

THE EXPERIENCE VALUE OF VISITORS: A CO-CREATION PROCESS

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Abstract

The present work explores the role of the visitor as co-creator of value using a sample of visitors to five major museums. The empirical findings chart the way forward for co-creation. Prior knowledge and interest enable visitors to participate and interact during the visit, all of which basically allows them to build a more intense experience in those areas that require their involvement (escapism and learning). It is these more active experiences, and only these, which drive the individual to continue participating actively after the visit, seeking information and revisiting the museum, following it on social networks and making recommendations on opinion pages.

Keywords. Experiences, co-creation, museums.

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1. INTRODUCTION

Customer experience management or experience marketing has emerged as a promising management approach (Homburg et al., 2015). Pine and Gilmore (1998, p. 98) were the pioneers of this approach when they highlighted the role firms play as experience providers and explained that “an experience occurs when a company intentionally uses services as the stage, and goods as props, to engage individual customers in a way that creates a memorable event”. Therefore, experiences should be memorable and emotionally significant (Barlow and Maul, 2000; Boswijk et al., 2007; Medina, 2010; Wu, 2012).

While firms are providers of experiences, consumers are not passive receptors, but play a relevant role as co-creators of experiences. As Tynan and McKechnie (2009) affirm, experiences are subjective and mental evaluations are the result of a co-creation process through the relationship and contact between firm and consumer, or even through other relationships, and are multidimensional since they imply building different consumer responses.

Museums are a good example of organisations involved in offering customers memorable experiences. Since consumers seek novelty and variety in leisure experiences, cultural organisations are required to increase their audiences (Slater, 2010), placing the emphasis on the customer and on creating more engaging experiences (Mencarelli, Martux and Puhl, 2010; Minkiewicz, Evans and Bridson, 2014). Traditionally characterised by a curatorial orientation (Kotler and Kotler, 2001; Minkiewicz, Evans and Bridson, 2014), museums are now concerned with offering visitors a wide array of sensorial, aesthetic, recreational, social, educational, and amusement experiences (Kotler and Kotler, 2001; Silverman, 2007). Nevertheless, visitor experience is not confined to the visit or to the museum’s *in situ* offer, but is born through a co-creation process that covers both pre- and post- visit.

Perhaps due to the research and educational role that museums have taken on, marketing research has shown surprisingly little interest in visitor experience of exhibits (vom Lehn, 2006) and has left this area of research to visitor studies (Goulding, 1999a, 2000). Although consumer experience has been analysed in the tourist context (Hosany and Witham, 2010; Willard, Frost and Lade, 2013; among others) and is specifically linked with the creation of value in heritage tourism experiences (Radder and Han, 2015), most research into museum visitor experience has dealt with the museum's educational role and how the learning experience can be enhanced, and has overlooked other kinds of museum visitor experience (vom Lehn, 2006).

To fill this gap, the current research analyses the case of museum visitors and puts forward three stages of the museum visitors' co-creation of value: before the visit, during the visit and after the visit. In the first stage, value co-creation is related with visitor knowledge, involvement and planning before the visit. In the second stage, visitors co-create experiences in situ by participating in the museums' activities and interacting with staff or other visitors. In the third stage, value co-creation occurs when visitors intensify their experiences through further participation in the museum's activities and social networks and by giving their opinion in blogs and other opinion social networks. We propose that co-creation activities before and during the visit determine visitor experience, whereas these experiences are the antecedents of the intention to co-create value after the visit.

2. CO-CREATION OF EXPERIENCES. CONCEPTUAL AND THEORETICAL BACKGROUND

2.1. Visitor experience value

Experience might be defined as something which rises above the everyday to become memorable and which contributes towards the personal enrichment of the person experiencing it. An experience is a special event, but also involves the value it provides, a value which can

be reflected through the benefits, emotions and impressions caused by an event or activity (Boswijk et al., 2007).

In the domain of museums, visitor experience is a key factor in ensuring the museum's sustainability and even its very survival (Garde, 2015). The experience should be so rewarding and pleasing that it leads to the intention to repeat. It implies providing experiences that emphasise "symbolic meanings, hedonic pleasure and subconscious responses, instead of primarily stressing tangible benefits, utilitarian functions and conscious processes" (Holbrook and Hirschman, 1982, p. 132). The report issued by the Permanent Public Laboratory on Museums (2013) sets out that both what museums propose and actual visitor features favour learning, involvement in the activity, fascination or enjoyment and are variables which point to the most positive experiences, in other words those which leave a mark.

Indeed, the array of experiences a museum can offer its visitors is wide-ranging and almost always spans the four realms proposed by Pine and Gilmore (Radder and Han, 2015) representing four results of consuming a product, a service, or an event, in the current case, visiting a museum: entertainment, education, escapism, and aesthetics.

Entertainment involves amusement, enjoyment and having fun, usually when adopting an inactive attitude. This is the result of passively absorbing experiences through the senses, although there is less relational connection with the event, since it is observed from outside. Entertainment in the domain of museums is achieved when visitors can enjoy the visit in a relaxed manner, deriving pleasure and fun from an activity (visiting several rooms and galleries, trying out interactive equipment, etc.).

Education refers to the intellectual results of consuming, that is, learning, acquiring information, or increasing one's knowledge. According to Pine and Gilmore (1998), it requires active participation but no close connection to the event. For instance, when seeking

to provide an educational experience, the museum can offer historical recreations, art exhibits, guided tours and audio guides that interpret what the museum has to offer.

Aesthetic experiences refer to observing and enjoying the environment or physical atmospherics of a place. It implies higher levels of customer immersion but low levels of customer participation. The aesthetic experience can be achieved through sensory perceptions, especially visual and haptic ones.

Escapism is also amusement, but as an imaginative activity that allows individuals to break away from reality or routine. It requires active participation and a high degree of immersion in an event. Escapism entails visitors observing things which can raise their awareness, stir their imagination and help them to discover magic, delight, fascination and ecstasy in objects as well as get away from the routine of everyday life.

2.2. Co-creation of value and co-creation of experiences

One basic axiom of the service-dominant logic is the interactive nature of value creation. The customer is always a co-creator of value and this implies that value creation is interactional and relational (Vargo and Lusch, 2004, 2008). According to the logic, the firm makes value propositions, with both the offer and the beneficiary creating value. This premise has recently been updated to state that “value is co-created by multiple actors, always including the beneficiary” (Vargo and Lusch, 2016). Value creation does not merely take place through the activities between a firm and its customers, but among a whole host of actors. Customers determine the value of a proposition based on the specificity of its usage (Ranjan and Read, 2014), that is the value in use. As a result value creation is experiential, and only proves possible with the active participation of the customer, before, during and after consumption.

Consequently, co-creation of experiences considers the consumer to be an active agent in the consumption and production of values (Prebensen et al., 2013), and regards customer

involvement as essential for defining and designing the experience. In the context of tourism, Campos et al. (2015) define a co-creation tourism experience as the sum of the psychological events a tourist goes through when actively contributing via physical and/or mental participation in activities and interacting with other subjects in the experience environment. The more the customer puts into a tourist experience, the more they perceive positive and memorable tourist experiences.

Several studies have examined co-creation and co-creative interactions between supplier (the industry, the destination or organisations) and tourist (Campos et al., 2015). Some studies focus on the managers' perspective to describe the mechanisms, processes, and resources (knowledge, time, creativity) involved in engaging tourists in co-creation, so that they can enjoy a memorable consumption experience (Campos et al., 2015). Others focus on the tourist perspective to analyse what happens in the tourist sphere, encompassing the behaviour and psychology involved in experiences, before, during, and after the trip. The dimensions of co-creation to be considered involve the active participation and active role of the tourist, involvement, interaction with the supplier and social interaction, the contribution to designing the experience, engagement in the experience, the tourist construction of experiences, or the satisfaction with the co-creation of an experience (Cabiddu et al., 2013; Mathisen, 2013; Minkiewicz et al., 2014; Mossberg, 2008; Prebensen and Foss, 2011; Mathis et al., 2016).

In the current paper, we study the case of a specific context for consumer co-creation (i.e. museums) and explore it from the consumer perspective (i.e. the visitor). The only authors to analyse co-creation in the case of a museum are Minkiewicz et al. (2014), although they only focus on co-creation during the visit and propose three dimensions: co-production (active participation in one or more activities performed throughout the consumption experience), engagement (intentional interaction with others in the form of general discussions about the exhibitions), and personalisation (tailoring their experience to their specific interests). In our

study, following Prebensen, Woo and Uysal (2014), we propose, that visitor co-creation can also occur before, during, and after the visit.

Before the visit, co-creation involves designing and planning the experience as well as the visitor's prior knowledge and involvement in the subject (operand resources). Similarly, Waligo et al. (2013) suggest pre-visit planning and anticipation to understand tourism experience, and Prebensen, Woo and Uysal (2014) propose tourist motivation, knowledge and involvement as the antecedents of the perceived value of a holiday experience.

During the visit, on-site, visitors can act as co-producers, participating and interacting in different ways (Campos et al., 2015). Technologies and on-site interactive facilities as well as the museum staff help visitors to interact and participate.

Finally, after the visit, they can be ready to create content, share their experiences and memories and recommend the visit (on-line or off-line), or to intensify the experience with further knowledge about the museum. In this line, Prebensen, Woo and Uysal (2014) propose recommendations and repeat purchase as a consequence of the perceived value of an experience.

In the next section, we detail the process of value co-creation by museum visitors considering the visitors' operand resources before, during and after the visit.

3. THE PROCESS OF MUSEUM VISITOR CO-CREATION

3.1. Co-creation during the visit: participation and interpersonal interaction

On-site co-creation tourism experience involves active participation (physical or mental) and interaction with other subjects and with the environment (Campos et al., 2015). For the case of museums, Hood (1983) indicates that visitors choose to go to a museum, amongst other reasons, so as to be with people or to enjoy social interaction and because of the chance to

play an active part. As a result, we focus on these two aspects: participation and social interaction.

Visiting museums (as well as visiting heritage sites, churches and other historical landmarks) has usually been considered an activity where the tourist acts as a passive sightseer. Yet, visiting museums also involves participation and interaction.

From the theoretical perspective of value co-creation, participation implies customer involvement and motivation to experiment, dialogue and cooperate with the firm or what it has to offer (Mustak, et al., 2013). Participation is active when the individual becomes a key factor in developing and creating the experience. In the domain of museums, active participation can be physical, emotional or mental (Bertella, 2014), planned (brought about by the museum) or spontaneous and informal. In contrast to being seen as a spectator, a visitor can be an actor, an explorer of multisensory experiences, someone who wants to interact and learn (Campos et al., 2015). Drawing on this idea, certain museums, such as the Tate Gallery, foster the use of pull techniques to make visitors active when seeking information (Simon, 2010).

In services marketing, interaction is important because services depend upon encounters that occur during delivery. Indeed, tourist experiences have a social dimension based on the interactions tourists engage in on site (Campos et al., 2015). Social interactions during travel are sources of experiences (Minkiewicz et al., 2014) and stimulate thoughts, feelings, and people's creativity (Ballantyne et al., 2011). Visitors co-create their experiences through interpersonal relationships with other visitors (Caru and Cova, 2007; Falk and Dierking, 2000; Prebensen and Foss, 2011) and by interacting with employees (Bitner, et.al, 1994; Czepiel and Gilmore, 1987; Slatten, et.al, 2011).

As for interaction with other visitors, in the context of tourism and leisure, the customer often shares the setting with other customers. It has been recognised that other customers, people

who often share the same service environment during the service encounter, can influence an individual's service experience (e.g. Zhang, et. al, 2010; Martin and Pranter, 1989; Grove and Fisk, 1997). In the context of tourism and museums, several studies have found that experience and learning are co-created and enhanced by interacting with other visitors (vom Lehn, 2006; Amorin, et.al, 2014; amongst others) or with friends or family (Minkiewicz, Evans and Bridson, 2014).

One specific interpersonal interaction is that between visitors and staff. Customers evaluate a service based on the specialised skills, techniques, and experiences with the employee with whom they interact (Paulin, Ferguson, and Payaud 2000; Richard, 2010). Employees have changed their role from one of service provider to one of experience provider (Bharwani and Jauhari, 2013; Wong, 2004; Slatten et.al, 2011). In today's museums, mediation is reflected through a range of initiatives which include personalised visitor advice. The role of staff members is essential in engaging customers in their experience, facilitating discussion, and in making unique and powerful social experiences possible as well as in customising visitor experience (Simon, 2010; Minkiewicz, Evans and Bridson, 2014).

On the basis of the previous reasoning, we propose the following hypotheses:

H1. Active visitor participation has a positive influence on the value of the experience (learning, entertainment, escapism, and aesthetics).

H2. The interpersonal interactions of the visitor have a positive influence on the value of the experience (learning, entertainment, escapism, and aesthetics).

3.2. Co-creation before the visit: planning and knowledge

Value creation may commence prior to the interaction between organisation and customer. In this phase, the organisation uses its operant and operand resources to design and provide value proposals to customers, although customers themselves might also be involved in

designing and defining the service and the experience. In the case of museums, visitors can activate their operand resources to design the experience they will have, specifically, planning the visit and previous knowledge. In this sense, Falk and Dierking (2000, p. 87) state that “Visitors to museums do not come as blank slates. They come with a wealth of previously acquired knowledge, interests, skills, beliefs, attitudes and experiences all of which combine to affect not only what and how they interact with educational experiences but also what meaning, if any, they make of such experiences”.

When visitors plan the visit and when they have knowledge about the museum subject (art, history, science, etc.) together with some experience in cultural tourism they are more prepared and confident about engaging and participating in the proposed activities (Prebensen and Foss, 2011; Mancini, 2013) as well as interacting with staff or other visitors. Caru and Cova (2007) point out that those who frequently visit museums or exhibitions engage more actively in the visit, thus favouring greater involvement. In their research into heritage consumption experiences, Minkiewicz, Evans and Bridson, (2014) propose the main drivers and inhibitors of consumer propensity to co-create. The drivers of consumer propensity to create their own experience are involvement and previous knowledge of the activity, and the main inhibitors are limited exposure to the experience and cultural preconceptions. We thus propose that:

H3. Visitors’ previous knowledge has a positive influence on participation (H3a) and interaction (H3b) during the visit.

H4. Visitors’ planning of the visit has a positive influence on participation (H4a) and interaction (H4b) during the visit.

Similarly, planning and previous knowledge provide a basis for deriving greater value from the experience in terms of learning, entertainment, escapism, or aesthetics. Falk and Dierking (2000) conjecture that, amongst other factors, the museum visitor experience is shaped by

motivation and prior visitor experience. The report issued by the LPPM (2013) states that the only visitors who really learn during a visit are those who are already familiar with the subjects dealt with in the museum or those who have previously sought information on the content and who have planned the visit. Interest and prior knowledge endow the museum's proposal with value and shape visitor experience. Greater visitor understanding (both vis-à-vis a direct knowledge of the museum and of the subject as well as an indirect knowledge arising out of their interest in learning, frequency of museum visits and other kinds of cultural activities), coupled with a more carefully planned visit might be expected to create a certain familiarity that will lead to visitors playing an active role in the co-creation process of their experience. This is then likely to be reflected in a better experience with the visit in terms of entertainment, aesthetics, escapism and learning. Thus,

H5. Visitors' previous knowledge has a positive influence on the value of the experience (learning, entertainment, escapism, and aesthetics).

H6. Visitors' planning of the visit has a positive influence on the value of the experience (learning, entertainment, escapism, and aesthetics).

3.3. Co-creation after the visit: intensification of the experience and content generation

Once visitors have concluded the visit, they may manifest their involvement in co-creating additional value by intensifying the experience and generating content in online communities. Dong and Siu (2013) indicate that a more favourable service experience should lead to a stronger tendency to intensify it. Visit intensification has been related to making the experience more tangible through purchasing souvenirs, gifts and photos (Bigné et al., 2005; Dong and Siu, 2013; Rojas and Camarero, 2008). Here, we propose that the experiential value may also encourage visitors to intensify the experience by seeking further information about the museum on the web page and social networks or by participating in other activities

promoted by the museum. Positive experiences will lead visitors to become consumers of other museums' content.

Moreover, after the visit, individuals may be willing to share their experiences with other potential visitors in social networks and other online communities. Literature has examined the antecedents of user generated content in the context of tourism (Parra-Lopéz et al., 2011; Wang and Fesenmaier, 2004; Yoo and Gretzel, 2011). These studies have focused on tourists' benefits and incentives, and have positively related tourist intention to generate online content with functional, social, psychological, and hedonic benefits, as well as with altruism, trust, or personal skills. However, the intention to create online content is negatively related with the costs of use (effort, difficulty of use, and loss of privacy). In the current study, we propose that the first driver of consumer intention to create content is to share their experiences. Indeed, one motivation to create content is the desire to help the company and other individuals share positive experiences (Yoo and Gretzel (2011). Therefore, in the case of museums, visitors will involve themselves more with the museum's social networks and other online communities' opinions when the experience has proved memorable.

H7. The value of the experience (learning, entertainment, escapism, and aesthetics) has a positive influence on the intensification of the experience.

H8. The value of the experience (learning, entertainment, escapism, and aesthetics) has a positive influence on visitors' content generation.

4. METHODOLOGY

4.1. Sample and data collection

Data were collected through a survey conducted at five Spanish museums: the Queen Sofía National Museum of Art in Madrid (MNCARS, contemporary art museum), the Guggenheim Museum in Bilbao (contemporary art museum), the National Archaeological Museum in

Madrid (MAN, archaeological museum), the Prince Felipe Science Museum in Valencia (MCPF, science museum), and the Science Museum in Granada (science museum).

A questionnaire was designed to measure the variables in the model. The questionnaire was revised by the managers of two museums and some questions were adapted to the specificities of each museum. A pilot test was conducted to estimate interview time and to improve the structure and layout of the questions.

A group of professional surveyors were in charge of data collection. In each museum, an interviewer had to choose 35 visitors randomly, on different days of the week and at different times of the day (morning and afternoon). Visitors were contacted at the hall at the end of the visit. Data were collected in July 2015.

A total of 175 valid questionnaires were collected. As for the days of the week, 13.7% of questionnaires were collected on Monday, 10.3% on Tuesday, 33.1% on Wednesday, 10.2% on Thursday, 22.3% on Saturday, and 10.3% on Sunday. The sample consisted of 48% men and 52% women. Age distribution was 22.9% up to 25 years old, 14.2% from 26 to 35 years old, 20% from 36 to 45 years old, 16.6% from 46 to 55 years old, 9.2% from 56 to 65 years old, and 17.1% over 65 years old. 79.4% were Spanish visitors and 18.9% foreign visitors.

4.2. Measurement of variables

When possible, measurement scales were adopted from past research and adjusted to the context of the current study. In order to fine tune the measurement scales and validate their content, help was sought from museum directors and the results of the pre-test survey were used.

Partial least squares (PLS) was used to perform the joint estimation of the measuring model and the structural model. PLS is flexible with regard to the measuring scales of the variables and allows both reflective and formative latent variables to be created. The computer

application used was SmartPLS v3.2 (Ringle *et al.*, 2015). Table 1 shows the variables used in the study and the measurement indicators together with the corresponding descriptive statistics (mean and standard deviation). Information is also provided concerning the outcomes of the reliability and validity analysis of the measurement scales used. Table 2 shows the correlation matrix.

For the reflective scales, the composite reliability (ρ) and extracted variance (AVE) values are given, as are the factor loadings, all of which yielded acceptable values with the exception of one item of knowledge, whose standardised loading is only 0.67. For formative scales, Diamantopoulos and Winklhofer (2001) recommend conducting a multicollinearity diagnosis to gauge the validity of the indicators. The values of the variance inflation factor (VIF) in Table 1 reveal that there are no problems of multicollinearity when constructing the formative scales used in the analysis. Nevertheless, in the aesthetic construct there is one non-significant indicator, the appeal of the interior, in addition to which the only significant indicator of the formative interaction construct is interaction with experts.

Table 1. Descriptive statistics. Reliability and convergent validity

<i>Description</i>	<i>Mean (SD)</i>	<i>Loadings / Weights (t-statistic)</i>
Knowledge ($\rho=0.95$; $AVE=0.84$)		
<i>(Loadings)</i>		
I have a very good knowledge of art/history/science	2.69 (1.19)	0.67 (11.17)
I love art/history/science (in all or some of its facets)	3.42 (1.06)	0.82 (26.22)
I have a keen interest in learning about art/history/science	3.74 (1.03)	0.83 (36.46)
I frequently visit museums or exhibitions	3.20 (1.05)	0.71 (12.75)
I frequently participate in cultural tourism activities	3.42 (1.07)	0.84 (31.15)
I frequently participate in cultural activities	3.43 (1.14)	0.81 (21.08)
Planning the visit ($\rho=1$; $AVE=1$)		
<i>(Weights)</i>		
Extent to which the visit is planned	2.88 (1.39)	1 (-)
Interaction (<i>Formative scale. VIF = 1.203, 2.069, 2.097</i>)		
<i>(Weights)</i>		
I have interacted with other visitors in some activities.	2.29 (1.30)	-0.12 (0.68)
I have interacted with the museum staff in some activities	2.55 (1.54)	0.27 (0.88)
During the visit, there were experts who gave me information	2.81 (1.60)	0.84 (3.39)
Participation ($\rho=0.86$; $AVE=0.67$)		
<i>(Loadings)</i>		
I have actively participated in the visit.	3.44 (1.39)	0.89 (42.67)
I have been encouraged to participate in the activities.	2.46 (1.48)	0.79 (14.42)
During the visit I felt myself to be more of an actor than a spectator	2.22 (1.36)	0.78 (16.66)
Learning ($\rho=0.90$; $AVE=0.75$)		
<i>(Loadings)</i>		
It has been enriching.	4.22 (0.80)	0.92 (68.08)
It has been instructive.	4.28 (0.86)	0.93 (83.64)
I have learnt things that I didn't know.	4.28 (0.96)	0.74 (11.81)
Entertainment ($\rho=0.89$; $AVE=0.73$)		
<i>(Loadings)</i>		
The exhibition was entertaining.	4.20 (0.81)	0.89 (26.42)
The exhibition was enjoyable.	4.13 (0.82)	0.85 (16.66)
I enjoyed the exhibition a lot.	3.96 (0.87)	0.83 (21.09)
Aesthetics (<i>Formative scale. VIF = 1.148, 1.329, 1.483</i>)		
<i>(Weights)</i>		
The setup and scenography of the exhibition are appealing.	3.92 (0.95)	0.784 (2.05)
The external design of the building is aesthetically attractive.	4.02 (1.07)	0.638 (2.15)
The internal design of the building is aesthetically attractive.	4.00 (0.95)	-0.183 (0.53)
Escapism ($\rho=0.90$; $AVE=0.75$)		
<i>(Loadings)</i>		
I was completely immersed in the exhibition.	3.36 (1.18)	0.85 (29.93)
The visit allowed me to escape reality.	3.19 (1.27)	0.86 (34.70)
I have been enraptured by the visit.	3.52 (1.19)	0.89 (44.34)
Intensification ($\rho=0.86$; $AVE=0.68$)		
<i>(Loadings)</i>		
I would be happy to participate in future museum activities.	3.44 (1.45)	0.79 (23.17)
I intend to seek out more information about the museum on its web or social networks.	2.35 (1.44)	0.84 (27.04)
I intend to follow the museum on its social networks.	1.98 (1.28)	0.84 (25.18)
Content generation ($\rho=0.85$; $AVE=0.65$)		
<i>(Loadings)</i>		
I intend to talk about my experience in social networks or other websites (e.g. blogs)	2.02 (1.36)	0.72 (11.30)
I would make suggestions to the museum if asked or given the chance by them.	2.83 (1.26)	0.80 (19.34)
I would be willing to give my opinion of the museum on travel websites.	2.25 (1.49)	0.88 (44.54)

Table 2. Correlation matrix

	(1)	(2)	(3)	(4)	(5)	(6)	(7)	(8)	(9)	(10)
(1) Learning	0.869									
(2) Entertainment	0.595	0.857								
(3) Escapism	0.464	0.395	0.866							
(4) Aesthetics	0.369	0.325	0.318	<i>n.a.</i>						
(5) Knowledge	0.390	0.291	0.353	0.368	0.785					
(6) Interaction	0.377	0.180	0.264	0.205	0.289	<i>n.a.</i>				
(7) Participation	0.385	0.259	0.442	0.273	0.339	0.611	0.822			
(8) Planning the visit	0.062	0.000	0.116	0.058	0.323	-0.106	0.003	1.000		
(9) Intensification	0.499	0.347	0.545	0.157	0.409	0.375	0.479	0.087	0.813	
(10) Content generation	0.389	0.243	0.436	0.127	0.307	0.285	0.339	0.074	0.669	0.805

(*) The main diagonal shows the square root of the extracted variance for the reflective variables

5. ANALYSIS AND RESULTS

As already pointed out, empirical testing of the proposed hypotheses was performed using PLS. Nevertheless, in order to gauge the stability of the estimators and the model fit, we repeated path analysis with AMOS v23.0. Table 3 sums up the empirical results achieved in the two analyses and shows the stability of the estimation performed. The R^2 values are: $R^2_{\text{Entertainment}}=0.099$; $R^2_{\text{Escapism}}=0.231$; $R^2_{\text{Aesthetics}}=0.167$; $R^2_{\text{Intensification}}=0.370$; $R^2_{\text{Learning}}=0.230$; $R^2_{\text{Participation}}=0.120$; $R^2_{\text{Social interaction}}=0.120$; $R^2_{\text{UGC}}=0.236$. The goodness of fit values indicate an adequate fit ($\chi^2/\text{df}=26.36/8$, $p<0.001$; $\text{GFI}=0.97$; $\text{AGFI}=0.81$; $\text{NFI}=0.95$; $\text{CFI}=0.96$; $\text{RMSEA}=0.11$), taking into account that the model estimation includes several non-significant paths.

According to the results, participation and interaction impact on the value of the experience, although not significantly on all the dimensions or areas. Participating more actively in the visit generates escapism ($\beta=0.396$, $p<0.01$), learning ($\beta=0.183$, $p<0.05$) and entertainment ($\beta=0.180$, $p<0.05$). Personal interaction only raises the level of learning ($\beta=0.185$, $p<0.05$). Neither participation nor interaction have any significant effect on the aesthetical dimension of the experience. As a result, hypotheses H1 and H2 are partially supported.

As regards the impact of knowledge and planning the visit on participation and interaction, we see how a greater knowledge and interest in the museum's activity generates significantly higher levels of participation ($\beta=0.391$, $p<0.01$) and interaction ($\beta=0.364$, $p<0.01$).

Hypothesis H3 is thus supported. The same is not true, however, of planning, which only has a significant and negative influence on interaction ($\beta=-0.225$, $p<0.05$), leading us to reject hypothesis H4.

Table 3. Estimated coefficients

Hypotheses	Relationship	PLS	Analysis path
H1	<i>Participation</i> → <i>Learning</i>	0.183*	0.161 [†]
H1	<i>Participation</i> → <i>Entertainment</i>	0.180*	0.167 [†]
H1	<i>Participation</i> → <i>Escapism</i>	0.396**	0.344**
H1	<i>Participation</i> → <i>Aesthetics</i>	0.111	0.007
H2	<i>Interaction</i> → <i>Learning</i>	0.185*	0.202*
H2	<i>Interaction</i> → <i>Entertainment</i>	-0.015	0.014
H2	<i>Interaction</i> → <i>Escapism</i>	-0.034	0.024
H2	<i>Interaction</i> → <i>Aesthetics</i>	0.014	0.053
H3a	<i>Knowledge</i> → <i>Participation</i>	0.381**	0.313**
H3b	<i>Knowledge</i> → <i>Interaction</i>	0.364**	0.235**
H4a	<i>Planning</i> → <i>Participation</i>	-0.121 [†]	-0.097
H4b	<i>Planning</i> → <i>Interaction</i>	-0.225*	-0.150 [†]
H5	<i>Knowledge</i> → <i>Learning</i>	0.274**	0.238**
H5	<i>Knowledge</i> → <i>Entertainment</i>	0.261**	0.217**
H5	<i>Knowledge</i> → <i>Escapism</i>	0.213*	0.219**
H5	<i>Knowledge</i> → <i>Aesthetics</i>	0.388**	0.376**
H6	<i>Planning</i> → <i>Learning</i>	-0.008	-0.015
H6	<i>Planning</i> → <i>Entertainment</i>	-0.087	-0.084
H6	<i>Planning</i> → <i>Escapism</i>	0.043	0.023
H6	<i>Planning</i> → <i>Aesthetics</i>	-0.060	-0.068
H7	<i>Learning</i> → <i>Intensification</i>	0.365**	0.370**
H7	<i>Entertainment</i> → <i>Intensification</i>	-0.005	0.015
H7	<i>Escapism</i> → <i>Intensification</i>	0.414**	0.366**
H7	<i>Aesthetics</i> → <i>Intensification</i>	-0.163	-0.205**
H8	<i>Learning</i> → <i>Content generation</i>	0.278**	0.277**
H8	<i>Entertainment</i> → <i>Content generation</i>	-0.026	-0.021
H8	<i>Escapism</i> → <i>Content generation</i>	0.358**	0.324**
H8	<i>Aesthetics</i> → <i>Content generation</i>	-0.095	-0.109

Significance levels: [†] $p<0.10$; * $p<0.05$; ** $p<0.01$.

If we focus on how knowledge and planning relate to the value of the experience, we see that visitors who have a greater knowledge of or interest in the museum's activity achieve a significantly more enriching experience in all facets; learning ($\beta=0.274$, $p<0.01$), entertainment ($\beta=0.261$, $p<0.01$), escapism ($\beta=0.213$, $p<0.01$) and aesthetics ($\beta=0.388$, $p<0.01$). Having planned the visit to a greater or lesser degree, however, does not have any significant impact on the experience. We thus accept hypothesis H5 and reject hypothesis H6.

Of the four dimensions of experience considered, only escapism and learning have, in that order of importance, a positive and significant effect on intensification ($\beta=0.414$, $p<0.01$ and $\beta=0.365$, $p<0.01$) and content generation ($\beta=0.358$, $p<0.01$ and $\beta=0.278$, $p<0.01$). The experiences of entertainment and aesthetics have no significant impact on intensification and content generation. Hypotheses H7 and H8 are thus partially supported.

6. DISCUSSION

The active role played by museum visitors generates dynamics and processes which should be taken into account by managers if experiences are to be viewed as a competitive tool (Dirsehan, *et al*, 2011). The present study explores the process of co-creating experiences which occurs before, during and after the visit. Results indicate that prior visitor knowledge is the main driver underlying their ability to actively participate and interact during the visit, as well as the quality of the experience in every sense: learning, entertainment, escapism and aesthetics. By contrast, prior planning has no impact vis-à-vis ensuring a better experience. Indeed, it restricts the individual's subsequent interaction with others or with the museum staff. Put differently, the less the amount of planning, the more the individual feels the need to interact with others. In a similar vein, Black (2005) points to the limited exposure to the experience, that is, "infrequent consumers, value opportunities for social interaction most highly" since interaction with other visitors and with the museum staff provides them with the chance to learn.

As regards co-creation in situ, active participation during the visit boosts learning, entertainment and the chance for escapism. These results underscore the idea of Pine and Gilmore in the sense that learning and escapism are experiences that require individuals' active participation. For its part, social interaction only leads to greater learning, but does not

impact on the other realms of the experience. As already pointed out, interacting with experts is mainly valued because of the opportunities it affords the visitor to learn.

Finally, visitors are motivated to translate their experience into co-creation activities after the visit. Findings show that the learning and escapism experience impact on behavioural intention. In other words, visitor learning and the sense of being captivated during their visit will have a positive impact on their intention to participate in other activities organised by the museum in the future, to seek information and, therefore, to follow the museum on social networks and even to rate the museum positively on opinion pages.

Managerial implications

The findings show that the experience of learning and escapism are the cornerstones of the museum visit, and are influenced by prior visitor knowledge and their activity during the visit, and are determinants of visitors' behavioural intentions. Being able to provide such positive experiences is of enormous interest to the museum, since this may leave a greater and longer-lasting impression on the visitor, and incline them towards repeating the visit on other occasions. It might even lead to a closer link to the institution. This will guide museum marketers when allocating resources and designing appropriate activities and strategies that favour learning and escapism. The museum can undertake a number of activities to boost learning: guided tours, lectures, workshops, courses, seminars, film screenings, theatre performances, arts activities, publication of teaching material (audio-guides, activity sheets in the rooms, videos, etc.) and publications. Yet, it is also essential to seek mechanisms that can enable the visitor to escape and immerse themselves in the exhibition. As a result, museum managers should offer contextualisation and interpretative assistance both before and during the visit as well as sensorial or virtual reality technological experiences which help to further the preparation and immersion for visitors who so wish vis-à-vis their forthcoming artistic or cultural experience.

Fostering active participation and interaction (consumer to consumer and consumer-employee) inside the museum will therefore make the visitor experience far more enriching and pleasant and will enable visitors to engross themselves in the exhibition. Museum managers should therefore provide visitors with tools to enable them to voluntarily take part in co-creative activities. Museums should thus stage exhibitions and display works that captivate, intrigue, interest, excite or entice visitors to engage.

As regards social interaction, museum managers should also, through their workers (mediators), encourage a fresh interpretation of the works that will invite visitors to explore them. Staff-mediated learning includes structured interactions, such as museum tours, stage shows, or commented visits, and unstructured interactions, for instance, unscripted conversations between staff and visitors (Pattison and Dierking, 2013).

Findings reveal that if visitors acquire prior knowledge and are familiar to a certain extent with what they will see, they are more likely to interact with the museum staff and with other visitors. This leads us to consider how to bring about interaction and participation for those who are less knowledgeable. In this sense, the museum should provide rooms for people with no previous knowledge. A short video at the beginning with some indications about what they will be seeing together with a few tips to help them understand and enjoy the visit may prove enormously beneficial. The availability of information points and explanation rooms might also encourage interaction with museum staff.

Finally, in order to create engagement, visitors must be kept involved after the visit. Museums might thus consider organising activities in which visitors are given the chance to choose their favourite exhibits and to make fresh appraisals and interpretations thereof. Using tools such as blogs, social networks, customer ratings and evaluation systems, is also becoming a key ally for museums.

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