Focus Group Protocol

This protocol was developed by Rockman et al in collaboration with the Art Institute of Chicago, the J. Paul Getty Museum, the National Gallery of Art, and the Philadelphia Museum of Art for a cross-institutional study of digital catalogues. For further information and additional instruments, visit https://digpublishing.github.io/catalogues-study

Thank you all for joining me today and for being a part of this study. My name is ___, and I work for an education research firm that has been hired by a team of four art museums to analyze their digital catalogues. The staff at these museums - the J. Paul Getty Museum, the Philadelphia Museum of Art, the National Gallery of Art, and the Art Institute of Chicago - want to better understand how people are using their catalogues and what they can do to improve them for different audiences. Now that you've completed reviewing the four catalogues as part of your homework, we're here today to talk about your observations and share feedback. I welcome both positive and negative feedback, and I can assure you that I will not be sharing any names or identifying information when I report back to our four museums. With everyone's permission, I would like to make a recording of today's discussion so that I can listen back and take notes later. This recording is just for my use, and will not be shared with any other parties. [Check for consent. Press record.]

Just a few logistical items before we begin. I'm going to paste the urls for the four catalogues in our chat window so that you can reference them during the discussion if you need to. You can view the chat window by clicking the "Chat" button at the bottom of your screen. It may be helpful to do some screen sharing during today's discussion as well, and if you'd like to do that you can click on the green "Share" button at the bottom and then select the screen you would like to share with the group.

Catalogue urls:

Matisse: https://publications.artic.edu/matisse/reader/works/section/24
Roman Mosaics: http://www.getty.edu/publications/romanmosaics/
Dutch Painting: https://www.nga.gov/research/online-editions/17th-century-dutch-paintings.html
John G. Johnson Collection: https://publications.philamuseum.org/jgj/vol1

Introductions

To get our discussion going and get to know one another, I thought it would be nice to first go around the room and say a little about the work you do or if you're a student, what you're studying. I can start… [when done, choose next person to speak, and ask that they choose the next person after they are finished]

Research Practices

In what context can you picture using a catalogue like this?

How do you typically find resources for your work? (e.g. search engines used, search strategies)

How might you expect to find a catalogue like this? (Where would you expect to find it listed?)

Navigation/Structure

How easy or difficult were the catalogues to navigate?

Did you prefer one catalogue's structure over another?

Did you prefer the design or look of one catalogue over another?

Did you encounter any issues with readability or legibility while using the catalogues?

Was it difficult to find any special features or contents in the catalogues?

Is the relationship of each catalogue to the larger parent website of the museum obvious to you? (e.g. NGA/PMA navigation between collection pages and catalogue, header banners, etc.)

Was the terminology of the various parts of catalogues clear to you, or did any of it throw you off? (e.g. "Scholarly Apparatus," "Curatorial Entry," "Technical Summary")

Tools and Special Features

Which of the tools did you like while browsing these catalogues?

Which tools did you not enjoy or not need?

Was it easy to find the tools? (e.g. image viewing options, citation functions)

Would you have found these on your own if not for the homework instructions? (How deep do you think you would dig into a catalogue's content and features in the course of natural use?)

Were there additional features you wish the catalogues included?

Text and Content

As part of the homework, we asked you to spend a little time reading the actual text of the catalogues and reflecting on it.

What are your thoughts on the type of scholarly information contained in these catalogues?

Are there particular sections that are useful to you and the kind of work you do? (e.g. essays, technical info, provenance, etc.)

Did you pay attention to the authors of the publications as you reviewed them? (Do you trust the authors as credible experts?)

Did you have any questions about peer review while reading these publications? Is peer-review relevant to your estimation of the value of these catalogues?

Are the scholarly essays on par with other kinds of sources you might cite?

How does the text content of the catalogues compare to your expectations for museum catalogues?

Do you want museum catalogues to provide interpretive text like the essays provided in these works, or are you simply looking for the more technical information when you use a catalogue?

Citations, Downloading, Updates

Do you have a need to cite sources like this in your work?

Did the citation tools provided by the catalogues work well for you? Why or why not?

As a digital catalogue, sometimes these resources are updated or altered. Did you come across this information while browsing the catalogue? (If not, where would you expect to find this information?) [Lives on "About" page on Getty catalogue]

Does the fact that these catalogues change over time make you less likely to cite them for your work?

Is it important to you to be able to download hard copies of the catalogue?

Is it important to you to be able to download artwork images? (allowed in NGA/PMA catalogues)

Was it easy to locate printable versions of the catalogue?

Do you have a preference for reading the digital version versus a PDF or print-out? (What other formats would be useful to you?)

The Getty's catalogue is available as a paperback for purchase? Does this option appeal to you?

Comparison to Print/Advantages of Digital

How do you feel these catalogues compare to their print counterparts? (advantages, disadvantages)

What level of interactivity do you seek from these catalogues?

Are you looking for places to voice your own opinions/questions or interact with other readers?

What is the potential utility of these catalogues for your field of work?

Are museum catalogues that gather information on many artworks in one place still relevant to research, or can artwork-specific research be presented on its own, apart from a cohesive publication, and still be useful?

How should museums prioritize which artworks receive this special treatment?

What is the utility of publications that focus on a single institution's collections versus making connections between institutions? (What other sort of connections between institutions' catalogues/collections would be helpful for your research?)

Are there ways these digital catalogues could be improved to serve your profession even better? (e.g. additional content, features)

Additional comments and suggestions?

Thank you for your time and thoughtful feedback!