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“RETURNABILITY” AS A CRITERION OF A SUCCESSFUL MUSEUM

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The modern trends and innovations are described by the museum experts in order to propose a solution, how success can be evaluated. Why they fix some necessary innovations in order to evaluate effectiveness? Supposing the new facilities and services attract people and help increase income, the managers control the number of innovations they do to analyse a museum as a big system with input, output and feedback. Strictly speaking, the magic of big numbers was described by Marie-Louise von Franz. The ability to manage numbers gives power. It is easier to believe figures than to make logical conclusions. The change of museum communication paradigms resulted in decreasing of the influence of cognitive component on the success of the museum. That means the success of a museum does not depend on the innovative approaches or modern trends like the increasing number of multimedia in exhibition halls, it is influenced by the attractive atmosphere leading to a desire to come again with friends or with the family. Targeting at the young visitors creates/attracts the constant museum audience for the following decades. Since the generation Y was revealed as the mainstream of the museum public, the suggestion is to use in designing web-sites the methodology clear and understandable to the generation Y.

Key words: museum, effectiveness, museum communication, returnability.

«ВОЗВРАЩАЕМОСТЬ» КАК ПОКАЗАТЕЛЬ ЭФФЕКТИВНОЙ РАБОТЫ МУЗЕЯ

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Современные тенденции и инновации используются экспертами при описании музеев в попытках оценить их успешность. Почему они фиксируют именно эти нововведения для оценки эффективности? Предполагая, что новые объекты и услуги привлекают людей и помогают увеличить доход, чтобы проанализировать музей как большую систему с вводом, выводом и обратной связью, менеджеры контролируют именно их. Строго говоря, магию больших чисел описала Мари-Луиза фон Франц. Способность управлять числами дает силу. Легче верить цифрам, чем делать логические выводы. Изменение парадигм музейной коммуникации привело к снижению влияния когнитивной составляющей на успешность музея. Это означает, что успех музея не зависит от инновационных подходов или современных тенденций, таких, как увеличение количества мультимедиа в выставочных залах, на него влияет привлекательная атмосфера, приводящая к желанию снова приехать с друзьями или с семьей. Ориентация на юных посетителей создает/привлекает постоянную музейную аудиторию на последующие десятилетия. С появлением нового поколения виртуальное пространство стало похожим на реальное, и для оценки эффективности управления музеем могут быть применены методы веб-аналитики: количество вернувшихся посетителей и коэффициент конверсии.

Ключевые слова: музей, эффективность, музейная коммуникация, возвращаемость.

Magic of big numbers

The modern trends and innovations are described by the museum experts in order to propose a solution, how success can be evaluated. They propose some system of markers like a form with check-boxes. Completely filled form brings an excellent mark. Is it correct? Of course, it is not. Just opened, with all modern conveniences a museum will be not yet popular simply because it is too young. It takes time to get excellent marks.

The first battle between the museum society and bureaucratic system resulted in the conclusion on the state level that museums are not commercial institutions and do not provide services, their income cannot be managed and control in the same way as a factory does it because it is not the main goal of functioning. The museums have influence on their visitors and finally they change them. General Director of the State Hermitage Museum, academician Mikhail Piotrovsky defined the role of museums in the modern society: “a Museum forms a complex man without whom our civilization and particularly our country have no future”.

Why they fix some necessary innovations in order to evaluate effectiveness? Supposing the new facilities and services attract people and help increase income, the managers control number of innovations, they do to analyse a museum as a big system with input, output and feedback. Strictly speaking, the magic of big numbers was described by Marie-Louise von Franz¹. Ability to manage numbers gives power. To believe figures is easier than to make logical conclusions.

What does the museum effectiveness mean?

Some basic features are now obligatory for any museum: interactivity (special activities giving personal experience to a visitor, social inclusion (accessibility for any visitors with disabilities), digitalization of information services (including virtual tours and smart apps). The programs for volunteers can be considered as a particular case of the so-called participatory museum.

All these features help to increase the number of visitors—a typical marker of effective management. But this quantity depends on the season, the day of the week and has some limits according to the security rules. Uniform distribution of visitors inside of the building is one of the most important problems for a big museum. Too many visitors in high season of White Nights and summer time, when the museum works all days non-stop, and low attendance in autumn, or in morning time comparing with evenings. Hospitality and minimal comfort provide attractiveness of a place. Some years ago in Heureka, the Finnish Science center (Helsinki), my friends and me had a chance to visit an interactive exhibition sponsored by the Ministry of internal Affairs of Finland. The title was not very original “Who killed Sarah?” (reference to Twin Peaks etc.), but we spent an hour and a half trying to solve a puzzle by all possible criminalistics means (sponsored by the Ministry of internal Affairs of Finland). The exhibition space presented various places, laboratories and possibilities to pick up information about a criminal event. Any visitor could become a policeman and conduct the investigation. Unfortunately, I did not have enough time to finalize my “mission”; our children did it earlier. Being one from a museum I tried to notice and remember all useful ideas instead of simple enjoyment.

Positive emotions for all members of family—it is the Heureka style. Of course, that was not an art museum, but the goal of the exhibition was absolutely different from aesthetic, it aimed at giving visitors positive cognitive experience.

¹ *Franz M.-L. von, Hillman J. Lectures on Jung's Typology. Dallas, 1982.*

In 2005 in Rome during the “White Nights”—cultural event when all museums are open for public—I tried a system helping disabled people “to see” houses in Pompeii with the help of special stylus transferring form of the architecture in resistance of device in hands. “Touching the architecture”—that was really impressive. I have never met anything similar again. Up-to-day “VR-AR” (virtual reality-augmented reality) is a tribute to fashion. On the one hand, VR coming from the game industry is very expensive for the moment. On the other hand, people having the latest version of smartphones and tablets are not numerous, internet connection, Wi-Fi is not everywhere, even mobile connection can be inaccessible, e.g. in Russia. VR allows public good experience and could make a museum more accessible with the help of advanced technologies, translating knowledge to the blind or having deaf-mutism visitors. The museologists fix the changing of the model of communication, particularly digital communication². Museum communication involves visitors in discussion. The success is possible only if a curator speaks the same language with public or allows some ways of translation. The Concept of an exhibition should be transferred to conscience of visitor and reflected in his own experience. In case our visitors are able to receive and transfer a message to others, this shared message defines so-called success in mass media.

Hypothesis

While every December the State Hermitage Museum is celebrating its days, the museum staff is occupied with special exhibitions, events, meetings and, of course, one day of free entrance. Once, the necessary words were pronounced by security officer influenced by total museum hospitality of these days: “Welcome again!” Only two words, but they express the main idea of success. If you like something, you want repeat it again: to see again you favorite film, to return to some nice place with friends in order to fix your positive experience and share with others. We do not take in account the cases when visit was planned according to the principle “must see”.

In the very beginning the visitors of the Imperial Hermitage were well educated and did not need special explanations except simple comments of the museum guardians. After the October revolt in 1917 the Hermitage museum had to adapt the exhibitions for the new type of visitors according to state requirements. Any state museum had to be simple, homogeneous, clear for understanding, full of obvious information³. Guided tours gave visitors no chance to have personal opinion or some positive emotions as a result of communication. According to the statistical data of 1970s for the 3170000 visitors the ratio organized visitors/individuals was 1:4 with the trend of increasing of the individual visitors⁴. Foreigners constituted 280 000, that is less than 10%. The most interested audience at that time—18–34 years old⁵; and we can believe they continue to visit the museum in our days—25%⁶. They are the basic consumers of the text comments and printed materials.

² *Leshchenko A.* Empowering digital museum audiences to foster museum communication // ICOFOM Study Series. 2012. Is. 41. P. 237–244.

³ *Сундиева А.А.* История одной декларации // Вестник Томского университета. 2007. № 300 (1). С. 77.

⁴ *Губчевский П.Ф.* Посетители Эрмитажа // Сообщения Государственного Эрмитажа. 1974. Т. XXXVIII. С. 70.

⁵ Там же. С. 72.

⁶ *Харитонова Т.Ю.* Социально-психологические особенности посетителей в ситуации музейной коммуникации (на примере Главного штаба Государственного Эрмитажа). Автореф. дисс. канд. психол. наук. СПб., 2018. С. 17.

Nowadays more than 4 millions of visitors arrive annually⁷. The State Hermitage museum organizes over 320000 various guided tours. This way the ratio organized visitors/individuals is equal to 1:10. The foreign tourists prefer summer time and arrive by ferries. The most part of visitors come to the museum in low season and belongs to the permanent audience of the museum exhibitions. They are following all museum news and get information anyway including the Internet (web-site of social media)⁸. Social media also demonstrate stability of their followers⁹. Strictly speaking, the amount of virtual visitors is also impressive—2120373¹⁰ but nobody writes, if they are unique or returning. Perhaps we talk about a single visit aiming to get information on actual exhibitions, tickets or opening hours. Unlike the time of the 20th century when the linear growth of the number of visitors demonstrated the efficient management, now we have only one criterion of success—returnability.

Methodology of estimation

Since the generation Y was revealed as the mainstream of the museum public, the suggestion is to use in designing web-sites the methodology clear and understandable to the generation Y.

The special instruments of web analytics, e.g. Google-analytics or SpyBOX, propose to fix returning visitors and we are able to do it for the museum web-sites¹¹. For the web-site or blog these data are not absolutely transparent¹². A unique visitor of a web-site correspond to a single visitor of a museum, who arrived once with school tour, or only because “everyone must see”. The modern model of museum communication suppose the returning visitors, coming several times per year for the lectures, special events or opened exhibitions even they are not ‘Friends of the museum’ (special category of donators). Really effective museum work allows a museum to attract the permanent visitors, because they are ready to visit museum in low season. There are different methods: evening hours, specially opened rooms, one-day exhibitions, lectures, and other special events.

For the commercial companies the coefficient of conversion plays a big role too: ratio of the achieved goals (purchase or order) to the total amount of visits. There are museum sites offering the electronic tickets, but the main goal is not only to buy a ticket but to visit a museum and get personal impressions. A returning visitor shows the first impression was positive, that’s good. What are their next goals? In that case an advanced sociological survey aiming at their formalization can be useful

Conclusion

The change of museum communication paradigms resulted in decreasing of the influence of cognitive component on the success of the museum. That means the success of a museum

⁷ Отчет Государственного Эрмитажа. 2017. СПб., 2018. С. 160.

⁸ Харитонова Т.Ю. Социально-психологические особенности посетителей в ситуации музейной коммуникации. С. 17.

⁹ Гук Д.Ю., Харитонова Т.Ю., Богомазова Т.Г. Музей в современном информационном пространстве // Евразийский союз ученых. 2015. № 12–5 (21). С. 21.

¹⁰ Отчет Государственного Эрмитажа. 2017. С. 160.

¹¹ Гук Д.Ю., Определёнов В.В. Методические аспекты анализа и контроля эффективности информационных ресурсов музея в сети Интернет // Информационные ресурсы—футурологический аспект: планы, прогнозы, перспективы. СПб., 2014. С. 127.

¹² Рамирос К. Возвращаемость посетителей и анализ ожиданий аудитории блога. См. по адресу: <https://altblog.ru/recurrence-visitors-analysis-audience-expectations-blog> (ссылка последний раз проверялась 21.12.2018 г.).

does not depend on the innovative approaches or modern trends like the increasing number of multimedia in exhibition halls, it is influenced by the attractive atmosphere leading to a desire to come again with friends or with the family. Targeting at the young visitors creates/attracts the constant museum audience for the following decades. With the advent of a new generation the virtual space became similar to the real one and the methods of web-analytics can be applied for the estimation of the efficiency of the museum management: the number of returned visitors and coefficient of conversion.

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