INTRODUCTION

Perception of people about any institution, subject, place, person etc. is commonly treated as an indicator of their awareness, attitudes, experiences, expectations and behaviour pattern. The concept of perception is largely used in the fields of psychology and marketing to interpret and analyze the different mental processes that people undergo to form impressions of people, product and organization etc. It is one of the oldest and most fundamental disciplines within psychology, dating back to the times of the ancient Greeks. The main aim of perception studies is to understand how stimuli from the world interact with our sensory systems, forming visual, auditory, tactile, olfactory, and gustatory representations of the world. In psychology, perception is influenced by a variety of factors, such as the intensity and physical dimensions of the stimulus in which the activities of the sense organs get affected by preceding stimulation, a person's past experience and attention factors such as readiness of the person to respond to a stimulus, motivation and emotional state of the person. Stimulus elements vary in visual organization to form perceived patterns according to their nearness to each other, their similarity, the tendency of the person to perceive complete figures, and the ability of the person to distinguish important figures from background. Through selective attention, a person focuses on a limited number of stimuli, and ignores those that he considers less important. The various research works in psychology and psychophysics about perception is directed at discovering the relation between environmental events and personal experiences. Though an understanding of perception is critical for all areas within Psychology,

the modern study of perception is highly integrative, combining cognitive, behavioural, computational, developmental, and neuro-scientific approaches.

In marketing, perception is concerned with understanding how the consumer views a product or service. The five senses of a person help him in this process. The marketers use various props to stimulate consumers, i.e. through the use of colours, sound, touch, taste, or smell, to make or buy their product. Here the components of perception include the perceiver, target of perception, and the situation. The factors that influence the perceiver are organization and interpretation of information based on past experiences and knowledge, needs, values, and desires of a perceiver at the time of perception, emotions of the perceiver. Marketers use stimuli to grab customers' attention and most often these efforts are clearly visible and are known to the customer. They often use intriguing headlines or attractive commercials to attract attention to their advertisements of the target audience. This information processing happens in a series of activities by which stimuli are perceived, transformed into information, and stored. Thus, exposure, attention and interpretation mainly constitute perception.

In the present world we live in a highly complex society dominated by information technology. Now-a-days, new media has opened up wide scopes and opportunities for education, entertainment and information retrieval. Thus, museums need to find ways to create their own niche and to remain in public priority in competition with other user friendly and highly accessible media. For this museums need to be more public oriented and focus on their respective target groups/visitors.

Thus, public need to be considered as one of the most important forces, which have a direct impact on museums in terms of consumption and patronage. Public perception about museum need to be studied using appropriate methodology for understanding and predicting their impressions, thought process and beliefs. A person's perception of museum is often influenced by his past impressions, the contrast effect, his personal needs, ego-enhancing biases and illusions of control, in which people reinterpret events so as to put themselves in favourable light, false consensus biases, whereby individuals regard their own attitudes and behaviours as normal and customary and their own belief.

Museum staff often face a constructive dilemma as they design their public spaces because the exhibits should facilitate learning as well as cater to the need of a diverse visiting public who have their own personal choices of where to attend, what to do and how to interpret the exhibits. To be effective, exhibits need to be highly intrinsically motivating at every step of interaction in order to sustain involvement of audience who view their visit primarily as a leisure activity. To meet these challenges it is vital to support the design process with a strong programme of public perception research and evaluation.

Some surveys have been undertaken on museum visitors to study their behaviour pattern and perception. Dr. B. Venugopal did an evaluation study on 'Families Visiting National Museum of Natural History', during May 1986, on 626 visitors in 145 family groups. The findings of this study revealed that family groups generally prefer to visit museum during holidays or weekends. Their rate of frequency of occurrence is at peaks

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during fore and afternoon sessions. Majority of these family groups were children and adults. Prof. Asif A. Naqvi and Dr. Venugopal did 'An Evaluation Study of the First Floor Gallery of the National Museum of Natural History, New Delhi' on fifty family groups during a period of six months. The study suggested that a multisensory approach is important in attracting the visitors to any exhibit and hold their attention. If more senses are employed, effectiveness of exhibits can be enhanced. The most important factor that influences visitor experience in museums is orientation. Dr. Sunjay Jain's article published on 'Public Perception of Museum in India' discusses different perceptions of people about museum in our country. According to the author museum is still perceived as a place for keeping old, historical, rare extinct, strange, odd, unusual things with numerous examples. These examples illustrate how educated people perceive museums in India. He suggests that if we want our public to perceive museum as a place for learning we need to make strategies to make our museum consumer-centric. Science museums like National Museum of Natural History, New Delhi also conduct surveys on museum visitors to collect information for their own purpose but they do not publish their findings.

All the above studies on visitors done in India are primarily evaluation studies, done at a small scale. Their studies have limited and museum specific scope. The above studies inspired the researcher to study Public perception of museums in Vadodara city at a larger scale with broader scope. It is the first detailed survey of perception of public in India.

The study of 'Public perception of museums in Vadodara city' will facilitate the museum authorities to meet their missions of becoming

institutions of relevance to our public in an increasingly complex world. They will be able to connect to different information and ideas to evaluate the present scenario and serve the people better more effectively in future. The interpretation and outcome of the research data will aid the museum in rightly managing the public perception by taking corrective actions, designing appropriate marketing mix i.e. product, price, policies and promotion.

Objectives and Goals

An important part of a research project is setting some clear and achievable objectives. The research proposal should clearly state the objectives of the research work. Since it is not possible to discover everything, the researcher should clearly state the precise limit of the research area. Therefore, it is necessary to delimit the topic.

The researcher critically evaluated the objectives of the research with the help of a tool called SMARTE which meets the following criteria:

> Specific: The research objectives are specific to the research statement and focus towards the same.
> Measurable: The objectives lead the researcher to achieve progress and can declare success.
> Advantageous: The research work is such that it is of benefit to the museums, researchers and society.
> Realistic: The objectives are made realistic to get honest response from the target group.

> Time limited: Setting of deadlines for the completion of the research work.

> Evidence based: The research work is based on proper evidence, which can be demonstrated.

In India, Gujarat is one of the states having largest numbers of museums and galleries. These museums impart education and entertainment amongst the masses in an informal way and contribute in a big way for knowledge enlightenment and educational promotion. Such perennial source of delight and mental stimulation are the museums located in Vadodara. Public Perception of Museum in Vadodara city will give a clear and transparent idea about the various aspects of museum and its effect on the general public so that museum will be able to sort out the issues of marketing strategies and the different ways of improving its links with schools, visiting groups and others. It will facilitate the museum authorities to meet their missions of increasing knowledge, stimulating lifelong learning and becoming institutions of relevance to our public in an increasingly complex world.

Once the researcher was clear of the research objectives, definite research plan was developed. The areas of her research work included a detailed study of demographic profile of the respondent, their general perception of museum, behaviour, preferences and interests of people, their attitude, expectations, opinions and the impact of museum on people to meet the above defined objectives and goals.

Type of Research

Research design is the framework or blueprint for conducting the marketing research project. Research design provides the glue that holds the research project together. A design is used to structure the research, to show how all of the major parts of the research project – the samples or groups, measures, treatments or programs, and methods of assignment, work together to address the central questions.

The components of a research design are:
- ➤ Information needed
- ➤ Data collection methods
- ➤ Measurement and scaling procedures
- ➤ Sampling process and sample size
- ➤ Data analysis procedures

The study is primarily a descriptive study which describes what is going on and what exists. Public opinion polls that seek only to describe the proportion of people who hold various opinions are primarily descriptive in nature. The main objective here is to describe something. For example, if we intend to know what percentage of people would like to go for a special exhibition on "Ganesh Chaturthi" in a museum we will be doing a descriptive study.

Methods generally used in descriptive research:
- ➤ Surveys (Primary Data)
- ➤ Panels

➢ Scanner data (Secondary Data)

The research work is mainly based on survey method so as to know and understand the public perception of museum in Vadodara city. A questionnaire was prepared so that people's perception could be described by observing each of the variables, we were trying to relate as well as study their relationship with the museum. This social research is based mainly on survey of a definite number of people of particular areas at a particular time span. After collection of the data through survey analysis, interpretation of the same was done. In some cases researcher was in touch with the respondents to help them clarify their doubts while answering the questionnaire.

Research Methodology

1. Survey:

The survey is done on a definite number of people (mainly adult population) of Vadodara. The questionnaire was distributed to a sample of 3000 people, of whom only 1503 responded after repeated follow up. Usually, the population of Vadodara city is too large for the researcher to attempt to survey all of its members. Thus, the researcher has taken a sample of 3000 people at random. The researcher had gone to the respondent's home or office and had given the questionnaire. After certain time the researcher returned to pick it up by prior contact over phone so that the respondents could work in private at their own convenience. Moreover, the respondents could ask questions about questionnaire and clarify, what they were being asked to do. Generally this encourages public response and thereby results in increase in the

percentage of people filling up the questionnaire. In addition to above, the questionnaire was given to some of the organisations, institutions of Vadodara to get the response of parents of the students on the topic selected for research.

The sample reflects the characteristics of the people of different areas of Vadodara. It was distributed to residents of mainly – Subhanpura, Gotri, Nizampura, Sama, Fatehgunj, Channi, Karelibagh and some other areas of Vadodara city. The researcher had selected the cluster random sampling method of sampling since it was the best way to sample a population of Vadodara City which was so diverse and spread across a wide geographic region. By this method one could cover a lot of the ground geographically to get to each unit to be sampled.

Steps followed in this sampling method:
The steps followed in this sampling method are:

> Randomly sampling the clusters

> Dividing Baroda population into separate clusters according to demographic variables

Survey is done single handedly. Census is possible when a team of several members are involved. For this survey, sampling method was preferred over census method due to the following advantages:

a) Lower cost: A sample survey cut down the cost of research considerably as a portion of the population was only studied.

b) Time Saving: Collection and processing of the data had become easier as the volume of work was reduced.

c) Easy Organization: Since the volume of the work was less, adequate and well-planned arrangement was done for collecting more reliable and accurate information.

Limitations of the sample survey

Although survey was carried out using sampling method which has many merits, it has at the same time few limitations, which are as below:

a) Limited Information - Since a portion of the population was studied in sample survey, it provided information in a limited way.

b) Sampling Error - Due to generalization based on a portion of the population the result might suffer from sample error.

Cluster Random sampling method

The researcher in her survey has selected Cluster Random Sampling Method for collecting information.

Cluster Random sampling method:

A group of item with high internal (within the cluster) homogeneity and also with high external (between clusters) heterogeneity is termed as "Cluster". The Group or Cluster exists amongst "Object" and "Variables" due to inherent and natural relationships and similarity. Cluster Analysis identifies these groups. Cluster Random Sampling is the process of identifying natural homogenous group existing in data, so that the similarity within and the difference among group may be used for understanding the basic character of data (Sharma.2002).

The researcher had selected the above method of sampling since it was the best way to sample a population of Baroda City which was so diverse and spread across a wide geographic region. By this method one could cover a lot of the ground geographically to get to each unit to be sampled.

As explained above, this method was more efficient than other methods when sampling across a geographically dispersed area.

2. Tools:

i) **Questionnaire**: The questionnaire prepared for survey included 73 questions as is provided in **Appendix - Questionnaire**. The researcher included both close-ended questions and open-ended questions in the questionnaire like dichotomous, multiple choice, semantic differential, rating scale, completely unstructured because closed-ended questions pre-specify all the possible answers, and respondents make a choice among them. They provide options that are easier to interpret and tabulate. Open-ended questions allow respondents to answer in their own words. These questions often reveal more as they do not constraint the respondent's answers. These questions are especially useful in the exploratory stage of research, where the researcher is looking for insight into how people think rather than measuring how many people think a certain way.

The quality of the questionnaire has immense effect on the quality of research. Thus, the researcher has taken utmost care in ensuring that the questionnaire is complete in all respects to meet the requirements of the research problem.

a) Clarity of the question: The questions were such that the meaning of each question was clearly conveyed to the respondents.

b) Concise: The number of questions ware kept as less as possible to minimize the time, effort and cost of survey.

c) Simplicity: The questions were well thought out and planned so as to make them simple to address, to understand, to respond.

d) Understand ability: The questionnaire required the respondents to be literate, Even if the respondent can read to some degree; the questionnaire was such that the questions might not be difficult for them to understand at the first place.

e) Logical: The questions were arranged in a logical and systematic manner for better understanding and effective communication level between the researcher and respondents.

f) Precision: The unit of enumeration was defined precisely to ensure accuracy and completeness in the information.

g) Cross check: Some questions were included with a view to cross check the answers or views of the respondents.

h) Confidentiality: The respondents were given full assurance of confidentiality of the information given by the researcher.

i) Consent: Before providing the respondents with the questionnaire their consent was taken.

j) Object: The object of enquiry was made clear to the respondents at the very outset.

k) Objectivity: The questionnaire provided straightforward direction for the respondents, so that they did not find any difficulty in answering the questions.

The questionnaire consisted of both short close-ended questions and open- ended questions.

Close ended questions are generally of the following types:

> Dichotomous – A question with two possible answers.

> Multiple choice – A question with three or more possible answers

> Importance scale – A scale that rates the importance of some attribute

> Rating scale – A scale that rates some attribute from ' poor' to 'excellent'

Open ended questions are of the following types:

> Completely unstructured – A question that respondents can answer in an almost unlimited number of ways

➢ Word association – Words are presented, one at a time, and respondents mention the first word that comes to mind

➢ Sentence comparison – An incomplete sentence is presented and respondents complete the sentence

The questionnaire was pretested with a sample of 10 respondents before it was used. The lead questions were attempted to create interest. Difficult or personal questions were asked towards the end of the questionnaire so that respondents did not become defensive early. The questions flew in a logical manner.

ii) Computer – Internet surfing was done to study already collected data relevant to research topic. Microsoft Office Excel 2007 was used to analyse the data, prepare graphs and tables which helped in interpreting the data more accurately.

3. Literature study:

Consultation of published reference books, journals and other literary references were done for the purpose of studying published data already collected and available, which included data collected by any other organization or person relevant to the research work on hand.

Referencing System:

The Author/Date or Harvard Referencing System is followed in this thesis because it is simple, tidy and more flexible.

Chapters:

This study is organised in four chapters.

1. Theory of Perception and its Application in Museums
2. Demographic Profile of Respondents and their General Perception of Museum and Related Issues
3. Museum Visiting Pattern, Preferences and Interests: Analysis and Interpretation
4. Expectations, Opinions and their Rating of Museum: Analysis and Interpretation

The <u>first chapter</u> comprises of the theory of perception and its relevance in the field of museum. As perception of people is widely studied by psychologists and marketing professionals, the first chapter discusses the meaning of perception in psychology and marketing, the scientific accounts and theories of perception, principles and categories of perception and a brief account of the level of complexity in it. It also discusses the factors affecting the perception of people and importance of study of perception in psychology and marketing, the role of consumer perception and the various methods to gather consumer perception in marketing. It relates these to the importance of study of perception in museums.

The <u>second chapter</u> describes the demographic profile of the respondents which gives details about the respondent's gender, age, languages they know, their educational qualification, occupation, marital status, their annual family income and number of earning members in their family. It also presents the analysis and interpretation of the general perception of people about museums which include their view on how museum as an

institution serve individuals and the society, what comes to their mind when they think of museums, what our society would miss if museums didn't exist. It also deals with some other related issues like the trust of people on the information presented by museums, their preference of museum, library and media and the reasons behind their views. Some of the responses of the people are given as they were told during the survey without doing any corrections.

The third chapter deals with the analysis and interpretation of the respondent's museum visiting pattern, their attitude towards museum, their interests and preferences for various museum programmes and activities and the importance of museums in their life. The chapter discusses issues like how often they visit museum annually, when they have visited a museum last time, have they seen with whom they generally visit, number of people normally in their group, how much time they spend in a museum, generally the factors which make them visit a museum and what prevents them from visiting the same. It also presents topics like when do the people visit a museum, the sources where they look for information about museums, do they use internet or museum website in preparing for their visit, their rating of the museum's website, what are things they look for in a museum website, the list of things they would like to have for gaining knowledge about museums. The chapter also discusses that normally who decides in their family to go to a museum and who are the people to influence this decision, do they visit museums on request of their children, their leisure hour activities and the ones they would like to do in a museum during their visit, are they interested in viewing programs on current topics and the specific areas for the same. This chapter also deals with the list of things that can

encourage these people to visit museum again, the things in Vadodara they take pride in and the importance of Vadodara museums in their lives.

The fourth chapter studies the general expectations of the respondents from the museum, the nature of exhibits they would like to see in galleries, their opinion regarding the various programmes which the museums should include in the interests of people, the things they would like to do in a museum. The chapter also presents the expectations of visitors regarding the presentation of information by museums, the languages they expect for the labels. Some other issues of discussion are their expectations from the staffs of museum, whether they have approached any staff during their visit and their view on special provision for women in museums. The chapter presents the rating of people regarding the quality of amenities provided by museums to visitors, experience of museum exhibitions in terms of visibility, the labelling of exhibits, the quality of service of the administrative staff of museum, the quality of service of the educative staff, their satisfaction level after their museum visit. It also discusses their view on general ambience, staff, display, museum programmes, information provided by museum, amenities, admission fee and the factors that made their museum visit memorable and even those that didn't appeal to them during their visit.

The studies discussed in these four chapters show that there are more male visitors than female and are between the age group of 30 to 49 years. Majority of them are well educated and have mostly single earning members in their family. Most of the people are service holders and belong to middle class families who generally consider museums to be a

place to collect, store, care and display objects to impart knowledge to society.

30 % of the people surveyed visit museum only once annually. Many visit as a tourist to some other place but not the same museum again at least not within 12 months. Generally they visit museum to satisfy their knowledge related needs or due to popularity of exhibits. Very few people visit museums in a group of two, mostly they visit with their family members. Most of them cited lack of time as the main reason for not visiting a museum. Some are not interested or are not aware of the events of museum which prevent them from visiting. The personal factors affecting their visit are unsuitable timings and location of museums.

People expect museums to maintain a well-designed website for getting information on various events, exhibits along with their images. They also expect museums to arrange for online booking of tickets. They also expect to have events based on school curriculum, more interactive programmes, trained guides, museum tours, bilingual or trilingual labels, resting places, toilets and paid cafeteria.

Majority of them are proud to have museums in their city and they rated the various aspects of the museum to be good.

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