

Chapter 9

Digital Storytelling in Museums: The Power of Communication

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ABSTRACT

Due to the COVID-19 pandemic, digital media has gained an increasing importance not only for individuals but for organizations as well, and became instrumental in keeping people connected. Over the last few years, museums have had to overcome many challenges and have had to increasingly rely on technologies to expand public access to cultural heritage. Digital storytelling has the potential to transform the way citizens engage with cultural heritage, and has been widely recognized as a key element to attracting the visitors of museums and other cultural heritage sites. This article presents a digital storytelling joint project between Grão Vasco Nacional Museum and some partner schools that was conducted during the COVID-19 confinement. This project allowed the participants to explore different forms of art, from paintings to sculptures, different periods, authors, and themes. This communication method went through different stages and led to the development of a successful Aesthetic and Artistic Education Project that was recognized by the Portuguese Directorate General for Education.

INTRODUCTION

Interest in culture and cultural heritage is a key motivation for a large number of travelers (Brooks, 2011). In this context, destination and heritage site managers, as well as the tourism sector, must be prepared to provide the modern visitor with interesting and engaging heritage information on the places they visit (Brooks, 2011).

One of the primary missions of cultural institutions, and of museums, palaces and monuments in particular, is to provide access to Cultural Heritage. Museums play a distinct role in servicing society with the information it needs, and have to do their best to respond to increasing demands. People's per-

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ception of museums has changed over time and they have managed to adapt to the evolution of society and specialize, focusing on different fields, sciences, phenomena or people even (Enasel, 2013).

Heritage communication adds value by building the understanding and emotional attachment that enhances any tourism experience or scholar activity. It will assist in capturing the imagination of the visitor, sparking what may become a life-long social, emotional or intellectual connection (Brooks, 2011).

So, what can one do when Museums shut their doors due to the COVID-19 pandemic?

During these times, the question we kept asking was how much did people miss their museum - the interaction with art, the community, the togetherness found in such an institution? (Hollein, 2020). To keep in touch with the community, especially the younger ones, Grão Vasco National Museum developed a new educational project based on digital storytelling.

BACKGROUND

Museums create environments with the exhibitions they offer and the stories they tell, leaving a museum's own credibility exposed as much as the credibility of the stories they present (Pine & Gilmore, 2007). In telling stories, curatorial approaches and exhibition design play an important role in the visitor's experience (Counts, 2009), suggesting that perceived authenticity relies on a museum's authenticity and on the visitors' expectations of the museum to create experiences that they will perceive to be authentic (Hede et al, 2014).

The communication of these stories in museums should take into account different levels of visitor's interest, and consider that an individual or group of visitors may fit into different groups at different times during an average day or over the full duration of a vacation. Thus, three types of visitors are defined, (Brooks, 2011):

1. Visitors who just happen to be there, as part of a larger vacation experience;
2. Visitors who are interested in a particular site for its special attributes;
3. Visitors with a strong emotional connection to the site that may be part of their own cultural heritage.

Children are an important part of the public who comes to museums. Communicating with them requires a specific didactic approach. It requires interpretation techniques that are used to fit the different stages of child development. The following examples (Brezovec et al., 2018) explain some of those techniques and define the most suitable age for each activity. Thus, from

1. 0 to 2 years – colour, sound, touch, repetition
2. 2 to 7 years – playing, repeating, identifying and matching things and experiencing real things
3. 7 to 11 years – creating their own meanings, exploring, discovering, fine motor co-ordination
4. Over 11 years – increasingly complex problem solving, participatory activities, discovery and exploration.

The development of global skills and literacy must be understood in relation to the different ways in which we communicate, and shall include words, images, music, gesture, and so on, and across disciplines for a variety of purposes (Shinas, V. & Wen, H., 2022).

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