Museums, Heritage Tourism and The Disruptive Innovation

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ABSTRACT

The Pandemic has compelled all the sectors of life to welcome new way of working and stand the test of time. Museums are no exception to this. Museums stand as a proof of cultural heritage of humankind. Museums have come a long way from the times when they could be only visited physically. Arranging photographic tours, replacing the informative bulletin boards with the audio tours demonstrated the capacity of museums to embrace such challenging times as "disruptive innovations" – innovations caused due to disruptions. With the introduction of new technologies like Internet, museums adopted to the phenomenon of developing their own websites. The recent innovation of virtual tours stands as testament to how the museums are making way for the new normal. This has provided a different experience as compared to the traditional museums. The communication revolution has also widened the scope of heritage tourism. Social networks, dedicated television channels on tourism have created awareness of rich heritage of near and distant areas. Thus, this paper tries to examine how museums and heritage tourism has adapted to innovations in the fields of Information Technology and Communication with the help of technology, giving a multidimensional experience to the public.

The paper is based on qualitative analysis primarily. It also considers a few case studies of the Indian museums and heritage tourism that have modified their operational systems to such disruptive innovations and transformation. The paper considers surveys done by various institutions to measure the changes in ways how museums operate, as well.

Key Words- Disruption, Innovation, Museums, Heritage Tourism, Information and Communication technologies.

I. Introduction

The word Heritage is derived from the Latin word "Heres" from which the word called "Eritage" emerged in old French. Through this, we have the modern word "Heritage". "Heritage" essentially means something which is inherited. While heritage stands as a solid proof of human race, museums have contributed for preservation of Heritage to a great extent.

The mentions are found regarding chitrasalas, Chitravithi which were believed to be the museums of the earlier times. Those could have been visited by the onlookers to explore rich heritage preserved within them. Museums in India flourished with the efforts of British, who were further assisted by princely states. With this, the total number of museums went on increasing. In the year 1857, the total number of museums was 12. By the end of 1947, it went on to be 105 in the Indian peninsula. After the independence, museums in India are now categorised into Museums of National Importance, Memorial Museums, and Anthropological Site Museums and many more such categories.

With the introduction of technological innovations, museums too developed the ways how they functioned. These changes were matching with the changing times. This helped museums to survive in technologically dominated world. Such innovations also help museums to manage their collection differently, provide realistic visitor experience. In the times, when allocation of grants and funding towards the museums are shrinking, digitally enabled museums try to compensate the financial losses too. Thus, museums and innovation is not limited to withstanding the test of time, rather it may be looked at as a tactic of business innovation. Museums have introduced innovative practices at three levels- Innovation in Management of records, Organizational Innovation and Innovative visitor experience.

The primary function of museums is preservation of heritage. The invention of multiple software technologies help in digitalising artefacts, items to be preserved in the museums. Such software technologies are useful in digital collection, management and storing data in museums. After the completion of digitalisation, with the help of internet, the museums can have a digital presence. The option of exploring digital museums is given through online registration and subscription charges. Software helps in maintaining records of total number of visitors, income generated through subscriptions and activities of the museums conducted digitally.

Technologies in museums can be helpful in organizing human resource of the museums, accounting of museums, purchases of the artefacts and heritage items. The bookings, if done digitally, for exploring the museums will help in reduction of queues in front of ticket counter. The systems of digital payments help in monitoring income-expenditure records facilitate foreign currency exchanges through card payments.

In terms of modern technologies, visitor experiences need to be modernized too. The audio-visual tours in the form of recorded videos, were popular among the passive visitors. These became more personalised with the guided audio-visual tours for the visitors. Such innovations went on increasing with technological innovations such as simulation media, interactive films, 3D graphics and the most recent Virtual Reality (VR) tours.

In the new age communication technology, web based presence of the museums was essential to connect to the masses, gather funds and promote their own events. The innovations could be presented too with the help of web based technologies.

Indian museums were nowhere lagging behind in terms of advancement according to technology. A lot of museums marked their virtual presence till the extent of creating their own virtual reality tours and exhibitions.

Pandemic and onslaught of COVID 19 forced the museums in India to innovate for digital presence and revenues. Some of the pandemic innovations went up to the extent of creating repository of museums artefact. VARA is one such initiative acting as digital museum repository to connect the heritage enthusiasts to the museums. VARA is a reservoir of artefacts displayed at major museums. VARA showcases digital 3D artefacts presented in a highly interactive format. The National Museum in Delhi is the pioneering museum towards the promotion of technology adoption to enhance visitor experience. The initiative of VARA is helpful in bringing innovative way of aiding education and research for enthusiasts across the world by building a repository of near true 3Dimensional reproduction of the gallery exhibits, and providing detailed information regarding the artefacts. This has helped in promoting research and conversations discussing the artefacts. It has features like creation of personalised collections, digital reconstruction of missing details by creating an account for free. This enables participative learning and visitor experiences.

A survey conducted by Museum Booster on "Museum Innovation Barometer" in 2021 suggests that museums across the globe have started innovating their services giving immersive experiences to the visitors online and offline both. This survey highlights the fact that museums have adopted these developments as disruptive innovations. The survey is conducted from December 2020 till May 2021 covering 150 institutions representing 200 museums. It focuses on "technology and innovation in museums". It is significant to note that 80% of the museums have accepted the importance of technology in giving immersive experience to the visitors. Technology induced experiences enhance access to common people and attracts more online visitors. It leads to diversification of audience reaching out to the museums helping museums also to reach sustainable development goals.

As for now, the least present within exposition technologies still are 4D elements, holographic imagery, speech interaction, gesture and motion control, 3D elements, AR, VR and wearable devices. Each department of museums have adapted to technological innovations. In all, museums have positively responded to the crisis and drawing future plan to enhance technology induced experiences more. Franklin Sirmans, Director at Pérez Art Museum quoted -"Three to five years' worth of digital commitment has happened within the span of the last year. Digital has really expanded the walls of the museum in a lot of ways." The museums have built a digital experience team and have made continues digital efforts since opening.

Museums with such innovation have provided a new dimension to the concept of "Heritage Tourism". Artefacts preserved in museums still represented the heritage of bygone eras even during pandemic. The virtual reality tours made it possible for people to visit museums and explore heritage at the comfort of their houses. Thus, museums have become the torchbearers of turning negatives into positives and initiating a new trend in Heritage Tourism.

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