



# Museum Learning Experience: Turning visitors as participants

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## Abstract

Public participation such as visitor satisfaction was directly related to experience of the effectiveness learning and discovery also involvement in motivating learning behaviour at the museum. These will enhancing museum in direction shaping a sustainable future as the museums as institutions for lifelong learning. The study reports the current status of a study focusing on Research Framework (RF) towards an adult visitors' learning within informal education setting through museum exhibitions that are a part of on-going doctoral research programme that correlated with the museum management in Malaysia.

**Keywords:** visitors' experience and learning; public participation; informal learning; lifelong learning.

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## 1.0 Introduction

Museums are offer informal learning preferences to visitors with various learning experiences through visitors participation in engaging exhibits that facilitated visitor learning. Findings reveal that the participatory of visitor in engaging exhibits will make them purposefulness (they feel involved), next motivate meaningful results for visitors' 'learning outcomes'. This benefits museum management a set of very practical strategies and tools for designing exhibits for sustainable lifelong learning in museums. In defining museum, Adler (2004) and Ahmad (2013), agreed with International Museum Association and many museum scholars and expertise had established with the decision of International Council of Museums (ICOM) in 1984 was elaborated that museums are a non-profit making, permanent institution in the service of society. The definition of a museum has evolved, in line with developments in society. ICOM updates this definition in accordance with the realities of the global museum community. In addition to that, with its development and once open to the public, ICOM elaborated the role of museum further as the institution that which acquires, conserves, researches, communicates and exhibits for the purpose of study, educational and enjoyment, material and evidence of people and their environment (Vienna, 2007). Today, a visitor may develop such traits as seeing, grasping, analysing, questioning, extracting clues related to life from what they see (Unal, 2012).

A key focus of the study was on how adults visitors describe learning through turning visitors' as participants in engaging exhibits and what benefits their learning experience. This adaptation in this paper only highlights a preliminary synthesis of the sourcing narratively, identifying trend or gap with limited graphical displays towards museum learning on informal learning contexts focused on solitary adults' visitor in static exhibition approach versus interactive technology exhibition setting in Malaysia.

## 2.0 Visitor/Participant Development

Visitor development is a vigorous process of improving services to existing visitors and reaching out to new participants. According to Anderson (2005), the development of visitor means "enrich the visitor experience by helping them to learn more and deeper for their enjoyment of what the museum has to offer. Visitors' development is about breaking down barriers in all its shapes and forms as well as to visitors who participated in activities that they considered worthwhile.

Visitors as participants are clearly a goal for many museum education practitioners, and increasingly an outcome expected by museum administration that is to shape museum audiences that are motivated, interested, and actively participated with exhibition content, then practitioners and researchers must first define the ways to design and build those opportunities (Wood and Wolf, 2008). Kotler and Kotler (1998) argue that successful museums need to "provide multiple experiences: aesthetic and emotional delight, celebration and learning, recreation and sociability". In delivering multiple experiences that are satisfying and engaging museums will meet specific needs of different target groups and also help individual audiences in their self-development process.

Black (2012), has views that museums should be to change the approach of museum visitors, adapting them from one-off visitors into regular users who perceive themselves as visitors to active participants in the work of museums. The process can transform them from visitors to the participants to ensure that their visit is enjoyable, providing opportunities for social interaction, soft supports, with no involvement of pressure and reflection to encourage people to revisit the museum. As an educational environment, museums also promote the learning experience and can fulfil their duties fully when visitors are facilitated to have good experience.



Fig.1. Illustration of the flow diagram screening on Visitor / Participant Development in Visitor Development Model perform a role of museum functions responsible in execute highly developed learning in the activities

Sources: Adapted from Walzl (2006).

### 3.0 Methodology

The methodology of this research is based on a triangulation method that offers amalgamation of qualitative and quantitative strategies provides multiple perspectives and the most in-depth understanding of the experience in an exhibition. Qualitative methods on their own are often deliberated anecdotal, and not credible, valid and reliable. Quantifiable information (about motivation for a visit, the effectiveness learning when engaging exhibition and satisfaction levels) can serves as a context for more descriptive and interpretive data. Evaluators working with more ethnographic, naturalistic approaches have considered triangulation technique as an important way to control bias an establish validity (Soren, 2001). This paper only

uses qualitative methods, which refer the literature review in the purpose the identification of issues from the perspective views of museum scholars and experts towards creating direction in developing museum exhibitions in Malaysia for public learning. The study was on how adults visitors describe learning through turning visitors' as participants in engaging exhibits and what benefits their learning experience and informal learning outcomes. Majority of literature review is based on western scholar in knowing the scenario of museum learning within adult visitors. It would be required to the further enhance the robustness of this research. This will be the foundation idea towards a study on solitary adult visitor studies in Malaysia because there is a limited study on museum learning through exhibition using static versus interactive technology in the local context.

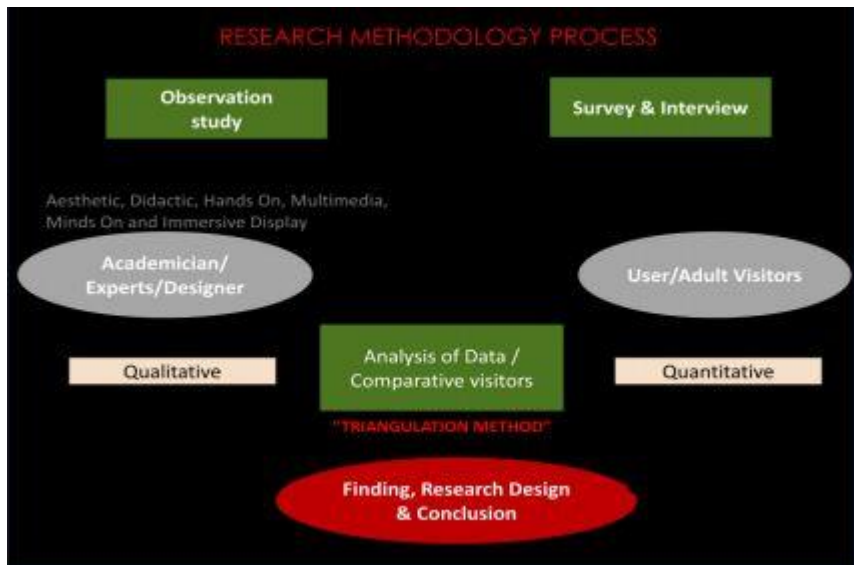


Fig.2. Illustration of the flow diagram showing on a triangulation method that offers a amalgamation of qualitative and quantitative strategies provides multiple perspectives and the most in-depth understanding of the experience in an exhibition activities that developed learning.

Source: Ahmad, S. (2013).

### 3.1 Research Limitations

Owning to parameters set by a research grant, where funds are only for the site for local site activities (secondary data gatherings) within Malaysia. Therefore, all such information and data on other countries in the current paper relies heavily on secondary data. This study was only focus on how solitary adults visitors describe learning through adapting visitors' as participants in engaging exhibits and what benefits their learning experience and informal learning outcomes. Encouragement given by Griffin (2012), Kelly, Savage & Hatherly (2005) proved the necessity of research such as which this paper is based on, uncovering learning

through gathering of information through informal setting exhibition techniques that will give virtuous impact to the quality of future exhibitions.

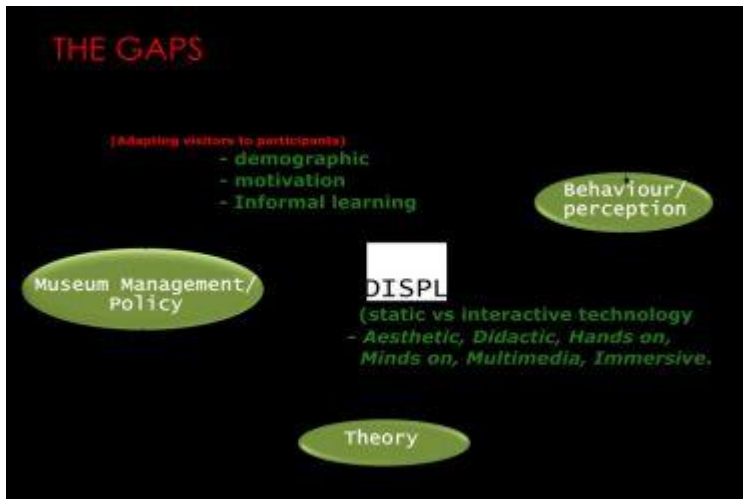


Fig.3. Illustration of the flow diagram showing on Adapting Visitor to Participants towards their participation in an exhibition activities that developed learning.

Source: Ahmad, S. (2013).

#### 4.0 Literature Review

There were researchers who backboneed in museum learning participated on exhibition setting where their input in contribution their research publication and their guidelines for best practice to future museum exhibition such as Museum Association, Museum Department, Exhibition Consultants, Exhibits designers and others who related to the development of museum learning. As Universiti Teknologi MARA strives to achieve its aspiration as the leading university in Malaysia, there has been a momentous thrust in the development of academic sourcing via online journals (Bajunid, et.al., 2012). This can be performed if one to just Google museum learning and exhibition connected with SAFE Premier, Science Direct, SciFinder Scholar, Scopus, Wiley On-Line Library and many Digital Library whereby there exist numerous journals and books from International Museum Association such as American Museum Association and International University which involved a research on museum education or museology. Some journals and books which interested were subscribed on-line from the distributors.

#### 5.0 Findings

## 5.1 Type Museum Learning and Learner (Visitor)

Evidently, learning that always happen in a museum and divided into three categories namely formal learning, self-directed learning and informal learning. This research scope only focuses on informal learning which involved an unplanned casual encounters that lead to new insights, ideas or conversation.

Howard Gardner developed a theory on the dissimilar ways that individuals learn and process information, which called the multiple intelligences theory. According to Gardner's theory, visitors might show well-built learning skills in any of seven different style categories that summarized in the following tables (Table 1):

Table 1. Summaries Howard Gardner Theory of Learning that called 'Multiple Intelligence Theory' in the learning process to perceive information.

Howard Gardner Theory of Learning, 1983		
Types of Learner	Behaviour of Learner	Participating with Display
1. Visual Learner/Spatial Learner  Artists, photographers and architects often exhibit this learning style.	Enjoys by looking at pictures, watching movies, drawing, designing and creating three dimensional representations. Activities that appeal to the spatial learning style include sketching, graphing, creating charts and mapping out stories.	Learns best by visualizing, dreaming, working with colors and pictures.
2. The Linguistic Learning	Enjoys with reading, writing and telling stories, debating, reading aloud, drama and creative writing.	Learns best by saying, hearing and seeing words
3. The Logical/Mathematical Learner	Enjoys doing experiments, asking questions, exploring patterns and relationships	Learns best by classifying, working with abstract patterns, categorizing.
4. The Musical Learner	Enjoys singing and humming, listening to music, playing instruments.	Learns best by rhythm, melody, music.
5. The Kinetic Learner	Enjoys moving around, touching and talking.	Learns best by touching and moving, processing knowledge through action.

6. The Social Learner	Enjoys being with friends, talking to people and being part of a group	Learns best by sharing, cooperating, interviewing and comparing.
7. The Solitary Learner/Introspective Learner	Enjoys working alone, pursuing their own interests	Learns best by self paced instruction, reflecting and individual projects.

Source: Dawson, M. (2006), Lord Academy, Museum Seminar, Malaysia National Museum, Kuala Lumpur; [http://www.ehow.com/about\\_5367145\\_howard-gardner-learning-style.htm#ixzz2icl21m6R](http://www.ehow.com/about_5367145_howard-gardner-learning-style.htm#ixzz2icl21m6R)

## 6.0 Discussion

The growing demands of visitors who have been performed as participants by those who have earlier felt is excluded from what museums and heritage site (museum collection) have to recommend. The high quality requirements demands by visitors. The revisited visitors are increasingly experienced and educated. Visitor is no longer to be passive recipients and change to active participants that want to be involved, to questions, to take parts as equals, and to received as high standard of service as would be offered at any type of leisure site. Dawson (2006) has emphasized that within the museum environment, the learner needs to be an active participant in the process and not a passive recipient. Learners construct their own understanding of the world by reflecting on their experiences and interpreting what they see, hear and feel to the objects in what exhibition displays are offered.

### 6.1 Participation Benefits to Visitor Needs

According to Walzl (2006) research found that Morris, Hargreaves and McIntyre (2001), a company in Manchester, specialising in visitor research and arts marketing with their comprehensive study, they developed a chart based on a hierarchy of visitor participation or engagement which reflects Maslow's pyramid (1970) of visitor needs. Their model is a useful way of segmenting visitors by their main motivations classification. The categorization has been grouped into four key drivers:

- socially-motivated visitor
- intellectually-motivated visitor
- emotionally-motivated visitor
- spiritually-motivated visitor.

Each of them are hierarchical, starting with the socially motivated visitor who generates about 48% of visits to museums, the intellectually-motivated visitor approximately 39%, the emotionally-motivated visitor make about 11% and the spiritually-motivated visitor concerning 3%. For galleries, the numbers are quite different with 18% of the spiritually motivated visitors. The higher visitors move up the hierarchy the more fulfilling and rewarding the museums visit was. Thus, the aim of good programming with promoting mediation devices (audio guides, interactive terminals, smart phone, augmented reality, etc.) and

promote visitor engagement with adapting them from visitors as participants seems to be a trend to museum environment (Refer Fig.4).

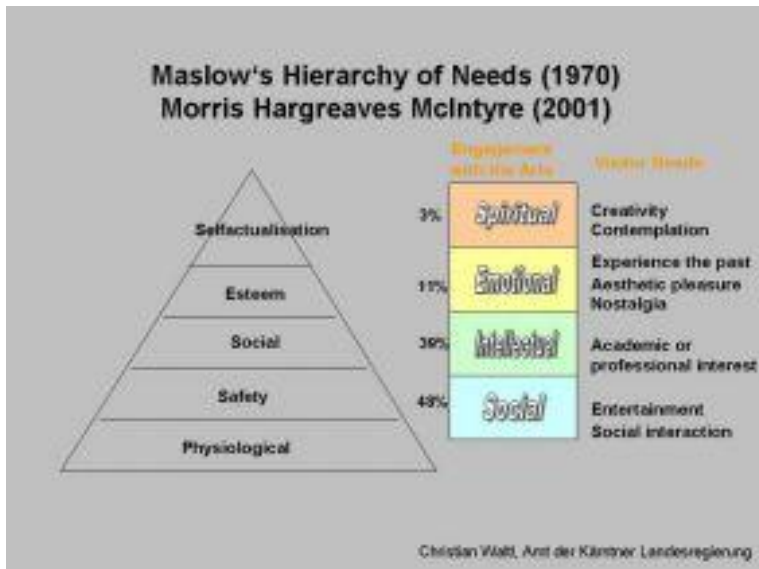


Fig.4. Illustration of Needs Hierarchy after Maslow (1970) and Morris, Hargreaves, McIntyre (2001),  
Sources: Adapted from Wallt (2006).

Table 2. Summaries type of Participation Benefits to Visitor Needs is identified in exhibition engagement could offering visitors effective learning with multiple experiences and evolved valuable of learning outcome.

Participation Benefits to Visitor Needs Based-on Selinda Model

Category of Visitor Needs	Engagement	Behaviour of Participation	Type of Exhibition Technique
1. Socially-motivated visitor	Social engagement or social interaction	Touching, arguing, gesturing, debating, making eye contact, laughing, standing in close proximity to one another and mirroring posture.	Hands – On, Minds – On, Multimedia and Immersive Environments.
2. Intellectually-motivated visitor	Intellectual engagements	Observing, hypothesizing, comparing, analyzing, contemplating,	Hands- On and Minds-On



		recognizing, wondering and so forth.	
3. Emotionally-motivated visitor	Emotion engagements	Sense of beauty, respect, wonder, peacefulness, special privileges, caring and attraction, amusement, love, sympathy, surprise, concern, fear, disgust, anger and embarrassment.	Communicated without any intellectual mediation and a visceral response to objects – example medieval history.  Aesthetic and Didactic
4. Physical-motivated visitor	Physical engagements	Pushing Button, crawling through a simulated cave environment, kicking, pouring sand on floor and manipulating object include spending time with exhibits, reading a label, watching someone else engage, standing still and being contemplation.	Hands- On and Immersive Environments, Multimedia, Aesthetic and Didactic

Source: Perry D. (2012).

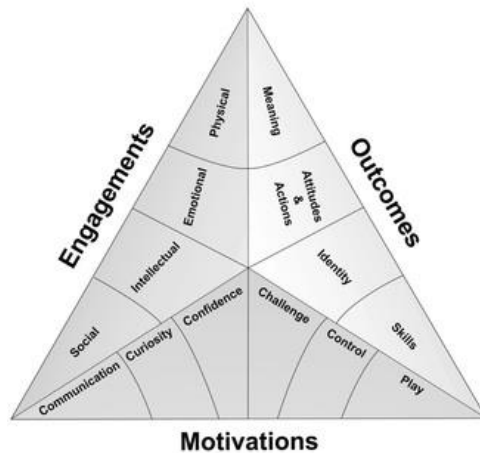


Fig.5. Illustration of The Selinda Model of Visitor Learning.

Source: Perry, D. (2012).

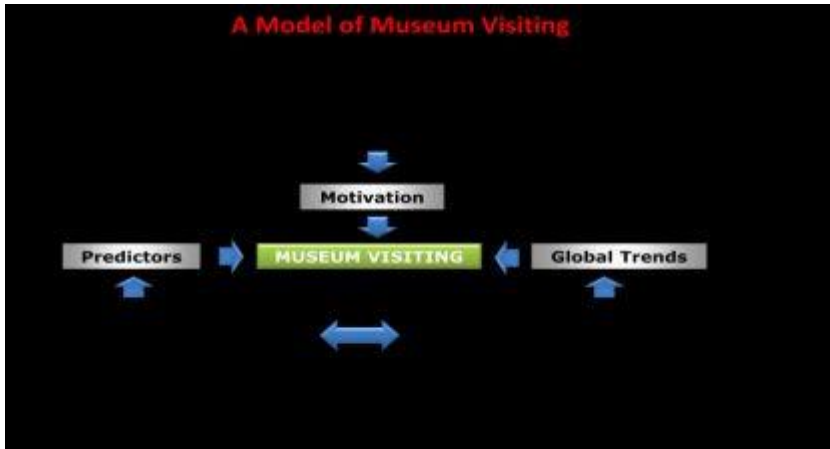


Fig.6. Illustration Model of Museum Visiting identified adapting visitors in participating actively promote motivation to the visitor visiting. (After Hood 1996; Kelly 2001).

Source: Walff, C. (2006)

In the comprehensive study by Hood (1996) and Kelly (2001) is clear identified that the motivation for a museum visit must be seen in a wider social context (Refer Fig.6). Meanwhile, Perry explores the six motivations that adapted from The Selinda Model of Learning (Refer Table 3). They're described in terms that will make the most sense in the context of hands-on exhibits, although the fundamental principles can be applied more broadly as summarized as following:

Table 3. Summaries type of Participation Benefits to Visitor Needs is identified in exhibition engagement could offering visitors effective learning with multiple experiences and evolved valuable of learning outcome.

Motivations Based- on The Selinda Model of Learning

Types of Motivation	Engagement	Behaviour of Participant (Outcomes)
1. <b>Communication</b>	Cater a range of abilities	encouraging social interaction and collaboration between visitors within social groups .
2. <b>Curiosity</b>	Stimulate perceptual and intellectual curiosity	Pique interest by leaving some things unsaid – while too little information can be frustrating, if things are too obvious then curiosity can wane.
3. <b>Confidence</b>	motivated to learn in situations they feel "safe and smart".	Success breeds a feeling of success and a "series of "mini successes"

4. <b>Challenge</b>	confidence and competence	an appropriate level of uncertainty and challenge.
5. <b>Control</b>	have control over our environment is an important facet of the psychology of visitor experiences.	feel in control when they have appropriate choices and the power to influence what happens in the environment.
6. <b>Play</b>	ability to engage the imagination is an essential ingredient of free-choice learning.	most satisfying, and enjoyable experiences, playful with ideas, thoughts and all over

Sources: Perry D., L (2012), Forrest. (2013).

## 7.0 Conclusion

Museums are centres of knowledge and the role to provide an educational experience is the key objective in serving their visitors. The impressive halls, real objects or comprehensive exhibitions do need visitor participatory in order to be rightfully called museums caring for their culture and for future generations (Waltl, 2006). Successful museums have to be proactive in planning their audience development strategies. Black (2005) and Waltl (2006), refers to audience development planning as a “long-term challenge” and argues that in setting out to develop revisited visitors and new participants, we are actually seeking to change human behaviour.

The strategic plan such turning visitors as participants as a framework help to devise reasonable goals, allocate resources to agreed priorities and at the same time reflect the overall mission and professional standards on the care of collections.

## 8.0 Recommendation

Currently with museums increasing their audiences and ‘revisited visitors’ also updating museum visitors to participants and trying to make collections more user-friendly to the public, more sophisticated - technically as well as methodically - interpretation devices become an important part in the process of participatory the visitor. Tools such as audio guides, computer interactive, multi-layered text labels, as well as specially trained mediators are helping to make the museums experience more worthwhile for visitors by linking the visitor experience with the collection displayed and initiating a communication between the visitor and the object. Turning visitors as participants in an interactive experience is much more likely to result in a positive museums experience and enhance more visitors revisited and a visit to sustain life-long learning. Together they bring a meaningful learning outcomes of participants and given museum management a collection of very viable strategies and tools for designing exhibits to the museum in Malaysia.

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