

# Exploring Visitors' Experiential Experience in the Museum:

## A Case of the National Museum of Taiwan Literature

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Museums not only provide visitors with educational, recreational and aesthetic function, but also create a memorable experience to meet the psychological needs of consumers. This research adopted experiential marketing theories of Schmitt to explore the perceived experiential value, satisfaction and loyalty of visitors through the museum personality associations. Using National Museum of Taiwan Literature (NMTL) as example, literature review and in-depth interview with curators and visitors were applied in this research to investigate how museum combine the customer experience and marketing strategy, inviting visitors to sense, feel, think, act and relate to the museum brand. The results are as follows: Sense experiential module: "communication tools," "brand recognition," "presentation of products" and "space and environment" create unique sensorial experiences. Feel experiential module: museum's "space and environment" is the most direct media to arouse inner feelings and emotions of visitors. Many visitors also considered this museum to be one of the Taiwan historical and cultural contexts. Think experiential module: museum's "presentation of products" is exhibitions and activities create experiential value and make the show more diverse through electronic media. Act experiential module: museum intends to change the passive attitude of provision to an active one. Through the "communication tools" and "presentation of products," the visitors were attracted to museums for learning the knowledge and to enjoy the atmosphere. Relate experiential module: associate with the positive individuals experience and social culture, it also links the individuals with museum and the community like "joint establishment of brand" and "staff".

***Keywords: experiential marketing, visitor, museum***

### **1. Introduction**

Many museums have faced reduced exhibition space and devoted themselves to providing various services for visitors. To achieve the objective of information sharing, all the museums have endeavored to present the exhibition contents and services and developed the new form of "aesthetic service of museums" through various services and designs. Museums have overcome various barriers to change their passive attitude to an active one to provide various resources, which enables the visitors who cannot pay a visit to museums to directly interact with museums in their living environment. How can they undertake new functions and challenges? In terms of the

marketing strategies of museums, the marketing of museums can be initiated from various aspects, including “establishment of system,” “human resources,” and “development of visitors” [5]. All the aspects, from policy to implementation, are filled with opportunities. Therefore, in addition to providing entertainment, education and aesthetic experiences, museums should also create unforgettable experiential process to meet the consumers’ psychological needs. Moreover, museums should convey local spirit and cultural charm. Unlike the typical and serious research museums, museums should switch their focuses from “objects” to “people.”

Experiential marketing is an important trend after the rise of the era of experience economy. It is a marketing concept integrating rationality with sensibility. The product it sells is an experiential process and service. Consumers have to personally pay for it to experience a good lifestyle. From the perspective of experiential marketing, the appeal for the pursuit of sensibility focuses on consumers’ experiences and enables them to get impressed through personal experiences. It not only offers entertainment, but also enables the people who experience the product to interact with it mentally. As a whole, the frameworks and viewpoints of operation and experiential marketing of museums are universal. They both put emphasis on the connection with cultural life and the creation of unforgettable experiences for consumers. In other words, museums conform to the developmental trend of time. Therefore, based on the general situation and market trend of museums, this study intends to investigate, from the perspective of experiential marketing, what are the marketing strategies used by museums to promote itself and how they can solve the issues of operation when presenting cultural value. Based on the interviews with museum staff and visitors, this study intends to understand the marketing strategies of museums and visitors’ individual museum visiting experiences.

## **2. Literature Review**

Museum visiting experiences are the experiences perceived by visitors after they visit museums. Therefore, museum visiting experiences are closely related to visitors. Visitors are one of the important factors constituting museums. Faced with the visitor-centered trend, museums have to take into account the behaviors and needs of visitors in various aspects, such as environment, service, equipment and psychology, to meet their needs and desire for knowledge and experiences, in order to provide them with a good impression from the moment they enter a museum to the moment they leave. McLean (1993) suggested that museum marketing is a procedure integrating organizations with people to gain benefits, meet its needs or desire or increase the number of visitors [6]. Moreover, Bradford (1991) suggested that museum marketing should be distinctly divided into two parts, external marketing and internal one. To establish reputation, museums have to take into account the comments and needs of their external target population and include them into the marketing mechanism. Experience economy is a creative industry [1]. Pine and Gilmore (1998) suggested that the era of experience economy is affected by the rapid development of technology and fierce competition among enterprises. In such an era, economic value itself is changed from primary commodities to goods, services and experiences. Experiences are categorized as the 4<sup>th</sup> economic product. Experiences are an important new trend and have a unique sensibility. They store memories and experiences in life and integrate customers with them to learn diversified experiential activities and to further get moved to create unforgettable “experiential” experiences, which are the maximum value of experiential economy [8]. The strategic experiential modules (SEMs) proposed by Schmitt (1999) are regarded as the theoretical basis of experiential marketing. Their purpose is to create different experiential forms for customers

and include five modules, sense, feel, think, act and relate. The objectives and appeals of them are completely different. Moreover, Schmitt also proposed the categories and forms of experiential media [9]. Museum marketing is the process of museum operation, and general public is the marketing object. The objectives as appealed by strategic experiential modules through senses, think, etc. conform to the unique situations of museums. The 5 major modules of museums are summarized in Table 1:

Table 1. Strategic Experiential Modules of Museum

Categories of Strategy	Objectives	Appeals
Sense	To create sensory stimulation and to provide the joy and satisfaction of aesthetic enjoyment during the visiting period.	To win visitors' recognition for the professional image of museums through tangible objects, such as appearance of buildings, internal display, design style and image of museums.
Feel	To stimulate the inner feelings of visitors through a certain experience, to trigger their imagination and to create a strong connection between visitors and museums.	During the visiting period, situational layout is used to change visitors' feelings about reality and to guide them into a certain emotional atmosphere by affecting their experiences of time, space and matter.
Think	To encourage and trigger the curiosity of visitors, to change general public's stereotype against museums or to assess the exhibition contents and to think more creatively.	To think who the communication object is. To create the sense of wonder through thinking principles. To trigger collective and decentralized thinking. In the end, to stimulate visitors to further discuss, perceive and solve problems.
Act	To appeal for experiencing life style and to stimulate different types of visitors as the cultural promoters of lifestyle and trend.	To add some experiential acts where thinking is not required, such as idol endorsement, or to interact with other people to reflect self-worth.
Relate	To enable visitors to get related to other people and even the entire population and culture through museums or brands to share the same cultural value and social classification.	To reflect individuals in a social environment due to the needs of social classification and identification, cultural value, social roles, brand communities and kinship. Specific museums and appeals provide visitors with the culture in which they intend to participate. To create a unique social identification for individuals.

Gobe (2011) pointed out that people choose a brand may represent an individual's social position and his or her identity, the brand owners should consciously aware of what features of their products can attract the customers [2]. According to the general situation and market trend of museums, the focus of museums is not on providing entertainment, but on feeling a place, creating an impression on it and triggering visitors' inner feelings and interactions with the events, in order to further promote tourism. As discussed above, experiential marketing is an important trend after the rise of the era of experience economy. It is a marketing concept integrating rationality with sensibility. They are essentially universal.

### 3. Research Method

This study took the National Museum of Taiwan Literature (NMTL) as an example. Firstly, this study collected the data concerning the museum, including website, publications, propaganda, data, and literature. Secondly, this study investigated the current status of operation and marketing from the perspectives of the policy of museum and the museum itself, in order to compare the collected data with the data of the subsequent interviews. After

survey the current status of the case, this study conducted semi-structured interview to interview 8 groups of visitors to understand the concepts that were not explained in the literature. Lastly, this study invited two professional museum staff to act as the coders. The author then performed analyses.

### 3.1 Research Subjects

Background information of the subjects: experts and visitors in the NMTL.

- 1) Experts: 9 persons, who are curators and staff. There were 9 interviews to be conducted.

Table 2. List of the Experts Interviewed

Subject A-1	Director
Subject A-2	Curator for Display and Exhibition Department
Subject A-3	Organizer for Display and Exhibition Department
Subject A-4	Librarian for Research and Collection Department
Subject A-5	IT personnel for Research and Collection Department
Subject A-6	Chief of Public service department
Subject A-7	Volunteer Manager of Public service department
Subject A-8	Information Desk Manager of Public service department
Subject A-9	IT staff of Administrative Office

- 2) Visitors: 10 visitors in the NMTL selected as the subjects of the research to conduct interviews. There were 8 interviews to be conducted.

Table 3. List of the Visitors Interviewed

Subject B-1	B-1-1 (older sister), B-1-2 (younger brother) 2 subjects totally, 20-30 years old, IT industry
Subject B-2	B-2-1 (husband), B-2-2 (wife) 2 subjects totally, 40 years old, Husband: civil servant; Wife: Housewife.
Subject B-3	Female, 30 years old, senior high school physical education teacher
Subject B-4	Female, 30 years old, cram school industry.
Subject B-5	Male, 29 years old, scholar/PhD
Subject B-6	Male, 31 years old, consultant of ecological research
Subject B-7	Female, 59 years old, retiree of Tainan City Government.
Subject B-8	Female, 16 years old, student.

### 3.2 Research Process

- 1) The time for data collection and the interview contents was on December 2012.

Interview design and literature review: based on the “Organization Chart” of the NMTL and the museum-related promotion data.

- 2) Place of the interview: the NMTL.

How the interview was performed: Each semi-structured interview approximately took from 10 to 30 minutes.

- 3) Time of data processing and arrangement.

- 4) Establishment of textual data: after the draft on the interview text was established, the 2 encoder were requested to encode the text.

- 5) Verification and analysis of textual data: The textual data were analyzed by the researcher according to the content. In addition, the researcher also checked the content as expressed by the subjects and the text concerning the experiential marketing of the museum.

## 4. Research Results Analysis and Discussion

### 4.1 Analysis on the Products of the NMTL

According to the results of the on-site inspection, the products of the NMTL are presented as follows:

- 1) Publications: The NMTL uses literature as media. In addition, it provides publications to enable the external world to understand it. It hopes to fully present its achievements through publications. Subject A-1 “The publications of the museum play the role of openness and integration from the perspective of a public department.” (Figure 1)
- 2) Exhibitions: Exhibitions are very important to the museum. Content and form are important as well. Therefore, the museum hopes that, in addition to presenting internal energy, exhibitions can closely interact with visitors in terms of overall planning and display (Figure 2).
- 3) Activities: Activities represent the features of the museum. The speakers invited for the lecture or activities are those who are expertise at their field, and the best presentation will be documented and published subsequently. Academic symposium transforming the activity space into a space for open discussion through planning. To enable visitors to participate in these activities is the best approach for the museum to spread literature (Figure 3).
- 4) Services: The information desk, volunteers and guides of the Public service department provides the services of experiential marketing. In terms of information desk, the information desk of instantaneous services provides information guidance, such as introduction to museum. Moreover, in terms of static services, there are also telephone and mailbox that provide consultation to enable visitors to generally understand the museum operation. Furthermore, the museum assists visitors and further guides them to various sections for receiving relevant services (Figure 4).



Figure 1 Publications



Figure 2 Exhibitions



Figure 3 Activities



Figure 4 Services

In recent years, the virtual services provided by the museum using internet have also increased, including website, database, e-newsletter, Facebook, news, online exhibitions, etc. which are the communication bridges between the museum and visitors. The museum information can be provided to visitors instantaneously. After the interviews, this study found that the comments on promotion were mainly provided from the management level and business department, such as the Display and Exhibition Department and the Research and Collection Department.

## 4.2 Strategic Experiential Modules of the NMTL

### 1) Presentation of Sense Module

In terms of space image, what experiential sense does the architecture or internal decoration of the NMTL intend to convey? Subject A-1 suggested, *“The architecture itself is a symbol. The staff inside should think about how to connect himself/herself with architecture between inside and outside.”* This indicates that staff’s work performance serve as a medium to help the visitors feel the “Museum Experiential Marketing.” The architecture itself is a historical building and is connected with the modern museum to present its own aura and literary style (Figure 5). Most of the visitors who frequently visit the museum are purely to experience the space and atmosphere of the museum. Visitors’ senses of the architecture are different. However, based on the understanding of the museum itself and historical background, they also suggested that the history of the architecture is closely related to local history. Therefore, the museum has become an identifiable brand. The exhibition designs, as well as the posters, flags and exhibition devices in the space, convey literary and rustic atmosphere. Artistic decorations, floor poster and signs are used in the exhibition space to guide visitors (Figure 6).



Figure5 The façade of the existing old building was used to combine both “presentation of products” and “space and environment,” creating unique senses through designs.



Figure 6 Flags are used in the museum to convey and create atmosphere.

As indicated by Subject B-5, *“The environment is the text of expression. If the entire environment is regarded as text, museum visiting is also a kind of reading. It is like reading a book that has been written.”* As this is concerned, Subject B-3, B-5 and B-6 hoped that they can read museum publications or books in display in the exhibition site or space. In terms of the experiential exhibition designs, the visitors hope that the multimedia interactive devices can be integrated into the exhibition designs. Subject A-2 indicated *“The museum will design*

*the exhibitions according to exhibition contents to enable visitors to experience the exhibitions and use multimedia to display cultural relics.*” Therefore, “communication tools,” “brand recognition,” “presentation of products” and “space and environment” are used to create unique senses through designs.

## **2) Presentation of Feel Module**

Current museums involve many theories, such as experiential marketing, integrated marketing, economy, consumption, anthropology and art. For example, Gobe’s “emotional branding theory” is integrated with significant changes in anthropology, creativity, sensory experiences and art, and so are museums. Museums can achieve the function of experiential marketing through policy planning. Most of the visitors interviewed in this study have heard or learned of the reputation of the museum or attend exhibitions through the introduction of friends. Emotional connection is established through word-of-mouth, and so is recognition. This architecture from Japanese Colonial Period was transformed into a museum after it was once used as Air Force Headquarters and Tainan City Government when the KMT government came to Taiwan. However, the uniqueness of the museum is obviously discernible. Many visitors directly associate the museum with local culture and suggest that it is one of the historical and cultural backgrounds of Tainan (Figure 7). In terms of the museum’s provision of local information of Tainan, Subject B-3 indicated that the historical and geographical information provided by the museum “fail to meet the needs of researchers or tourists.” Therefore, although many visitors suggest that there is a lack of local information, they also know that the museum’s objective is to introduce literature in Taiwan. They do not ask for too much and will turn to other historical relics, art & culture units and libraries for information. Several subjects who are local residents indicated that this architecture has become the memory of their childhood or youth, constituting their collective memory [3], a notion proposed by the French socialist, Halbwachs (1992), as well as the “genius loci,” [7] a notion proposed by Norberg-Schulz (1980). Subject B-5 indicated “*The light projected on the scripts under the entrance seemed romantic as I went in the museum. It is great that these lights guided me one by one, and I felt that I was walking into a dreamland.*” Therefore, in terms of feel, visitors emotionally experienced the local literary spirit, and “space and environment” are the media which can directly affect their feelings.

## **3) Presentation of Think Module**

According to the interviews of the visitors, most of the visitors mainly visit the museum for recreation purpose. Some visitors indicated that they visited the museum because they intended to attend the exhibitions held in the museum. For example, they were attracted by specific promotion activities or exhibitions, but visitors learned the information of the exhibitions almost from Internet. But most subjects suggest that they did not have any presumptions for the access of knowledge and experiences through exhibitions. Some of the visitors hoped to acquire knowledge through the exhibition or activity design/planning provided by the museum. Some of the visitors who attended the exhibition indicated that they experienced, perceived and thought of the literary spirits and objectives. Subject B-5 indicated “*These (exhibition books or articles) displayed enable researchers or writers to feel that we are not individuals who walk alone, but a group of people walking together. In this way, we can feel powerful.*” Moreover, visitors mentioned that they hoped there are more audio stimuli. Taking the routine native language exhibition for example, the stimulation of various languages increases visitors’ extended reading, which is also beneficial to self-exploration and in-depth investigation on individual experiences (Figure 8).



Figure 7 This old architecture experienced many changes in identities. Many visitors associate this museum with local culture and suggest that it is one of the historical and cultural backgrounds of Tainan (Photograph by the NMTL).



Figure 8 Taking the routine native language exhibition in the museum for example, the stimulation of various languages increases visitors' extended reading, which is also beneficial to self-exploration and in-depth investigation on individual experiences.

Besides, the exhibition itself is also more diversified. Subject B-2 indicated that after attending the exhibition of native language literature, *"I should really take the chance to get exposed to my native language. Although I am a Hakkinese, I cannot speak any Hakkinese."* It could be inferred that, in the think module, exhibitions and activities are used as "presentation of products" to market a concept to visitors and create added value.

#### 4) Presentation of Act Module

Visitors' requests for services are their direct experiential feelings. Staff hoped that the products and services provided by the museum could shorten the distance between literature and life of people and arouse their interest in literature and reading (Figure 9). Subject B-1 answered the question about what moves him or what relates him when attending the exhibition, *"I work in other place, so I like to come here and move around. I will also visit other relics, such as governor's residence (near Bo-Ai Elementary School) or Wu's Park."* She expressed visitors' aggressiveness for visiting art & culture units. Moreover, in recent years, the museum tried to improve the once passive interactions between visitors and the museum, and ponder how to actively interact and exchange with the local residents? It intends to change the passive attitude of provision to an active one. In addition, it also intends to achieve the objective of sharing of educational resources through active presentation. For example, the museum used the concept of "ex situ exhibition:" it provided general public with a "mobile" exchange space for literature in various places through tour exhibitions and "The Mobile Museum of Taiwan Literature." This mobile museum also becomes a center for providing external and updated information of the NMTL. Therefore, in terms of act, the museum used "presentation of products" and "electronic media" to enable visitors to feel that museum visiting is the learning of knowledge and to be attracted by the process of enjoying such an atmosphere, the aforementioned products can be used as "communication tools" to convey the market concepts to them.





Figure 9. The exhibition uses "AR Augmented Reality" of the smartphone's sensory interactive program "Layar" to combine the display panel and AR Augmented Reality. Visitors can target some special patterns (such as a sea monster, etc.) to start the animation through mobile devices. This enables the visitors to have a vivid experience from the atmosphere of the space.



Figure 10 NMTL's website

### 5) Presentation of Relate Module

In terms of visitors' expectation towards experiential marketing, because the museum was founded in Tainan, a city with significant historical and cultural meanings, its advantage should be its connection with the cultural background of Tainan. How to aggressively interact and exchange with local general public? A souvenir store is opened in the museum to sell publications and souvenirs to meet the needs of research, activity/achievement presentation. Permanent Exhibitions and various special exhibitions of literature are installed in an attempt to increase the museum's opportunity to interact with general public. After attending the exhibition in the museum, Subject B-8 suggested that *"My own learning is active learning. Exhibition is simply a source of information. I will buy books to better understand relevant knowledge."* Therefore, the platform's function of connection is achieved. Moreover, the museum provides visitors with virtual services via internet. In recent years, there have also been an increasing number of visitors acquiring information via internet, apart from the service of Information Desk (Figure 10). However, some visitors, such as Subject B-7 indicated that *"The information provided by the museum should help us better understand knowledge: large newspapers seldom mention art & culture information in Tainan, and such information is only available in local China Daily News. Although I can use internet, I seldom visit websites and the website of the museum."* This fact showed that information acquisition approach varies with generations. For example, those who are used to reading newspaper will find it difficult to acquire information. Besides, the change in the media environment also affects information acquisition approach. Although the museum has tried its best to promote various information acquisition approaches, some visitors still cannot acquire such information. As the dimension of service is concerned, most of the subjects suggested that the services of either staff or volunteers are great. Therefore, in terms of the relate module, "joint establishment of brand," cross-border cooperation, local communication and connection, and image and word-of-mouth of "staff" of the museum were presented.

### 4.3 Discussion

Based on the results, the museum has used various experiential marketing strategies to provide visitors with the products and services they need according to their opinions and expectations. Therefore, with the application of various ideas, the entire museum implements various operation and environmental coordination to meet the expectations of visitors and to achieve marketing objectives. Most of the visitors intend to further explore,

purchase publications or ask questions out of curiosity, and thus experience the profession, creativity, friendly style and effort of the museum. The visitors express their opinions on experiential marketing, which reflects whether managers have implemented the penetration and influence of museum marketing in the aspect of the so-called communication, namely, promotion, from a comprehensive perspective, and presented them to the visitors.

Moreover, many visitors suggested that, in terms of service quality, the museum offers a friendly image. The subjects working in the museum also suggested that, the museum staff is also willing to provide satisfactory services as long as the conditions of policy, resources and ability are met. Bradford (1991) indicated that a museum, in order to establish the reputation of its own, needs to take the target group's views and needs into consideration, and incorporates it into a marketing mechanism [1]. Staff frequently mentioned that it is necessary to attach importance to visitors' opinions to further adjust services and products. Managers mentioned the penetration and influence of marketing from a comprehensive perspective. They convey information to visitors via service designs. Therefore, the objective and expectation of the current experiential marketing is to expand the effective application of resources of Taiwan literature and to benefit the development of Taiwan literature.

According to the results, an experiential marketing module for museums which is modified from Schmitt's module is shown in Figure 11. The center of the diagram is the audience, representing that the museum is audience-oriented. The first outer circle of the center is the five functions as the foundation of operation. In order to achieve the purpose of experience marketing, the museum uses the Schmitt's module as the strategy. Different experiential media are used according to the needs of different modules. Thus, this is the implementation process of experiential media by the museum.

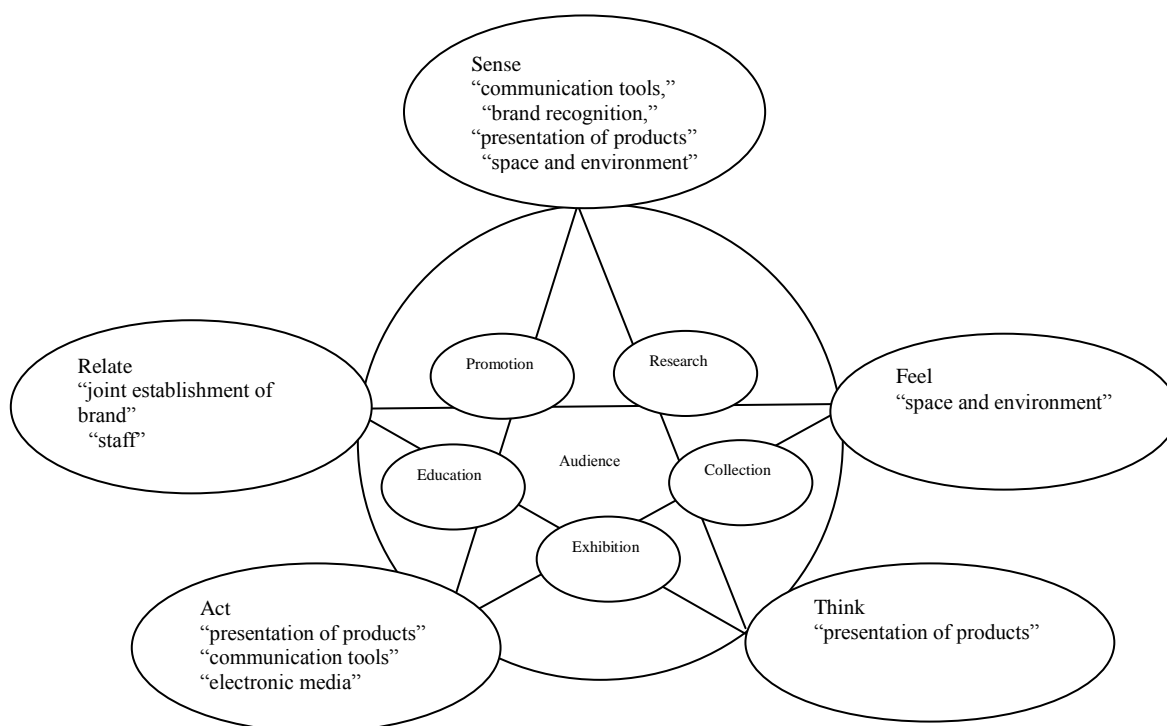


Figure 11. Museums utilize experiential media to create a reality interaction with audiences. Modified from Schmitt's module

According to the investigation on the media of experiential marketing using the theory of “strategic experiential module,” the museum possesses sufficient software and hardware to promote museum experiential marketing. However, it should be more aggressive to respond to the relatively competitive museum environments in Taiwan or abroad. Moreover, the original designs of the museum, including exhibitions or facilities, can be improved as long as several adjustments are made. However, owing to the restrictions on fund, equipment or policy, the maximum effect can only be achieved by making some adjustments to the experiential interactive designs. Furthermore, how to use “emotional branding” to perform operation and win the emotional recognition of visitors through their sensory experiences is also an important challenge to brand establishment of museum.

## 5. Conclusions

According to McLean (1993), the museum marketing is a procedure that combines the organization and the people [6]. Museums should fully use the marketing activities of exhibition concepts. Visitors should be regarded as the origin of extension to transform each unit—museum functions, experiential modules, and experiential media—into an organic individual. In addition, exhibitions should be designed according to the promotion and marketing strategies of museum. Related elements constitute a field or a conceptual praxis for a consumer to experience the situational interaction (Figure 11). In terms of the educational function of museums, exhibitions should be able to arouse the interest of visitors and meet their learning expectations. Moreover, during the visiting period, exhibitions should trigger visitors’ motivation of extended reading and learning. On the other hand, the guided tours, educational promotion activities, free observational learning and experiential learning of museums make them the places for social education, learning and recreation. Therefore, museums should provide relevant cultural and educational resources to fully assume their educational responsibility. Stylianou-Lambert (2011) argued that museums can offer culture and history information of a place [10]. Meanwhile, scholars such as Pine and Gilmore (1998) pointed out that the experiential marketing is an important new trend, and it possesses unique sensibility, which preserves life memory and experience. The customers would enjoy the diverse learning, and experience the activities. By doing so, they would be touched and have a memorable experience [8]. Museums may play many roles. Their roles are not determined by their hardware, but their internal designs and content presented. How to integrate the exhibitions space of museums into which software/hardware design to provide adequate educational services for exhibition points and put experiential marketing into the practice of design is the issue to be considered. The constant application of innovative design concepts may also help develop the multiple functions of museums.

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