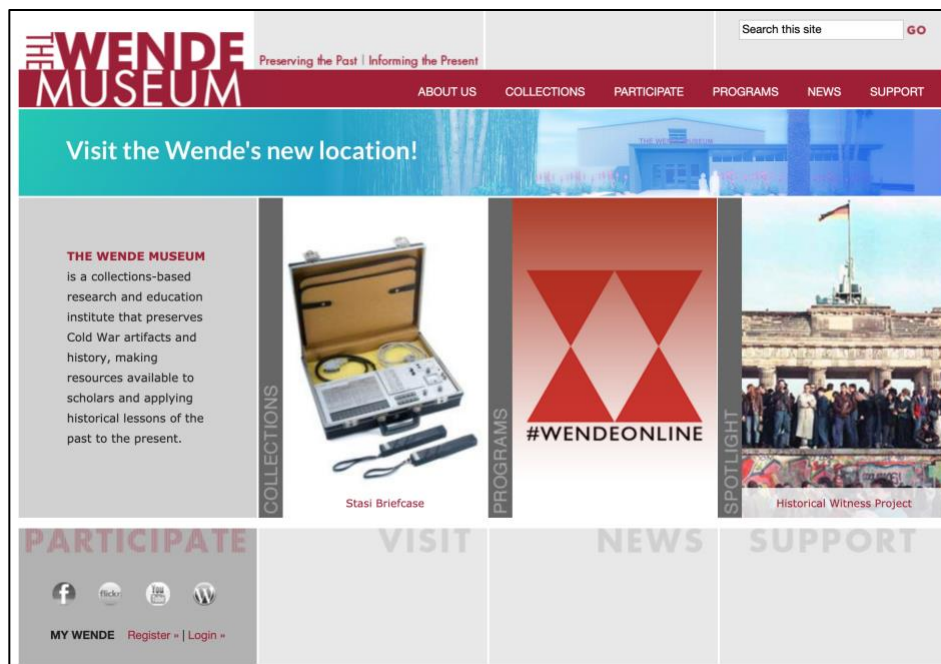
The Wende Museum’s website is dated, and the interface had not been updated for several years. This gives the user the impression that the museum itself may be dated and old-

⁶ Julian Hartley, "Museums and the Symbolic Capital of Social Media Space." In *Engaging Heritage, Engaging Communities*, edited by Onciul Bryony (Rochester: Boydell & Brewer, 2017), 190.

⁷ Hartley, "Museums and the Symbolic Capital of Social Media Space," 198.

⁸ Peter Pavement, “Gramophones in the Gallery: A Chronology of Museums and Media Technology,” *Journal of Museum Ethnography*, no. 27 (2014): 12.

fashioned. There are many layers to the website, which makes it difficult to navigate at times. The main tabs on the top of the site are “About Us, Collections, Participate, Programs, News, and Support.” On the main page, there are also four panels. The first one is the mission statement of the museum, the second one is titled “Collections,” the third “Programs,” and the fourth “Spotlight.” The Collections and Programs panels have slideshows of photos. There are four smaller panels beneath those, with headings “Participate,” “Visit,” “News,” and “Support.” The “Participate” panel has links to Facebook, Flickr, YouTube, and WordPress. While the YouTube and Facebook accounts are up to date, the Flickr has not been used since 2009 and the WordPress since 2016. This also just how badly the website needs to be updated.



Wende Museum Website Homepage March 2020

Under the links to these pages, there is also a spot to log in or register for a My Wende account. When clicked on, there is no description of what it means to create an account, but if you use the search bar, you can find results. With an account, you can subscribe to an email list and

participate in forums on the website; establishing account is also the first step to making a financial contribution and helps the Wende understand who its visitors are to serve them better.

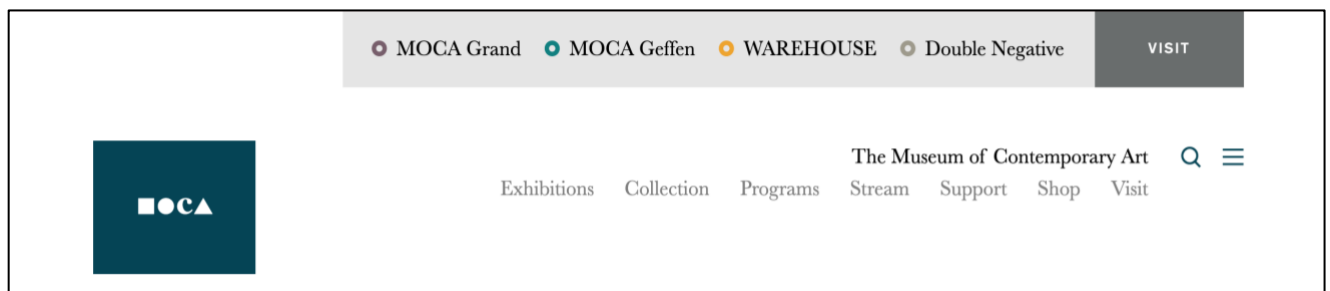
The multiple ways to navigate to each page are disorienting for the user. Having too many choices can feel overwhelming. When you hover over the headings at the top of the page, subheadings pop down that are under that general category. Each subheading has four to eight options to click on. Again, this choice is overwhelming for the user. While it is important to display all the different pages, the information is a lot to take in. If you click on just the heading, you are taken to a general page for that topic and then the subheadings are listed on the side of the page.

A key component missing from the website is an online store. As Camarero, José Garrido, and San José state in their article, this is an important component to increase interactions.⁹ With an online store, if users want to buy an item, they can access the store through the online front page. An online store makes it more convenient for the user to engage in a casual interaction with the museum. The act of purchasing something solidifies the relationship between a patron and the museum. The object they buy is physical evidence of their desire to support the institution.

The main page of MOCA's website is sleek and modern. This matches the feeling of a contemporary art museum. The colors of the top navigation bar are a dark navy and medium grey tone. These pop nicely against the bright white background. As you scroll, there are staggered rectangles with pictures and captions for different ongoing events at the museum. Right away the user is confronted with relevant information. Some of the same headings are listed at the bottom of the page. This time there are subheadings listed below them. The headings are Exhibitions,

⁹ Camarero, Garrido, and San José, "Efficiency of Web Communication Strategies: The Case of Art Museums," 44.

Collection, Programs, Stream, Support, About, Education, Visit, Shop, and News. Like the Wende, the user has several options for how to navigate for the site. Below the list of headings are icons that link to the Instagram, Facebook, Twitter, YouTube, and Tumblr pages. The Tumblr page has not been updated since February 2020, but all the other platforms are up to date. At the very top of the page, the user has the option to click on MOCA Grand, MOCA Geffen, WAREHOUSE, and Double Negative. When the user selects one of the locations, they are sent to a page with information about hours, admission, directions, parking, upcoming events, and contact information.



MOCA Homepage March 2020

These pages are easy to navigate, and the information does not seem overwhelming. The white background brings cleanness to the experience. In the navigation bar below the location bar, the options are Exhibitions, Collection, Programs, Stream, Support, Shop, and Visit. The user could have also gotten to the location information by clicking on Visit. When the user hovers over one of these options, no drop-down bars appear. Even though it is less clear what information is present in each category, it is less overwhelming than seeing five different subsections listed. Instead of being on the drop-down bar, these subsections are listed permanently on top of the screen.

Unlike the Wende, MOCA does have an online store. This facet of two-way interaction is important to have. When the user clicks on the Shop heading at the top of the page, a new tab

opens up for the store. The same headings as the main page appear at the top of the store if you hover over them. Some of the shopping categories are MOCA apparel, kids, games, home, clothing, jewelry, and books. These categories are listed if you scroll down the main page. The different membership levels are also included in the shop. When a user purchases an item from the online shop, they are building a relationship with the museum. If it is MOCA apparel, they are showing people with whom they interact that they are a part of the MOCA community. This is also an effective form of subtle advertising. The logo becomes engrained in everyday life for some people. This also means people want to own merchandise to feel like they are a member of the MOCA community.

Facebook:

Since Facebook has a common interface for all its profiles, this comparison will be more focused on the differences between content. A good way to understand a museum's online presence is by looking at its audience. The Wende has 5,845 likes on its page as opposed to MOCA, which had 282,340 likes as of April 2, 2020. Just because the Wende has significantly fewer likes does not mean they have failed to build an online community. A few elements factor into each museum's number of likes. The first of these is that the Wende is a much smaller museum than MOCA. While in terms of other art museums, MOCA is not the largest or most well-funded, in comparison to the Wende, they have more resources. In addition, while both museums focus on making its collection accessible to the broader public, MOCA has an advantage because art often seems more approachable than history. In addition, contemporary art is a much wider topic than Cold War history through the lens of the Soviet bloc. No one needs to be an expert to look at art; while the context clarifies how it came to be, it is not necessary information. On the other hand, at a history museum, context is everything. Sometimes this can

be intimidating to visitors, and going to a history museum is a more conscious experience of making connections. Not to say that art museums are entirely passive experiences, but they can be seen as more approachable. Location is also a potential factor in the number of likes. Tourists usually flock to downtown Los Angeles and go in search of places like Museum Row.

Unfortunately for the Wende, Culver City is not necessarily a tourist destination.

Before the onset of COVID-19, the Wende used its Facebook to highlight its in-person programs. Before an event, there would be a Facebook post once a day for about a week leading up to it that served as a reminder. While events were happening, there was typically a live stream or Facebook Live, making the program more accessible. This feature allows users to view the live stream after it is finished. Users can either revisit the event or watch it for the first time. An important part of social media management is understanding what the audience on each platform is most responsive to. Facebook users are usually more willing to read longer captions and the Wende is attentive to this. As opposed to its Instagram or Twitter posts, its Facebook posts include more detailed text.

MOCA uses its Facebook page in similar ways as the Wende, but with less specific posts. Instead of having more tailor-made posts for its Facebook, MOCA uses essentially the same text for each platform. The content is not as personalized for Facebook as many of the Wende posts are. Generally, its page underutilizes Facebook-specific features like Facebook Live. They also do not post daily. After looking at the way they use other social media platforms, it is clear that MOCA does not focus its efforts on Facebook.

Instagram:

Both museums devote a lot of their time posting to Instagram. It is arguably the most versatile platform and a platform a wide range of people are on. Instagram lends itself well to the

visual world of museums. As of June 1, 2020, the Wende had 3,325 followers and 1,224 posts. MOCA had 581,000 followers and 3,025 posts. The Instagram story has become one of the most important features of Instagram. This is a photo or video that is posted for only 24 hours unless the user chooses to place it in their “highlights.” Both museums also use their bios to provide a lot of information in a small space. They both have their physical addresses and a linktree. Any user can create a person linktree which opens a separate window and has links to external sites. This is an effective way to get around Instagram’s policy of not allowing hyperlinks in posts. It is also a useful way to provide key resources to followers. Another important feature is Instagram TV (IGTV). MOCA and the Wende both use this feature frequently to include videos that are longer than the 60 second limit on normal posts. These can all be found in a separate tab than posts and are easy for a follower to access. All social media posting is intentional, but a museum’s Instagram is not there just to be aesthetically pleasing.

The Wende posted on Instagram daily, whether that was a story or a conventional post. Another feature of Instagram is creating “Highlights” to save old stories. By creating these highlights, stories can stay for longer than 24 hours, until the highlight is deleted. For the Wende some of these highlights are “Song-A-Day,” “Friday Finds,” “Exhibitions,” and “Archive Sneaks.” By watching these highlights, an Instagram user can get a good sense of what the Wende museum is like. While there are many highlights included, someone who is familiar with how Instagram operates would not be overwhelmed. The way the Wende set up its Instagram allows a user to get to know them on its terms.

There is a distinctive tone shift from Facebook posts to Instagram posts. The Facebook posts are more formal where the Instagram posts are more playful. This is in part because Instagram captions are much shorter than a Facebook post since Instagram is mainly used on

phones. Although the captions are still long since they have the goal of informing followers instead of just sharing a cute picture. There are overlaps in content though. Its Instagram also has event reminders and items from its collection. On a mostly daily basis, they post stories or posts.

The tone of the MOCA Instagram is more serious. Its captions are typically longer, which makes it difficult to keep the user engaged in the whole post. While scrolling through Instagram, many people do not stop to read long captions; instead they “like” the post and continue scrolling. MOCA also uses Instagram regularly to post pieces from its collection, videos of artists, and event reminders. Another frequent type of post from them is pictures from events that happened. MOCA has very few highlights on its profile. If the user wants to learn about the museum, they must make a more direct effort by visiting the website. While on the Wende profile, there is an opportunity to explore details of the museum all in one space. At the beginning of 2020, MOCA started offering free general admission to all its sites. Several posts from January and February included a picture of an item from its collection and then an advertisement for free admission. The end of these posts typically ended with, “For more information to plan your visit, head to moca.org/visit.” This is a way to encourage users to further connect themselves to MOCA. Though it may not seem like it, leaving Instagram to go to a website is a big commitment. Overall, the Wende’s Instagram profile offers more information, not just about them as a museum, but about the personality of the environment. The MOCA Instagram is more professional and driven by events.

Twitter:

Twitter is the most casual of all these platforms. One main reason for this is the limit of 280 characters. This can be difficult to manage for casual and professional users alike. While in recent years some companies have adapted to the casual and comedic style of Twitter, a lot of

industries still struggle with that. The Wende and MOCA use Twitter similar to how they use Instagram. Most of its tweets include images and the same hashtags they use on other accounts. This makes sense for the practical purpose of continuity between content and platforms. On the other hand, their profiles would probably gain more traction if they adapted a little more to the style of Twitter.

The Wende's Twitter bio is like its Instagram one. It includes its location of Culver City, a link to the website, a linkt.ree, and a calendar icon that says that the user joined in November of 2009. The bio reads, "The Wende Museum provides access to artifacts & personal histories of Cold War-era Eastern Europe." Like how MOCA did on its Instagram, the Wende encourages users to plan their trip on its website at wendemuseum.org/about-us/visit. Most of its tweets are about event reminders or generally advertising its new exhibits. One tweet from February 24, 2020, is a retweet of the Los Angeles County Sanitation Districts that says, "FREE Household Hazardous Waste and E-Waste Roundup this Saturday, February 29, in @CulverCityGov at @WendeMuseum (10808 Culver Blvd), from 9 am-3 pm. Bring medicines, used needles, paints, household cleaners, old computers & TVs. Open to all @LACounty residents. #RETWEET #recycle" Below this message is a photo that says "Too Toxic To Trash" on it and has a map of where to find the Wende Museum. This is an example of how the Wende functioned as a community space online.



@WendeMuseum Retweet Feb 24, 2020

In a similar fashion to the Wende, the MOCA Twitter is used mostly like its Instagram. Something interesting to note is that it is a verified account. According to Twitter, “the blue verified badge on Twitter lets people know that an account of public interest is authentic. To receive a blue badge your account must be authentic, notable, and active.”¹⁰ While a blue checkmark is not necessary to function as a professional account, it certainly does lend authenticity. The rest of its profile is simple. Its bio is “The Museum of Contemporary Art,” with its location listed as Los Angeles, CA, a link to its main website, and a calendar icon that indicates they joined in April 2009. Most of its tweets have photos in them. While its Instagram feels formal, its Twitter is more casual. It is a similar level to the Wende’s Instagram. The content focuses on a wider variety of topics than only its collections and events. One thing they often tweet, or retweet, is a famous artist’s birthday, for example a February 18, 2020 tweet in honor of Yoko Ono’s birthday that also highlights a piece of her artwork on view at MOCA

¹⁰ <https://help.twitter.com/en/managing-your-account/about-twitter-verified-accounts>

Grand. They also frequently quote tweets from other institutions that engage in a dialogue with a larger community.



@MOCAlosangeles Tweet Feb 18, 2020

One thing that both museums seem to find difficult is engaging directly with its users. They struggle with the key component of two-way communication. Both museums focus on the inclusion of emotional-based content in the form of pictures and videos. These mediums are much easier to interact with than blocks of text. As they scroll through their feed, an Instagram user will stop for a second to look and the photo but typically will not stop and read the caption especially if it is long.

Post COVID-19 Outbreak:

Since the onset of COVID-19, the whole world has been living in unprecedented times. This phrase permeated emails, posts, and conversations. Even though it has begun to feel overused, it is true. As Hartley reminds us, museums already have a difficult time making their online content relevant to the shifting social dynamics in the world.¹¹ When museums began to

¹¹ Hartley, "Museums and the Symbolic Capital of Social Media Space," 200.

close, they were hit with a make-or-break moment—they could continue their usual online content, or they could create a new way of interacting with their online community. For the Wende and MOCA, this meant actively engaging with users instead of passively posting events. The museums responded in similar ways by creating a curriculum for children’s education and introducing virtual family activities. In alignment with Pavement’s argument that museums are on the cutting edge of technology, both museums adapted their programming quickly.¹² As COVID-19 closures continued, MOCA has a difficult time creating new and approachable content for their online users. Although, as COVID-19 closures continued, MOCA had a difficult time creating new, approachable content for the community. The Wende continued to translate their pre-COVID programming as well as create new content.

Websites:

Before COVID-19 museum websites seemed neglected. After their closures, museums needed a way to replace the physical space that tied everything together. Websites began to fill the void left by the closure of the physical spaces. The Wende and MOCA transformed their websites into the central hubs of information and activities. Both websites have a considerable amount of their collection online, which is another key component of a museum. Although the collections were mostly available online before the onset of COVID-19, more objects were added in the last few months.

After the closure of the physical Wende, its website became the central location for online programming titled #WendeOnline. The museum uses this hashtag on all its social media platforms to tie together the new programming they began in March. Once the user can navigate to the #WendeOnline page of the website, it is a great resource. The problem is that the Wende

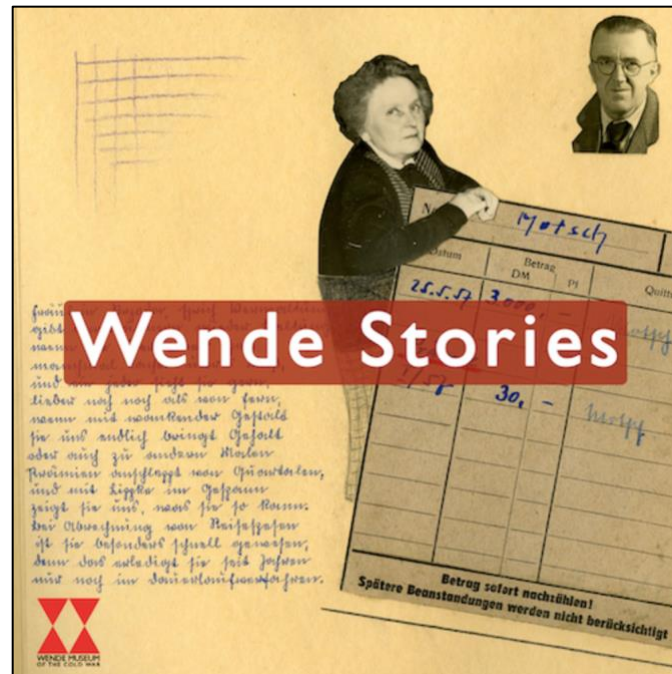
¹² Pavement, “Gramophones in the Gallery,” 25.

website is confusing to navigate, so it takes a few clicks and some trial and error before the user make it to the page successfully. The actual page has a list of upcoming and past events, exhibitions, activities, and miscellaneous information. Each event has a link to its page where there is a description and a link to watch the recording of it. This page provides room for interaction by watching videos, doing a past Family Day activity, or touring a virtual exhibition. One of the programs they feature is Cold War Spaces, which is a weekly “lunchtime chat” via Zoom with museum staff members and often outside speakers. The Wende takes this as an opportunity to connect elements of Cold War history to the circumstances brought on by COVID-19. An example of this is a conversation from May 10 titled “In Search of Our Times Lecture: Fact and Fiction: Art, News, and Propaganda,” which was co-hosted with the Pacific Council on International Policy. During the conversation, they talk about how bias is even more prevalent today with the way algorithms work on social media. They also discuss how “fake news” and “alternative facts” are not new ideas. Tracing modern-day phenomenon to the past helps give perspective on how to approach these issues today.

On a week-to-week basis, the Wende has a somewhat consistent programming schedule. As a part of the broader #WendeOnline they post Song-A-Day Soundcloud playlists, #MuseumMomentsofZen objects, #TriviaTuesdays, Wende-sday Finds, Wednesday yoga classes (uploaded to the Wende’s Vimeo), and Cold War Spaces talks. #MuseumMomentsofZen are posted on Facebook, Instagram, and Twitter, while Song-A-Days are posted only on Instagram stories. In addition, yoga classes are available through Facebook and the website. There is also a Friday night film series where every week a movie is posted with a place to stream it, though there is no discussion portion after viewing the movie. There are also Family Day Activities on the website. Some of these include a Virtual Pioneer Scavenger Hunt, a Make Your Time

Capsule guide, and a design of your board game activity in collaboration with the El Segundo Museum of Art. All the social media platforms still serve as places to advertise for upcoming events but instead of these events being in person, they mostly take place on Zoom.

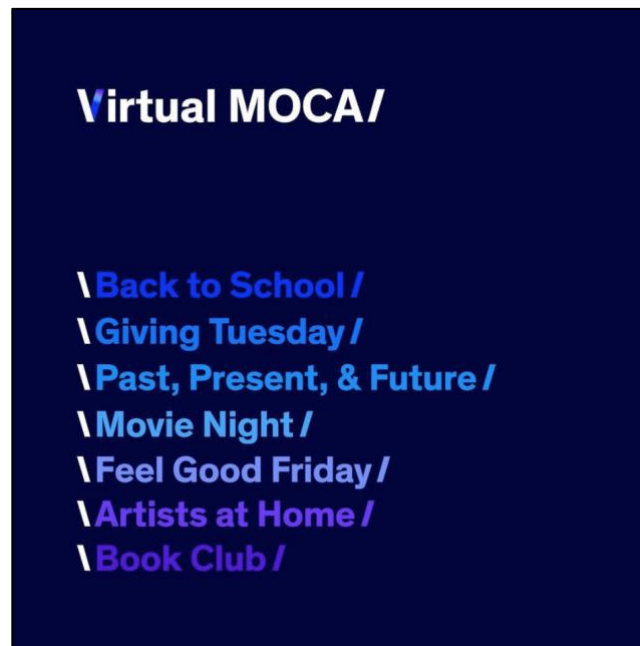
Another feature of #WendeOnline is Wende Stories. On its website, there is a page for this program with a link to a form to fill out a Google Form. There is also a description of the project where they explain that “wende” means “turning point” or “change,” and they are hoping to document this huge historical shift taking place in the age of COVID-19. At the bottom of the page, it says, “Select submissions will be shared (with permission) to continue fostering community while afar.” The museum is recognizing the historical as well as emotional importance of this time. They are actively seeking stories that will hopefully connect people. They also do an excellent job connecting it directly to its mission and its focus. There are three sections of the form: questions for reflection, submission of media, and personal information. Some of the reflection questions include: are you attempting to document this time in any way, have you lived through something like this, how has this experience impacted the way you think about community, what is giving you hope? Users can then upload documents, photos, or videos that capture their experiences during COVID-19. There are follow-up questions about what the user wants the museum to do with their submission. The final part of the form is personal information such as age, if they have been to the Wende Museum, and address. Documenting these stories is important for historical purposes but also for building community. When users feel like they have contributed to something larger than themselves they become emboldened. During COVID-19 people want to feel like their story matters and Wende Stories gives people the opportunity to feel that their lived experience is valid.



Wende Stories Logo 2020

MOCA programming operates on a similar weekly program schedule as the Wende. For each day of the week there are preset programs—Monday: Back to School, Tuesday: Giving Tuesday, Wednesday: Past, Present, and Future, Thursday: Movie Night, Friday: Feel Good Friday, Saturday: Artists at Home, Sunday: book club MOCA. Just as the Wende did, MOCA created #VirtualMOCA to link all its posts about programming. This structure and its approachable website interface make its virtual programming easier to navigate than the Wende's. In addition, they have a more comprehensive curriculum for adults wishing to teach children about contemporary art. These more fleshed-out ideas can be partially attributed to the fact that MOCA has more resources as a bigger institution. Also, with Giving Tuesday they pick an artist or community fund to encourage its followers to donate to. The difference in institution size but also type of museum is demonstrated by the Artists at Home visits. Visiting an artist at their studio is vastly different from visiting a historian in their office. These two things are not comparable at all. Even if the Wende wanted to, they could not do something like this. By doing

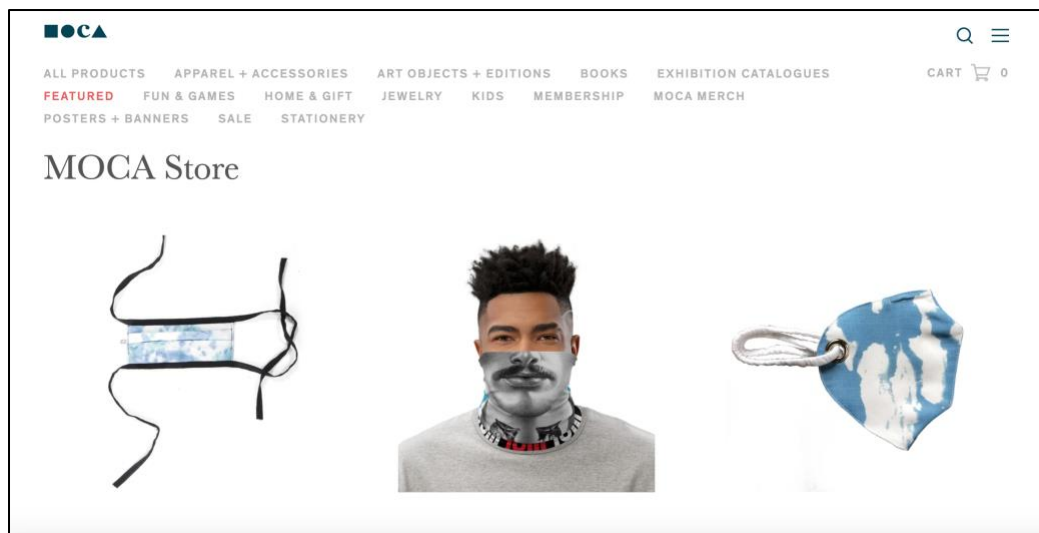
these studio visits, MOCA is creating approachable, emotional, and exclusive content. This is an opportunity for users to step into the hidden world of an artist.



Virtual MOCA Schedule Graphic 2020

As mentioned before, MOCA has an online store. After the onset of COVID-19, they added face masks and puzzles to its store. The face masks are limited-production artist-designed and made to benefit the museum during COVID-19. In total there are nine participating artists, and all masks are \$28 each. There are also a variety of puzzles from a 1000-piece Andy Warhol Selfies puzzle to a Little Puzzle Thing Rose. MOCA saw an opportunity to connect with community members by selling masks and puzzles. They picked up on the social significance of puzzles and were able to make a profit because of its quick response. Face masks offer an even greater opportunity to profit, because of how essential they are. Someone can go onto the MOCA website, choose between designer face masks, and purchase one. The interaction between the user and MOCA does not end. The mask is shipped to their residency and they can start wearing it out. Unique masks have become conversation starters and part of fashion. A person who wears a MOCA mask advertises the museum and themselves as someone who has an appreciation for

art. In addition, masks can be emotional purchases, especially at the early stages of COVID-19. MOCA provides a way for users to interact with the museum, contemporary art, and specific artists by selling these face masks. It is an effective way to build an emotional bond between the institution and its community.

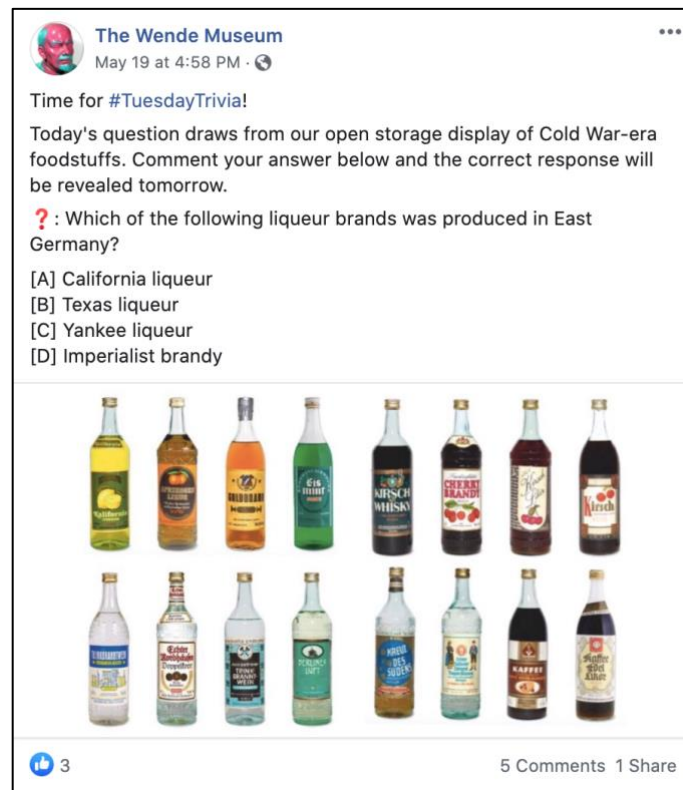


MOCA Online Store March 2020

Facebook:

A few weeks after the closure of its physical space, the Wende transformed its Facebook page into a site of interaction. During the transition of online programming, they posted #MuseumMomentsofZen, #MuseumFromHome videos, and images of its exhibit Medea Insurrection. Soon they got their footing and started posting more interactive content. An example of this is its #TriviaTuesdays. These usually include a photo and then a multiple-choice question about the photo. Users are encouraged to comment on their answers below. Including these trivia questions prompts interaction between the user and the museum content. A user can comment on their answer below, but they will not find out the answer until the next day. They are prompted to return to the Facebook page and therefore will consume more of the content.

Users can also interact with one another in the comments section. Even though this is a small activity, it is useful in laying the foundations of a community.



Wende Museum Facebook Post May 19, 2020

The Wende posts on its Facebook at least once a day, whether it is an event reminder or a part of its social media programming. Another element of its programming is Wende Collection Reflections, which is where the museum highlights work from its collection and goes over its significance in a two- or three-minute video. One of the first videos is about the Wartburg 353 and the role it plays in its upcoming exhibition. These videos are uploaded to the Wende's Vimeo account and then embedded in a Facebook post. They post these videos on its Instagram account as well, but the videos are not as compatible with that platform. Posting these videos allows the user to have a glimpse of the physical space of the Wende. During the video the object is shown from various angles, giving the user a sense of its three-dimensional existence. For

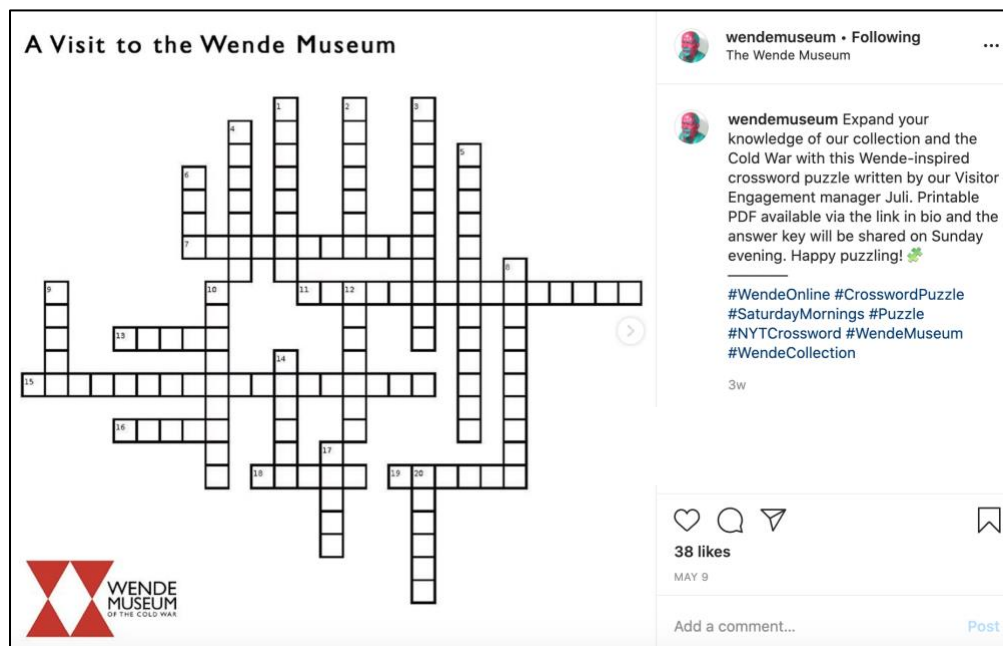
users who have been to the museum and users who haven't been, this is a useful way for the museum to draw in members of the community.

The MOCA Facebook profile is underutilized. Most of its posts are the same as its other platforms; there is no specialized approach to Facebook. They post every other day or sometimes less frequently. For example, there is a gap in its Facebook posts from May 30th to June 26th. This was when Black Lives Matter protests were happening nationally in the wake of George Floyd's death. When they posted again on Facebook, there was no acknowledgment of its absence or a statement made about George Floyd's death. After they posted on June 26th they didn't post again until July 8th. Facebook is not MOCA's way of attempting to build community. Its posts do not prompt users to interact with one another or MOCA. Instead, they use Facebook intermittently as a way to advertise other events.

Instagram:

The Wende adapted its Instagram profile to make it a site of interaction and communication, just as they did with its Facebook page. On average, they post twice a day as a regular post and more on the story feature. All the content posted on Facebook can be found on its Instagram but with modified captions. On Instagram, they use more hashtags and have shorter, more casual captions. Although in terms of Instagram captions, they are exceptionally long, and the average user isn't likely to stop and read them. Its posts are relevant to the social climate of the time. They posted in support of the Black Lives Matter movement, highlighted historical LGBTQ+ figures throughout Pride Month, and posted about the Space X launch. These posts are relevant and show users that museums are not all outdated. The Wende does not let its subject matter as a history museum, limit its scope of posts.

Instagram is the platform with the most interactive posts. The Wende has Trivia Tuesdays as they did on Facebook, Textile Tuesdays where they post a textile from its collection and continue the pre-COVID-19 #askacurator. They also post activities directly on its Instagram. For example, on its Instagram story, they posted an activity for making your segment of the Berlin Wall. There was a template that you could screenshot and then fill in on your phone. They also posted a blank crossword for the user to screenshot and fill out. This interaction encourages the user to come back to find out the answers. Users are also directed to the website to print out the PDF version.



@WendeMuseum Instagram Post May 9, 2020

MOCA's Instagram is the hub for its Artists at Home videos and most of its other posting. After each week they create a highlight for all the stories from then to keep stories accessible. This is a user-friendly way to organize information. Another action they took was to create a separate Instagram account for its MOCA teens programming. This account features content and activities tailored toward a younger audience. Like its Facebook posts, there is a gap

in Instagram posts from May 28th to June 11th. They became active again on July 1st to start advertising for a project called “In Plain Sight” that took place on July 3rd and 4th. This was a sky writing campaign that took place above 80 ICE detention centers across the United States to highlight the hypocrisy of Independence Day. Following these posts, MOCA did address its silence on the death of George Floyd on June 10th. Its response was purely reactionary and included white text on a black background, saying that they support protestors and stated as an institution they started a process of introspection over a year ago. They made a follow up post on June 25th where this time they acknowledged its silence could be interpreted as complicity and then went on to explicitly state “Black Lives Matter.”

We support the protesters across Los Angeles and around the world bravely demanding justice and an end to anti-Black racism and violence.

Along with our solidarity in the struggle against systemic racism, it is critical that we as an institution prioritize the necessary, difficult, often deferred work of comprehensively assessing how our workplace culture, practices, policies, and privileged position in society perpetuates and contributes to systemic racism.

More than a year ago, MOCA formally began a process of introspection with working groups and staff-led open discussions on issues of diversity, equity, accessibility and inclusion in our workplace. Over the past week, we as a staff met several times to speak candidly with each other about the limitations of that process so far, recent events, and next steps to further accountability. And we will continue to do so, beginning with anti-bias training at all levels of the organization.

MOCA publicly commits to not just further introspection and accountability, but substantive action that produces change, and to sharing more about the process as we move forward.

@MOCA Instagram Post June 10, 2020

MOCA has been silent. We acknowledge how this period, intended for introspection, could be interpreted as complicity. That would be unacceptable, for our staff and for the communities we have purported to amplify and serve. Black Lives Matter.

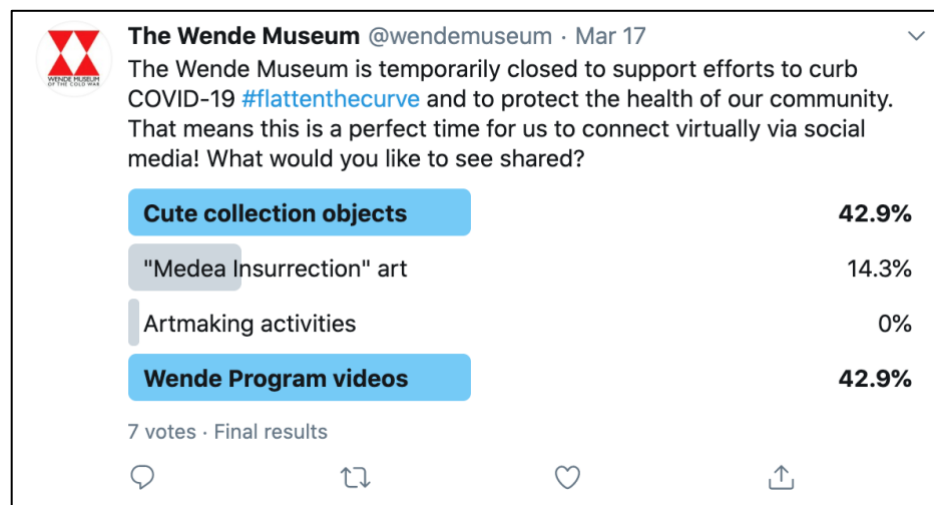
We further acknowledge that MOCA must be clear-eyed about its own contradictions and failures in order to be worthy of its incredible, deeply committed staff and to be a meaningful community resource. Our work lies ahead of us.

@MOCA Instagram Post June 25, 2020

Despite its initial failure to engage in critical conversations around race, MOCA made consolidated efforts to help its surrounding community during its #GivingTuesdays. The first Tuesday they posted about this was April 7th where they thanked healthcare workers as a part of #WorldHealthDay2020. They also call on members of the community to donate personal protective equipment and donate to help feed healthcare workers. Its next Giving Tuesday posts focus specifically on the community around them. They partner with various local organizations like the LA Food Bank, My Friend's Place, and Skid Row Coffee. They also encourage users to support MOCA by buying products on its website and becoming a member. After its brief hiatus, its Giving Tuesdays continue similarly. Organizations like Watts Community Core, Artist Relief, and Black Immigrants Bail Fund are highlighted. By supporting and promoting specific organizations each week from different communities, MOCA broadens its community network. A concrete example of this is providing free art kits to Watts and South-Central LA through the Crenshaw Dairy Mart. This community-building effort relates directly to its subject matter. Throughout the pandemic, its focus on Giving Tuesdays fostered community.

Twitter:

After the closure of its physical space, the Wende uses Twitter in a similar way as they did pre-COVID-19. They still do #AskaCurator and continue to retweet a variety of historical accounts. In the first few weeks of the lockdown, its Twitter mostly repeated Instagram posts only with slightly different texts. Like with its Instagram, after a few weeks, the Wende started taking full advantage of the unique interactive features of Twitter. The main example of this is its use of polls. Its first poll asks its followers to vote for the content they want to see shared. Its options are cute collection objects, “Medea Insurrection” art, artmaking activities, and Wende Program videos. At the outset, the Wende is trying to put the interests of its followers first. This is also a prime example of two-way communication that works to build trust between the museum and its community. Even though only seven people voted in the poll, that is seven people who felt like their voices were heard.



@WendeMuseum Tweet March 17, 2020

On Twitter, the Wende also takes the opportunity to engage with larger popular culture by participating in things like National Pet Day and #MuseumMomentsofZen. For National Pet

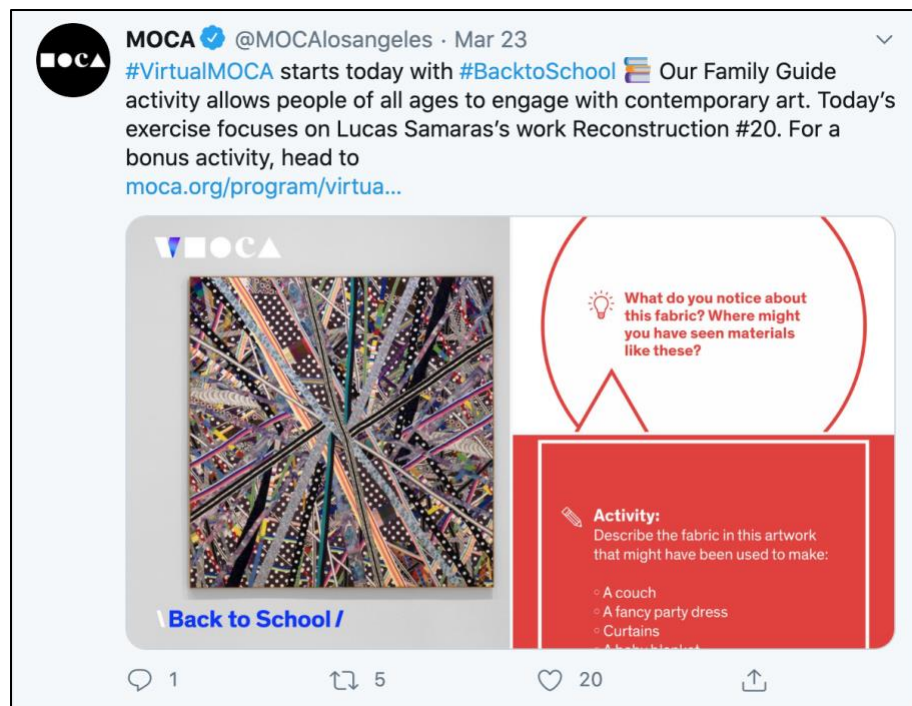
Day, they posted a rocket ship template for followers to print out and color in. There is a hole in the middle for their pet to put their head through. This template is reminiscent of one item in its collection of Soviet space dogs. The activity is also one of its #MuseumfromHome initiatives. By giving users a blank template the Wende gives people the opportunity to make Cold War history its own. People have emotional connections to its pets, and this is another example of two-way communication. After coloring the template and photographing their pet, people can share it back with the larger community. #MuseumMomentsofZen are posted every week and contain items from its collection that are calming. This hashtag is something a lot of museums participate in, including MOCA. Using this hashtag connects the Wende to the museum world at large.



@WendeMuseum Tweet April 11, 2020

MOCA continues to use Twitter as a casual way to interact with its community. While they still post as frequently as pre-COVID-19, they alter its tweets to be more interactive. They post its #VirtualMOCA activity of the day with visuals that often include questions. For example, several of its Back-to-School activities are centered around a piece of artwork. Then

there are prompts listed to help students and adults alike think about the work of art in a new way. On Twitter, they also take the opportunity to post for small holidays such as the first day of spring, international museum day, and national napping day. MOCA also posts #MuseumMomentsofZen and prompts followers to respond with their favorite part of the piece of art. Although just like its other social media platforms, there is a gap between posts. On Twitter, there is a month gap in between tweets, from May 30th to June 26th. Unlike on Instagram, there is no acknowledgment of its absence or a reason for it. Despite its absence, MOCA does develop communication with users by attempting to be relatable. Building this approachability fosters community among its followers.



@MOCAlosangeles Tweet March 23, 2020

Conclusion:

Both museums made significant changes to their websites and social media profiles as they transitioned away from their physical spaces. Their websites became the hub for

information, events, and content. Social media continued to serve as an effective form of advertising but also became a place for small interactions between users. Instagram was prioritized for content and posting. The Wende does a more consistent job posting on all platforms but Instagram is still their focus. MOCA barely posts on Facebook which excludes potential community members. This in part has to do with the audience they are trying to appeal to. Instagram is used by a wide age range, but most users are probably in their 30s or younger. Facebook is known to be used by older generations; many young adults do not have accounts. Twitter is thought to be used by younger generations as well, but not as popular as Instagram. Users are less likely to navigate directly to a museum website than they are to access it through social media. It is also important to look at how this translates out of the digital and into the physical world. For example, the work MOCA did on #GivingTuesdays by donating art supplies, food, and hygiene kits. Also, the Wende becoming a temporary COVID-19 test site. These are acts of community building in the physical world. The only in-person community building that was possible for them is all COVID-19 related. Building a virtual community is about connecting with others during isolating times, but also taking a step out of the context of COVID-19 and trying to grow with others.

The Wende and MOCA changed their programming in different ways because of their subject matter. As a history museum, the Wende comes from the context of documentation of the past and exploration of the present. Throughout COVID-19 it maintained its mission of preserving Cold War art, culture, and history from Soviet Bloc countries and exploring its legacy. But it did more than stick to its mission, they expanded it. With its Cold War Spaces discussions, they made connections between the Cold War to the circumstances of COVID-19. During the pandemic, they explored the culture and art from the Cold War in a new light. They

did expand its focus beyond the Cold War by offering online yoga classes, becoming a temporary testing center, and creating different Family Day activities. The Wende also took on the responsibility of documenting through the Wende Stories initiative.

Starting with a much more ambitious mission statement, MOCA fell short in some ways. The core of its mission is “we are a museum,” “we are contemporary,” and “we care.” Under “we are a museum” MOCA states, “We present, collect, preserve, and interpret the art of our time.” In terms of COVID-19, they did not have an equivalent to Wende Stories or a way to collect art from the present. Although, it did encourage its community to make art through its donation of art supplies to various community members and its Back-to-School activities. Under “we are contemporary” they state, “we question and adapt to the changing definitions of art.” As a part of “we care” they state, “we make the experience of art accessible, we embrace the inevitability of change, we support the multiplicity of perspectives, we encourage the urgency of contemporary expression.” It did not live up to the last part of its mission. Its month-long absence on social media and the hiatus of its programming stopped all its previous community-building efforts.

While both museums have specific missions dedicated to its subject matter, Wende stepped out of its mission to prioritize community engagement. This is not to say that MOCA did not engage in community building with #GivingTuesdays. Generally, its social media posts were less interactive, even though they did provide consistent content for the first months of lockdown. The Wende and MOCA both experienced a shift between being about something to being for someone. In this time of crisis, they did their best to show up for their community and continue to build trust with their community. MOCA stayed more centered on its focus on

contemporary art, basing all of its content on that, but the way they shared it changed. They began to include prompting questions.

There are important implications to the online actions of these museums. Since there is no physical space people can visit, people can only go to online content to engage with the museum. If a museum failed to adapt to the new importance of an online presence, it would fade away from its communities. In this time of crisis, museums are faced to reevaluate their role in their community. The Wende sought to solidify its role in its community through education, entertainment, and critical conversations about the past and the present. In addition, they served as a physical community site for COVID-19 testing. MOCA did not engage in as many critical conversations in its online presence. Instead, it focused its posts on entertainment and education about contemporary art. When they stopped posting for a month during the Black Lives Matter protests, they redefined their role in the community. They paused their social media activity to take time and reflect internally, instead of focusing on the community. Since social media became the main platform for virtual existence, this was a major decision, with serious implications. Going forward, as museums start to reopen, they will have to maintain a strong online presence. Providing online content is an opportunity to connect with more members of the community. Not only that, but it is vital to staying in touch with the community and fostering a kind of virtual community.

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 - Instagram: <https://www.instagram.com/wendemuseum/?hl=en>
 - Twitter: <https://twitter.com/wendemuseum>
- Museum of Contemporary Art:
- Website: <https://www.moca.org/>
 - Facebook: <https://www.facebook.com/MOCAlosangeles/>
 - Instagram: <https://www.instagram.com/moca/?hl=en>
 - Twitter: <https://twitter.com/moca>