How Museums in the Digital Age Become More Dynamic, Visitor Oriented?

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Abstract: Modern museums generate more active participation and conservation of cultural heritage. It develops quality of community lives. Due to this, there are considerable voluntary preservation trusts, heritage trusts, conservation trusts etc have emerged in the world. Museum Community acts as the storage, creation centre for the objects and events of the museum. Museum ownership keeps always within the community except for objects. Objects have no physical or emotional home. Museums borrow the object from the people in the community and it returns as short-term exhibitions for their awareness. Museums are playing major role in the education sector. Museums mainly encourage self improvement, self-respect, and self-actualization of its community. Museums are the places where people can preserve their cultural heritage and life blood of any community in this world.

Keywords: Changing role, special events, audience development, cultural tourism, cyber-museology, on-line learning

1. Introduction
With the advent of Internet, museums in the world redesigned their services to borderless world and become lifeblood of the community. Rapid developments of information and communication technologies have changed the traditional concept of museums. Modern museums are more powerful, dynamic and can reach their users without the restrictions of geographical boundaries. In this Internet era museums are fast moving to digital mode and can be accessed universally.

With the ever-growing electronic availability of information on both national and global networks, many museums have turned their attention to provide electronic access of their physical cultural heritage. Users do not have concerned with the museum hours of operation, and they do not have to physically go to the museums to access resources. Museum professionals are always at the forefront of the latest technologies in order to find new ways to optimize the management of museums and resources, and to provide improved services. In the past ten years, the web has broadened geographic access of the museums to include remote as well as local users, and electronic resources have made it possible to transmit materials around the world. The era of digital museums has arrived.

2. Changing Role @ Museums – Old Wine in New Bottles
Modern Internet era, museums provide wide range of information about collection, exhibitions and venue to its community through museum websites. Museum websites offer interactive online learning and flexible exploring to the cultural heritage. The role of museums and art galleries have changed and expanded their services beyond the traditional boundaries.

A frequent response by art galleries to the situation of changing roles and audiences has been mounting of special events to bring in increased visitors and to modernize their appeal and therefore competitiveness, Hooper-Greenhill 1994; Frey & Busenhart (1996). In the past, museums and art galleries have defended for the entertainment of visitors and now they have become establishment for learning and enjoyment. They should have clear idea of their target audiences to provide effective services. There are visitors who make general visits as well as special events. Therefore, research needs to concentrate visitor type, their motivation, why they visit, visitor needs etc. This type of research helps to organize special events to attract more audiences to the museums. And also most of the time visitors attend permanent collections. Permanent collections should be kept under care and preservation for future generations. Museums and art galleries can conduct programs to educate younger generation on the value of rare collections and to prevent conservation.

In this digital era, museums and art galleries cannot just exist as warehouses. Audiences do not like to gaze at exhibits and museum professionals should have to be actively engaged with them to make their visits more enjoyable and meaningful. To meet the budgetary constraints it is very important to widen their services to attract more visitors. Museum professionals can organize more educational, entertainment programs and shopping malls to make money. This helps to develop new relationships with their audiences, and attract more people to the museums.
Gone are the days when the arts could be isolated in ivory towers, and commercial considerations could be safely ignored. Art galleries and art museums now find themselves in market places where it is important to establish an image and a reputation in order to attract people to their doors, Digney (1989).

Rapid developments of information and communication technologies (ICTs) have changed the traditional concept of museums. Modern Internet era museums are more powerful, dynamic and can reach their users without the restrictions of geographical boundaries. Museums are fast moving to digital mode and can be accessed universally to sustain collaboration. The modern communication technologies have dramatically changed the history providing e-museums for the global society. It has become a new way to disseminate information among wider scholarly community faster than ever before. Digital museums fill the knowledge thrust regardless of social class or ethnic background. It facilitates an economical opportunity for scholarly communication without any geographical barrier. It provides e-learning facilities among users and gives better solution for the users, who never come to the museums focusing on distant education.

3. Special Events

This can be one time event or events that can be occurred time to time such as annual exhibitions, art exhibitions or events organized under special themes. These special events are not related to museums’ permanent collection and conduct for a short period to attract different groups of audiences that usually not visit museums. Once they make a visit, it will eventually become a habit of them. To attract wide audience, publicity should have to give using modern communication media like museum websites.

Museums and art galleries also can be used for conferences, entertainment; product lectures etc. and can generate income this way too. They can organize seasonal events, commemorative and holiday events to attract new visitors and also it helps to increase the ticket rates. Research has shown that special and temporary events are very productive way of attracting more people to the museums.

Special event at art galleries and art museums are often run to complement the institution’s programme, and include festivals, musical concerts, workshops, open days, gala days, demonstrations, and artists’ talks, Axelsen & Arcodia (2004). Galleries are also increasingly being utilized by businesses as a ‘new and unusual’ venue for conferences, client entertainment and product launches, McLean (1997).

Special events are carried out by various museums and art galleries throughout the world. It helps museum professionals to gain thorough knowledge and experience on special event development and implementation. And also these events help to prevent mistakes.

4. Audience Development

Research is being carried out constantly to develop audiences and modernizing museum programs to expand more participation. These researches are different from museums to museums according to the way they are carried out it. It may depend on timing of research, type of questions, type of visitors, etc. Research can be carried out various topics such as socio-demographics, comments on displays, prices, facilities, opening hours, support given by the museum staff, quality of presentations. This helps to increase the audience to a large extent. Museums should know their audience truly to provide effective service to them. Without knowing their audience any museum or art gallery cannot develop on their own. Therefore, it is very important to know their audiences well and make every attempt to know them better to attract more people. Creating more meaningful events help to encourage repeated visits of audiences. Museum professional should be concerned on why people visit to their museums, what is the purpose of their visits and what they are seeking in the museums. Museum staff can interview the visitors and learn from them what exactly they need. These visitor requirements can be varied from visitor to visitor. It improves quality of museum services and be able to provide exactly what their audiences need. This helps to increase more and more people day by day and such museums and art galleries get public recognition and will lead to the global recognition too while generating more income.

For various reasons people visit museums and art galleries. It can be –

- To enjoy
- To change daily routine
- To gain knowledge
- To experience sense of discovery
- Curiosity
- To demonstrate personal knowledge
- For emotional and spiritual enrichment
- Because someone recommended it, Axelsen & Arcodia (2006).
Audiences can be increased through the following events -

- Special exhibitions
- Family activities
- Performances
- Artist talks
- Educational Programs
- Annual events
- Outdoor market place
- Story-telling sessions
- Gallery tours
- Movies
- Cultural festivals

5. Cultural Tourism

It has been revealed that museums are now playing major role not only in the wider sphere of arts, but also within tourism and leisure. Museums cannot no longer sit back and expect that people will start queuing up. Their roles have changed to attract more audiences. Barry Lord defines cultural tourism as visits by persons from outside the host community motivated wholly or in part by interest in the historical, artistic, scientific or lifestyle/heritage offerings of a community, region, group or institution. When compare with other tourism activities such as eco-tourism, heritage-tourism, edu-tourism, adventure-tourism, agro-tourism that cultural tourism offers authentic resources to the community. Authentic resources can be defined as sites, services, or events which reflect local, regional or national heritage, Lord (2002).

6. Cyber-Museology

Museums are playing a great role to broaden the global cultural horizon. Museums have given to birth to cyber-museology which means developing electronic information to preserve and disseminate cultural knowledge and heritage and to create link between users and content. To meet the needs of constantly changing contemporary society, research are being carried out to identify visitor types, special events of those people attending the Institutions, Institutions’ permanent collections etc. Such research is helpful to provide efficient customer service to match their needs.

With the advent of WWW, audiences used to access museum web sites, museum databases and this type of audiences can be defined as virtual museum visitors. Virtual visitors access museum web sites for their studies and can be lived far from the physical buildings. They expect that the museum sites offer digital image collections which physically cannot accessible. Museum professionals should have knowledge on what their visitors expect from the museum web sites.

The role of museums was no longer to collect objects but rather to provide knowledge to the members of society, MacDonald and Alsford (1994).

7. On-Line Learning

Museums websites can provide information to the community beyond their limits which never done within their physical walls before the dawn of World Wide Web. Users can access wide range of information such as images, collection, content which are not possible to access physically. Delivering information through websites are more effective, low maintenance and at the same time can access to a wider community without any geographical barrier at any time in the globe. Web offers to use multimedia and databases which eventually facilitate for online extended learning. Museums can be sold their educational products online and it will help to raise funds too. Visitors can do the learning before or after the physical visit to the premises.

On-line activities can be –

- Whiteboard delivery
- Classroom activities
- Onsite activities
- Exhibitions
- Guided exploration of database resources
- Outreach projects
- Work submission area

8. Collaboration with Community
Museums publications, newsletters can be provided on-site downloading. Newsletters can be delivered via e-mail or can be downloaded on-site. Museums professionals, experts can be interviewed through online. Museum websites offer to ask questions using online form or visitors can access FAQs (frequently ask questions) for their general queries. And also museums can develop on-line shops with e-commerce capabilities to sell their products to people.

9. Conclusion
Museums are the places where people can preserve their cultural heritage and life blood of any community in this world. Museums can be considered as heritage institutions. In this electronic era, museums are actively involving with their communities. It helps to build their own past while facilitating for the awareness of contemporary issues such as famine, racism, AIDS, and drug abuse. Museums audiences can be scholars, teachers, students, museum staff; and museum visitors. Past times museums preserve their existing collection to satisfy its funding donor. But now the image has dramatically changed and it raised social awareness. In fact modern museums generate more active participation and conservation of cultural heritage. It develops quality of community lives. Due to this, there are considerable voluntary preservation trusts, heritage trusts, conservation trusts etc emerged in the world. Museum Community acts as the storage, creation centre for the objects and events of the museum. Due to degradation of global environment and existing wars everywhere in the world, museums are facing challenging situation. It is the responsibility of every citizen in the globe to protect their cultural heritage for future generations. Museums are connected with the communities and help them to build their own past. Museums have become yardstick to measure cultural richness of nations. Museums preserve and enhance cultural heritage. They initiate new programs to educate public on their great cultural assets.

References