

Tourism-oriented marketing strategies of corporate museums

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INTRODUCTION

In recent years, corporate museums have attracted growing attention not only as venues for public relations and corporate branding, but also as visitor-oriented experiential resources within tourism. By enabling visitors to experience products, technologies, and founding stories in physical spaces, they can function as strategic marketing assets for firms and as nodes that stimulate visitation and local circulation for destinations (Pine & Gilmore, 1998). In this sense, corporate museums differ from many conventional tourism resources in that they can provide brand experiences accompanied by understanding and conviction.

In practice, however, visits to corporate museums do not necessarily lead to broader tourism outcomes. Corporate-side indicators and tourism-side indicators often remain disconnected, and the role of corporate museums within tourism marketing has not yet been sufficiently organized. In particular, the post-visit behavioral chain—where visitors go next, what they purchase, and how they recommend the destination—is closely related to destination outcomes, yet it has not been adequately framed as an explicit design issue. This problem awareness constitutes the starting point of the present study.

Research on corporate museums in Japan has mainly focused on basic characteristics, typologies, diversity, individual facility activities, and functions in corporate public relations and corporate communication (Hirai, 2012; Takayanagi, 2015; Machida, 2020; Takayanagi & Awazu, 2021; Komahashi, 2023). However, studies that position corporate museums as tourism marketing resources and comparatively analyze how they connect visit attraction to post-visit behavior remain limited. International research has, by contrast, treated corporate museums as industrial tourism destinations and heritage vehicles (Riviezzo et al., 2021; Cerquetti et al., 2023). Yet across both domestic and international research, integrated comparative studies that clarify how design characteristics attract visitors and connect them to post-visit behaviors remain scarce.

Within this context, Oshima (2025) conceptualized corporate museums as strategic value-transmission devices that communicate founder leadership and shape brand value and organized their roles through three pathways: emotional resonance, value internalization, and technological recognition. This study provides an important analytical foundation for understanding corporate museums from managerial and strategic perspectives within Japan. At the same time, however, its primary concern lies in brand value enhancement rather than in the connection of post-visit behavior within destination contexts. Accordingly, the present study builds on that perspective while shifting its analytical focus from brand value formation to tourism-oriented design and behavioral linkage and repositions corporate museums as components of tourism-oriented marketing strategy.

Based on this background, the present study addresses the following research questions through a comparative analysis of a small number of cases.

RQ1: What design features of corporate museums attract visitors?

RQ2: How do those designs connect museum visits to post-visit behaviors (local touring/circulation, spending, revisits, and recommendations)?

By answering these questions, this study redefines corporate museums from a tourism marketing perspective and presents design implications regarding the conditions and combinations that enable behavioral linkage.

METHOD

This study adopts a qualitative comparative case study design to clarify combinations of design factors that attract visitors and generate linkages to post-visit behavior, rather than to classify corporate museums exhaustively (Baxter & Jack, 2008).

Three facilities were purposefully selected as cases because they display clear contrasts in both design characteristics and tourism-related roles. Specifically, the cases are the TOTO Museum (hereafter, TOTO), which emphasizes structured brand understanding; the INAX Live Museum (hereafter, INAX), which combines participatory experiences with local touring; and the Nikka Whisky Yoichi Distillery Museum (hereafter, Nikka), which is characterized by strong narrative appeal and authenticity and functions as a destination attraction.

The analysis employed four perspectives. The first is the design of visit motivation, which examines what kinds of attractions and value propositions are used to encourage visitation. The second is the depth of onsite experience, which considers how exhibitions and experiences are structured to deepen visitors' understanding and involvement. The third is the design of local touring/circulation routes, which explores how museum visits are connected to nearby attractions, dining, and retail opportunities. The fourth is the linkage to post-visit behaviors, which examines what cues and touchpoints are designed to move visitors from the onsite museum experience to subsequent off-site actions. Here, "linkage" refers to design elements that mediate the transition from museum experience to later behaviors such as circulation, spending, revisiting, and recommendation.

The data were based on onsite observation, descriptive documentation of exhibits and experiences, publicly available materials, and interviews. These elements were organized through a common analytical framework and compared across the three cases to examine how the design characteristics of corporate museums contribute to attracting visits and linking them to post-visit behaviors.

FINDINGS

The comparative analysis revealed clear differences across the three corporate museums in both the design factors that attract visitors and the combinations of design elements that connect visits to post-visit behaviors. These differences correspond to variations in how each facility foregrounds particular types of experiential value and what kinds of touchpoints it provides.

First, from the perspective of visit attraction (RQ1), each case emphasized a different kind of experiential value. TOTO offers a structured exhibition narrative that helps visitors understand the corporate philosophy and commitment to quality behind its products and technologies, thereby providing a convincing brand experience. The attraction here lies less in overt participation than in a configuration that allows visitors to understand the company's ideas and technologies in a coherent and systematic way. INAX, by contrast, encourages participatory and active engagement through hands-on creation experiences and outdoor or extended exhibits. Nikka differs further still: through its strong narrative concerning the company's founding and production process, combined with a sense of authenticity, the visit itself becomes a compelling experience, enabling the museum to function as a destination attraction. In other words, the cases suggest three attraction patterns: a structured-understanding type, a participatory-experience type, and a narrative-authenticity type.

Second, from the perspective of linkage to post-visit behavior (RQ2), differences were observed in the ways that the visit connected to subsequent actions. At TOTO, the visitor experience tends to be completed primarily within the museum. While it supports understanding and brand evaluation, the design elements that directly encourage local touring or longer stays remain relatively limited. By contrast, at INAX, the museum experience is structured so that visitors can move more easily to strolling, dining, and shopping in the surrounding area, suggesting that visitor behavior can expand stepwise into the local setting. At Nikka, tours, tastings, and retail are designed as a continuous sequence, thereby supporting on-site spending and also making revisits and recommendations more likely. Thus, post-visit behavior can be organized as a chain extending from "onsite completion" to "local touring/circulation" and further to "destination attraction-based stay, spending, and recommendation."

Based on these comparative findings, corporate museums can be broadly organized into three types: the brand-experience type, the participatory/circulation type, and the destination-attraction type. These should not be understood as rigid classifications, but rather as analytical tendencies. What is important is that the degree and form of behavioral linkage are not determined by any single factor; instead, they are shaped by combinations of design factors such as the depth of experience, the strength of narrative appeal, and the degree of integration into local routes. The comparative analysis therefore suggests that

corporate museums can be understood not merely as exhibition facilities, but as design resources that orient post-visit tourism behavior.

CONCLUSION

Theoretically, this study demonstrates that corporate museums can be reconceptualized not only as venues for corporate public relations or brand display, but also as tourism marketing resources that connect visit attraction to post-visit behavioral outcomes, including local touring/circulation, spending, revisits, and recommendations. Through a comparison of a small number of cases, the study has shown that behavioral linkage does not arise from a single factor but is shaped by combinations of major design factors such as the depth of experience, the strength of narrative appeal, and integration into destination routes. Corporate museums can therefore be understood not merely as exhibition facilities, but as design resources that orient visitors' subsequent actions. In this sense, the present study extends Oshima's (2025) argument from the domain of brand value formation to the domain of tourism behavioral linkage.

Practically, firms should design corporate museums not only to increase visitor numbers and brand understanding, but also to anticipate and support post-visit behaviors by incorporating explicit touchpoints that encourage movement beyond the museum, spending, and recommendation. At the same time, destination stakeholders should not treat corporate museums as isolated stand-alone spots but should integrate them into circulation routes that connect nearby attractions, dining, and retail. The value of corporate museums does not end with the exhibition experience inside the facility; rather, it can develop into broader tourism outcomes when connected to local tourism flows.

As a future research agenda, future studies should combine visitor surveys, review data, and observations of movement from onsite to off-site locations in order to examine more precisely how the design characteristics of corporate museums influence local circulation, spending, revisits, and recommendations. In addition, the development of a simple KPI set that captures both corporate-side indicators and tourism-side behavioral indicators simultaneously will be important for enhancing the practical applicability of the framework proposed in this study.

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