Creating sustainable practice in a museum context: Adopting service-centricity in non-profit museums

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ARTICLE INFO

Keywords:

Non-profit museums
Sustainability
Consultant customers
Reflective spaces
Self-paced consumption
Satisfaction

ABSTRACT

The main purpose of this study is the identification of issues from a consumer perspective that can assist in the creation of sustainable museums. This work specifically focuses on customer research including the service encounter experience. It has been suggested museum sustainability is questionable in the long term, with a need for fundamental change in the mental modes and attitudes assumed in the management of the sector, in particular the need for more effective and appropriate marketing strategies. Adopting a qualitative research approach, twenty consultant customers kept a service encounter diary and were subsequently interviewed in-depth. These scripts were analyzed thematically until theoretical saturation was achieved. Findings indicate many issues focusing on the creation of reflective spaces, self-paced consumption, solitude versus social exchange, the need for supplementary service to be more effectively developed, improvement in non custodial servicescapes and the relationships of satisfaction to process and amenities. Implications for management and research have been highlighted.

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1. Introduction

Recently museum directors from around the globe were upset when Frank Howarth (director of the Sydney Museum the oldest museum in Australia) suggested "museums should exhibit in shopping malls as that is where the audiences are" (Wynhausen, 2007). Howarth's suggestion focused on the need for museums to focus on what is "contemporary and relevant" to be sustainable (Wynhausen, 2007). Here sustainability is used with the meaning of an organization having sufficient resources to maintain existence, and fulfill its objectives, into the future (Weerawardena and Sullivan Mort, 2006). There is currently great debate on the scope and practice of museums in the 21st century. The main purpose of this study is the identification of issues that can assist in the creation of sustainability in museums. This work specifically focuses on customer research including the service encounter experience and is predicated on the need to increase visitation and satisfaction.

Bernardi (2005) suggests museum sustainability is questionable in the long term, with a need for fundamental change in the mental modes and attitudes assumed in the management of the sector in particular, the need for more effective and appropriate marketing strategies (Bernardi, 2005, p. 15). McLean (1994) proposes that although governments have a vested interest in the provision of museum services for the public good, this is not a mission that is

readily accepted on all levels in the museum sector. Critics of museum management argue they lack customer orientation, they are playgrounds of political correctness and that they are trapped in custodianship of ancient artifacts failing to present them in an exciting and marketable way (Pierroux, 1998; Caldwell, 2005). Others have criticized the lack of research scope for many institutions and the lack of customer orientated interaction (Boorsma, 2006). This paper focuses on examining these issues and criticisms by commissioning a set of in-depth service encounter diaries and undertaking corresponding consumer interviews. The main objective of this research is to establish the consumer's opinion on the role of the museum and the practices required to increase intent to revisit in order to inform a sustainable future for museums.

1.1. Museums and marketing

As museums are usually non-profit organisations, and their mandate is collection, conservation and education of the public, for the public good, it is no surprise that the majority are funded by state and federal governments or corporations seeking social investment and sponsorship (Museums Australia, 2007). Emphasis in the museum sector is shifting towards the need for increased financial returns, and this is driven at the behest of those organizations behind museum funding. In addition, the trend in increased accountability and triple bottom line accounting has progressed from organisations, to their investment projects, hence the pressures exerted on museums. Pressures on museum management

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have, in some ways, lead to the conflict in primacy of museum function. Goulding (2000) notes that museums have been urged "to become more competitive and self-reliant" (Goulding, 2000, p. 262). Caldwell identifies museums are called to "demonstrate that they deliver 'value for money' (Caldwell, 2005, p. 1). Gilmore and Rentschler also support that museums are expected to "offer value to government by attracting increasing visitor numbers" (Gilmore and Rentschler, 2002, p. 745).

It is evident that museums struggle with establishing the definition of the service offering and service package that meet the perceptions of the consumer and focus their service design heavily on the primacy of function as perceived by the museum organization. Understanding the customer dimensions of the service are essential for the development of increased visits and creating value for consumers and investors. Adopting a service centric approach is proposed as being an for museum management in their quest for sustainability.

It may be argued that for most museums visits are free, so visitors generate little monetary value. It has been suggested in some studies that visitor fees to museums cover only 5–10% of museum costs (Rosset, 1991; Fourtes, 1999; Valentino, 1992). It is apparent a figure of 70% is the global benchmark for funds derived from government and private sponsor sources. Museums need to present to these sponsors that the museum is worthy of their investment with a strong market of visitor numbers who will recognize the public and private investor sponsorship and support positively. Thus, the role of visitors is not one of direct revenue collection but indirect through market value creation of the sponsorship from private enterprises and social value creation of the public good (Weerawardena and Sullivan Mori, 2006). Whether funding is tied directly to visitor numbers is not clear, but the link between customers, revenue and value creation both social and monetary is one that museums need to understand. Recent literature suggests that by increasing museum offerings for visitors (ranging from cultural to additional services), they can increase visitor flow and revenues (DiMaggio, 1986; Kotler and Kotler, 1998; Goulding, 2000; Bagdadli, 1997; Solima, 1998; Chirieleison, 2003; Bernardi, 2005, p. 3) enhancing social and monetary value objectives.

1.2. Museums as a service

Academic research into museum visitation and management, patron motivation for visiting, patron expectations, and satisfaction has been conducted (McLean, 1994; Screven, 1986; Boisvert and Slez, 1995; Falk et al., 1985; Tramposch, 1998; Robbins and Robbins, 1981; Bhattacharya et al., 1995; Kawashima, 1998; Botti, 2000), but in most part, the samples are drawn from management and museum directors' perceptions of patrons, there is little direct evidence from consumers and findings do not appear to be incorporated into museum practice. The definition of a museum is not regarded as controversial within the literature. How museums are managed, and what the orientation, or prime role or function is, is the contested area (Pierroux, 1998; Yeh and Lin, 2005).

It is recognized that the museum functions include conservation, education and entertainment or enjoyment. Researchers observe museums as custodians of tangible objects rather than from the services perspective of a provider of intangible experiences. McLean (1994) states, "Museums are essentially object-based: their very existence depends on the possession of a collection", (McLean, 1994, p. 191). It is evident that a narrow classification of museums has been adopted with a product rather than marketing orientation. This could also explain the custodial-centric approach to museums in general i.e. a focus on the object rather than a customer centric focus on the intangible benefits derived from the visit. Given the role of museums to educate, inspire and portray stories of the past, knowledge generation and stimula-

tion, a service centric paradigm for analysis and management is argued to be more appropriate. Gilmore and Rentschler (2002) first identified the product centric view, suggesting relationship-marketing strategies as important for improved museum management, shifting the paradigm of museum into a services domain.

It is evident in museums operations that tangibility and the curatorship of display is not essentially the problem for museums, it is the service component relating to the tangible object that has been difficult to define and achieve, "the artifacts are clearly tangible; it is the emotions they evoke which are intangible" (McLean, 1994, p. 193). The need to manage these emotions and intangibilities supports the need for a services-marketing approach. It is well founded in services-marketing literature that making intangible elements more tangible in the communication and provision of the service renders them more memorable and concrete and influences increased service consumption (Lovelock, 1983).

In relation to museum services, and managing intangibility, marketers have several opportunities. Previous simple approaches have included offering visitors postcards from the museum as they left, using the cafes and gift shops as attendance incentives (Caldwell, 2005). Some facilitating and supplementary services are and have been used to increase the obvious tangible offerings to museum visitors, such as special museum exhibitions and lectures. Researchers who endorse the concept that a museum visit is an experiential encounter focus on more than objects and displays, and support the social role of the museum. They see the use of promotion of museum shops and cafes and other services as a means to tangibilise the core service. Proactive and contemporary museums now offer maps, directions, online-booking, activity sheets for children, online games, podcasts, blogs and numerous other museum services that relate to the museum collection at site and online in order to make an attempt at tangibilising intangibles. Moreover, embracing a services paradigm suggests that practices like standardization will not hinder service delivery as consumers create and customize their own experiences (Caldwell, 2005).

The definition of the service lies in the domain of the consumer and what the consumer perceives as the item of consumption (Hume et al., 2006). There is no doubt the museum market is heterogeneous with the many and varied visitors interacting with museums in many differing ways. The consumption process is not about what displays are offered but how the consumer moves through the displays and engages with them. Adopting a services paradigm would move the presentation of collections from a product (custodial) centric focus to one of a customer process and consumption; however it is evident that this currently is the exception rather than the norm. In research conducted by Gilmore and Rentschler (2002), they found that, despite different orientations of museums directors, "visitors are encouraged to engage in predominantly passive observation rather than participating in the experience", and that "museums rely on using standardized reported messages" (Gilmore and Rentschler, 2002, p. 756). This research is guided by the research question "What is it that the consumer wants from a museum experience?" The research adopts a service research paradigm informed by a service operations approach (Hume et al., 2006) to look closely at what consumers want, how they interact, how they perceive process and flow and aspects of servicescape and how these interact to influence positive judgments about revisiting the museum space more regularly. Service operations approaches have not previously been conducted in this sector, positioning this as new and exciting research for the museum sector.

1.3. Data and method

This research approaches consumer research from a services-marketing paradigm focusing on consumer opinion and the factors that influence repeat visitation. Advancing other museum audience

research, this study has used service encounter diaries extracted from a consultant customer group, rather than teachers or educators (Hsi, 2002; vom Lehn and Heath, 2005). Previous research has not focused directly on what consumers want from the encounter. This research explores descriptions and diary scripts of typical events and experiences as described by the consumer's service encounter diaries. This process is then triangulated using in-depth interviews with the consumers to identify attributes that are critical and non-critical to a museum consumption. Research was conducted at a major modern history museum site in an Australian capital city metropolitan museum.

Consistent with the suggested range of case sampling of more than four cases (Eisenhardt, 1989), 20 consultant customer diaries were collected and interviews were conducted. The consultant customers function as lead users (von Hippel, 1996) in this context. Consultant consumers documented their visits using a service encounter diary which included headings focused on observational process mapping, critical incidents, expectations, factors of satisfaction and process flow. This process was supported by the investigator examination of the museum, cross referencing and documenting activities, services (supplementary and facilitating) and exhibitions relevant to each visit. Sampling proceeded until theoretical saturation was achieved. Theoretical saturation is a process whereby themes and constructs from one case or interview are substantiated by the evidence of another case, and sampling proceeds until no new issues are introduced (Eisenhardt, 1989).

The consumer diaries and interviews were used to gather thick description of the critical factors and non-critical factors, the interactions with contact employees, enabling technologies, service scripts, and tangible and intangible service aspects that enhance the technical and functional service quality, satisfaction, and desire to revisit. The interviews were guided by open-ended questions highlighting the steps and processes, the level of interaction, the desired outcomes. Probing and funneling techniques were used if required. Non-attendee interviews were similar however focused on the reason why there was non-attendance.

A set of scripts were obtained from each of the consultant customers. Consistent with the method outlined by Hubbert et al. (1995) and Arnould and Price (1993), the unit of analysis was the script comprised of the service encounter diaries' documentation of the interactive experience and the transcripts of the in-depth interviews. The scripts were coded separately, each encounter mentioned and stage of delivery was recorded for each individual. These were organized using sequential incident analysis in order to develop sub-classifications of stages of delivery (Danaher and Mattsson, 1998) and were then organized using a conceptual map (Miles and Huberman, 1994) and analyzed based on understanding of the extant literature.

2. Findings of the qualitative research

The following section will highlight and discuss the findings of the consumer perspective of the museum service offered based on the service encounter diaries and follow-up in-depth discussions. Within this section, reflection on current theory will be incorporated by a process of enfolding the literature (Eisenhardt, 1989).

The issues raised by consumers included issues of experience type, social exchanges versus solitude, expectations, entertainment and the education culture, process, self-paced consumption, interactivity, display content, wait time and queues, intangibles and atmospherics, reflective urban spaces and urban tourism, tangibles, the accuracy of information, frontline personnel behaviour and relationship development and finally outcome attitude and behaviour satisfaction and desire to return.

3. Experience type

3.1. Expectations, excitement and entertainment, education culture

The first interesting area in experience type or reason for the visit raised by consumers was whether the visit was for entertainment, edutainment or education. Each visit purpose raised differing levels and types of expectations from the museum exchange. Those looking for entertainment were focused on interactive exhibits "hands on a bit of fun for the holidays" (respondent 7) and free merchandise. Education visitors required accuracy of information and presentation of artifacts in exhibits, the educational group needed to be mentally challenged by the exhibit.

Respondent 3: "I don't have to be ecstatic with a display, but as long as there are few disappointments I will generally think I have enjoyed it...my issue is when I have to deal with silly rules in the space that detract from interacting with the display..."

Finally, those looking for edutainment i.e. the combination of both entertainment and education wanted a cultural education experience that provided fun and interaction. The degree of interactivity required by the edutainment group was less than the entertainment fun seekers.

Respondent 10: I believe that there is a real opportunities for museums to increase overall customer satisfaction. Customers want to feel a part of something mystical, old of the past.... but there are opportunities to develop lifetime customers by providing it in a fun and modern way.

3.2. The influence of solitude versus social exchange

The next emergent issue with respect to the type of consumption experience was the social nature of the visit i.e. whether the visit was alone or in a group was suggested to influence expectations. Consumers suggested that the expectations of a social event would differ from those seeking a reflective secluded or solitude experience. In the event of a social experience, a faster pace, more interactivity and more variety of exhibits would be required. There would be much less emphasis on curatorship and more on entertainment. Whereas is a solitude experience a self-paced slower process would be adopted with display narratives playing a more important role. The emphasis on the experience would be more closely aligned with education and cultural reflection.

Respondent 6: "I go to the museum for different reasons at different times.... If I go with my friends we will have a coffee at the café, have a lot of laughs do the games but if I go alone ...it is more educational I read all the stories and see it as a cultural thing."

3.3. Process

3.3.1. Self-paced consumption, interactivity, display updates

Continuing on the theme of pace and consumption process the level of interactivity was discussed with respondents. All respondents suggested they evaluated different museum visits in different ways depending on the level of expertise/difficulty required to understand the displays, customer's own knowledge and previous experiences and interaction with the museum. Moreover, respondents all had preconceived ideas of the level of customer service required for particular interactions and developed expectations based on this knowledge in particular, from past museum visits. Respondents expected a higher degree of service from highly

complex and interactive displays and lower expectations from traditional and well-known exhibits. Moreover, if an exhibit had to be booked or had an admission fee, consumers expected higher levels of interactivity and customer service. Consumers suggested that in a self-paced process emphasis should be on "accurate content displayed in an interesting way" not interactivity (respondent 18) and that the museum staff needed to respect the desire of patrons to move slowly and at their own pace through exhibits. Queuing and corridor design were seen as inappropriate for the self-paced consumers. They felt constrained and rushed by this design process.

Respondents suggested the degree of difficulty of the interactive experience and the knowledge required to engage in the museum service changed the measures and expectations of enjoyment of the encounter. Some respondents suggested they evaluate complex/expert services on the overall outcome and would tolerate a less friendly approach but expect experts to speak in a language they can understand and be interested in them as visitors. For interactive services, the content must be accurate and "the technology" or "game": "easily understood" (respondent 6) and "tech friendly" (respondent 10) content. Respondents also suggested that they were more tolerant in complex situations, however they required the provider to communicate and educate them during the process delivery in order to gain satisfaction. It was evident from respondents that the degree of difficulty altered their expectations of the service during the process and that the degree of difficulty, and the "unknown", required efficient support from experts and this influenced the evaluation of customer satisfaction. Most respondents however suggested they had very high level of tolerance for complex displays. Many respondents who suggested they required self-paced consumption felt these type of displays impacted their ownership of their consumption by the reliance on expert content and discussion. They liked to be directed around the museums via signposting and visual maps, however did not wish to be "rushed" (respondent 3) or "moved along" (respondent 10) and "have to wait for some commentary from an expert" (respondent 4). Two distinct groups emerged with respect to self-paced consumptions and they were the single consumer and those with children.

Respondent 4: "The need for complex help/expert activity also changes how I feel...if they are really disinterested or very interested and interesting...it will make a difference to how my visit goes. To tell you the truth waiting for an expert irritates me."

Respondent 13: "Professional service increase my joy of this visit and my expectation for next time...I desire greater quality and I expect greater quality."

3.4. Wait time and queues

Respondents suggested they had a predetermined acceptable timeframe for delivery of the service and the pace of consumption of the museum visit. They also suggested that a level of tolerance existed with the time they were prepared to wait depending on a number of factors. These included the degree of difficulty of the service, the ratio of other customers to providers (peak demand periods such as school holidays) and their available time. They suggested that wait time only affected customer satisfaction if they felt ignored or they believed the provider to be lazy, negligent and inattentive and the exhibit design to be flawed.

Respondent 1: "Minimal waiting time [is best] however it is free so one has to expect some waiting I guess..."

Respondent 14: "I would expect to wait at a medical center due to past experience but not at a museum...I would not have thought they were that popular!"

3.5. Intangibles and atmospherics

3.5.1. Reflective urban spaces and urban tourism

Respondents suggested different service exhibits and museum visits had different expected consumptions durations both in the form of time and number of interactions. Respondents had pre-conceived ideas of the expected duration and the number of interactions required for a particular type of exhibit and visit, and were annoyed by curators trying to extend it unnecessarily, creating queues and/or speeding/rushing them through the experience. Several consumers identified the use of museum spaces as local tourist destinations and "away from it spaces, in the city" (respondent 11). These consumers suggested that they used their time at the museum "as a time of reflection" (respondent 4), "kind of like a weekend away but in a short period of time and not far from home" (respondent 8). These consumers supported the concept of urban tourism (Jansen-Verbeke and van Rekom, 1996; Russo and van der Borg, 2002) and the use of reflective spaces within museums for purpose other than artifact exhibit.

Respondent 11: "Lately I have been using the great spaces in Brisbane as kind of a get away from activity. You know when you can't get away but you want to feel like a tourist...I am getting that from the new museum spaces."

Respondent 2: "The dreaminess, the escape, the reflection that's what I need from the museum...I can remember when I went as a kid...the old museum in Brisbane...it was almost scary and mysterious...that what a museum experience needs to be."

Respondent 11: "I like the quiet, the reflection...the feeling of no stress and learning something...reflection yes reflection that is what it is."

3.6. Tangibles

3.6.1. Frontline personnel behaviour and relationship development

Respondents identified several areas with respect to the behaviour and style of frontline personnel that contributed to a successful outcome. The majority of respondents expected courtesy, empathy and knowledge about the museum displays and museum space. Respondents felt that excellence in these areas strongly contributed to satisfaction and poor performance strongly contributed to dissatisfaction. Respondents were annoyed by personal conversation, resentful comments about the museum/employer, comments about the difficulties of trading conditions and overbearing and rude people. All these factors induced dissatisfaction and reluctance for future contact. Lack of consistency and accessibility of personnel for enquiries in complex displays and disinterested expert staff was contributory to increased dissatisfaction. Dismissive staff greatly enhanced dissatisfaction and impacted directly on negative revisit intention. All respondents felt that extraordinary service including any contribution to edutainment and entertainment enhanced customer satisfaction. This strongly contributed to positive future visits.

Respondent 2: "Be friendly prompt and helpful, experts be interested and staff add to your fun."

Respondent 3: provider was willing to "Go the extra mile with my kids... extra tattoos, more drawing equipment and some fantastic story telling!"

3.7. Outcome attitude and behaviour

3.7.1. Satisfaction and desire to return

There were many different dimensions offered concerning satisfaction and dissatisfaction. Some respondents suggested that avoiding dissatisfaction, and the factors that irritated them, gave them satisfaction. Others saw the two variables as distinctly different and felt that dissatisfaction through unsuccessful service outcomes and the overall museum experience was longer lasting, more memorable and had a greater negative impact on revisit intention. Most respondents felt that gaining satisfaction was their personal goal and the avoidance of dissatisfaction should be the goal of the provider. Some respondents suggested that avoiding dissatisfaction had greater impact on positive repeat purchase intention. These respondents in particular were those with very high expectations and interestingly, children. These respondents suggested that gaining satisfaction by minimal provider error, minimal interruptions to exhibit consumption, no queues and having fun was their primary goal. It was suggested that there were degrees of dissatisfaction and termination was related to the severity of the dissatisfaction. The severity of dissatisfaction was always related to core service delivery failure and the failure of the museum experience to deliver any of the prime functions: entertainment, education and urban tourism.

Respondent 10: "I don't have to be deeply moved or excited by a display, but as long as there are few problems I will be relatively satisfied... I get very annoyed by displays promoted for kids being spread all over the museum... like some retail outlet... what... we need to drag our kids all over the museum to see a couple of dinosaurs! Last time I went to the museum I had a pram... one lift... and the exhibition was spread over four floors... you do the math!"

3.8. Service delivery

The dimension of service delivery was the most prominent response from respondents in gaining customer satisfaction. All respondents stated issues such as reliability, consistency with advertising, promotion, and the defined service offering, accuracy, timeliness and informed, knowledgeable frontline personnel as paramount to gaining satisfaction. In avoiding dissatisfaction, elements of the core service delivery such as lack of service recovery and admitting error, rude and uninformed staff, the degree of wait time, and lazy staff were all featured prominently in this order. Respondents discussed the importance of the availability of service delivery tools, such as technology; to expedite service delivery and enhance interactivity was essential for satisfaction. They suggested that this contributed to satisfaction, however lack of availability only impacted on increasing dissatisfaction when technology was the perceived as predominant and essential in service delivery for the museum market. Respondents suggested that past experience of service/service delivery would influence future expectations of service delivery particularly with wait time tolerance.

Respondent 2: "Service easy, not invasive, friendly and prompt."

Respondent 6: "Satisfaction... Accuracy, timeliness, professionalism, integrity, sincerity, willingness to serve"

Museums should be aware of the types of services experiences required by customers. This needs to reflect current and future requirements and tempered with the belief that not all displays have to be the same and attract all groups/customer. They should develop mechanisms which assist the customer in going to the museum. Make it easy for customers (i.e. e-business, 24 h access) using online. Ensure that front line staff are knowledgeable and do not see the customer as being an interruption to their job. En-

sure a service ethics exists through all levels of the company/organization. Look, for opportunities to value add in the service interaction without necessarily looking at value adds as selling opportunities. Develop quality control procedures to ensure that the service delivery provided is at the highest quality available. Be mindful that the customer has, in the majority of instances, choices when it comes to selecting a entertainment venue. Accordingly, the service provider should look for opportunities to develop 'life time' customers based on a symbiotic relationship.

3.9. Implication for theory and future directions

The findings of the qualitative research raised some significant points for museum theory development and the development of experiential service research. First, as the experience was clearly identified by respondents to be experiential in nature, adopting a service paradigm for the design and delivery of museum services would be beneficial and assist in museums more clearly targeting and delivering the service to their consumers. The aspects of intangibility, perishability, heterogeneity and simultaneity were identified by respondents, undoubtedly classifying the experience as a service (Loveloock, 1983; Shostack, 1985) and suggesting the adoption of service centric approach to be appropriate.

Second, the intangible aspects of the museum experience highlighted by respondents included the concept of the use of servicescape to create reflective spaces supporting the concept of urban tourism and urban retreats, with consumers suggesting a preference for self-paced consumption and adequate process flow. Service delivery factors included increased interactivity and edutainment through technology, the importance of the role and scripts of boundary spanning frontline staff with the view of social exchange versus solitude experiences and the three levels of expectations of the desired service, specifically entertainment, education and edutainment. These market segments would suggest a heterogeneous customer base exists that will be responsive to a standardized customized services approach, that caters to each of their needs. Further empirical investigation testing these observations would clearly advance theory in experiential services and the museum context.

The use of supplementary and facilitating services was identified in the in-depth interviews similar to that found in other service industries (Gronroos et al. (2000), cited by van Riel et al. (2001)). A service paradigm would suggest facilitating services (and goods) are mandatory with supporting services (and goods) not mandatory; instead, their purpose is to differentiate the service package from those of competitors and to enhance the perceived quality and value of it (Gronroos et al., 2000). When operating in a service paradigm the goal of supporting services is to enable consumer co-production. In the museum experience, supplementary services can decrease the reliance on passive participation typical of traditional museum environments and move the museum experience firmly into the service domain enhancing intangibility, the holistic experience and visitor satisfaction. It is evident that some museums are operating in this domain clearly offering both facilitating and supplementary services to customers. The Australian museums observed offered clear communication of the supplementary services and value adds available with this directly related to the primacy of function, with more marketing orientated museums emphasizing the extra services in communication in a more customer orientated manner and those who primacy of function was more custodial not focusing on supplementary services at all.

3.10. Implications for management

Analysis of the consumer experience supported Australian museums as operating in a service paradigm. While the research

indicates support for the position that Australian museums were growing in customer orientation using supplementary services and value added activities in an attempt to increase patronage by stimulating excitement and interest. Irrespective of these positive findings, it is evident that enhanced application of service theory and strategy would greatly benefit design and delivery in the museum experience. Understanding the needs of the many market segments and positioning the experience of exhibits in a services paradigm not a product centric exhibition approach and would offer a more marketable and pleasing experience. Issues of flow and interactivity are clearly identified by the education and entertainment segments. The education seeker is not far behind in needs for interactivity and technology, and additionally has a continuing and high demand for accurate and informative content in displays.

A valuable area for enhanced management practice in the future for museums is the exciting identification of museums as reflective urban spaces and the need for museums to provide servicescapes and flow that caters for self-paced consumption. There is a need for service function strategy to incorporate aspects of atmospherics, personnel and contact interactivity, types of technology, queuing theory and quiet spaces. It is no doubt a challenging and exciting time for museum services.

3.11. Limitations

The research is subject to a number of limitations. It adopted a qualitative method in order to more deeply understand the museum experience for a customer perspective. While this yields valuable insights it does limit generalisability. Subsequent qualitative work should be undertaken to enhance generalisability. This work was undertaken in the Australian context in a museum with a general collection which is delimitation. Further work should also be undertaken in other country context and with museums holding other types of collections.

3.12. Conclusion

Overall, this research adopted a qualitative approach to examine an Australian museum experience from a consumer perspective in order to identify factors that would enhance customer satisfaction and repeat visitation. Respondents clearly identified museums as experiential in nature and as a part of the services sector. They offered a good insight into the primary of the display function of museums, along with the need to work to enhance the experience for the different education, education and entertainment segments. The consultant consumers interviewed provided some very valuable insights highlighting issues for enhancing museum experience including self-paced consumption, the need for reflective urban spaces, the importance and need for interactivity from staff and technology and the importance of atmospherics, servicescape and flow. In creating a sustainable future for museums it is evident that adopting a service centric approach has the potential to enhance visitor experience and thus the long term success of museums.

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