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Analysing the Impact of Museum Objectives on Achieving Cultural Diplomacy Objectives

Author: Tonya Nelson

Supervisor/s: Christopher Gordon,

City, University of London

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ANALYSING THE IMPACT OF MUSEUM EXHIBITIONS ON ACHIEVING CULTURAL DIPLOMACY OBJECTIVES

**A Case Study of the Victoria & Albert Museum's
Light from the Middle East Exhibition**



Clore AHRC Research Project

Tonya Nelson

15 May 2013

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INTRODUCTION



When visitors to the Victoria and Albert Museum (V&A)'s recent photographic exhibition *Light from the Middle East* were asked whether it could have any affect on foreign relations between the UK and Middle East, the following answers were given:

"No, it's just an exhibition."

"No, two rooms in a museum are too small to show the complexity of the situation in the Middle East."

"Yes, sometimes a single picture has more power to change minds than 1000 words."

"Yes, the space allocated for the exhibition and the marketing shows that the V&A respects and values the Middle East and wants to encourage its visitors to learn and understand the lifestyle of the people from this region."

Material culture has always played a part in foreign relations. During the 18th century, Meissen porcelain, invented and produced in what is now Germany, was used by the Saxon king as a diplomatic gift (Cassidy-Geiger 2008). During the Cold War, the US government sponsored a display of top consumer appliances called the *American National Exhibition* aimed at demonstrating to Russian visitors the benefits of living in a democratic, capitalist society (Feifer 2009). More recently, China's famous Terracotta Warriors of Xi'an have been heralded as serving "China better today as soft power ambassadors than they ever served the first emperor of China" as military soldiers of the afterlife (Dzodin 2010).

The question is: What is the impact of the exchange and exhibition of material culture in the context of international diplomacy? In the case of Meissen, royal correspondence of the King of Saxony shows that the gift of Meissen was not simply a token of good will, but marked a specific diplomatic intent (Cassidy-Geiger, 2008). There was a quid pro quo of sorts that linked the exchange of a valuable cultural product to a specific foreign

policy act. However, the efficacy of the exchange of material culture as it is practised today in the form of 'cultural diplomacy' is not as easy to measure. Newspapers, academic journals and policy papers are littered with great anecdotes about how cultural exchange improves foreign relations, but a precious few present an analytical framework for measuring actual impact (Holmes 2012).

The aim of this study is to understand the impact of cultural exchange through museum exhibitions from a cultural diplomacy perspective. It attempts to construct an analytical model that ascribes quantitative value to qualitative data about changes in opinions, beliefs and behaviours resulting from museum exhibition attendance. Specifically, the study will seek to understand whether the V&A's exhibition *Light from the Middle East* influenced the opinions, beliefs and behaviours of its visitors with regards to cultural diplomacy objectives between the UK and Middle East.

WHAT IS 'CULTURAL' DIPLOMACY?



Diplomacy, in the formal sense, is broadly defined “as the art or practice of conducting international relations through the negotiation of alliances, treaties, and agreements” (American Heritage Dictionary 2009). It is a form of ‘soft power’ that uses persuasion and attraction to achieve foreign policy outcomes, as opposed to ‘hard power’ which relies on military force or monetary coercion (Nye 2004). Historically, international diplomacy has been practiced by and between officials of governments – diplomat to diplomat. Since the end World War II, the practice of diplomacy has broadened to include a government-to-people element, known as ‘public diplomacy’ (Siracusa 2010). Public diplomacy differs from official diplomacy in that it is transparent, widely disseminated and concerned with the behaviour and attitudes of publics, rather than governments (RAND 2004).

Cultural diplomacy is the strand of public diplomacy concerned with establishing, developing and sustaining relations with foreign states through arts and education. The aim of cultural diplomacy is to facilitate “the exchange of ideas, information, art, and other aspects of culture among nations and their peoples in order to foster mutual understanding (Cummings 2003).” The concept gained currency during the Cold War when the US and Soviet Union used arts and educational exchanges to persuade the rest of the world of the value of their respective political systems and ideologies (Cull 2009). In this form, cultural diplomacy was about using particular arts outputs to articulate tightly controlled messages about a country for foreign publics to consume. Consequently, cultural diplomacy came to be seen by many as euphemism for propaganda.

In recent years, the top-down branding approach to cultural diplomacy used during the Cold War has been replaced by a new paradigm that focuses on dialogue and exchange rather than monologue and persuasion (Leadbetter 2010). Because of this shift in emphasis, many international organisations, including the British Council, have started to use the term ‘cultural relations’

rather than cultural diplomacy. According to Steve Green, Team Leader for the European Union National Institutes of Culture: “The central premise of cultural relations, and I think the ‘smarter’ version of public diplomacy, is we listen to and engage as equals with [other countries] (2010).” United States foreign policy scholars are encouraging the US to take a similar view. In their article *Public Diplomacy: Ideas for the War of Idea*, Peter Krause and Stephan Van Evan argue:

“Dialogue makes the audience feel heard, which primes [it] to consider the speaker’s message. It also helps the audience to educate the speaker about its concerns, and this helps the speaker focus discussion on the real interests of the audience. U.S. public diplomacy has often assumed a monologue format in recent years. Instead, the United States should focus on creating a two-way exchange of ideas (2009).”

They went on to say, “To engage in dialogue with those from the Muslim world, Americans must know something about its culture and history. Americans know very little, however, because U.S. education on these subjects is woefully thin. This should change” (Krause 2009).

Another important element of this paradigm change is the shift from few-to-few communication to that of many-to-many interactions (Bound et al 2007). The proliferation of social media channels of communication means that governments can no longer control information flow and more people can directly connect with each other across national boundaries. In fact, any channel of communication that can be controlled or influenced by government is likely to be discounted in favour of what are now seen as ‘authentic’ modes of communication such as websites, blogs and Facebook (Bellamy 2008). Furthermore, the credibility of cultural diplomacy work declines dramatically when it is perceived by foreign publics that national governments are involved (Donfried 2010). On the other hand, the involvement of civic and public organisations, such as museums, seems to encounter less scepticism from their overseas counterparts (Wang 2006).

There will always be an argument that by participating in cultural diplomacy, cultural institutions lose their independence and become instruments of government. But now, more than ever, there is a space where museums can do their work in ways that improve intercultural relations while maintaining their freedom.

THE ROLE OF MUSEUMS IN CULTURAL DIPLOMACY



“[T]o allow visitors to address through objects, both ancient and more recent, questions of contemporary politics and international relations.”

British Museum Founding Principles set by Parliament, 1753

In the 18th and 19th centuries when many private collections held in Europe became public goods, one of the first functions of museums was that of nation branding (Hoogwaerts 2012). By carefully selecting artefacts deemed essential to a nation’s identity and exhibiting them to the public, museums were implicitly engaged in ‘old style’ cultural diplomacy by promoting their countries’ socio-political values and systems (Hoogwaerts 2012). Over time, museums have grown and evolved such that there are many activities that facilitate cultural diplomacy and intercultural exchange – museums engage in international loans of objects, exhibit the material heritage of other countries and cultures and facilitate international research. Furthermore, at least for museums in the UK, there has been a movement over the past 20 years to position museums as not only keepers of precious collections but as important social spaces in which people can interact through the exploration of heritage and material culture (Selwood 2010).

However, the benefits of all this work, from cultural diplomacy perspective, have never been measured or quantified (Bound et al 2007). It could be argued that this is the result of a lack of clarity in mission and definition of goals. In an interview the Director of the National Museum of Australia, Frank Howarth, suggested that “[Museums are in] danger [of] being seen to be indulging in excellent irrelevance doing first class work about which most people don’t care very much or which isn’t an influencing policy or isn’t making a difference” (Russo 2011). He argues that while museums are offering opportunities for audiences to connect with them, “museums find it difficult to accurately describe where such participation and engagement leads. (Russo 2011).” In 2007, DEMOS, a UK think tank, produced a report on cultural diplomacy that echoed this sentiment (Bound et al 2007). It pointed out that cultural institutions in the UK, particularly national

museums, attracted millions of tourists each year, providing a platform for building intercultural understanding and respect, thereby facilitating public diplomacy efforts. However, the authors found little data or analysis articulating the impact and value of cultural organisations' work in this area. Among the report's recommendations were: (1) "FCO [Foreign & Commonwealth Office] should collaborate with DCMS [Department of Culture Media and Sport] to monitor the number of tourists attracted by cultural institutions as a matter of course and use them as one of the proxy measures of the impact of the UK's public diplomacy work" and (2) "cultural institutions ... should create international strategies, whose partial function would be to show how their international work contributes towards the UK's international priorities (Bound et al 2007)."

As a result of DEMOS' report, in 2008 DCMS funded a major initiative called the *World Collections Programme (WCP)*. The programme provided £3 million in funding for the UK's top national museums to develop cultural exchange projects in FCO priority regions: African, Middle East, China and India (British Museum website 2011). Over the 3 years of the project, the museums were asked to engage in the following activities: (1) Developing new relationships; (2) digitisation of the Collections enabling wider electronic access; (3) professional development, training, skill sharing and staff exchange; (4) non-English language access to the Collections (online, radio, etc.); (5) public programmes connected to exhibitions; and (6) overseas exhibitions and loans (British Museum website 2011). While it is clear many worthwhile projects resulted from this programme, no evaluation was carried out to understand the extent to which the projects advanced UK cultural diplomacy objectives. In the final report about the programme, short case study descriptions of each project appeared to act as 'evidence' that this funding was well spent, but provided no analysis that would allow the government to compare the results of the programme to other public diplomacy initiatives.

This lack of impact analysis might be explained by the work of Melissa Nesbitt. In her article, *New perspectives on instrumentalism: an empirical study of cultural diplomacy*, she closely examines the development of WCP and concludes that the museum leaders involved used the political rhetoric of cultural diplomacy, supported by the DEMOS study, to obtain financial resources for international work they would have done anyway. Based on interviews with 15 museum leaders, she concluded that rather than the museums being used as tools for the government's foreign policy agenda,

the museums used the government as a tool for their own institutions' agenda.

WCP may have been a clever turning of the tables, but the lack of evidence of impact makes it difficult to lobby for sustained funding in this area. The programme ended in 2011 and no additional government funding has been allocated to continue the work of the participating museums (WCP 2011).

Where there are evaluations of exhibitions or public programmes with an international relations element, the focus tends to be on internal museum or sector focused goals such as audience development and visitor satisfaction. For example, in the evaluation of the British Museum's exhibition *The Hajj*, a significant portion of the report was dedicated to analysing the audience profile – race, religion, traditional versus non-traditional visitor type – and visitor experience in terms of wait times, exhibition layout, amount and level of interpretation and use of online resources (British Museum 2012). Clearly, the exhibition was quite successful in attracting new audiences, with 66% of visitors coming from a BAME background. While this speaks favourably to the British Museum's ability to cater to range of audiences, it says nothing about the long-term affects the exhibition had on those visitors.

There was, however, some investigation of outcomes and impacts that provided anecdotal evidence that the exhibition served cultural diplomacy objectives. Focus group responses indicated that non-Muslims left exhibition with a better understanding of Islam and a greater respect and empathy for those who practice the religion. Visitors also reported positively that the exhibition brought together people from different backgrounds together for shared experience. These comments, presented in the 'other impacts' section at the very end of the report could have been developed further to make a case for more funding for these types of exhibitions at the British Museum and in other museums across the country.

MUSEUMS AND CULTURAL DIPLOMACY OBJECTIVES FOR THE MIDDLE EAST



The key to understanding whether cultural exchange activities are effective is identifying the specific diplomatic objectives of the countries involved. For example, for many of the post-Soviet Union countries like Estonia, cultural diplomacy mainly focuses on nation branding in order to facilitate economic growth through tourism and trade (Kaljurand 2013). For countries like Turkey and Qatar the focus of cultural diplomacy is directed at raising their profile as important players in the geopolitical landscape (Larrabee 2010; Kamrava 2012). For the UK and United States, a significant focus has been on using cultural diplomacy to counter religious extremism that results in terrorist activity against their citizens (Rugh 2004; Schneider 2008).

This paper will explore the potential of museum exhibitions to improve UK foreign relations with the Middle East with regard to religious extremism linked to terrorism. In order to create an analytical framework for this assessment, the scope of the problem must be defined and specific areas where cultural diplomacy efforts might help must be pinpointed.

In the 2008 article *Arab Muslim Attitudes Towards the West: Cultural, Social and Political Explanations*, Peter Furia and Russell Lucas set out to understand the basis for the seeming 'clash of civilisations' that led to incidents such as the 9/11 terrorists attacks in the US and 7/7/7 attacks in the UK. They developed and tested the following hypotheses:

Hypothesis 1: Arab-Muslims who possess high levels of "Islamic consciousness" will be systematically hostile toward "Western" countries in general.

Hypothesis 2: Arab Muslims who possess high levels of "Arab consciousness" will possess systematically negative attitudes toward "Western" countries in general.

Hypothesis 3: Arab-Muslims lower in socioeconomic status will possess systematically hostile attitudes toward the West.

Hypothesis 4: Arab-Muslim youth will be systematically hostile to the West.

Hypothesis 5: Arab-Muslim males will be systematically hostile to the West.

Hypothesis 6: Arabs-Muslims who care about a specific foreign policy issue will assess individual Western countries on the basis of that country's actions regarding that issue.

The authors used data collected from 2,788 respondents from Egypt, Saudi Arabia, Jordan, UAE, Lebanon, Kuwait, and Morocco who were asked about their attitudes about 5 Western countries: US, UK, Germany, France, and Canada. They then used a regression equation to understand how different cultural, social and political attitudes influenced whether the survey group felt favourably or unfavourably about the western countries identified. The only hypothesis that was supported by the analysis was Hypothesis 6: that a western country's political position on foreign policy issues is a statistically significant factor in influencing the respondents' attitude toward that country. The study found no basis for believing that age, gender or socioeconomic status or affiliation with Islamic religion or Arab heritage influenced the attitudes of the survey respondents.

What this study, and others with similar findings, suggests is that the troubled relationship between the UK and Middle East is one of foreign policy. Thus, it would be naïve to say that cultural diplomacy could completely ameliorate the problem. The most sophisticated exhibition about culture of Middle East countries will never make up for the fact, for example, most Arab-Muslims do not agree with the US and UK position on Israel and Palestine.

However, this is not to say that cultural diplomacy can play no role in relationship building in this region. James Zogby, Founder and President of the Arab American Institute and senior advisor to the polling firm Zogby International, has focused on polling Arab and Western world people to understand their attitudes toward each other. In his book, *Arab Voices: What They Are Saying to Us and Why It Matters* Zogby echoes the findings of Faria and Lucas, but also points to other factors that aggravate the situation (2010). The most significant of these are:

- (1) The stereotypical portrayal of Middle East people in the media and popular culture. "Western media reports have too often fed us

mythologies and half-truths about a vengeful Arab mentality. Influenced by such depictions, many in the West got used to the idea of Arabs as angry [people] (83).”

(2) The lack of nuanced, balanced reporting from Western news outlets on issues related to Middle East politics. “The real Arab World is more complicated than the neat caricature frequently presented by commentators, politicians and even some academics (71).”

(3) Western people’s apparent lack of interest in learning about the Middle East. “In the run up to the Iraq war, most Americans knew virtually nothing about the country. ...National Geographic released the results of a survey testing the general knowledge of young Americans [finding] only 13% ... could locate Iraq on the map (125).”

(4) There is general ignorance of the diversity of lifestyles and cultures within the Middle East region. “Americans and Westerners are often fed sweeping assertions about Arabs that assumes a dull, repressive, and monochromatic culture (62).”

All four of these factors, hereinafter referred to as the ‘Zogby Issues’, are ones that can be addressed through cultural work, particularly museums which have an educational and artistic remit.

But who should be the target audience of this work and where are they? William Rugh, former US ambassador to Yemen and UAE and professor of foreign policy at Tufts University, breaks down the Middle East population into three distinct groups (2004):

(A) Those people who have spent time in Western countries as students or on business and have a reasonably good understanding of the culture and language and are favourably disposed to Westerners.

(B) The relatively small group of radicals who believe the West threatens their culture. They are typically literate, well-educated and come from relatively well-off families, but have been radicalised through an experience they have had with the West.

(C) The large silent majority that tends not to focus on the [West] very much, unless events in the region, such as the Palestinian uprising or the Iraq War, bring [the West] to the group’s inescapable attention. Members are part of the lowest socioeconomic group and are not highly literate.

Rugh argues that due to the military interventions that occurred after September 11th, the first group (A) has stopped speaking in defence of West while the second group (B) has become more vocal and persuasive. Due to the proliferation of satellite TV and other internet-based means of communication, the third group (C) is also more connected to international events and are increasingly formulating and voicing their views on issues. Rugh goes on to say:

In terms of the three groups here described, it is probably futile to try to convert the few extremists away from their [views]. It is possible, however, to work with and embolden those with [pro-West] views and, hence, to influence the great middle of Arab and Muslim opinion, which, thanks to new technologies, is gradually being brought into the public realm (152)

While the opinion of Arab world people is important, addressing the Zogby Issues means looking at the beliefs, opinions and behaviour of the UK citizenry. A 2012 YouGov-Cambridge study (2012) asked 1733 UK residents the following question:

In the long term, do you think it is possible for the West and the Muslim world to coexist in peace, with each respecting the other's values and traditions, or is there a fundamental conflict between the two sets of values and one or other must eventually prevail?

The largest percentage of respondents (43%) said there 'is a fundamental conflict; in the end one or other must prevail.' A slightly smaller percentage (41%) said 'It is possible for the West and Muslim world to co-exist in peace.' The remaining respondents (14%) responded 'Don't know.' In the era of new cultural diplomacy, where 'many to many' communication via social media and other communications is vital, it will be critical that UK citizens believe that the West and Middle East can co-exist peacefully, as it will be their views that Middle Easterners will be most influenced by. UK Museums can play a role in helping its residents become 'citizen diplomats' by acting as spaces where mutual understanding can be developed and pathways to peaceful coexistence explored.

**CASE STUDY:
THE V&A'S LIGHT FROM
THE MIDDLE EAST EXHIBITION**



With the scope of the problem and specific areas for cultural diplomacy work identified, an analytical framework for understanding the impact of museum exhibitions on the UK cultural diplomacy objectives in the Middle East can be developed. For the purposes of this research, the V&A's *Light of Middle East* exhibition was selected as a case study to establish a benchmark for understanding how an exhibition can work to address the Zogby Issues: (1) the breakdown of stereotypes about Middle Eastern people; (2) a more nuanced and balanced approach to reporting about the Middle East society and politics; (3) a lack of understanding, knowledge and interest in the Middle East by the general UK public; and (4) a showing of the diversity of the region.

The reason this is being called a 'benchmark' study is that the exhibition was not developed with these cultural diplomacy objectives in mind. *Light from the Middle East* is the culmination of a collaboration between the V&A and British Museum to increase their holdings of contemporary Middle East art. The museums were given a grant by the Art Fund in 2009 to acquire works of art by living artists from the Middle East region and the driver behind the exhibition was to show the works acquired. According to Marta Weiss, Curator of Photographs at the V&A and co-curator of the exhibition:

Concerns of collecting are different from concerns for putting together an exhibition. When you're putting together an exhibition, it's crucial to be able to put things together [in a way] that forms a narrative, that creates a sort of argument and a kind of flow for the visitor. When you are collecting, it's more thinking about what else you have in the collection and how what you're acquiring fits into the existing holdings. Does it fill a gap? Does it complement something we already have? So there were different motivations for acquiring the works than there normally would be for putting together an exhibition (Art Radar 2013)."

However, the motivation behind seeking to acquire contemporary Middle East photography does link to some of the stated cultural diplomacy objectives. According to Venetia Porter, the British Museum's Assistant Keeper, Islamic and Contemporary Middle East, and contributor to the exhibition:

The premise for the acquisition of works by Middle Eastern artists living in their country of origin or in diaspora is that they demonstrate, in the widest sense, clear and interesting links with the history and cultural heritage of the Middle East or offer insights on the politics of the region today. Their works often have powerful stories to tell and in the British Museum these can be contextualised within the broader narratives of the Middle East (Porter 2013).

Hence, one of the underlying objectives of the acquisition project was to allow Middle Easterners to voice for themselves aspects of their culture and current socio-political circumstances to UK audiences. The presentation of these works therefore implicitly function to breakdown stereotypes, show different perspectives on Middle East life and politics which, one hopes, leads to a more nuanced, if not balanced, reporting of the situation in the region and finally, the acquisition itself demonstrates interest among the UK population (although at an intellectually elite level) in the culture of the Middle East.

The exhibition was comprised of over 90 photographic works of living contemporary artists from 13 different countries including Afghanistan, Iran, Iraq, Saudi Arabia, Morocco, Palestine, Lebanon, Egypt, Turkey, Kuwait, and Syria. It was organised by photographic technique – recording (works that “use a range of approaches to exploit and explore the camera’s capacity to record”), reframing (works that “appropriate or imitate images from the past in order to make statements about the present” and resisting (works that “question the idea that a photograph can tell the truth”) (Weiss 2012; Art Radar 2013). According to Weiss, there was an initial plan to organise the exhibition by social or political themes – such as the position of females, conflict, and religious identity -- but these were dropped because it seemed a predictable way to view the region and because this was not her area of expertise (Weiss Interview). She said organising by photographic technique best utilized her own area of expertise and aligned with the V&A’s interest in “processes and techniques and how things are made and why they are made that way” (Art Radar 2013), while providing a new way of viewing the subject matter of the photographs.

The exhibition was held in the Porter Gallery on the ground floor close to the main entrance of the museum. The exhibition was free and because of its location, appeared to draw many visitors who did not plan to see it. According to Weiss, the decision to present the exhibition in the V&A free gallery was made, in part, due to a previous exhibition of contemporary South African photography held in one of the ticketed exhibition spaces did not meet visitor number targets (Weiss Interview). The Porter Gallery was seen as a good venue for attracting visitors who did not have a pre-existing interest in the subject. Running from 13 November 2012 until 7 April 2013, the exhibition garnered 311,760 visits.

Analytical Framework and Impact Assessment Methodology

Using the Zogby Issues as the basis for assessing outcomes, the next step in creating the analytical model was to develop a methodology to collect the views and opinions of exhibition visitors and convert it into data that can be analyzed using statistical methods. Opinions and views were collected by surveying 92 visitors to the exhibition and conducting follow-up interviews with selected respondents. The survey instrument was a paper-based questionnaire that had three parts. The first part of the questionnaire asked respondents to assess the impact of the exhibition in terms of its ability to help dispel stereotypes, present a more nuanced and diverse view of Middle East culture and inspire curiosity and interest in the region using a seven-point Likert rating scale. The second part explored the same Zogby issues more indirectly using a mix of interval and non-interval multiple choice and open-ended question formats. The third part of the questionnaire captured demographic information such as age, education, country of origin, ethnicity and religion.

Upon the completion of the exhibition, the responses to the questionnaire were collated and coded for analysis. The table below presents how the data was coded and categorized based on the demographic information provided:

Category	Coding
Age	1 = ages 14-25 2 = ages 26-45

	3 = ages 46-85
Education	1 = Secondary School 2 = University
Religion	1= Catholic 2= Protestant 3= Muslim/Islam 4= Other
Country of Citizenship	1= UK 2 = Americas 3= Asia 4= Europe 5= Middle East
Length of time in UK	1=0 (visitor) 2=1-5 years 3=6-10 years 4=10 years +
Ethnic Background	1=UK 2=European 3=Middle Eastern 4=East Asian 5=South Asian 6= African
Visits to museums last year	1: 0 2: 1-2 times 3: 3-5 times 4: 6-10 times 5: 11-20 times 6: 20+

The Likert scale questions, which asked respondents to rate different aspects of the exhibition, on a scale from 1 to 7, was easily converted into statistical data for analysis. The data was first subjected to an univariate analysis which describes the distribution of all responses for each question, including central tendency (mean, median, and mode)¹ and dispersion (including the range, variance and standard deviation). Then a Kruskal-Wallis statistical test was used to identifying statistically significant differences (p-value < .05) responses for each question based on demographic subgroups – age, religion, country of origin, and frequency of visits to museums, for example. Likert scale responses are considered ordinal data that is non-interval and non-normally distributed (Jameison

¹ Because none of the data collected constitute continuous numerical values, the mean is the least reliable scale of measurement and thus won't be discussed in the analysis section of this paper.

2004). Thus, this type of data should be analyzed using nonparametric inferential statistical measures (Creswell 2009:153; Allen and Seaman 2007; Mogey 1988). Kruskal-Wallis test is used for ordinal data to assess differences among three or more independently sampled groups (Mogey 1998). In this case, the Kruskal-Wallis test was able to show, for example, whether there was a statistically significant difference between responses of respondents who typically visit museums 1-2 times per year versus those who visit 6-10 times per year.

For multiple choice questions, answers were converted into statistical data by coding each response choice numerically. For example, 'Yes, definitely' was coded a 1. Multiple choice question responses are considered categorical data (Maraun et al. 2005). An appropriate statistical analysis method for categorical responses is the Chi-squared test because it shows whether the question responses differ from what would be expected if there was no relationship between the variables. If the p-value is <.05, this indicates there is a statistically significant difference between the Chi-squared estimate and actual results, suggesting that there is a relationship between the variables. For the purpose of this analysis, the responses of study participants who reported being Muslim and/or a citizen of or ethnically descendent from a Middle East country featured in the exhibition were grouped together and compared against the responses of the remaining study participants.

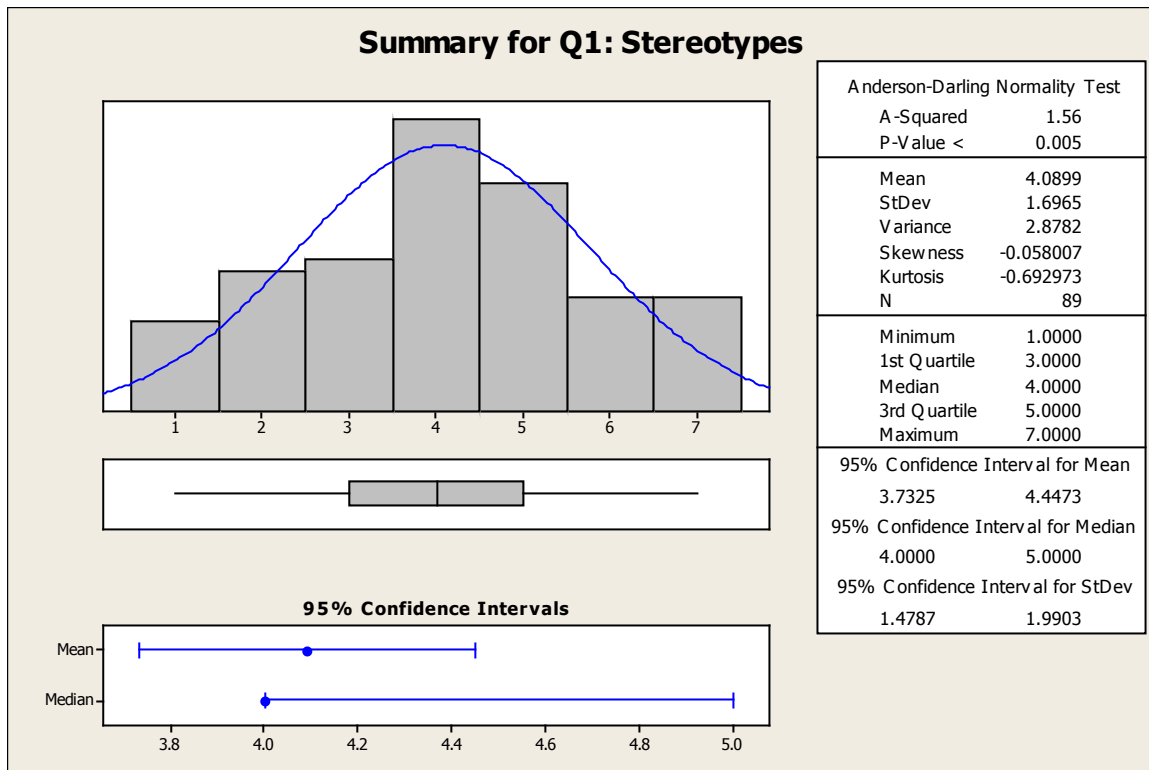
Respondents were recruited in two ways. Emails requesting participation were sent to London-based community and special interest groups who were thought to have a particular interest in visiting the exhibition, such as museum studies and international relations student groups, community groups related to the countries and regions represented in the exhibition, and photography and arts clubs. This group represents approximately 20% of the total respondents. The remaining 80% were recruited on the spot when they exited the exhibition.

Analysis and Findings

Part I: Likert Scale Questions

Statistical analyses of the responses to the questionnaire are presented below, question by question, along with a discussion of the findings.

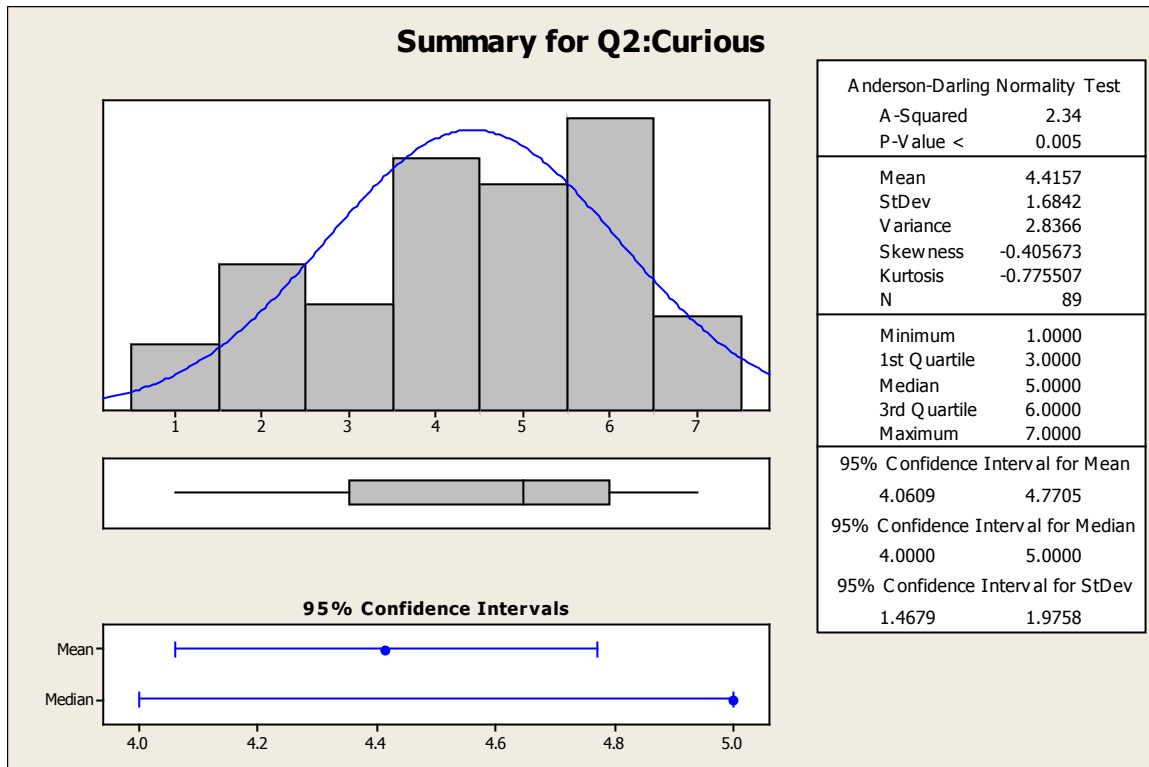
Q1. To what extent did the exhibition avoid perpetuating stereotypes about Middle East countries? (Please rate on a scale 1-7 with 1=not at all, 4=somewhat, and 7=very much)



Total Count	Median	Mode	No. of Mode
90	4.00	4	23

For the total respondent population, the median rating was 4.00 with a mode of 4, meaning that respondents thought that exhibition somewhat avoided perpetuating stereotypes about the countries represented in the exhibition. When comparing respondents reporting themselves as Muslim against those who did not, the result was the same, with Muslim respondents also reporting a median rating of 4.00. However, when comparing respondents who reported themselves as ethnically from one of the Middle East countries represented in the exhibition, there was a statistically significant difference (.009) in opinion, with Middle East respondents reporting a median rating of 3.00. This suggests that this group thought the exhibition was less successful in avoiding stereotypes than respondents from other ethnic groups. Although the median value for respondents reporting they are citizens of Middle East countries is also 3.00, there was not a statistically significant difference between the opinions of those who are citizens of other countries. Age group, education, length of time in the UK, and number of museums were not differentiating factors in respondents' answers to this question.

Q2. To What extent did the exhibition show the UK is curious about the Middle East? (Please rate on a scale 1-7 with 1=not at all, 4=somewhat, and 7=very much)

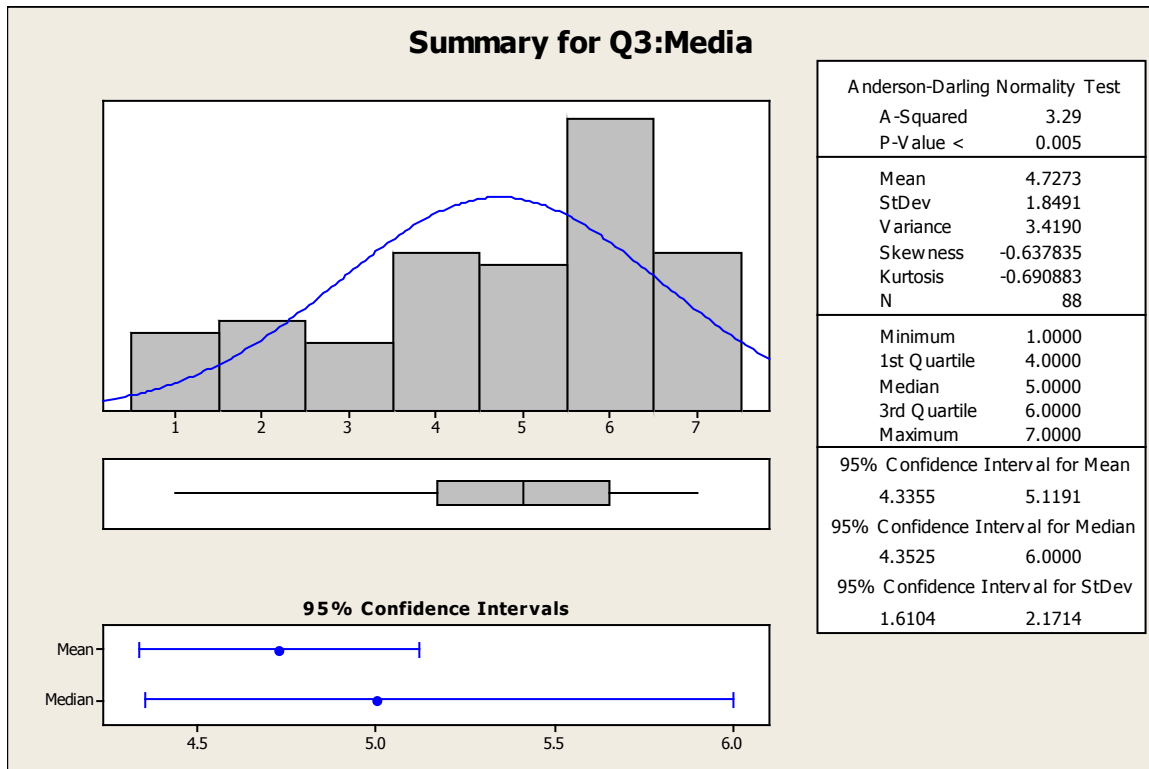


Total Count	Median	Mode	No. of Mode
90	5.00	6	22

For the total respondent population, the median rating was 5.00 with a mode of 6. This suggests that respondents thought the exhibition more than somewhat demonstrated the UK’s curiosity about the Middle East. Although respondents who identified themselves as either ethnically from the Middle East or citizens of one of the Middle East countries represented reported a median rating of 4.00, the difference in their response was not found to be statistically significant. Nor was there a statistically significant difference based on religious affiliation, although Muslim respondents reported a median value of 3.00 while non-Muslims reported a median value of 5.0. Age group, education, length of time in the UK, and number of museums were not differentiating factors in respondents’ answers to this question.

Q3. To what extent did the exhibition give a more nuanced view of people from Middle East countries than that given in the media and

popular culture? (Please rate on a scale 1-7 with 1=not at all, 4=somewhat, and 7=very much)



Total Count	Median	Mode	No. of Mode
90	5.00	6	26

For the overall respondent population, the median rating was 5.00 with a mode of 6. This suggests that the exhibition more than somewhat gives a more nuanced view of Middle East countries than the media and popular culture. One respondent said:

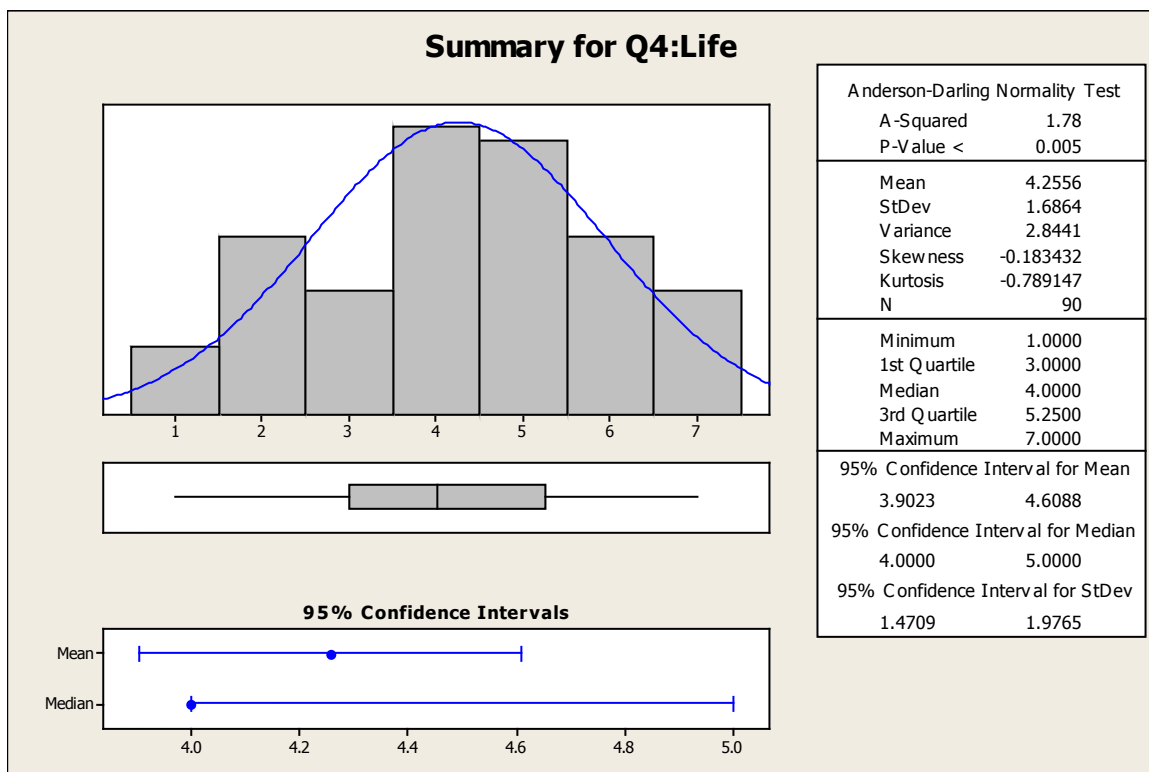
“My degree in Near Eastern archaeology ... means that I have a fairly good idea of modern Arabic cultures and lifestyles. However, [the exhibition] allowed me to approach it from a different perspective which I rarely see first-hand, and even then only through the lens of news and media – how these people feel about their heritage and modern situation. This really hit home, and made me reflect on how one can feel that one ‘knows’ and ‘understands’ a culture, but only superficially.”

Muslim respondents reported a median rating of 4.00, but there was not a statistically significant difference with non-Muslim respondents. A Muslim respondent from Tunisia said, “Given that everything in the news is violent and to do with negativity, it is nice to see this culture being celebrated.”

For those respondents of Middle East ethnicity or Middle East citizenship, however, the median rating was 2.00 – suggesting that for this group the exhibition offered a similar view of the Middle East as what is presented in the media and popular culture. While the difference in median rating did not differ significantly from a statistical point of view, the lower median rating should be noted.

Age group, education, length of time in the UK, and number of museums were not differentiating factors in respondents' answers to this question.

Q4. To what extent did the exhibition provide insights into real life in the Middle East? (Please rate on a scale 1-7 with 1=not at all, 4=somewhat, and 7=very much)



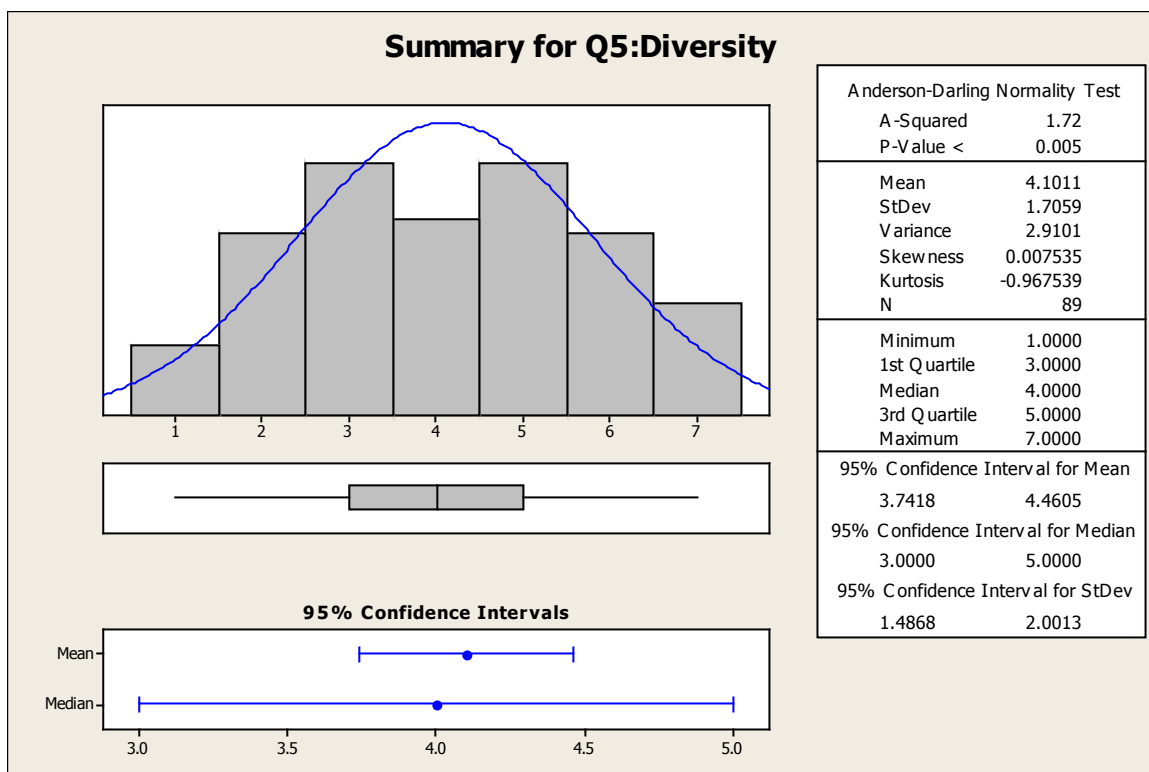
Total Count	Median	Mode	No. of Mode
90	4.00	4	21

For the total respondent population, the median rating was 4.00 with a mode of 4. This suggests the exhibition somewhat provided insight into real life in the Middle East. One respondent stated, "I felt [the exhibition] gave a better insight into the Middle Eastern view of identity rather than the Western view of Middle East identity."

There was no statistically significant difference between Muslims and non-Muslims on this question, nor were there differences between those who are ethnically Middle Eastern and those who were not. However, once again those who are citizens of Middle East countries had a median rating of 2.00. While there was no difference in their rating from a statistical standpoint, the lower score should be noted. One respondent said, “I think that if someone wants to show the real life in the Middle East countries, this kind of exhibition has to be produced by Middle East people.” As the photographic works were produced by people from the countries represented, presumably the comment related to the curatorial staff, which did not include any people from the countries represented.

Age group, education, length of time in the UK, and number of museums were not differentiating factors in respondents’ answers to this question.

Q5. To what extent did the exhibition give an impression of the diversity across the Middle East countries? (Please rate on a scale 1-7 with 1=not at all, 4=somewhat, and 7=very much)



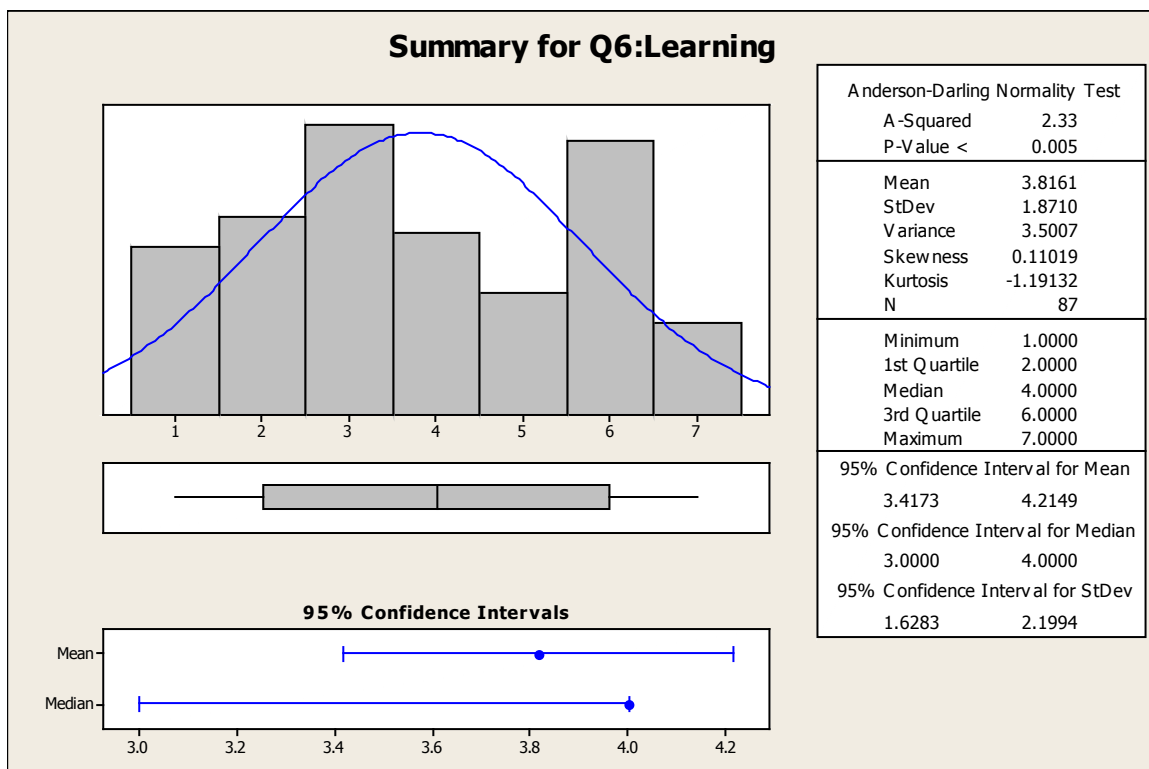
Total Count	Median	Mode	No. of Mode
90	4.00	3,5	18

For the overall respondent population, the median rating was 4.0 with modes of 3 and 5. This indicates that respondents were of two minds about this question – some thought the exhibition was more than somewhat

successful in showing diversity and others thought it was less successful in showing diversity.

This question, more than any other, divided respondents who are ethnically from the Middle East region, citizens of the Middle East countries represented and/or Muslim. Muslim respondents gave a median rating of 2.00, citizens from Middle East countries gave median of 3.00 and those who are ethnically from the region gave a median rating of 3.00. There was a statistically significant difference between Muslims and non-Muslims and Middle East citizens and non-citizens. One respondent said, “The exhibition sadly does not depict the diversity of cultural, religious and social aspects of people of the Middle East. It does not encourage one to view the Middle East from a lens of critical inquiry but ends up re-enforcing pre-conceived, almost colonial imperial, perspectives.”

Q6. To what extent did the exhibition encourage visitors to learn more about the relationship between the UK and the Middle East countries represented? (Please rate on a scale 1-7 with 1=not at all, 4=somewhat, and 7=very much)



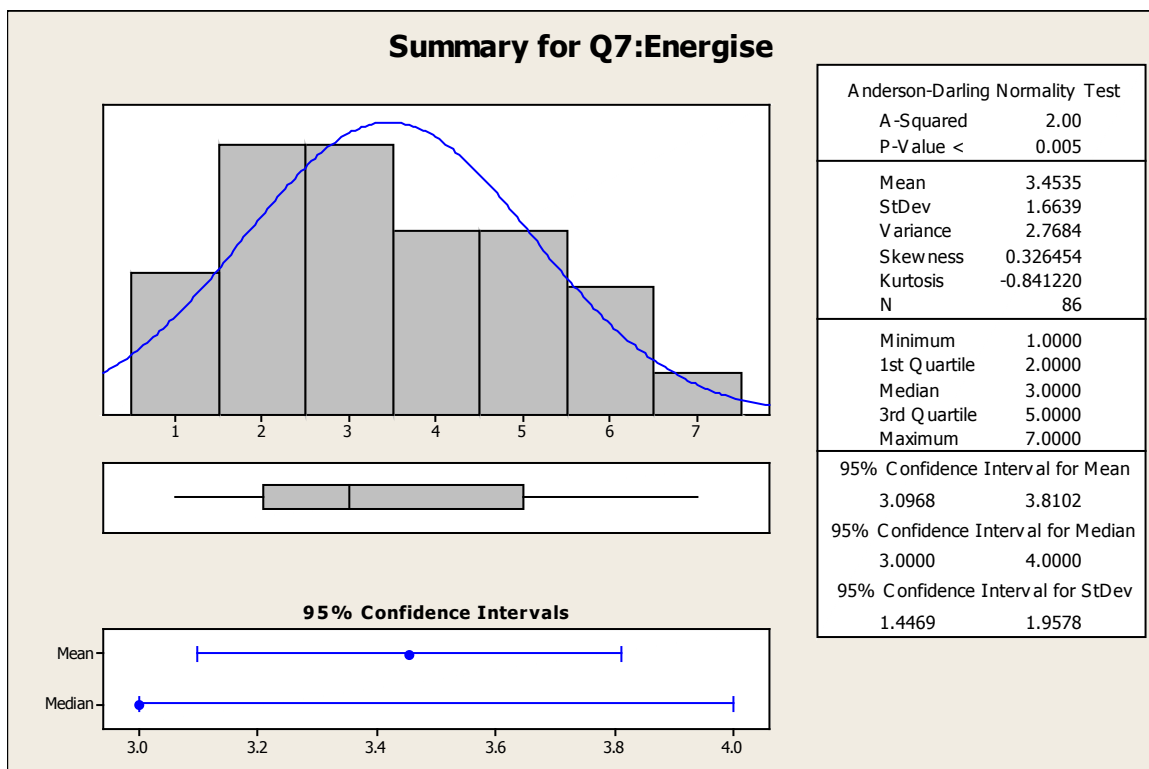
Total Count	Median	Mode	No. of Mode
90	4.00	3	19

For the overall respondent population, the median rating was 4.00 with a mode of 3. This suggests that exhibition did slightly increase visitors’ interest

in learning more about the relationship between the UK and Middle East. Generally, Muslims and Middle East citizens and those ethnically affiliated with region rated this question lower (median 2.00), but there was not a statistically significant difference with the rest of the respondents.

However, respondents who reported themselves as citizens of UK or ethnically British reported a median score of 4.00 suggesting the exhibition had more of an influence on the local population. One respondent said, “As the exhibition is right at the entrance of the museum and free, it encourages people to see it even if not previously interested.” Another said, “The exhibition pointed out the pain in the Middle East... something I knew about but had not really understood deeply...the exhibition said ‘hey, look...stop and think...we need to be seen as we are not as the distortion of western preoccupations.’”

Q7. To what extent do you think the exhibition energised visitors to speak positively about the relationship between the UK and Middle Eastern countries? (Please rate on a scale 1-7 with 1=not at all, 4=somewhat, and 7=very much)



Total Count	Median	Mode	No. of Mode
90	3.00	2,3	19

For the overall respondent population, the median rating was 3.00 with modes of 2 and 3, by far the lowest rating of all the questions. There was no statistical difference between the views of Muslims and non-Muslims or those who are ethnically from the Middle East and those who aren't. However, there was a statistical difference between Middle East citizens and others, with no Middle East respondent rating this question more than a 3 (median 2.00).

Part II: Interval and Non-Interval Multiple Choice Questions

Q8. Does the fact that the V&A is holding this exhibition demonstrate that the UK is able to understand and respect the values and lifestyles of people in the Middle Eastern countries? (Yes definitely, Yes, Probably, Don't Know, Probably Not, and Definitely Not)

Of the total respondent population, over 70% of respondents stated that they believed the exhibition demonstrated respect for Middle East values and lifestyle. However, within the subset of Muslim and Middle East respondents, the majority said that the exhibition did not have this effect. The difference of views on this question was statistically significant (.018). One respondent said, "The exhibition does not reflect respect for the Middle East but for the artists selected to show their work."

Another respondent, a UK citizen who had worked for 20 years in Saudi Arabia said, "The UK respects the values of the Middle East. However, the values of the UK are not respected in Iran or Saudi Arabia." Another respondent followed that statement by saying that the "UK is always open to the art and history of other countries – that what makes it a wonderful country. However, other countries aren't open to UK art and history. It seems there is always a pressure for the 'West' to look positively on the Middle East but never any pressure the other way around."

Another respondent said, "The exhibition gives you a platform to think about the Middle East, but it is still up to the visitors themselves to make the effort to understand and respect."

Q9. Did the layout of the exhibition, by photographic technique, enhance or distract from your overall experience? (Yes definitely, Yes, Probably, Don't Know, Probably Not, and Definitely Not)

The large majority of respondents (82%) said that the layout of the exhibition enhanced the overall experience. This view was shared by Muslims and those of Middle East descent and/or citizenry. Another respondent said, "I loved the curation...it was very dynamic."

Q10. Does this exhibition give you better insight about Middle Eastern life?

A few more than half (57%) said that the exhibition gave them better insight into Middle Eastern life. There was no statistical difference between the views of Muslims or Middle Eastern peoples, with 53% of this group stating that exhibition gave better insight on the region. One respondent said, “Although I studied Middle East policy and know a lot about the norms and policies in the area, this exhibition gives me a difference insight because they offer personal stories and experiences.” Another respondent said, “The photographs revealed situations and sides of Middle Eastern life that you would never come across on your own.” Another respondent said, “More than it gives me insight into life in the Middle East, it gives me insight into art production in the region which I now see to be of very high quality.” Another respondent said, “The exhibition makes me keen to travel to these countries.”

Q11. Were you able to relate the exhibition to your own experience and lifestyle? (Yes definitely, Yes, Probably, Don’t Know, Probably Not, and Definitely Not)

Overall, 75% of respondents said that they were able to relate to the exhibition. While slightly fewer of the Muslim and Middle East group were able to relate the photos to their own experiences (60%), there was not a statistically significant difference between the non-Muslim, non-Middle Easterners and this group. One respondent said, “Especially the photographs of women or those that show the contrasting positions of women and men made me think about my own position in society as a woman.” Another respondent said, “I can relate to the photographs because many of the artists use western references in their artworks.” Another respondent said, “No, we live in a different world – no war in our town and democracy.”

“I live in the Middle East for quite some time. The exhibition reflected what I have learned to see as normal, so it is probably not much of an insight. In Lebanon I was often confronted with both ‘partying’ but also celebration of martyrdom.”

Q12. How did the exhibition make you feel (circle one):

Happy	2	Amused	5	Inspired	12
Excited	1	Peaceful	6	Impressed	19
Proud	2	More connected	8	Disappointed	2

Sad	9	Annoyed	4	Intimidated	1
Bored	2	Angry	3	Confused	7
Uncomfortable	7	Isolated from other people	3	Less connected	1
<i>Deflated</i>	1	<i>Joy</i>	1	<i>Interested</i>	1
<i>Scared</i>	1	<i>Curious</i>	2	<i>Intrigued</i>	1
<i>Aware</i>	1	<i>Thoughtful</i>	1	<i>Powerless</i>	1
104 responses					

Although the question asked respondents to select only one answer, many selected 2 or 3 words to describe how they were feeling. Others offered their own words (highlighted italics). For the total respondent population, the largest percentage of people felt ‘impressed’ with the exhibition. ‘Inspired’ and ‘connected’ were second and third most reported feelings about the exhibition. The illustration below presented the results as a Wordle in order understand results by seeing the word choices represented by relative letter size.



The Wordle below presents the feelings of those respondents who identified themselves as Muslim, a citizen of a Middle East country or are ethnically from the region. Although ‘impressed’ and ‘connected’ still feature prominently, other, less positive terms exceed or equal them – ‘Angry’, ‘uncomfortable’, and ‘annoyed’.



Discussion

Despite the exhibition not being developed to address the stated cultural diplomacy objectives, it is clear that it had an impact in these areas for those of visited. None of the Likert scale questions which specifically asked about Zogby Issues garnered an overall median or mode score of less than 3. This suggests that as a general matter visitors felt that the exhibition did, to a certain extent, show a less stereotypical, more nuanced and diverse Middle East. The exhibition was most successful in both providing a more multi-dimensional view the Middle East than the media and popular culture outlets and demonstrating that the UK has curiosity about the region. It was least successful in energizing the public to speak more positively about the UK's relationship with the Middle East.

The statistical tests allowed the data to be analysed at a more granular level and, thus, revealed some very important difference between the views of Muslims and those with connections to the Middle East countries represented. There was a statistically significant difference in how this group felt about the extent to which the exhibition countered stereotypes, showed diversity and demonstrated the UK's understanding of and respect for Middle East cultures. It is important to note that this group did not have median or mode score on these issues of less than 2 – this means they believed that the exhibition had some positive effect on these issues just not as much as the overall population of respondents. In interviews, respondents from this group commented:

“‘Muslims are backwards’ this is the insight that came from this exhibition. The exhibition perpetuated images of war which doesn’t represent the overall ‘true’ images of Middle East.”

“The exhibition gives a message of fear from the Middle East in general, they look like barbarians and totally uncivilised ...”

“[The exhibition] ends as a ‘curiosity’ rather than demonstrating an attitude of trying to learn something from the Middle Eastern countries”

A number of comments suggested that although the works were created by artists from the Middle East, there was suspicion about the curatorial selection process. “They are showing us what they want us to see, it’s like looking at the empty part of the glass. It seems like a huge effort [was made] to show the worst of the worst.”

The difference in view suggests that in any future exhibition in which addressing the Zogby issues is part of the strategic objective, more work needs to be done to understand how Muslims and those connected to the Middle East will respond during the exhibition development stages.

CONCLUSIONS & RECOMMENDATIONS



With the V&A hosting over 3.2 million visitors a year, with 43% from overseas (V&A website 2013), this study shows that the museum has the capacity to help the UK achieve cultural diplomacy objectives. Add this to the 5.5 million visitors to the British Museums and 5.3 million who visit the Tate Modern and the millions of other visitors to the UK's museums (BBC News 2013) and one recognises that the sector could be a powerful force in helping to advance the UK cultural diplomacy efforts.

However, as the 2007 DEMOS report suggests, the cultural sector must move from using anecdotes and isolated stories about international successes to more analytical methods for showing consistent, broad-based and measurable impact and provide benchmarks for comparison across international activities and over time. The analytical framework used to analyse *Light from the Middle East* takes a step in this direction.

Based on this research, the following actions are recommended:

1. Museums are well-placed to facilitate intercultural learning, understanding and respect under the new cultural diplomacy paradigm, but must explicitly make cultural diplomacy a part of their strategic agendas and evaluate performance in this area.
2. In order to sustain a position as an 'authentic' voice separate from their respective governments, museum leaders have to identify cultural diplomacy objectives that have synergies with their collections and public programming aims but not be solely driven by them.
3. FCO should fund diplomacy efforts that take place within the UK as well as foreign countries. Having a citizenry that is well informed and who can act as 'citizen diplomats' is now as important as developing the skills and knowledge of official diplomats. Museums are well-positioned to educate UK residents on international issues through the display and interpretation of their collections.
4. Use the rhetoric of cultural diplomacy at your own risk. Analysis of the WCP programme showed that museums cleverly used cultural

diplomacy as a way to raise funds for international work they were already doing. However, the failure to demonstrate measurable impact that related to UK diplomatic objectives may have been the reason funding for the programme was not continued.

5. A sector-wide framework for analysing museums' cultural diplomacy work should be created so that exhibitions like the *Hajj and Light from the Middle East* can be assessed in aggregate in order to articulate overall impact of the sector's work in this area.

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