Evolving museum experiences and museum (re)branding in the 21st century: A case study on the refurbishment of RAMM (2007-2011)

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Abstract

Today, many museums both around the world and in Britain are in the process of renewing, rejuvenating, refurbishing and/or rebranding themselves. These museums are actually doing this in order to be able to respond better to the evolving needs and wants of consumers, which change continuously as a result of the transformations that take place in the consumer culture. The central aim of this thesis is to investigate the paradigm shifts happening in contemporary British museums, which evolve parallel to the evolving British consumer culture. These paradigm shifts actually seem to be a reflection of the paradigm shifts that are happening in 21st century museums all around the world, in general.

Museums of today are highly interested in branding and they invest in it to a great extent. This is in part due to the effects of postmodernism on museums. This fondness for branding seems to turn museums into objects of consumption, makes them like other products in the market. Another aim of this thesis is to investigate how contemporary museums are defined as objects of consumption and managed as brands. For this purpose, Royal Albert Memorial Museum (RAMM), a British museum situated in Exeter, which has been going through an inclusive refurbishment process for the last four years, has been selected for carrying out an extended case study on. Diverse data collection tools have been used such as participant and non-participant observations were made; in-depth interviews with especially staff members and also some other stakeholders like volunteers and visitors were carried out, photographs were taken; website of the museum was analysed; a lot of field notes were taken and then these data have been analysed. The RAMM example and also the literature review made on world museums in general have shown that the museums of the last century have got into the direction of uniting and co-creating value with their visitors, in their museums. This is a thorough democratization process in the museum. In order for this to take place, museums have taken the interaction and participation levels with their visitors much higher. Detailed accounts on these and other phenomena about new museums can be found in the thesis.

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