

Chapter 44

Social Identity Seeking and Sharing as a Creative Activity of Art Consumers

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ABSTRACT

The chapter offers an overview of dynamic processes changing the role and place of museums and art galleries in our societies. After many decades of being static displays of things, they are now changing into places of interaction and communication on a variety of levels. The text is presenting some current patterns of developing a sense of collective belonging and also it is looking at the communication processes between institutions and visitors with a focus on the role of digital technologies and social media in the process of preserving, narrating, and sharing the object of art and beauty. The purpose of this chapter is to provide a framework for further research on digital practice linked with contemporary social identities and art institutions that are a significant social institution with public value and the ability to link the local cultural heritage global context.

INTRODUCTION

Museums and art galleries are permanent institutions in the cities. If they are created by transformation of historic buildings, they very often place the local narratives into the global context. If they are built in the recent period, they can be regarded as products of contemporary design and architecture style. As a rule, they play a crucial role in the formation of visual identity and image of the place where they belong. Museums transfer values, opinions, and sense of beauty between generations and locations. In recent years, a major reform in the design of public museums has taken place in many countries. In the era of new media, the process of redefining relationships between visitors and objects can be observed. Museums have been transformed from a static display of things into a place that offers access to culture and heritage as a dynamic process involving interweaving human actions, beliefs, skills, and materials

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interpreted as sources of individual identity. The items displayed in museums and galleries are often used to form the aesthetic background of product promotion or to enhance the narrative of the contemporary self.

This research focuses on the visual dimension of the process of creating individual identities during individuals' interaction with contemporary art galleries, art fairs, or museums. These institutions are significant parts of the international economy, as they are closely connected with such cultural industries as fashion and mass cultural tourism industries. Due to the pre-COVID-19 growth of tourism, the local narrative and material objects were promoted, described, commodified, marketed, and thus were easily accessible to local and international visitors who documented their visit to the art institutions on numerous photographs shared on the social media. Museums are educational establishments that help to develop the understanding of the sense of belonging to the larger social context. How does the way people consume arts, document their visits, and publish the records on social media enhance their sense of identity? What roles do social media play in influencing visitor's choice what to visit and what to capture in the form of a selfie? The research examines museums and galleries as _ project-based public space that produces the collectively shared knowledge and values and contributes to them. It also outlines some current patterns of developing a sense of belonging of individuals to the larger collective and cultural context. The aim is to disclose some communication processes between the institutions, the content producers, and the visitors, or users. In this brief, the students involved in the research provide an opportunity to discover some interaction forms among the complexity of encounters and exchanges witnessed in the current digital societies.

FROM 'CABINETS OF CURIOSITIES' TO PERMANENT SOCIAL INSTITUTIONS

The authors apply the term 'contemporary museum' to institutions that began to appear about 250 years ago and perform an educational and experiential function. Their predecessors, the so-called "cabinets of curiosities" served as rooms for collections gathered by monarchs since the sixteenth century, as well as for those belonging to private individuals, for instance, cleric Manfred Settala in Milan, around 1700. The greatest collector's popularity was drawn by medals (Burke, 2009, p. 124). Short-term exhibitions including the Salon in Paris and art presentations can also be mentioned.. The world exhibitions in London, Amsterdam, and Chicago appealed to a wide range of people in an unbeatable way and had a significant influence at the time. On the contrary, permanent expositions leave a long-term impact (Burke, 2013, pp. 115-117).

The oldest public museum of this type is the British Museum in London, which was founded in 1753 on the basis of scientist Sir Hans Sloan's collection. In 1793, at the time of the Great French Revolution, one of the largest museums was opened to the public - the French Louvre (Protection p. 2018, p. 19). In connection with the deepening social differences and the redistribution of wealth in the revolutionary years a layer of scholars was formed, whose efforts reflected new philosophical concepts and established the basis of Enlightenment concepts. The latter proclaimed equal access of all classes to cultural achievements among other things. The opening of the Louvre to the public was preceded by a series of edicts on the confiscation of royal collections, and the Louvre was named the Museum of the French Republic in the National Assembly declaration. The process of making large museum institutions accessible did not proceed at the same pace in Europe, but gradually all major cities started considering it an important stratifying sign of cultural maturity and significance. Bennett defines the emergence of museums in Western countries as a key part of the process of reorganizing public space through high

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