

Valued Sentiments, Disclosed Narratives: Seniors Accessibility to Science Museums in the Philippines

Jessie Rose M. Bagunu¹

Miriam Charmigrace Q. Salcedo²

Clyde Jeric Joan Morpos³

¹Library, School of Library and Information Studies, University of the Philippines Diliman

²Library, School of Library and Information Studies, University of the Philippines Diliman

³School of Library and Information Studies, University of the Philippines Diliman (UG Student)

[¹jmbagunu@up.edu.ph](mailto:jmbagunu@up.edu.ph) [²mqsalcedo@up.edu.ph](mailto:mqsalcedo@up.edu.ph) [³cmorpos@upd.edu.ph](mailto:cmorpos@upd.edu.ph)

Introduction

The Philippines is an archipelagic country consisting of more than 7,000 islands and a population of over 100 million people. Among the nation's various demographic groups, one of the categories distinguished by law is the elderly sector, whose members are referred to as senior citizens. According to the Philippine Republic Act No. 7432 (1992), the term senior citizen is defined as any resident of the country who is at least 60 years of age. Based on the 2020 census (Philippine Statistics Authority, 2022), senior citizens were found to make up 8.5% (around 9 million individuals) of the total Filipino household population, exhibiting a one percent increase since 2015. This number is projected to grow to roughly 16% by 2045 (Philippine Statistics Authority, 2015). Coinciding with this growth are several emerging issues within the elderly demographic group. Poverty is one of these problems.

As of 2015, estimates of senior citizens living under the income poverty threshold, or the monthly income required to support basic food and non-food needs as determined by the government, are at 890,000 while those living under the food threshold (monthly income requirement for basic food needs alone) are at 300,000 (Reyes et al., 2020). Even with their old age, a considerable amount of Filipino senior citizens are active members of the working class (Philippine Statistics Authority, 2015). 42% are employed in various industries, many of whom have jobs in agriculture, fishery, and forestry. Meanwhile, their non-working counterparts, including those with disabilities, are mostly dependents who rely on the government and their respective families for support. Perhaps the most striking finding about Philippine senior citizens

is the low levels of educational attainment. It was found that a majority (51%) were only able to undergo formal education in elementary school and completed sixth grade or below.

Given the circumstances senior citizens are in, it is no wonder that the national government seeks to make their later years in life comfortable by improving their access to resources through special assistance and privileges. Programs and pension systems such as Social Security System (SSS) and Government Service Insurance System (GSIS) provide regular monetary assistance to previously working seniors upon retirement. Laws also play a key role in improving accessibility for elderly Filipinos.

The Republic Act No. 9994 (2010), for instance, mandates the priority of senior citizens, through express lane privileges, in both private and public accommodation and grants them a 20% discount with Value-added tax exemption in the purchase of goods and services. Seniors with disabilities are addressed by the Batas Pambansa Blg. 344 (1982), also known as the Accessibility Law, which requires the installation of ramps, handrails, and other accessibility features in buildings and construction projects; as well as the Republic Act No. 7277 (1992) or the Magna Carta for Disabled Persons, which prohibits discrimination based on disability.

These government initiatives show a clear message that accessibility is vital to senior citizens' wellness and well-being, and that continuous efforts must be made to ensure that essential resources are kept as accessible as possible for the development of the elderly population. One of these essential resources is information, particularly scientific information which Filipino seniors may be deprived of, given census data indicating that most of them were not able to pursue higher levels of education. Such information is readily available and creatively presented in science museums. For this reason, the research aims to: 1) gain valuable insights into Philippine science museum accessibility via senior citizen narratives and 2) formulate essential recommendations for the improvement of Philippine science museum accessibility using gathered narratives. The research is unique in that it is one of the firsts, if not the first, to study science museum accessibility in relation to elderly perspectives in the Philippines. Present implications of the research include obtaining a better understanding of the current senior citizen-related state of affairs (accessibility issues, progress, management, etc.) of science museums in the country. Future implications involve the creation of programs and policies geared towards facilitating the equal and equitable access of science museums not just for seniors but for all disadvantaged groups, in addition to inspiring prospective research into this topic

Methodology

The study employed a qualitative method and utilized an online survey questionnaire as the research instrument. The online questionnaire was created via Google Forms, whose shareable link was forwarded to senior citizen respondents. The form looked into seniors' sentiments regarding the accessibility of science museums in the Philippines, specifically, the study identified two museums: Philippine Air Force Museum and The Mind Museum. Participants were asked whether or not they have been to any of these museums. If yes, they are further questioned about how they accessed the museum or museums, as well as issues they might have encountered in accessing such museum/s. If no, respondents were requested to provide their perceptions about science museums, including reasons as to why they were not able to access a science museum. In addition to the survey questionnaire, interviews were also conducted to supply additional context to form responses.

Summary of Findings

The research had a total of 11 respondents. After conducting survey questionnaires and interviews, it was found that the majority of participants consisted of females (see Figure 1) with 60-64 as the dominant senior age group (see Figure 2), and that most of whom were from the National Capital Region or NCR (see Figure 3).

Sex Assigned at Birth

11 responses

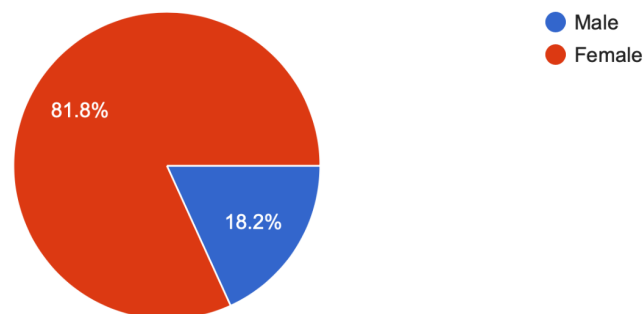


Figure 1: Percentage Distribution of Male and Female Respondents

Age Group

11 responses

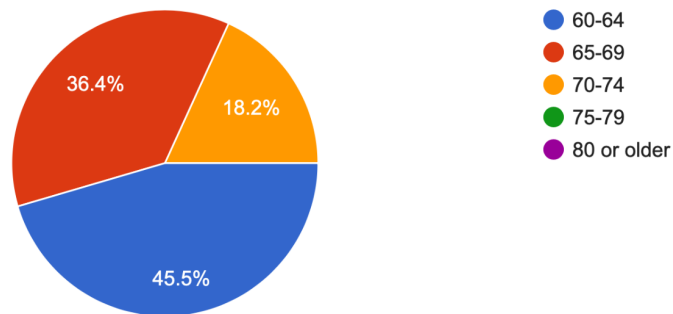


Figure 2: Percentage Distribution of Senior Age Groups

Region

11 responses

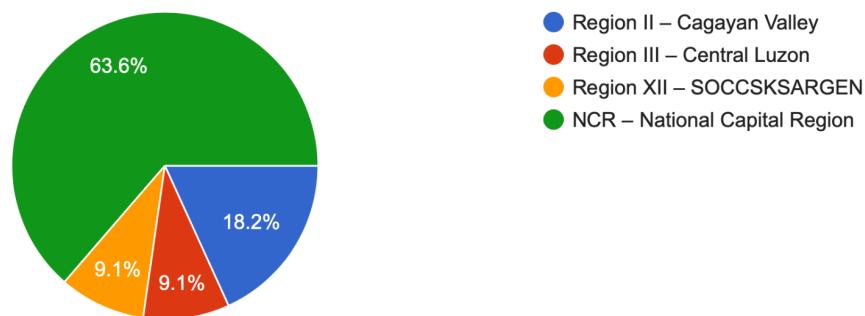


Figure 3: Percentage Distribution of Region of Residence

When the participants were asked if they had visited any of the identified science museums, the majority responded with “no” (see Figure 4). They reported the following reasons for not being able to do so: 1) Long distance from place of residence to the museums (reported by 66.7% of respondents); 2) Lack of awareness or not knowing about the museums (44.4%); 3) Lack of time or busy schedule (55.6%); 4) Being alone and having no companion or guardian to go the museums with (22.2%); 5) No viable means of transportation (11.1%); and 6) Lack of financial resources (11.1%) [Note that participants can provide multiple reasons]. However,

non-visitors held generally positive views of museums, stating that they consider museums important for gaining knowledge on the historical and scientific development of the country. Moreover, nearly all of them expressed willingness to participate in, or even pay for, a proposed science museum visit for senior citizens. If one were to be organized, their ideal ways of accessing the museums involved free transportation to the museums, inclusion of food, guided tours with assistance, and reserved spaces for seniors inside the museums.

Have you been to any of the following science museums: 1) Philippine Air Force Aerospace Museum, 2) The Mind Museum?
11 responses

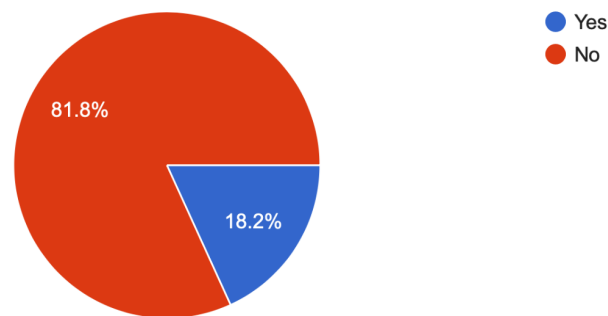


Figure 4: Percentage Distribution of Science Museum Visitors and Non-visitors

Meanwhile, individuals who have been to any of the museums identified by the research were found to have known about science museums through friends and family. Furthermore, they have only visited the museums once, which they accessed through private transportation. When asked if they encountered accessibility difficulties, they reported that they did not face any challenges at all and that their visit was supplemented with senior privileges and discounts. Overall, respondents who have visited the museums were satisfied with their experience, the services rendered by the museums and would recommend other senior citizens to visit the science museums.

Conclusions and Recommendations

Given the findings, the study arrived at the following conclusions: 1) There is a lack of senior citizens' awareness of science museums in the country; 2) Distance, time, and income level are significant factors that affect senior citizens' access to science museums; and 3) Both science museum visitors and non-visitors in general think of museums positively and are interested in accessing science museum services and resources. Therefore, the following measures for the improved accessibility of science museums in the Philippines for Filipino citizens are recommended:

- Science museums should exert more effort in the promotion of their services and resources. This can be done through the dissemination of publication materials such as newspaper, television, and radio ads or other means of communication that are traditionally utilized by senior citizens. Social media may also be used in the form of Facebook posts, YouTube videos, etc.
- Science museums should carry out programs and activities specifically designed for senior citizens. An example is free museum day (in a week) for seniors, similar to free movie day passes for seniors (given every Tuesday depending on the location or city) in movie houses.
- Relationships between science museums and local government units, including associations of senior citizens must be strengthened to pave the way for effective collaborative efforts such as organizing free guided tours for senior citizens, especially those who have no means of transportation or paying for entrance fees.
- Since science museums are concentrated within the National Capital Region, partnerships between public and private institutions should be developed to construct science museums throughout the country, as well as features like roads and signages for facilitating navigation and access to museums.
- Crafting laws on senior citizen education should be taken up by the Philippine legislature to address the gaps in science literacy among Filipino senior citizens, to coordinate interagency efforts on educating senior citizens about scientific and technological developments, as well as to mandate the provision of science libraries, museums, and reading centers to elderly learners throughout all regions of the country.

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