

# VIRTUAL AUDIENCES, PART 1:

A 2021 ANNUAL SURVEY OF MUSEUM-GOERS DATA STORY



When the COVID-19 pandemic began, many museums pivoted quickly to virtual content as a way to continue to engage museum audiences. If museums had to be closed, and people were spending a lot more time at home, it seemed like a good idea.

## But how did it actually play out?

To find out, we asked frequent museum-goers about their virtual engagement during the first pandemic year (roughly March 2020 - February 2021).

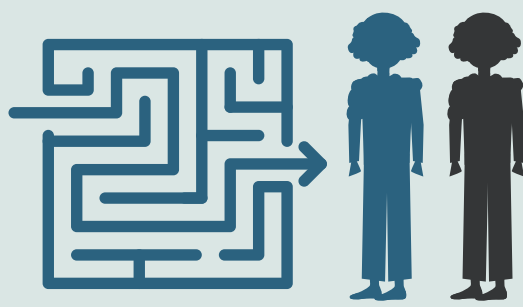
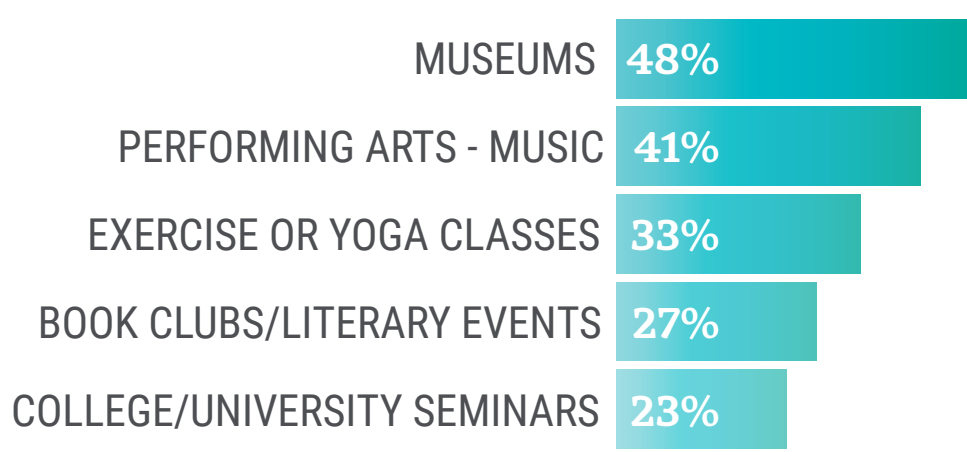


Before we get to the results, however, let's define what we mean by virtual content.

Additionally, we asked about virtual content broadly, from a variety of organizations (not just museums). We wanted to understand breadth of virtual engagement as well as frequency of virtual museum engagement.

## So, what did we find out?

First, let's look at the top five types of virtual content adults reported engaging in *at least once* during the previous pandemic year:

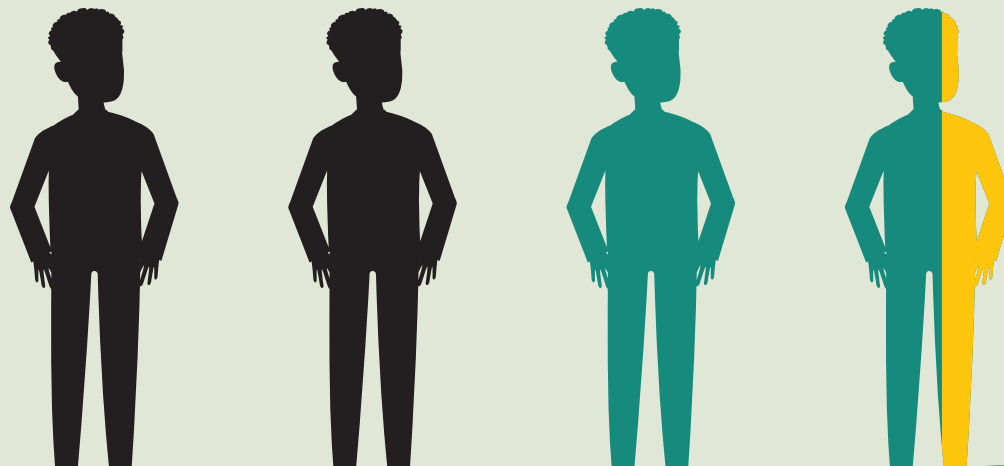


No surprise, frequent museum-goers were most likely to engage with museums virtually ... and we reached about half of our frequent audience.

While about a third of frequent museum-goers casually dipped into virtual museum content, nearly one in five museum-goers were "super-users:" they were engaging at least once a month or more online.

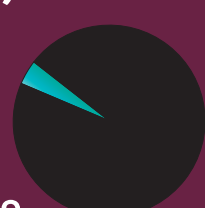
### Frequent Museum-Goers' Engagement with Virtual Museum Content

DID NOT PARTICIPATE
  CASUAL PARTICIPATION
  VIRTUAL SUPER-USERS



## There was some not-so-good news, however.

When we examine non-museum-visitors from our concurrent broader population sampling, only 4% tried out *any* virtual content from museums.



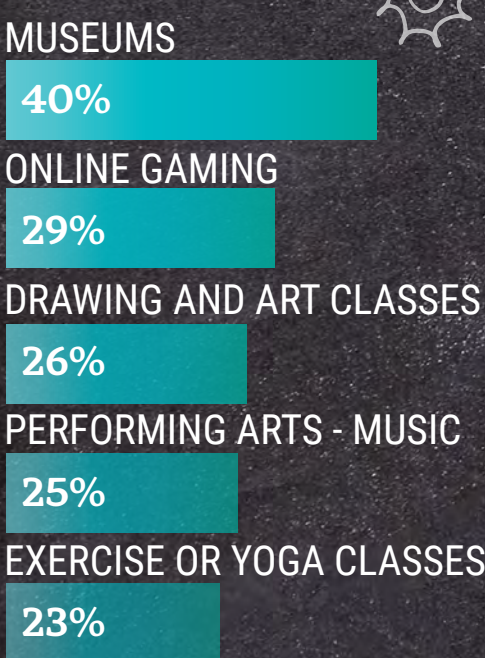
Of those who did, non-visitors who were 60 or older were 2.5 times more likely to try out virtual museum content (5% did) than adults under 40 (2%). While these numbers may be small, they do point to a potential growth audience: the broader population of older adults.

Overall, these numbers present some complicated findings, indicating museums need to think strategically about the virtual content they produce and share. In our next *Data Story*, we'll highlight two audiences for whom virtual content worked effectively ... as well as some of the barriers potential audiences experienced.



## WHAT ABOUT CHILDREN?

We asked frequent museum-going parents and guardians an almost identical question about their minor children. Here are the top five things they reported their children engaging with *at least once* in the previous pandemic year:



Turns out, museum-going children were *less likely* to have engaged with museums virtually than museum-going adults. (This makes a lot of sense when we think about it: many children were getting screened out from online school, and children going to school in person were not looking to fill their day.)

Annual Survey of Museum-Goers Data Stories are created by Wilkening Consulting on behalf of the American Alliance of Museums.

Sources include:  
 • 2021 Annual Survey of Museum-Goers, n = 53,217; 140 museums participating  
 • 2021 Broader Population Comparison Sample, n = 1,273  
 • 2017 - 2020 Annual Surveys of Museum-Goers and Broader Population Comparison Sampling

All quotes are graphically represented with a figure that generally matches their demographic profile (age, gender, race and/or ethnicity).

\*Data Stories share research about both frequent museum-goers (typically visit multiple museums each year) and the broader population (including casual and non-visitors to museums).

More Data Stories can be found at [wilkeningconsulting.com/data-stories](http://wilkeningconsulting.com/data-stories).

