Researching the motives behind the acquisition, possession and application of heritage collectibles in home interiors

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Abstract

Previous research considered the significance of the home environment representing the owner's social identity in general but there is no clear research that identifies the motive behind acquisition, possession and application of heritage collectibles in home interiors. The aim of this research was to discover the reason why people possess heritage collectibles in their home interiors. In addition, this research considered the occupied space of the possessions, location within the home, and the type of heritage collectibles.

The sample of this study consisted of 330 female adults residing in the centre of Saudi Arabia. The method of investigation was a self-report questionnaire, which was classified into four main themes: the reason behind having heritage collectibles in home interiors, occupied space, location within the home, and the type of heritage collectibles. The results indicated that there are a diverse number of reasons behind people's possession of heritage collectibles. The main reason was social identity then gifts, trends, and matching with other furniture within the home. In addition, there was a significant relationship between identity and occupied space ($p=0.001$) and social identity with the type of heritage collectibles ($p=0.001$).

The contribution to new knowledge in this study should help designers to develop their concepts in their interior design projects and discover the relationship between heritage, interior design, and social identity, which will provide designers with the direct and indirect needs of their clients.

Keywords: interior design, home environment, individual's social identity, heritage collectibles, Saudi Arabia.

Introduction

Environmental psychologists have long considered the significance of surroundings on the personal identity of the individual. The emergence of the Internet and the concept of the world as a global village have all contributed to a homogeneous society. Through the process of globalization interior design has been unified throughout the world to reflect modern societal needs. Interior design has constantly redefined itself as an expression of culture. Nevertheless, the concept of identity is still an intriguing and evident part of this world. Identity is seen as dynamic and fluid: it is viewed as a structure as well as a process. There are a number of identities including personal, social, national, religious and gender. This study focuses on social identity in particular.

Traditionally, there has been a link between people and possessions. For example, the historical custom of burying the dead with their possessions dates back 100,000 years (Leaky, 1981). Belk (1988) coined the term of the extended self and focused on the notion that "our possessions are a major contributor to and reflection of our identities" (Belk, 1988, p139). His extensive research discovered that key objects and possessions could enlarge, consolidate and strengthen a person's sense of self. Belk uses the terms "self" "sense of self" and "identity" synonymously. Moreover, Dittmar (1992) indicates that possessions serve a number of functions. In their symbolic roles, possessions symbolize and reflect personal characteristics as well as social identity. The Dittmar study provided a rationale for studying how material goods and possessions effect the establishment of identity. Dittmar proposed a social psychological model of purchasing items, which hypothesizes that people will acquire possessions, which reflect their personal and social identity.

A home including its features, furniture and designs provide us with detailed information about the people who reside in the particular dwelling. Homes are imbued with people's sense of self, their memories and their personal tastes. Borzooeian's 2014 research focuses on the significance of the home, as it is where we rest and

spend time socially with our families and where we can find support (Borzooeian, 2004). Therefore, is it in this dwelling that our identities are displayed in our choice of interior design?

There are a number of theories, which can be applied to a discussion of the relationship between environment and identity. For example, social identity theory and identity process theory. Research by Steggell et al., concentrated on the important role of theory in housing research as it helps to focus research questions and guide methodology choices. This study highlighted the relevance of social identity theory to housing research which explains how people base their identity and answer the question "Who am I?" through their choices of personal dwelling. (Steggell et al., 2003, p19) Therefore, possessions within the house can symbolize and represent the owner's social identity.

A means of identity expression has been viewed as an important aspect of a home (Moore, 2002). This could be expressed through furniture choices, layout of rooms, decoration or position of possessions (Gram-Hanssen & Bech-Danielsen, 2004). Possibly the area in which you choose to reside can be seen as an expression of identity or can indicate a particular type of lifestyle choice (Borzooeian, 2014). Research indicates that people choose environments, which provide continuity, longevity and fit in with their social identity. Furthermore, identity can be changed and manipulated according to an individual's life changes and/or states of mind (Nasar and Kang, 1999).

Cognition and the way this impacts on behavior is a crucial element of this area of research as people can change their actions to fit their attitudes. Another relevant theory to apply to this area of research is Festinger's cognitive dissonance theory, which states that housing and interior design could possibly change the inhabitants. Therefore, how people view themselves could be changed possibly by making alterations to the physical environment (Borzooeian, 2014). Speller's et al research indicated that changes in individuals' spatial environment could negatively affect the identity of the inhabitants (Speller et al., 2002).

Twigger-Ross et al., argue that places are crucial sources of identity elements. Places are part of self-identity and seen as crucial as gender and social class. Identity is conveyed from room to country. This research focused on interviewing residents living in the London Docklands area. They found evidence that people use place identifications to distinguish themselves from others in different regions. Therefore, place is similar to a social category (Twigger-Ross et al., 2003, p207).

Heritage in Saudi Arabia is rich in its diversity style, functions, and elements as a result of the large space of the Kingdom and diversity of climate, which results in varied styles of architecture and heritage collectibles. The Kingdom has distinctive regions and each unique region possesses a different culture and identity. All regions represent the Kingdom of Saudi Arabia's social identity.

The central region of Saudi Arabia called Najd consists of the provinces and cities in the areas of Riyadh, Qassim, Hail, and extends also to other provinces related to the geography of the area. This region is a vast plateau that combines rocky and sandy areas with isolated mountains and valleys. There is a desert environment and the climate is dry. There is a strong correlation between urbanization and heritage style and the existing environment. The environment forces certain conditions and requires the people within this region to adapt to the forces, in addition to religious, social and economic conditions (SCTA, 2009)

Nowadays people in Najd region design their home in a variety of ways. However, the cultural heritage of this region is evident in the choices people make regarding their home. They apply some traditional heritage in their home. For instance, some people hang items on the walls, others combine pieces into holders and other smaller handmade architectural crafts. This study attempts to provide an explanation of the reason behind people's possession of heritage collectibles within the home interior in the central region of Saudi Arabia. In addition, this research considers the occupied space, location within the home, and the type of heritage collectibles.

Materials and Methods

Study area

In this study the researcher will refer to some of the traditional heritage collection in Najd region such as plant materials, textiles and architectural crafts. Firstly, plant materials refer to pieces made from natural materials such as palm leaf and wood. Palm leaf is a suitable material to use in the construction of flat mats and baskets (Figure 1). Flat mats can be used for a variety of functions such as for sitting, sleeping and even as place mats. Over the centuries a vital handicraft, traditional door carpentry, was used to ensure the safety and security of

each home (Figure 2). In modern society people use these handicrafts as wall displays in their homes, as the geometric patterns/colours are distinctive and vibrant.

Figure 1: Palm leaf baskets and flat mats.

Figure 2: Traditional door.

Furthermore, textiles were a crucial material source for early Arabians. Local goat or sheep wool could be utilised into furniture, tents and even mats (Figure 3). In relation to architectural crafts, the fireplace of an Arabian home was normally constructed by one special craftsman and then decorated by another skilled expert. In the past, the fireplace was the central feature of the living space. This feature was a focal point for convenience and hospitality (Figure 4). Nowadays people may use an outdoor room for receiving guests and socialising. There are clear and prevailing cultural traditions in Saudi Arabia and the interior design choices of a home can often reflect the heritage of the occupants (Babelli, et al, 2011).

Figure 3: Traditional textiles and furniture.

Figure 4: Architectural crafts, fireplace,   Al-Mosokaf Traditional Souq in Onaizah, Al-Qassim.

Questionnaire

The method of investigation was a self-report questionnaire, which was classified into four main themes: the reason behind having heritage collectibles in home interiors, occupied space, and location within the home, and the type of heritage collectibles. The pilot study was constructed to develop the actual questions for the questionnaires.

In the first question, respondents were asked about the reason why they possessed heritage collectibles at home. Respondents were given 5 choices as follows: social identity, gift, trend, matching furniture, and others.

In the second question respondents were asked about the occupied space of heritage collectibles. Respondents were given 4 choices as follows: corner, indoor room, all home, and outdoor room.

Subsequently, respondents were asked in question three about the location of heritage collectibles within the home. Respondents were given 7 choices as follows: home entrance, indoor guest room, living room, dining room, bedroom, outdoor room and all over the home.

Finally, in question four, respondents were asked about the type of heritage collectibles. Respondents were given 4 choices as follows: pieces, furniture, heritage and wall display.

Survey

An online survey method was used to distribute the questionnaire. The sample consisted of residents from the centre of Saudi Arabia who possess heritage collectibles. The questionnaire was sent to 730 mothers of the family, from a range of ages and occupations. Only 472 questionnaires were returned. Moreover, 142 questionnaires were excluded, as the family did not have heritage collectibles in their house. Therefore, the completed number of questionnaires was 330. This sample was chosen because this group ultimately makes the final decisions regarding their home interior design.

The questionnaires were distributed during the winter of 2014. Statistical analysis was carried out using Statistical Package for Social Sciences (SPSS Inc, Chicago, IL, USA) Version 16, Chi-square test was employed to assess the significance of relations and statistical value was set at $p < 0.05$.

Results

The results obtained revealed that in relation to question one of the questionnaire the largest proportion of respondents gave social identity as the main reason behind why they possess heritage collectibles at home (79.4%), a gift from people was the next highest response (7.9%), because the items were trendy and fashionable resulted in (6.1%), whilst matching with other furniture in the home was the lowest figure (6.7%) (Figure 5).
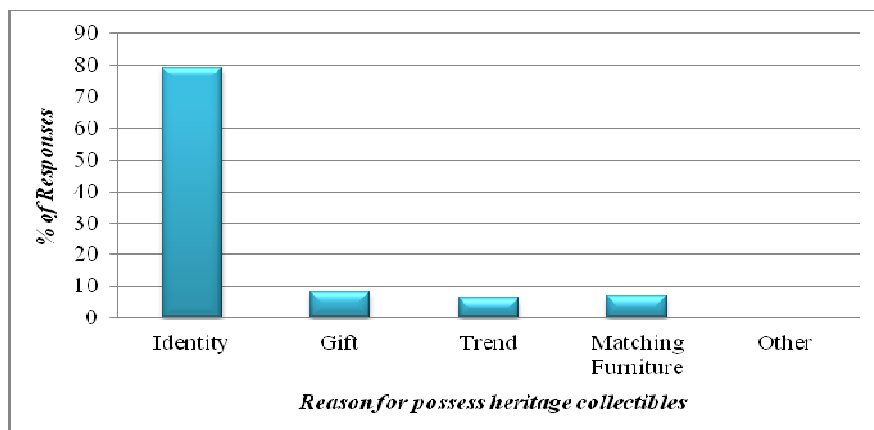

Figure 5: The reason why people possess heritage collectibles at home.

Question two concerned the occupied space of heritage collectibles. The data showed that these items were most often displayed in the corner of a room. This was the largest section of results (64.8%), whilst some respondents indicated that they applied the traditional heritage throughout the home (2.4%) (Figure 6). Statistical analyses tests show that there is a significant correlation between identity and occupied space of heritage collectibles p=0.001. It was found that people who had chosen the reason of identity behind the application of heritage collectibles were more likely to use a big space such as an outdoor room or all their home to display their items. Whilst the people who selected other reasons for owning heritage collectibles would be more likely to use small spaces like a corner of a room.
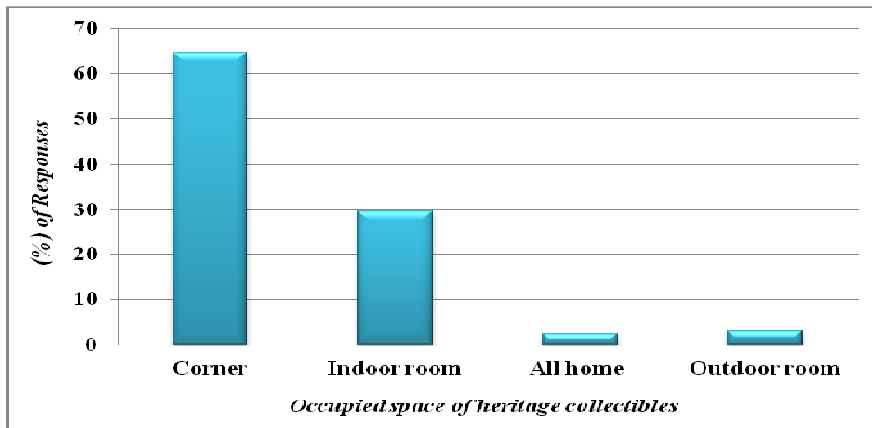
Figure 6: Occupied space of heritage collectibles

Question three indicted that the largest answer about the location of the heritage collectibles at home was to present it in the living room (34.5%), whilst divide the collectibles all over the home was (1.8%). The statistical analysis indicated that there is no significant different between identity and location of heritage collectibles (p=0.297) (Figure 7).
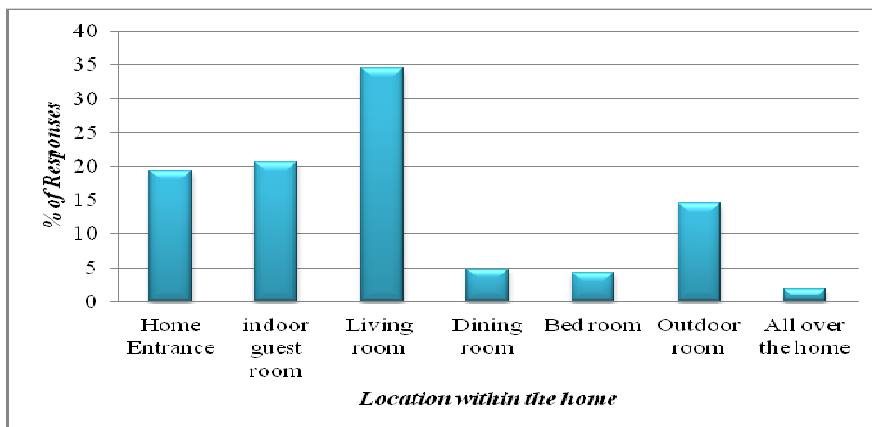

Figure 7: Location of heritage collectibles within the home

Question four was about the type of heritage collectibles people have and whether they are individual pieces or if the items take up a large wall display. The graph reveals that most responses indicated that they were pieces (39.4%) or even furniture items, whilst wall display was only (9.7%). Statistical analysis demonstrate that there is a significant correlation between social identity and type of heritage collectibles p=0.001. It was found that people who have chosen the reason of social identity behind application of heritage collectibles use heritage style whilst the people who selected other reasons of owning heritage collectibles just have pieces (Figure 8).
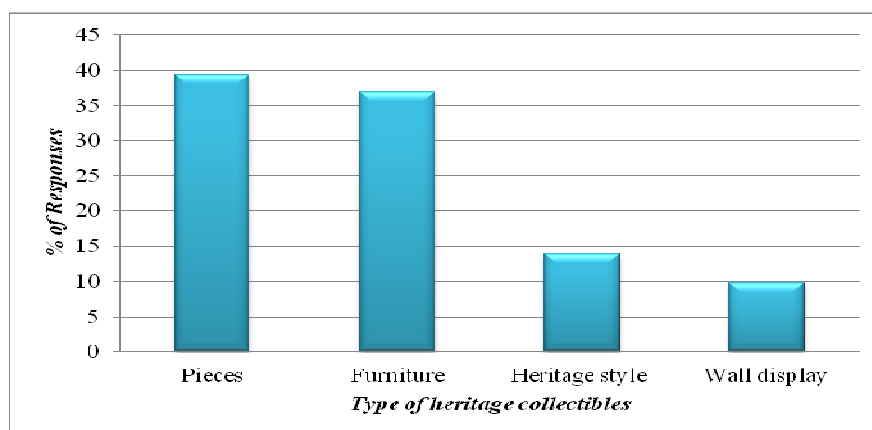

Figure 8: The type of heritage collectibles

Discussion

Overall, the results provide evidence for the fact that social identity was the main reason behind respondents owning heritage collectibles (79.4%). Dittmar's (1992) research has been supported by these findings. Dittmar's social psychological model of purchasing items indicated that people acquire possessions, which reflect their personal and social identity. Evidence was found for the crucial role of place in maintaining and enhancing social identity. It was discovered that people who have chosen the reason of social identity behind their application of heritage collectibles were also more likely to display their items in a large space or throughout the room. Whilst the people who selected other reasons behind why they own heritage collectibles they would be more likely to display their items in just one area of the house.

The research findings concur with social identity theory. Research by Steggell et al, explains how people base their identity and answer the question "Who am I?" through their choices of personal dwelling. (Steggell et al., 2003, p19). In addition, the results align itself with research by Gram-Hanssen and Bech-Danielsen, (2004) as they stated that furniture and decoration could indicate an individualistic approach to identity and lifestyle. The results of this study revealed that possessions in the house could symbolize and represent the owner's identity. Furthermore, the desire to reflect needs, personality and identity through interior design has face validity.

As suggested by Twigger-Ross et al., places are a crucial source of identity and place is aligned to a social category. This research supports Twigger-Ross et al., and their notion that places are a fragment of self-identity and seen as crucial as gender and social class. Therefore, social identity is conveyed from room to country (Twigger-Ross et al., 2003, p207).

Festinger's cognitive dissonance theory, predicted that housing and interior design could possibly change the inhabitants. Moreover, as Nasar and Kang's research suggests, if identity can be changed and manipulated according to an individual's life changes and/or states of mind (Nasar and Kang, 1999) then it is reasonable to assume that the categories must have a salience for the individual. This needs to be examined more systematically in order to gain a better understanding of the relationship between heritage collectibles and identity. Future work could consider the role of other environments such as the workplace, shopping centres and nurseries/schools in relation to social identity.

The sample size was only conducted with women, which makes the research gynocentric. Therefore, future research should consider the role of the man within decisions regarding the home and identity. Is there a gender difference concerning heritage collectibles? Does a man view the collectibles in their spatial world in a markedly different way to the woman? In addition, the children of the family could be interviewed and their views on the items in their house could be obtained.

This study is extremely significant, as no previous research has looked at the discipline of interior design in relation to motives for possession of items. The implications of this study are useful for interior designers, and homeowners. The results may also be of interest to housing designers and educators as the interiors in which we reside can play a crucial role in creating a secure home environment and developing our social identity.

Conclusion

In conclusion, although the home environment research area has been well documented these findings provide a timely insight into the motives behind acquisition, possession and application of heritage collectibles in home interiors. Although there are different reasons why people acquire heritage collectibles this research discovered the main reason why people possess heritage collectibles in home interiors, which was linked to identity. This paper contributes significantly to the on-going debate regarding the way home represents social identity.

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