"Take a Picture, It Will Last Longer" – Visitor Photo Behavior at EMP|SFM

Experience Music Project | Science Fiction Museum and Hall of Fame
Summative Evaluation
New Directions Project
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Executive Summary

This evaluation looked at one set of visitor behaviors – taking and using photographs – in the whole of Experience Music Project | Science Fiction Museum and Hall of Fame (EMP|SFM). It was conducted between April 30 and May 6, 2010 by collecting semi-structured interview responses from 58 EMP|SFM visitors during their visits. We sought to identify 1) whether visitors were taking their own photos in the galleries; 2) how they planned to use those photos; 3) whether they planned to use visitor-generated material (in the form of the *Taking Aim* Flickr site) after their visit; and 4) what parts of EMP|SFM most resonated with visitors, and whether those things had any connection to photo-taking behavior.

Despite the limitations inherent to a small, preliminary study, the results offer lots of new ground to explore, whether through further evaluation or through expanded program initiatives. Regardless of the course of action, the following key findings can help shape EMP|SFM's next steps:

- Less than one year after the new photo policy began, more than two thirds of EMP|SFM visitors report taking pictures during their visit.

- Many of the museum's most-photographed locations seem to also be the spaces and things that most resonate with visitors.

- When asked how they might use their photos, most photographers (in about three quarters of all their responses) indicated plans to share the images in some way post-visit – potentially exposing new audiences to EMP|SFM's most compelling elements.

- A majority of visitors indicated they might use an EMP|SFM photo-sharing venue / community (from the *Taking Aim* interactive) after their visit.

Introduction

Experience Music Project (EMP) is dedicated to the exploration of creativity and innovation in popular music. By blending interpretative, interactive exhibitions with cutting-edge technology, EMP captures and reflects the essence of rock 'n' roll, its roots in jazz, soul, gospel, country and the blues, as well as rock's influence on hip-hop, punk and other recent genres. Visitors can view rare artifacts and memorabilia and experience the creative process by listening to musicians tell their own stories.

The Science Fiction Museum and Hall of Fame (SFM) is the world's first museum devoted to the thought-provoking ideas and experiences of science fiction. SFM's exhibitions promote awareness and appreciation of science fiction literature and media while encouraging visitors to envision new futures for humanity. In the Science Fiction Hall of Fame, the museum pays homage to the most respected of science fiction practitioners—writers, artists, publishers and filmmakers.

EMP|SFM is housed in a 140,000 square food Frank O. Gehry-designed building set amid the backdrop of the Seattle Center. Since opening in 2000, the museum has welcomed more than 4.5 million visitors through its doors and has been a key economic driver among Seattle nonprofit arts and culture organizations.[1]

In September 2009, EMP|SFM changed its photograph policy, allowing for non-flash photography in the galleries. At the time, spokeswoman Maggie Skinner said, "From a marketing perspective, people sharing photographs is the best positive publicity you can get."[2] Since that time, visitors have been happily taking photos in the gallery, but the museum had done little to see what visitors do with these photographs after leaving the museum. This evaluation serves to collect preliminary data on where in the museum visitors are taking photographs as well as to determine how visitors use the photographs.

This evaluation seeks to assess how visitors use personal photography at EMP|SFM by answering the following questions:
1. Do visitors take pictures in the galleries? Where?
2. What do visitors plan to do with the photos they take at EMP|SFM?
3. Do visitors plan to look at the *Taking Aim* photos on the EMP Flickr site after they leave the museum?
4. What artifact or gallery in the museum is their favorite or least favorite? Is there something in the museum they found particularly surprising? Is there something that evoked strong memories or associations? Is there some connection between what visitors responded to seeing in the museum and their own photographic habits?

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[1] Experience Music Project / Science Fiction Museum and Hall of Fame. "About EMP|SFM." http://www.empsfm.org/aboutEMPSFM/index.asp (accessed May 30, 2010).

[2] Guzman, Monica. "Local museums rethink no-photos policy." *Seattle Post-Intelligencer*, September 15, 2009. http://www.seattlepi.com/local/410223_museum16.html (accessed May 30, 2010).

New Directions is an IMLS funded project designed to train museum studies graduate students to understand, support and engage in audience research. A key component of the training is using museums as learning laboratories where students work with an institution to conduct audience research, under the guidance of evaluation mentors and support staff.

Literature Review

Evaluators at the Exploratorium have tackled questions of visitor behavior in the past, including general assessment of what visitors actually "do" in a space – in terms of the learning behaviors they display – and (with a more ambitious set of goals than ours) how that experience changes participant thinking and attitudes. The study also looked at which exhibit elements captured visitors' imaginations enough to prompt self-directed engagement – in this case, conversations. We believe that studies that address visitor interest and activity in general can inform the examination of one visitor activity in particular.[3]

Education researcher David Anderson has written extensively on the topic of post-visit experiences and their value (which this evaluation addresses through visitors' uses of photos). His work deals with the effects of post-visit experiences on visitors' learning of content and recollection of their visit – including articulating a framework for post-visit activities that maximize science learning after field trip visits.[4] And a recent conference paper by Silvia Filippini-Fantoni and Jonathan Bowen explores the challenges and the potential of "bookmarking" activities as a tool for greater visitor engagement both during and after museum visits; their findings across many cases could prove useful for a deeper exploration of how visitors use the images they take away from a museum.[5]

Methods

The research instrument was completed by April 21 and revised and approved for final use on April 29. Data collection took place during two hour time periods between Friday, April 30 and Thursday, May 6 (including EMP|SFM's monthly All Access night). Researchers selected three locations in the museum in which to collect data: on the second floor of EMP, just off of Sky Church; on the third floor of EMP, between the *Taking Aim* temporary gallery and the Sound Lab gallery; and on the second floor of SFM, just outside the gift shop. Data was also collected at different times of day to ensure a well-rounded sample of visitors, although a majority of the

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[3] Hein, George. "Traits of Life: A Collection of Life Sciences Exhibits." Exploratorium, 2003. http://informalscience.org/evaluation/show/9 (accessed May 31, 2010).

[4] Informal Science. Member portfolio for David Anderson. http://informalscience.org/member/portfolio/494 (accessed May 31, 2010).

[5] Filippini-Fantoni, Sylvia and Jonathan Bowen. "Bookmarking In Museums: Extending The Museum Experience Beyond the Visit?" In *Museums and the Web 2007: Proceedings*, (ed. J. Trant and D. Bearman). Toronto: Archives & Museum Informatics, published March 1, 2007. http://www.archimuse.com/mw2007/papers/filippini-fantoni/filippini-fantoni.html (accessed May 31, 2010).

data was collected between noon and 3pm. Analysis of the data took place between May 9 and 19, allowing ample time to review, code and enter the data.

All museum visitors were potential participants in the research study. To ensure a random sample of visitors, data collectors interviewed every fourth person to cross a given line, regardless of age or sex.

The primary research instrument was a semi-structured interview of participants at some point during their visit to EMP|SFM. The study strove to assess the participants' self-identified level and methods of engagement with the museum based on described behavior as well as proposed behaviors with which visitors might engage after leaving the museum. In addition to questions aimed specifically at answering the evaluation questions, researchers also collected data on whether or not participants were Seattle locals, participants' approximate age, and the make up of the participants' groups.

Results

Visitors taking photos in the museum
Of the 58 participants who completed the interview, 41 indicated they took photos in the museum (70.7%).

Where visitors took photos in the museum
Among the 41 interview subjects who reported taking photos in the museum, patterns emerged among the locations of those photos. Most participants (63.4% of respondents, n=26) photographed Roots & Branches, and another significant proportion took photos in the Guitar Gallery (34.1%, n=14). The Taking Aim and Jimi Hendrix galleries followed close behind, reported in ten interviews each (24.4% of all respondents). [Note: all "Percent of Cases" columns in Tables 1-4 total greater than 100% because interviewees were able to provide multiple responses to each question.]

Table 1: Frequencies of Visitors' Reported Photo Locations

| | | Responses | | Percent of Cases |
		N	Percent	(n = 41)
Photo Locations[a]	Northwest Passage	8	8.9%	19.5%
	Jimi Hendrix Gallery	10	11.1%	24.4%
	Guitar Gallery	14	15.6%	34.1%
	Sound & Vision	1	1.1%	2.4%
	Roots & Branches	26	28.9%	63.4%
	Sound Lab	7	7.8%	17.1%
	Taking Aim	10	11.1%	24.4%
	SFM	9	10.0%	22.0%
	Other parts of the museum	5	5.6%	12.2%

Total	90	100.0%	219.5%

a. Dichotomy group tabulated at value 1.

What visitors plan to do with the photos they take in the museum

The expected uses that interview participants reported for their photos are intriguing. The greatest proportion shared plans to post photos from their visit to sites like Facebook – 39.0%, or 16 of the 41 reported photographers, said so. Most of the other responses were distributed across a range of other ways for respondents to share their images. Nine respondents each planned to leave the photos on their camera or computer, to print photos for an album or scrapbook, or to post to an online album (22.0%); and eight others planned to share the photos with others, either in person or online (19.5%). Among all these "non-Facebook" responses, most involved sharing photos: a total of 26 (63.5%) across the categories of print or online photo albums or other in-person sharing. Similarly, 25 interview responses (61%) involved specific plans to post photos of visitors' EMP|SFM experiences online.

Table 2: Frequencies of Visitors' Planned Uses for Photos

		Responses		Percent of Cases
		N	Percent	(n = 41)
Planned Uses for	Leave on camera or computer	9	16.1%	22.0%
Photos[a]	Post to sites like Facebook	16	28.6%	39.0%
	Print for album or scrapbook	9	16.1%	22.0%
	Post to online album	9	16.1%	22.0%
	Share with others	8	14.3%	19.5%
	Other use for photos	5	8.9%	12.2%
Total		56	100.0%	136.6%

a. Dichotomy group tabulated at value 1.

Visitors planning to look at the Flickr pool of *Taking Aim* photos

Of the 53 participants who answered this question, 28 indicated they had plans to look at the *Taking Aim* Flickr pool (52.8% of valid responses). The most common reason for looking at the Flickr pool was to see photos that others had taken at the interactive (10 responses, 21.3% of valid responses), followed by a generic belief that looking at the photos online would be fun (7 responses, 14.9% of valid responses). Of the 25 participants who indicated they did not plan to look at the Flickr pool, 7 participants were unsure or had not yet been to the interactive (14.9% of valid responses), and 6 expressed a generic lack of interest in what the Flickr pool had to offer (12.8% of valid responses).

Table 3: Frequencies of Visitors' Reasons for Using or Not Using Flickr Pool

		Responses		Percent of Cases
		N	Percent	(n = 53)
Reasons Visitors Might or Might Not Use Taking Aim Flickr Pool[a]	Find own photo	5	9.6%	10.6%
	See others' photos	10	19.2%	21.3%
	Show someone else	3	5.8%	6.4%
	Generic fun	7	13.5%	14.9%
	Re-live day / Extend visit	3	5.8%	6.4%
	Other - positive response	4	7.7%	8.5%
	No interest	6	11.5%	12.8%
	Tech-aversion	3	5.8%	6.4%
	Didn't take own photo	2	3.8%	4.3%
	Unsure / Haven't been yet	7	13.5%	14.9%
	Other - negative response	2	3.8%	4.3%
Total		52	100.0%	110.6%

a. Group

Connections between what visitors react to and their own photographic habits

When asked about what they reacted most strongly to, 58 respondents offered a total of 80 responses. One of the most common answers (n=15, from 25.9% of interviewees) was to identify a single, specific artifact in the museum – everything from Captain Kirk's chair to Kurt Cobain's handwriting. The same number and proportion of people said the Jimi Hendrix gallery was the place or thing that had struck them most about their visit so far. And one object in particular attracted the next greatest share of attention: the Roots & Branches guitar sculpture was named by 19% of respondents (n=11).

Table 4: Frequencies of Things to Which Visitors Reported Reacting Most Strongly

		Responses		Percent of Cases
		N	Percent	(n = 58)
Strongest Reactions[a]	All Great	5	6.3%	8.6%
	Roots & Branches	11	13.8%	19.0%
	Hendrix Gallery	15	18.8%	25.9%
	Sound Lab	10	12.5%	17.2%
	Guitar Gallery/Guitars	5	6.3%	8.6%
	Other Specific Galleries	11	13.8%	19.0%
	Specific artifact	15	18.8%	25.9%
	Other	8	10.0%	13.8%

Total		80	100.0%	137.9%

a. Group

Unfortunately, this evaluation did not generate enough responses to perform statistical analyses that might determine strong relationships between these sets of data. Looking purely at the frequencies of given responses, however, it does seem that visitors tended to photograph the items to which they reacted most strongly.

Table 5: Cross-Tabulation of Visitors' Strongest Reactions and Photo Locations

		Participants Identified Strongest Reactions							
		Everything	Roots & Branches	Hendrix Gallery	Sound Lab	Guitar Gallery / Guitars	Other Specific Galleries	Specific Artifact	Other
Where Participants Took Photos	Northwest Passage		2	5	2		1	2	1
	Jimi Hendrix Gallery	1	4	5	3		1	1	1
	Guitar Gallery		5	5	6	1	2	4	2
	Sound & Vision				1				
	Roots & Branches	1	9	7	5	2	4	5	3
	Sound Lab		1	4	5		2	1	1
	Taking Aim	1	2	3	1		2	4	3
	On Stage								
	SFM		3	1			4	4	2
	Other parts of the museum		1	1	2		1	1	1

Discussion

The results of this evaluation show a number of important things about how visitors are using EMP|SFM. First and foremost, many of them are indeed taking pictures in the galleries. Of those photos, most are shared with audiences beyond the visitors inside the museum. And those photos seem to represent many of the things that visitors find most captivating about their visit.

Maggie Skinner alluded to the power of this combination of factors in the article mentioned above. EMP|SFM's new photo policy is not only useful "from a marketing perspective" because it permits visitors to spread the word about their visit to other potential audiences. It also offers those visitors an opportunity to engage with the objects and spaces they find most compelling in a way that is not possible at many of the institution's peers. Posing in front of an artifact or capturing one's own view of a space is a relatively rare museum experience.

EMP|SFM visitors who take photographs inside the gallery spaces are taking advantage of a unique way to deepen their own engagement with the galleries. EMP|SFM can and should take the results of this study and expand upon them in order to harness the power of that increased engagement. It seems that the potential ways to leverage visitor photos for museum marketing may already be clear. Beyond that, though, EMP|SFM has a new tool at its disposal for a host of other uses. Could education programming be enriched by offering participants a way to make (and take home, and share) their own visual memories of the event? Could a robust, loyal online community develop out of a well-managed EMP|SFM photo sharing network? Based on our

findings, we believe that the possibilities are virtually endless, and the EMP|SFM should look more strategically at how to fold visitor photography into its other programming and institutional goals.

Limitations of methodology
The methodology used in this study presented several limitations. They stem from the museum's layout, the time span of the project, and the design of the evaluation instrument.

Location and Time
Due to the layout of the Frank O. Gehry building which houses EMP|SFM, there are many entrances and exits and no central area where researchers could ensure that visitors would be concluding their visit. Although the researchers attempted to overcome this limitation by collecting data in three distinct locations, many of the participants were in the middle of their visit and therefore data about where photographs were taken may not be complete. Visitors may have taken additional pictures or seen another striking object after speaking with the researchers. Similarly, some participants were interviewed before they reached the *Taking Aim* gallery and interactive, which may have affected the responses given about looking at the *Taking Aim* photos on the EMP|SFM Flickr site.

Additionally, the days and times of data collection were limited by the availability of the two researchers and the time restrictions placed on project completion. Although the researchers made every effort to collect data across a variety of days and time periods, additional data would help develop stronger conclusions. Also, the time of year during which the data was collected was dictated by the parameters of the project. As it was neither spring nor summer break, the audience may have been different than the audience that comes to the museum during peak months. In particular, the proportion of members vs. non-members and locals vs. non-locals was very lopsided. This may have been caused by the time of the year, but also by the offerings of the museum. During the data collection period, there was no newly opened exhibit on display, as *Taking Aim* opened in February. A new exhibit may have affected the audience as well.

Follow-Up
Because no contact information was collected from participants, it is impossible to follow up on planned behaviors. Many of the research questions addressed actions the participant planned to take (what they planned to do with their photos, if they might check out the *Taking Aim* interactive, etc.), but without the opportunity to follow up, there is no way to know if participants did so.

Age Categories
Researchers categorized participants and their group members into one of four age categories: child, teen, adult and senior. These categories allowed for wide ranges in perceived ages within a single category. More segmentation across age (young adult, middle age, senior, for example), might have yielded more complex data about visitor behavior as a function of age, particularly in relation to visitors' planned uses for the photos taken in the EMP|SFM galleries.

<u>Pilot Testing</u>
Due to the time restrictions on the project, there was no opportunity to pilot test the interview instrument. Although some shortcomings of question order and wording quickly became apparent at the beginning of data collection, making changes to the instrument would have invalidated earlier data.

<u>Interruptions</u>
The researchers interviewed every fourth person to cross a line determined by the researcher, following the completion of the previous interview. However, people would often stop and ask the researcher for directions or ask questions about the exhibits, assuming the researcher was affiliated with the museum. Such occurrences sometimes had the affect of throwing off the "fourth person across the line" count that helped ensure a random selection of participants.

<u>Limitations of Data</u>
Most limitations of the evaluation have to do with its methodology as described above; many of those challenges might be controlled in a future study for fruitful new results. However, there are also some limitations on the data collected.

<u>Shared Cameras</u>
One limitation related more strictly to the data was the challenge of participants without cameras. Over the course of the evaluation, several participants indicated that someone else in their group had a camera or that the camera got passed around among the group of visitors. Since researchers were often only interviewing one member of a group, the scope of photo-taking behavior they reported may have been limited: the primary photographer in the group may not have been the interview subject. Participants may not have been aware of where all of their group's picture were taken, or may not have related to the photos that they themselves did not take. Researchers were often only recording a single point of view.

<u>Sample Size</u>
As the researchers only conducted 58 interviews during the data collection period, the sample size was too small to find any real statistical significance in the results. A larger sample size would be required to find more meaningful correlations within the data set.

Conclusions

Beyond the discussion and suggested possible next steps above, we also offer several possible research considerations for the future:

1.) How else do people decide to remember their visit? By buying something at the store, for example? Do any of the various way visitors remember their visit correlate with one another?

2.) Would visitors be interested in posting their own pictures to an EMP|SFM Flickr or Facebook site? Might the sharing of photos taken beyond limited projects like the *Taking Aim* interactive be an opportunity build more community around the museum, or to make it a place to share stories and experiences from EMP|SFM?

3.) How are people taking pictures (using a camera, camera phone, video camera, flip, etc.)? Is there a way the museum could use this knowledge to create a viral campaign of some kind? We imagine some activity like a scavenger hunt in the museum - something to get the word out and get people excited. It seems like there are ways the museum could be taking advantage of all of these photos' existence.

4.) Are there other places visitors would like to see interactives like the one in *Taking Aim*? Are they using the interactives the museum already provides (especially the Oral History booth in Sound & Vision)? This question can be expanded to look at spaces like the Taking Aim Interactive, but also Sound Lab and On Stage. More broadly, an evaluation of how visitors experience the museum: either specific spaces or in general. Is there something missing – or something more - that EMP|SFM could do?

References

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http://www.empsfm.org/aboutEMPSFM/index.asp (accessed May 30, 2010).

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Appendix: Interview Instrument

Day/Time of Visit: May ____   AM   PM   EVE   Participant: M   F   b   g

Age Ranges of Group (P=Participant): Child____   Teen____   Adult____   Senior____

Thank you for taking the time to talk with us today. We are speaking to visitors about taking photos at EMP. This interview is voluntary and anonymous and you may skip any questions or stop at any time.

1. Tell me about something you saw in the museum today that you felt most strongly about when you saw it. It could be something you loved, or hated, or that surprised you, or that sparked a memory or reaction or conversation.

2. EMP just changed its policy to permit photography in the galleries. Did you take any pictures at the museum today? Yes   No

       *IF NO: What made you decide not to take any pictures?

       *IF YES: Tell me about the pictures you decided to take.

       *Where in the museum did you take pictures?

Northwest Passage	Jimi Hendrix	Guitar Gallery	Sound & Vision
Roots & Branches	Sound Lab	Taking Aim	On Stage
Homeworld (SFM)	Fantastic Voyages (SFM)	Brave New Worlds (SFM)	Other:

4. How do you plan on using the pictures?

     _____ Leave them on my camera

     _____ Posting to Facebook, MySpace, etc.

     _____ Printing to put in a photo album

     _____ Posting to an online photo album

     _____ Sharing with friends (texting, etc.)

     _____ Other (please explain)

5. Did you use the *Taking Aim* photo interactive today?   Yes   No

  Do you think you might look at the *Taking Aim* photos on Flickr?   Yes   No

       *Why or why not?

6. Are you a Seattle local or are you visiting from out-of-town?

     Local   Non Local

7. Are you a member of EMP?   Yes   No