An Empirical Sympathetic on Exhibition Design Types at the Museum

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ABSTRACT

A graphic designer is highly required to select the right visual elements in designing an exhibition design for a museum. This is to ensure an exhibition is successful in contact with the visitors. In the case of exhibition design for the Malaysian National Museum, a multidisciplinary process used as an integrated approach by working with various disciplines. By examining the design process of the existing exhibition for the Malaysian National Museum, this paper revealed extensive types of exhibition as an example for comprehending the complexity of an exhibition design for museum in Malaysia.

Keywords: *Exhibition Design, Interface Design, Museum Studies*

INTRODUCTION

Museum also known as an entity that dedicated to public service and, consequently, their relationship with their audience is the core of interest. Moreover, museum commonly is classified into five basic types which are natural history and natural science, science and technology, history, art and a recent kind of museum is the virtual museum. Within this, many extensive researches have been conducted on museum audiences or visitors, their characteristics, needs and expectations (Classen, 2007; Smith & Tinio, 2008; Bickford, 2010). However, the way interface design towards new technologies in the museum environment impact museum audiences" experiences has only recently started to be covered.

For the discipline of Interface Design for the museum, the use of interactive technologies towards effective's interfaces in the exhibition environment is a rich area of research as these technologies are significantly changing the way visitors experience their museum visits (Lorenc, Skolnick and Berger, 2007). In this sense, considering the different perspectives on the current role and concept of museums, this research paper aims to examining the design process of the existing exhibition for the Malaysian National Museum and further extensively understands on the type of exhibitions and its interface design characteristics at the Malaysian National Museum. The complexity of an exhibition design discovered in this paper as an example for comprehending for museums in Malaysia.

THE BACKGROUND

The Malaysian National Museum

The National Museum is the premier museum in Malaysia and is one of the most famous museums in Southeast Asia. Preliminary, it was officially opened on 31 August 1963, the National Museum has undergone constant changes in terms of exhibitions, organizational structures and activities. The size of National Museum is 362 feet long and 124 feet wide. This museum building is built with two large murals on the front to reflect the tradition of national arts and culture. The architecture of this National Museum building is supported by 26 pillars concrete that have been renovated to retaining the characteristics of traditional Malay palaces. The concept of 26 columns is based on a combination of 13 columns on the east and 13 piles on the west side of the building, which symbolizes Malaysia is formed from 13states.

This National Museum houses four permanent exhibition galleries featuring Malaysia's history and rich cultural diversity. In particular, the first gallery known as "*Balai A*" shows the Malaysian culture of people, the second hall called "*Balai B*" exhibits Malaysia's historical

art effects, archaeological discoveries, traditional handicrafts, Malay and indigenous weapons collection. The third gallery or called '*Balai C'* was exhibited various collections of national nature such as insects, mammals, fish and others. Beside '*Balai C'* is the forth hall called '*Balai D*' which showcases materials that related to the Malaysian's economic activities such as industry commercial and public transport. Meanwhile, the center piece of the National Museum is used as a place to hold a temporary exhibition. Figure 1 shows the floor plan of the gallery at Malaysian National Museum.
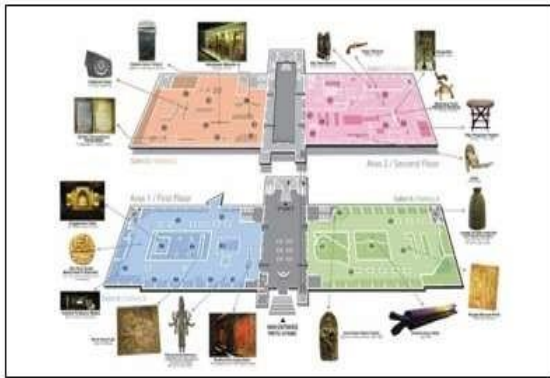
Figure1. *The floor plan of four galleries at the Malaysia National Museum*

Types of Museum Exhibition Design

According to Lorenc, Skolnick and Berger (2007), exhibition design is an environment that communicates the content through medium of graphic design. Moreover, Demir (2009) has added that exhibition design as a new branch to its design categories. This new branch has many types and it is can be varied from public centre's, visitor centre's, institutional centre's, trade shows, parks and heritage centre's, art galleries, showrooms, traveling exhibitions to museums.

On the other hand, peoples are normally recognized the term of museum as a place or a building that stores old materials. But this traditional view moreover has been increasingly growing as the UNESCO through a professional body called ICOM (International Council of Museums Members) has given a new definition for the museum. Accordingly, the museum has been defined as a permanent and non-profit institution, in which it is always open to the public for the purpose of research and education.

As an educational exhibition purpose, the museum visitor to an exhibition is free to wander through an environment rich in sensory stimulation, where attention to one object or message may compete with another (Bit good & Patterson,1993). And as we all know that the traditional functions of the museum are including an activity such as collecting, researching, translating, documenting, preserving, and exhibiting. Nevertheless, as technology rapidly changing, the role of the museum has changed considerably. Moreover, museum concept also changed from Object Oriented (which focusing more on services pleasure) to Information Delivery (concentrating on enjoyment and edutainment). Figure 2 shows the changes from Object Oriented to Information Delivery.
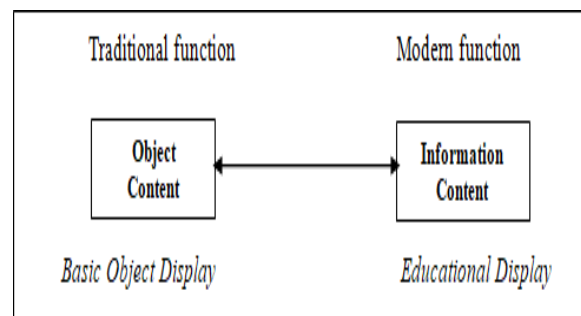

Figure2. *The changes role of museum from Object Oriented to Information Content Delivery*

One of the main functions of a museum is organizing and displaying the selected items into a meaningful story (Neal, 1987). Towards this role, museums also have been eager to innovate in the application of digital technology to the display of museum content with the aim of enhancing visitor experience (Tallon & Walker, 2008). As Hooper-Greenhill (1994) stated that museum through an exhibition design must communicate statement with the audience and transmit the information technologically, so museums must find ways of presentation collections of museums. So, the vital role of the exhibition designer is to focus on the story of the exhibition. The secondary focus, Erkmen (2004) points will be on using the space, displays, materials and the harmony of the design elements with these. Hence, the understanding of an exhibition as an interface design of the collections content is highly required by all parties involved at the museum.

Talking about an interface design of museum exhibition, the appearance or display between the visitor and the museum exhibition is called interface design. In this sense, the exhibition works as a medium with an effective interface for the collections, depots and research. Thus, a visit to an exhibition counts as a good use of leisure time, and some exhibitions are almost

overrun with visitors. In relation, interface design of an exhibition at the museum are divided into four namely presentation interface, conversation interface, navigation interface and explanation interface. Within this understanding, for museum exhibition, a broad literature established there are four common types namely permanent exhibition, chamber exhibition, temporary exhibition and travelling exhibition. All these types are based on duration of time be exhibit, space involved and scope of exhibition. The summary of it as per shows in Table1below.

Table1. *Types of exhibition from broad literature*

	Permanent exhibition	**Chamber exhibition**	**Temporary exhibitions**	**Travelling exhibitions**
Duration Time	It may stand for 20-30 years	A small-scale is play that is open for a short time period such as a few hours, a day or a week.	Which last for a few Weeks or months. *(The duration depends on the availability of the works on loan, the number of potentials visitors, the schedule of the exhibition facilities, etc.)*	A two-day exhibition They can be on loan at a venue for years, or else be open for a month at each Venue.
Space and scope	Museum staff generally, consider an exhibition outdated after five to ten years. Nevertheless, financial reasons sometimes keep permanent exhibitions in place for years.	Such exhibitions are organized for conferences, trade shows or festivals	The space sometimes is based on the content.	They are like franchises: their content and form are more or less constant, but items from the museums that temporarily house them may be added to the display.

In this article, the exhibit unit (display) is defined as a combination of two factors: exhibit components, and the configuration or relationships among these components. Figure 3 illustrates these two factors comprising an exhibit unit. An exhibit unit is made up of one or more of the following components: (1) exhibit objects; (2) a communication media (presentation) and (3) text information to be communicated (it is involving the use of language). Therefore, all of these three components do not necessarily have to be included in all exhibitions. For example, some exhibits include only media and text information (e.g., an exhibition through interactive computer). Exhibit objects might comprise a painting, a sculpture, a piece of furniture, or also a manuscript. Therefore, the exhibit objects it all depending's to the types of exhibition material. While, according to the viewpoint in this article, an exhibit object is defined as a visible or tangible thing that does not present text information. For example, art museum commonly emphasis paintings and sculpture as an exhibit objects due to visitors generally preferred.
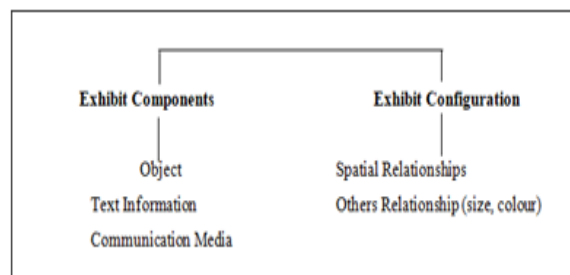

Figure3. *The Exhibit Unit*

While others museum more preferred a visible thing such as an interactive computer to emphasize the meaning that objects communicate to visitors. Moreover, to understand the impact of exhibits object on people, we must understand which characteristics of exhibit objects; text information and communication media have the strongest impact on visitors. Table 2 provides a list of a few of the characteristics for exhibition components that are likely to have a significant impact on visitors.

Table2. *Characteristics of Exhibit Components*

Exhibit Unit	**Characteristics**
Object	Size Motion Shape Texture Color2 or 3 Dimension Sense modality Material

Text Information	Written or Verbal	
	Text material	Typeface Point size of text Word length Contrast between letter and background Question for heading to increasing visitor reading
	Text configuration	Style Sentence complexity Vocabulary
Communication Media	Label panels Flip or slide panels Diagram panels Video disc Video/movie Slides Computers Hand-held exhibit guides Audio tape Museum guides Geographic maps	

Types of Exhibition Design at the Malaysian National Museum

Analysis on the document provided by the Exhibition Unit, Department of Museum Malaysia, and exhibitions could be characterized by content, genre, venue, or the type of audience to focus on. In term of exhibitions types at the museum, it is classified into 4 types of exhibition performs by the Department of Museum Malaysia counting Permanent Exhibition, Temporary Exhibition, Special Exhibition and Mobile Exhibition. All that exhibitions moreover have a duration of time show or display, organized and aim to communicate a message through engaging their audiences in meaningful and compelling interactions. The duration of an exhibition varies from a very short time (one or two days) extent up to months, years and decades. The summary of exhibition types by Department of Museum Malaysia as per shows in Table 3.

Table3. *Types of exhibitions*

Permanent Exhibition	Temporary Exhibition	Special Exhibition	Mobile Exhibition
• Hall A: Pre- history gallery • Hall B: The Malay Kingdoms • Hall C: ColonialEra • Hall D:Malaysia Now	Themed temporary exhibition	Which last for a few weeks or months.	Outreach show

Towards these 4 types of exhibition, analysis on the report of exhibition documents from 2016 to 2018 provided by the Exhibition Unit, Department of Museum Malaysia, a number of exhibitions were listed according the exhibition types. Table 4 show the list of exhibitions by categories types. The analysis also revealed that most of the exhibition organized by the Department of Museum Malaysia is temporary and special exhibition. However only one mobile exhibition in 2017 namely *'Khabar Dari Antartika'* which aims to increasing the Malaysians awareness about Antarctic and climate change. The penguin statue of the Emperor species is also exhibited in this exhibition. This exhibition was held at the centre gallery of the National Museum, then moved to the Nature Museum, then at Zoo Negara and ended up at Raja Tun Uda Library, Shah Alam.

Table4. *List of exhibitions from 2016 to 2018*

	Temporary Exhibition	Special Exhibition	Mobile Exhibition
2016	• 1 Malaysia, ICerita • Silang Budaya • Wayang Kulit • Estetika Tembaga dan Perak • GambusSerantau	• Tenun Songket ASEAN: Satu Rumpun, SatuWarisan • IstanaCzech	
2017	• Wayang Kulit Nusantara: Simbloisma disebaliklayar	• RajaKita • Kartun danKita • 40 tahun HubunganMalaysia- China • Kuala Lumpur SukanSEA 2017: Bangkit Bersama • Ikon Fesyen Retro:SALOMA	• Khabar Dari Antartika
	• Khazanah Kapal Karam: Rahsia yangterbenam	• PEKING MAN-Tapakwarisan Zhoukoudian	• SKELETON

2018		• Hari Kebangsaan 2018: Selaut Pengorbanan Segunung Harapan	• Kenali Muzium • Sajian Masakan Tradisional

In brief, the process of designing an exhibition, it commonly involved an activity from a design concept through to a physical appearance which is three-dimensional (3D) exhibition. Designing an exhibition also is a collaborative process which integrating the disciplines of architecture, graphic design, interior design, and content development to developing a communicative environment that 'tell a story' to audiences. It clearly showed that the designer of an exhibition is not alone during the process, there are many experts collaborating in the process such as a graphic designer, an art historian or an audio-visual designer. Through embedding those activities of innovative, creative, and practical solutions, an exhibition usually involve and engage a visitor and influences their understanding of a subject (Lorenc, Skolnick and Berger, 2007).

Primarily a design language and a concept had to be found for the museum's exhibition design. As Erkmen (2004) stated that the museum exhibition design has to have its own language, this indicating whether it is temporary or permanent exhibition and has to have a relationship with the materials, lighting and the design concept. Thus, the clear understanding on the types of exhibition is a must for those who involved in the development of exhibition.

Exhibition Components within Exhibition Types at the Malaysian National Museum

Museum in Malaysia was originally known as a picture school because of it's widely used as an exhibition method. Museum exhibition moreover are typically in conventional approaches where art effects normally be exhibited in the exhibition chamber and detailed with appropriate captions to explain the history and function of the artefacts. However, the latest technology developments have produced a new media approaches from electronics to photonic using 3D and 5D applications at museums or exhibition galleries all over the world.

In term of exhibits unit, The Malaysian National museum have been practicing the exhibits components including exhibit objects, a communication media (presentation) and text information. Most of the exhibition reports showed on how the exhibits components been using in the exhibition. Analysis on the exhibit objects that involved with the exhibition material, most of the exhibition were defined clearly showing the material in the exhibition. It included an appropriate size of material involved, the color and variety of 2D or 3D object.

Analysis of the text information component of an exhibition is more complex than exhibit objects and communication media. Since the educational messages of an exhibition are presented in either written or auditory format, the use of language is a critical part of the exhibition's impact. The text information component deals with typeface, point size of text and the word length. In short, it referable as a language, both in terms of how it is presented and its meaning. Therefore, a good design and graphics layout can strengthen the text but cannot take the place of it. For the exhibition organized by the Department of Museum Malaysia, the impression of the text, the grammar and the content were prepared by art historians and academicians who are specialized in linguistics. So, with that well-prepared text, the type face used in most exhibitions is considerable easy to be read by the visitors. In term of characteristics of contrast between letter and background, most text used in the exhibitions show the difference space between text letter and the background.

An exhibition unit also involved communication media components. This referred to the label panels towards exhibit objects, video, slides, geographic maps and Computers Hand-held exhibit guides. As most of the exhibition presented through a traditional way, these characteristics is the most unable to analyze within the sample of exhibitions. The summary of analysis as per given in Table 5.

Table5. *Characteristics of Exhibit Components applied in the previous exhibition by Malaysian National Museum.*

Exhibit Unit	Characteristics	Applied in Exhibition by National Museum
Object	Size Motion	/
	Shape Texture	/
	Color	/

		2 or 3 Dimension Sense modality Material	/ /
Text Information	Written or Verbal		/
	Text material	Typeface Point size of text Word length Contrast between letter and background Question for heading to increasing visitor reading	/ / / /
	Text configuration	Style Sentence complexity Vocabulary	/
Communication Media		Label panels Flip or slide panels Diagram panels Video disc Video/movie Slides Computers Hand-held exhibit guides Audio tape Museum guides Geographic maps	/

CONCLUSION

The main target audiences of a museum are the visitors. The aim of a museum exhibition is to communicate and reach the audience. The exhibition design and interface design are the initial tools of communicating. Briefly, exhibition design is all about building a bridge between the viewer and the exhibited through effective interface design.

Towards this, the satisfied visitors are the most important references for a museum. To design an exhibition is a big experience with its opportunity that gives the chance to graphic designer to collaborate with other disciplines. In fact, it can be understood that designing exhibition is a multidisciplinary work.

In this sense, the understanding on exhibition design particularly types and its characteristics are the most notable issue to be looking more by the people who are involving in the process of designing exhibition.

Whether it traditional way or interactive, an exhibition particularly for the museum required effective interfaces in ensuring the visit not only gathering information but possibilities of experiencing it.

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