

Characteristics of Multifunction Malaysian Art Galleries

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Abstract Art galleries are known as places that exhibit both art and artworks such as paintings or sculpture. However, an art gallery is supposed to be a platform to enhance not only the quality of fine art but also as the introduction of new art and design products. Based on this notion, this study aimed to redefine the role of the art gallery in order to enhance the development of the art and design industry which not only includes exhibiting fine art artwork but also in terms of promoting and introducing new art and design products. In this research, the researchers first adopted an observation approach to collect data. Secondly, the researchers interviewed the gallery curators. Both government and private galleries were sampled. Structured questions were used in designing the questionnaire which focused on the role of the art gallery as an art centre as well as the function of the existing art galleries. Findings from this study focused on how art galleries in Malaysia did not have knowledge about the real function of art galleries and why they held to their strategies of making profits only from exhibiting fine art. This study should help to expand the functions of art galleries by promoting and exhibiting all types of art and design works. Also, public programming or activities such as art competitions and art seminars can be held in the art galleries as well.

Keywords Characteristic · Multifunction · Malaysian art gallery

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1 Introduction

This research focused on understanding the social impact of the art gallery in our economy and in our society. The most important thing in developing arts into a high level is through the participation and the involvement of an audience. The word ‘involvement’ exists in art, sports, or recreation and by involving in this kind of activity, it will assist an improvement in an economy based on major enhancement of knowledge through impressive innovations [1]. Especially in the arts, ‘involvement’ is more to the commitment from the audience in terms of being part of the exhibition. This explains very well how important the art gallery can be to the development of art and design.

The history of the art gallery begins in the nineteenth century and the role of the art gallery at that moment was as an educational establishment [1]. History actually explains how the art gallery was treated as a centre to spread education amongst people at that period of time. However, even as a centre of education, art galleries at that moment tended to focus only on informal learning and from that time the role of an art gallery has developed into a bigger prospect. Nowadays, art galleries are only focusing on promoting fine art’s artwork instead of promoting other fields of art such as industrial design, interior, or even automobile design. If we refer to our Malaysian National Visual Art Gallery, it obviously states that their vision is to become the centre for the development and focusing on the collection of visual arts and to be the trustee for the national art heritage [2]. Their vision has highlighted the words ‘visual art’.

‘Art’ itself is very subjective and everybody has his or her own concept of art. As per the definition, in addition to being flexible, art is all about a term or idea that makes people observe and critically think about some kind of activity or things that other people make and deliver creatively [3]. This term refers to other fields of art too and not exclusively to fine art.

The basic function of the art gallery includes exhibiting an artwork, organizing art talks or art discussions, and organising events related to art such as art competitions or seminars.

In organising an exhibition, an artist will come with a proposal regarding exhibiting an artwork, and after the proposal been processed and has been approved, the exhibition will be set up accordingly. The most important thing in organising an exhibition is to set the date, the venue, and to gather an audience [4]. After that, it depends on the marketing strategy of the gallery where the curator will play an important role to promote the artwork that is exhibited. This is where the goals of the gallery take place.

In Fig. 1, Magnus Bruno Frederik Resch in his writing has explained the main goals of art galleries which consist of three important elements. The elements include goals in terms of academics, goals in terms of artistic values, and goals in terms of socioethical concepts. These three elements explain some of the concepts which help gallery management to reach their goals. A thing that needs to be highlighted is their goals in terms of economic value. As stated in Fig. 1, their goal

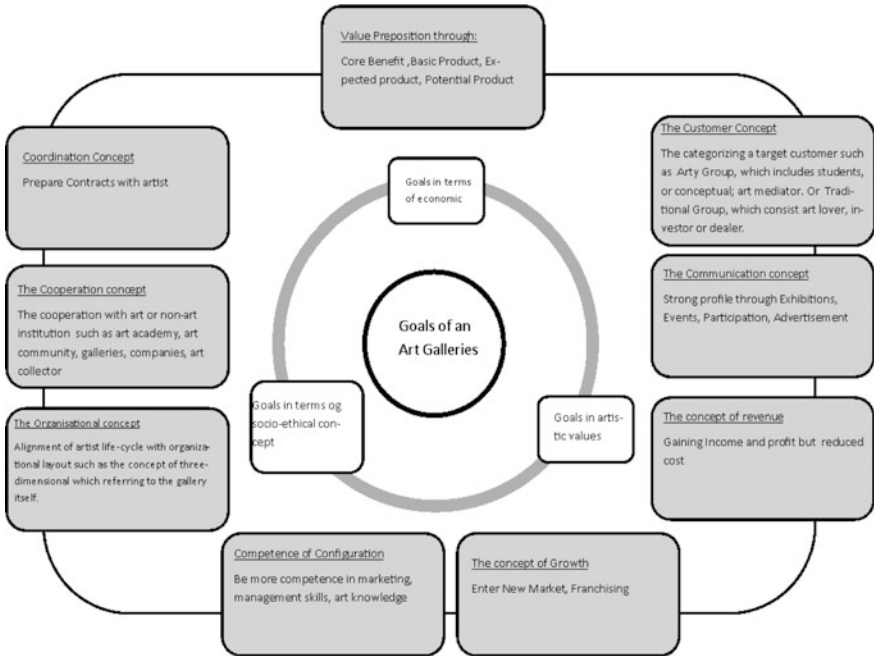


Fig. 1 New art gallery business model by Resch [5]

in economic value is more to value preposition through core benefits of the basic product referring to the expected product and potential product. However, as discussed with art gallery curators and experts not in the field of fine arts, the art gallery usually focuses on potential products in fine art artwork.

When referring to art activities, usually an art gallery will organise a discussion about problems that occur in the art industry and also referring to the fine art world.

1.1 Statement of the Problem

In Malaysia, there are many potential art galleries. In fact, there are more than 50 art galleries in Kuala Lumpur which are actively involved in the art industry, locally or internationally. However, most art and design products especially product design have been introduced through other institutions rather than the art gallery itself. This is because art galleries currently focus only in exhibiting fine art artworks.

The impact when exhibiting an artwork in an art gallery can boost a designer’s level of confidence. It creates the opportunities for the designers to be well known in art industries while at the same time being able to expand their creativity. An art exhibition is an event where the designer or the artist, the artwork, and the audience interact with each other.



Fig. 2 Some Malaysian art exhibition catalogues from selected art gallery websites, years 2013 and 2014

Figure 2 shows a sample of art exhibition catalogues featuring Malaysian artists and their fine art artwork. This is evidence which explains the importance of redefining the role of the art gallery. Is it exclusively for fine art artwork?

Although we understand that the art gallery plays an important role to provide a platform for artists to present their artworks such as paintings and sculpture, what of the designers who are not majoring in the field of fine arts including industrial designers and graphic designers? Can they produce creative products and promote these products through art galleries? Yes, they can, but the problem lies in the fact that

little promotion has been done regarding the multifunctions of the art galleries. Thus, their new ideas of furniture design, or an innovative automobile design, or even a new invention of machine technology are not being promoted effectively. The economic opportunity to develop or commercialise these new concepts further is minimised.

Art which consists of product design, machine technology and design, or interior design has not been recognised as part of an artwork. It seems there is less exposure about product design through the gallery rather than fine art artwork, and this is where the function of the art gallery as an education center has been questioned. The main function of an art gallery is to promote and develop the art and design industry [5]. It doesn't matter if it's from the fine art industry, machine and technology industry, or even industrial design industry. As long as it is under 'Art and Design' any product has the right to be promoted in art galleries.

1.2 Objectives

The objectives of this study were to understand the knowledge of art galleries among art curators so that in future there will be no hesitation to other designers in terms of proposing their piece of art, even though the artwork is not under the concept of fine art. This is important to focus on the art gallery's strategies and future plan in the development of the art and design industry.

2 Literature Review

Resch [5] stated that nowadays the commercial art galleries tend to be a part of a city's cultural life and they play an important role in the development of the art market. It explains how an artwork can contribute to the growth of a country's economy. However, according to him, referring to the situation of the art scene nowadays, in terms of market reality some art galleries are just only gaining small profits to continue surviving in the art industry. He has suggested if art galleries want to succeed in the art industry, they need to collaborate with other industries and reorganise their business strategies in terms of business practices.

Resch [5] also stated that his research has gathered data which became evidence that most art galleries nowadays have neglected the power of innovation in their business model. He explained how art galleries nowadays are focusing more on artistic exhibition rather than efforts to increase their profits.

This statement actually gives a lot of ideas on how art galleries can be more multifunctional in terms of developing art and design industries to a much higher level in terms of focusing on the art of machinery, digital art technology, the art of jewellery, or even the innovation of product design.

Corsane [6], in his writing, explains how gallery professionals are facing a few challenges in order to boost the image of the art gallery. For an example, he claimed

gallery professionals need to be able to attract special interest groups, referring to an audience who at the end of the day might bring in a profit to the art gallery. Through the multifunction concept, the art gallery will be fully defined as a center of education, and maybe in future will not only focus on art, but other industries as well.

Fopp [7] claims that the generation of people nowadays attends museums (galleries) to be 'educated'. In other words, art galleries and museums are treated as places where knowledge can be gathered and audiences choose to visit art galleries to see things that are unavailable elsewhere, and to be told things that they could not find out anywhere else.

When we look at the role of art exhibitions, Cline [8] claims that art exhibitions act as a centre of art and ideas for the audience. She explains how an art exhibition is like a mirror to the public where it reflects the interest of art while at the same time challenges the ideologies.

The statement from Cline obviously shows the importance of art exhibitions in terms of developing the art scene in our society. Imagine if art exhibitions not only focused on fine art's artwork but also other fields of art; the function of the art gallery as a centre of education could be expanded. It could be an art gallery, an art museum, or even a showroom for any art field.

However, in order to make an art exhibition a success, sometimes it depends on the knowledge of curatorial experts. According to Love [4], contemporary curators play an important role in creating and contributing to the audience about ideas and art strategies while at the same time creating opportunities for artists in terms of exposing art ideologies. Karen also explains how curators can also gather intellectual and creative contributions from other fields of art or from other areas in society.

This is one of the ideas of how art gallery management should be more flexible in curating an art exhibition. I believe if creative contributions from other fields were given the same opportunities as fine artists, the Malaysian art scene would be more variable and the mission in terms of making an art gallery a centre of education would be successfully achieved.

When understanding the role of an art gallery is exposed, it can create a new perception about how to present the new artistic element to society. Not only focusing on the fine art industry, the art gallery will approach other dimensions of creative design such as interior design, industrial design, or machine technology design. Every creative industry involved in design specification has its own artistic element that should be introduced to the audience. It should be every art gallery's vision to introduce and develop the art and design industry.

3 Research Methodology

This research methodology was developed by referring to the qualitative method through interviews and surveys. To answer the researchers' first and second objective, an interview was conducted in order to understand the knowledge of art

galleries among art curators. As mentioned earlier, art curators play an important role in any art exhibition. Because of that, in this research methodology, the interview involved five art curators from different backgrounds and from different galleries. After that, the researchers focused on art gallery strategies and their future plans in terms of developing the potential of art and design into a higher level.

Surveys were conducted among art gallery audiences to analyse the role and function of the art gallery through their perspectives. Most of the questions asked focused on how well art galleries have been organised in terms of exhibiting an artwork and what kind of artwork has usually been exhibited in an art exhibition.

All the results from the interview and the survey were gathered in order to identify knowledge about the function of the art gallery and the strategies so that it could be a reference for other art galleries in Malaysia and other designers. This methodology would accidentally create a comparison and similarities between each selected gallery as to their contributions and efforts in the development of art and design.

4 Analysis

Data were gathered through an interview conducted earlier. Five Malaysian art galleries were selected for the interview session. These galleries were the most established and popular galleries in Malaysia all of which were located around Kuala Lumpur. Table 1 shows some of the interview content which was developed into a table template.

From the data analysis, questions 1, 3, 4, and 5 were structured to answer the researchers' first objective and questions 2, 6, 7, and 8 were structured to answer the researchers' second objective.

For the first question, the question is to acknowledge how many years the curator has served the gallery. This is to determine the level of the curator's knowledge of managing an art gallery.

The second question is all about investigating what type of artwork has been selected to join an art exhibition. This question acknowledges the concept that the gallery uses in terms of selecting an artwork that can contribute in making profits.

The third question focused on the gallery's objectives rather than organising an exhibition. This question was important because the curator's answer will lead to the strategy that the gallery implements in terms of the development of the art industry.

The fourth question regards the art gallery's contribution to the growth of the Malaysian economy. The answer to this question proves how selling an artwork can benefit the artist, society, and the economy.

The fifth question was structured to the art curator about why the art gallery tended to focus more on fine art and how about other artwork which is not in the fine art field. This question investigated why other artwork such as product design

Table 1 Data analysis from an interview, 2013

| Question | Gallery A | Gallery B | Gallery C | Gallery D | Gallery E |
|--|---|--|---|--|---|
| (1) How long has you been working as a curator/assistant curator? | 5 years | 1 years 3 months | 8 years | 3 years | 3 years |
| (2) Usually, what kind of artwork that has been chosen to be exhibit in this gallery? | Artwork that has aesthetic, cultural education, non-provocative and not about any sensitive issue Cultural education | Depend on the artwork exhibition's theme | Painting, sculpture and installation art | Depend on the artwork exhibition's theme | Contemporary artwork |
| (3) What is the objectives of this gallery instead of organizing an artwork exhibition? | Cultural education | Make an exhibition for Uitm's alumni, provide a place for alumni to do an exhibition | As a platform for young artist to produce artwork | Hold an art event, promoting artwork, and help young artist by providing a residencies | Promote young and emerging artist |
| (4) How does art gallery contributes in Malaysian economic development? | Emphasize the art history through the value of artwork and the successful of the artist | Selling artwork | From artwork selling | By making people visit gallery | Gain profit from selling artwork, usually by using the money exchange system because most of the collectors are from abroad |
| (5) Usually, art gallery tend to focus on artwork which is more to fine art, but how about product design? | Providing another gallery for product design which has been named "Galeri Inovasi" | Once exhibiting product design such as furniture design | Once exhibiting interior design in 1997 | The intension only focussing in fine art's artwork | Product design is not an artwork that has the aesthetic value |

(continued)

Table 1 (continued)

| Question | Gallery A | Gallery B | Gallery C | Gallery D | Gallery E |
|---|---|---|--|---|---|
| (6) Why art gallery did not try to promote product design? | There is no proposal from the designers | Need someone who can monitor the marketing of the product design's artwork | A bit complicated in terms of the audience and less proposal from designer | Product design industry already has their own platform to promote their product | Product design industry already has their place to exhibit their creative works such as showroom. Art gallery is not suitable to exhibit product design's artwork |
| (7) Is there any application from the designer out there to exhibit their product design? | Do receive application from product design to exhibit their artwork | Less application because the rules and regulation is the artist need to be one of Uitm's alumni | Once had in year 1997 (the interior exhibition) | Not so of the designers come and propose to do their product design exhibition | Not yet, so far |
| (8) If there is an application from product designer to exhibit their artwork, is there any procedure that they have to go through? | Just send a proposal to the gallery | Send a proposal | There is no specific form, just send a formal letter including the designer's proposal | The product need to have the combination between fine art and product design | The product design need to stand as an artwork, not as a product. This is to treat the product design as an asset like other fine art's artwork |

had not been exhibited in the gallery even though an art gallery is all about a centre of education and the term 'art' itself is very subjective to be judged.

The sixth question questioned the effort an art gallery took in terms of promoting other art products besides fine art's artwork. It clearly explained the problem statement of this study.

The seventh question confirmed whether there is a proposal from other designers who are not in the field of fine art proposing their artwork to be exhibited in the art gallery. This is important to identify whether there is any demand from other designers in terms of exhibiting their product.

The last question is about the art gallery's reaction if there are exact rules and regulations that designers have to follow if they wish to propose conducting an exhibition whereby the artwork is not related to fine art's artwork.

These questions are related in terms of explaining the characteristics of a multifunction art gallery. This is important to investigate how well Malaysian art galleries manage their vision and mission in the development of art and design.

Through the interview and the observation, obviously art galleries need to implement the concept of multifunction in order to provide a space to other art fields unrelated to the fine art world but still carrying the 'art' term in their design or product.

5 Findings

Through a critical analysis from the interview and surveys, the result of the data analysis explained that obviously art galleries usually contribute to the growth of the economy by selling artwork to the art collector. Some of the art galleries even take advantage in terms of selling artwork to foreign collectors so that the gallery gains profits through money exchanged.

In terms of art products, the art gallery usually focuses on fine art artwork due to the lack of application from product designers to exhibit their product designs. However, even though art galleries in Malaysia tend to focus more on fine art artwork, some of the galleries are still taking their chances to market some of the product designs such as furniture, ceramic, or even fashion design. Some of the curators even stated that as long as the product design had the essence or the combination of fine art, they were willing to promote and exhibit the artwork.

After completing this research, the researchers found that overall, most art curators who were interviewed has less knowledge about defining what actually is an art gallery and what the basic function of an art gallery is. Through analysis and some observation, art curators did not focus on the 'art and design' as general but they specified the term of 'art and design' only in the fine art field.

This finding has strengthened the problem statement of this study that the management of art galleries can be developed in many other ways. Instead of organising an art gallery to be more functional, in terms of collaborating with other industries which implemented an essence of design, it can also contribute a lot in

terms of gaining big profits to the development of our country, especially if the art exhibition involves potential investors from abroad. An art gallery is like a platform to expose the aesthetics of art and design. The word ‘design’ refers not only to the aesthetic in fine art artwork, but also includes other fields of design.

6 Conclusion and Recommendation

Overall, this research was all about understanding the role of an art gallery and finding a way to make it multifunctional for the sake of the Malaysian art and design industry so that in future there will be no hesitation by other designers in terms of proposing their piece of art, even though the artwork is not under the concept of fine art. This is important to focus on the art galleries’ strategies and their future plans in the development of the art and design industry in Malaysia.

Nowadays, an art gallery’s main intention is giving an opportunity to young artists to conduct their own exhibitions so that they can improve their skills in artwork making or presentation. By conducting exhibitions, providing seminars, and art workshops, their main intention is to capture public attention and market the product or artwork. More collectors will bring more profits to the gallery institution.

This is where the multifunction concept plays an important role. The art gallery is not only a place to exhibit art, but also acts as a contributor to the economic industry. By using several marketing strategies such as advertising and promotion, art galleries also gather people from all over the world and connect them through art.

In future there should be a place for other artwork to be exhibited besides fine art artwork in the art galleries. Yes, we are aware that there is a special space for the products of industrial design, interior design, or machine and technology to be promoted. However, the place that has been provided is not enough in terms of exposing the creativity of product making in the beginning of the sketching process. I am sure that most of the people out there sometimes feel curious about how a product is created from A–Z, from sketches to analytical drawing and the final product. This is the initiative that should be taken seriously by the responsible person, especially the person who is in charge of the development of the art gallery so that the art gallery will be participated in by fine art artists or students but also can gather people who are interested in art from every angle.

Art exhibitions are supposed to be the best opportunities for the designers to expose their new inventions and designs, not only referring to the traditional method of making an artwork, but focusing on the definition of ‘art’ itself. In future, designers should be able to express art in their artwork even though the outcome of the artwork will be in product design.

However, in completing this research, the researchers realise the weakness that still has room for improvement. This is referring to the number of participants. The number of participants is important in terms of strengthening the data analysis and the research objective. Other than that, the scope of this research is too minimal as

the case study only focused on Malaysian art galleries. It is hoped that in future this research will expand into a broader scope with a strong data analysis provided.

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