CultureCase

Understanding online museum communities

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Summary

This paper uses a survey of students in Taiwan to understand how best to create emotionally resonant and engaging experiences with online museum communities. The survey was completed by more than 1,000 (mostly young and female) students who were asked about how they felt interacting with museum websites and the communities that are supported on them. The study found that people were motivated by certain emotional, cognitive or psychological needs like arousal, joy and curious distraction from the everyday. These states can be induced by the managers of online museum communities by ensuring their sites feel relevant, have opportunities for interaction, make people feel connected, make them proud completing tasks or showing off their work, all the while ensuring the experience is playful and individualised.

The research was not just into museum websites

‘Museum online communities differ from mainstream museums in that their objective comprises both digitising collections and artifacts and soliciting opinions and building online interactions.’ Online communities are increasingly important for how a museum or collection is perceived in the world. They are comprised of ‘people who love museum collections, and exhibitions shape the way [their] self is presented’. They are not simply an audience but an active cohort of citizen researchers, advocates, and donors. Contemporary museums increasingly need to understand how these audiences behave online as they switch between platforms, sites and devices.

A more distributed form of community management is a good idea

‘Based on the results of this study, online museum community managers should encourage participants to form their own online teams’ around existing shared interests and values. This would likely lead to a more affective experience compared with an official “one-size-fits-all” approach to building discussion groups, crowdsourcing, social media channels and other ‘online communities of practice’.

Keywords

Taiwan **museum** **survey** **community**

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