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Revista de Antropología, Ciencias de la Comunicación y de la Información, Filosofía,  
Lingüística y Semiótica, Problemas del Desarrollo, la Ciencia y la Tecnología

Año 35, 2019, Especial N°

# 19

Revista de Ciencias Humanas y Sociales

ISSN 1012-1587/ ISSNe: 2477-9385

Depósito Legal pp 198402ZU45



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## **Museum Communication: A Conceptual Study**

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### **Abstrac**

The main purpose of museum management was to form knowledge which could be achieved through appropriate communication. Museum could act as communication tool for public, both through non-exhibition communication and exhibition related communication. Communication could also be conducted verbally and non-verbally. With the advancement of technology and public behavioral change, museum needed to make breakthroughs through various disciplines of science, to construct the owned values, as a way to communicate. There were only a small number of researches that discussed museum from the perspectives of communication. The objective of this paper was to formulate the concept of museum communication from the viewpoint of Communication Science, therefore the researcher conducted literature studies on previous researches and conducted observations in two university museums in Indonesia. The museums were Anatomy Museum of the Faculty of Medicine and Health Sciences Atma Jaya University/Museum Anatomi Fakultas Kedokteran dan Ilmu Kesehatan Universitas Atma Jaya (Museum Anatomi FKIK UAJ) Jakarta and National Education Museum of Indonesia University of Education/Museum Pendidikan Nasional Universitas Pendidikan Indonesia (Mupenas UPI) Bandung to obtain the picture of a communication process. This research was the first stage of the research that aimed to analyze the theory and practices of communication in museums.

### **Keywords:**

communication, museum, museum communication, communication model, museum university, museum value

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## Comunicación del museo: un estudio conceptual

### Resumen

El objetivo principal de la gestión del museo era formar el conocimiento que se podía lograr a través de una comunicación adecuada. El museo podría actuar como una herramienta de comunicación para el público, tanto a través de la comunicación no relacionada con la exposición como de la comunicación relacionada con la exposición. La comunicación también podría realizarse verbalmente y no verbalmente. Con el avance de la tecnología y el cambio de comportamiento público, el museo necesitaba hacer avances a través de varias disciplinas de la ciencia, para construir los valores propios, como una forma de comunicación. Hubo solo un pequeño número de investigaciones que discutieron el museo desde la perspectiva de la comunicación. El objetivo de este trabajo fue formular el concepto de comunicación del museo desde el punto de vista de la Ciencia de la Comunicación, por lo tanto, el investigador realizó estudios de literatura sobre investigaciones anteriores y realizó observaciones en dos museos universitarios en Indonesia. Los museos fueron Anatomy Museum of the Faculty of Medicine and Health Sciences Atma Jaya University / Museum Anatomi Fakultas Kedokteran dan Ilmu Kesehatan Universitas Atma Jaya (Museum Anatomi FKIK UAJ) Jakarta y National Education Museum of Indonesia University of Education / Museum Pendidikan Nasional Universitas Pendidikan Indonesia (Mupenas UPI) Bandung para obtener la imagen de un proceso de comunicación. Esta investigación fue la primera etapa de la investigación que tuvo como objetivo analizar la teoría y las prácticas de comunicación en los museos.

### Palabras clave:

comunicación, museo, comunicación del museo, modelo de comunicación, universidad del museo, valor del museo

### Research Context

Various symbols as human efforts in communication are documented by an institution known as museum. Museum documents various media that show a nation's civilization journey. The communication symbols created by people are not merely gathered, recorded, maintained, and stored, but efforts are

made to make them accessible and can be re-communicated. Museum becomes the bridge connecting the past and the present as well as enables reflection for the future through a unique communication process where space and time between the creator of the message and the recipients can possibly be different. Not many research has been conducted on museum communication. Most researches found viewed communication occurs in museum through the mediation of exhibition/display arranged by the curator and did not provide clear definition on the meaning of museum communication. The researches obtained by the researcher ranging from 1963 to 2014 were of De Borhegyi (1963), Parker (1963), Cameron (1968), Miles (1989), Hooper-Greenhill (1991), Horta (1992), Shalaginova (2012) and Nielsen (2014).

The objective of this paper is to develop a concept of museum communication from the point of view of Communication Science. Literature study on previous researches and observation in two university museums were conducted to get a picture of museum communication process. The museums were Anatomy Museum of Faculty of Medicine and Health Sciences Atma Jaya University (Anatomy Museum)/Museum Anatomi Fakultas Kedokteran dan Ilmu Kesehatan Universitas Atma Jaya (Museum Anatomi FKIK UAJ) Jakarta and National Education Museum of Indonesian Education University/Museum Pendidikan Nasional Universitas Pendidikan Indonesia (Mupenas UPI) Bandung. University museums were chosen as there has not been any research on this type of museum in Indonesia even though university museums have collections that epistemologically represent subject disciplines (such as, anatomy, mineralogy, zoology, etc.) and the history of the subject disciplines (such as physics, chemistry, biology, etc.). Essentially the main function of a university museum is to preserve scientific materials, provide educational means and inspire sustainable research (Green, 1969: p. 161). In addition, university museums are “life laboratories” that develop in line with the development of science. University museums also become a learning base by providing direct involvement between users and object (Rowe, 2002: p. 21; Romanek, 2008: p. 279). To carry out the functions and the concept mentioned above, museums, particularly university museums, cannot be passive institutions. Observation on the application of museology concept in university museum is a way to understand the dynamics of occurring communication process.

The Perspective of Communication Theory

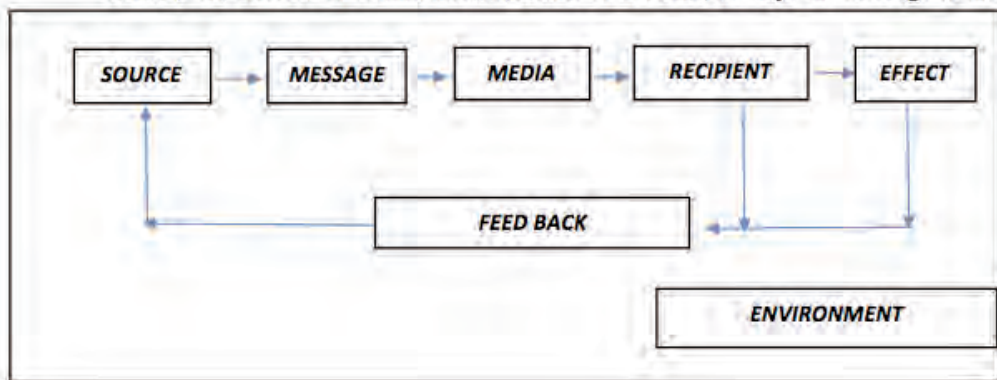
Everett M. Rogers (1985), an American rural sociology expert with great interest on communication research study particularly in the dissemination of innovation, defined communication as a process where an idea is transferred from the source to the recipients with the intention of changing their behavior. Toge

ther with Lauwrence D. Kincaid (1987), Rogers later developed the definition of communication as a process where two or more people form or carry out information exchange which eventually leads to deep mutual understanding. Dance and Larson recorded that until 1976 there were 126 definition of communication from various scientific perspectives. However, according to Cangara, the definition of communication cannot be separated from the substance of communication itself which is as a process of information (message) transfer from one person to someone else or vice versa (Cangara, 2017: p. 35-36). According to Cangara, the elements in communication can be illustrated as following,

Illustration 1. Elements of Communication

Source: Cangara, 2017: p. 36

Source, also referred as communicator, sender or decoder, conveys the message to the



recipient. Message, also referred as content or information, is the statement conveyed by the sender to the recipient. The statement can be verbal (written or spoken language) as well as non-verbal (sign language) that is understandable to the recipient. Media is the device used to transfer the message from the source to the recipient. In this model, media can be mass media including newspaper, radio, film, television and internet. It can also be networks such as Quran recitation group or social gathering group, group of radio or movie enthusiasts, community organization, place of worship, folk festival, arts performances, and other alternative media such as poster, leaflet, brochures, banner, book, bulletin, sticker etc. Recipient, also referred as audience/ public, target, adopter, communicant, receiver or decoder, is the target of the message sent by the source to the recipient. Effect, also referred as impact or result, is the difference between what is thought, felt and done by the recipient before and after receiving the message. Effect can affect a person's knowledge, attitude, and behavior. Therefore, effect can also be interpreted as a change or reinforcement on a person's

knowledge, attitude and behavior as the result of message reception. Feedback, also referred as reaction or response, is the response given by recipient as a result of message reception from the source. Some think that feedback is also a form of effect. Environment is the situation that affects communication. It can be interpreted as its physical form, socio-cultural, psychological forms and time dimension. For example, when the recipient's location is far in the mountain, the message cannot be sent and received due to physical obstacle. Other example could be a community's socio cultural environment or community's psychological environment that is traumatized by current disaster.

### Review of Previous Researches

In previous researches, experts developed various museum communication models. Communication models shifted from time to time. Starting from a model that focused on the visitors, to models that focused on the the exhibition, exhibitor, creating personal meaning for the visitors, semiotical approach to the communication, and transformation communication model. Several phenomenal works discussing these models were written by De Borhegyi (1963), Parker (1963), Cameron (1968), Miles (1989), Hooper-Greenhill (1991), Horta (1992), Shalaginova (2012) and Nielsen (2014). All of these works focused on exhibition activities except Nielsen which provides views on museum communication with the environment.

De Borhegyi (1963) focused his model on visitors' visual communication. Borhegyi observed that it was the curator who was responsible for attracting museum visitors. In his communication model, Borhegyi stated that visitors would be attracted to the explanation, lighting, tactile application, sound, topic program, and the use of place and exhibition that effectively and dramatically motivating, which he called museum interpretation program. Borhegyi stated that effectively motivating exhibition was the exhibition that provokes people to think. In this model, thinking involved critical thought that brought visitors from clear and obvious phenomena to abstract. De Borhegyi model was the beginning of the study of visitors and exhibition staff communication. It set visitors as the focal point of exhibition communication efforts.

No matter how artistic the layout, how scrupulously accurate the scientific label, if the exhibit doesnot attract the interest or reach the intellect of the average museum visitor, it is simply wasted time, money and effort (Borhegyi, 1962)

The next model was developed by Parker (1963) who used cognitive theoretical approach and identified museum as communicator. Parker stated that object or

concept had its own organization that visitors' created with their extensive knowledge. Through visitors' knowledge organization in their universe, the meaning of an object or a concept was conceptualized. Parker also stated the importance of museum to understand the users' reading behavior. In the museum, visitors did not read the entire presented text but preferred reading text only to find the answer to their question. Parker did not elaborate linear and non-linear communication concept as the loci of visitors' attention. In general, visitors read from left to right, saw picture clockwise, and interested to visually attractive pictures, text and exhibition. Very satisfied visitors were readers that used various strategies to be able to understand the exhibition. Understanding reading technique was the prerequisite for effective communication in museum. Parker's communication model indicated public as part of an exhibition design where their cognitive capability was directly related to the communication and content assimilation of the exhibition (Parker, 1963: p. 350-360).

While De Borghegyi's attractive exhibition composition explained the visitors as target of museum interpretation program, and Parker identified the object/concept and visitors were the main components in a communication process in creating exhibition composition, Cameron's (1968) communication model centered on interpretation of the exhibition. Exhibition was the center communication between exhibitor's interpretation and visitors' meaningful concept. First, the exhibitor decided a message. Then, using language object and extracting meanings from observable phenomena, visitors formed an applicable concept. In arranging exhibitions, Cameron expressed the needs of the exhibition environment to reduce noise or interference in transmitting messages. Some examples of noise are a wordy exhibition label with overly small texts, unattractive layout and design. Two new elements in Cameron's model were organizing meaningful concept and feedback. According to Cameron, there were three partners in museum communication equation: exhibitor, exhibition environment, and visitors. Good exhibition communication influenced two visitor's characteristics, such as the desire to create meaning and the ability to provide feedback (Cameron, 1968: p. 33-40).

Miles (1989) responded to Cameron's work by introducing the encoding and decoding concept on exhibition communication study. In general, encoding was the exhibitor process in deciding what would be presented in an exhibition. The visitors decoded the messages in processing or assimilating the communication. The key differences between traditional concept of encoding –



decoding and Miles' concept was that the visitors in Miles' concept did the encoding and decoding. More than encoding, the exhibitor constructed the exhibition. With their existed knowledge, visitors would try to apply a concept to the exhibition project. Later, they also did some encoding of the new information to be stored into their existing cognitive framework. Miles' model involved visitors' trial, exhibitor, and interpreted detailed addition to previous models (Miles, 1989 in Whittle, 1989: p. 17-18).

A museum communication model that deconstructed the entire previous model where exhibitors (communicator team), meaning (exhibition) and visitors (active meaning creators) formed a museum communication system was developed by Hooper-Greenhill (1991). Hooper-Greenhill did not include exhibition environment as initiated by Cameron, neither the visitors' cognitive framework as initiated by Parker where visitors' needs, visitors' perceptive skills, the object or concept being exhibited, nor the interactive give and take between visitors and exhibition. Hooper-Greenhill's model showed the meanings and media of an exhibit as the convergence point of the communicators and the visitors (meaning makers). The model clearly defined the involvement of the process, concepts, relationships and components that was not demonstrated in previous research. This model shows an interaction between a team of communicators and the audience. It recognizes the active role of the audience and thus shows the necessity of analysing its motivations, knowledge and expectations before message are developed.

Hooper-Greenhill's idea was considered as new inspiration for museum managers because it used cultural approach in applying communication theory in the museum. The idea was later developed in Horta's research (1992) using Semiotics approach where experience on museum was the key. Museum exhibition should be seen as an open text, providing visitors' needs and pleasures as well as visitors' involvement in cultural process, as an active agent, critics and participant at the same time. Museum exhibition is a meaning exchange media that can increase the value of the museum as social interaction place and a unique instrument for individual and social development.

In De Borhegyi's (1963) and Parker's (1963) communication models, nearly post-modern modern approach can be sensed. Even though they are instructive, De Borhegyi and Parker had already considered visitors' interaction. Next Cameron's (1968) communication model which was responded by Miles (1989) began to pay attention to feedback provided by the visitors. Construction made by visitors became Miles' consideration in formulating stories



in exhibition in the museum. The encoding and decoding process done by visitors became the consideration in creating visitor-oriented exhibition. Hooper-Greenhill's (1991) communication model emphasized on convergence process which according to the researcher began to lead to the concept of visitor influence. Even though it had not entirely based on the concept of participatory museum, Hooper-Greenhill's communication model used cultural approach to emphasize the importance of interpretative strategy in constructing meaning on exhibition. Moreover, Hooper-Greenhill underlined the importance of improving museum's function as communicator in 21st century. And Horta's research re-confirmed it by giving great consideration that museum communication was presented by museum exhibition as a process and as a product of museum's work. The message delivered as 'speech' of museum language is an expression of communication in the form of text or discourse. Communication process occurred in a triadic relationship, consisted of emitters -object-receivers that played important roles in mediation and significance. Material aspect in museum sign was the first element in museum language (Horta, 1992: p. 322-325).

Shalaginova and Nielsen's research were of the works found in the 2000s era. Shalaginova's research offer a communication model for heritage interpretation, where the museum is included. Shalaginova's research is based on the thought when heritage interpretation is considered as a mechanism for understanding a heritage site, and understanding as a cognitive-social mechanism is only able to take place in communication, it is important to analyse the communication process for heritage interpretation and to show a multidimensional approach to communication. With the development of new technology, it is no longer easy to identify who is the sender and who is the receiver, as the information can now be accessed on demand by anyone. A new model underlines the importance of meaning negotiation and not its transmission, and defines communication as the process by which messages are formulated, exchanged and interpreted. A heritage interpreter see the effectiveness of the media based on whether it is not used by the visitors, or on the contrary extensively used, and also when it is not used in the way it was meant. In order for understanding to take place, the audience first has to receive the message, and when the medium which carries the messages is found too complicated to use or unattractive, then the message will not be received at all. The communication model for heritage interpretation developed by Shalaginova combines many of the elements, namely Bill Lewis's interpretive model, Cameron's model, Hooper-Greenhill's model, Schramm's model communication and communic

ation model developed by Office of Technology Assessment. The component of the Shalaginova communication model consists of a team of communicators (often it is more than one person, who develops interpretive messages), an active meaning-maker and an interpretive medium. Because both understanding and communication are the processes, which are influenced by culture in the form of collective knowledge systems, in order for communication to be successful and for understanding to take place, both a 'Team of Communicators' and an 'Active Meaning-maker' need to find the common ground for communication (which also includes sharing compatible collective knowledge systems). Every individual has knowledge and experience, which is characteristic of him/her only. In the same way, individuals come from cultural environments which determine their collective knowledge systems. The same applies to the 'Team of Communicators' and an 'Active Meaning-maker', who need to find common ground, which allows communication and understanding to take place. The choice and quality of interpretive medium may either stimulate or hinder understanding and is to a certain degree culturally determined (Shalaginova, 2012: p. 45-52).

Nielsen's research that introduced transformative museum. Communication took place in a transformation system built by knowledge, information and past tradition, debate, discussion, current trends/tendencies and ideas, thoughts and opportunities in the future. The communication model introduced by Nielsen was called Nautilus Model. Nielsen described communication model in museum transformation process framework using spiral model that was often used to present innovation's development and connection (Nielsen, 2014, 244-248). According to Nielsen, communication was an important concept in transforming museum to enhance learning and increase visitors' interests because museum was meaningless without visitors' involvement. Within transformation framework, the orientation of the museum was flexible so it could meet the needs of various groups. Nielsen's communication model viewed museum as a very complex institution that could no longer dwell on its own self, but it had to explore the challenges and opportunities arising from various obstacles. In achieving the objective, museums should enhance cooperation with its partners and visitors, develop and make experiments as well as convey and implement various new approaches. Museum also needed to improve the experiences and change its system (Nielsen, 2014: p. 250-253). From all works, only Nielsen's research gave the definition of museum communication as "the core of museum work, approaches and responsibilities" (Nielsen, 2014: p. 12).

## Findings and Discussion

To formulate the concept of museum communication, in addition to examining previous researches, the researcher also conducted observations in FKIK UAJ's Anatomy Museum and Mupenas UPI. From the observations, the researcher constructed elements and dimensions of communication that could describe a communication system in museums (Chart 1. Source: Yudhawasthi, 2017: p. 5). The three important elements mentioned by Horta as triadic relationship, emitters -object-receivers (Horta, 1992: p. 325), were parts of the basic elements of museum communication. The researcher noticed the uniqueness in the elements that the messenger in museum was not just the person who existed now, but also someone who might not be able to be present because he/she had deceased or was faraway from the location. In ethics and cultural heritage context, museums could not eliminate the presence of the original creators by ignoring their message merely because the creators did not exist anymore. Hence, museums documented various objects created in the past, present or predicted in the future. Objects were taken from various area or locations as well. With various exhibition objects, museums became the bridge in connecting knowledge between generations and even between nations.

Message transmission could be specified in the context of direct and indirect transmissions. Direct transmission is when visitors interacted directly with the objects as messages, and indirect transmission is when the visitors used the media of exhibition, mass media, social media and/or internet managed and prepared by museum's team of curators. The curator team in museum could consist of director of the museum and the curators. Hence in the process, object interpretation by curator team occurred, which constructed in various media, such as exhibition. In addition, object interpretation could also be transmitted in the museum with the assistance of educator (guide) team both verbally and non-verbally. The message recipients had the opportunity to make connection between their concept and familiar museum object to obtain meaningful experience and even created new meaning. In the era of constructivist learning, the message recipient was an individual who was believed to already have existed knowledge (Hein, 1995: p. 1) and they would construct their knowledge on what they saw, felt, heard and experienced. Therefore, creating impressions in museum does not necessarily have to be done on one media, but today museums need to apply multi-dimensional communication.

In the dimension of multi-dimensional communication, communication was

built from all elements, verbally and non-verbally, which interpretation was depended on many factors such as culture and experiences growing in societies. Messenger did not only influence the message but also the media and recipient. Conversely, media could also influence the form of the message and the recipient's response to the messenger. It means communication could exist when there was interaction or reverse reaction between the elements involved (Miller, 2005). This was reinforced by, not only the concrete environmental situation, but also socio-culture and psychology. Museum should perceive itself as a communication system with its various communication processes and communication contexts. By positioning itself as messenger, it would be easy for museums to create program to communicate their vision and mission, and eventually would be able to construct their values to the message recipients.

From the observations conducted, the researcher noticed that university museums had not fully comprehended the elements, dimensions and contexts of communication created in the environment. University museums had not positioned themselves as a communication system, while if we incorporated the International Council of Museum's (ICOM) definition of museum, museums needed to understand the museum communication further.

a museum is a non-profit, permanent institution in the service of society and its development, open to the public, which acquires, conserves, researches, communicates and exhibits the tangible and intangible heritage of humanity and its environment for the purposes of education, study and enjoyment (International Concil Of Museum).

As a communication system, the researcher described the components and elements of communication in a simple chart below. In the chart, effect was described connected but not binding to the system circle since the effect was a study outside the communication system, instead feedback as part of the system that needed to be studied as a unit of communication system.

Chart 1. Museum as a Communication System.  
Source: Yudhawasthi, 2017: p. 5.



The realization of museum as communication system cannot be separated from museum paradigm that changed from object-oriented to people (visitor)-oriented. Now museums became the place to build social interaction or “Third Place” (Rentscheler, 2007: p. 12-13; Institute Museum and Libraries Services, 2009: p. 9). Professor Ray Oldenburg explained that as the “Third Place”, museum was expected to be the destination after home and work place for healthy society (Weaver, 2007: p. 31). Robert Lumley in Cox argued that with the new paradigm, the role of museums became further than just one way communication (Cox, 1998: p. 180). Not only providing the essential information, museums

also became a pleasant place for people. It means that museums were able to support diverse needs of various visitors, including people with specific needs and adapting to technology development. Museums should provide opportunities to the visitors to make connection with the familiar concepts and objects (Hein, 1995” p. 3; Hein, 2004; Cox, 1998: p. 180; Chen, 2008: p. 4; Muelen, 2009: p. 5). Visitors were not passive groups in receiving messages, instead they were actively carry out personal agenda. They tried to find what they needed in the museum and constructing meanings on their own selves while exploring the exhibition and attending other public programs offered by the museum (Silverman, 1995: p.161-170; Rounds, 1999: p. 5-8; Hooper-Greenhill, 2010: p. 31; Davies, 2013: p. 345; Nielsen, 2014: p. 23-25).

Modern museum was a concept of museum that defined itself as a modern institution. Therefore, the management of museum should use accurate and measurable management. Modern university museum was a concept of museum that defined itself as the modern center of education, research, and recreation at the same time, which are the general objectives of museum formulated by International Council of Museums (ICOM). Kotler, Kotler and Kotler specified the components and elements of museum into 8 (eight) categories, namely collection, exhibition, value (experience), facility, program which consisted of publication and web-based activity, and service (Kotler, 2008: p. 289). These components were owned by museums in general, and would vary depending on the condition of the museum, including university museums. The researcher added stakeholder components that would directly intersect with value (experience), both ones that were communicated to them by the museum and the other way around. The university museum stakeholders are (1) users consisting of students, lecturers, staffs of the faculty and university, public outside the campus who visit the museum, (2) initiators and managers of the museum, (3) policy makers in the university, including the foundation, the dean and/or rector.

These components became important in a museum communication model because the study on the stakeholder was a new paradigm in museology. It was very close to communication science, which recipient of message (museum’s stakeholder) was an important part of a communication process beside the messenger the message itself. In this study, the role of communication became important for the development of the university museum. As part of educational institution, objects exhibited in university museum has two characters that differentiate them from other museums. One, the objects would represent particular object disciplines. Two, the objects had function as learning media (were used or still used). With these unique characters, the university museum

also required unique communication system. The components of museum communication were shown as a museum communication model in the following Chart 2,

Chart 2. Museum Communication Model



To implement the university museum’s complex functions that reached and motivated the stakeholders, communication process should be examined comprehensively based on basic components and elements in university museum management. These components and elements would actually continue to develop according to the creativity of the museum manager and the needs of museum stakeholders. All these components and elements formed the concept of museum communication. In the context of communication science, the studies would develop multilinearly in building new disciplines of science that enriched the range of communication disciplines. Communication played a role both in museum’s communication media and museum’s communication content. Various channels were available in



museum's communication media to be utilized by museum institution. Communication also provided the content of the message needed to be transmitted to all museum-stakeholders. Museum communication was developed through the merging of several disciplines of science in a study about communication and museum. To make it a discipline of study, museum communication was aided by several other disciplines and studies, such as management, marketing, advertising, sociology, anthropology, law, architecture, etc. Communication played a comprehensive role in museum. There was no aspect, even simple interaction that happened in museum, that did not involve communication.

### Conclusion

Museum communication is a concept of managing modern museum using various discipline approaches to construct museum as a place that has value (e.g. education, research and entertainment value). Understanding museum communication would help the management to make museum more attractive to its stakeholders. It can inspire and change stakeholders' mindset on value, benefits and quality of museum as well as service and experiences at museum. Therefore, stakeholders would be more willing in contributing to museum development.

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Revista de Ciencias Humanas y Sociales

Año 35, Especial N° 19, 2019

Esta revista fue editada en formato digital por el personal de la Oficina de Publicaciones Científicas de la Facultad Experimental de Ciencias, Universidad del Zulia.  
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