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Visitor Engagement in a Digital Age: National Palace Museum and
National Taiwan Museum as Examples

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Visitor Engagement in a Digital Age:
National Palace Museum and National Taiwan Museum as Examples

Abstract

“Visitor Engagement in a Digital Age: National Palace Museum and National Taiwan Museum as Examples” Museums nowadays often utilize technology to boost visitor engagement. To find out if technologies serve the function of visitor engagement well, this paper chooses two exhibitions, respectively, “Giuseppe Castiglione: Lang Shining New Media Art Exhibition” in National Palace Museum and “Engraving Prestige: Hand Tattoo of Paiwan, Laiyi” in National Taiwan Museum, and looks into their ways of promotion on the official websites, social media sites, and on-site design. However, with all the functions of digital aids, it is still important for museums to keep a balance between the usage of advanced technologies and traditional ways of visitor engagement for exhibitions.

Introduction

Museum exhibition nowadays have transformed a lot with the development of technology. Moreover, museums are more democratized, which involves more interaction with visitors. In other words, museums are focusing more on visitor engagement, which means to spark interaction between the exhibitions and create better visitor experience. Common types of design to boost visitor engagement include instructional labels, audio tour, educators (guides), and games (Simon 164).

National Palace Museum (NPM) and National Taiwan Museum (NTM) have utilized technology in their promotion and exhibition to boost visitor engagement, which gives visitors easier access to related information, involves interaction and takes visitors across time and space to experience ancient displays from a modern prospective.

Noticing the trend of enhancing visitor experience, I hypothesize that the two major public museums in Taiwan, National Palace Museum and National Taiwan Museum act not only as the preserver of cultures but also as bridges that connect the public to the ancient times, to technology, and to the topics of their exhibitions. Besides showcasing displays with printed descriptions, the two museums have more interactive approach to boost visitor engagement.

To prove the hypotheses, this paper uses one exhibition from each museum to find out:

- How does the museum utilize technology, online resources, and interactive designs to boost visitor engagement?

Literature Review

Museum exhibitions have transformed a lot as time goes by. Nowadays, many people look upon museum visits as ways of self-learning and recreation. Therefore, it is crucial for museums to find effective ways to engage their visitors. In the year 1995,

Hooper- Greenhill stated that the ways museums produce information and communicates with visitors would be brought to a new level with the development of technology. Museum exhibitions had long been curatorial-based, and according to Hooper- Greenhill, this “disempowered the visitors and left them as passive receivers of curatorial wisdom, rather than positively interacting with the museum environment” (83). Fortunately, museums nowadays have been setting up user-friendly websites and fan page, and interactive devices on set. These digital designs could help inform potential visitors of the latest exhibitions.

With the invention of Web 2.0 and the development of computer and mobile devices, the general public has easier and quicker access to the latest information. For museums, new technologies can also expand and enhance communication with the public (Hooper-Greenhill 86). Setting up official websites is a common approach for museums. Besides websites, social network sites such as Facebook, Instagram and YouTube have also been utilized by museums to stay close to the public. Ku Chieh-kuang (顧潔光) and Lee, Young-yu (李永裕) have pointed out the use of social media as a marketing approach. Managing social media was not only about posting latest news of the museum but also communicating and interacting with visitors (Ku and Lee). Social media also allowed two-sided communication, which bring the visitors and museums closer. With new approaches, museums nowadays could create better visitor experience and boost visitor engagement as well. Therefore, museums nowadays should not be a mausoleum of historical knowledge, but a site to provide opportunities for visitors to experience and interact with the knowledge they can learn there. The first step to meet today’s young visitor half way is to use social media network. The most common social media site used by people, especially youngsters is Facebook. In “A Study of Business Models of Museum Facebook Fan Pages,” Han Tzu-Shian and his fellow researchers analyzed the

marketing performance of Facebook fan pages of museums. Han and his fellow researchers quoted Diaz's words to reveal the three keys to successful Facebook promotion: 1. Telling stories. 2. Making connection with reality. 3. Humanized and interactive. This research had organized a table on analyzing the management of Facebook fan page according to the context and interaction of the posts.

In order to draw visitors to come visit in their leisure time, museums are trying to create better full-scale visitor experiences, which is the key to seize visitor engagement. "[T]he overwhelming majority of museum visitors come during weekends and vacation periods" (Falk and Dierking 12). This indicates that what museums can offer visitors during their leisure time can be the key to boosting visitor engagement. According to Stephanie Weaver, there are six types of free-time emotional rewards of people: "social interaction, active participation, comfortable surroundings, challenging, new, or unusual experiences, opportunities to learn, a sense of doing something worthwhile (qtd. in Weaver 26)." These six types of goals can serve as guidelines for museums to their design of exhibitions, guide tours, websites, and fan page. If their designs can meet the expectations of potential visitors, museums can attract people and spread knowledge through their exhibitions.

After being drawn by the inviting information online (either on websites or social media), visitors might want to pay visit to the museum. Therefore, the interaction on-site and the "atmosphere" of the exhibition would be import. I used John H. Falk and Lynn D. Dierking's theory on the Interactive Experience Model to analyze National Palace Museum's and National Taiwan Museum's design for visitor engagement. According to Falk and Dierking, the Interactive Experience Model could be break down to the three: personal context, social context, and physical context. The personal context includes factors such as visitor motive and visitors' areas of interest. This helps to create an enjoyable museum experience, where the visitor can fulfill his

or her self-expectations of the visit while catering to their own timetable. The social context includes factors such as the age range of visitors, types of visitor groups (family, friends, students or individuals), and interaction with museum staffs/guides, all of which can affect the museum experience. Finally, the physical context explains how a museum visit is based on the freedom of each individual visitor, and how the architecture and “feel” of the museum itself affects the visitor experience. The physical setting of the museum alone has a profound impact on the museum visitor (1-7).

Methodology

National Palace Museum’s and National Taiwan Museum’s digital design for visitor engagement would be analyzed. Theories mentioned by scholars above would be used to analyze their designs and approaches.

First, the official websites of NPM and NTM would be analyzed according to the accessibility of exhibition-related information according to the critical question “Can I access clear, comprehensive information about the exhibitions and events at the museum without getting tangled in navigational knots?” from web designer, Alex Pirl (qtd. in Stack) .

Facebook post as means of promotion would be analyzed according to the successful factors Han pointed out in his research “A Study of Business Models of Museum Facebook Fan Pages.” Diaz’s three keys to successful Facebook promotion would be used as standards to see if NPM’s and NTM’s post on Facebook fit any of the keys, which include: 1. Telling stories. 2. Making connection with reality. 3. Humanized and interactive. For the first key, telling stories, it is important for Facebook fan page editors to come up with posts that are informative and absorbing.

On-set designs for boosting visitor engagement would be presented and explained. The designs would be analyzed based on Stephanie Weaver’s types of

free-time rewards of people, as well as Falk and Dierking's Museum Interactive Model.

National Palace Museum “Giuseppe Castiglione: Lang Shining New Media Art Exhibition”

Founded in 1925, National Palace Museum in Taipei (NPM) has been an important museum to the preserving and showcasing of ancient Chinese artifacts. Nowadays, NPM also invites guest exhibitions to be held in their exhibition halls. With development of technology and more focus on visitor engagement, NPM has adopted innovative exhibition methods to spice up their exhibitions. For instance, since the year 2002 NPM has been working on the “Digital Museum” project, which include setting up interactive web sites, establishing multimedia display systems, making interactive films/clips, and so on. In the year 2015, NPM presented the exhibition “Giuseppe Castiglione: Lang Shining New Media Art Exhibition.” The exhibition showcased an innovative way of presenting ancient art works, and created an interactive world full of multi-sensors which allowed viewers to experience a new form of art.

Being the most well-known public museum in Taiwan, National Palace Museum has been utilizing technology to spice up their exhibitions since the 2000s. In October, 2015, NPM put on the exhibition “Giuseppe Castiglione: Lang Shining New Media Art Exhibition,” which makes paintings “come to life” with new media installations.

Before going to NPM, visitors can search for related information about the exhibition. According to Web designer Alex Pilcher, a good museum website must provide easy access to “clear, comprehensive information about the exhibitions and events at the museum without getting tangled in navigational knots” (qtd. in Stack). When visitors search for information about “Giuseppe Castiglione: Lang Shining New Media Art Exhibition” on the official website of NPM, they need to click on the

button “Visiting” on the horizontal row. Exhibit info is presented in chronological order, alongside with pictures showing the feature on the exhibition. “Giuseppe Castiglione: Lang Shining New Media Art Exhibition” has its own website, which is well-designed with colorful background and clear links to different sub topics.

NPM also uses Facebook to promote this innovative exhibition. Before the exhibition started, NPM had already inform its fans about this up-coming exhibition (see fig. 1-3) and reached 277 likes and 32 sharing. During the exhibition period, the editor of NPM Facebook page keep their fans posted about once a week and would have direct interaction with the visitors commenting on their posts. The post on 9 Sep. 2015 informed the visitors of the topic, dates, and venue of the exhibition. Also, “Let us enjoy Giuseppe Castiglione’s artistic achievements (讓我們一同來欣賞郎世寧的藝術成就)” sounded inviting, which fit one of Diaz’s keys to successful Facebook promotion, “humanized and interactive” (qtd. in Han). Also, in the post on January 1 (see fig. 3), NPM added photos taken on-site, which allowed visitor to have a taste of what the actual exhibition would be. This acts as a good way of “making connection with reality” (qtd. in Han).

國立故宮博物院 National Palace Museum 在郎世寧 (含新媒體展) 相簿中新增了 1 張相片。
2015年9月23日 · 讚

下個月月初除了「神筆丹青—郎世寧來臺三百年特展」，也將同時推出運用新媒體藝術的【藝域漫遊—郎世寧新媒體藝術展】，以現代數位科技再現郎世寧經典作品，距離郎世寧300年後的當下，讓我們一同來欣賞郎世寧的藝術成就！

展覽預告：藝域漫遊—郎世寧新媒體藝術展
Coming Exhibit: Giuseppe Castiglione — Lang Shining New Media Art Exhibition
日期(Dates)：2015/10/08 起
陳列室(Gallery)：正館210陳列室 Exhibition Area I Room 210



Fig. 1



Fig. 2



Fig.3

In NPM's later post on Facebook for the exhibition, NPM announced their launching of their very first 4K animation "Animation: Adventures of the Mythical Creatures at the National Palace Museum," which took inspiration from Giuseppe Castiglione's painting "Great Universal Map," on their YouTube page, and the news was posted on Facebook as well (see fig. 4). Most viewers gave positive feedback, and said that the creative animation allowed them to learn something. This fits Marilyn Hood's concept of free-time rewards (qtd. in Weaver), for the animation allows viewers to learn something new.



Fig. 4

The on-site exhibition is likewise enhanced by digital animation; upon entrance, we are greeted by two animated virtual guides, Emperor Qianlong and a sister from 300 years ago. Each of the animated character displays a QR Code. Emperor Qianlong is the Chinese guide and the sister is the English guide. Visitors only need to scan the QR Code with his or her smart phone to obtain further information. This interactive guide let visitors have a taste of the exhibition before entering.

Thirteen new media devices in total are set in “Giuseppe Castiglione: Lang Shining New Media Art Exhibition.” Among all the devices, “Let’s Paint One Hundred Horses” allows any visitor to get creative with painting horses on tablets and leave their work of art on the big screen with Castiglione’s masterpiece “One Hundred Horses” as background. Also, the animation “Adventures of the Mythical Creatures at the National Palace Museum” is broadcast in the exhibition.

The special design of the exhibition uses black as their background color of the

venue, which enables the lights and effects from electronic devices to be seen clearly. With the colorful lights from “The Peacock Spreading Its Tail Feathers,” glowing columns of “Immortal Blossoms in an Everlasting Spring,” and music from Qing court in the background, the exhibition creates an engaging space for visitors to wander in the genius of Giuseppe Castiglione. According to what Falk and Dierking pointed out in the Interactive Museum Model, the physical context of this exhibition of NPM creates sense of invitation and interaction among visitors.

National Taiwan Museum “Engraving Prestige: Hand Tattoo of Paiwan, Laiyi”

Established in 1908, National Taiwan Museum (NTM) is the oldest museum in Taiwan. As NPM does to Chinese history, National Taiwan Museum has deep ties to the history of Taiwan. During the Japanese Colonial Era, NTM served as the place to showcase the glory of Japanese’s achievements in ruling Taiwan. Today the Museum remains the scale it had when it opened. The collection and research continue to focus on anthropology, earth sciences, zoology, and botany that are relevant to Taiwan. At present, NTM has also utilized digital aids and other interactive designs to create great visitor experience. Starting in October, 2015 and running till April, 2016, NTM presented the exhibition “Engraving Prestige: Hand Tattoo of Paiwan, Laiyi.” The exhibition combined the traditional historical displays, technological aid, and interactive stations, all of which aimed to help its visitors relate to the legacy of Taiwanese aboriginal tribe.

Though National Taiwan museum is not as grand and internationally famous as National Palace Museum, the comparatively smaller exhibitions NTM offers nowadays are both educational and interactive. Taiwanese history and culture are often the features in the exhibitions of National Taiwan Museum, and the exhibition “Engraving Prestige: Hand Tattoo of Paiwan, Laiyi” is no exception. From Oct. 2015

to 10 Apr. 2016, NTM had the exhibition “Engraving Prestige: Hand Tattoo of Paiwan, Laiyi,” revealing the stories behind Paiwan tribe female hand tattoo. NTM had started their promotion about the exhibition on their Facebook fan page in September, 2015, which attracted more than seven hundred likes by October, 2015. Besides posting pictures and photos, editors of NTM Facebook page also added a clip as a trailer for the upcoming exhibition in September, 2015, which triggered viewers to ask about the meaning of the tattoos (see fig. 5). The editor of NTM’s Facebook fan page often uses colloquial language to inform or remind visitors. Also, their Facebook post include photos taken on-site, which adds to the understanding of the “physical context” which Falk and Dierking pointed out.



Fig. 5

The welcoming page of NTM looks inviting, with photos and pictures of their exhibitions. Information of the exhibition “Engraving Prestige: Hand Tattoo of

Paiwan, Laiyi” could be found easily once visitors click the button “Exhibitions” and look for the post with the clear picture of hand tattoo. The simple step of finding related information about the exhibition fit Alex Pilcher’s propose of a good museum website. However, “Engraving Prestige: Hand Tattoo of Paiwan, Laiyi” did not have its independent website. In this exhibition, only a 24-second trailer was available on their official YouTube channel, though NTM holds many other clips in their YouTube Channel database.

Upon arriving at NTM, visitors could see its Greek-temple like architecture, which was designed and built during the Japanese Colonial Era. The seemingly Western architecture actually reflects the diverse history Taiwan has held. Located in the 2nd floor, the exhibition “Engraving Prestige: Hand Tattoo of Paiwan, Laiyi” took only the space of one exhibition hall and the area next to the grand stairs. The exhibition used the broadcasting of videos as the main means of display. Beside every comment board was a monitor showing the interview with people (mostly elders) from the Paiwan tribe. Each of the interviewees told the story of their hand tattoos, some of which were tattooed since the Japanese Colonial Era. The genuine interview clips attracted visitors, and absorbed some visitors to sit on the benches watching the whole clip.

In addition to digital aid, NTM had set up a section outside the exhibition hall here visitors could bring back the prints of tattoos of the Paiwan tribe by rubbing pencils against a sheet of paper. “Interactive display includes designs that can trigger senses of visual, audial, smell, and touch, which enables visitors to have a more interesting and educational experience during the visit” (qtd. in Zhang, chong- shan). The setting of the drawing section is an example of interactive design involving senses of touch and vision. Also, next to the drawing section were several glass cubes with Paiwan tattoos, in which visitors could put their hand as if the tattoos had been

on their hand.

Conclusion

National Palace Museum and National Taiwan Museum have utilized technology in their promotion and exhibition to boost visitor engagement, which give visitors easier access to related information and take visitors across time and space to experience ancient displays from a modern prospective. For example, NPM allows visitors to use smartphones and tablets to interact with ancient artworks. While NTM uses detailed interview clips of Paiwan elders to unveil the secrets behind their hand tattoos.

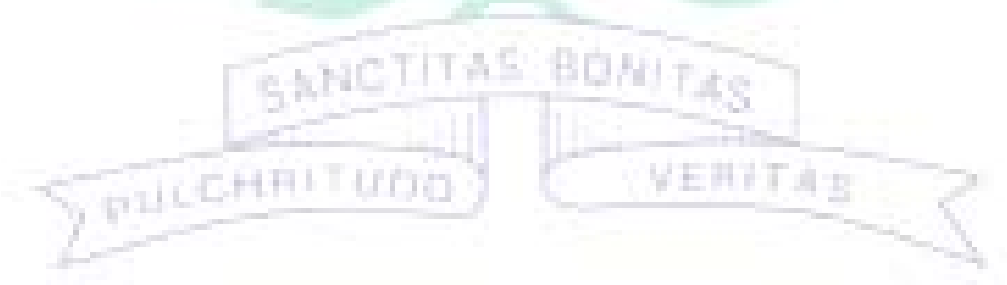
Being the head of public museums in Taiwan, NPM has higher budget and better venues to showcase exhibitions. The release of their first 4K animation “Adventures of the Mythical Creatures at the National Palace Museum” is the result of the collaborative work from NPM. “Giuseppe Castiglione: Lang Shining New Media Art Exhibition” is a good example of showcasing ancient artwork using new media and technology.

A smaller museum comparing to NPM, National Taiwan Museum also made applying digital aid in their exhibition “Engraving Prestige: Hand Tattoo of Paiwan, Laiyi” possible, though only “video showing” was used. Yet, NTM showcased an example of having hands-on interactive sections, like the tattoo drawing section together with technology-assisted display.

For both museums having user-friendly websites, Facebook fan pages, and YouTube channel, it is important to keep a balance between the usage of advancing technology and traditional ways for exhibitions. “[B]efore utilizing new media, museums should carefully assess the target audience and predicted outcome, and ponder on whether the usage is adequate,” stated Herminia Din, in the research “Museum Media and Technology: Five Thought-Provoking Questions.” In the fast

paced and entertainment-driven society, museums are “the essential institution for lifelong education” (Lee, Ging-fang). Having digital aids to boost visitor engagement is an innovative approach for museums and it could help visitors related to exhibitions more, like the example of NPM and NTM. Yet, the ultimate goal of museum exhibitions is to educate people and bring them closer to art or history. Besides the design of the museum, visitors should also be the initiative during exhibitions. Only when visitors themselves be active to receiving informative messages from the exhibitions can they benefit from the design for visitor engagement. Museum education expert George Hein stated that the real learning process comes from the experience of the learners, especially the experience of them participating in (qtd. in Lin Yu-pei). “As many of my colleagues point out, your background, who you are with, and the physical environment all contribute to making a museum visit meaningful for you,” said Hein (qtd. in Portner). In other words, with joint effort from the museums’ design of visitor engagement and visitors’ activeness to participate in, museum visits would be more joyful and meaningful.

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