

## A REVIEW ON THE EXHIBITION STRUCTURE TOWARDS THE IMPACT OF UNDERSTANDING MUSEUM EXHIBITION MESSAGE

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### ABSTRACT

Initially, museums served as a gatekeeper to history, heritage and culture. Over time, the museum are now becoming as one institution that conserves, communicates and exhibits artifacts for the purpose of education and evidence of people and their environment. Moreover, museum has become an institution which helps in generating and transferring of knowledge. Thus, it is crucial for the museums to identify what factors that can contribute in delivering the message successfully to their audience. One of the factors that contribute to the successful of exhibition message is exhibition structure which includes display cases, lighting, color, graphics, text and flow of the message. It was proven that, the exhibition structure have significant effects towards the audience. Therefore, this paper discussed the visitor's perceptions on exhibition structure that helps in facilitating the audience to understand the exhibition message. In brief, this paper will help the policy maker and the museums to come up with attractive presentations of the artifacts to gain more visitors to visit museums and at the same time to deliver the message effectively to their audience.

**Keywords:** *museum, exhibition structure*

### INTRODUCTION

#### **Background Summary**

Cultural attraction has become one of the factors that affect tourism in the country (Ahmad & Badarulzaman, 2005 cited in Lau & Badaruddin, 2010) and museum is one of the niche products of Malaysias' tourism industry. To illustrate, 3.1 million have visited Malaysias' museums in 2016 (Utusan Malaysia, 2017). Initially, museums served as a gatekeeper to history, heritage and

culture. Over time, the museum are now becoming as one institution that conserves, communicates and exhibits artifacts for the purpose of education and evidence of people and their environment (ICOM, 2010). Museum has now become one influential institution that generates and transfer knowledge by making their collections accessible and useful within the community. However, in facing these developments, museums are now facing new challenges. It is crucial for the museum to attract, create curiosity and entertain their visitors so that the visitors experiences can be enhanced (Belcher, 1992). Thus, to overcome the challenges, museum should collaborate with museum abroad, share collections in travelling exhibitions, create public programs with school curriculum, outreach activities can be conducted. Nevertheless, by providing a very exciting multi-sensory experience with an opportunity of a first-hand encounter with real objects, the visitors will feel pleasure, entertained, and satisfied. In the same way, interesting exhibition will provide an opportunity to the visitors to explore the affordances and experience of objects and artifacts (Lehn, Heath & Hindmarsh, 2001). Despite this, museums in Malaysia has been found out to have an absence of interior design strategy and suitable solutions for elderly visitors (Elottol & Bahaudin, 2011). Perhaps, this is the reason why the community are not interested in visiting the museums. A study done by Mokhtar & Kassim (2011) revealed that the respondents have no interest in museums. Thus, it is suggested that the museums need to conduct a comprehensive enhancement in several aspects of the exhibition namely the concept and design, display, lighting and the use of interactive technologies (Elottol & Bahaudin, 2011). With regard to this, museums should think freely or out of the box to move from the classic way of museum and come out with attractive presentation of artifacts to draw more visitors (Bernama, 2005). Therefore, this paper aims to determine the visitors' perceptions of the exhibition structure in a museum. The review of exhibition structure will be further explained in the next chapter.

## **Exhibition Structure**

Museum communication has been widely discussed by the scholars. However, research on exhibition structure and its relationship with the impact are scare (Nur Afni Binti Halil, Hashima Mohaini Mohammad, Nor Ez-zatul Hanani Binti Rosli, & Audrey Anak john, 2018). Exhibition structure in this paper was referring to technical structures such as display cases, lighting, color, graphics, texts, labels and flow of the message. Research revealed that technical structures does have an impact towards the visitors. Visitors can understand better the exhibition message if the exhibition structure was implemented accordingly (Nur Afni Binti Halil et al., 2018). Thus it is important for the museums to execute a successful exhibition as it can help to deliver the right message to the visitors. Furthermore, as museums can be a social setting, it is crucial to design the exhibition by maximizing the engagement in order to allow for the creative imagination (Goulding, 2002).

In a museum, all objects or artifacts will be placed in display cases. Therefore it is important to plan how should the display cases been placed. Kaplan (1999) in his study, found out that display

cases that had been placed accordingly to the size and detail will increase its readability among the visitors. Furthermore, enough space between the cases will make people using wheelchairs move comfortably (Durbin, 1996). Equally important in exhibition structure is lighting. Lighting also will provide aesthetic experience and enable the objects to be outstanding and turn out to bring different moods towards the visitors (Nur Afni Binti Halil et al., 2018). In addition to this, visitors' perception can be enhanced from the directional lighting and thus it helps to facilitate visitors understanding on the exhibition message (Museum & Galleries Commission (1995).

Another structure that contribute to the exhibition success is colors. Colors are one of the important element that will attracts human eyes. A great combination of colors used in the exhibition will makes the artifacts looks stunning and enable creates intimate and relaxing environment (Belcher, 1991). In the same way, graphics play a significant role in exhibition success whereby the graphics can help the visitors to focus on the attention on the displays. Thus, graphics should be attractive, lively, and simple but impressive (Jones, 2001). With regard to texts and scripts, Lord & Lord (2002) suggested that text should be brief and simple such as short line and simple wording. It is apparent that simple text will be appreciated by the visitors and lead them for further reading as they enjoy the informal and rhythmic text (Gilmore & Sabine, 1999). Next, flow of the message is one of the essential point in museum exhibition. The exhibition message should be created like a storyline as it will help the visitors to be engaged with the message and thus understand the exhibition message. Carliner (2001), suggested that the key element should be presented by relating it to the visitor's experience and thus it will refine the subject of the exhibition and key topics can be identified. As well as other structures, label or panels should be placed accordingly as it will helps in facilitating better understanding towards the exhibition message. Writing labels should be designed in question form so that it will lead to curiosity and therefore it can encourage participation from the visitors. In addition to this, simple text will allow the mediation of information (Ciofli & Bannan, 2002). Besides that, Kelly (2006) stated that labels should be placed near to the objects to avoid confusion between the other objects. To summarize, the literature shows that well-planned exhibition structure will improve the cognition of visitors mind and educational attainment. In addition to this, suggestions and recommendations by the scholars proved that it will provide numerous advantages to the visitors.

## **METHODOLOGY**

This study adopted quantitative survey method as it is reliable and statistically significant to the entire population (Potabenko, 2002). Therefore, to determine the perception of exhibition structure, survey questionnaire has been distributed to visitors at Islamic Arts Museum Malaysia. The analysis will be analyzed using SPSS (Statistical Package for Social Science). The survey was divided into two parts which is Part A (demographic profiles) and Part B (related to exhibition structure). The first part, questionnaire was in multiple questions while in second, the answer based on

5points of Likert scale from 1= strongly disagree to 4=strongly agree. A total of 364 respondents involved in this study.

## FINDING AND ANALYSIS

### Demographic characteristics of the respondents

By referring to Table 1, majority visitors of the Islamic Arts Museum Malaysia is Malaysian with percentage of 54.1% and 45.9% of the visitors are non-Malaysian. Pertaining to visitors' age, most of the visitors aged above 43 and 31-42 years old with percentage of 23.4% and 19.5% respectively. On the other hand, teenagers aged between 13-18 years old were the least visiting the museums with percentage of 9.3%. Meanwhile, the rest of the museum visitors were aged 19-24 years old, 25-30 years old and 31-36 with percentage of 15.9%, 15.7% and 16.2% respectively. The respondents have been asked their frequency of visiting the museum and it shows that majority of them visited museum for the first time with a percentage of 60.7%. There was only 3% of them have visited the museum within 6 months. From the finding, majority of the visitors have spent between 31-60 minutes in the museum. With reference to the Table 1, 32.7% of the respondents spent around 40-60 minutes, 27.5% spent 31-45 minutes visiting the museum, and 23.6% spent more than 60 minutes. There was only 16.2% of the visitors who spent time in the museum between 15-30 minutes.

Number of respondents (%)						
Citizenship	Malaysian			Non- Malaysian		
	54.1			45.9		
Age	13-18	19/24	25-30	31-36	37-42	43 and above
		9.3	15.9	15.7	16.2	19.5
Last time visited museum	Within last 6 months	Within last year	1-3 years	More than 3 years a go	Never (This is my first time)	
	3.0	6.9	10.7	18.7	60.7	
Duration in the gallery	15-30 minutes	31-45 minutes	40-60 minutes	More than 60 minutes		
	16.2	27.5	32.7	23.6		

Table 1: Distribution of respondents' demographic at Islamic Arts Museum Malaysia

### Perception on the Exhibition Structures

Exhibition structure does play a role in facilitating better understanding on the exhibition message. The structure includes display case, lighting, color, graphics, texts, labels & panels and message flow.

### Display Case

Display case is one of the exhibition structures that can facilitate better understanding of the exhibition message. From the results in Table 2, mean score for display case is quite similar. Display case was placed with attention to the shape, size and detail to increase label readability (3.55). Visitors also agree that display case in IAMM is readable (3.40), the arrangement of display case have enough space to move comfortably (3.50) and design of the display case is interesting (3.40). This result shows that the respondents agreed that display case also play a role in facilitating the visitors to understand the exhibition message with overall mean score 3.46.

<b>Display case</b>	<b>Mean scores</b>	<b>SD</b>
Each case placed with attention to the shape, size and detail to increase label readability.	3.55	0.53
Each case is readable.	3.40	0.53
Display case have enough space to move comfortable.	3.50	0.56
The motifs or design of the display case is interesting.	3.40	0.55
<b>Overall</b>	<b>3.46</b>	<b>0.54</b>

Table 2: Distribution of respondents' perception on display case at Islamic Arts Museum Malaysia

### Lighting

Lighting is one of the elements that can help the visitors understand the exhibition message. With overall mean score which is 3.47 (Table 3), this finding show that lighting really facilitates the visitors understanding on the exhibition message. Lighting in Islamic Arts Museum Malaysia actually provides a pure emotion toward the exhibition (3.50) and even creates a positive mood (3.45). Lighting can also create conducive mood (3.51) and help the visitors to see clearly the exhibits (3.49) while the low light is actually can creates a warmth environment (3.42) which help the visitors understanding the exhibition message.

<b>Lighting</b>	<b>Mean scores</b>	<b>SD</b>
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The lighting can provide a pure emotion toward the exhibition.	3.50	0.55
The lighting creates a positive mood.	3.45	0.55
The lighting creates a conducive mood.	3.51	0.55
The lighting can help me see clearly the exhibits.	3.49	0.55
The low light levels of lighting creates a warmth environment.	3.42	0.58
<b>Overall</b>	<b>3.47</b>	<b>0.56</b>

Table 3: Distribution of respondents' perception on lighting at Islamic Arts Museum Malaysia

### Colour

Colour not only can attract visitors to focus on the exhibition but it also can facilitate visitors in understanding the exhibition message. Table 4 shows that visitors of Islamic Arts Museum Malaysia agree that colour play a role in facilitating them in understanding the exhibition message. Colour that been used in the exhibition is looks fascinating (3.35), creates an intimate environment (3.38), creates a relaxing environment (3.40), encourage them to give attention to the exhibit components (3.33), restful to the eye (3.44) and help them to engage to the exhibit (3.44).

Due to similar mean score, it proved that colour do facilitates them in understanding the message. With 3.39 of the overall mean score, it shows that Islamic Arts Museum Malaysia is very particular in giving their visitors the best experience by making the lighting as best as they can.

Colour	Mean scores	SD
The colour used in this exhibition looks fascinating.	3.55	0.54
The colour in this exhibition creates an intimate environment.	3.38	0.52
The colour in this exhibition creates a relaxing environment.	3.40	0.56
The colour encourage me to give attention to the exhibition components.	3.33	0.54
The colour is restful to the eye.	3.44	0.54
The colour is helping me to engage to the exhibit.	3.44	0.56
<b>Overall</b>	<b>3.39</b>	<b>0.54</b>

Table 4: Distribution of respondents' perception on colour at Islamic Arts Museum Malaysia

### Graphics

Graphics do play a role in the museum and exhibition and that is why Graphics Department in the Islamic Arts Museum Malaysia had work hard to give the best to the visitors. Graphics not only attract the visitors but graphics can also facilitate the visitors in understanding the exhibition message.

As shown in Table 5, the visitors agreed that graphics in the exhibition at Islamic Arts Museum Malaysia is attractive (3.33), lively (3.25), increase their motivations to see the exhibitions (3.25), simple (3.50), impressive (3.33), conveyed the message of patriotism (3.41), conveyed a feeling of patriotism (3.44) and even help the visitors to focus on the displays (3.36).

Table 5 shows that overall mean score for graphics is 3.37 and it proved that graphic is one of the structure that contribute in facilitating the visitors to understand the exhibition message.

<b>Graphics</b>	<b>Mean scores</b>	<b>SD</b>
The graphics is attractive.	3.33	0.58
The graphics is lively.	3.25	0.57
The graphics increase my motivation to see the exhibitions.	3.32	0.57
The design is simple.	3.50	0.53
The design is impressive.	3.33	0.58
The design conveyed the message of patriotism.	3.41	0.55
The design conveyed a feeling of patriotism.	3.44	0.55
The design helps me to focus attention to the displays.	3.36	0.58
<b>Overall</b>	<b>3.37</b>	<b>0.56</b>

Table 5: Distribution of respondents' perception on graphics at Islamic Arts Museum Malaysia

## **Texts**

Text is another exhibition structure that can help the visitor to understand the exhibition message. As shown in Table 6, it shows that visitors agreed that text used in the Islamic Arts Museum Malaysia facilitates them in understanding the message. Visitors agreed that text in the museum is brief (3.57), simple (3.54) and help them to understand the message (3.47). Short lines text that been used in the exhibition encourage them to further reading about the subject matter (3.52) and level of speech that been used helps them to achieve high level of competencies. With the overall mean score are 3.52, this finding show that text used in the exhibition at Islamic Arts Museum Malaysia facilitates the visitors in understanding the message.

<b>Texts</b>	<b>Mean scores</b>	<b>SD</b>
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The text is brief.	3.57	0.54
The text helps me to understand the message.	3.47	0.54
The text used is simple.	3.54	0.56
Short lines encourage me for further reading about the subject matter.	3.52	0.53
The level of speech helps to achieve high level of competencies.	3.50	0.55
<b>Overall</b>	<b>3.52</b>	<b>0.54</b>

Table 6: Distribution of respondents' perception on texts at Islamic Arts Museum Malaysia

### Labels

Labels is one of the structure that can facilitate the exhibition message to be conveyed their intended message successfully to the visitors. As there is not so much difference, it shows that the labels are one of the elements that can facilitate better understanding the exhibition message (Table 7). Visitors agreed that labels in the exhibition were placed according to their sightlines so that they see clearly the labels (3.43). Visitors also agree that labels enhance their view and grab their intention (3.35). In addition, labels in the exhibition are also informative (3.35), simple and brief (3.40).

<b>Labels</b>	<b>Mean scores</b>	<b>SD</b>
The labels placed with according to my sightlines so that I can see it clearly.	3.43	0.55
Labels can enhance my view and grab my attention.	3.35	0.57
The labels are simple and brief.	3.40	0.55
The labels are informative.	3.35	0.58
<b>Overall</b>	<b>3.38</b>	<b>0.56</b>

Table 7: Distribution of respondents' perception on labels at Islamic Arts Museum Malaysia

### Message Flow

Another element which can facilitate better understanding on the exhibition message is the message flow. Table 8 shows that visitors of the exhibition agreed that each information in the exhibition relates to the theme highlighted (3.58), the flow of information was done according to their respective themes (3.54) and the message is interesting with nice flow of information (3.57).

Therefore, with the overall score of 3.56, it is proved that message flow can help the visitors in understanding the exhibition message

<b>Message flow</b>	<b>Mean scores</b>	<b>SD</b>
Each of information relates to theme highlighted.	3.58	0.54
The flow of information was done according to their respective themes.	3.54	0.53
The message is interesting with nice flow of information.	3.57	0.52
<b>Overall</b>	<b>3.56</b>	<b>0.53</b>

Table 8: Distribution of respondents' perception on message flow at Islamic Arts Museum Malaysia

## CONCLUSION

The objective of this study is to determine the perceptions of visitors towards the exhibition structure. From the literature, exhibition structure does have an impact towards the visitors. Therefore, well-planned exhibition structure can help the museums to communicate the exhibition message successfully. This study revealed that message flow is the highest score which means that it really facilitate the visitors in understanding the exhibition message as it helps the visitors in understanding the subject matter. Presenting the message through referential content, present and explain concepts, categories, themes or other information which can define and interpretive framework will help in creating the value of rhetoric which then facilitates the visitors in understanding the exhibition message (Kratz, 2011). In order to achieve the museum objectives and to be such an impressive museum, museums should continuously strategise their message and exhibition structures so that the message can be transmitted successfully and give positive impact to the visitors. Thus, this study would help any other museums, policy maker, exhibition organizer, government, or any other parties that related to exhibition on the exhibition element which can help them to convey their intended message to the visitors successfully. In addition, Kementerian Penerangan, Komunikasi dan Kebudayaan Malaysia and Jabatan Muzium Malaysia would include this research to their policy and provide training on message delivery and structure to facilitate better understanding and have positive impact to the visitors.

Furthermore, this study can help the museums to come up with attractive presentations of artifacts or historical exhibits to draw more visitors in order to convince the visitors to appreciate what they should appreciate.

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