

Understanding the Exhibition’s Characteristics of Selected Museums in Malaysia

Norfadilah Kamaruddin

Creative Visual Exchange Group (CREaTE), Faculty of Art & Design, University Teknologi MARA (UiTM), Shah Alam, Selangor, Malaysia

Abstract: The literature on the museum studies has primarily focused on the study of cultural and heritage memory with a secondary focus on tourism agenda. Given the extraordinary expansion of the museum sector worldwide in the recent decades, the development of museums exhibition has not yet been examined within the broader of interface design perspectives. Thus, it is an appropriate time to expand this range of analytical concerns by looking in depth on the exhibition characteristics of the so-called ‘new look of museum’. This article seeks to review the exhibition’s characteristics that commonly used in Malaysian museums. The goal is not easily to generate a generic survey or typology of museum displays, but to describe the use of different forms of museum exhibition within the specific characteristics.

Keywords: museum history; museum studies; exhibitions characteristics; interface design.

moreover helps the determine what information to convey to the visitor. Imagine that we were selling the exhibition to another person who didn't know anything about it, how would we describe it? In deeds, the “big idea” provides the focus for the exhibition around which the story, interpretive approaches and museum visitor experiences are built.

When talk about the museum experience from the visitor's perspective, most literature established that visitor’s experience are based on the interaction among three contexts (visitor-constructed) which are personal context, social context and physical context. Additionally, the personal context incorporates a variety of experiences and knowledge of the individual visitor that includes the visitor's interest, motivations, and concerns. In depth, every visitor's perspective is strongly influenced by the social context. This is because of most people who visit museums are commonly in a group, and those who visit alone invariably met other visitors and museum staffs. However, the physical context includes the architecture and 'feel' of the building, as well as the exhibits contained within the hall. In summary, Figure 1 show the view of this relationships.

I. INTRODUCTION

Exhibition is one of the major links between museums and the public. As a communication device, exhibitions make use of a wide variety of interpretive media and one of which is language in the form of exhibitions texts and objects. As such, every exhibition must have a “big idea” where is a sentence or statement of what the exhibition is about. The “big idea”

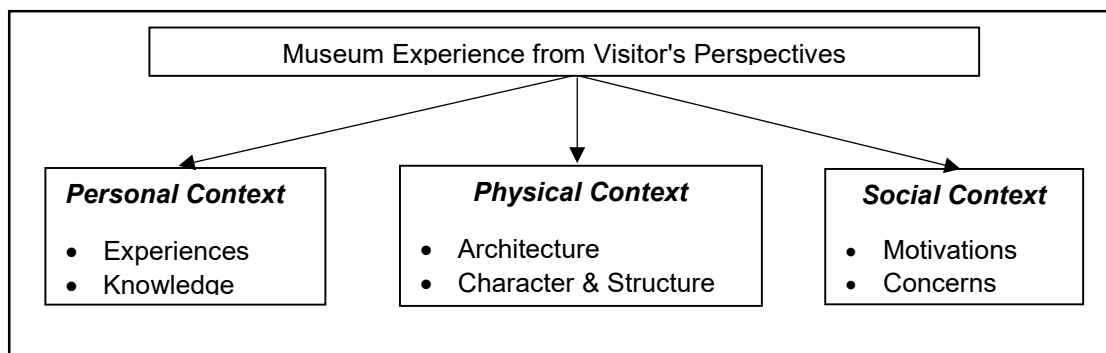


Figure 1:The relationship of Museum Experience Elements from Visitor’s Perspective

Accordingly, by focusing on the transformation of museums, it seems that museum nowadays as a cultural space as well as an educational physical place. Towards these new roles, this article seeks to examining and further identifying in common on the different types of museum exhibition’s characteristics of four selected museums in Malaysia based on physical context. In regards of four museum exhibition that have been examining from each museum that including, one permanent exhibition from the Malaysian National Museum

and the National Automobile Museum in Sepang, Selangor; one temporary exhibition from the Textile Museum in Kuala Lumpur; and one special exhibition from the Royal Museum in Kuala Lumpur. Each exhibition of the selected museum moreover had been examined perfectly based on the distinction between three aspects of the physical identity of different exhibitions type namely: Structure, Style, and Technique.

II. ANALYTICAL OF EXHIBITION CHARACTERISTICS OF FOUR MUSEUM EXHIBITIONS IN MALAYSIA

Museums exhibition is the value and authenticity of their collections through different modes of exhibition. Towards these, numerous qualities were shared by many museums in illustrating this point. In example, art museums are displaying artworks and art pieces through simple presentation. Thus, the looks of these traditional display technique frequently appear as a neutral presentation. Therefore, in general, an exhibition creates an almost totally closed into information-communication system. As per claimed by Duncan & Wallach (1978), the museum plays a unique ideological role. By means, a careful selection of objects or material and placed in a well-designed context, the museum exhibition transforms ideology in the abstract into living belief. In which, the visitor has no choice than to accept the interpretations that constitute the exhibition (s)he is visiting, because there is always the museum as a medium that defines the meaning of the objects.

Therefore, during the process of preparing an exhibition, the curator consciously or unconsciously encodes the museum objects with messages. This required the curator to does not remove the information contained within the object, but the selection of an appropriate medium and manipulation

techniques intend to be offering the visitors a strictly guided information. In fact, the actual physical hall and conceptual context will be creating purely understanding by the museum visitors. This special situation can be described as the basic puzzle of the successfulness of any museum exhibition. However, there are 4 types of exhibition that commonly exist within museum exhibition. It namely permanent exhibition, temporary exhibition, special exhibition and mobile exhibition.

Additionally, different type of exhibitions has different kind of requirements and appearance. In example, for the special exhibition that commonly happened within one week to three or four months, most of the museum curator will showcase the exhibition with special budget. This totally different if compared to mobile exhibition or permanent exhibition. Following analysis is based upon the distinction between three aspects of the physical identity of different exhibition types which are structure, style, and technique. Structure involves the organisation of the material or object that being exhibit; style refers to the general atmosphere in which the communication process takes places and the term technique comprises the practical technique of information be transferring to the visitors. Figure 2 illustrate the components of physical identity analysis.

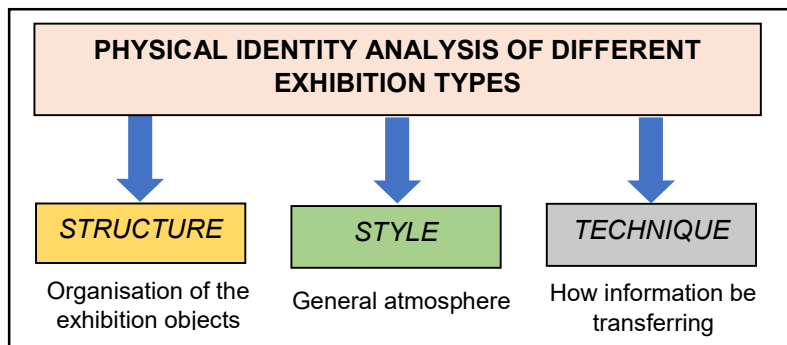


Figure 2: The components of physical identity analysis

Structure

Museum communication has been widely discussed by scholars across wide literature (Hyowon Hyun, Jungkun Park, Tianbao Ren, Hyunjin Kim, 2018; Wang, Quo, 2018; Castellani & Rossato, 2014; Heilig, Feuerhahn & Sikkenga, 2014; Latham, 2012; Capriotti, 2010). Many studies moreover suggested that, in order to make the exhibition as an effective communicative media, effective production structures can affect visitor experience of discovering meaning in the exhibition. Here it explained that exhibition structure does play a role in facilitating better understanding on the exhibition message. The structure includes display case, lighting, colour, graphics, texts, labels & panels and message flow. Additionally, analysis of the structure, in which involves on how the organisation of the exhibition material or objects being presenting within the exhibition. It more referred to the

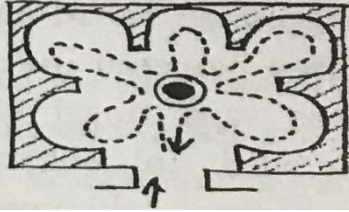
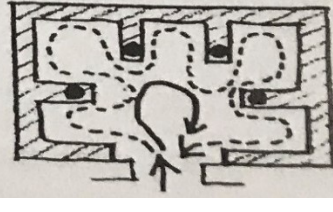
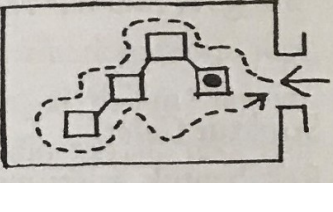
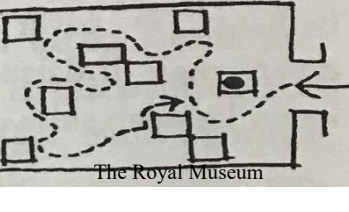
primary museum material be exhibited in the exhibition hall. On this aspect, previous scholar was mentioned that there are two basic approaches that should be considered in exhibiting the material which are thematic and taxonomic approach. For taxonomic approach, material is displayed alone, but for the thematic approach involves how the material be displayed and should telling a story. In depth, thematic approach is described by Shanks & Tilley (1987) as a 'narrative display' while taxonomic approach is a pure aesthetic display form. Thus, within this understanding, the structure of material display within 3 different types of exhibition from different museum in Malaysia was analysed thoroughly.

The analysis on display structure found that the permanent exhibition located at the Malaysian National Museum was applied the taxonomic approach while the

National Automobile Museum located at Sepang, Selangor applied the thematic approach. Interestingly, a similar approach of the thematic structure also be used for permanent exhibition by the Textile Museum and the taxonomic approach applied for the temporary exhibition by the Textile Museum. The similar approach of the taxonomic also be

utilized on the special exhibition by The Royal Museum. From this analysis, it can be declared that most of the exhibition in Malaysia are more preferred on displaying the exhibition material solely rather than bring it in narrative story. The summary of the analysis shown in Table 1.

Table 1: Analysis of Exhibition Characteristics for Physical Context on Structure

Exhibition Types	Exhibition Characteristics: <i>Physical Context</i>	
	Structure (the organisation of the exhibition material)	
	<i>Taxonomic</i> (Display Alone)	<i>Thematic</i> (Narrative Display)
<u>Permanent Exhibition</u>	 <p>National Museum and Textile Museum</p>	 <p>National Automobile Museum</p>
<u>Temporary Exhibition</u>		 <p>Textile Museum</p>
<u>Special Exhibition</u>	 <p>The Royal Museum</p>	

Moreover, satisfaction of visitors' experiences is largely derived from the physical environment and personal experiential from the objects displayed at the museum. As a simple example is display cases. As per suggested by most established scholars, each display case should be placed with attention to the shape and size of the artefacts or exhibition material. This is to increase the readability labels which are not higher than 0.9 meters to suit for short or seated people. In addition of that, all display cases also can be designed in order to attract the visitors. In which it be suggested that display case can be design either open or closed concept where must

have enough space beside them for the visitors to move comfortably especially people who are using wheelchairs.

Another element that can help in facilitating visitors having a better understanding on the museum message is lighting. In facts, lighting can also offer an aesthetic experience which can affect the visitor in creating different moods such as a bright and happy environment, mysterious voids and enable the objects to glow and sparkle. Analysis on the exhibitions involved define that most museums uses low light levels. In contrast, literature established lighting should be at moderate levels, spotting the cases and pieces in them so that the visitors can see clearly the objects and labels. Clearly

it was recognized that lighting can enhance the visitors' perception and help them in understanding the exhibition.

Style

Visiting museum will provide such a numerous advantage to the visitors. The visitors learning experience would make the individual seeing things differently by expanding their knowledge, an expansion of what they already know and new things that add their body of knowledge. Thus, besides different approaches as to the structure, there are also different approaches as to style. Style is more related to the sought effects on how the display materials clarify and emphasize the intended message. In fact, all exhibitions by their nature should have some educational content as it always tries to tell visitors things that they are unlikely to have known before. However, the method used may aims at different effects. In this respect, there are 3 styles established in the literature namely contemplative style, cognitive style and affective style of the exhibition.

Within these three different styles, cognitive style is the most popular been using in many exhibitions across the world. Moreover, regarding the cognitive style, there are distinguishes value of aesthetic display and didactic display. As per agreed by Burcaw (1975), the aesthetic style of display is concerning of each object is shown in a way to emphasise its aesthetic qualities. Supporting texts and display mechanisms complement but are subordinate. As a communication device moreover, value of aesthetic display for an exhibition, in which each text labels can be designed so that they have a high probability of being read, meet the educational objectives of an exhibition and further create visitor satisfaction. On the other hand, the didactic style aims primarily at imparting knowledge where information delivered through exhibition material. Nevertheless, in both cases, the intention of the exhibition is to be having an effect on the emotions of the viewers. Following this understanding, the analysis of style was conducted through cognitive style with value of aesthetic and didactic displays. The summary of analysis as per shown in Table 2.

Table 2: Analysis of Exhibition Characteristics for Physical Context on Style

Exhibition Types	Exhibition Characteristics: <i>Physical Context</i>	
	Style (to the sought effects on how the display materials clarify and emphasize the intended message)	
	<i>Aesthetic</i> (Value of Quality)	<i>Didactic</i> (Information Delivery)
Permanent Exhibition	<i>National Museum</i>	<i>National Automobile Museum</i>
Temporary Exhibition		<i>Textile Museum</i>
Special Exhibition		<i>The Royal Museum</i>

If looking on the style of display within four different types of exhibition involved in the analysis, it clearly shown that most exhibitions are using didactic style of presentation. Only permanent exhibition at the Malaysian National Museum applied aesthetics display in some exhibition hall. As per mention in the literature, each elements of exhibition contributes to an overall visitor experience that accounts for the interaction between the audiences' interests and the messages to be conveyed in order to enhance the visitor learning experience. In fact, to satisfy visitors, combining traditional approaches with technology can be the factors that contributing to the overall visitors' experiences. Besides that, analysis also discovered that exhibition text and labels are one of many parts of the total exhibition that must work in conjunction with all forms of interpretation such as objects, graphics, photographs, video and computer and other interactives.

Technique

Finally, excellency of each exhibition can be value through technique of communication. Some scholars were suggested on effective communication through an exhibition is needs to be focussing on the degree of interaction, distinguishes between interactive and passive displays (Hall, 1987). Beside other scholars were elaborated that display techniques (which referred to 'modes of use') must base on the number of physical use and the mechanism apply. The main difference on this view is between static exhibits (those which do not change situations) and dynamic exhibits (which change in order to illustrate two or more different situations). Dynamic technique in particular is referred to those which run continuously, e.g. a film loop, which can be activated by the visitor. This situation could also consider as an interactive dynamic exhibit. A further subdivision of the interactive mode involves simulation modes. Consequently, for this analysis study, three different techniques were considered as a value for techniques analysis including static, dynamic and interactive technique. The results of the analysis as per show in Table 3.

Table 3: Analysis of Exhibition Characteristics for Physical Context on Technique

Exhibition Types	Exhibition Characteristics: <i>Physical Context</i>		
	Technique (to the sought effects on how the display materials clarify and emphasize the intended message)		
	<i>Static</i> (Not changes)	<i>Dynamic</i> (Simple Changes)	<i>Interactive</i> (Involved engagement)
<i>Permanent Exhibition</i>	National Automobile Museum	National Museum	
<i>Temporary Exhibition</i>	Textile Museum		
<i>Special Exhibition</i>			The Royal Museum

To hold visitors' attention and set up the ideal conditions for learning experiences, each exhibition need to attract visitor's attention. However, in order to have effectiveness of the exhibition message transmission, the source (exhibition team) should know what kind of information that they need to include in order to educate the visitors and which objects, texts and events that can attract the visitors and gained a lot of information about the subject matter. Analysis at the four museums has shown that most museum displays techniques, such as objects in showcases are more not attractive for visitors. In which, most of the available static displays are the most being used in the exhibitions. Moreover, three-dimensional visual strategies (in example videos and interactive panel) are more successful in helping visitors recall the key information but very limited be using in the exhibition involved in this summative analysis. This only see on the special exhibition at the Royal Museum.

III. CONCLUSIONS

This paper has aimed to contribute to literature relating on how the museum should planned their exhibition accordingly in order to communicate the message effectively. It is evident from the study that museums in Malaysia has strategized their exhibition message and structure. However, improvement from time to time needs to be implemented in order for the museum in Malaysia achieve to the international standard. In facts, throughout this summative analysis of the museum exhibition's characteristics, an audiences (visitors) can see as amain factor that contributing to the successfulness of each exhibition. Consequently, in order to achieve the museum objectives and to be such an impressive museum, the policy maker of museums in Malaysia should continuously strategize the types of exhibitions and interface design structure so that the message of any exhibition can be communicated successfully and give a positive impact to the visitors. The outcomes of the analysis also would help any other parties that related to exhibition on which the exhibition style, structure and techniques are highly cater the visitor's needs. Thus, the Department of Museums Malaysia can help the other local museums to come up with attractive presentations of artefacts or historical exhibits in order to convince the visitors to appreciate what they should appreciate.

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