



HOW STORYTELLING IN INTERIOR SPACES ENHANCES THE USER EXPERIENCE?

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Abstract : Storytelling in interior spaces has always been an important component in making a built environment interactive and engaging, that enhances the user experience, that further help in establishing a connect with the space. This connect further helps in determining the users' frequency to the space, hence making their experience in the space better and worthwhile.

INTRODUCTION

Since ancient times, storytelling has been employed as a means of conveying information and narratives. It is a method of telling or making stories that connect with people. This tool is incredibly strong and can instantly establish a bond. Storytelling is proved to be a reassuring practice, even if it's a familiar story before sleep, sharing a scary story around a campfire, or reading a comfortable genre, immersing yourself in stories can bring a feeling of safety and calmness. Associating stories to a space, can be highly beneficial as it facilitates an immediate bond between the user and the environment. The narrative engrosses the user, holds their attention, and instils a sense of enthusiasm. The art of storytelling is an element that has always been there in the spaces, but isn't visible to the human eye and therefore, it is something that is interpreted. I visited the memorial of Dr. Kallam Anji Reddy in Hyderabad, which is a place that has both outdoor and semi-indoor areas. It presents multiple ways to navigate through Dr. Reddy's life. The space told the story and journey of his life, through several different elements. His life's story and journey was communicated through various elements in the space. The place used both psychological and physical aspects to enhance the experience of the user. The design incorporated physical elements like lighting, textures, materials and furniture. The psychological aspect was the ideology of how a user would perceive certain spaces differently, including the feeling of anticipation around the place and the human perception of calmness and peace around the nature.

Consequently, the memorial serves as a model to comprehend that the users experience in the area is influenced and shaped by the psychological and physical components and features.

Literature review

Every space speaks about its history, its evolution over the period of time and also gives insight about the people who have been in the space. The placement of elements in the residential areas give narratives of the family residing in the space, which give an idea about their personal interests and also gives an idea about their cultural background. The user experiences can differ depending on additional factors, such as olfaction, which can significantly modify the atmosphere and narrative within the space. The sense of smell can change the narrative of a room by the feelings it evokes in the person present in that room. Consequently, the individuals who own residential spaces can arrange their surroundings to express their individuality, telling a story about themselves through their preferred colours, patterns, finishes, materials, accessories, and visual aesthetics, which can evoke satisfaction and pleasant scents. Sarah Pink says that "homes can be structured in relation to the material physical home, which can also simultaneously be used as a device for self-representation." (Pink Sarah, 2004). "The material physical home" can be transformed into "a device of self-representation "through interior storytelling. The user's connection and comfort in the space is heightened by their ability to self-represent, making them feel an immediate sense of belonging and ease.

A very interesting question that arises in midst of this, is how storytelling is connected to spaces? In the paper 'The role of story designers in building experiences of space' by Mariana Ciancia (2022), the author elaborately discusses about this matter. She defines this connection to be impactful 'as people use narratives to shape and share their personal experiences, a narrative-based approach to the physical, digital, virtual and hybrid experience of spaces may contribute to the construction of knowledge environments that enhance interactions'. The author talks about how the relation between storytelling and design is important. She says 'The relationship between design and storytelling hinges on how narratives can go beyond the practical, problem-solving aspect of the discipline and create insights that bring about fresh meanings in the continual interaction between representation and understanding'. This gives many interesting outcomes, as to how the spaces benefit from the narratives being depicted in the space, these narratives further build an emotional bond and connect to the space, which additionally contribute to the users' frequency to visit the place, contributing to the sales and customer base of the space. Therefore, the narratives establish particular emotions and feelings towards the space.

Spaces can be manipulated and altered to convey a certain story, to make the user experience a particular way in the space. These alterations in the space can be achieved using the psychological and the physical aspects in the space. Such types of alterations are more noticeable in cafes, which are popular among today's youth. Cafes employ various themes, that depict different stories and create an experience for the users that may or may not resonate with them. Paul Emmons, Marcia, Carolina Dayer and Luc Phinney talk about such manipulations or alterations in their paper 'How confabulations can be used to give the user a meaningful, and emotionally connected experience' (2007). In this paper they discuss about how a space plays an important role on the user's behavior, and how it creates an impact in their further experience while interacting with the space. In this paper, they define confabulations as a tool that is used to infuse meaning, emotion, and cultural context into designs, therefore creating experiences through them. They furthermore elaborate on how confabulations can be instituted in an individual's mind, and how they can be done through different mediums like material, colour, structural members, and a play of furniture arrangement and layouts.

Irrespective of an indoor or an outdoor space, all spaces have a story to tell. Outdoor spaces, in particular, are able to bring people together and communicate narratives through their design, features, and interactions with nature. Authors Piredda, Francesca, and Davide Fassi explore this idea in their paper "In a Garden: Designing gardens through storytelling," (2015) using a garden as an example to illustrate how outdoor spaces can convey the stories of a community and its surroundings. Using these aspects, the public visiting the space, they get an idea of the surroundings' daily routines and the culture around it. The authors suggest that employing a transdisciplinary approach can be used to create different narratives, bringing out a much better user experience.

Stories in the outdoor spaces, take shape over a period of time, creating stories to tell and showcase to the future generations. In the paper 'Storytelling through architecture' by Claire Nicole Wallace (2007), the author discusses about the language, in which a particular story about the space can be communicated. She emphasizes on a multi-layered language that would appropriately depict the story. She initially discusses, as to how style, is the only layer used in telling the story of the space, which makes the user experience very dull and mundane. Therefore, the inclusion of the psychological aspects that creates anticipation and curiosity in the place, and the physical aspects like the furniture and materials become a part of the multi layered language that help in the right depiction. Giving an example of a site that has been a home to a long generation of farmers, the author conveys that the site required renovation. The designers of the space used the old remains or waste from the site to repurpose them to something new in the house. This alteration to a physical aspect, conveyed or told the story of how the farmers had mutual respect for the old and new interweaving and beginnings. The psychological aspect was that the farmers' ideologies and cultures were successfully transmitted through the space.

RESEARCH METHODOLOGY

This research paper follows a qualitative as well as a quantitative methodology. It includes the responses of the interviews from different people.

Quantitative research-

The quantitative research, highlights that 96% of the responses, received from the survey form, convey that the space they are in affects their mood and behaviour. Furthermore 94.1% of the responses, believe that the space can communicate to the user. Many responders of the survey form, say that the physical elements in the space like the lighting, flooring, paintings and textures speak or communicate to them the most. As a result of these elements, the psychological aspect of the ambience created in the space comes into the picture, which according to many responders speaks to them the most. A few responders also told how the furniture placement in the area makes them feel a certain way, for example a cluttered space makes them feel overwhelming while an organised space makes them calm and peaceful. Therefore, both the aspects are interdependent on each other. 88.2% of the responders said that they have visited such a space that depicts or tells a story and that they have felt connected and engaged in the space. Few responders also told that the technology in the space also helps in literally understanding about the story of the area.

Qualitative research-

As a part of the qualitative research, I conducted interviews, to understand and get the opinions of different people on this matter.

Prakalpa, a 20-year-old, said that she preferred to see more visually depicted elements in the space, as it makes it easier to process and understand. She later added that these elements stay in the individuals' memory and therefore creates an impact and enhances their experience. She said, "one of the first things I observe when I enter a space are the focal points". This contributes to the physical aspect of the space and cultivates in the memory, adding to the psychological aspect. She also added that the colours and lighting in the space invoke feelings. She said, "furniture placement in the space gives a sense of behaviour, for example, when you go to a fine dining restaurant, the furniture there is well organized and this gives me a sense of how I should behave in that space". This depiction through the furniture tells a story about the organization, culture and habits being followed in the restaurant. She furthermore added that the experience of the story by the user also depends on their mood throughout their time spent there.

Sanjana, a 20-year-old, said that the wallpapers and the artworks in the space communicate to her, be it the technique used in the artwork, or the colours, or the figures in the artwork. The first thing that she observes while entering a space are the focal points. She said, "I think why I observe these elements when I enter the room are because of the hierarchy of the vision". She later added, "everything in a space comes as a whole, the elements independently, do not depict a story, but all the elements combined as a whole do". She concluded saying that a blend of everything makes the space interactive, engaging and makes her feel more connected to the story of the space.

Raj Aryan Sharma, a 20-year-old, conveyed that every space, should have a story. He said, "creating a story in the space, gives the person in the space a sense of belonging". This story could be depicted by adding personal touches, that create a mental affect to believe that the space is personalised and hence provides comfort. He also said that the colours in the space matter as they decide the mood or the vibe of the place and hence impacts the mood of the user that further enhances or determines the experience of the

user in the built environment. He said the first thing that he observes when he enters the space are the walls, as they more evidently visible and are at the eye level and hence catches his eye first. He concluded saying that an amalgamation of elements would bring out the perfect story in the space and would boost users' experience.

Janani, a 20-year-old, architecture student, said that the furniture placement in the place matters a lot. She said, "In the beginning of the semester, our class is given the task of coming up with a furniture layout for the class, because this would later give an impression of our class's identity to the visitors, if the class's desks are disorganised and messy, the visitors would get an impression that we like being messy, which would create an indirect impression on the quality of our work". The physical and the mental aspects are interdependent on each other, it is a sort of loop that only works when both the components are moving. She also said that the lighting in the space affects the students' productivity in class. She concluded saying that interactive elements help in making a memorable experience for the user.

Simran, a 20-year-old, said that stories are very important in spaces because they create impactful memories with the users that stay with them. She said, "a café in Mumbai called Amazonia, is a place that depicts a story of a jungle with all the elements that they have used, which very well narrate the jungle and its nature's story. The memories created in the space become a great contributor in making a space a person's favourite". She continued to say, "a space is not just about the four walls, it is also about the feel and connect to the space".

Interviewee-Raj Aryan Sharma said that the space can tell a story through amalgamation of the elements in the space, which falls in line with the authors Piredda, Francesca, and Davide Fassi's paper. "In a Garden: Designing gardens through storytelling." (2015) which also tells about a transdisciplinary approach in which the user experience can be enhanced and therefore the combination of different components could shape out a better experience of the space.

Upon the research interviews, the topic can be broken down into three categories, which determine the user experience and the storytelling method in the interior spaces.

Physical aspect: this aspect contributes to both the user experience and the storytelling, it includes elements like lighting, flooring, materials, textures, furniture, wallpapers and colours. The physical aspect and the psychological aspect go hand in hand, determining the user experience. This aspect, speaks volumes to the user, visually. This includes everything that the user interacts with in the space, invoking emotions and feelings about the space and the built environment.

Psychological aspect: this aspect also contributes to both the user experience and the storytelling, it includes the curiosity, the anticipation, the excitement that the human mind feels in a space. This aspect speaks volumes to the user, mentally. This aspect creates a huge impact on the user as it decides how the user would process or take in the story of the certain space, this would also determine their experience, therefore giving the user an output or helping them to decide what exactly they feel in that space or the built environment.

Unlike the above aspects that indirectly tell a story, another aspect would be of the elements that literally and evidently tell the story of the area, that would include paintings depicting the story through illustrations, or wallpapers in the space, or the use of technology in the area to give the user, a decided experience of the space. This would also include scrolls, written texts in the space.

Conclusion-

Therefore, in conclusion, interior storytelling, enhances the user experiences, not just in one way but through several different ways. The aspects of storytelling through space go hand in hand and are completely interdependent on each other, one doesn't work without the other. These furthermore shape out an amazing user experience and creates a memory and impact on the user, which encourages them to visit the space more often, benefitting everyone. Therefore, these components and the users are part of a cycle, that benefit from each other in terms of the revenue for the interior spaces, and for the users, in terms of the experience that they get in these interior spaces.

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