

# **MOMA (Museum Of Modern Arts) – Case Study**

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The Museum of Modern Art was created in 1928 by John D. Rockefeller Jr. wife, Abby Aldrich Rockefeller and two other friends, Lillie P. Bliss and Mary Quinn Sullivan. “The daring ladies” (their nicknames) started renting small quarters for the new museum in the Heckscher Building at 730 Fifth Avenue in Manhattan to finally open the museum to the public on November 7, 1929. The MOMA was the premier museum dedicated exclusively to modern arts and the first museum in presenting modern European art. MOMA’s first successful exhibition was right in the beginning, by presenting paintings by Van Gogh, Gauguin, Seurat and Cezanne. The museum gained international prestige with the famous exhibitions of *The Lone* of Vincent van Gogh (November 4, 1935) and *Retrospective* by Pablo Picasso (1939-1940). Expansions of the museum came during 1950s and 1960s, but its major innovation was in 1984 when Cesar Pelli doubled the Museum’s gallery space and enriched the visitor facilities.

The large and varied collection of the Museum of Modern Art is one of the most complete in the entire world. The MOMA’s collection has grown to comprehend over 150.000 paintings, drawings, sculptures, prints, architectural models, photographs and design objects. The museum also owns 22.000 films and more than 3 million film stills; its library and archives are the premier research resource of their kind in the world, it has more than 300.000 books, periodicals,

artists books and more than 70.000 individual artists files. This museum is the first in the world in containing material regarding modern and contemporary art.

The Museum also contributes to the development of art education by providing complete programs activities to both general public and special communities. This is with the purpose of extending the awareness of being instructed about the world of modern and contemporary art. Moreover, MOMA counts with gallery talks, lectures, symposia and a variety of activities for parents, families, students, teachers, bilingual visitors, preschoolers and people with special needs. The museum also has one of the most extensive art publishing programs with more than 1200 editions in approximately twenty languages.

In January 2000, MOMA and P.S.1 Contemporary Art Center became cohorts. In this new alliance, MOMA became the sole corporate member of P.S.1 and P.S.1 continues artistically and corporately independent. The new partnership promises positive results for both institutions and offer a large variety of collaborative opportunities in exhibitions, educational programs, administration and collections. Today, MOMA and P.S.1 have thousands of visitors per year and a large part of the audience is benefited through different services such as circulating exhibitions, loan programs, circulating film and video library, publications, Web site, retail sales, special events and educational activities.

## **Media Under Management and Constituents**

MOMA is an art space where media is translated in a variety of issues. This museum has different ways of media management that goes from using the human senses to perceive a piece of art, to the use of technological strategies such as the MOMA website.

Going through the MOMA website, it is visible to realize that media is not only what it is obviously seen, but the way how the art field works in satisfying the audiences' needs: Needs that do not have to be addressed to pure arts, but needs that can be accomplished through arts. An example that illustrates this last idea is the MOMA Store. The store has different sections that go from kitchen, work place and prints, to kids' appliances, jewelry, accessories, books and dining. What is interesting to observe here is that arts and media are sharing a common space where consumers can think not only about arts as being involved in an artistic activity, but also think about arts as a resource that can provide them the accomplishment of specific desires (e.g. to have a piece of jewelry, a kitchen set with paintings of specific artists). In this order of ideas arts, media and technology are producing a whole variety of messages that are coded in a way that people decode according to their necessities; it is here where economy also takes an important role in being the foundation of these strategic and dynamic processes among arts and media.

When Lüders (2009) explained in the article *“Personal Media Concept”* that a main challenge in defining personal media was the fact that the same technologies “are used for personal as well as mass communication purposes” (p. 684), it came immediately the thought that arts institutes such as MOMA are able to create this environment when people are navigating in the mass media realm to satisfy their personal media desires.

#### *Media and Art Education at MOMA*

Besides its “in side” education programs that are oriented to a variety of communities, MOMA has been developing an amazing website that facilitates audiences to experience, from the “out side”, almost all what the museum can provide. The website - that includes common links such as “newsletters”, “MOMA news” and “support” – gives the audiences the opportunity to appreciate the MOMA collections, exhibition and publications online. The website allows people to share MOMA’s pieces of art through Twitter and Facebook, which signifies a significant step in terms of expanding the Artists and the MOMA’s prestige. The initiative of sharing MOMA artwork online brings the arts closer to the community, in “breaking the ice” about what common people think about museums and their accessibility. This accessibility has been even more expanded through the creation of the MOMA iPhone App, a free application that has multiple functions: it serves as a tour guide at the moment of attending to the museum; it shows the latest news about MOMA; it publishes the new upcoming events and it also allows people to visit the collections and exhibitions. As it is seen, multimedia and arts go together in finding new

mechanisms to engage communities in learning about arts.

*The Google Art Project, the Visible and Invisible Environments*

Another interesting and educative feature that the MOMA website has is what they call “MOMA on the Google Art Project”, a partnership between MOMA and Google that allows people to explore museums from around the world and to learn from a vast variety of artworks, with information about the artists, the periods of time and about the artwork itself. People are also allowed to create their own collection of visual arts and share it through Facebook, Twitter and via E-mail. This multimedia approach brings to this paper what McLuhan (1967) says about invisible environments:

*"This is another mysterious feature about the new and potent electronic environment we now live in. The really total and saturating environments are invisible. The ones we notice are quite fragmentary and insignificant compared to the ones we don't see. The English language, for example, as it shapes our perceptions and all our habits of thought and feeling, is little perceived by the users of the English language. It becomes much more perceptible if we switch suddenly to French. But in the case of environments that are created by new technologies, while they are quite invisible in themselves, they do tend to make visible the old environments. We can always see the Emperor 'sold clothes, but not his new ones" (p.164).*

The MOMA website is a tool that according McLuhan's concept, can be catalogued as a tool to create invisible environments. The example of the English

language can also be replaced with the example of arts seen from the artists' point of view vs. the audience/societies approach. For artists, art is their lives and most of the times, art is their modus vivendi. Artists know the purpose of their artwork and the impact that they want to impart in audiences. That is their visible environment. But once their artwork is visible to the public and the public can manipulate it, the concepts related to purposes and impact can change. Audiences are susceptible to adopt any kind of position at the moment of being involved in arts and even more when media and technology are involved. The reason is because media and technology provide a wide variety of flows of information – those in the invisible environments – that artists cannot even imagine. The case of the MOMA website depicts that the invisible environments are built once individuals are able to perceive a piece of art, interpret it, take it as part of him/herself and then classified it in his/her new art collection; this new art collection will be now part of that visible world that people are able to see to latter be part of others' invisible worlds and new codifications.

### *Constituents and Management*

The constituents of the MOMA website according to this analysis, is anyone who can be interested in the arts world, especially in visual arts. In previous paragraphs, education was mentioned and therefore, constituents that benefit from MOMA are students and all type of communities that are willing to learn more about visual arts and media technologies. Going further, sponsors and enterprises that want to gain more prestige in supporting artistic initiatives are also benefited, since

MOMA already has a meaningful image.

Even though MOMA is an institution founded by opulent personalities, its philosophy is the diffusion of arts to anyone who want to learn. The management of the museum and website has multidisciplinary purposes, according to the type of program that MOMA are developing, the targeted communities, the type of sponsors and the level of community engagement they want to reach. The art management in this case is a combination between fundraising, marketing, Public Relations, Education Department, Multimedia and cultural programming. All these areas, working collectively to reach their goals. In the MOMA case, this institution is large enough to encompass all this elements and more.

## **Accessibility as a Central Concern: why does it matter?**

The multiple art tools that MOMA provides in terms of community engagement are wide. This museum is giving to the people an opportunity to be closer to the visual arts world. Knowing MOMA's attempts to reach the awareness about the importance of arts in different types of communities, there is the emergence of a series of questions: what type of public is this institution really addressing its efforts? Is MOMA interested in targeting underrepresented communities, youth at-risk, low-income population that probably are lacking of transportation for example and technological tools? How MOMA's cultural programming is working towards the involvement in visual arts of people that have a distorted image about museums?

Being aware of the efforts of this art institution, it is important to wisely answer these questions. It is not appropriate to say that the activities that MOMA are creating are ineffective; however, it would be a release for the society in general and those that have no opportunities to participate in the arts, the existence of a museum that also maintain interests in teaching underrepresented communities how valuable is the fact of being in a museum, learn about arts and media so these people can “take the veil out of their faces” and realize that a museum is not just for an exclusive group of people of a certain social status.

Why does it matter? It matters because the extension and success of arts and its benefits are measurable through the level of accessibility that different communities can obtain. It matters because if institutions such as MOMA are not aware of welcoming at-risk youth in giving them the tools of participating in a multimedia art learning program (for example), these people can continue on the streets wasting their time in undesirable behaviors. The fact is not to deviate MOMA’s purposes, but to expand the spectrum this museum has in regards to arts accessibility.



## **Conclusion**

The purpose of this case study was to create a critical thinking environment where arts- through the MOMA's example- can be seen as a vehicle that generates community cultural development. In addition, it was very enriching to analyze how media and technology are able to go further and transmit art knowledge to those that already had a image about arts, but more important, to those who have never experienced arts before (MOMA on the Google Art Project). Moreover, it was important to tailor different concepts managed in class as well as to make questions about how arts institutions are managing the concept of arts accessibility.

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