

Cooper-Hewitt, National Design Museum Visitors Summer 2008 Summary of Findings

Office of Policy & Analysis
Smithsonian Institution
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Introduction

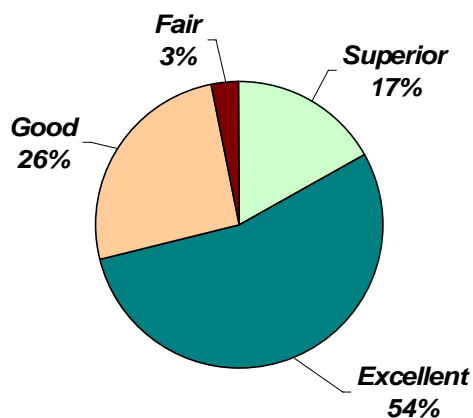
In June 2008, the Office of Policy and Analysis (OP&A) conducted the fifth in a series of periodic sample surveys of visitors exiting the Cooper-Hewitt, National Design Museum (Cooper-Hewitt or CHNDM). The goal of this series of surveys has been to assess the satisfaction of visitors, to capture their opinions on a range of visitor amenities, and to describe the visitors themselves. The first survey was conducted in December 2005/January 2006 (Winter 05/06), the second six months later in June 2006 (Summer 06), the third in January 2007 (Winter 06/07), the fourth in December 2007/January 2008 (Winter 07/08), and the fifth in June/July 2008 (Summer 08).

The focus of this report is the findings of the Summer 08 survey. At the same time, the discussion compares the most recent results with those of previous surveys. The reader is encouraged to examine Appendix A, where results from all four surveys are presented. In general, cooperation rates for these surveys were good. In the most recent survey, 303 visitors completed questionnaires out of 359 eligible to participate, or a cooperation rate of 84%.

Overall Satisfaction

Exiting visitors were asked how they rated their experiences at the Cooper-Hewitt. The scale for the rating was: "Poor," "Fair," "Good," "Excellent," and "Superior." In the Summer 08 survey just over half (54 percent) of exiting visitors chose "Excellent," a rating that indicates that a visitor is very satisfied and has little or no criticisms. Those who are critical of the visit to some degree choose "Good," "Fair," or "Poor." No one selected "Poor," only 3 percent chose "Fair," and 26 picked "Good." The "Superior" rating is selected by those who feel that the visit is so special, that "Excellent" is not adequate as a rating. "Superior" was marked by 17 percent of exiting visitors. These ratings are a return to those from the first three surveys, following a slight dip in the Winter 06/07 survey when a larger percentage selected "Good" and a smaller percentage chose "Excellent." (See Appendix A, Question 4.)

Visitor Satisfaction Ratings, Summer 2008



Overall, this rating remains very close to the average for all Smithsonian exhibitions and museums. Across 40 Smithsonian exhibitions and museums surveyed over the last four years by OP&A.

Visitor Satisfaction Ratings: CHNDM Summer 2008 and 40 Smithsonian Exhibitions and Museums (Mean)



Similar to the rating, the share of visitors who indicated that their visit was better than expected (43 percent) was in line with the first three surveys. This is down slightly from the Winter 07/08 findings. (Appendix A, Question 5.)

Combining visitors' responses to the rating and expectation questions produces an advocacy measure. This measure can be viewed as a continuum from "Strong advocates," who rate their visit as "Superior" and indicate that it was "Better than expected," and "Weaker advocates", who rate the Museum as "Superior" but not "Better than expected" or "Excellent" and "Better than

Expected,” down to those who rate it “Poor” and “Worse than expected.” The share of “Strong Advocates” in the Summer 08 survey was 11 percent and, combined, “Strong” and “Weaker Advocates” accounted for 43 percent of visitors. The trend of a slightly growing group of strong advocates reverted back to Winter 06/07 levels while the combined percent of both tiers of advocates remained at the high it had reached in the last survey. (Appendix A, below the responses to Question 5.)

Ratings of Individual Aspects

In an increase over the Winter 07/08 survey, nearly three-fourths of respondents would visit the Cooper-Hewitt on a subsequent visit to Manhattan; the remaining fourth is not sure or would not. Visitors’ views of the admission fee were in line with the first three surveys, with just under two-thirds of visitors voicing that it was about right, after this number had dropped in the last survey. (Appendix A, Question 6 and 7.)

The museum’s customer service also received more positive marks than in the last survey. Over 60 percent of visitors indicated that they were welcomed, that security guards were courteous or that they received help; and more than half indicated that staff had a positive attitude – all increases over the Winter 07/08 survey. About a third indicated they were thanked when they left (similar to the last survey) or that staff were knowledgeable (not asked before). Only 4 percent did not mark a single positive aspect of customer service, compared to one-tenth of visitors in the Winter 07/08 survey when this was asked for the first time. (Appendix A, Question 11.) Likewise, the combined Excellent and Superior overall customer service numbers increased slightly from Winter 07/08. (Appendix A, Question 14.)

It is possible to compare various specific aspects of the museum and amenities across the five surveys. The share of visitors rating directions within the museum (to find objects and exhibitions as well as to find other museum locations such as restrooms, shop, and food service) still lag behind the number rating them Excellent and Superior (combined) in the first two surveys. (Appendix A, Question 14.)

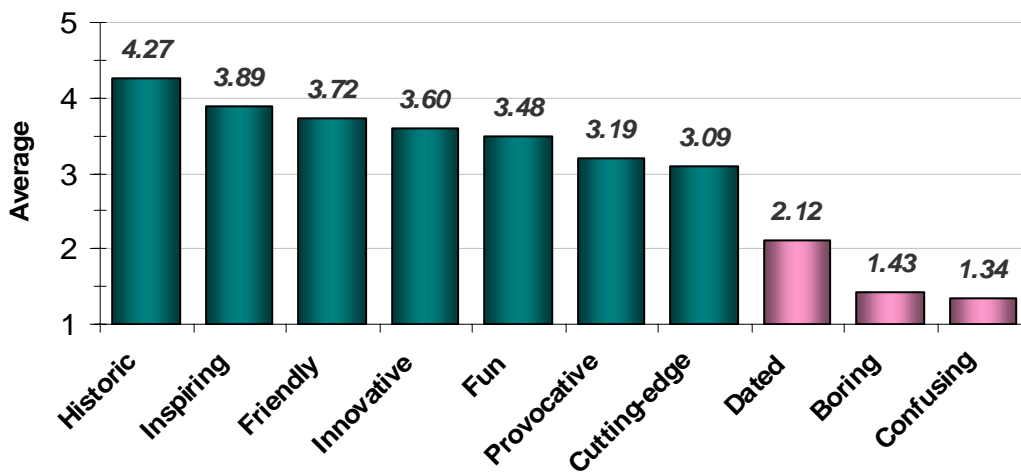
In this summer’s survey, less visitors reported that they bought something in the museum shop (13 percent) than in any of the other four studies (the percentage had increased each period from 16 percent to 31 percent). Combined Excellent and Superior marks for customer service (39 percent), selection of goods (43 percent) and value (quality compared to price) (22 percent) remained near their Winter 07/08 scores, lower than in the first three surveys. (Appendix A, Question 15.)

When asked to indicate things that would have improved the experience, visitors to the Cooper-Hewitt were most likely to indicate that no changes are needed (37 percent). The improvement selected most often was an audio tour (16 percent, which was similar to the percent of visitors reported using one in past surveys). Other improvements marked were more info on the exhibit labels (13 percent), easier to read labels (11 percent), more personal relevance (9 percent), and more logical exhibit layout (8 percent). (Appendix A, Question 12.)

In an effort to understand visitors' views of Cooper-Hewitt, the questionnaire asked how well 10 words applied to the Museum on a scale of 1 to 5 (1, definitely does not apply, to 5, definitely does apply). The 10 words included both positive terms that the Museum would be pleased to be seen as, as well as negative words, which it would hope to avoid.

The positive words all received higher composite scores than the negative words. In order of applicability, visitors marked that the Cooper Hewitt was *Historic* (which received an average score just over the somewhat applies rating of 4); *Inspiring*, *Friendly*, and *Innovative* (just below “4”); *Fun* (about midway between “4” and the neutral rating of “3”); and *Provocative* and *Cutting-Edge* (just over “3”). Visitors indicated that the negative words *Confusing* and *Boring* applied the least (slightly more than a rating of “1”) followed by *Dated* (just over the does not quite apply rating of 2”). *Historic* was the only choice which more than half of the visitors indicated definitely applies (56 percent). Conversely, three-fourths indicated that *Confusing* (77 percent) and *Boring* (75 percent) definitely do not. (Appendix A, Question 13.)

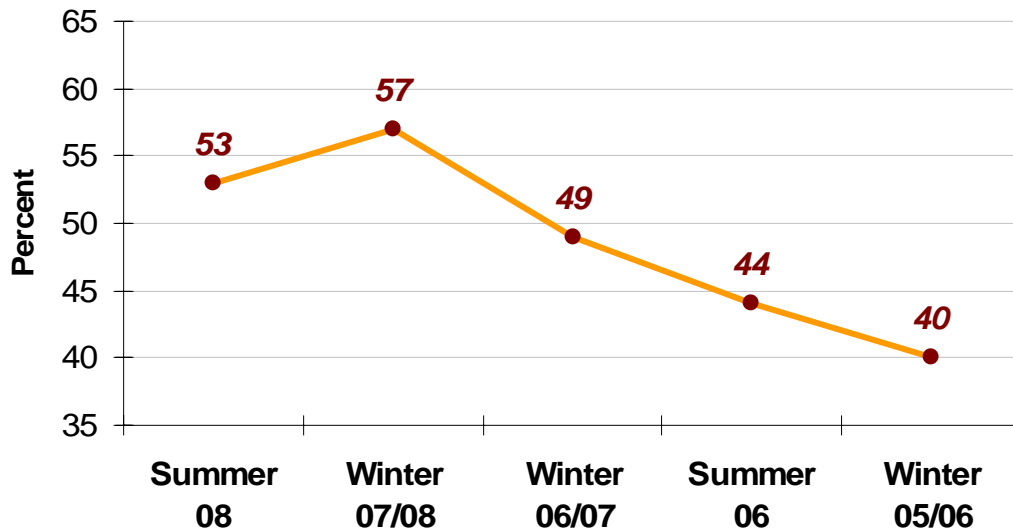
Applicability of Words to Describe CHNDM
5=Definitely applies, 1=Definitely does not apply



Reason for the Visit

Over half of the Summer 2008 visitors were making their first visit to the Cooper-Hewitt. Through the previous four surveys this had increased steadily from 40 percent in Winter 05/06 to 57 percent in Winter 07/08. First time visitors were less likely to rate the Museum “Excellent” or “Superior” (57 percent combined versus 86 percent). The percent of visitors who are not aware that the Cooper-Hewitt is a Smithsonian facility continued to recede (32 percent, compared to 38 percent in Winter 07/08 and 42 percent in Winter 06/07). As in previous surveys, most (90 percent) are neither museum members nor Smithsonian members. (Appendix A, Questions 1-3.)

Percent of First Time Visitors



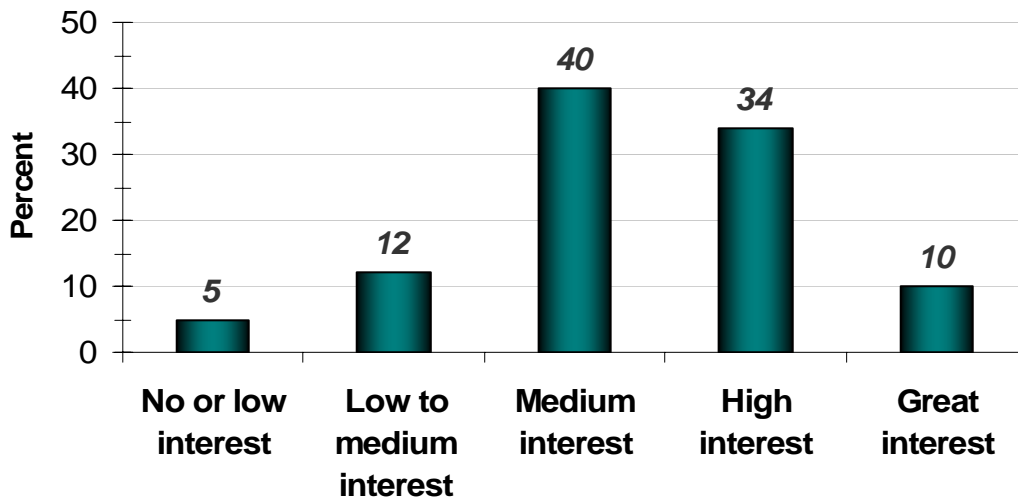
Sixty-two percent of visitors came specifically to see *Rococo: The Continuing Curve*. This is only the third individual special exhibitions to attract more than half of the Museum’s visitors. (*Fashion in Color*, 81 percent in Winter 05/06 and *Design Life Now*, 50 percent in Winter 06/07 were the others.) Thirty-seven percent were making a general visit, close to the percentages from the last three surveys. (Appendix A, Question 8.) Significantly, visitors who indicated that they came specifically for *Rococo* were more likely to rate the Museum “Excellent” or “Superior” (78 percent combined versus 59 percent) while visitors who indicated that they came specifically to make a general visit were less likely to do so (60 percent combined versus 76 percent).

Visitor Characteristics and Interests

The trend approaching gender parity from the first survey through the fourth reversed; women once again accounted for more than six in ten (63 percent) respondents. Similarly, the very slight trend of the younger age structure also reversed. In addition, adults (couples or more than two) remained the predominant visit configuration (79 percent); visitors coming alone and groups with children comprised the minority. Geographically, 44 percent lived in New York City (Manhattan, 28 percent; the outer boroughs, 16 percent), and 13 percent were international visitors. (Appendix A, Question 20-23.)

Visitors’ interests in design were queried in a question which asked respondents to rate themselves on a scale (5 levels) ranging from low interest in design to great knowledge of design. (Responses were truncated from the Winter 07/08 survey in which the question first appeared.) The most common response was the middle option, “Medium interest, like visiting

Level of Design Interest, Summer 08



design museums/exhibitions” which was marked by 40 percent of respondents. “High interest, seek greater knowledge, and attend programs,” the next highest interest level was reported by 34 percent and “Great knowledge of design, prefer exploring on my own,” the highest interest level was marked by 10 percent. (Appendix A, Question 10.)

A majority (63 percent) of visitors had taken an art or design class in the past and about one in six (16 percent) are currently studying art or design. Less than one-fourth had not taken such a class, a figure lower than the last time the question was asked in Summer 06 but comparable to Winter 05/06. The share of visitors who work professionally in the design field (22 percent) or used to (8 percent) are comparable to the Winter 06/07 and Summer 06 surveys, though they trail the share from the first survey. (Appendix A, Questions 18-19.)

Higher and Lower Interest in Design

The Cooper-Hewitt audience was split into two discrete groups: those with a high or great interest in design and those with medium or low interest. The higher interest audience was less likely to be visiting for the first time (43 percent compared to 62 percent for lower interest visitors). As might be expected, they were also more likely to work professionally in the design field (41 percent versus 9 percent) and have taken a design class at some point in their lives (86 percent versus 67 percent).

While the group composition of both higher and lower interest visitors was predominantly adult groups, those with higher design interest were more likely to visit alone (16 percent versus 9 percent) while those with less design interest were more likely to be visiting with children (14 percent versus 4 percent). Notably, higher interest visitors were more likely to consider the words *Inspiring* (79 percent versus 56 percent) and *Friendly* (71 percent versus 55 percent) as applicable (“4” or “5”) to the Cooper-Hewitt.

Visitors Above and Below the Median Age

The median age of visitors in the Summer 2008 survey was 48 years old. Interestingly, visitors above this age were more likely to rate the Museum “Excellent” or “Superior” (76 percent combined versus 65 percent) as well as “Better than Expected” (51 percent versus 36 percent). Not surprisingly, they were also more likely to revisit the museum on a subsequent visit to Manhattan (80 percent versus 68 percent). Visitors above the median age were also more likely to consider the word and *Friendly* (67 percent versus 56 percent) as applicable (“4” or “5”) to the Cooper-Hewitt.

Visitors below the median age, on the other hand, were more likely to work professionally in the design field (30 percent versus 14 percent). They were also more likely to indicate that staff had a positive attitude (63 percent versus 44 percent) and were more likely to consider the word *Cutting-Edge* (45 percent versus 31 percent) as applicable (“4” or “5”) to the Cooper-Hewitt.

Conclusion

Knowing about shifts in the Museum’s audience, periodically assessing their satisfaction, and understanding their opinions on a range of amenities are important to create meaningful experiences for visitors. The utility of the results from this series of surveys is clear. The Museum's various departments can use the information to shape, refine and promote exhibitions and programs that will provide satisfying experiences for the visiting public.