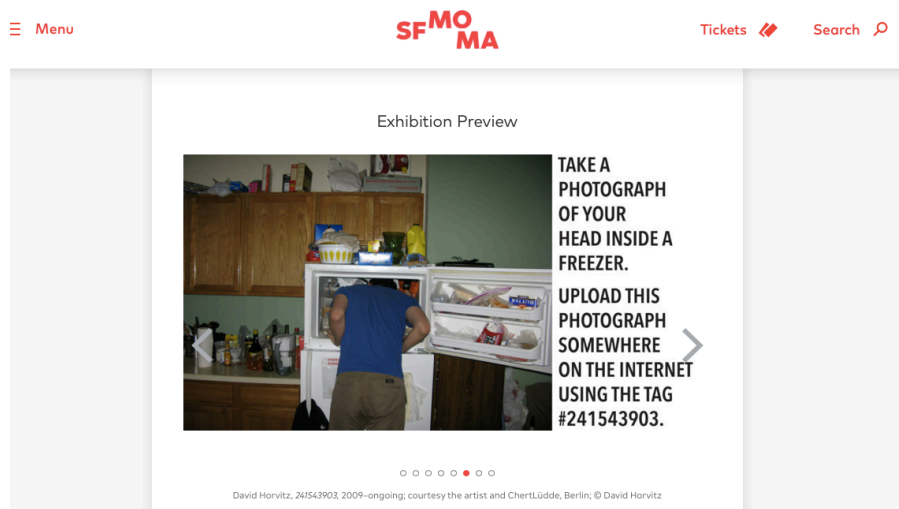


The Power of Social Media and the Transmission of Photographs

At the San Francisco Museum of Modern Art a new exhibition confirms the power of photographs as distinct forms of communication while highlighting the technological advancements that have changed how images are transmitted, or shared, across communities. *Snap + Share: Transmitting Photographs from Mail Art to Social Networks* explores the ubiquity of images in our daily lives through various media, and the ways in which contemporary artists have commented on or contributed to this dramatic increase in visual stimulation. Beginning with the Mail Art movement that began in the late 1960s and grew to include overlapping networks of international artists, *Snap + Share* offers a fascinating look into how different technologies and modes of exchange have transformed artistic production over the last fifty years.



Screenshot of the Snap + Share exhibition preview that appears on SFMoMA's website with a 2009 work by David Horvitz that encourages viewers to document themselves recreating his performance using an internet hashtag.

Although social media platforms like Instagram seem worlds apart from the artist-made postcards and letters that form the basis of correspondence art, the exhibition demonstrates how both are part of a larger history of participatory culture and interactive media. At the heart of this history is the creation and exchange of images as indicative of a universal desire to communicate and forge a sense of community.

Social media technology implementation example

In the spirit of the exhibition, SFMoMA launched an innovative social media campaign that attempts to cultivate new audiences while capitalizing on user-generated content by encouraging visitors to photograph themselves in the exhibition with the intent of sharing and tagging the resulting images on Instagram. Rather than limiting this to a digital exchange, however, the museum announced that it would then choose a select number of participants to receive a personalized correspondence from its staff. In effect, the snap + share Instagram campaign merges both the physical space of the museum with the virtual world of social media while providing a memento of the exhibit as an additional incentive.



Screenshot of SFMoMA's call for online and in-person snap + share content.

Features

The basic features of SFMoMA's snap + share campaign can be adapted to serve a variety of settings, including exhibitions that do not have a Mail Art or digital component but emphasize the interactivity that is inherent to the transmission of images. In the context of the Brooklyn Museum, a similar campaign could be initiated to create greater interest in departments that receive less visitor traffic online and in-person than more popular sections like the Elizabeth A. Sackler Center for Feminist Art.

Such creative campaigns have been successful in the past; for example, the online interactive curatorial project *Split Second* (2011-2012), which asked online visitors to select the works that would be included in a small exhibition of Indian painting. This online campaign directed visitors to a department that most were not as familiar with, thus creating an opportunity for museum education and audience engagement.

Snap + share's features use two museum realms that visitors already frequent, mobile technology and social media and the physical space of the galleries. In the announcement for the campaign, SFMoMA asked visitors to photograph themselves with a specific work in the Snap + Share exhibition, therefore prompting its audience. A similar request could direct Brooklyn Museum visitors to my selected museum object, the *Gwa'sala Kwakwaka'waka Speaker Figure*, which is otherwise tucked away in a corner of a fifth floor gallery, and has very few user-generated tags in the museum's online database, which suggests a low number of web viewers as well. What's more the museum rarely features objects from the Art of the Americas department on its social media accounts, especially its Instagram page, where digital officers tend to mostly highlight the content of recent exhibitions and events.

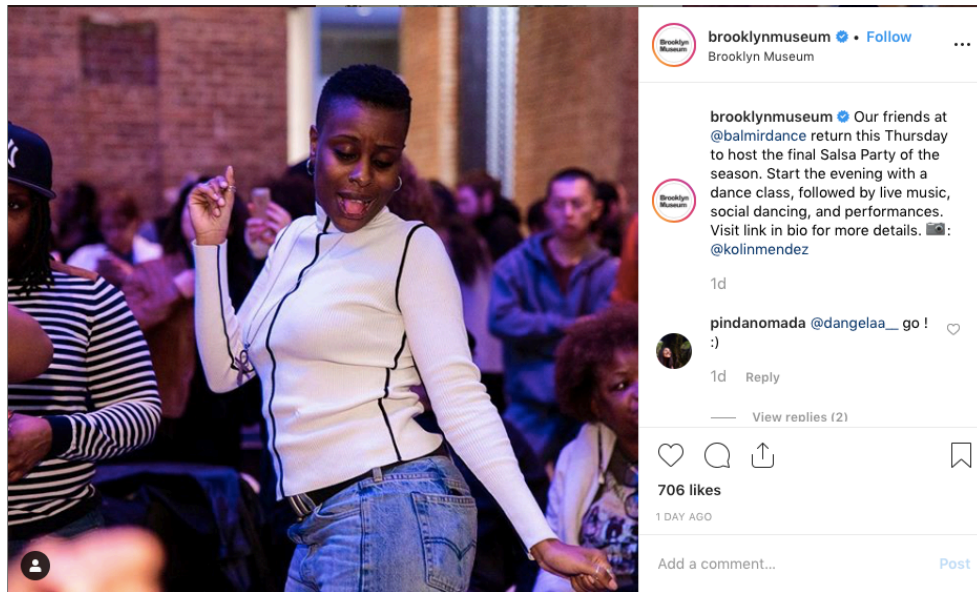
Visitors would be asked to add their own images of the *Speaker Figure* as part of this campaign with a hashtag that the museum could then use to select and repost the most engaging selfies. Hashtags enhance the museum's digital brand, and this specific feature would create an awareness of the encyclopedic nature of its collection. An additional feature that the museum could add in order to tailor this interactive campaign to its own content would be a brief description or caption that details the provenance of the object, including its history as part of its holdings of Native American art.

As in SFMoMA's snap + share, the final component, or feature, of this modified campaign would be the series of postcards that are sent to a select number of visitors who participate in the social media campaign. Here, perhaps the most effective, and interesting, image to use for a personalized correspondence would be the historical photograph that the museum has for the *Speaker Figure* in its online database. Using this image would create an art historical association with the campaign while reminding visitors of the extent to which the museum's website is a rich source of information.

Potential interactivity benefits

Alongside the potential outcomes of interactivity listed above, one of the most transformative benefits that this social media campaign could produce is an increase in online engagement with the Brooklyn Museum's Instagram page. As it stands, the museum's account is limited to posts and reposts of images that do not have related campaigns attached to them. As the 2016 Horizon Report on museums confirms, "the proliferation of communications technologies has enhanced the social implications of a visit, creating a bridge from a physical experience to a virtual realm." Currently, the content of the museum's Instagram page indicates that there is more that can be done to

ensure that a bridge between these two realms is fully realized so that visitors are encouraged to digitally document their onsite encounters, thus inviting (and inspiring) their social networks to be a part of their visit, as the report suggests.



Screenshot of a recent post on the Brooklyn Museum's Instagram page, which serves as an announcement for a special event. Most of the museum's posts are limited to this promotional content rather than visitor engagement.

In this sense, a social media campaign based on the snap + share communicative and interactive features would provide the ideal channel for increasing the museum's role as "a socially responsive institution in service to the public" (Fantoni et al, 2014).

Potential Audiences

This proposed social media campaign would appeal to the Brooklyn Museum's diverse visitors, specifically members of its local audience, who frequent its temporary exhibitions and regular programs but are perhaps not as informed of the contents of its collection. The vast potential of social media technology allows cultural institutions to engage viewers in fun, informal ways that are at once educational and interactive if done through thoughtful channels of exchange.

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