

THE EFFECTIVENESS OF VISUAL RESEARCH IN ENHANCING THE CULTURAL KNOWLEDGE AND PRACTICES IN CREATIVE INDUSTRY

Doris Maying*

Universiti Malaysia Sarawak

Yakup Mohd Rafee

Universiti Malaysia Sarawak

Sarah Naemah Aman Leong

Universiti Malaysia Sarawak

Awangko' Hamdan Awang Arshad

Universiti Malaysia Sarawak

Hishamuddin Siri

Universiti Malaysia Sarawak

Sylvester Wielding Jussem

Universiti Malaysia Sarawak

Mohamad Zamhari Abol Hassan

Universiti Malaysia Sarawak

Hakimi Halim

Universiti Malaysia Sarawak

Poline Bala

Universiti Malaysia Sarawak

ABSTRACT

This paper aims to explain the effectiveness of visual research to investigate cultural objects as the way to enhance cultural knowledge and practices in the creative industry. Based on the experiential study that was participated by the researcher, has discovered the factors that influenced the effectiveness in visual research based on the three different case studies which particularly on the cultural heritage of Parang Bajau at Kg. Siasai, Kota Belud, Ring Ladies of Embhan Community at Padawan, Sarawak, and Megalith Cultures of Kelabit Highlands at Bario, Miri. Through the comparisons based on the three case studies has identified three factors of visual research which is internal, external and the context of the research subject. These factors will contribute for better documentation, especially in visual, particularly for practicing researcher in the cultural studies, enhancing the information of cultural knowledge, developing the creative economy through the representation of visual cultures and most significant for the society purposes that own the culture.

Keywords: Visual research; Cultural objects; Visual documentation; Visual experiential; Creative industry

Received: 24 July 2018

Accepted: 26 April 2019

1. INTRODUCTION

Visual documentation is known as a required methodology in collecting data especially culturally investigation, and essentially to provide the existence of visual on the regarding case study. Crossman (2011) believed that visual data may deliver a strong experiential basis to support outdoor recreation management in the decision-making of visual research methods applied following to the context on the subject. Reviewing the process that was conducted in the three case studies has clearly explained the research nature demanding few factors to execute the result for well-documented visuals. Besides, according to Schroeder (2002) on visual consumption in approaching consumer interest, visual is considered the most comprehensive methods of marketing for the understandings of consumer behaviour and focusing on visual representation that is valid in the selected cultural system.

MacDougall (1997) mentioned that most images that appeared purposely in Social Science to show everything but remained mute and frustratingly disquieting the audiences. Following to that, Mullen (2002) reviewed Pink (2001) that visual research is an effective approach in the research of ethnography study which is the sub-area of Social Science. According to Rafee, et. al., (2015) the use of photos, videos and sketches as visual data in Social Science research contributes and improved in delivering information compared to the text-based data which is agreed to be more complicated to extract and understand. The uses of visual data are purposely to describe and to analyze the material cultures, especially the written data which is very helpful to enhance and support the information in the text-based by applying the artistic value of the visual. By employing the artistic value into visual data, the practitioner is required to be motivated by creativity (Amabile & Pillemer, 2012 & Csikszentmihalyi, 1999) and adapt to the surrounding environment or the physical of the culture (Cohen, 2012). Besides, researchers find that the use of visual data that appeared with artistic sense is well contributes to the public with the cultural knowledge and raising awareness of the abandoned cultural practices.

Some images could have delivered incorrect vision and knowledge to the community that wishes to retrieve the information. The researcher must consider that ability of human vision is not always active to have imaginary understanding in visual as not everyone could describe visuality aspect of certain images displayed (Rose, 2001). Following to that, the accessibility to experience the subject interested could limit the fissure, and as the images are supposed to draw the experience closer to the audiences (Biggs, 2007). Based on Kolb's experiential learning (Kolb & Fry, 1975) suggested that through experience, practitioners would make an observation and evaluate things by seeing directly it, and then the practitioners would be able to do the representation based on virtual understandings. Relating to that, Rasanen (2012) also mentioned that experience made the learning process towards subject interest is considerably effective especially in the mean for visual literacy. At some point, several situations are not explainable through words but with the factors considered will extend the idea to enhance the visual sharing of the subject related. Through the effectiveness of visual experiential also helps to demonstrate the ways of knowing and understands the subject or approaches to involve in the social practices especially that containing arts-informed aspect. Addition to that, Butler-Kisber & Poldma (2010) also mentioned that the effective experience during the visual research will expose the hidden ideas and create the new perception for the researcher and the research audience towards the subjects that are being studied or shared.

Through the case studies, the researcher has discovered that the factors did give influences in the cycle of visual research in the way pertaining visual data, as it is important to research (Svilicic, 2011) especially in cultural studies. Cultural is known as a vital component in an ethnic in which as the artistic involvement could assist the society itself. Based on Saemala (1990), it is understood that the inclusion of arts in research will develop educational thoughts and practices towards the cultural understanding, foremost as the meaning of salvation for the culture itself. Butler-Kisber & Poldma also mentioned Freidman (1997) that transforming experience into knowledge with the engagement of critical analysis in the research practices also part of the key for effective research. The discovery of the factors in visual research will create a suggestion for the effective methods, so the outcome of visual documentation will create better meaning and responsible purposes displayed. Moreover, the association of arts in the visual research as suggested has the potential to impact towards the society in economically as the effectiveness of visual tourism could influence the interest for the consumer as according to Howkins (2001), that creativity are involved in all levels of businesses.

Other than that, as the technological tools may interpret in particular ways but the capability for human vision to look the visuality of the particular subject also comes with various ways (Rose, 2001:6). To deliver the content, imagery representation of the culture has to be accurate and well-presented to determine the form, meaning, and effect. Increasing of the internet technological tools, even in the business is required to be imaginatively and creatively in order to be competitive that are effective for consumer consumptions (Howkins, 2001 & Schroeder, 2002). As for this one, having the visual as the tool for practitioners should profitable in the process for having critical visual recording which could be defined the matter on how to look, how an image will be recorded, what might it do and how the visual data might be used to the society. Visual data is urgent for making images, reproduce or displaying visual with rich in meaning, supported the purpose of the visual research factors needs to be counted as a compulsory in the research domain especially for visual data. With the effectiveness of the visual process for cultural related shall provide various positive causes into the society.

2. METHODOLOGY AND DISCOVERY

The effectiveness of the visual research has made the researcher discover the factors, through the collection of data information and visuals was performed onto three research that consisted of the Social Sciences area, which is: (1) Parang Bajau at Kampung Siasai of Kota Belud, Sabah; (2) The Ring Ladies of Embhan Community at Padawan, Sarawak; and (3) Megalith Cultures of Kelabit Highlands at Bario, Miri. The similarity of these case studies is that mainly belongs to the society, and the research was looking at the significant dominant cultures in the mentioned community, the cultural objects or the social practices. These research areas are discussed in this paper since all of them have employed the practice-based research through visual experiential and art practices. The processes that are applied in all of these three case studies were analyzed based on the visual methodologies that are used on every each of the cultural practices.

In the first case study, the Bajau, one of the communities that is populating at Sabah is well known for their skills in the making of *parang* (Madlan, et. al., 2014). The making process and the aesthetical value of the cultural object was the main focus of documentation. To document the process, the researcher has involved with the *parang* maker through the experiential videos to

record the making procedures. The second research was conducted at Padawan, Sarawak which is relating to the Ring Ladies of Embhan Community, the sub-ethnic of Bidayuh. These ladies generally known with their brass ring ornament they wore around their arms and calves since children (Rafee, et. al., 2012). Concerning on the diminishing practices, the researcher focused to capture artistic photos of the ladies wearing their costumes and also interviews to define the ornamental pieces of their traditional costume. Besides that, the experiential study was involved in all of these case studies as the experience essentially subjective because it only can be perceived by those who belong to the subject and always simplified to be shared by anyone or to some else (Biggs, 2007).

Figure 1: *Parang Bajau* making process



Figure 2: Portraiture and artistic photo shooting of The Embhan Ring Ladies



The next research was on the Megalith Cultures of Kelabit Highlands, located at Bario, Miri. This culture was practiced by ancient societies of the Kelabits that used large stone either it is engraved or build as a monument (Hitchner et. al., 2009; Bala, 2014). For the megalith study, the researchers recorded the visual of the whole physical forms of the stone, using few of technology documentation tools to produce a different format of visual documentation in different perspectives especially Batuh Ritung which is more structurally form. Other than that, the carved mark on the stones called Batuh Narit Arur Bilit was trace-out by the researcher as the way to record the actual size and the details carved marks of the design that is believed to be carved by the headhunter from the society. All of these case studies were approached through the researcher visual experiential in order to get the understanding of reality dimensions of the cultural practices and then the art practices are performed based on the critical observation that required the researcher's creativity to produce the visual documentation that possessed artistic values in representing the cultural subjects.

Figure 3: Tracing process of carved designed on the Batuh Narit Arur Bilit



Figure 4: Measuring activities, and three- dimensional angle views photo and video documentation of Batuh Ritung



The whole processes that involved in the documentation have defined the effectiveness of visual research that appeared in the categorized factors influenced. These factors defined to be part of the documentation divided into three categories of factors that related which known as internal, external and context. These factors also divided based on the characteristic of the subject or social practices, tools or methods and data collection that will be obtained. The categorized details as shown below:

Table 1: Categorized Factors in Visual Research based on the Case Study

INTERNAL		EXTERNAL	CONTEXT
Case study	Social Practice	Tools	Visual Data
Parang Bajau (Kampung Siasai)	Making process of <i>parang</i> Bajau	Action Camera	Footage of the making process of Parang Bajau from the maker views.
Embhan Ring Ladies (Kampung Semban)	Wearing of Ruyakng and Rasukng	DSLR Camera 360° Camera	Portraiture of the Ring Ladies, and focusing on the costume ornaments photos. 360° video recording of the Ring Ladies eagle-danced.
Kelabit Megaliths (Bario)	Megalithic structure or monument	Drone 360° Camera DSLR Tracing	Aerial view of the megaliths with varied angles. Artistic shots and 360° side view of the megalith. Inner view of megalith structure (Batuh Ritung, Pa Lungan). Retrace and re-pretend the original design of carved mark of Batu Narit Arur Bilit.

Referring to the **Table 1**, all documentation process on visual was performed based on the subject research itself, which are according to the nature of cultural material. Through the case studies, chronologically from the earlier case study until the latest research proved there's enhancement in the visual research documentation practices in the uses of tools and methods to collect visual data. This was understood that the experience from research field has given the input and the real environment of research activities that motivate the researcher to improve the effectiveness of visual research. The researcher also finds through those researches fields led many lessons and critical thinking in the action of documentation, the utilization of tools and the way research practitioners observing their object interest in with creativity senses.

Based on all the experiential studies performed by researcher realized that retrieving the background of the culture are necessary for the purposes to understand the research subjects in the first place, then will guide the next actions of the research, also give an early opportunity for the researcher to do the surface analysis. This is considered as the internal factor based on the research applied, which is considered in the knowledge and understanding about the culture. Through the internal, the researcher would have to consider on the best tools and methods that is able to execute the documentation effective and objectively. The use of tools and methods are to be selected based on the visual experiential and also following to the case studies or social practices. Tools and methods are considered as the external factors since it is meant to approach the research subjects.

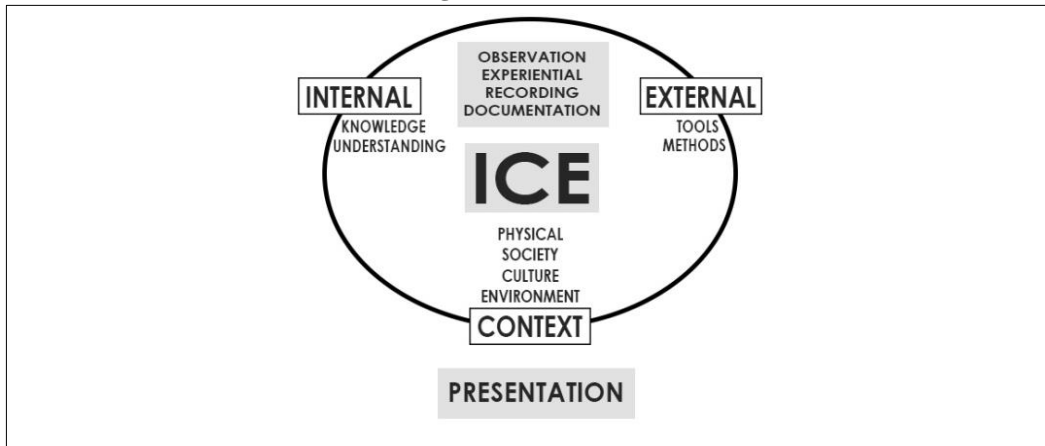
While, the visual data that to be collected are according to the context interest of the researcher and manipulate the usage of documentation tools creatively in obtaining quality of visuals.

Basically, the researcher has to know the physical or characteristic of the subject that to be studied as it will suit based on the background information. The background understanding, historical, stories, and introduction of the material culture should be mastered or learned by the researcher as the approaches that engage with subjectivity, reflexivity and as the notion of the visual knowledge or a critical “voice” (Pink, 2003). Through those early studies will decide the next step or setting of the external which involving the experiential of visual on to the subject and identify the context factor of the research. The whole factors that existed in the research frame are very depending on each other and the continuity of the information from the factors is responsible to support the whole practices of the visual research.

3. DISCUSSION AND FINDINGS

Based on the three case studies, the researcher has identified that the visual research has the possibility to be effectively enhanced through the existence of certain influences within the process. In the process of visual research, the researcher aware that such studies that related to cultural it is essentials to be experienced and having the artistic creativity since the nature of an artist is visually sensitive. Referencing to the Kolb’s experiential learning theory (Kolb & Fry, 1975) to help the student in the education is having an effective learning process are proving the potential in the visual process (Kolb & Kolb, 2005). While the art practices in the cultural context are provided on more criticality in visual documentation which is requiring the creative thinking and artistic senses as the problem approaches or as an alternative in the research setting (Amabile, 1999; Amabile & Pillemer, 2012). In order to have the process are objectively performed by the researcher, through the identified influences from those case studies has discovered the factors of visual research.

The discovery of these factors has inspired to develop a model that is known as ICE which is representing the Internal, Context and External. As shown in **Table 1** based on the case studies categories, the model appeared after the researcher realized that the methodology and processes that involved actually has been influenced by the factors which very much contributed to the research methodology in the field and executed the needs in data required. The process of observation, experiential study, recording, and documentation will be more structured and guided according to the research objectives. Besides, these factors believed to influence the most decisions on the surrounding activities and enhancing the data visual obtained based on the situation. The ‘factors’ showed that it has played many roles in disseminating cultural visuals through the visual. The ICE model described as shown below:

Figure 5: ICE model

The first factor is about an internal aspect of the case study itself, which is about the knowledge and understanding of cultural studied. The researcher believed the initiative to gain early information such as reading material or verbal communication from the society, one of the basic procedures. Through all the content studied will develop ideas or working process that will be executed on the next stage of the visual research. For example, through literature review will define the issue or problem that surrounds the culture and as a trigger for the creative process in the documentation.

External is the second factors that influence the technique of the researcher to capture their visual documentation. Consisting tools and methods that are chosen, based on the first factors earlier, the researcher will choose their mode or manner of observation, the involvement of experiential study, methods to record and the documentation process. These factors will satisfy the desires that were required in the documentation of the research. The external factor also will determine the outcomes of the visual data that was documented in the field, including the presentation will rely on the effectiveness of this factor.

For context factor, the physical and the environment of the studied subject will be the influence of the data collection of visuals. The idea on how to pertain the visual is depending on how angles and perspective need to look after and consider. Some issue may difficult the process and the solution must be sought during then. Other than that, it should be looking back or referring to what of the purposes required in the research-based on first and second factors of visual research earlier. The context factor will convey the important content as it will bridge the experience to the audience, especially those case studies that has challenged to access closer. Meanwhile, ICE can be referred as cycle processes. In pertaining data of visual, there possibly having leakage of information or unrealized skipped situation during the process, the researcher may able viewing back the previous factors or any organization that suit the researcher themselves. The model is not compulsory to be performed accordingly but it's depended on the practices and needs of the visual research.

The researcher believed that the ICE is an influential substance in the cultural studies or other potential areas that requiring the visual usage. As explained, ICE definitely contributes in the research process to be more meaningful to share since it is creatively enhanced documentation onto the case study. Meanwhile, the experiential study that involved has dragged closer the information and the experiential sight of the cultural practices to the audiences, and ICE greatly improvised in the process of the experiential study. Besides in guiding the research process, ICE has potential to produce various possible outcomes such as in the cultural representation and the process of work or research are more objective. Looking into other perspectives, as ICE is used in enhancing visual cultures and it seems the creativity that exist within are able to help in managing the community productivity. Creativity is the possible substance that can be existed in many levels in the economy (Howkins, 2001) for example the product representation such as visual tourism.

4. CONCLUSION

Based on the discovery and discussion, ICE could be an alternative model in the cultural study in obtaining critical visual documentation with great responsibility as documented images are necessary to deliver the meaning implied, accurate perception of the representation of cultural practices then will be laid to very well-documented heritage. The experiential display on the research has formed more matured in content which can be extracted from the moment and therefore has the possibility to form the basis for something else, such as knowledge. Besides, developing the sense of awareness and care within society regarding the cultural issues, especially on the diminishing social practices. Meanwhile, in the context of the community benefits, ICE is relevant to be adopted in the creative economy and as well for others area. Based on the three case studies, ICE has enhanced the effectiveness of the visual in representation and also cultural knowledge purposes. In the economic field, advertising is addressing the production and the consumption of a product for example the visual cultures are useful for the tourism purposes as the creative economy (Howkins, 2001). Adopting ICE in the economic context would have the effect possibility of visual to influence the consumer and also to reflect based on consumer identity (Schroeder, 2002). The rationale of ICE as the model aid are greatly influential as it is providing the positive impact for both knowledge of cultural practices, sustainability and also benefiting the community.

ACKNOWLEDGEMENT

This article based on the studies made through Kursi Dayak Grant, Institute of Borneo Studies UNIMAS (F03/DRC/1457/2016), Kursi Nusantara Grant, Institute of Borneo Studies UNIMAS (F03/NRC/1465/2016), and Fundamental Research Grant Scheme, Ministry of Higher Education (F03/FRGS/1500/2016).

REFERENCES

- Amabile, T. M., & Pillemer, J. (2012). Perspectives on the social psychology of creativity. *The Journal of Creative Behavior*, 46(1), 3-15.
- Bala, P. (2014). Being Christians in Muslim-Majority Malaysia the Kelabit and Lun Bawang experiences in Sarawak. *Religious Diversity in the Muslim-majority States in Southeast Asia: Areas of Toleration and Conflict*, 506, 379.
- Biggs, M. (2007). Modelling experiential knowledge for research. *In the art of research: Research practices in art and design*. Helsinki: University of Art and Design (UIAH).
- Butler-Kisber, L., & Poldma, T. (2011). The power of visual approaches in qualitative inquiry: The use of collagemaking and concept mapping in experiential research. *Journal of Research Practice*, 6(2), 18.
- Cohen, L. M. (2012). Adaptation and creativity in cultural context. *Revista de Psicología*, 30(1), 3-18.
- Crossman, J. E. (2011). Experiential learning about intercultural communication through intercultural communication. Internationalising a Business Communication Curriculum. *Journal of Intercultural Communication*, (25).
- Csikszentmihalyi, M. (1999). 16 implications of a systems perspective for the study of creativity. *In Handbook of creativity (pp. 313-335)*. Cambridge University Press.
- Freidman, K. (1997). Design science and design education. In P. McCrory (Ed.), *The challenge of complexity* (pp. 54-72). Helsinki, Finland: University of Art and Design.
- Hitchner, S. L., Apu, F. L., Tarawe, L., Galih@ Sinah Nabun Aran, S., & Yesaya, E. (2009). Community-based transboundary ecotourism in the Heart of Borneo: a case study of the Kelabit Highlands of Malaysia and the Kerayan Highlands of Indonesia. *Journal of Ecotourism*, 8(2), 193-213.
- Howkins, J. (2001). *The Creative Economy: How people make from ideas*. London: Allen Lane, 68-84.
- Kolb, D. A., & Fry, R. (1975). Towards an applied theory of experiential. *Theories of Group Processes*. John Wiley and Sons, London.
- Kolb, A. Y., & Kolb, D. A. (2005). Learning styles and learning spaces: Enhancing experiential learning in higher education. *Academy of management learning & education*, 4(2), 193-212.
- MacDougall, D. (1997). The visual in anthropology. *Rethinking visual anthropology*, 276-295.
- Madlan, L. B., Seok, C. B., Mutang, J. A., Baharudin, S. A., & Joo, H. C. (2014). The prejudice of Bajau: from own and others ethnic perspective: A preliminary study in Sabah. *International Journal of Information and Education Technology*, 4(3), 244.
- Mullen, L. (2002) & Pink, S. (2001). Doing Ethnography: Images, Media, and Representation in Research. *In Forum Qualitative Sozialforschung/Forum: Qualitative Social Research (Vol.3, No.1)*.
- Rafee, Y. M., Arshad, A. H. A., Dim, A. R., Siri, H., & Samaroon, M. J. (2015). Visual Ethnography and its Applications in Ethnographic Painting. *Procedia - Social and Behavioral Sciences*, 211, 399-406.

- Rafee, Y.M, Jussem, S.W, Awang Arshad, A.H, Halim, H, Siri, H, Abol Hassan M.Z, (2012), Community Based Tourism- The Attraction Of 'Embhan' Community In Kampung Semban, Sarawak. *BIMP-EAGA Journal of Sustainable Tourism Development*,1(1),11-20.
- Rose, G. (2001). Content analysis, counting what you think you see. In, G. Rose (ed.) *Visual Methodologies, an Introduction to the Interpretation of Visual Materials*.
- Saemala, F. (1990). Security goals and strategies in the Solomon Islands. *The Security of Oceania in the, 1*.
- Schroeder, J. E.(2002). Visual consumption. Routledge.
- Sviličić, N. (2011). History and Future of Visual Anthropology. *Collegium antropologicum*, 35(1), 187-192.