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# From Communication Tools to Cultural Messengers: A Study on the Construction of Museum Media Theory

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***Abstract***: *McLuhan put forward the view that "everything is a medium" in his book understanding the media: on the extension of man. The museum is the medium of time and has the dual functions of disseminating knowledge and witnessing the evolution of civilization. At present, the academic research on Museums mostly focuses on how to expand social benefits, but there is less analysis on the communication function of museums as media. This paper holds that the museum is a kind of media, and interprets it from the relevant classical theories of communication. It holds that the museum plays an important role in promoting intra human communication, intergenerational communication, mass communication and even cross-cultural communication.*

***Keywords***: *Museum; Communication function; Media law*

## Introduction

As an important carrier to witness the evolution of human civilization, museum is the basic unit for a country to disseminate and educate its national cultural information. Therefore, the museum has a good function of popular science and is an important media. As one of the four ancient civilizations in the world, China has a long history of Chinese culture, a large number of museums and a vast sea of cultural relics. However, museums have failed to achieve more effective development. From the perspective of the public, cultural relics can only be viewed from a distance. Cultural relics can not always be dusty, and the significance of the museum is not just to collect treasures. It should really step into the vision of ordinary people, and enter the world to give full play to the function of cross-cultural communication. Therefore, from the perspective of communication theory, we should re-examine the museum, regard it as an important media carrier, make use of its rich content resources, carry forward it, and make them truly popular.

## Museums are a Medium of Communication

Media in the traditional sense refers to the material tools that can spread and store information, generally referring to newspapers, radio, television, the Internet and so on. Therefore, if defined according to the traditional concept of media, museums are neither media nor media. However, Canadian communication scholar McLuhan believes that "everything is a medium", and all material carriers that have nothing to do with information communication within our understanding are actually media. McLuhan's theory provides

a new perspective for us to re understand the media. If we look at it from this perspective, the museum is undoubtedly a media. It has the functions of spreading culture and witnessing the evolution of civilization. By watching various cultural relics displayed in the museum, we have realized the "dialogue" with the ancients and can truly feel the value concept and thinking lifestyle of our ancestors. Museum is also a medium of time and space. It provides a real space and perfectly realizes the connection of people in different times and regions.

As a media, Museum has the dual role of both disseminator and communication tool. on the one hand, when the museum is used as a communication tool, it appears in the form of entity. It is a natural information treasure house, containing huge and rich natural historical and cultural information, and the general public is its receiver; On the other hand, the museum is also a disseminator. Its clearest responsibility is to spread civilization, inherit culture and educate the public.

## Communication, Dialogue and Connection: Museums under Mcluhan's Media Theory

### Museum is Information

In the past, most people thought that the media is only the carrier of information or content. It is static and does not have initiative. McLuhan believes that the media itself is the real meaningful information, and human beings can engage in corresponding communication and other social activities only after they have a certain media. Media can play a great role in the communication process, and even determine the communication effect in many cases, surpassing the communication content itself to affect the audience .

Based on McLuhan's theory, the author believes that museum is information. As a medium, museum affects our subconscious to a great extent, but we are not aware of its existence and only stay in the consumption of information. For example, the purpose of most people visiting the museum is to watch all kinds of exquisite collections displayed inside, but before visiting, they will mostly understand them through various means and obtain all kinds of information about them, so that they will inadvertently know more or less the information of the museum where the collections are located. The popular explanation is that to understand a collection, you must know the museum in advance. At this time, the museum is equivalent to a medium. At the same time, many large museums in the world, such as the British Museum in Britain, the Louvre in France and the Forbidden City Museum in China, the museum itself is an excellent cross-cultural messenger and the cultural card of the city, attracting tourists from all over the world. In addition, cultural relics itself is a kind of information transmission, which must repeatedly use the media to achieve the purpose of communication, and cultural relics communication needs the carrier of museum. The earliest Museum in the world was built in the 4th century BC. At the beginning of its establishment, its goal was to collect various works of art. Later, it gradually evolved into a place for collecting, collecting, displaying and studying objects representing natural and human cultural heritage. At present, museums have become public institutions that provide cultural knowledge popularization and education for the public. Therefore, to a large extent, it can be said that without museums, there will be no dissemination of cultural relics.

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As a media space and physical carrier to display culture and history, the museum has the potential to affect people's values and thinking patterns. Therefore, it plays a vital role in promoting interpersonal communication, especially mass communication. To do a good job in Museum communication in the future, on the one hand, we should fully tap the media potential of the museum and make use of its rich content attributes to make the communication mode more story and human culture; On the other hand, with the help of various emerging media, museum publicity can help more people get spiritual baptism and value sublimation, build cultural identity, and promote the interaction and exchange between different civilizations.

## The Museum is an Extension of the Human Body

McLuhan believes that media is the extension or expansion of people's sensory and sensory abilities, text and print media are the extension of people's visual abilities, radio is the extension of people's auditory abilities, and television is the comprehensive extension of people's visual, auditory and tactile abilities. according to McLuhan, the author thinks that the museum is also an extension of the human body. With the increasing development of modern communication technology, the extension of museums to the human body is reflected in the aspects of vision, hearing, touch and smell. For example, more and more museums have made bold innovations in the restoration, storage and audience experience of cultural relics. All these fields are shining with the light of modern new technologies. For tourists, Visiting the museum is a high-end audio-visual feast. In addition, in addition to mobilizing the sensory system, the most important thing is to need people's perception and imagination. Museum is the extension of human wisdom and imagination. Entering the museum, people realize the dialogue with history. The significance of the existence of museums is that people can find evidence of their own sources and existence during their tour, and know where they come from and where they want to go in the future.

Museum is the extension of human body. The practical significance of this view lies in that the future museum communication should fully understand and grasp the sensory attributes of different media and museums, firmly focus on "people" as the core, and the communication technology and content should constantly change with people's needs, so as to fully mobilize different sensory organs of human body, It can also achieve a high degree of interaction and dialogue between people and content, so as to achieve a good communication effect.

## The Structure of the Museum is the Connection Between People and Things and Between Different Civilizations

The concept of "global village" is another conclusion put forward by McLuhan based on the development of electronic media. In his opinion, the rapid development of modern science and technology has narrowed the space-time distance on the earth, eliminated regional boundaries and cultural differences, increasingly frequent and convenient international exchanges, and a new, integrated global village with everyone's participation is about to emerge.

The author believes that the significance of McLuhan's judgment on "global village" is that he saw the impact of media development on the traditional space-time cognitive system, put forward a new perception model,

and inspired people to look forward to the trend and trend of media development in the future. At present, the thesis of "global village" has already become a reality. In the future, we will enter the era of interconnection of all things. All things are media, and the museum is also a part of the whole media ecosystem. In the future, museums will be able to realize the connection between people and things, and even between different civilizations. Museums have moved from mystery and inviolability to popularization, popularization and globalization. Museum communication is no longer a collision between nostalgia and civilization, but a close connection and a dialogue between different civilizations that breaks through time and space.

## Game Communication: Museum is a Game

Communication game theory is a new media view put forward by psychologist William Stephenson. Stephenson focuses on the game nature of communication and believes that it is better to regard the media as toys than tools. People play with the media not so much for utilitarian considerations as for the purpose of the game. According to this view, he regards communication as two types: one is working communication, the other is game communication .

Although Stephenson's theory puts too much emphasis on the entertainment function of media, it provides a new perspective for re understanding the attributes of media. As a media, the museum is also a game. On the one hand, the media function of the museum is not limited to spreading culture and educating the public. Entertainment is also its attribute. Visiting the museum is not only for learning, but also for relieving daily pressure; On the other hand, the museum is a physical space and carrier built by people to provide game activities. It can supplement the entertainment function in addition to the education and publicity function. For most tourists, taking relatives, friends and children to visit the museum is largely for entertainment purposes. The museum is an excellent game place to promote intergenerational communication and enhance group stickiness. In addition, in many countries, in addition to listing museums as public institutions for cultural knowledge popularization and education, museums are also an important part of their cultural and creative industries. Taking Britain as an example, as one of the most developed countries in the world, many museums not only open to domestic people for free, but also attract a large number of foreign tourists as important entertainment places, creating huge foreign exchange.

According to the characteristics of the museum's game media, the museum can do a good job in game communication in the future, that is, develop some games integrating ideology and entertainment, which can not only achieve the purpose of spreading museum culture, but also teach in fun.

## The Narrative Significance of Museums

Narratology, also known as structuralist narratology, was first proposed by French literary theorist Todorov in 1969. At the beginning of narratology, it was mainly used in the field of literature, which was the structural analysis of narrative works in literature. Later, the scope and connotation of narrative theory were extended through the exploration of literature by formalism and structuralism. Nowadays, narratology has extended from literature to anthropology, sociology, psychology and so on. It regards narration as an important and basic communication behavior of human beings. Various reproduction forms related to reality or fiction, such

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as myth, novel, history, news, film and television, drama, advertising and so on, all involve the Research of narrative theory. The meaning of narration no longer refers to the text, but involves the overall description and information display of symbols, stories, methods, communication, interpretation and reception. It is a dynamic concept related to the communication content, methods and processes. According to the relevant theories of narratology, the author believes that any media information has narrative elements. As a kind of information communication media, the museum can also be interpreted from the perspective of narratology. Through this theory, we can understand and explain the museum, and deepen the understanding of the interactive relationship between the museum, cultural relics and the audience.

## The Museum is both a Narrator of the Same Story and a Narrator of Different Stories

According to the relevant theories of film narratology, from the perspective of the relationship between narrator and story, narrator can be divided into same story narrator and different story narrator. The so-called same story narrator is the active participant and witness of the story it tells. Different story narrators tell what they see, hear and feel as bystanders. Museum is not only the same story narrator, but also the different story narrator .

As the narrator of the same story, the museum can speak. It is not only the cultural card of the region, but also the "spokesman". If the development history of the city is a continuously updated documentary, the museum is the "narrator" who witnessed the rise and fall of the city. Taking the Forbidden City as an example, the purpose of the Forbidden City Museum is to collect the Royal treasures of the Ming and Qing Dynasties, but its existence value has long exceeded this itself. As a personal participant, it is the Forbidden City of the emperors of the Ming and Qing Dynasties. After the prosperity and rise and fall of the two dynasties, it has listened to countless regrets of the previous dynasties. At the same time, it has also been trampled by the iron hoof of imperialism and witnessed the revival of modern China from degradation again.

As a narrator of different stories, the identity of the "spectator" of the museum is reflected in that, on the one hand, the combination of museum building materials, construction style and spatial layout will make the museum itself an entity with narrative attributes, reflecting certain communication purposes and cultural connotation. For example, the China Pavilion during the Shanghai World Expo adopts the landscape design of the combination of nine palace lattice and Jiangnan garden, combined with the decorative materials of "China Red", making the whole pavilion full of Chinese elements.  on the other hand, most of the exhibits generally contain deep metaphorical meaning, which many tourists cannot understand. If the exhibits are effectively matched with the exhibition space provided by the museum, the information transmitted by the museum will be given a real sense of existence and can be recognized for many times, and the meaning of the exhibits will be better changed from metaphor to simile, which is convenient for communication and understanding.

## Museum is a Narrative Text

In the past, the cognition of the museum mostly focused on its platform, that is, it only regarded the museum as an important platform for displaying history and culture and teaching in fun, while ignoring its textuality. Under the interpretation of narratology theory, the author believes that the museum is not only a cultural

symbol, but also a kind of narrative text. It faithfully records the evolution process of the natural geography and human history of the region. It is a spatiotemporal text connecting the past, the present and the future.

As a narrative text, the museum is reflected in one is true, the other is that it can be developed. On the one hand, as a narrative text, although it is not as rigorous and detailed as books, nor as gorgeous as TV movies, its value is reflected in the real sense of existence. Only when you walk into the museum closely can you get the satisfaction confirmed by yourself; On the other hand, around the museum itself, the development of cultural and creative products can also be realized. This view has more practical significance, because in the past, the cultural and creative products of the museum were mostly concentrated in various collections displayed in the museum, ranging from various exquisite small items to variety shows, such as national treasures, but ignored the development value of the museum itself. In the future, cultural and creative products can be developed around the museum itself, which can effectively carry forward the spirit of the museum and publicize the cultural connotation of the museum.

### The Narrative Mode of the Museum is More Interactive

The so-called "narrative way" means how to tell a story. Compared with newspapers, radio, television, film and other media, the narrative mode of the museum has inherent interaction, that is, it pays more attention to the effective connection between the text and readers. Focusing on the characteristics of Museum narrative mode, the current functional development of museum should not only be satisfied with exhibition, but also firmly grasp the two levels of experience and participation.the future development direction of the museum highlights interactivity, provides people with a physical space for interactive participation and deep immersion, and realizes the dialogue between people and things, people and time and space.

At present, more and more museums have introduced VR and AR technologies, and visitors are no longer passive participants. Museums are not just for exhibition. They provide users with sensory and emotional integration through virtual reality, provide tourists with immersive satisfaction, and achieve the perfect integration of traditional culture and high-tech.

## Conclusion

With the continuous development of science and technology, the urging effect on the media industry is also deepening. The development trend of media increasingly shows that the future is an era in which all things are media and all things are interconnected. Therefore, taking the museum as a communication medium and carrying out the construction of Museum media theory has theoretical and enlightening significance for re understanding the museum. In the future, museum communication should not only give full play to its own media attributes, but also be good at taking the lead in carrying out cross-cultural communication at a greater level with the help of various emerging media.