

Understanding Visitor Engagement at Private Art Spaces: A Mixed-Methods Study of A Non-Profit Gallery in Indonesia

Zafira Meizzati Indraputri¹, Novika Candra Astuti²

School of Business and Management, Institut Teknologi Bandung

¹zafira.indraputri@gmail.com, ²novika.candra@sbm-itb.ac.id

Abstract

Private art spaces occupy an unusual position in the cultural landscape. They carry public-facing missions—education, cultural dialogue, community building—yet operate without the institutional funding that sustains government museums. This study examines factors shaping visitor engagement at Gallery XYZ, a non-profit contemporary art institution located in a major creative city in Indonesia. Despite years of programming exhibitions, workshops, and cultural events, the gallery faces inconsistent attendance and a narrow visitor demographic. The research employed a convergent mixed-methods design, integrating quantitative survey data (n=162) with qualitative semi-structured interviews (n=11). Survey respondents were categorized into three segments: current visitors (n=88), aware non-visitors who recognized the gallery but had never attended (n=34), and those entirely unaware of its existence (n=40). Thematic analysis following Braun and Clarke's framework identified six interrelated themes: motivational drivers, engagement barriers, visitor experience quality, brand perception, communication effectiveness, and value perception. Quantitative findings revealed that 81.8% of visitors were irregular—either lapsed or one-time attendees. Access and distance emerged as the dominant barrier (67.0% of visitors, 31.1% of non-visitors). The companion dependency pattern proved equally notable: 61.4% visited with friends, while 25-31% across segments cited lacking a companion as a barrier. Qualitative findings revealed a perception gap—the gallery commanded prestige among art insiders yet remained largely invisible to the general public. Non-visitors described galleries as spaces "made for other people," suggesting psychological barriers that practical interventions alone may not address. The study contributes to cultural marketing literature by illustrating how private art spaces in developing economies may inadvertently cultivate exclusive reputations despite inclusive aspirations.

Keywords: Visitor Engagement, Art Space, Mixed Methods, Thematic Analysis, Cultural Marketing, Audience Development.

1. Introduction

Art institutions exist, in principle, to connect people with creative expression—to provoke thought, cultivate aesthetic sensibility, and perhaps transform how individuals perceive the world. Yet many such institutions struggle to attract sustained visitation. This challenge intensifies for private art spaces in developing economies, which must balance ambitious cultural missions against limited resources and fluctuating attendance.

The creative economy has emerged as a notable contributor to global development. UNCTAD (2022) reported that creative industries account for approximately 3% of global GDP and employ over 30 million people worldwide. Indonesia ranks among the top ten exporters of creative goods in the developing world. However, within this broader landscape, visual arts and gallery-based activities remain comparatively underdeveloped—overshadowed by more commercially visible sectors such as fashion, film, and digital content. Physical attendance at cultural institutions has declined across many regions, raising questions about how such spaces might sustain relevance.

Gallery XYZ provides a useful case for examining these dynamics. Operating as a non-profit contemporary art space in a major creative city in Indonesia, the gallery has

established itself as an important node within the local art ecosystem. Its programming encompasses solo and group exhibitions, artist residencies, educational workshops, public discussions, and performance events. The institution has supported emerging artists through studio programs and provided platforms for both established and developing practitioners. Its stated mission—to serve as a bridge between art and society—positions it explicitly as a space for public engagement rather than commercial transaction.

Yet attendance patterns suggest a gap between mission and practice. Annual visitation has declined in recent years, with considerable monthly fluctuations. The demographic profile proves equally narrow: young adults aged 18-35 constitute 89% of visitors, while families, children, and older adults remain largely absent.

These patterns invite closer examination. What motivates individuals to visit—or to stay away? What barriers, whether practical or psychological, inhibit broader participation? Research on Indonesian young consumers indicates that adoption behavior depends not only on general openness to novelty but also on domain-specific interest—an individual may demonstrate high engagement in one domain while remaining indifferent to another (Nasution & Astuti, 2012). This framework may help explain why certain audiences readily engage with gallery-going while others, despite awareness, never translate interest into action. The present study addresses these questions through a mixed-methods investigation, integrating quantitative survey data with qualitative interviews to examine visitor engagement factors at Gallery XYZ.

2. Method

Research Design

This study employed a convergent mixed-methods design, collecting quantitative and qualitative data concurrently and integrating findings during interpretation. The rationale for this approach lies in the multidimensional nature of visitor engagement. Certain aspects—visit frequency, demographic composition, channel preferences—lend themselves to numerical measurement. Other dimensions resist easy quantification: the sense of belonging or exclusion experienced upon entering a gallery, the social meanings attached to cultural participation, the unspoken reasons why someone never quite makes the trip. Neither method alone could adequately capture this complexity.

Quantitative Component

A structured survey was distributed via social media platforms and direct outreach during November-December 2025, yielding 162 valid responses. Sample size was calculated using Cochran's formula with a 90% confidence level and 10% margin of error. Based on screening questions, respondents were categorized into three segments: Visitors who had attended Gallery XYZ at least once (n=88), Aware Non-Visitors who recognized the gallery but had never visited (n=34), and Unaware respondents encountering the gallery for the first time through this survey (n=40).

The survey instrument addressed demographic variables (age, gender, occupation, domicile) alongside behavioral patterns including visit frequency, companions, and information sources. Motivational factors and perceived barriers were assessed, as were attitudinal measures using 5-point Likert scales. Analysis proceeded through descriptive statistics, cross-tabulation for segment comparisons,

and persona identification grounded in Falk's (2009) visitor identity model for current visitors and Dann's (1977) push-pull motivation theory for non-visitors.

Qualitative Component

Semi-structured interviews were conducted with eleven participants: five current or past visitors (coded A1-A5) and six non-visitors from the general public (coded B1-B6). Ages ranged from 23 to 62 years, with occupations spanning creative professionals, academics, private sector employees, civil servants, a homemaker, and a university student. This diversity enabled exploration of engagement factors across varied life circumstances.

Interview protocols addressed awareness and discovery of art spaces, motivations and barriers, actual or anticipated experiences, and suggestions for improvement. Interviews lasted 30-60 minutes, were conducted in Indonesian, and transcribed verbatim. Analysis followed Braun and Clarke's (2006) six-phase thematic analysis framework: familiarization, initial coding, theme searching, theme reviewing, theme defining, and report production. This process yielded 47 descriptive codes organized into six main themes with eighteen sub-themes.

Table 1. Research Participant Overview

Component	Quantitative (Survey)	Qualitative (Interviews)
Sample Size	n = 162	n = 11
Visitors	88 (54.3%)	5 (A1-A5)
Aware Non-Visitors	34 (21.0%)	6 (B1-B6)
Unaware	40 (24.7%)	-
Dominant Age	25-35 (53.1%)	23-62 years range
Dominant Location	Local area (59.9%)	Local area (9 of 11)

3. Result and Discussion

The integrated analysis revealed six interrelated themes, each illuminating different dimensions of visitor engagement. The quantitative data established patterns and magnitudes; the qualitative data provided texture and explanation. Taken together, they suggest a phenomenon more complex than any single factor could explain.

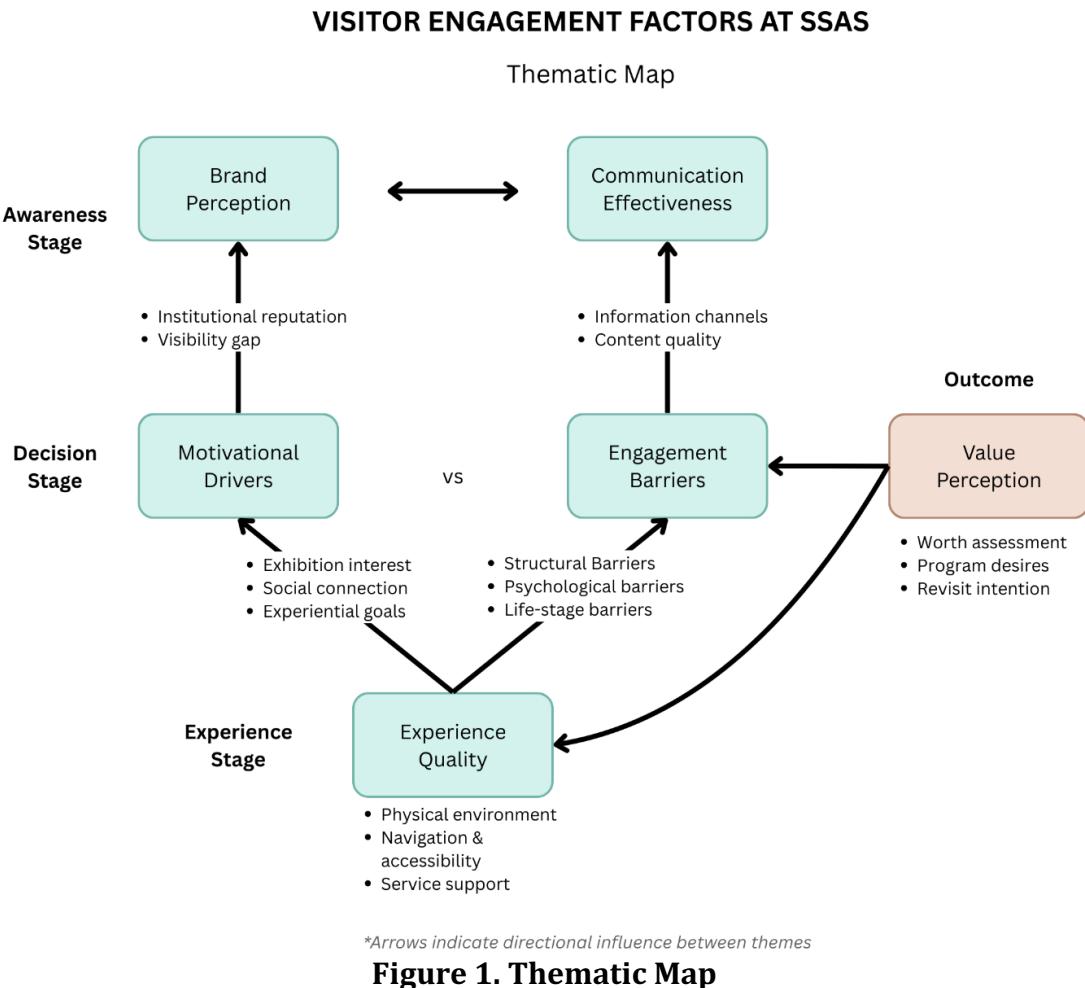


Figure 1. Thematic Map

Theme 1: Motivational Drivers

Quantitative findings indicated that art appreciation constituted the primary stated motivation—76.1% of visitors selected "experiencing art" as a key reason for attending. Experiential motivations followed: enjoying ambiance and architecture (55.7%), seeking nature and tranquility (43.2%). Social motivations appeared consistently, with 29.5% reporting they attended because a friend invited them.

Qualitative data introduced additional nuance. Visitors described their motivations not as isolated factors but as overlapping constellations of interest. A1, a creative professional in her twenties, explained: "First, I need to know what the exhibition is about and whether it aligns with my personal interests. If I am interested, I will come. If not, I probably will not." This exhibition-contingent behavior—attending for specific content rather than for the institution itself—recurred across interviews. A2 expressed a similar pattern: "Most of the time, it's because someone I know is exhibiting, or because I'm interested in the artworks or the theme."

The social dimension, perhaps underreported in survey responses, emerged more prominently in conversation. A2 characterized gallery visits as fundamentally social: "Talking about the artworks with other people is considered entertainment for me. That conversation itself is part of the experience." For A3, an experienced curator in his sixties, opening events served networking functions—"During openings, I can

meet the artists and talk with them." These accounts suggest that galleries function as social spaces as much as exhibition venues.

Persona identification from survey data yielded three visitor types: Art Explorers (56.8%) driven primarily by art-related motivations, Experience Seekers (40.9%) attracted to ambiance and atmosphere, and Social Companions (2.3%) motivated mainly by accompanying others. This distribution aligns with research indicating that engagement depends on domain-specific interest rather than general novelty-seeking (Nasution & Astuti, 2012). Notably, Experience Seekers demonstrated higher satisfaction—mean revisit intention of 4.06 compared to 3.56 for Art Explorers—suggesting the gallery's experiential qualities may exceed its exhibition programming in meeting certain visitor expectations.

Theme 2: Engagement Barriers

While motivational patterns appeared relatively encouraging, barrier analysis revealed why interest often fails to translate into sustained engagement. Access and distance emerged as the dominant structural barrier, cited by 67.0% of visitors as a difficulty and 31.1% of non-visitors as a factor preventing visitation.

Table 2. Barrier Comparison Across Segments

Barrier Type	Visitors (n=88)	Non-Visitors (n=74)
Access/Distance	67.0%	31.1%
Schedule conflicts	-	58.1%
Prefer other activities	-	48.6%
Exhibition relevance	39.8%	-
Wayfinding/signage	37.5%	-
No companion available	25.0%	31.1%
Cost concerns	26.1%	10.8%

Qualitative interviews revealed barriers that survey items could not fully capture. B4, a working parent with no gallery experience, articulated a sense of exclusion: "I feel like art galleries are made for other people, not me. There are certain groups of people who enjoy that kind of place." Asked for three words describing galleries, B4 responded: "Boring. Expensive. Foreign." This perception of galleries as spaces belonging to other social groups suggests barriers extending beyond practical concerns about location or cost.

A distinct but related barrier concerned art literacy. B5, introduced to galleries by her partner, expressed confusion: "There are works where I don't understand the form, what medium is used, or what the meaning is... As someone who's not very knowledgeable about art, I can feel confused." B6 acknowledged: "I liked it, but I didn't really understand it. I just enjoyed looking at it... I'm kind of afraid of being judged." This fear of appearing culturally incompetent may discourage potential visitors from attempting engagement.

The companion dependency pattern appeared across both methods with notable consistency. Survey data showed 61.4% of visitors attended with friends; only 15.9% visited alone. Among barriers, 25.0% of visitors and 31.1% of non-visitors cited lacking someone to accompany them. Qualitative accounts reinforced this: A2 stated, "I rarely come alone. I prefer going with friends." B4 explained: "When I go out, I don't really want to be alone. With friends, our activities are usually eating or watching

movies... With family, it's all about the kids." Gallery attendance, it appears, functions as an inherently social activity for most individuals.

Theme 3: Visitor Experience Quality

Among those who had visited Gallery XYZ, experience ratings were generally favorable. Emotional connection to exhibitions received the highest mean score (4.13), followed by architecture and ambiance (4.03) and staff friendliness (3.94). These figures suggest the core experience—encountering art within an aesthetically considered environment—functions adequately.

However, operational friction points emerged. Digital information accessibility scored lowest (3.70) with the highest variance, indicating inconsistent experiences obtaining practical information. A5 recalled: "We called before going there because we were confused... Google didn't have any information about opening and closing times." A2 noted navigation difficulties: "I remember being confused about where the exhibition spaces were. At that time, there weren't any clear direction signs... For first-time visitors, the layout can be confusing."

Physical accessibility emerged as a notable gap. A3 observed: "The building itself is not very friendly for people with disabilities. The programs are inclusive, but the physical space is less so." A4 reinforced this point: "Because everything there is stairs. Not to mention people with disabilities, even elderly people might have difficulty." This tension—between inclusive programming and exclusive infrastructure—warrants attention.

One underutilized asset surfaced in multiple interviews: the on-site cafe. A4 identified its strategic function: "Usually, the starting point is the cafe first, then they're curious, 'oh, this is the gallery?'" Non-visitors expressed similar interest; B6 stated: "Food. Having a dedicated food area. Outside of the art itself." The cafe may serve as a lower-barrier entry point for audiences not yet comfortable with contemporary art contexts.

Theme 4: Brand Perception and Visibility

Perception data revealed a notable paradox. Among art professionals and regular visitors, Gallery XYZ commanded considerable prestige. A3 described it as a pioneer: "It is quite proper... the most proper one around here." A4 positioned it as a benchmark: "The ideal gallery... it actually makes [the city] iconic." Terms such as "proper," "professional," and "pioneer" recurred.

Yet this prestige existed within a narrow circle. Non-visitors demonstrated limited awareness. B3, a homemaker from the local area, stated: "That was the first time [hearing about it]." B4 was emphatic: "No. I never looked it up, and I never saw anything about it. People around me don't really talk about art."

Survey data quantified this disparity. Among respondents who mentioned Gallery XYZ when asked to name Indonesian galleries, the majority were existing visitors—virtually none came from the Unaware segment. The gallery exists vividly for those who have experienced it, yet barely registers among those who have not. This pattern suggests strong brand depth but limited brand breadth.

Theme 5: Communication Effectiveness

Instagram dominated as the primary information channel for visitors (72.7%), followed by word of mouth (33.0%) and TikTok (33.0%). For aware non-visitors,

however, the pattern differed: personal networks led (61.8%), with Instagram reaching only 29.4%. This divergence suggests that while Instagram may effectively maintain relationships with existing audiences, it proves less effective at reaching new ones.

Qualitative analysis identified specific content shortcomings. A1 observed: "Right now, when I see it on IG stories, it's usually just a poster. I think it needs a short narrative and a clear hook." A2 elaborated: "The communication feels limited... For the general public, the posts don't really create curiosity. The hook isn't strong enough."

An algorithm-related visibility problem emerged among non-visitors. B2 noted: "My algorithm lacks the information, which shows how uninterested I am." B6 discovered the gallery through independent content creators rather than official channels. These patterns suggest the gallery's organic reach may be confined to already-interested audiences, creating a self-reinforcing cycle that fails to attract newcomers.

Theme 6: Value Perception and Program Preferences

Value assessments varied considerably across segments. Art professionals generally considered visits worthwhile; A3 noted: "Yes, it is worth it because of the difference in experience." Non-visitors expressed greater skepticism. B2 rated potential value at "3 out of 5," adding: "There needs to be one more spark to get people coming." B4 stated directly: "It's a very low priority. The barrier isn't distance or price, it's simply lack of interest."

Both survey and interview data revealed concrete preferences for expanded programming. Visitors (52.3%) and non-visitors (43.2%) expressed interest in varied exhibition themes extending beyond fine art—including pop culture, comics, games, and music. Workshops attracted notable interest, particularly among non-visitors (55.4%). Family programming received emphasis; B3 stated: "Very important. So children can also learn and know that these places exist."

These preferences suggest potential pathways for audience development—programming that does not presuppose art appreciation but might introduce new audiences to the space. A4 expressed receptiveness: "Why not with something popular?" B5 proposed cross-disciplinary approaches: "Maybe they can collaborate with other forms of entertainment that people can relate to... combining art with other community events like poetry or stand-up comedy."

Table 3. Summary of Key Quantitative Findings

Dimension	Key Finding
Retention Challenge	81.8% irregular visitors (30.7% lapsed, 51.1% one-time)
Social Dependency	61.4% visit with friends; 25-31% cite no companion as barrier
Primary Barrier	Access/distance (67.0% visitors, 31.1% non-visitors)
Event-Driven Visits	Mean 3.59 agreement: "only visit if interesting exhibition"
Perception Shift	Gallery perceived as "calm/peaceful" (+21.6%) over "artistic" (-31.8%)
Program Desire	Workshops (55.4% non-visitors), varied themes (43.2%)

4. Conclusion

This investigation indicates that visitor engagement at private art spaces cannot be attributed to any single factor. Location, marketing, and programming each play roles, but none alone accounts for observed patterns. Engagement emerges—or fails to emerge—from the interaction of these elements within specific audience contexts. An individual who might willingly visit under different circumstances may decline due to lacking a companion, finding exhibition themes remote from personal interests, or harboring some half-conscious sense that galleries cater to other social groups.

Several findings carry implications beyond this case. First, the companion dependency pattern—consistent across both quantitative and qualitative data—indicates that gallery attendance functions as a social activity for most potential visitors. Programming designed to facilitate social connection may lower barriers for individuals lacking gallery-going companions within their existing networks. Second, the psychological barriers articulated by non-visitors—perceiving galleries as spaces "for other people," fearing judgment for inadequate art knowledge—suggest that accessibility encompasses cultural signaling, not merely physical infrastructure. Programming that does not presuppose art literacy may help bridge this gap. Third, the disparity between brand depth (prestige among art circles) and brand breadth (invisibility to general audiences) represents a challenge common to specialized cultural institutions.

The access barrier, cited by 67% of visitors, points toward logistical interventions. Transportation partnerships—collaborations with ride-hailing services or shuttle arrangements—could reduce friction for visitors traveling from distant areas. The expressed interest in workshops (55.4% of non-visitors) and varied thematic content (43.2%) suggests that diversified programming—including participatory formats and cross-disciplinary exhibitions spanning music, games, or popular culture—may attract audiences who do not identify as "art people" yet remain receptive to creative experiences framed differently.

Communication strategies warrant reconsideration. The finding that non-visitors depend heavily on personal networks while remaining invisible to the gallery's algorithm suggests narrative-driven content may prove more effective than announcement-style posts. Collaborations with content creators who reach non-art audiences could extend visibility beyond existing circles.

This study carries limitations. The sample, while adequate for exploratory research, may not fully represent the diverse Indonesian population. The single-case design constrains generalizability, though it permits the depth required to understand complex engagement dynamics. Future research might employ longitudinal designs to track evolving patterns, or comparative approaches across institutions to distinguish context-dependent from universal factors.

Ultimately, the tension confronting Gallery XYZ—and similar institutions—lies not between artistic integrity and audience expansion, but between intention and perception. The gallery intends to bridge art and society. Yet for many potential visitors, that bridge remains invisible or impassable. Constructing it may require not abandoning the artistic mission, but finding ways to extend it toward those presently standing on the other shore.

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