

Introduction

Participatory design in museums can engage the public with technology as simple as a sticky note. This study focuses on a low-fidelity participatory museum project to demonstrate the viability of such methods. Within the "Dialogues with Darwin" exhibition at the American Philosophical Society Museum from April 17, 2009 to October 17, 2010, visitors were encouraged to "join the dialogue" by posting their own thoughts, comments, and questions on 3x3 inch sticky notes on two wall panels.

The goal of the prompt was to promote visitor interaction on the exhibit and related topics. Of the 508 posts sampled, 10.6% or 54 posts were part of conversation threads. Exhibit related, unrelated, and foreign language notes constituted 74.4%, 24.6%, and .1% of the total posts respectively.



Research Questions

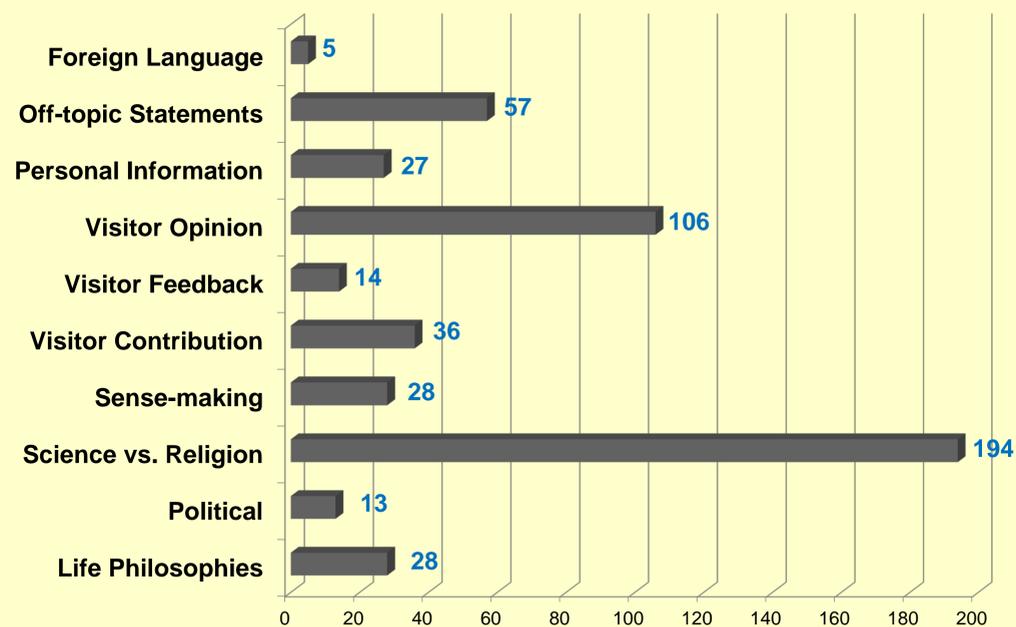
1. What themes emerge from low fidelity participatory dialogue in the Darwin Exhibit?
2. To what extent does the dialogue address the exhibits goal of creating of engaging public discourse related to Darwin and evolution?
3. Of the 'Science vs. Religion' posts, what strategies of persuasion were most popular?

Methods

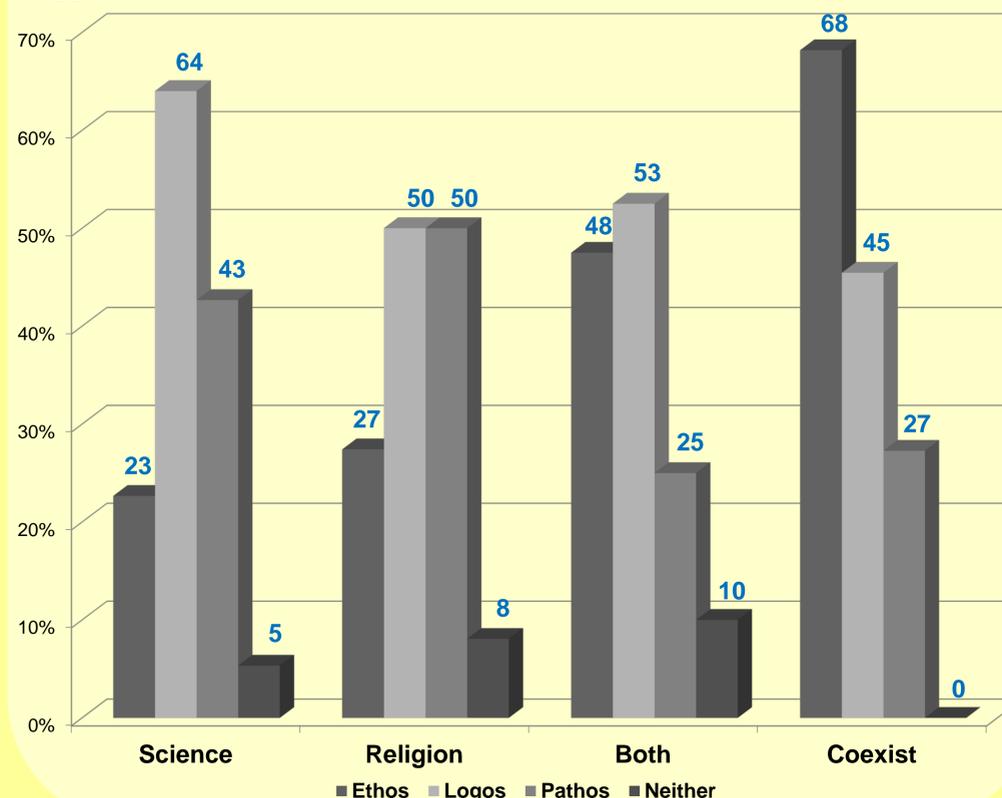
Using grounded theory, we analyzed a systematic random sample of the 2,030 unique sticky notes uploaded on the museum's Flickr account. To further classify the 'Science vs. Religion' posts, rhetorical analysis was used to ascertain trends in the modes of persuasion used by each side of the debate.

Results

The 508 sticky notes sampled were found to fall largely into three categories: off-topic statements to the public, visitor opinion, and the science vs. religion debate.



The 'Science vs. Religion' posts consisted of 75 science, 62 religion, 40 both, and 22 coexist posts. Logos was the most used with 107 posts, followed by pathos with 78, ethos with 64, and neither with 12.



Conclusion

The findings illustrate the themes that appear when users are given the freedom to contribute to an exhibit on evolution. Given the controversial topic, the majority of the posts were within the science vs. religion debate. Combined with visitor posts about the exhibit, related posts equaled almost 75% of the sample. Although the majority of the sample is on-topic, this does not necessarily reflect the broader dataset, including the unscanned sticky notes.

The project demonstrates the ability of low fidelity technology, the sticky note, to engage audiences and to act as a unique medium for discourse surrounding controversial topics. These results add to our understanding of participatory design in museums.

Future Work

- Author a research paper on results of this study
- Expand the timeframe of analysis to incorporate into a longer form paper

References

- American Philosophical Society Museum Flickr Stream
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- Golden-Biddle, K., & Locke, K. (2007). *Composing Qualitative Research* (2nd ed.). Thousand Oaks, CA: Sage.
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