

## Museum Engagement in Ghana

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**Abstract:** Museums around the world are gradually evolving to refine their role in society. These changes, however, are slowly felt in some part of Africa. In Ghana, museum engagement is very low as a result of poor visitors' experience in museums, poor managements, incomplete projects, lack of publicity and the nonexistence of museum education in the Ghanaian education system. The study specifically seeks to address the shortfalls of museum engagements in Ghana and to identify ways of increasing community engagement. Empirical approach of quantitative and qualitative research design, focusing on a descriptive survey method was employed for the study. The study has shown that, people do not visit the museum because of poor management, their busy schedules and low publicity of museums in Ghana. People, barely hear anything about museum activities and nothing about Ghanaian museums is fascinating to them. The study recommends educational reforms at the basic level tailored towards active participation of students in the history of Ghana through trips to the museums. This investment will go a long way to help the next generation get familiarised with Ghanaian culture and increase museum engagement in Ghana.

**Keywords:** Museum, Community Engagement, History, Africa, Ghana, Visitors.

### INTRODUCTION

The history of Africa shows that it had developed civilization before the period of invasion in the 16th Century. Africa had its own civilization that had from the simple hut houses, earth (adobe) buildings in the northern Africa region to the monumental structures in the form of the pyramids. Africa began to witness a decline in its identity and various components of its culture during and after the era of the European exploration.

Clearly, it's an undisputed fact that globalisation has become a dominant catalyse etching and eroding the African traditional systems. Shen *et al.*, [1] opines that globalisation is becoming increasingly evident, and serves as a threat to different cultures, destroying cultural diversity in the process by ignoring cultural identities. In order to confront such a global phenomenon it is important to promote cultural identity. Tylor [2] defined self-identity as that complex whole which includes knowledge, belief, art, morals, law, custom, and other capabilities and habits acquired by man as a member of society.

According to Kuntaa [3], the social and economic role of museums has become an important development tool for development planners in some countries. These countries, such as Britain, Kenya, and Egypt have now become aware of the potential of museums to add economic value to their communities by attracting economic and social activities to historical and natural landmarks within their political and administrative territories. In close collaboration with the museums, communities endowed with cultural and natural heritage have

become economically buoyant in comparison with other communities that are not endowed. Museums have also become key partners in sustaining socio-economic development in most countries. One of the most reliable ways of reconnecting with your past is through museums.

The museum has become an important part of the creative cultural industries, offering ready-made, conveniently packaged cultural experiences to visitors and sometimes at a price [3]. Museums by their functions have played important cultural roles in safeguarding the history of cultures. The preservation of cultural history, art in museums started dating back Greek history where temples dedicated to the Muses (the patron divinities in Greek mythology of the arts).

Kirwan & Kirwan [4] states that museums and art galleries, which define and celebrate the national heritage, should include and suitably integrate minority contributions which are also an integral part of a multicultural society's common heritage. Museums experience has gradually evolved over the years into one where individuals can reconnect with their past history, current trends, arts, virtually and have interaction with artifacts. Audiences are central to a museum's purpose and sustainability. This has created the very essence of engaging its various audiences, stakeholders or communities in a holistic manner. A Typical example is the open of the Donald J. Trump Presidential Twitter Library, a 4,000-square-foot museum space that gave the 45th president and his amazing Twitter legacy. This is particularly a shift from the regular exhibition of speeches and portraits of US presidents. Adopting modern social trends is a way to

laser target large audience that are accustomed to such social trends and events.

Black [5] asserts that the challenge and dilemma for museums to be financially viable and socially relevant has been discussed at length in many of the recent literature in the museum studies field. However, the case is different with Africa. Community engagement in museum in some parts of Africa is at its lowest level and in some cases practically non-existent. Wills [6] ascertains that the focus on outcomes weakens the ideal of participatory and collaborative community engagement projects being developed as a joint or cooperative venture. The role of museums in safeguarding the identity, history, arts, heritage, and culture and of its community is almost non-existent. With respect to the fact that the stakeholder (Community) are constantly not engaged are constantly not engaged. These make it very difficult for individuals to experience their valuable heritage, arts, and history through the museums. Apart from going there on their own free will or out of curiosity, museums in Ghana do not prioritize shaking up traditional organizational models to trends that are unique to its community or audiences.

Museums around the world are gradually evolving to refine their role in society. These changes are slowly felt in some part of Africa. Arinze [7] states that the negative interpretation of what museums means have continued to inhibit their development in most countries especially in the third world countries. In Ghana, community engagement in the museum is very low as a result of poor visitors' experience in museums, poor managements, incomplete projects, lack of publicity and the nonexistence of museum education in the Ghanaian basic education system. Walth [8] asserts that "the key role for museums is always to serve its visitor." This is contrary to the roles of museums in Ghana as less attention is paid to its audience to achieve their mission. The museum management pays less attention to audience research on primary and emerging audiences, surveying visitors, analyzing attendance data to boost community engagement in museums. Preliminary study of some of the museums in Ghana by the researcher [3], seems to show that the social and economic importance of the museums in Ghana is very low.

Therefore the study specifically seeks to address the shortfalls of museum engagements in Ghana

and to identify ways of increasing community engagement.

## METHODOLOGY

Empirical approach of quantitative and qualitative research design, focusing on a descriptive survey method was employed for the study. The population of the study mainly focused on people who have visited the museums and random individuals. The random individuals were to give fair assessment as to those who have not visited the museum. The population targeted people between the age range of 18-25 years, 26-35 year and 36 years and above. The respondents were randomly sampled from all the various regions in Ghana. However, the main focus was on Ashanti Region, Cape Coast and Greater Accra Region. This is for a fair assessment of the views of people living closer to museum populated areas. Quantitative research approach enabled the research team to retrieve statistical information through questionnaire and the qualitative research approach enabled the research team obtain additional information through interviews and observations to ensure fairness and credibility of data. Closed ended questionnaire was designed for the collection of data from the respondents for the statistical analysis. The respondents answered the questionnaire without the presence of the research team so that they will give genuine results. Interview guide and an observational checklist were also designed and managed personally by the research team to retrieve additional information for the study.

## RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

### Respondent's Demographics

The study sampled 202 respondents. Of which 117 representing 57.6% of males and 85 representing 49.1% of females respectively. With the age of the respondents, ranging from 18- 25, 26-35 and 36 and above, 95 of the 202 respondents representing 46.8%, 85 respondents representing 41.9 % and 22 respondents representing 10.8% respectively. 62 respondents representing 30.1 % were from Greater Accra, 85 respondents representing 44.3% were from Ashanti Region, 44 respondents representing 22.7% were from the Central Region and 11 respondents representing 5.4% were from other regions.

### The respondents' views on whether they have been to any museums in Ghana

**Table-1: Shows respondents view on whether they have been to any museum in Ghana**

Gender of respondents	Yes	No	Total
Male	97	20	117
Female	70	15	85
Total	167	35	202

Based on the report provided on gender and the visiting of museum in Ghana, a sum of 150

respondents who have visited a museum before and 50 random individuals, a total of 167 respondents agreed

they have visited the museum before, 97 were males as against 70 females. A total of 35 respondents also said they have never visited a museum before, 20 of them were males and 15 were females. The calculated value in this investigation is 0.022 in 1 degree of freedom and the critical value is 3.841. This shows that the calculated value is lesser than the critical value. Therefore the null hypothesis will be accepted meaning, there is no relationship between gender and the views on the visitation of the museum. The study reveals that the number of respondents who have visited the museum before were living within the museum community and have a fair idea of the museum activities.

However, with respect to respondents who have not visited museums before, revealed that they barely hear any information about museum activities, nothing about Ghanaian museums is interesting whilst most complain about busy work schedules so do not have enough time to visit the museums. In addition, further information from respondents reveals that, they have not had the chance to visit museums due low publicity to entice them to visit. The lack of interest in museums by other respondents opine that the museums have nothing new to offer. It is always the same thing over and over again. Ghanaweb [9] confirmed that a visit to the premises of the National Museum in Accra

confirmed there is low patronage of the place, the lack of publicity on its activities, shortage of manpower and fundamentally a lack of financial assistance.

An interview with one of the museum curators, shows that some museums mostly cook up new activities with respect to problems in the society such as waste recycling, annual student exhibitions, science exhibition among others to increase public engagements. And sometimes visit schools to educate students on the importance of museums to the society by going along with some museum exhibits and collections in order promote students to visit the museums. Despite the programs organized by the local museums, the community engagement is poor. This was asserted by majority of the respondents. Furthermore, the study reveals that the number of times they visit the museums is not encouraging. Business Ghana [10] confirmed that most of the museum in Ghana is neglected and need a major facelift thus; it is not surprising that the number of visitors to the museum has also declined significantly over the years. The majority of them visited the museum once and lost appetite for it due to limited collections in the museums and sometimes poor visitor experience.

**Respondents experience after visiting the museum**

**Table-2: The respondents view on their experiences after visiting the museum**

Gender of respondent	Normal	Good	Fun	Boring	None	Total
Male	30	15	7	45	20	117
Female	19	7	24	20	15	85
Total	49	22	31	65	35	202

Accounting for individual experiences after visiting the museum, a sum of 49 respondents confirmed that the experience they had was normal, Twenty two of the total respondents said theirs was good. A total of 31 respondents also pointed it out that their experience after visiting the museum was fun. Sixty-five of the total respondents also said theirs was boring, Thirty five respondents also chose none. None represents individual who have not visited a museum before. In this study, the calculated value is 60.532 in 4 degree of freedom, whereas the critical value is 9.488. The calculated value denotes greater number than that of the critical value, thus the null hypothesis will be rejected, meaning there is a difference between gender and their experience after visiting the museum.

Naturally, people normally visit the museum with high expectation of seeing fascinating things of past events or history, creativity works among others. However, this high zeal of discovering new things about their culture, arts, history among others was not up to their expectation with limited collections in the museums. Nevertheless, other individuals revealed their excitement about their experiences in some museums, especially when accompanied by a professional. Others

were also fascinated by the displays and Ghanaian archives in museum.

It is imperative to say that most individuals go to museums to satisfy their amusement and learn about the Ghanaian culture. It is therefore in this vein that expectations are always high among individuals who intend to visit the museum at their spare time. Some people highlighted their experience as normal and boring because of the no advancement of museum setting and displays. Essel [11] asserts that due to inadequate funds, the museums have weak collection policy, they depend on free donation of artworks, and are not in touch with the current artworks produced in the country. Museums overseas spend huge sums of money to build up collections of contemporary African artworks, yet Ghana’s government does not see that as a priority.

Visitors also complain of lack museum persons to accompany them on their tour and further explain the meaning of some displays to them. Even with instants where museum educators are around, some lack professionalism. With reference to other countries adopting new trends in museum operations, visitors

pointed out that the Ghanaian museums remain the same with little or no change. In addition, the majority of individuals lament about the poor structural maintenance of some local museums. This puts visitors

off to visit the museums for the second time in most cases.

**Age of respondents and the purpose for going to the museum**

**Table-3: Showing age and the purpose of going to the museum**

Age of respondent	For outing purpose	Know more about Ghanaian history	Art exhibition	Total
18-25	23	65	7	95
26-35	25	60	0	85
36 and above	8	14	0	22
Total	56	139	7	202

In reference to age and the purpose of going to museums, a total of 56 respondents said they go to museums for outing purpose of which the age range of respondents' between 18-25 recorded 23, 26-35 years of age recorded 25 and 36 and above years of age recorded 8. A total of 139 respondents also said they go to museums to know more about Ghanaian history of which the age range of respondents' between 18-25 recorded 65, 26-35 years of age recorded 60 and 36 and above years of age recorded 14. Seven of the respondents said they also go to museums for art

exhibitions, 7 of them fall under 18-25 years, 26-35 years of age recorded none same as 36 years and above.

In this study, the calculated value is 9.114 of 4 degree of freedom and the critical value is 9.488 which demonstrates that the calculated value is lesser than the critical value. Therefore, the null hypothesis will be accepted, meaning there is no relation between age and the purpose of going to the museums.

**The purpose of going to the museum**

**Table-3: Shows gender and the purpose of going to the museum**

Gender of respondent	For outing purpose	Know more about Ghanaian history	Art exhibition	Total
Male	43	67	7	117
Female	19	72	0	85
Total	56	139	7	202

With regards to the purpose of going to the museum, a total of 56 respondents confirmed they go to the museum for outing purpose, out of the total, 43 were males and 19 were females. A sum of 139 respondents also pointed it out that, they go to the museum to know more about Ghanaian history, 67 of them were males while 72 were females. Seven of the total of respondents, go there for an Art exhibition of which 7 were males as against no female. During this investigation, the calculated value is 18.650 of 2 degree of freedom and the critical value is 5.991 which demonstrate that the calculated value is greater than the critical value. Therefore, the null hypothesis will be rejected, meaning there is a relation between gender and the purpose of going to the museums.

Aside the museums in Ghana, the Cultural Center also known as the Art Center plays a significant role in promoting and showcasing the Ghanaian culture through performing art and visual art. An interview with the P.R.O (Paula) of the Center for Art and National culture reveals, a large number of individuals (foreign and nationals) normally visit the Art Center to experience the Ghanaian culture. This may naturally be one of the numerous factors for the decline in the number of people who visit museums. As confirmed by Kuntaa [3], museums in Ghana are unpopular with the majority of Ghanaians because they are unaware that the museums features as part of Ghana's development strategies hence do not see the need to visit museums. On the other hand, most Ghanaians recognizes the Art Center as a major stakeholder in featuring Ghana's development and as a true reflection of the Ghanaian art and history.

In Ghana, majority of individuals normally visit the museum for outing purposes, know more about Ghanaian history and sometimes for art exhibitions. An interview with random people revealed that they just visit the museum to satisfy their curiosity. Agyeman K. 2018 [12] personal communication, confirmed that most museums are also visited by diplomats and other high profile persons from other foreign countries to acquaint themselves with the Ghanaian culture and history during their visit or stay in Ghana. He further explains that some Ghanaian use the museum as a venue for relaxation during their free times, thus, most visitors just come to tour the museum and leave without learning anything.

**The views on the improvement of museums in Ghana**

With respect to improvement of museums in Ghana, all of the 202 respondents agreed that there should be improvements in museums in Ghana, including the 35 respondents who have not visited a museum before. Further information from respondents who have visited museums before revealed the specific areas with which improvement is needed. Out of a total of 202 respondents, 29% percent specifically wanted improvement with the services provided by the

museums. About 35.6% complained about poor community engagement and stressed, museums improve its community engagement. Also, 18.3% of the respondents wanted to see in Ghanaian museums adopting new trends to enhance the visitor experience in museums. Particularly, incorporating new technologies such as lighting systems, sound system, virtual reality gadgets etc. In addition, 16.8 % of the respondents complained about the poor visitor experience and wanted to see more professionalism in the services rendered by museum personnel. Agyeman K. 2018 [12] personal communication, also highlighted a few challenges faced by the museum administration. He stressed that funding of museums in Ghana was a big challenge as about 90- 95 % of museums in Ghana were owned by the government.

The government do not pay attention to museums in Ghana, museums in Ghana, hence making it difficult to carry out its core mandate of preserving and educating the society on the values and history of Ghana. Without funds, it is difficult to acquire collections for museum exhibitions, without funds, it is impossible to acquire the necessary logistics and manpower to maintain and improve the museums for visitors and society. Lastly, it is impossible to create awareness, to increase visitor engagement of museums in Ghana without funds.

Nevertheless, museums can create innovative programs that will entice the Ghanaian populace to visit the museum at least once a year. In United Kingdom, a natural history museum organises annual Eve party for its audience where members and interested individuals pay to party and have fun in the museum. This initiative generates lots of income for the museum to carry out its daily affairs independently without relying on the government or external funds. The Met [13] stated that Met museum in New York, USA also sets new attendance record with more than 7.35 million visitors with the exhibition of the *Michelangelo: Divine Draftsman and Designer*. The exhibition lasted from November 13, 2017 through February 12, 2018. This is to say that the introduction of new trends unique to visitors and community will see a rise in museum visits. Some museums in Ghana can partner the Annual Street Art Festival (Chalewote) which attracts thousands of people from around world. By hosting and displaying some of their exhibits. This will help attract people to visit the museum. Kuntaa [3] confirmed that the museums in Ghana are unpopular with the majority of Ghanaians because they are unaware that the museums feature as part of Ghana's development strategy. It is imperative to say that, there is a need for Museum education in Ghana through reforms of our educational system particularly at the basic level. An active participation of students in the history of Ghana through trips to the museums will go a long a way to increase museum engagement in Ghana. An increase in the number of educational programs organised by the

museums will cause massive increase in the number of visitors. Periodic training of museum staffs especially, the museum guide, curators, and other management spice up the museum organisation for quality visitor experience. Also, the introduction of Curatorial studies and other branches of museum study in the various universities will help improve the services rendered by museum personals and make it more attractive to tourist and the general population.

The role of museums in the society and in the country as a whole cannot be underestimated. It's only through the physical, as well as the behaviour, norms, and rituals aspects of material culture that creates objects and collections of museum to expand public understanding of the Ghanaian culture. As each and every second passed becomes part of history, there is a need to remain ourselves that its only through the preservation our material culture that we can still hold high our identity as Ghanaians with the help of the museums. Government increasing annual budget allocations for museums will help complete incomplete projects, provide the necessary logistics and revamp museums in Ghana. This will help create the need for the populace and tourist to visit local museums, giving a boost to our tourism.

Funding of the museums will help increase collections acquisition and loaning of collecting to fill the museums with all the necessary collections for different exhibition themes. Obtaining new collections and cataloguing them for future use will help the museums continuously exhibit new object which breaks monotony. A decentralize system ensure effective use of funds for the necessary project and also enable quick decisions made to facilitate rapid growth of the museum. For a growing museum sector, decentralization can help facilitate the process of expansion. It will also enable museum managers quickly and more easily to react to specific needs to appeal to its visitors. Jones [14] proposes that the "museum must make the idea live in its displays, exhibitions, events, collection policy, interpretation, education programme". All these cannot be done without the necessary funding and support from stakeholders. Kuntaa [3] highlighted, the social and economic role of museums has become an important development tool for development planners in some countries. These countries, such as Britain, Kenya, and Egypt have now become aware of the potential of museums to add economic value to their communities by attracting economic and social activities to historical and natural landmarks within their political and administrative territories. In close collaboration with the museums, communities endowed with cultural and natural heritage have become economically buoyant in comparison with other communities that are not endowed. Museums have also become key partners in sustaining socio-economic development in most countries. One of the

most reliable ways of reconnecting with your past is through museums.

Publication of museum programs will encourage them to visit the museum often. Kelly [15] and Essel *et al.*, [16] confirmed that the “twenty-first century poses many other challenges for museums. The scholars further recounts the challenges as “decreasing attendances in museum worldwide due a proliferation of leisure choices for a more sophisticated and demanding program. Creating museum programs that involve the community is a more effective way of improving community engagement in Ghana.

The study reveals that the youth visit the museum more hence museums should target the youth more during publicity. The media in collaboration with the museums and governments should create public awareness on the role of museums in Ghana. Essel *et al.*, [16] ascertained that museums all over the world are always strategizing in giving visual answers to why visitors must visit. They consider the diverse interest and sophistication of visitors in this regard. Some museums have resorted to the exploration of modern technological software, including the internet in creating online interactive virtual museum to pull internet users who may love to reach the exhibits of a museum with the click of a button. This also increases the number of visitors who view the exhibits of such museums. Furthermore, developing an interactive virtual museum for online users, promoting the museum through social media (such as Facebook, Instagram, Viber, Twitter) and tracking the number of visitors who visit these sites in order to increase its number of visitors (apart from the regular visitors who move directly to the museum itself) is also essential. Finally, the involvement of NGO’s and civil society in the administration of museums for the betterment of Ghanaians will help reduce the sole reliance on the government and fast-track the necessary improvement of museums in Ghana.

#### CONCLUSION AND RECOMMENDATION

The study has shown that, people do not visit the museum because of poor management, their busy schedules and low publicity of museums in Ghana. People barely hear anything about museum activities and nothing about Ghanaian museums is fascinating to them. The lack of interest in museums by the public is basically because the museums have nothing new to offer. It is always the same thing over and over again. Though, some museums organise programs and sometimes visit schools to educate students on the importance of museums to the society, the community engagement is still poor. Due to limited collections in the museums and sometimes poor visitor experience, people visit the museum once and loss appetite for it. Some people highlighted their experience as normal and boring because of no advancement of museum setting and displays. In some museums in Ghana, visitors

sometimes complain of lack of museum guide to accompany them on their tour.

However, the study recommends educational reforms tailored to active participation of students in the history of Ghana through trips to the museums. This investment will go a long way to help the next generation to familiarise themselves with Ghanaian history and culture. Also the introduction of Curatorial studies and other branches of museum study in the various universities will help improve the services rendered by museum personals. This will equip individuals with practical oriented know-how and knowledge for museum operation such as collection management, curator among others. These pool of knowledge when added through education and training will make the museum more attractive to tourist and the general population. Government, Civil Society and NGO’s coming on board to fund of the museums will help increase collection acquisition for different exhibition themes. Obtaining new collections and cataloguing them for future use will break monotony hence contributing to community engagement. Increase in funds will help equip museums with modern technological software, including the internet in creating online interactive virtual museum to pull internet users who may love to reach the exhibits of a museum with the click of a button. These new trends will reach the community even better. Furthermore, publicity is very essential in boasting museum engagement. The study recommends a collaboration of the media and the government in promoting museums will help draw more attention to museums in Ghana. Again, publicity through social media (such as Facebook, Instagram, Viber, Twitter) will develop an interactive virtual museum for online users and tracking the number of visitors who visit these sites in order to increase its number of visitors apart from the regular visitors who move directly to the museum itself.

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