

Culturally-Specific Museums: Who Are They For?

Translating Missions to Messages

Momoyo Sakai

A thesis submitted in partial fulfillment of the
requirement for the degree of

Master of Arts

University of Washington

2018

Committee:

Angelina Ong

Jessica Luke

Michael Blake

Program Authorized to Offer Degree:

Museology

© Copyright 2018

Momoyo Sakai

University of Washington

Abstract

Culturally-Specific Museums: Who Are They For?
Translating Missions to Messages

Momoyo Sakai

Chair of Supervisory Committee:

Jessica J. Luke, Ph.D.

Museology

Culturally-specific museums focus on a specific culture and ethnicity. Although they are meant to be relevant to everyone and raise awareness of multicultural topics by appealing to a wide range of visitors, these types of museums tend to be considered as institutions for people who are part of that cultural or ethnic group. The purpose of this research study was to understand how culturally-specific museums translate their missions into messages and how those messages are incorporated into communication and marketing strategies to appeal to a diverse audience. A qualitative, descriptive study was undertaken using semi-structured interviews of four museum professionals involved in communication or marketing at culturally-specific museums in the Seattle area. In addition, elements in each museum's website homepage were analyzed to provide evidence of the intended messages and audiences that were revealed in the interviews. The interviews demonstrated that the target audiences of the four museums could be described as concentric circles having more engaged audience as their center and broadening outward as the museums attempt to pursue their missions to be for everyone. Each museum's message clearly mentioned what it offered its audience to encourage engagement with multicultural perspectives. The process of creating their messages involved many sections of the museums, and opinions from visitors were also taken into consideration. Results also showed that the museums adopted the communication strategy to effectively transmit their messages depending on the intended audience. It is crucial that the stories and values that the culturally-specific museum convey be delivered to, discussed by, and shared with a greater diversity of people to accomplish their mission and for their sustainability. This study clarified future studies that are needed on culturally-specific museums to explore what potential communication and marketing approaches are available and should be taken to attain that goal.

Acknowledgments

Without the help of my Museology cohort and my advisor Angelina Ong, this thesis would not have been possible. I thank them for their constant support, which helped me survive these two years of study. Museology staff and faculty also greatly supported me and provided invaluable information as I pursued my master's degree. The alumni and their past work motivated me to further deepen my insights into the museum fields.

I would like to express my special appreciation toward my thesis committee members Angelina Ong, Dr. Jessica Luke, Director of the Museology Graduate Program, and Dr. Michael Blake, Professor of Philosophy at the University of Washington, for their very valuable comments on this thesis.

This research could not have been completed without the participation of the museum professionals I interviewed. I thank them for taking time out of their busy schedule to talk with me.

I also express my profound gratitude to my family and friends in Japan for providing me with continuous encouragement. I feel so fortunate to have them all in my life.

Finally, this graduation thesis is dedicated to my children, Hatsune and Hajime who, because of their mother's dream, have been suddenly thrown into a foreign culture without the necessary language skills or any other preparation. For two years you have watched me study, and struggle with a different language and culture. I hope to serve as an example (good or bad) and show you what it is like to pursue what you love and not give up on your goals. I really appreciate the weekend breakfast you cooked for me when I was battling with my assignments, and the hugs you gave when I was depressed about my lack of research progress. If you ever read this acknowledgement someday, please know that you are both credited as major contributors to this accomplishment.

List of Figures

Figure Number	Page
Figure 1: Holocaust Center for Humanity, Website Homepage (With My Own Eyes Version), July 9, 2018	47
Figure 2: Northwest African American Museum, Website Homepage, July 9, 2018	50
Figure 3: Holocaust Center for Humanity, Top Images (3 of 4), July 9, 2018	53
Figure 4: Nordic Museum, Website Homepage, July 9, 2018	56
Figure 5: Concentric Circles of Target Audience	59
Figure 6: Wing Luke Museum, Newsletter (Part), 2018	69
Figure 7: Wing Luke Museum, Website Homepage (Wham! Bam! Pow! Version), July 9, 2018	72
Figure 8: Holocaust Center for Humanity and Nisei Veterans Committee, Event Flyer, 2018	75

Table of Contents

	Page
Chapter 1: Introduction	1
Chapter 2: Literature Review	6
Roles and Missions of Culturally-Specific Museums	7
Audience-Related Issues of Culturally-Specific Museums	11
Museum Marketing as a Communication Tool	16
Summary	21
Chapter 3: Method	23
Research Approach	23
Research Sites	25
Subject Selection and Recruiting	26
Interviews	27
Website Homepage Analysis	28
Data Analysis	30
Limitations of Study	31
Chapter 4: Results	33
Findings	34
RQ1. What are the missions of culturally-specific museums and how do these align with their key communications messages?	34
a) Mission statements and messages	34
b) The missions of culturally-specific museums: From individual stories to the broader context	41
c) A Sense of responsibility shared by culturally-specific museums	44
RQ2. Who are the target audiences of culturally-specific museums and what are the strategies these museums employ to reach to them?	49
a) Target Audience	49
Concentric circles	49
Feedback from audiences	60
Communication effectiveness	63
Communication obstacles	65
b) Communication/Marketing Strategies	68

For core audiences	68
For broader audiences	70
Collaborative efforts	74
Summary	77
Chapter 5: Conclusion	80
Implications	83
Personal Views: Power of Museums as Change Agents in Society	85
References	89
Appendix A: Interview Guide	98

Chapter 1: Introduction

Definition of Culturally-Specific Museum:

“Culturally-specific museums are museums that collect or exhibit objects related to a particular ethnic or cultural group, focusing on art or historic objects, but often also highlighting the histories, accomplishments, or struggles of the featured culture.” (Okmin, 2017, p. 1).

This research developed from my personal experiences. I am an international student who came from Japan to the United States to join the Museology Graduate Program at the University of Washington. Although Japan has foreign residents from countries like Korea or China and indigenous people such as the Ainu, the country is relatively uniform both racially and culturally, and the number of museums that are categorized as culturally-specific museums is extremely small. For this reason, I was not particularly eager to visit or learn about culturally-specific museums until I began to attend programs hosted by them. While participating in such events, I noticed that although the themes and topics presented should have appealed to people of all cultural backgrounds, participants were primarily limited to members of the featured culture. I accordingly began to wonder how these museums presented themselves to the public.

Culturally-specific museums, as the name suggests, focus on a specific culture and ethnicity. For this reason, these types of museums tend to be considered by some as institutions for people who are part of that cultural or ethnic group. In the article “Melting Pot on the Mall?”, Reiner claimed that many of those museums are considered “too divisive, prone to politicization, or too narrow to be of general interest” by “many reasonable people” (Reiner, 2013, p. 33). However, while these museums “often began through a network of activists working to address real needs in disenfranchised communities” (Moreno, 2004, p. 510), they are primarily based on the idea of multiculturalism, with missions that are directed to a broad range of people. These museums should be created to recognize a culture which has often been regarded as marginalized from the mainstream, and they achieve this by showcasing works that highlight neglected parts of our heritage and the human condition (Gutmann, 1994). In this context, the viewpoints and values provided by culturally-specific museums should be widely acknowledged.

One of the fundamental roles that culturally-specific museums play is contributing to the construction of a more inclusive narrative by casting light from different angles on a history that has been presented through the skewed and narrow lens of conventional and colonial values. They explicitly aim to portray important universal elements to which all visitors can relate, and to convey their critical messages clearly through their activities such as exhibitions and programs. Beyond that, culturally-specific museums seek to help people

understand each other, despite their different cultures and backgrounds, by sharing their cultural values and perspectives supported by artifacts and research. This discussion could provide practical solutions to deal with various issues by fostering mutual understanding among individuals from different cultures in this advancing multicultural and multiracial society.

Once focused on being an object-oriented repository of collections, museums have begun to reconsider their role and relevance in society (Weil, 2002). Now, one of their missions is to encourage and create forums for public engagement. Furthermore, the demographic situation is shifting to a “majority minority” society in the United States (Farrell & Medvedeva, 2010) and people’s racial and/or ethnic identities have been changing drastically for various reasons (including international migration, marriage and cultural assimilation) so that many people no longer identify simply through ethnic or racial categories as they have in the past (JANM, 2009). Culturally-specific museums have great potential to provide a safe and inclusive environment for co-learning, exchange, and conversation for everyone in their communities, since those museums have been “uniquely positioned to engage with complex histories of race, ethnicity, culture, and religion” (Brown, Gutierrez, Okmin & McCullough, 2017, p. 123), and their activities will be enriched by the varied perspectives and voices represented.

To attract and engage a more diverse range of people, culturally-specific museums will need to advocate for their missions by presenting their values and intentions in more easily recognizable and understandable ways. Marketing is an important way of connecting audiences with the organization's ideal mission and conveying the strategies that help them realize their vision. Based on the long-held belief that museums should stay as far away as possible from commercial interests, the term "museum marketing" has been negatively viewed by some people in the field (Brinckerhoff, 2009). However, marketing is a powerful tool that cannot only raises awareness of a museum's existence but also communicate their mission and vision to potential audiences and motivate visitation. Thus, for culturally-specific museums who are struggling to broaden their appeal and establish their place in their communities, the importance of marketing can no longer be avoided.

The purpose of this research was to understand how four culturally-specific museums in the Seattle area translate their missions into messages and what marketing and communication strategy those museums use to convey their messages to more diverse audiences. The research was driven by the following two research questions:

1. What are the missions of culturally-specific museums and how do these align with their key communications messages?
2. Who are the target audiences of culturally-specific museums and what are the strategies these museums employ to reach to them?

Through this research, the importance of what, to whom, and how to communicate the missions of culturally-specific museums was clarified. The results provide a better understanding of how these museums shape their messages and how those messages are incorporated into marketing and audience communication strategies, and added to the literature on the topic of museum marketing for culturally-specific institutions.

Chapter 2: Literature Review

The purpose of this research was to understand how four culturally-specific museums in the Seattle area translate their missions into messages and what marketing and communication strategy those museums use to convey their messages to more diverse audiences:

1. What are the missions of culturally-specific museums and how do these align with their key communications messages?
2. Who are the target audiences of culturally-specific museums and what are the strategies these museums employ to reach to them?

To provide a theoretical base for this study and to illustrate its significance, this chapter will summarize and evaluate literature from three perspectives. Section one will explain the roles and missions of culturally-specific museums as well as what they can do to help resolve various problems in modern society. Section two will investigate what museum visitors and potential visitors expect from museum experiences and clarify issues and concerns that culturally-specific museums have regarding their types of audiences, and what caused them. Section three will summarize the characteristics of museum marketing and its potential effectiveness to resolve audience related issues of culturally-specific museums, and how these museums can achieve their purpose of social engagement through museum

marketing. Finally, the concluding portion will summarize the findings from the literature and describe the direction of this research.

Roles and Missions of Culturally-Specific Museums

In 2014, the Institute of Library and Museum Services (IMLS) reported that there were 35,000 active museums in the United States. According to the statutes of the International Council of Museums (ICOM), which were adopted in 2007, “a museum is a non-profit, permanent institution in the service of society and its development, open to the public, which acquires, conserves, researches, communicates and exhibits the tangible and intangible heritage of humanity and its environment for the purposes of education, study and enjoyment” (ICOM, 2010-2018). Although this definition covers a wide variety of institutions, such as art museums, history museums, science museums, aquaria, zoological parks, and botanic gardens, these institutions all provide distinctive experiences that cannot be obtained in other places, including the enjoyment of encountering rare and authentic objects, sensory experiences acquired from appreciating beautiful and interesting things, and knowledge gained from research and scholarship related to collections and exhibitions (Kotler & Kotler, 1998).

Culturally-specific museums, which are most often found in larger US cities that are home to many immigrants and minority ethnicities, fulfill the function of communicating and explaining a certain ethnicity’s culture. Janine Okmin (2017), Associate Director of

Education at the Contemporary Jewish Museum, defined culturally-specific museums as “museums that collect or exhibit objects related to a particular ethnic or cultural group, focusing on art or historic objects, but often also highlighting the histories, accomplishments, or struggles of the featured culture” (p. 1). Moreno (2004) stated that these museums “often began through a network of activists working to address real needs in disenfranchised communities” (p. 510), while “dominant or mainstream museums have usually emerged from the collection of a donor” (p. 510).

The presence of culturally-specific museums at a national or federal level has been enhanced in recent years, starting with the opening of the National Museum of the American Indian in 2004, and followed by the National Museum of African History and Culture in 2015. Though the idea is still under debate, an official recommendation to establish a National Latino Museum was made in 2011 (Reiner, 2013). This trend represents the Smithsonian’s “efforts to ‘decolonize’ the museum” and its “willing[ness] to acknowledge historic shortcomings” (Reiner, 2013 p. 34), including the marginalized groups in the field (Reiner, 2013). However, there is a counter opinion that “these kinds of federally supported ethnic museums [are] un-American” because they may “represent the balkanization of American history” (Hopkins, 2011, p. 9). One of the responses to this issue was the proposed establishment in 2011 of the National Museum of the American People, which would receive no federal funding. Reiner (2013) describes it as “a reactionary institution modeled on the

monolithic ‘melting pot’ style of multiculturalism” (p. 34). According to Jim Moran, a former U.S. Representative and a lead sponsor of a resolution backing the museum, the National Museum of the American People is “an institution devoted to telling the story of how the world’s pioneers interwove their diverse races, religions and ethnicities into the strongest societal fabric” (Moran, 2011, p. 5).

As mentioned above, there are different views and opinions concerning the existence and the significance of culturally-specific museums. Since whole museums, and not only culturally-specific museums, are closely related to different cultures, heritages, and related communities (Crooke, 2007), long-running debates over diversity and multiculturalism in museums, or even over multiculturalism or pluralism itself, have been carried out by many museum professionals and scholars, such as Charles Taylor and Brian Barry. However, culturally-specific museums can play a role in the present society, which is growing increasingly diverse and complicated. Their contributions are significant. They are well-evidenced and experienced; they have collected objects associated with the histories of certain cultures and ethnic groups that had previously been excluded from traditional museums; and they tell both broad and specific stories through those objects to reflect the experience of those groups (Brown et al., 2017).

Traditional museums have historically been considered to be neutral spaces and remain “above” political and social issues (Murawski, 2017). However, in practice, the museum has never been a colorless ivory tower. Janes (2015) wrote,

“neutrality is not a foundational principle of museum practice, but rather a result of the museum’s privileged position in society ... [and the] complacency, the absence of continuous learning, and the weight of tradition are persistent factors in the inability or unwillingness to rethink the meaning of neutrality and its implications for the role and responsibilities of museums in contemporary society” (p. 3).

Culturally-specific museums have kept quite a distance from neutrality issues since their beginnings due to their *raison d’être* and they have provided culturally-excluded people a safe and inclusive environment for co-learning, exchange, and dialogue. Because they are “uniquely positioned to engage with complex histories of race, ethnicity, culture, and religion” (Brown et al., 2017, p. 123), culturally-specific museums can provide a platform for the post-colonial perspective on identity and race political issues, which can lead to controversial conversations (Brown et al., 2017).

The United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization (UNESCO) stated in their Universal Declaration on Cultural Diversity (2002),

“In our increasingly diverse societies, it is essential to ensure harmonious interaction among people and groups with plural, varied and dynamic cultural identities as well as their willingness to live together. Policies for the inclusion and participation of all citizens are guarantees of social cohesion, the vitality of civil society and peace” (UNESCO, 2002, p. 4).

Similarly, the ICOM's "Museums and Cultural Diversity Policy Statement" illustrates that museums are faced with the need to change how they engage with visitors and communities:

"Museums have increasingly become forums for the promotion of community relations and peace. In addressing the problems of the world created due to inadequate cross cultural understanding, historical fears and ethnic tensions, museums are increasingly connecting with the important role that they can play in the promotion of cultural understanding through negotiated activities driven by community relations strategies" (ICOM, 1997, p.24).

Culturally specific museums are exactly those museums that have been dealing with the problems mentioned in the statement, and, as museums, they are expected to reach out to a wider range of people beyond a particular race, ethnicity, or religious belief because museums are institutions "in the service of society and its development [and] open to the public" (ICOM, 2010-2018). Engaging with the greatest possible number of people and communities is essential to both carrying out their missions and the sustainability of culturally-specific museums in this multicultural society.

Audience-Related Issues of Culturally-Specific Museums

While many culturally-specific museums have the potential to be relevant to everyone, and while expectations for them to appeal to a broader audience are growing, many are visited primarily by members of a specific community. For example, the Mexican Fine Arts Center Museum (later known as the National Museum of Mexican Art) once estimated

that 51% of its visitors were from Chicago's Mexican communities (Diaz, 2005). Similarly, surveys conducted by the Contemporary Jewish Museum showed that around 50% of their visitors self-identify as Jewish, and 15% of those who do not identify as Jewish reported they had a Jewish family member or were part of a Jewish household (Okmin, 2017). According to Okmin, the museum occasionally got responses from parents who were concerned that "their children might be preached to at [the] museum" or apprehension that "a Jewish museum is only for Jewish people" (Okmin, 2017, p.12). Reiner (2013) claimed many of the culturally-specific museums are considered to be "too divisive, prone to politicization, or too narrow to be of general interest" (p. 33). Harris (2013) described this consequence: "ironically, museums tend to create ethnic enclaves rather than serving as forums" (p. 61) by presenting specific cultures and their perspectives and "they may act to maintain the distance between ethnic enclaves" (p. 58), if they cannot attract a wider range of people.

Merriman (1991) suggested that museums "divide the population into those who possess the 'culture' or 'competence' to perceive them as a leisure opportunity and make sense of a visit and those who do not" (Merriman, 1991, p. 219) and this idea supports Bourdieu's (1984) claim that "a work of art has meaning and interest only for someone who possesses the cultural competence, that is, the code into which it is encoded" (p. 2). In this sense, cultural identity can be a psychological barrier to visiting a particular museum.

Mercier (2018) demonstrated that when people felt "museums didn't try to speak to them" (p.

37), visitors did not like going to them. Cultural identity may lead people to assume and/or judge that culturally-specific museums have nothing to do with them because the museums represent a culture that is different from their own. Moreover, even when people outside of the represented culture are interested in culturally-specific museums and actually visit them, there are times when they feel uncomfortable being there or are unsure as to whether or not the place is meant for them.

Olivia L. Erickson (2015), who researched an African American museum wrote, “[a] White visitor once asked a staff member (who was also White) if White people were welcome [at the museum]” (p. 118). One reason for this issue was that “a certain amount of self-policing takes place as these visitors take pains not to offend anyone and to present themselves as being culturally competent” (Erickson, 2015, p. 118). Similarly, *Restructure!*, a blog by Canadians of Colour (2009) stated, “when discussing racism, the greatest fear for people of color is being attacked by racism itself. The greatest fear for whites is being ‘attacked’ by being accused of racism [and] a ‘safe space’ for Whites to talk about race is unsafe for people of colour.” For many people who are outside the represented cultural background and who feel obligated to know more about other people’s history and culture, feeling uncomfortable or awkward can be a big obstacle to making personal connections to and engaging with a culturally-specific museum (Erickson, 2015).

People have the need to feel secure in an environment, and that need drives nearly all museum visitors to seek that which is familiar to them (Falk, 2009). The Japanese American National Museum (JANM) in Los Angeles asserted that their “participants were especially eager to know how the Museum was relevant to them. They indicated that they would be more interested in the information if they could somehow see themselves reflected in the story being told” (JANM, 2009, p. 28). DeVita (2009) also wrote that museums could be successful when they made visitors feel connected to the museum. The disconnection to a museum and its activities based on the visitors’ personal identities can strongly affect the diversity of the audiences of culturally-specific museums.

Issues of identity are complex and multifaceted, even within the same cultural group, making it challenging to define “race” and “ethnicity”. Visitor research conducted by JANM (2009) revealed the complexity regarding visitors’ identities. They reported that “one out of every three Japanese Americans is now multiracial, and increasingly audiences are no longer identifying themselves simply by ethnic or racial categories as they had in the past” (p. 5). Moreover, “the characteristics and defining qualities of Americas ethnic groups are constantly changing” (p. 4) so their relationships with museums are always subject to recalibration (JANM, 2009). Erickson (2015) argued that “the diversity of expectations both within and without various African American communities are simply too varied and

complex” (p. 83), and that museums would face the challenge and opportunity “to create a space where multiple notions of ‘Blackness’ exist” (p. 84).

However, should the awkwardness that arises from differences in the visitors’ identity and expectations be avoided? Sometimes it is this kind of awkwardness that allows visitors to explore experiences and perspectives that differ from their own and lets them notice the “voices that they might not otherwise hear” (Erickson, 2015, p.117). Bonnell and Simon (2007) argue that this awkwardness provides opportunities for deeper conversation, emotional engagement, and more personal connections with the exhibition and its interpretation. It is obvious that visitors of various races, positions, and opinions—specifically, people with backgrounds other than the featured culture—need to visit culturally-specific museums to take advantage of those opportunities.

Culturally-specific museums were created to recognize cultures that had been regarded as totally different from the mainstream culture; yet, they contain universal and important elements that everyone should know and can relate to, and they “speak to the neglected parts of our heritage and human condition more wisely than some of the canonical works” (Gutmann, 1994, p. 18). If culturally-specific museums can succeed in capturing the attention of a larger portion of the population, informing them that the museums’ forum is big enough to include a wide range of values and perspectives, it may be possible to attract broader and more diverse audiences. In doing so, these museums can appeal to the meaning

of the lived experience of culturally-diverse people and increase their interest in and attraction to these types of museums.

Culturally-specific museums are a source of pride for people within the featured cultural groups and an educational resource for people outside the cultural groups, providing a space for cultural diversity and to facilitate inclusion (Elliott, 2012; Okmin, 2017). To achieve these two missions, which may seem to be heading in different directions, culturally-specific museums are required to strike a delicate balance. However, when culturally-specific museums share their missions more broadly, many people who have judged that a museum is “not for them” based on a museum’s name or the collections it houses, may notice that the universal themes underlying the museum’s exhibitions or programs offer something for everyone.

Museum Marketing as a Communication Tool

Marketing is an important factor when considering how museums can connect the expectations of visitors and non-visitors with the activities that they provide. Sandell and Janes (2007) stated that “the adoption and application of marketing theory and practice in museums have been the subject of fierce and impassioned debate among professionals since the early 1980s” (p. 291). However, “in recent years this polarized thinking has lessened as museum marketing has become both increasingly widespread and more sophisticated in its application, [but] the extent to which it has been embraced nevertheless remains uneven, and

considerable confusion and misunderstanding still surround its purpose and potential”

(Sandell & Janes, 2007, p. 291).

In *Museum Strategy and Marketing*, Kotler and Kotler (2008) stated that museums are achieving their goals through strategic planning and marketing without compromising their mission and integrity, and that such planning and marketing effectively shape, communicate, and distribute quality experiences and programs to as many people as possible. They continue that “the most successful museums offer a range of experiences that appeal to different audience segments and reflect the varying needs of individual visitors” (Kotler & Kotler, 2008, xxiii).

Although there is no set formula for a successful marketing campaign, it is important to understand why people choose to visit a museum, which is generally based on a complex set of personal, social, and economic factors along with current trends and practices (Rosewall, 2014). In “The ‘Active Museum’: How Concern with Community Transformed the Museum”, Crooke (2015) wrote that the study of community was especially useful as it involved various aspects of current practice and ways of connecting museums with people. Bailey (2012) also said that understanding visitors and communities means “relating to an audience’s interests, level of knowledge, background, or characteristics” so that museums can “bear the responsibility of communicating vast—often intricate—stories to an array of audiences” (p. 66).

Sandell and Janes (2007) see museum marketing as “an overarching philosophy or orientation: one which places the public at the centre of the museum’s operations and which, to a greater or lesser extent, influences all its functions and activities” (p. 292). Marketing professionals provide knowledge of marketing, such as principles, methods, and tools, for all types of organizations, including museums, to advance those organizations’ purposes with their users. It is not the marketers’ intention to impose their goals on organizations (Kotler & Kotler, 2008). Rather, their proficiency and experiences help museums find a way to connect their mission to their visitors. Moreover, “museum marketing is unique because museums have a mission to educate the public as well as build audience and revenue” (Smithsonian Institution, 2001, p. 1); therefore, special consideration should be given to the practice of museum marketing.

As museums redefine the meaning of their existence, their marketing approaches—how they reach out to society—are also changing. According to Weil (2002), the consequence is that museums almost everywhere have, in essence, shifted from a ‘selling’ mode to a ‘marketing’ one. In the selling mode, their efforts had been concentrated on convincing the public to ‘buy’ their traditional offerings. In the marketing mode, their starting point instead is the public’s own needs and interests, and their efforts are concentrated on first trying to discover and then attempting to satisfy those public needs and interests (p. 31).

However, Weil (2002) also mentioned two precautions to consider regarding the spread of outcome-based evaluations. Firstly, “museums need to observe a certain modesty as they identify their bottom lines, lest they overstate what they can actually accomplish” (p.

39-40) and secondly, “museums must take care to assure that the need to assess the effectiveness of their public programs does not distort or dumb down the contents of those programs to include only what may have a verifiable or demonstrable outcome and exclude everything else” (p. 40).

In *Embedding Civil Engagement in Museums*, Black (2012) wrote, “museums have the potential to attract people who are radically different from each other. Institutions that facilitate social, cultural and generational mixing is a core underpinning of a civil society” (p. 276). He also stated that museums need to represent diverse communities and their multiple perspectives and that “representing diversity is not enough, as museums must also ensure those representations are widely communicated” (Black, 2012, p. 276). Erickson (2015) stated that culturally-specific museums needed to challenge, call attention to the experiences of minorities, and encourage people outside the cultural group “to become allies through the process of recognizing and internalizing a sense of shared humanity” (p. 130). This claim underscores the importance of sharing museums’ messages, and eventually their missions, more widely. The qualitative audience research conducted by JANM (2009) suggested that they need to “get the message out” (p. 41), if people were to even notice what they do. JANM (2009) stated that “the directions suggested by the findings challenged previously held assumptions and encouraged the exploration of new engagement possibilities in programs, marketing, communications, and development” (p. 24).

Yet, how can marketers communicate with people who are not particularly interested in visiting culturally-specific museums? Although “marketing is so often considered a ‘dirty’ word in nonprofits” (Brinckerhoff, 2009, p. 173), in many cases, marketing is one of the few ways to talk directly to non-visitors. Sandell and Janes (2007) wrote that museum marketing can help museums achieve their socially-oriented goals by broadening access and engaging a wide range of audience members. Marketing helps the museum become “attuned to the needs of its visitors and the communities it seeks to serve. Its varied offerings are informed by an awareness and understanding of the interests, perceptions, expectations, needs and preferences of both existing and potential audiences” (Sandell & Janes, 2007, p. 292). It also “permeates and helps to guide the entire organization” (Sandell & Janes, 2007, p. 292) and “plays a part in shaping the museum’s strategies and approaches to forward planning”. Marketing is the most useful way to help visitors understand a museum’s purpose and realize its value. It enables museums to achieve their objectives by building and sustaining relationships with a range of audiences (McLean, 1997).

Mills (2016) claims that “[a] mission statement is a nonprofit’s lead domino: It sets everything else in motion” (p. 3). Every museum has a mission statement which is proudly featured on websites and in printed materials, but that is not enough. According to Kolb (2013), all of the messages that cultural organizations, such as museums communicate “need to be based on the mission of the organization and convey the benefits the organization

provides” (p. 159), and developed to “be of interest to a specific target segment” (p.175).

Furthermore, especially for someone who have limited or no knowledge about the organization, providing information on specific benefits they would receive will motivate them for attending. (Kolb, 2013)

Summary

The information presented in this literature review clarifies that, in general, culturally-specific museums have two missions: to become a genuine cultural resource in order to uphold a positive identity for their represented communities and to become an educational resource to enlighten and deepen understanding for people who are outside of the communities represented by the museums. The information also reveals that museums were once object-oriented, but have now evolved into more community-oriented institutions, and their role as a forum for the community is being increasingly emphasized. Culturally-specific museums have tended to be considered places for people with those specific cultural backgrounds, since visitors’ identity-based motivations impact their visits; however, the museums can also provide a variety of resources and a safe and inclusive place for dialogue.

They have also engaged with complicated social issues and, in a society where demographics and people’s identities are changing rapidly, the museums’ collections and experience offer a particular advantage. Engaging with the greatest possible number of

people and communities is therefore essential for culturally-specific museums and the multicultural society of which they form a part.

Finally, this review has demonstrated how museums have the potential to be able to motivate non-visitors by communicating the benefits available from a visit to the museum, and that museum marketing has the opportunity to communicate these messages more broadly and effectively to potential visitors. However, there is a lack of the literature on museum marketing that focuses on culturally-specific museums that face such complicated circumstances. To address this issue, this study will investigate the messages that culturally-specific museums in Seattle area try to convey based on their missions and to determine who they target with their marketing methods and strategies and how they communicate their messages.

Chapter 3: Method

The purpose of this research was to understand how four culturally-specific museums in the Seattle area translate their missions into messages and how those messages are incorporated into marketing and audience communication strategies currently being employed. Specifically, the research aimed to answer the following two questions:

1. What are the missions of culturally-specific museums and how do these align with their key communications messages?
2. Who are the target audiences of culturally-specific museums and what are the strategies these museums employ to reach to them?

Research Approach

In order to answer these questions, this research used a qualitative descriptive study of culturally-specific museums, employing semi-structured interviews and website homepage analysis. The three main reasons that a qualitative descriptive study was the best choice for this research are listed below.

First, conversations with the staff at the target museums were necessary to obtain information in order to understand and explain how various factors had impacted

the current marketing practices at each culturally-specific museum within multiple contexts. Furthermore, through comparisons of this information, the study was able to clearly articulate the practices and philosophies around the current marketing method at each culturally-specific museum.

Second, by exploring experiences of a small number of interviewees and analyzing target material intensively and thoroughly, the researcher was able to understand the depth of their experiences and events. Furthermore, this strategy enabled the researcher to pluralistically and holistically grasp the many aspects of events and facts presented by each museum. These advantages are crucial when considering the history of each culturally-specific museum, the racial, ethnic, and cultural identity of the staff and visitors, and the differences in their viewpoints in society.

Finally, this method was chosen in order to take full advantage of the researcher's background. The researcher is an international student. Although, as a Japanese person, the researcher belongs to the East Asian category racially, ethnically, and culturally, she does not share the common identities or values of Asian Americans in the United States. From this standpoint, the researcher is one of the "others" when she visits any culturally-specific museum in this country. This position can provide the researcher a more objective and multilateral viewpoint in this study. At the same time, it

can help her to find out the universalities existing among those who do not share the same sense of values or identity.

Research Sites

Seattle has many museums that are classified as culturally-specific museums due to its demographic diversity. Ultimately, however, the following four museums were chosen as representative of the group.

1. Holocaust Center for Humanity
2. Nordic Museum
3. Northwest African American Museum
4. Wing Luke Museum of The Asian Pacific American Experience

These museums do not cover the wide range of all culturally-specific museums in terms of size and type (from history to art). However, all of the selected museums have similar geographic conditions in a broad sense and serve the same visiting population in the Seattle area. Additionally, the geographic concentration of these museums allowed for data collection efficiency and comparability in terms of the marketing approaches of each museum; it also facilitated a grasp of the characteristics of their strategies. Moreover, in consideration of the fact that this research stemmed

from questions concerning the ethnic identities and characteristics of museum visitors, these museums were specifically chosen because they were established on the basis of specific ethnicities and cultures in the Seattle area.

Subject Selection and Recruiting

It was essential that study subjects were recruited from the communication or marketing department of each museum in order to gain insight into the museums' official perspectives and approaches toward spreading the message of their mission and engaging a broader audience.

Interview participants were selected based on their positions and experiences as communication or marketing professionals within each museum. Contact information for them was collected via each museum's public website or through references from UW alumni of the Museology Graduate Program. Candidates were asked to participate via a personal e-mail message.

A list of the interviewees is as follows:

1. Olivia Little Erickson: Grant Writer at the Northwest African American Museum

2. Shaun Mejia: Marketing Associate at the Wing Luke Museum of The Asian Pacific American Experience
3. Erik Pihl: Community Engagement Executive at the Nordic Museum
4. Dee Simon: Baral Family Executive Director at the Holocaust Center for Humanity

Interviews

Semi-structured interviews were used to collect detailed information about the research questions. Talking directly with the participants was essential to understand how the museum converted their missions to messages and their reasons for and perspectives on their communication approaches.

Each semi-structured interview lasted 45 to 60 minutes and were conducted either in-person at their museum site or by telephone between May 22nd and June 21st of 2018. The interview used open-ended questions to obtain deeper and fuller responses based on the interviewee's own experiences. For the same reason, a list of interview questions was prepared with sufficient time beforehand to guide each interview (see Appendix A). The interview questions included:

- What is the impact that your museum would like to have on your visitors or the community?
- Who is the typical target audience for your museum?
- How do you determine what message to tell?
- How do you determine whether the messages you choose are relevant to the museum mission?
- How do you typically communicate with your target audience?

Website Homepage Analysis

In order to examine concrete examples of marketing approaches used by each museum to convey their mission and messages to a wide range of people, each museum website homepage was analyzed applying semiological approaches. This analysis provided contextual understanding for their latent content or “underlying meaning of communications” (Babbie, 2007, p. 325).

Semiology, or semiotics, is the study of signs and symbols. According to Chandler (2003), “we make meanings through our creation and interpretation of ‘signs’” and “signs take the form of words, images, sounds, odours, flavours, acts or objects” (p.16). Rose (2016) stated that semiology “offers a very full box of analytical tools for taking an image apart and tracing how it works in relation to broader systems of

meaning” and it “confronts the question of how images make meanings head on” (p.106).

In media communications, messages from the sender are encoded in signs and the recipient understands the messages by decoding the signs. However, the signs are not necessarily always decoded as intended by the sender, and there is always possibility that intentional signs and unintentional signs coexist in a media content. For this reason, inconsistency often occurs to a greater or lesser extent between the sender’s intentional messages and the messages understood by the recipient (Gujjima, 2010).

In this research, the signs on the website homepages of the target culturally-specific museums, which are, so to speak, the gateways to the museums’ online presence, were identified and interpreted through the eyes of the recipient (the researcher). Data obtained from the homepage analysis was used as concrete examples to support findings from the interviews regarding what messages the museums intended to convey and what audiences the museums intended to reach. In this way, a part of the culturally-specific museum’s actual marketing practice was revealed.

The website homepage was chosen as a study subject because the top result for an online search for a museum name is always the museum’s website address. This means that many potential visitors who lack prior knowledge of a museum will visit its

website. Furthermore, compared to other online platforms, such as Facebook and Instagram, a website is easy to access because people do not need to register for an account. Websites also offer a high degree of design flexibility, allowing each museum to display its unique characteristics. The homepage, in particular, is a major element of a museum's online presence because, if the first page of a website does not catch viewers' attention, viewers are likely to click away immediately. Thus, the impression, message, and usability of a website homepage are critical for appealing to a broader audience.

Data Analysis

Each interview was audio recorded and transcribed, then reviewed to assemble and interpret the information provided. Due to the small sample size, a formalized coding rubric was not developed, rather interview responses were examined for themes and patterns that aligned with the research questions. The data obtained from the interviews were used to clarify the similarities and differences of the marketing strategies adopted by these culturally-specific museums.

The various elements of the website homepage were used, including images, text, links, and structures to identify the signs that the page contained. The data was used to provide evidence of the museum's use of intended messages and their attempt to reach audiences that were revealed in the course of the interview with the museum's

staff. This demonstrated the actual marketing and communication situation of the culturally-specific museums, which then allowed recommendations for the kinds of improvements that might be necessary.

Limitations of Study

Research on four target museums from a specific geographic area cannot provide generalization to all culturally-specific museums' communication and marketing approaches. However, since these four museums vary in their featured cultures, sizes, origins, and history, finding common elements among these sites can reveal similar aspects of message communication for culturally-specific museums. Also, this study only interviewed museum staff who are working in the communication or marketing departments, and therefore does not represent views of other museum professionals within the museum, such as exhibition or program planners. However, the work of marketing and communication is closely related to other departments in a museum and disseminates awareness of museums and their activities to a general public that is not necessarily familiar with the museum, means that understanding the opinions of these staff members provides an important perspective for studying culturally-specific museums.

Moreover, while it provides an objective and multilateral point of view to this study, the researcher's perspective as an international student, as mentioned in the Research Approach section, may create barriers or cause bias due to her different cultural and linguistic background. In an effort to increase the reliability of this study, the research results were reviewed by other Museology graduate students and advisors.

Chapter 4: Results

The purpose of this research was to understand how four culturally-specific museums in the Seattle area translate their mission statements into messages and what marketing and communication strategies those museums use to convey their messages to more diverse audiences. The following two questions were addressed.

1. What are the missions of culturally-specific museums and how do these align with their key communications messages?
2. Who are the target audiences of culturally-specific museums and what are the strategies these museums employ to reach to them?

This chapter summarizes the findings obtained from interviews with marketing/communication staff and from analysis of the website homepages of the four target museums. Analyzing findings across all results illustrates some aspects of the four museums, and increases our knowledge of culturally-specific museums' marketing practices; it also supports a better understanding of the two research questions.

Findings

RQ1. What are the missions of culturally-specific museums and how do these align with their key communications messages?

a) Mission statements and messages

Interviews were conducted with marketing or communication professionals from four culturally-specific museums in the Seattle area that vary in their featured cultural topic, scale, and history. For this reason, at first glance, they seemed to be conveying contrasting messages based on the themes they each focused on. However, when an analysis was performed of the common ideas that emerged across museums, it became evident that each museum included information regarding what it offers to its audience to help them engage multiple perspectives so that they can better situate the museums' featured topics in a broader context. The following sections are brief descriptions of the four target culturally-specific museums, their mission statements, and their messages that revealed in the interviews.

Holocaust Center for Humanity (Holocaust Center)

<https://www.holocaustcenterseattle.org/>

The Holocaust Center for Humanity started as a Holocaust-based educational resource center in 1989. In 2015, the Center opened the first Holocaust related museum in Washington, in downtown Seattle. The museum tries to raise awareness, primarily among students, of human rights issues through various activities, such as programs, events, and exhibitions that feature artifacts and testimonies of survivors from the Holocaust. Their mission states, that: “the Holocaust Center for Humanity teaches the lessons of the Holocaust, inspiring students of all ages to confront bigotry and indifference, promote human dignity, and take action”.

Dee Simon stated that the primary message of the Holocaust Center for Humanity is a combination of teaching their audience about applying history to their lives and providing an opportunity for them to consider how this history informs their modern-day world.

The Holocaust is a tragedy that must not occur again anywhere in the world and anytime in the future. It is crucial that the painful experiences are passed down to the following generations so that the lessons learned from history will not be forgotten. In order to have students connect the Holocaust with the reality that occurred in

countries far away from their own and more than 70 years ago, the Center tries to promote the utilization and application of the lessons to students' real life to keep them from becoming fertile ground for future atrocities, rather than teaching the history as knowledge from the past.

Nordic Museum

<https://nordicmuseum.org/>

The Nordic Museum is the largest repository in the United States dedicated to preserving the legacy of immigrants from the five Nordic countries. It was established as the Nordic Heritage Museum in the residential area of Ballard, Seattle, in 1980.

Following reclamation of the old school building by school district officials, the museum relocated to another address in the same neighborhood, reopening in May 2018.

Their mission statement is: "We share Nordic culture with people of all ages and backgrounds by exhibiting art and objects, preserving collections, providing educational and cultural experiences, and serving as a community gathering place".

According to Erik Pihl, the Nordic Museum demonstrates the Nordic values of openness, social justice, innovation, and respect for nature that have been present through the 12,000 years of Nordic history so people can come to be inspired by the

Nordic peoples and find answers to various questions they might have about Nordic countries, including their design, quality of life, innovation, and so on.

Nordic countries are held in great esteem by many countries in the world due to their high quality of life regarding various aspects including social justice and environmental stewardship, and because of that, they are attracting a lot of attention from many people in the United States (Pihl, 2018). At the Nordic Museum's Grand Opening Cultural Community Gathering, Lars Heikensten, the Executive Director of the Nobel Foundation, who had been invited as a guest panelist, commented that the Nobel Prize was not a prize based on competition, but on contributions to humanity that can serve as a model in each field. Visitors to the Nordic Museum can see from its messages that the museum itself is a pioneer of new values that promote further social advances and tries to provide various ideas and encouragement to those who seek to improve society.

Northwest African American Museum (NAAM)

<http://www.naamnw.org/>

The Northwest African American Museum opened to the public in 2008 in the Central District of Seattle, which is historically known as the African-American neighborhood. The concept for this museum was initially proposed to the Mayor in

1981 but it took more than 30 years before it was actualized following input from various people, activists, and organizations. The museum is currently housed in an old school building which also contained affordable housing apartment units. On their website, they present their mission statement as follows:

NAAM's mission is to spread knowledge, understanding, and enjoyment of the histories, arts and cultures of people of African descent for the enrichment of all. We accomplish our mission by working with others to:

- Present and preserve the connections between the Pacific Northwest and people of African descent; and to
- Investigate and celebrate Black experiences in America through exhibitions, programs and events.

In her interview, Olivia L. Erickson revealed that the NAAM promotes social justice, focusing on local African American history to fill in a gap between their local histories and national African American history. Erickson explained that talking about African American history was an act of social justice because it provided a counter-narrative to the mainstream history. Through this approach, they can see themselves not just as a museum about history, but a museum that provides space to talk about current issues which cannot be ignored.

Like many other culturally-specific museums, the NAAM was established to tell and share the history of a particular people, namely, African Americans, who were segregated from the mainstream history, and, more specifically, to tell the stories of

African Americans in the Pacific Northwest, who have not received much attention for a long time. Considering that this museum is located in what was once an African American neighborhood, where the community had shrunk due to gentrification, and that the building is a former elementary school, which used to be the center of the local African American community, the messages sent by the museum to their visitors are reasonable and valid.

Wing Luke Museum of the Asian Pacific American Experience (Wing Luke)

<http://www.wingluke.org/>

The Wing Luke Museum of the Asian Pacific American Experience was named after a man of the same name; the first person of color to be appointed to the Seattle City Council and the first Asian American elected to hold public office in the Pacific Northwest. Following his death, a museum was opened in 1967 in the International District of Seattle by those who honored his wish to ensure that Asian Americans could learn about and be proud of their history and culture. This sentiment is reflected in their mission statement: “We connect everyone to the dynamic history, cultures, and art of Asian Pacific Americans through vivid storytelling and inspiring experiences to advance racial and social equity”.

Shaun Mejia said that through the visitors' entire experience, the museum is trying to provide their visitors with a very unique and authentic perspective that tells a different version of American history that is not taught in school.

In the International District where the Wing Luke Museum is located, people with roots in various countries such as China, Japan, Korea, Thailand, Vietnam, the Philippines and Mongolia coexist and co-prosper. The museum has "promoted cross-cultural understanding among many different groups and nationalities that are categorized as 'Asian'" (Farrell & Medvedeva, 2010), even though the museum was named after a Chinese-American. In fact, the Wing Luke Museum itself exemplifies the messages by carrying out its mission of linking those groups together and talking about their different experiences as Americans living in the same society. The messages from the museum that Mejia revealed in his interview are relevant to all Americans and those who are interested in American history and people.

As Kolb (2013) stated, the messages need to be associated with the mission and the message becomes the force to move people when communicating what benefits result from attending. An analysis of the mission statements and messages of the four targeted culturally-specific museums indicated that their messages were based

on their missions and conveying what they provide to equip their visitors to attain multicultural perspectives through utilizing the resources they have.

b) The missions of culturally-specific museums: From individual stories to the broader context

Despite the variation of the target museums, the basic ideas underpinning their mission statements, are essentially the same. One of their aims is to situate each of their particular themes into a broader context in history and society. This aim relates to one of the two missions of culturally-specific museums mentioned in the literature review: to be an educational resource for a wide range of people.

In her interview, Erickson, clearly stated that the goal of the Northwest African American Museum (NAAM) is “to make sure that people know how important the role is African Americans and Africans have been in establishing Seattle” and other cities throughout the Northwest. She also stated, that “those stories [of African Americans] are part of the larger history of the region” and, in order to have a full understanding about their community, people in those areas have to include the story of African Americans.

Pihl also said during his interview that at the renewed Nordic Museum (previously the Nordic Heritage Museum), people “still continue to talk about the great migration, the great immigration in the late 19th, early 20th century. A large chunk of

the permanent exhibition is dedicated to that but we all wanted to put that in context of 12,000 years of recording history and to say what are those factors that have contributed to Nordic identity, who are Nordic peoples, where are the Nordic countries, and what are the Nordic countries like today”. This Nordic Museum’s intention was emphasized in the middle of their website homepage starting with the museum’s mission statement. As seen in Figure 4, the initial phrase, “We share Nordic culture” was displayed in the largest font seen on the page. The rest of the statement followed below the phrase, with the words of “all ages and backgrounds” italicized, emphasizing that the museum is not only for those with Nordic heritage.

Similarly, according to Mejia, the overarching mission of the Wing Luke Museum is “to tell these unique stories about the Asian immigration history as well as the stories of people within our own community” because “Asian immigration story [...] is very unique perspectives that aren’t told necessarily” and “tells a different version of American history”.

Simon stated Holocaust Center for Humanity’s mission is to “use the Holocaust as a lens through which we teach people how to fight bigotry and indifference [...] we use the lessons of the Holocaust as a tool [...] and teach them about current day events and encourage them, inspire them to think and act differently”.

One goal of all four museums is for the histories they tell to be taken into the broader context of mainstream history. They do not merely present particular stories from particular perspectives, but rather stories from simultaneous and synchronized perspectives. Even when more than one person watches the same object at the same time, the meaning of that object significantly differs depending on each person's preliminary knowledge of the object, the depth of consideration toward the object, and the place from where the object is viewed. Each culturally-specific museum tries to add various points of view to explore the history that has been talked about for a long time from only the one fixed direction by telling the stories from their respective positions. The museums are challenging the traditional narrative to become broader than before so that many more people can relate to the story. In order for the attempt to succeed, the story that each culturally-specific museum tells needs to go through the process of being shared and discussed by diverse people with various backgrounds. As mentioned in Chapter 2, in this diverse and multicultural society, culturally-specific museums can provide credible educational resources on specific cultures and themes and can offer inclusive forums; they are critical to that process of sharing and discussing.

c) A Sense of responsibility shared by culturally-specific museums

All four interviewees indicated that their museums are based on a sense of responsibility that supports their mission. This “sense of responsibility” leads to the second mission of culturally-specific museums: to be cultural resources for the people represented and to provide safe places for exchange and dialogue that are described in the literature review.

The NAAM and the Wing Luke Museum demonstrated a sense of responsibility for strengthening and maintaining the right to tell their own histories from their own respective cultural perspectives, which previously have been marginalized. Erickson described the NAAM as having the special responsibility to the local black community to preserve local African American history and provide a space where those people feel like there is still a home for them. She stated that one of their visitors “described it as a sanctuary where she felt like she was welcomed, where she could see people who looked like her, and where she could see her own community’s history”. The NAAM’s intentions were reflected on its website homepage as well; it invited people of African descent stating, “Come somewhere where you feel comfortable, and you can celebrate your cultural identity and have fun”. Most of the people shown in the pictures on the NAAM’s homepage were black, and the use of primarily black and

white photographs and photographs that had dropped their color tones made the presence of the black color more intense. Moreover, all the activities—including the exhibition, the jazz brunch, and the author lecture series—demonstrated that the museum had a strong emphasis on African American culture and experience. The NAAM’s homepage sent the message that, by visiting the museum, African American visitors could meet people with the same cultural roots and interests. In that sense, the museum’s online presence had been built to appeal primarily to a limited group of people with an interest in the race, culture, and ethnicity presented by the museum.

The Wing Luke Museum also tries to make a connection between their stories and the people who do not necessarily know the history of Asian Americans by using topics, themes, or objects that are familiar to everyone. Mejia said, “It really puts things in perspective of how things are now. Like, especially in this day and age, it gets a little crazy in America with everything that’s going on ... we are increasingly so much more relevant. Not that we weren’t, but we have a voice and it’s important for us to tell our stories”. The Wing Luke tries to give a voice to Asian American people that do not always have a voice, because their stories are also essential parts of American history. The museum uses its website to attract viewers’ attention and convey the museum’s messages. A link to a YouTube video, entitled *Step Into a Uniquely American Story*

(Wing Luke Museum, 2018), was displayed on the lower right of the page. In the video, visitors can see an excerpt from *Letter Cloud*, a work by sound artist Susie Kozawa and visual artist Erin Shie Palmer. The video highlighted imagery from the interior of the museum. Voices reading from letters in English and in various Asian languages overlapped the images. Considering that letters are the symbol of sending and receiving messages, people who watch the video could perceive the museum's aims—to speak to them, to receive responses from them, and to become a place or forum through which to communicate.

The goal of the Holocaust Center for Humanity is also underpinned by a sense of responsibility. The museum recently opened in 2016, however, the organization started in 1989 as an education resource center in which students were taught by a group of Holocaust survivors who had heard about the Holocaust denial and found it necessary to share their stories with young people. They began speaking at schools, focusing on younger generations, so that the history would not be forgotten. As with the Wing Luke Museum, the Holocaust Center used the first page of their website to convey the most important information. It displayed links to six events in the middle section and three of the six links introduced lectures, film screenings, and testimonial activities by Holocaust survivors. Additionally, one of the links in the upper sections led to a video of Holocaust

survivor testimony. All of these elements show that the Holocaust Center is focused on delivering living testimony to audiences via those who experienced the Holocaust. According to Simon, the Holocaust Center for Humanity tries to communicate messages that would encourage young people to learn about the tragic history and past experiences of the Holocaust, apply this knowledge in their own lives, and realize a better future. This section of the homepage targeted the young people, prompting them to learn about the Holocaust by meeting people who experienced the atrocities, and to listen to their

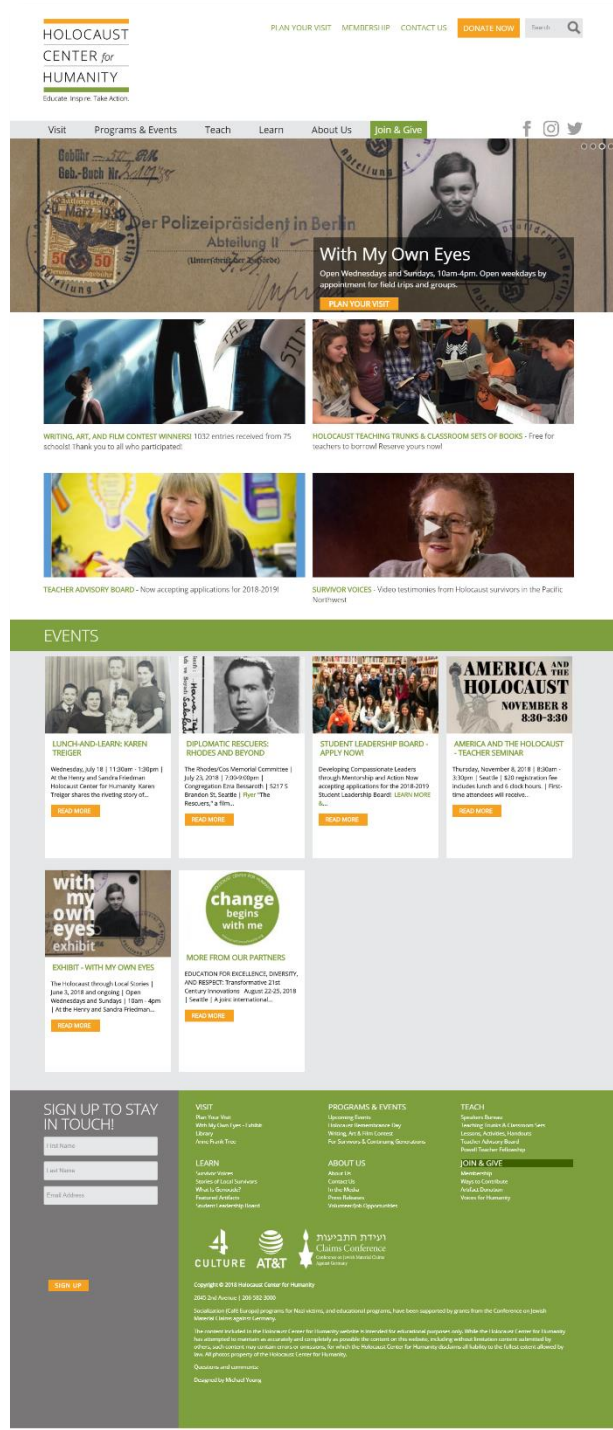


Figure 1: Holocaust Center for Humanity, Website Homepage (With My Own Eyes Version), July 9, 2018

voices either directly or in the form of videos. Moreover, one of the four top images that rotated, served as a link to information for the *With My Own Eyes* exhibition (Holocaust Center for Humanity, 2018). It showed an identification card that had been issued to a survivor of the Holocaust when he was a child. The picture would evoke empathy and curiosity in young visitors to the page and give them an opportunity to notice that they might find something relevant to them by clicking the link.

The sense of responsibility demonstrated by the Nordic Museum is for them to serve as a role model in improving social values. Pihl emphasized that what the museum needed to get across to visitors was the “Nordic region today and Nordic Americans, who they are, what shaped them, why the Nordic countries are the way they are today, why they have a global impact and why they have this sense of global social responsibility”. He said that the Nordic countries have recognized that they do have a high standard of living and a high quality of life, and at the same time, they feel a sense of global and social obligation to give back to people who are particularly struggling.

The responses of the interviewees illustrate that a sense of responsibility plays an important role in the process for achieving each museum’s primary objectives and missions. Despite what each sense of responsibility was based on, and the perspective

each sense of responsibility came from, responses demonstrated an interesting fact: all of them were directed toward realizing social justice or social equality.

RQ2. Who are the target audiences of culturally-specific museums and what are the strategies these museums employ to reach to them?

a) Target audience

Concentric circles

To convey their messages effectively, museums need to establish their target audiences. An essential factor of this research was to identify with whom the museums are trying to communicate. The interview results show that their target audiences can be accurately described as “concentric circles”, using a phrase from Erickson.

The scope of their audience gradually extends from the narrow range of a core audience to an unspecified large number (“everybody”) that is well beyond the core audience. It is interesting that their flow of thinking is similar to how the museums try to accomplish their goals by merging their particular featured topics into a broader context, as mentioned in the first section.

For NAAM, the center of the circle is the local African American community for whose stories it has a special responsibility to represent. Erickson clarified that one of

the museum’s most important roles was providing a forum for its core audience and the museum’s website homepage was clearly intended to appeal to them.

The keywords appearing on this homepage, such as “Northwest”, “local”, and “Seattle”, indicated their focus on local history in particular. Moreover, a noteworthy piece of text was placed over the top photo. It stated, “Welcome to the Northwest African American Museum” followed by the words “Celebrate our 10th Anniversary at

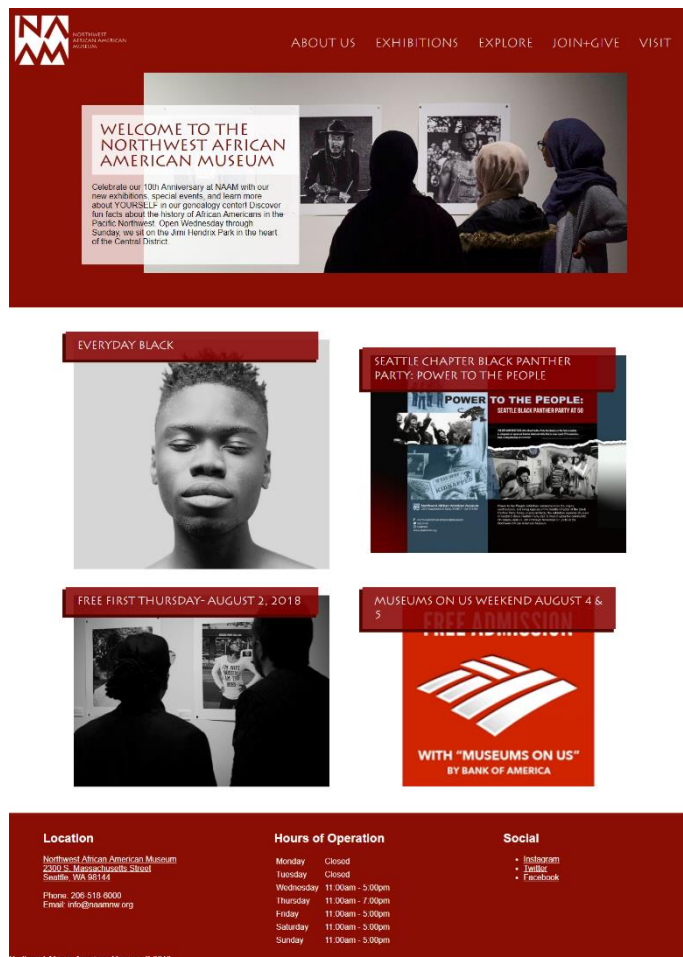


Figure 2: Northwest African American Museum, Website Homepage, July 9, 2018

NAAM with our new exhibitions, special events, and learn more about YOURSELF in our genealogy center!” As demonstrated by the capitalization of the word “yourself”, the website clearly indicates that it is aimed at people with African American ancestry who live in the Pacific Northwest—the museum’s core audience.

The predominant color of the NAAM's website homepage was brick red, which gave visitors an impression of vitality and power, while the top photo—portraying three women wearing hijabs and looking at photos in the museum's collection of black men wearing trilby hats, overalls, or with long, braided hair—displayed the diversity within the community with which the museum engaged. Erickson emphasized that their marketing materials should reflect the dynamism of their programming, “because we think our programs are those things. They are vibrant and relevant”.

Erickson also described their intention to reach broader audiences: “the second circle is the larger ... everybody who lives here. We want them to see this history”. The museum believes that the role African Americans have played has shaped Seattle; for all those who live in the area, the history that the museum tells is part of their history as well. Most of their visitors are primarily local, coming from the Seattle and King County areas. They have school groups who come, especially during February, which is African- American History Month. Their teachers bring them to learn about local African American history. In the summer, they also get tourists. Erickson said that educating the larger community is another important role they play. This intention can be seen in the middle part of the museum's homepage. It was divided into six sections. Each provided information about exhibitions and events. Two segments detailed the

museum's upcoming free-entry events. One detailed the "Free First Thursday" and the other the "Museums on Us Weekend", supported by the Bank of America. Although both of those events were held at most of the museums in the area. It was the only museum that emphasized such programs and none of the other museums provided such information on their homepages. This shows that NAAM focuses on inviting people who cannot always afford the entry fee to come to the museum. According to American Alliance of Museums, only 9% of US museum visitors are minorities. Hester (2016) said that the elimination of the museum's entry fee dramatically improved that rate. This section of the homepage demonstrated that the NAAM tried to reach broader audiences by presenting solutions to lower economic barriers, one of the factors preventing people from visiting museums. As described later, the NAAM has made collaborative efforts with other museums in the Seattle area to reach more diverse audiences.

For the Holocaust Center for Humanity, the primary target audience is students. They focus on the fifth or sixth grade to the end of high school, and they also work with university students. According to Simon, the museum gets about two or three school buses of children a day visiting them. Most of them are high school and middle school students from Washington State, as far out as Spokane. The museum's website clearly indicates its target audience through three out of four images at the top of the page

displaying strong ties between the Center and students. The first image was a picture of an elderly lecturer, who seemed to be a survivor of the Holocaust, in a classroom setting with a lot of young people (probably high school students). Through this image, visitors to the

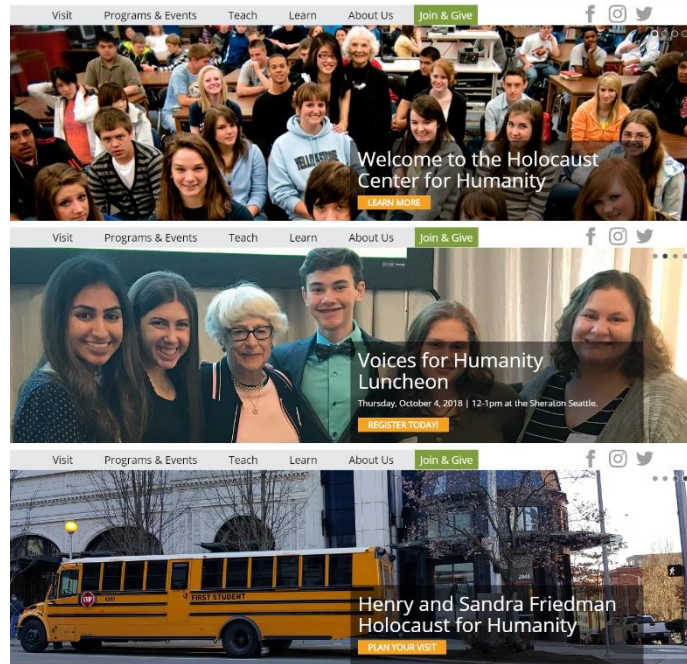


Figure 3: Holocaust Center for Humanity, Top Images (3 of 4), July 9, 2018

website could, at a glance, understand that the Center is involved in the education of young people. The second image introduced the event, *Voices for Humanity Luncheon*. It showed five young people, who seemed to be students, lined up with an elderly woman. This picture also demonstrated that the Center is a place where young people can learn from older people who have experienced historical events first-hand. The last image was a picture of a school bus parked in front of the building where the center is located, accompanied by a link to a web page about planning a visit. Upon examining those images, it was clear that the Holocaust Center mainly targets students in order to educate them about the Holocaust. However, looking at the four additional links,

indicated by the four medium-sized images that followed the main visual, it could be said that the website is not only directed at students. It is also aimed at teachers and schools, providing them with educational resources for teaching students. Three out of the four links were aimed at schools and teachers. The first announced the winners of a writing, art, and film contest targeted schools; the second introduced teaching trunks that could be used for Holocaust education in a classroom context; the third detailed recruitment for a teacher advisory board.

In her interview, Simon mentioned that the museum had used the experiences of Holocaust survivors as a powerful tool to share knowledge of history with the next generation and encourage young people to take action to avoid repetition of the tragedy of the Holocaust. In this process, teachers and schools played essential roles in reinforcing the power of these tools.

Simon revealed that the museum also serves areas throughout the Pacific Northwest in all five states (including Alaska, Idaho, Montana and Oregon) by arranging for Holocaust survivors to speak in local schools or teaching from classroom textbooks and materials, as well as training the areas' teachers. In addition, as with the NAAM, the Holocaust Center strives to acquire a wider audience by planning and

conducting programs in collaboration with various groups that experienced genocide similar to the Holocaust.

The Nordic Museum recognized that there was a great opportunity to reach out to an enormous audience just by engaging the Nordic community, since there are 800,000 people in Washington state—roughly 12% of the population—who have Nordic ancestry. However, they also want to engage a broader audience because there is a lot of interest in the United States about the Nordic region and Nordic people. To be more open and inclusive, one of the things they did was to remove the word “heritage” from the middle of the museum’s name. One of the main reasons for this change was because they found that “heritage” was limiting for some visitors who felt like, “the museum’s not for me if I don’t have Nordic heritage”.

While the Nordic Museum’s intentions were symbolized by its new name, they were also noticeable in the museum’s homepage as in Figure 4. The website’s configuration was fairly simple. The first part displayed the main image—a photograph of the ribbon-cutting ceremony from the museum’s opening event. However, as this image was overlaid with the blue, its details, including racial features of people in the picture, were rather vague. Via the ribbon-cutting photo and the words “We’re Open!”, visitors understood that the museum had recently opened. Together with this lettering,

the phrase “Ticket to the galleries are on sale now – visit today!” indicated that the word “open” not only referred to the re-opening of the museum but also its operating hours.

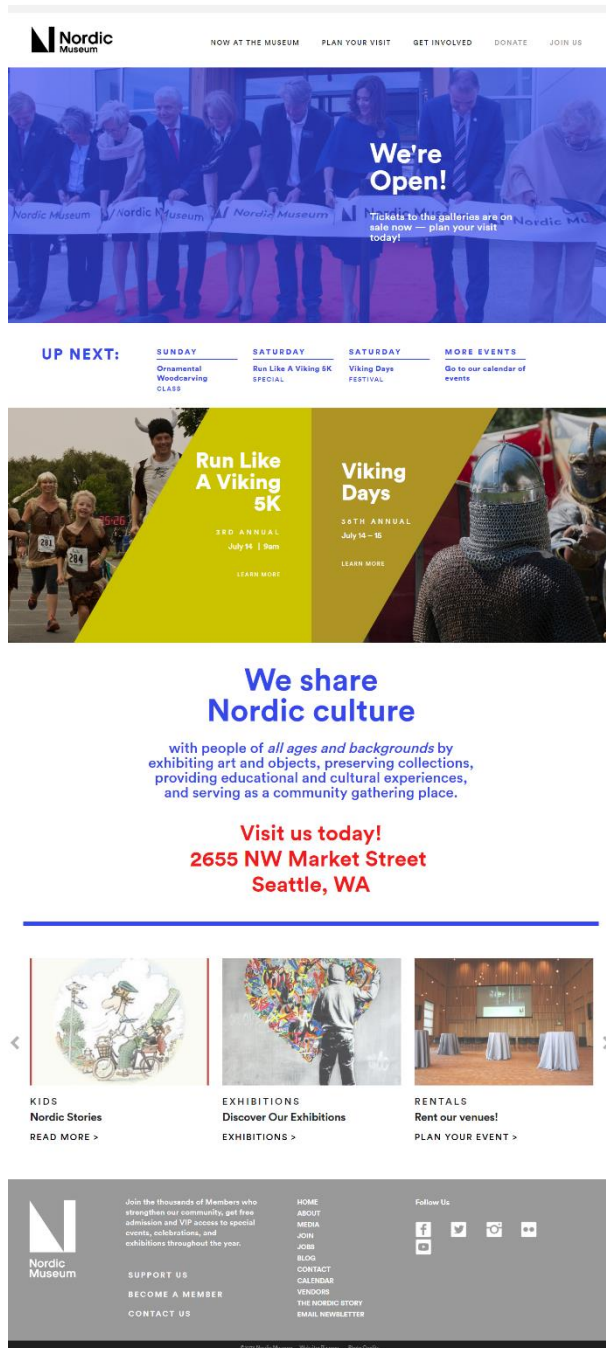


Figure 4: Nordic Museum, Website Homepage, July 9, 2018

Immediately below the main image, a schedule of the museum’s latest events was displayed. This positional relationship showed that the museum was open and inviting all visitors.

The Nordic Museum seemed very conscious about acquiring new visitors through its website homepage. However, as a museum with a long history of 38 years, it had not forgotten to follow up with its loyal long time visitors. In the second section of the page, two annual events were introduced via imagery and their

respective dates and opening times. The first was the “Run Like A Viking 5K” and the second was “Viking Days”—the third and 35th event of their kind, respectively. This indicates that these events were already well known and enjoyed by regular visitors and the community before the revamp of the museum. Displaying images of the events means that the newly renovated museum has inherited elements from the old museum. Although it may have been a coincidence that both events were related to Vikings and that the people shown in the pictures wore Viking costumes, all visitors to this website would get some sense of Nordic culture. In this section, the museum emphasized that even though it had changed its location and moved to a bigger and shinier building, it intended to continue engaging with its core audience of the Nordic community and regular visitors. It also showed that the museum was built on Nordic values, which is communicated through Nordic cultural activities. Further below, there was a call to action saying, “Visit us today!”. The letters were red—a font color only used in the entire page—and were followed by the address of the museum. All these elements show that the museum hopes that people who visit its website will actually come to the museum. The homepage was well organized and easy to read, and it was simple to locate links that visitors might be interested in. It could be said that the page was designed for a wide range of people.

Mejia stated that the Wing Luke told the Asian immigration story as a beacon for the Chinatown International District, where the community demonstrates those stories and that the museum hoped to play a role as a “neighborhood concierge” (Mejia, 2018) for visitors or citizens who are new to the area and need information about local attractions, eateries and key people. This concept can also go back to the Asian American history where the hotel and grocery store that are now part of the museum had been the information centers, accepting Asian immigrants who were stepping into the United States for the first time after a long trip from their home country.

Compared with other three museums’ websites, the homepage of the Wing Luke Museum contained many more text elements. The page was compact, did not require much scrolling, and the part below the main image was structured relatively simply using three sections—tours, exhibits, and visit us. The first two sections detailed four types of tours and three types of exhibitions, respectively. Each sub-section provided a brief description of the relevant tour or exhibit, displayed in a smaller font, especially for the exhibit, together with a thumbnail image. This showed that the site had been designed as a one-stop information center for individuals who were not familiar with the museum. According to Mejia, many of the museum’s visitors were new or tourists. The descriptions of the various items served as intriguing teasers for

visitors who lacked prior knowledge of the museum, and this implied that the homepage was intended to serve as a gateway for potential visitors. This proved what Mejia said in his interview about the museum trying to reach out to a broader audience, which included tourists and people with some interests in history and culture. The Wing Luke is located in Chinatown at the International District, which is one of the major tourist spots in Seattle, so they continually welcome many new visitors, especially during summers. Many of those visitors happen to be in the area and just come in unplanned, not knowing beforehand that there was a museum in Chinatown.

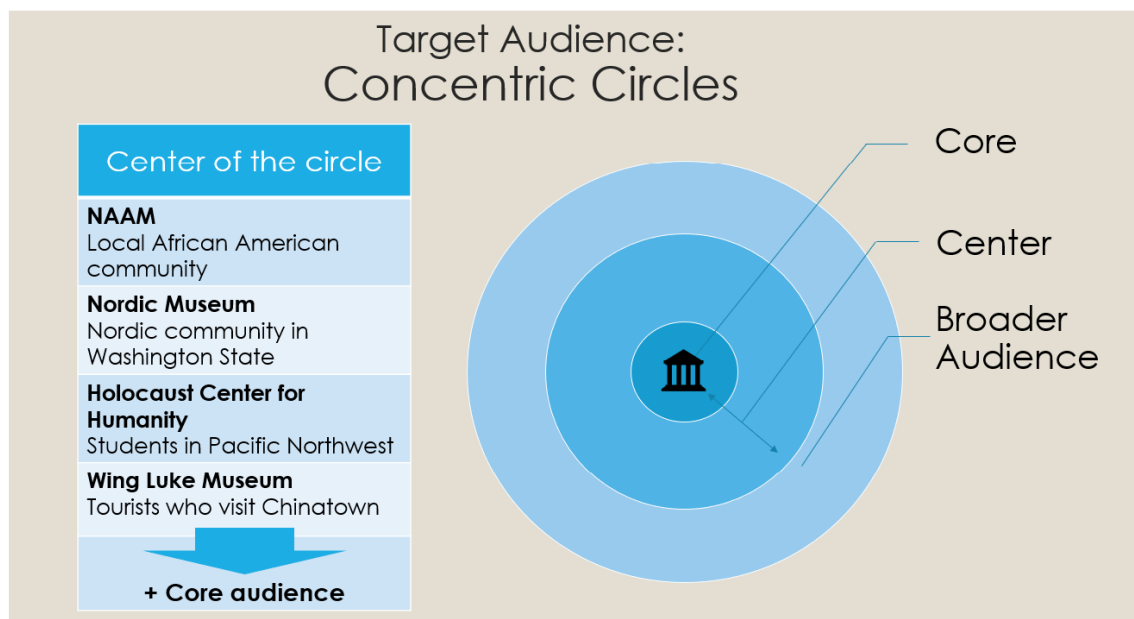


Figure 5: Concentric Circles of Target Audience

The model of concentric circles is reflected in how all four museums describe their audiences. The **core** of the circle typically consists of those who belong to the culture those museums represent. Subsequent target audiences are joined to shape the

circle with the **center** representing “fans”—people in their community who support the museum, as well as regular visitors and the outer circle representing broader audiences.

For each of the four museums, the scope of the center circle is different. The Wing Luke Museum, which targets tourists who visit Chinatown through their location, has a larger scope, and the NAAM’s scope of the center circle, which is based on the museum’s role as a local community center, is relatively narrower because the layers of the core audience and the primary target audience overlap. However, for any museum, the outer circle of the center area eventually expands to everybody.

Feedback from audiences

All four museums indicated that they utilize feedback, directly or indirectly, from their audiences and the communities that support them in order to reinforce their communication strategy.

The Holocaust Center for Humanity confirms whether or not visitors understood the museum’s main message based on the notes that they write. They have an annual writing, art and film contest, where over 1,000 students participate. Through reading the essays included with the artwork submissions, the staff can learn if the teachers are properly educating, if the message is getting across accurately and if the students are learning what they need to learn: “so really, it’s through our writing, art and

film contest that we measure our outcome, the impact to our audience”. Moreover, many of the schools who visit the museum participate in activities once they get back to their classroom, and have their students send letters and essays to them, which is another way to gauge the impact of the museum.

At the Nordic Museum, they have a section that is dedicated to the twenty-first century at the end of their exhibits, in which they invite visitors to comment, either electronically or by writing on a card, on the values that they have observed in the museum and to share their opinions. Those visitors’ opinions roll up into the museum’s larger message that is on the screen in that gallery and gives feedback to the people about what other people say and what they think of their values. So far, they have received a terrific response; the analog board is always full of visitors writing comments and putting them up on a board that is visible to other visitors.

Similarly, the NAAM relies on a lot of feedback. They use social media, phone calls, or text messages to staff members to understand what their community needs. When Michael Brown was shot at Ferguson and the Black Lives Matter movement rose, they realized that they needed to seriously focus on social justice issues because they were relevant in the community. They saw that people were hungry for opportunities to talk about social justice issues, about police violence, and about gentrification.

Therefore, they started having more programming focused on those issues in response to a need in the community. Erickson said that every program they have about those issues is incredibly well-attended and very diverse because “there are not a whole lot of places where people can go to talk about those things in their daily life” (Erickson, 2018).

The Wing Luke Museum takes a less direct approach to update their marketing messages. The museum has community advisory committees and other community members who give input and help choose the theme for the exhibits and curate the content based on the museum’s mission. Based on these community advisory committees, the marketing section takes the decisions they made and makes them more digestible and understandable for a greater audience. Responses from the audience of the museum are incorporated into the planning process for their activities, such as exhibitions and programs. As a result, the message used in their marketing strategy is updated to reflect the audience input. One example is their popular Bruce Lee exhibition series that began in 2014 and has entered its fourth year at the time of the interview after being extended in March of 2018. Many of the visitors were new, out-of-town visitors who were male and range in age from 25 to 35. Mejia stated that this visitor

demographic became obvious when the museum started the exhibition, so the marketing section was geared toward a Bruce Lee or martial arts fan base.

Feedback from their audience is very important to and useful for museums.

However, since museums are informal educational institutions, their details must be designed to balance between promoting their mission and providing content that their audiences expect, as seen in the examples of the Holocaust Center for Humanity and the NAAM.

Communication effectiveness

All four museums are convinced that their messages are effectively conveyed to their target audiences. Furthermore, they pointed out that community engagement has significantly contributed to their success.

Pihl said that they have received a lot of positive comments and feedback from visitors and their attendance has been very high, so they are confident that the Nordic Museum's approaches are communicating their messages well, and he thought that was because they had worked first on community engagement. Prior to reopening the museum, they had reached out and engaged with individuals to provide feedback through the focus group research.

Mejia was also confident that the Wing Luke's messages were well communicated to their intended audience through their current strategies. The museum has a certain audience that engages with their posts on social networking sites, and the Wing Luke feels that most of those who follow the museum know the museum's mission and understand their activist roles within the community.

Likewise, Simon said that most of the time, the Holocaust Center is able to communicate their messages successfully. Simon has never experienced that their communication materials were viewed differently than they intended, because "They're usually fairly simple".

At NAAM, they get a lot of online responses through social media, especially on Facebook. Their Instagram has also been growing because 20-somethings tend to use Instagram more than Facebook. Erickson said that those two platforms have been very impactful. Word of mouth is also a powerful tool to acknowledge the presence of the museum. At the front desk, they ask visitors how they heard about the museum. In most cases, they answer that it is word of mouth, while few people have heard something on the radio or the newspaper.

Communication obstacles

However, these museums also describe cases in which they were challenged to clearly transmit the message to some intended audiences due to cultural differences among visitors, visitor preconceptions, and misunderstandings.

Stereotyped assumptions about culture and history, sometimes from their own cultural members, prevented effective communication at the Nordic Museum and the NAAM. Pihl at the Nordic Museum noticed that some people did not understand or perceive that Nordic countries are actually comprised of diverse people. For example, during the grand opening of the museum, they had a contemporary Swedish singer who came to perform. She was a Swedish of Kenyan ancestry who was born and grew up in Sweden. To some people, it was surprising that they had a person of color singing at the grand opening. However, she represented today's Nordic countries, and that diversity was something that they wanted to be open about as contemporary Nordic reality.

Erickson said that, from time to time, she gets the feeling that people's assumptions about general African American museums become an obstacle. Some people think that "some stories are missing that need to be put in here". For example, the museum gets a lot of feedback saying, "I came here wanting to learn more about the slave trade, and it's not here". Or, when they offer free admission on Martin Luther

King Jr. Day, they always show the “I Have a Dream” speech at the NAAM, but some people have been disappointed that there is not enough about Dr. King in their exhibitions, because that is what they were expecting on Martin Luther King Jr. Day. Their visitors also expect to see more about slavery in the exhibitions.

The NAAM also had a few incidents of receiving hate mail and hateful phone calls from people who had not even visited the museum. They objected to the fact that the African American museum existed and claimed the museum was racist because it focused on African American history and they were tired of always hearing about black history. That attitude goes back to larger issues of why an African American museum is needed. Some people would argue that having culturally-specific museums “goes against the imagined ethos of the United States that we’re all together, we’re all Americans”. They see it as divisive to have museums separated by races, ethnicities, or cultures. Erickson contended that the haters not only do not understand what the NAAM is doing, but also do not want to understand it in the first place.

Miscommunication due to visitors’ preconception happens to the Holocaust Center for Humanity as well. Sometimes the museum gets negative responses which indicates the audience misunderstands its messages. For example, they have received letters from students saying things like “The war only happened because Hitler was the

leader”, even though they teach them that the Holocaust should not be blamed on particular people with evil intent. When this happens, they contact the teacher and ask if they could work with the teacher to adjust their teaching. There have also been cases where teachers or visitors become very angry about the current political situation in America, in the Middle East, or in Israel and Palestine, and try to focus on those. In such cases, the museum staff has to pull them away from that messaging and bring them back to their global message.

Mejia learned that there was a sensitivity they had to keep in mind when pushing out content to the public. He acknowledges that there are portions of history that might be harder for some people to absorb. While it rarely happens that the Wing Luke’s messages are viewed differently from what they intended, they had noticed there was some sensitivity among their audience that could bring out unexpected responses due to the historical background of certain things. To be prepared for this type of incident, the museum staff are trying to keep it in mind and be very transparent about issues that they run into.

b) Communication/Marketing strategies

The most important medium through which museums convey their unique messages is clearly their activities, such as exhibitions and programs. However, museums also use communication/marketing strategies to notify people about their activities. Through dialogue with the interviewees, it was discovered that there are common methods they use to communicate with each type of audience, the core audience and broader audience.

For core audiences

The main method the target museums use to send messages to their core audience is regular or occasional newsletters. Each museum has a separate mailing list comprised of both regular visitors and other interested parties who have not yet visited the museum but are motivated enough to sign up for the list. Newsletters keep in touch with each museum's audience by offering regular updates and prompting more passive audiences to engage with the museums.

The Holocaust Center sends out a monthly e-newsletter and occasional emails about what is coming up to their email list of 5,000 people. As for the design of their e-newsletter, while they review it annually to see if it needs updates, the design usually remains the same. Instead of focusing on design, they set priorities for the newsletter.

The team decides on the most important thing to highlight in the newsletter and lists events with images in order of importance or time.

Likewise, the Nordic Museum communicates with people who are members both digitally via e-mail and in hard copy. To those who are closest to them, they send out a quarterly newsletter that lists upcoming programs at the museum. They also publish an annual magazine that highlights all the programs that take place during the year.

At the NAAM, they use email newsletters, which go to their members and anyone who has given them their email address, and mailers that reach people who might not use social media. Postcards for different exhibits will go out to their larger contact list. The Wing Luke Museum also have monthly



Figure 6: Wing Luke Museum, Newsletter (Part), 2018

e-newsletters that go out to over 15,000 people.

The letters do not require cutting-edge designs or exquisite tastes, as Simon and Erickson mentioned, as the necessary information is organized in them. They are then sent to the museums' core audience, who is or at least may be interested in their activities, using accumulated contact lists. They are delivered to each individual on a regular basis. According to Kotler and Kotler (1998), one of the advantages of direct marketing, including newsletters and direct mails, is building a stronger relationship with each visitor and member and being able to increase their interest, attendance and contributions by appealing to individual needs and preferences. This leads museums to convey their messages more accurately, which results in an enriched relationship between the museum and its core audience. In her interview, Erickson revealed that many new visitors to the NAAM first learned about it via word of mouth. Given that fact, the NAAM will ultimately be able to reach a broader audience by increasing the number of members from its core audience who strongly engage with the museum.

For broader audiences

On the other hand, online communication, including social networking sites, is used to obtain the attention of the general public. In addition to their websites, all four museums have Twitter and Facebook accounts and recognized that social media sites

are very effective communication tools that can significantly impact the size of their potential audiences.

The Wing Luke Museum has been trying to solidify their online presence. They have an accounts on Facebook, Instagram and Twitter where they can quickly engage with their audience. Although the museum prefer conventional print materials that people can read in newspapers or magazines, they have noticed things are shifting towards digital media. In accordance with this trend, they have been shifting to newer technologies and newer platforms to be able to get their message out and engage with a younger audience.

In his interview, Mejia revealed that the messages the Wing Luke Museum sought to convey largely depended on the theme of the museum's current exhibition. The museum's website homepage clearly demonstrated this focus. Upon visiting the Wing Luke Museum website (Wing Luke Museum, 2018), the most noticeable aspect was the size of the primary image. The main image occupied almost half of the entire page. As of July 10, 2018, three images were rotated in this section. All contained the main visuals for the museum's three current exhibitions, including their title and basic details of each show—a brief explanation of the exhibition or the time period it was being held. The first image was the main visual for *Lore Re-Imagined* (Wing Luke

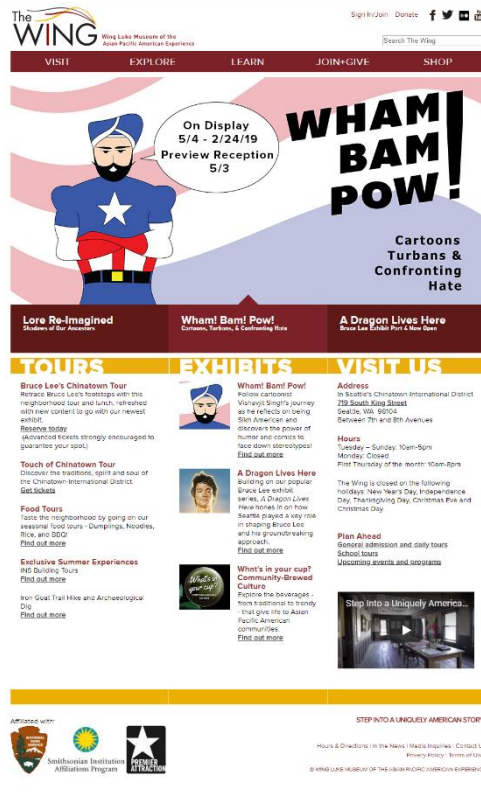


Figure 7: Wing Luke Museum, Website Homepage (Wham! Bam! Pow! Version), July 9, 2018

Museum, 2018), followed by *Wham! Bam! Pow!* (Wing Luke Museum, 2018), and finally *A Dragon Lives Here* (Wing Luke Museum, 2018).

The section then returned to the first exhibition’s visual.

There is no doubt that the primary image displayed

determines the first

impression of people visiting the website. Every exhibition explored a different cultural influence, though all were categorized as Asian culture, and each indicated the connection between its cultural roots and Seattle, the Northwest, and eventually the entire United States. For example, the imagery from *Wham! Bam! Pow!* featured a man wearing a blue turban and a costume with a big star against a background of red and blue stripes reminiscent of the American flag. In the imagery of *A Dragon Lives Here*, Bruce Lee spread his arms as if preparing to hold the high-rise buildings around the Space Needle in Seattle. These images encapsulate that the Wing Luke provides

different cultural perspectives to explore American society and experiences. Moreover, since exhibition-related information—the main image and items under the website’s “exhibits” section—occupied about two-thirds of the homepage, it can be inferred that the museum puts a major emphasis on communicating the information about the exhibitions and their messages.

A number of the programs at the NAAM target young adults who do not normally go to museums. To engage those people, the museum uses social media. They found that Instagram and Facebook are key communication tools to reach that audience. Erickson stated that the museum has been receiving a growing number of responses through these online platforms, and that they have been very effective in attracting a younger audience to the museum.

The Nordic Museum redesigned its website about a year and a half before the interview. This was a collaborative process that involved working with stakeholders throughout the organization. This wide variety of stakeholders and their re-branding consultants deliberated about how they should present themselves in a way that was consistent with their goals and objectives. Their decision to use specific images and content on the website came out of overarching guidelines related to their key messages, their mission, and their focus. They have also tried to overlay that with what they know

people are interested in, what their priorities are before they choose what their key message is, and what images they are emphasizing. Pihl explained that almost every museum department was engaged in the marketing process, including the program team, the exhibits team, the development team, and the marketing and communications team. The museum is making sure that there is a cohesive effort. Pihl claimed that, while they had 30 full-time staff, they probably accomplished as much as museums with 100 to 200 members of staff. He continued, “it requires that we have to work together collaboratively and be as efficient as we can”.

However, as Mejia mentioned in the interview, one of the biggest topics of concern for online media content is keeping it very concise, despite needing to communicate a lot of information. Otherwise, viewers tend to scroll through their information very quickly. For this reason, they try to keep things under a certain amount of words—typically about three or four sentences—while trying to get their message across efficiently. For them, it is important that the length is appropriate, and the content is worth reading.

Collaborative efforts

In addition to establishing an online presence through various social networking sites that appeal to wider audiences, some of the museums mentioned that

they had planned and participated in collaborative projects with other museums or different communities. The intent was to reach more diverse audiences who have never visited them.

Simon said that the

Holocaust Center for Humanity has been working with other groups and communities that have experienced genocide or other tragic events, such as

those from Bosnia and Rwanda, as well as some Native American tribes and the Japanese American community that experienced internment camps. Their messages slightly change when they work with those groups. They tend to focus more on the lessons of overcoming tragic events, moving forward, how to build a community after trauma and how to share their stories with future generations, including their children.



Figure 8: Holocaust Center for Humanity and Nisei Veterans Committee, Event Flyer, 2018

They have also worked with the LGBTQ community and the Museum of Flight to hold programs related to their experiences during World War II. The museum is making progress to serve different communities in different ways with different messages, depending on the audience.

Erickson said that a lot of NAAM's marketing efforts come from just being in the community and having staff attend community events to build partnerships, which greatly helps them reach larger audiences. For the last three years, they have had a partnership with the Seattle Art Museum (SAM) for an annual lecture series. The SAM has a marketing department and budget much bigger than the NAAM does, so the museums work together to get their audiences, which include people who would never normally come to the NAAM. It is a way for both places to boost the impact of their marketing and reach out to audiences that they would not be able to connect with otherwise. In the same way, the NAAM has also partnered with the Frye Art Museum to do programming and marketing together because the NAAM's audiences do not necessarily overlap with the art museum's.

The bilateral research project that the Nordic Museum conducted with scholars prior to its renewal opening can also be considered one of those collaborative works. In the process of its planning, the museum worked with a group of about 120 museum

professionals and scholars in both the United States and the Nordic region. The Nordic Council of Ministers was very excited about the project from the beginning, so they funded gatherings and symposia for these scholars. The outcome of the symposia was a lot of enthusiasm in the Nordic region for a museum in the United States that would discuss what is happening in the Nordic region today. As a result, the museum was covered by various media in the Nordic region.

Collaboration projects may have great potential as an effective strategy for culturally-specific museums to reach and communicate with more diverse audiences. By focusing their combined resources, such as budget and personnel, on one project and because they have something in common (the purpose of the activities, the type of participants, such as museum goers, etc.), each museum can benefit from the project. Moreover, the collaboration may activate the process of the museums' achieving their final goals: to merge their featured topics into the broader context.

Summary

The interviews and homepage analysis yielded various findings about culturally-specific museums' messages and how they communicate these messages. The results showed that the four target culturally-specific museums in the Seattle area mainly pursue two major missions. One is to try to combine the special story they are

telling to the flow of larger society and history; the other is the responsibility of realizing social justice. Although their messages varied, in order to achieve each mission, these museums attempted to convey that they existed as important educational resources for their audiences. They provide knowledge, new or different values that people can apply to their own lives, and safe environments where people from various backgrounds can share their experiences and perspectives.

Each museum saw its audiences in concentric circles, rendering the audience as more active and engaged with the museum at the center and spreading outward to potential audiences that had never visited the museum. Museums approached each level of audience in corresponding ways; this mainly included newsletters, various online platforms, and marketing activities through collaborative programs. Feedback from audiences was essential to the museums as it helped them shape their messages. At the point of the interviews, the four museums felt their messages were properly transmitted to their target audiences; however, the prejudice and homogenization of their featured cultures, histories, and the museums themselves caused obstacles to existing communications. All the homepages conveyed the museums' intended messages toward their intended target audiences, as clarified in the interviews. However, it was evident

that the two museums, NAAM and Holocaust Center, targeted and were designed to appeal to identified core audiences rather than broader audiences.

Chapter 5: Conclusions

The purpose of this research was to understand how four culturally-specific museums in the Seattle area translate their mission statements into messages and what marketing and communication strategy those museums use to convey their messages.

The following two questions were addressed.

1. What are the missions of culturally-specific museums and how do these align with their key communications messages?
2. Who are the target audiences of culturally-specific museums and what are the strategies these museums employ to reach to them?

The results of the interviews in this research demonstrate that the four targeted culturally-specific museums in the Seattle area tried to engage with a wider range of people to achieve two major goals. The first goal is to fulfill the social responsibility of each to the community, which is the foundation of each museum. The second goal is to merge their featured cultures or topics into the larger context of the society and to realize a society where those cultures and topics are accepted as legitimate references holding equivalent value within the current mainstream cultures, without being treated

as particular or exceptional by comparison. These two goals correspond to the two roles of culturally-specific museums, which are to become a source of pride for people within the specific cultural groups and to become a trustful educational resource for a broader range of people, respectively. (Elliott, 2012; Okmin, 2017)

The study made it clear that since all of the involved museums focus on different cultures and themes, the messages that they are trying to communicate based on their missions seemed to be different. However, it also revealed some commonalities. Each museum mentioned how it could help its audience engage with multicultural perspectives and social issues. This means that the museums are practicing what Kolb (2013) has suggested: to communicate to people what benefits they will receive from their visitation. The museums also shared a similar process of creating and refining their messages. All involve many departments within the museum including exhibition and program planning, design, and marketing, as well as take into consideration opinions from the community members who support each museum and opinions from visitors. This process “plays a part in shaping the museum’s strategies and approaches to forward planning”, as described by Sandell and Janes (2007, p. 292).

The results also demonstrated that while each museum has a different target audience, these audiences can be described in terms of concentric circles with the more

engaged audience as their center, and the museums attempted to engage broader audiences to pursue their missions. Data suggests that the museums adopted different marketing strategies for corresponding target audiences, as Kolb (2013) suggested, to transmit their messages effectively.

One of the main methods the target museums use to send messages to their core audience is regular or occasional newsletters. The design of the newsletters is relatively simple, providing the necessary information to offer regular update and to prompt more engagement with the museum. On the other hand, online communication, including social networking sites, was used to obtain the attention of the general public. All four museums recognized that social media sites are very effective communication tools that can significantly impact the size of their potential audiences. An analysis of the homepages of the four museums' websites informed that each museum chooses the elements on its page, such as images, text fonts, and layouts, to convey its intended message to the corresponding target audience. However, this research could not clarify whether their online strategies had attempted to motivate potential visitors, especially those who do not share the same cultural identity as the museum's community, "to become allies through the process of recognizing and internalizing a sense of shared humanity" (Erickson, 2015, p. 130). Another marketing strategy mentioned by some of

the museums was to participate in collaborative projects with other museums or different organizations and groups; this provided a good opportunity for them to appeal to new audiences because, in many cases, their audiences do not overlap.

All four museums believed that their messages are effectively conveyed to their target audiences and they pointed out that community engagement has contributed to their success. However, the museums need to communicate with the different levels of their audiences, and it was questionable whether their messages were transmitted most effectively to all of these levels. Moreover, although it does not happen very often, sometimes various factors including stereotyped assumptions about culture, anger and hatred against particular cultures/groups, and different historical views prevent effective message communication.

Implications

The results of this study suggest that culturally-specific museums could make better use of their websites to convey their messages. Compared to other online platforms, such as Facebook, Twitter, and Instagram, a website is easy to access and allows each museum to not only display its unique characteristics but to transmit its key messages due to the high degree of design flexibility. Their website homepages have the potential to attract more non-visitors by crafting the structure and messages directed to

the broader audience to better communicate what missions of culturally-specific museums are and what they can offer their visitors.

In addition, collaborative projects with organizations that have audiences that differ from their own may have great potential as an effective strategy for reaching more diverse audiences. All the targeted museums have limited budgets and personnel. Thus, by focusing their combined resources on a specific project, each organization could benefit. If the projects involve three or more groups, the effectiveness and benefits could be further expanded.

Finally, this research highlighted the possibility for many future studies on culturally-specific museums. First of all, it is important to collect data from many more culturally-specific museums with increased diversity on who their audiences are and how they reach out to and engage with their audiences. Moreover, it is desirable to measure the effectiveness of their current marketing and communication strategies. The four museums targeted in this research revealed through the interviews their belief that their intended messages were conveyed effectively. However, it is important to collect data on how impactful their messages actually are and to what level of audience those messages have been transmitted. Such results can contribute to understanding what

specific marketing and communication approaches are available and should be used for effective message communication.

Although this research only provides data on the four culturally-specific museums in the limited area of Seattle, the geographic and demographic factors of the place in which culturally-specific museums are located have a strong influence on their missions and messages and how these are communicated, the results can provide an overview understanding regarding message communication of culturally-specific museums in the Seattle area. By combining these data with the data obtained from future studies of other culturally-specific museums, it will be possible to further support these types of museums to achieve their mission and help to reinforce their presence in society.

Personal Views: Power of Museums as Change Agents in Society

I believe that knowing someone else means knowing about myself because “as individuals we are all different; in a multicultural society that difference is considered as part of shared communities” (Crooke, 2007, p. 82). Furthermore, as someone who moves back and forth between the two completely different cultures of the United States and Japan, I believe, from my own experiences, that knowing about something or

someone from multiple aspects will provide a better understanding of what they are, rather than knowing them “correctly”.

This research started from my personal questions, such as “How do culturally-specific museums present themselves to the public?” and “Are they trying to reach more diverse people?” By finishing this research, certain answers to those questions were obtained. However, I have been unable to answer emerging questions, such as whether it is ethical for a culturally-specific museum—a place sometimes considered a “sanctuary” by the people in its community—to invite outsiders to visit by employing marketing methods. I do not think that the question will be solved very soon. Nevertheless, considering the trend of advancing assimilation of racial, ethnic, and cultural identities, I predict that sooner or later, culturally-specific museums would need to take on the role of a forum to be opened to a broader range of people, while collecting the objects belonging to their culture of focus.

Some people argue that culturally-specific museums can create cultural divisions in society through the course of discussion on why culturally-specific museums were built in the first place or in what direction those museums are heading, which can lead to those divisions becoming frozen in place. However, any attempt to protect or “freeze” a culture permanently is impossible because human activities change.

While the objects from a particular culture could be protected for a long time, this should not be the original purpose of culturally-specific museums.

By recognizing the reality that there is an obvious imbalance in value judgements in society, the culturally-specific museum becomes a necessary tool or stepping stone to promote social justice and equality. This is given context by a comment made by Gutmann (1994): “the liberal democratic defense of diversity draws upon a universalistic rather than a particularistic perspective” (Gutmann, 1994, p10). At the same time, the crucial mission of the culturally-specific museum is achieved not merely by the museum’s efforts alone; it can be realized only by being widely disseminated to and discussed among a wide range of people with various values and backgrounds.

Even if a culturally-specific museum adopted the most successful marketing methods and attracted a large number of people, the museum could not force those who were not interested to visit. People who would gather there would be those who were somehow interested in the museum and its topics and those who were seeking some kind of connection to them. Some of them would find enough connections to stay there; some would be disappointed and would go away. It would take the same course as that repeated by the people in any museum’s current situation. Of course, the museum has to

be always aware of balancing its missions and attracting people without selling itself to the immediate interest; however, in the end, only those people who are able to make connections to the museum would continue to attend. By increasing the number of “connected” people who feel familiar with culturally-specific museums—even at a slow pace—the museums will be able to share their themes and deepen understanding among people with different racial and cultural backgrounds. The process will certainly alter conventional social norms and values in the future, which is the “power of the museums as change agents” that I unexpectedly found in this research.

References

Babbie, E. (2007). *The practice of social research* (11th ed.). Belmont, CA: Thomson Wadsworth.

Bailey, J. (2012). Planning for Community Needs. Lord, B., Lord, G. D., & Martin, L. (Eds.), *Manual of museum planning: Sustainable space, facilities, and operations*, 66-72. Rowman Altamira.

Black G. (2012). Embedding Civil Engagement in Museums. In Anderson, G. (Ed.), *Reinventing the museum: The evolving conversation on the paradigm shift* 267-285. Plymouth, UK: AltaMira Press.

Bonnell, J., & Simon, R. I. (2007). 'Difficult' exhibitions and intimate encounters. *Museum and society*, 5(2), 65-85.

Brinckerhoff, P. C. (2009). *Mission-based management: Leading your not-for-profit in the 21st century* (Vol. 231). John Wiley & Sons.

Bourdieu, P. (1984). *Distinction: A social critique of the judgement of taste*. Cambridge, Mass.: Harvard University Press.

Brown, L., Gutierrez, C., Okmin, J., & McCullough, S. (2017). Desegregating conversations about race and identity in culturally specific museums. *Journal of Museum Education*, 42(2), 120-131.

Canadians of Colour (2009, June 02). A “safe space” for Whites to talk about race is unsafe for people of colour. *Restructure!* Retrieved June 10, 2018, from <https://restructure.wordpress.com/2009/06/01/a-safe-space-for-whites-to-talk-about-race-is-unsafe-for-people-of-colour/>

Chandler, D. (1994). *Semiotics for beginners*. Retrieved June 10, 2018, from <http://visual-memory.co.uk/daniel/Documents/S4B/>

Crooke, E. (2015). The “Active Museum”: How Concern with Community Transformed the Museum. *The International Handbooks of Museum Studies*.

DeVita, M. C. (2000). *Service to People: Challenges and Rewards How museums can become more visitor-centered*. Lila Wallace-Reader's Digest Fund.

Diaz, V. (2005). *On Modeling Civic Engagement: Case Studies of Culturally Specific Museums and Latino Constituencies*. John F. Kennedy University.

Dilenschneider C. (2018). Attracting Diverse Visitors: Cultural Organizations Overlook The Most Important Factor (DATA). *Know Your Own Bone*. Retrieved June 10, 2018, from <https://www.colleendilen.com/2016/06/16/attracting-diverse-visitors-cultural-organizations-overlook-the-most-important-factor-data/>

Elliott, C. (2012). *"(Re)Presenting America": Are culturally specific museums a good thing?* Retrieved June 10, 2018, from <http://www.peoplesworld.org/article/re-presenting-america-are-culturally-specific-museums-a-good-thing/>

Erickson, O. L. (2015). *Co-Constructing Racial Identities at Seattle's Northwest African American Museum* (Doctoral dissertation). University of Washington

Falk, J. (2009). *Identity and the museum visitor experience*. Walnut Creek, Calif.: Left Coast Press.

Farrell, B., & Medvedeva, M. (2010). *Demographic transformation and the future of museums*. AAM Press.

Gujima Y. (2010) Semiological Analysis of Magazine Advertising. *Teikyo University Interdisciplinary Research Center Anthology (1)*, 87-100. Teikyo University

Gutmann, A. (1994). *Multiculturalism: Introduction*, 3-24. Princeton University Press.

Harris, I. T. (2013). Ethnic diversity or ethnic enclaves? Representing African American history in US Museums. *Educação & Linguagem*, 16(2), 58-76.

Hester, J. L., & CityLab. (2016, November 18). Why Free Museums Matter. Retrieved

June 10, 2018, from

<https://www.citylab.com/life/2016/09/why-free-museums-matter/501386/>

Holocaust Center for Humanity (2018). *About us*. Retrieved June 10, 2018, from

<https://www.holocaustcenterseattle.org/survivor-voices/14-about-us>

International Council of Museums (ICOM). (1997). Museums and Cultural Diversity

Policy Statement. Retrieved August 10, 2018, from

<http://archives.icom.museum/diversity.html>

International Council of Museums (ICOM). (2010-2018). *Museum Definition*. Retrieved

June 10, 2018, from <http://icom.museum/the-vision/museum-definition/>

Janes, R. (2015). The end of neutrality: a modest manifesto. *Informal Learn Rev*, 135,

3-8.

Japanese American National Museum (JANM) (2009). *The Cultural Museum 2.0*

Engaging Diverse Audiences in America. Retrieved June 10, 2018, from

media.janm.org/projects/innovation/janm-cultural-museum.pdf

Kolb, B. (2013). *Marketing for cultural organizations : New strategies for attracting and engaging audiences* (Third ed.). New York: Routledge, Taylor & Francis Group.

Kotler, N. G., Kotler, P., & Kotler, W. I. (2008). *Museum marketing and strategy: designing missions, building audiences, generating revenue and resources*. John Wiley & Sons.

McLean, F. (1997). *Marketing the museum*. New York: Routledge.

Mercier, G. K. (2017). *Differential Concerns: Perceived Benefits and Barriers to Visitation from the Mental Models of Museum Visitors and Non-Visitors*. University of Washington.

Merriman, N. (1991). *Beyond the glass case: The past, the heritage, and the public in Britain* (Leicester museum studies series). Leicester [England]; New York: Leicester University Press.

Mills E. (2016). Great Mission. Bad Statement: Why the social sector should worry more about words. *Stanford Social Innovation Review*. Retrieved June 10, 2018, from https://ssir.org/articles/entry/great_mission._bad_statement

Moreno, M. J. (2004). Art museums and socioeconomic forces: the case of a community museum. *Review of Radical Political Economics*, 36(4), 506-527.

Murawski, M. (2018, March 16). *Museums Are Not Neutral*. Retrieved April 15, 2018, from <https://artmuseumteaching.com/2017/08/31/museums-are-not-neutral/>

Nordic Museum (2018). *About us: Mission*. Retrieved June 10, 2018, from <https://nordicmuseum.org/about>

Northwest African American Museum (2018). *About us: Mission & Vision*. Retrieved June 10, 2018, from <http://www.naamnw.org/about/history>

Okmin, J. (2017). *What is the job of a culturally-specific museum?* Retrieved June 10, 2018, from <https://museumquestions.com/2017/09/11/what-is-the-job-of-a-culturally-specific-museum/>

Reiner, N. (2013). Melting Pot on the Mall?: Race, Identity, and the National Museum Complex. *International Journal of the Inclusive Museum*, 5(2): 33-41

Rose, G. (2016). *Visual methodologies: An introduction to researching with visual materials*. sage.

Rosewall, E. (2014). *Arts Management: Uniting arts and audiences in the 21st century*. Oxford University Press, USA.

Smithsonian Institution Office of Policy & Analysis (2001). *Audience Building:*

Marketing Art Museums. Retrieved June 10, 2018, from

<https://www.si.edu/Content/opanda/docs/Rpts2001/01.10.MarketingArt.Final.pdf>

Taylor, C. (1994). *Multiculturalism: The politics of recognition*. Princeton University Press.

UNESCO Universal Declaration on Cultural Diversity: UNESCO. (n.d.). Retrieved

August 10, 2018, from

http://portal.unesco.org/en/ev.php-URL_ID=13179&URL_DO=DO_TOPIC&URL_SECTION=201.html

Weil, S. (2002). *Making museums matter*. Washington, D.C.; Washington, D.C. ::

Smithsonian Institution Press; Smithsonian Institution Press..

Wing Luke Museum of the Asian American Experience (2018). *About us: Our Mission*.

Retrieved June 10, 2018, from <http://www.wingluke.org/about>

APPENDIX A: Interview Guide

Consent Script:

Thank you for agreeing to meet with me today. Before we begin, let me clarify that I am asking you to participate in this interview as part of my thesis research at the University of Washington.

The purpose of this research is to understand the marketing approaches currently being adopted by culturally-specific museums and to explore what changes they can make to appeal to more diverse audiences.

This interview will take about 45 to 60 minutes and will be recorded for research purposes. You and your institution will be identified in my published report and anything you say may be quoted or paraphrased. You may request to review your quotations prior to the final submission of my thesis. Your participation is voluntary and refusal to participate will involve no penalty or loss of benefits. If you have any questions or concerns in the future you may contact me or my advisor.

Do you agree? Do you have any questions before we begin?

General Questions

- What is your job title?
- How long have you worked at this museum?
- What are your primary job responsibilities?
- What was your professional or academic background prior to your current position?

Marketing/Communications:***(Target Audience)***

1. Who is your typical target audience?
 - Are they different depending on exhibition content?
 - How do you determine who your target audience is? Example: is this based on data?
 - Do you set any numerical goals (visitors, earnings)? If you do, how do you set those goals?

(Marketing Strategy)

2. How do you typically communicate with your target audience?
 - What media/marketing strategies do you use?

- Have you found certain strategies work best with certain audiences? Please explain.
 - Is there any particular media the museum prefers to use?
 - Why do you use the media rather than other media?
 - Has your communications/marketing strategy evolved over time? If so, how and why have changes happened?
3. Can you briefly describe the marketing materials development process for me?
- Who is involved in the process?
 - How do you work together?
 - Are there processes in place for this type of project management?
 - How do you determine what to include in the design layout? content? writing?
- Does your museum have any standards? / Do you have any standards?

(Messaging)

4. What is the impact that your museum would like to have on your visitors? On the community in which you are located?

5. What do you aim to get across about the museum?

- How do you determine what messages to tell?
- Do you use different messages depending on the target? If so, how?
- How do you determine whether the messages you choose are relevant to the target audience?
- How do you determine whether the messages you choose are relevant to the museum mission?
- Do you feel your messages are communicated effectively to your audiences?
- Are there issues or obstacles you face when communicating your intended messages?
- Would you change any of these approaches in the future? If so, how?

6. Have there been instances where your marketing materials were viewed differently than intended (or as controversial) by audiences? Please describe.

Process-Specific Questions:

7. Can you describe the decision-making process in creating your website homepage?

- How is the concept originated?

- Why did the museum chose the particular photos/layout/tagline etc.?
- Do you use external sources or consultants?
- Is there a review process?
- Are there different departments or teams involved?