Review of the ROM's Digital "Winnie-the-Pooh" Exhibit

The digital exhibit of the ROM's "Winnie-the-Pooh: Exploring a Classic" is reviewed in this paper. The target audience is kids, families, and nostalgic adults. The virtual exhibit adopts an article-like design with text, images, and embedded links for different features. Its sections, features, and headings are similar to museum tour spots that illuminate significant details on the "Winnie-the-Pooh" storyline, illustrations, and inspirations. Connecting to theoretical and methodological frameworks from the course, major strengths and challenges are revealed.

The strengths of the ROM exhibit are its interactive web features and user's control of time. The selectable functions of the page allow users to control their experience. According to Anderson et al, an 'agenda of mission' focuses on who leads during a museum experience, usually the adult while the children must obey. The "Winnie-the-Pooh" exhibit has options to watch "The Many Adventures of a Canadian Bear", explore the gallery or watch a Q&A with Justin Jennings. These options allow the child user to control their experience according to their 'mission' without an adult dictating their actions. Also, the nature of a webpage lets the child control their time. Anderson et al. outline that an agenda of time relates to time allocation issues between the child and the adult. As seen, the "Winnie-the-Pooh" exhibit lets the user adjust their timing so they can pause, resume, skip or end a video, audio tour or book reading. The chance for a child to act on their schedule allows them to act according to their 'agenda of time' without competing. Extending to Simon's discussion that technological devices make users "more willing to engage in ways that might be considered rude or disruptive if you were together in person" (97), the ROM exhibit's option to pause, resume or leave the exhibit altogether may be 'disruptive' in a real museum setting. Overall, the ROM exhibit lets a child act according to their agendas that may not be possible in person.

Weaknesses to the "Winnie-the-Pooh" digital exhibit include the lack of social aspects and physicality. Unlike the actual museum, the 1-2 users can't have social interactions with other visitors or staff through discussions or questions. Without the sociability of physical museum spaces, online exhibits feel distant and isolating. By extension, the role of social objects is eradicated. According to Simon, social objects connect people who "create, own, use, critique, or consume it… facilitating exchanges among those who encounter them" (129). Although there are interesting objects in the "Winnie-the-Pooh" exhibit, they aren't 'social objects' without people to socially engage with. Another weakness is the lack of physicality in digital exhibits like playing and treasure hunts. For example, there is one instructional DIY and the voice-over tour of the actual exhibit is a reminder of the inability to physically visit. As Simon had emphasized, "museum and physical environments provide other social design opportunities that are impossible to simulate virtually" (137). Thinking about physically navigating in museums with group activities, and play structures highlight the different opportunities that physical spaces offer in contrast to online spaces. Since these physical activities cannot be replicated virtually, the digital exhibits are lacking physical opportunities for their visitors.

Analyzing the virtual "Winnie-the-Pooh" exhibit through the works of Anderson et al. and Nina Simon reveals several strengths and challenges. The ROM's virtual exhibit has strengths in offering the user the ability to act on their 'agenda of mission' and 'agenda of time' through the site's interactive web features and control of how time is spent. At the same time, the exhibit's weaknesses include the lack of social interaction and physical experiences. Perhaps the exhibit can provide messaging functions for questions and discussion with staff and users. Despite the challenges and strengths of this digital ROM exhibit, it still offers a convenient and safe opportunity to explore the "Winnie-the-Pooh" during the Covid-19 pandemic.

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Proposal of Extension for the ROM's Winnie-the-Pooh Digital Exhibit

The Royal Ontario Museum's digital "Winnie-the-Pooh: Exploring a Classic" exhibit about the magical world of Winnie and his friends from the Hundred Acre Wood is the focus for this extension in this proposal. With an article-like design featuring sections based on the physical Winnie-the-Pooh exhibit, it offers a 'highlights' gallery, an audio tour and articles on relevant objects ("Winnie-the-Pooh: Exploring a Classic"). Being web-based enables users to navigate the various articles, videos and images or choose to pause, resume, and leave activities altogether. Despite the variety of content and options, there are still weaknesses and gaps such as the lack of social aspects for engagement and lack of physical exploration or play opportunities. Through my extension, I will address these weaknesses and aim to improve the user's experience with the Winnie-the-Pooh exhibit. In this proposal, I am pitching an extension to the ROM's "Winnie-the-Pooh: Exploring a Classic" digital exhibit through the implementation of communicative functions, creating a 'home kit' subscription, and a Winnie-the-Pooh-themed online learning game. Specifically, the communicative functions will compensate for the lack of social engagement, the 'home kit' will incorporate physicality and the online game can foster engagement, learning and fun.

To pitch my extension ideas, this proposal is organized into five sections. The first section illuminates the challenges of the lack of social aspects and lack of physical play opportunities for children. Sections two to four will cover each proposed activity according to research and course concepts. Specifically, the second section will describe the adding communicative functions such as the comment sections for existing content and 'live hours' of activities. Then the third section discusses the components and subscription process of the 'home

kit.' After, the fourth section details the proposed Winnie-the-Pooh-themed online game. Lastly,

arising limitations will be discussed before a conclusion.

**Weaknesses and Gaps**

The weaknesses of the current "Winnie-the-Pooh" digital exhibit is the lack of social

aspects for engagement and physical play opportunities for children. Unlike the physical

museum space, the 1-2 online users can't interact with other visitors or museum staff through

discussions or questions regarding the artifacts/displays, which renders the online museum user

susceptible to feeling isolated and distant. By extension, the role of social objects and related

sociality is eradicated. In *The Participatory Museum*, Nina Simon posits that "social objects"

(which are not always physical items) connect people who "create, own, use, critique, or

consume it… facilitating exchanges among those who encounter them" (127-129). Although

there are potential social objects in the exhibit, there is no space for the users to engage socially

regarding those objects. The second weakness is the lack of physical play opportunities that is

inherent for online exhibits since "museum and physical environments provide other social

design opportunities that are impossible to simulate virtually" (Simon 173). For instance, virtual

exhibits cannot offer play structures, scavenger hunts or student group tours that the physical

museum can. As emphasized in Nodelman's "Touching Art," the ability to touch invites

interaction that signals the experience being offered which can create a connection and

stimulation (23). The untouchable quality of virtual museums suggests that it is not a stimulating

experience for users. Without these aspects that prompt participation and engagement, it can

make a child's online museum experience boring or not memorable.

**Communicative Functions**

As previously discussed, the exhibit lacks sociality which is mainly due to the lack of space to socially interact with others on the website. To combat this, implementing communicative functions that allow visitors to interact with other visitors and staff will open up a space for sociality and the building of online communities. The first communicative function proposed is that all existing content will implement a comment section so users will have a chance to add their thoughts and answer related or open-ended questions. Relatedly, each component of the virtual exhibit will add questions relating to the content to elicit comments and/or conversations from the user. Since the target audience is children and their accompanying guardians, if necessary, the questions should not be too complex to not discourage visitors. This comment section will outline that one can add general comments, ask questions, or consider the included questions for their response which are questions based on the section (see fig. 1). The comment section is based on Simon's steps for making a visitor's experience more communal. Specifically, Simon posits that changing the way visitors interact with the content and the way this content connects them with others socially can shift visitors from individual to communal interactions (26), resonating with the abilities of social objects to probe interactions. In the five stages to achieve a more communal experience, the idea for developing comment capabilities is centered on stages two to three since stage one is already done as the online exhibit provides access to content for users. Allowing for comments regarding the content achieves stage two of giving visitors a chance to take action in commenting, asking questions or responding to others (Simon 26-27). The access to the entirety of people's comments adheres to stage three of letting visitors see how their actions fit into the broader community of visitors (Simon 27). By allowing comments, visitors can talk about their reflections on the content they had consumed enabling the ability to socialize with other users.

**Fig. 1.** Example for the comment section to be implemented. Thompson, Derek. "Comment

Section Image." *The Atlantic,* 24 Sept 2013,

https://www.theatlantic.com/business/archive/2013/09/the-case-for-banning-internet-com

To continue, another communicative function is 'live hours' for general events. Inspired

by Instagram Lives and YouTube Premieres that allows viewers to comment and react in real-

time. It will be a screen that shows the presenter and/or presentation materials with a space for

comments and feedback (see fig. 2). For example, these entail presentations on the evolution of

Winnie-the-Pooh and other activities such as story readings, craft tutorials and mad libs. After

these sessions, there will be a specific discussion page for the attendees if they wish to chat

more, leave a review, and/or post their crafts. This function continues in adhering to the stages of

personal to communal interaction outlined by Simon. Specifically, stage four of connecting those

who "share their content and activity interests" is addressed because 'live hours' provide the

option for people who are interested to join/participate in the various sessions (Simon 27). Stage

five of making the museum filled with potential social or interesting encounters with other

people is addressed by the follow-up discussion page that allows people to connect based on

their shared experience (Simon 27). Furthermore, these live sessions are meant to build

communities as "they enable interaction and expression of enduring interest through the digital

environment" (Chen et al. 2). Chen et al. state that "the structure of the online communities can

either create or help develop active participation... often leading to the formation of an online

community of like-minded individuals" (3). Their discussion on forming a like-minded

community informs the creation and structure for the follow-up discussion page helps to connect

people who are interested and choose to participate/join the live sessions. Given this chance to

collectively do something online, talk, discuss will encourage and perhaps empower users to

actively participate, especially when it comes to activities and crafts. Through the

communicative functions of enabling a comment section for discussions and live sessions to

build communal participation along with its follow-up page, the Winnie-the-Pooh online exhibit

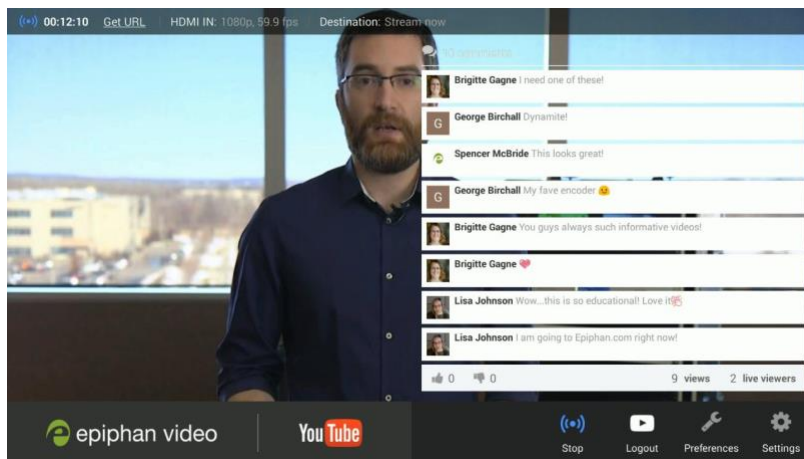offers social interactions for its users that address the lack of social aspects.



**Fig. 2.** Format inspiration for 'live hours' and live sessions. "Webcaster X1 Tutorial

Screenshot." *Epiphan Video,* https://www.epiphan.com/userguides/webcaster-x1-

yt/Content/2_YouTube/tipshow-comments.htm

**The 'Home Kit' Subscription Box**

The 'home kit' is meant to address the lack of physical engagement of the current online

Winnie-the-Pooh exhibit. It is a paid subscription program that ships to recipients during June,

July, and August. In these Winnie-the-Pooh-themed kits, they will be filled with different

activities per box with two types of items: individual use and subscription activities (see fig. 3).

Individual use items could include toys (action figures, stuffed toys), personal use (tote bag,

toothbrush, blanket) and activities (colouring books, activity books, crayons). Accompanying the subscription box are live sessions of tutorials for groups of subscribers to complete their activities together. Activities can include making crafts (painting, drawing, designing), guided reading, and cooking (baking cookies, Winnie-themed recipes). It is important to note that food-related activities must be done with a supervising adult and the subscription box will not provide any fresh ingredients. However, it will provide items such as templates, cookie cutters, box mixes as applicable. Subscribers can upload a picture of their crafts and creations to be displayed on the virtual exhibit so they can view each other's work. The creation of the 'home kit' was guided by the lack of 'touchability' in accordance with Nodelman's text as well as an attempt to enhance learning opportunities through interactivity as discussed in Andre et al.'s text. For Nodelman, picture books inviting participants to touch signal their approachability and interactivity enabling connection in ways that museums artifacts cannot offer due to their rules against touching (9). By adding more hands-on and touchable items in the 'home kit,' it will elicit interactivity and make a child's virtual museum experience more attractive and engaging.



**Fig. 3.** Inspiration for home kits for children. Haneline, Amy. "Collage of Multiple Subscription Boxes for Kids." *USA Today*, 19 Nov. 2019,

www.usatoday.com/story/life/parenting/2019/11/19/subscription-boxes-kids -babies-toddlers-great-experience-gifts/2277152001/.

The 'home kit' incorporates 'touchability' in a museum-related context that offers participation and development of skills in the process. The learning goals involved with the 'home kit' and related activities are based on Andre et al's text regarding museums as a place for learning that highlight interactivity as an important avenue for learning (48). As a result, home kit activities being physically interactive can teach or further develop a child's social skills, sensory-motor skills, active listening, and so forth. Echoing the use of museums for learning is Barkeshli and Rostamian's text discussing virtual museums taking advantage of web technologies to instruct/teach visitors to learn what they're interested in (16-17). With that being said, the digital nature of the Winnie-the-Pooh exhibit enables the use of live sessions for subscribers to video chat and work on their activities together (see fig. 4). According to Andre et al., "guided (either by parent or museum educator) hands-on activities were the leading effective activities for facilitating children's learning in most children's museums" (59) which is why live sessions are vital for museum staff and the parents/guardians at home to be able to guide children in their 'home kit' activities for skill development. Furthermore, interactive types of activities enrich children's engagement and conversation within the exhibit (Andre et al. 59). This is taken into account with the emphasis on hands-on activities to be done as a group via live sessions to elicit engagement with others and create a sense of collective participation. Through the guidance of parents/guardians and museum staff during live demonstrations of 'home kit' activities, children can complete their crafts, learn related skills while having an opportunity to interact with other children in the session.

**Fig. 4.** Sample of how a live session would look like on Zoom. Flaherty, Colleen. "Synchronous Instruction." *Inside Higher Ed,* 29 Apr. 2020, https://www.insidehighered.com/news/ 2020/04/29/synchronous-instruction-hot-right-now-it-sustainable

**The Winnie-the-Pooh-themed Online Game**

The creation of the Winnie-the-Pooh-themed game addresses the lack of play and also enables learning in a fun way. The game will use the aesthetics and styles of Winnie-the-Pooh, but the content children will be learning is on subjects such as math, science, and geography. The home page/main game map is envisioned to have multiple selectable sections with each character signaling a different (see fig. 5). Upon selecting a section, it will reveal a page of various mini-games (see fig. 6) including word searches, matching, puzzles, etc. The development of a game is based on Sylaiou et al.'s discussion on technology's impact on education learning potential, specifically about gaming applications and gaming features that can increase and motivate learning (61). Games are advantageous to learning through their visual/imagery of information, "learning via entertainment," interactivity and clear outline of goals (Sylaiou et al. 63). Applying these to the proposed game, the visuals of the content can aid learning and understanding while the 'fun' associated with games adhere to learning using entertainment. Further, the gameplay is

entirely based on the user's interactions as they must select their desired section and game that have individual playing instructions and learning goals. To take into account the child's personal needs and preferences, Hsu and Liang's text was consulted regarding the Contextual Model of Learning (CML) that states that "museum learning is an ongoing process and results in continuous interactions among personal context, sociocultural context and physical context over time" (Hsu and Liang 334). Specifically, the personal context which is the child's distinct qualities, experience and preference influence their learning in the museum (334) informs the various activities to allow for personal preference, strengths, and weaknesses so each child has a choice to decide what and how they will learn specific content. In regard to sociocultural context regarding "the need of children for social interactions in museum learning" (Hsu and Liang 336), it is addressed by previous extension ideas of communicative functions and live experiences. In creating a Winnie-the-Pooh-themed game, it addresses the lack of play for children as well as takes advantage of the museum context for learning that can produce an entertaining and educational experience overall.



**Fig. 5.** Inspiration for the home page of the game. "Map of the Hundred Acre Woods." *Google Cloud Official Blog*, 15 June 2016, cloud.googleblog.com/2016/06/Disney-and-Spitfire-Stu

dio-bring-Winnie-the-Poohs-Hundred-acre-Wood-to-life-in-new-ways-with-Google-Maps-APIs.html.



**Fig. 6.** Inspiration for Page of Activities. "Reading Eggs Junior Activities." *Reading Eggs*, readingeggs.com/articles/2020/02/17/kids-learning-games/.

**Conclusion**

     I have proposed communicative functions of implementing comment sections along with 'live hours,' a 'home kit' subscription and its accompanying live video sessions, and a Winnie-the-Pooh-themed game to teach subjects using mini-games as an extension to the current digital exhibit. Although the proposed extension addresses the lack of social aspects and lack of physical play opportunities, other limitations have arisen pertaining to accessibility concerns and lack of child involvement. In terms of accessibility, these activities can be alienating to children of lower socioeconomic and financial status because 'home kits' are a paid subscription while the live sessions along with the Winnie-the-Pooh-themed game may require newer models of computers/laptops in order to run successfully. Also, these extension ideas depend on adults to implement, design, code and may disregard the children's perspective and unique experience. These arising limitations signal the need for continued research and development of the proposed ideas in order to provide more equitable opportunities for users. Nonetheless, this extension

proposal has outlined activities that can provide an overall more engaging, participatory, and fun experience for children of the Winnie-the-Pooh digital exhibit.

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