



INCORPORATING USER PARTICIPATION IN HERITAGE INSTITUTIONS: APPROACHING INSTITUTIONAL STRATEGIES IN RELATION TO NEW SOCIAL MEDIA AND AUDIENCE NEEDS

Federica Mancini¹

¹IN3 – Internet Interdisciplinary Institute, Spain

ABSTRACT

The gradual inclusion of the participation of the public in museums through social networks and other tools that enhance the user's leadership in the management of information and in the knowledge production seems to have led to an evolution in the cultural experience of the public. However, we do not know yet whether the possibility to intervene and manipulate the content really optimize the communication between visitors widening their possibilities of action turning them into a concerned and active audience. In this study, we have analyzed practices and motivations of on line audience, detecting some guidelines that should be considered when incorporating user participation in heritage institutions. The analysis of when a participatory environment can encourage the dissemination of the contents of the museum and engage audiences in an ongoing and repeated relationship that encompasses even the attendance realm, was performed using a qualitative methodological perspective though supported by some quantitative data related to the profiles of the recipients of cultural activities and their practices in the network. The suggestions proposed, by virtue of being the result of an evaluation process of public preferences, would highlight the real needs of on line visitors and reduce the dissociation between the way that museums seek to use their pages and effective practices of their users. Looking at these results, this research (based on the analysis of four case studies) represents an attempt to approach the strategies adopted by the institutional sphere in relation to the new social media and to the current needs of the public.

Keywords: On line museum, Social web, Social networks, On line visitors, Participative practices, Self-motivation, Audience needs, Institutional strategies.

Contribution/ Originality

This study documents the digital strategies used by museums of art and design to communicate with their audiences. The paper's primary contribution is finding those that elicit a positive response from the general public and the factors that are linked implicitly to their success.

1. INTRODUCTION

The transition from the era of mass media to the information and knowledge society has produced a new type of communication that is no longer based on the broadcasting of information to an undifferentiated audience, but organized in networks linked together. This new model has qualitatively transforming everyday communication and information practices in the commercial, financial, professional, educational, recreational and interpersonal sector (Castells, 1997) so that even the museums have been influenced by these new features that define the material basis of what Castells define as 'Network Society'.

These new features arising from the encounter between ICT and museums represent, therefore, an area of experimentation with great potential that Santacana Mestre and Hernández Cardona (2006) define as the new frontier of the current museology. This experiment, however, has produced, at least initially, solutions designed to replicate the communication techniques of the traditional media, establishing with the audience a relationship based on the simple transmission of content.

In fact, at the beginning of the nineties, when Internet knew a massive distribution, museum websites were used as showcases where to publish museum's address and opening hours while only 10 years later the cultural institutions start to incorporate the technology needed to the participation of the public.

The international interest in the cultural participation in fact intensified in the mid-2000s when social networks begin to spread, leading to the gradual creation of a global village and to the transformation of the Web in an information platform open to the contribution and collaboration (Manovich, 2008).

The concept of information produced by the users in museums first appears in the article 'Learning From Amazon And eBay: User-Generated Material For Museum Web Sites' (Durbin, 2004). It described an initiative by the Victoria & Albert Museum where museum managers encourage visitors to post pictures of events of their lives on a museum wall, on the occasion of two temporary exhibitions: Stepping In and Out: Contemporary Documentary Photography y 100 Photographs: A Collection by Bruce Bernard. After the exhibition end, the most significant contents were also published on the website and achieved a big hit in terms of public participation.

In addition, during the same year the V&A in collaboration with BBC and Lomographic Society, also carried out another initiative that provided to the public the opportunity to experience different photographic techniques and to publish the outputs on a virtual gallery on the museum website while other museums, including The 24 Hour Museum (Britain's National Virtual Museum), started experimenting with RSS and Wikis.

Therefore it is from the spread of social networking and the participatory applications that we are witnessing to discussions about how communities and its millions of users can be exploited by cultural institutions to promote heritage and encourage the emergence of groups of regulars to their collections (Von Appen *et al.*, 2006) users.

Generally it is said that cultural institutions' incorporation of web 2.0—that is, online applications, platforms and communication media that aim to facilitate interaction, collaboration, and content exchange in cultural institutions—has made user empowerment possible (Universal, 2008). Indeed, the participatory process inherent in web 2.0 philosophy requires that control be partially ceded to users, whose production of artistic, scientific and documentary content is to be converted into a form of collective knowledge, supported by the thousands of users who choose to collaborate. Despite this, faced with the newness of the 2.0 phenomenon, cultural institutions have implemented different approaches and diverse strategies in the area of heritage sharing.

Therefore the most open institutions have incorporated social networks, social tagging and storytelling techniques years ago. An example is the project Open Collection of the Brooklyn Museum, in which the remote user is encouraged to post pictures of objects, tagging artworks, playing with the tags, sharing their knowledge and disseminate on line its own collections¹.

Likewise projects such as the Tales of Things², the Tate Movie Project of the Tate Modern Gallery of London or the 1001 Stories from Denmark³, are other examples of cultural co-creation through techniques of digital storytelling in which stories and memories are "linked" to the objects and to geographical representations. Such proliferation of ways of incorporating participation in the virtual sphere means that it is necessary to analyze even more the effects determined by the environment in which certain interactions are carried out, or need to be carried out. Based on these premises an investigation based on current practice was made of the conditions that communication strategies adopted by museums in on line space need to respect ultimately, in order to generate a positive effect on user response. Our ultimate goal, then, was to check under what conditions we can achieve favorable dynamics to both strategic knowledge diffusion - capable to maximize the involvement of users and the interest in the information - and construction of a lasting relationship between public and institution. To do that we performed a visitors study of the on line audience using a qualitative methodology based mainly on on line questionnaires and phone interviews.

2. MATERIALS AND METHODS

2.1. Framework: The Characteristics of on Line Space in Participative Practices

In the physical museum, the characteristics of the environment as experienced by visitors, are fundamental at the point at which they construct meaning, which impacts on their behavior, what they look at, and what they remember.

A variety of studies undertaken on art exhibitions (Abrams *et al.*, 1997) and science exhibitions (Luke *et al.*, 1999) etc. show that what the public recalls above all is linked more

1 <http://www.brooklynmuseum.org/opencollection/collections>

2 <http://talesofthings.com/>

3 http://www.kulturarv.dk/1001fortaellinger/en_GB

directly to the emotions and feelings that they experience in the physical context, than to the exhibition content.

Moreover, research carried out by [Csikszentmihalyi and Rochberg-Halton \(1981\)](#) has shown that human beings show high levels of motivation when they find themselves in supportive environments; when they are involved in meaningful activities; when they experience an absence of anxiety, fear, and other negative mental states; when they can exercise choice, as well as control over a situation, and, finally, when the tasks that they have to do are suited to their capabilities.

Therefore, in on line spaces as in the physical museum, the characteristics of the context may influence perception of the environment, effecting the initial choice to access the space, as much as members' use patterns. Indeed the characteristics of the interface, such as the combination of colors, the position of the different elements, the communication style, graphic design, navigation, and potential for interaction can also come to influences users' future memories and their motivation to return ([Norman, 2004](#)).

In this sense, cultural institutions have a wide range of options when deciding strategies to use in on line space that conform, for example, to their central mission. Spatial design arises from these strategies, as well as project characteristics, that is to say established aims, the level of participation, the ways in which collaborators are rewarded, the skills needed to navigate and consume content, the actors involved, among other elements.

As well as all of the above, the fact that 2.0 on line space configures itself like a social space needs to be taken into account. This plays a key part as far as the user is concerned, above all at the unconscious level, which exerts a determining influence on the ways in which they use it. Social applications, in fact, not only operate according to their explicit official function (functional needs), but also in a large part through their ability to induce and satisfy motivations relating to competition, the desire for excellence, curiosity, or the longing to be part of a group ([Giacoma and Casali, 2009](#)) which come to determine the extent to which it penetrates the flux of users' daily activities.

Nevertheless, the development of passive behaviors, the process of individual participation or of involvement in co-creation, arise due to the strategy used in on line space, as well as personal characteristics.

Moreover, as well as satisfying the need to develop personal skills or to feel part of a group, there are other factors linked to strategic contextual elements that can stimulate or hinder the virtual public's involvement in the consumption and handling of content. According to the scaffolding educational paradigm ([Wood *et al.*, 1976](#)) for example, in order for students to develop their own skills, educators need to create a controlled situation, mediated by the presence of a guide, and limited by explicit objectives ([Simon, 2010](#)).

The presence of previously defined specific objectives—as maintained by [Csikszentmihalyi and Rochberg-Halton \(1981\)](#) for instance, can allow the user to gain from benefits that are promoted by their contribution in general, even though the lack of an activities coordinator might

represent a factor that inhibits participation, because without this is is rare for a prospective public to emerge, which is capable of self-motivation.

To this degree a on line space, for example, which provides a system for voting on museum exhibitions might function better, at least according this analysis, than an open, empty space, in which users are asked to record their impressions, although this topic needs further investigation.

Despite this, it is assumed when designing a on line space at least, that open self expression requires the self-generation of individual creativity, and this results in the removal of all indicators that allow participants to control their experience.

2.2. Case-Studies

To meet our objective, a study was made of a group of museums deemed representative in terms of their use of ICT, and more specifically of their participative environments as related to web 2.0.

In addition it was decided to focus just on art and design museums (modern and contemporary) and to gather the consent to participate of a small group of almost four or five institutions. As a result of this selection process, four case studies were chosen: MART (Museo di Arte Moderna e Contemporanea di Trente e Rovereto/ Trento and Rovereto Modern and Contemporary Art Museum), the Thyssen-Bornemiszdade Museum in Madrid, London's Victoria & Albert Museum, and the Indianapolis Museum of Art (IMA).

Only those institutions that are part of our case studies agreed to participate in the investigation, while the other did not reply to our request for collaboration or rejected mentioning the lack of time and resources as justification.

2.3. The Survey

It was thought that the proposal to combine different methodological approaches, as in traditional public studies, might help a general view of the phenomenon to be elaborated, and to overcome the fragmentary and incomplete nature of data provided by metric analysis programs, and programs that measure participation.

Therefore, starting by taking advantage of data that came from the Mart Museum and Thyssen Museum's facilities for statistical analysis, it was thought opportune to approach on line visitors directly, by administering both open and closed questionnaires, accessible online through a distribution link in the museums' social networks.

Initially, closed response questionnaires were targeted at users of the Mart Museum: 135 responses were collected out of 853 hits on the questionnaire between October 2009 and April 2010. Such questionnaire aimed mainly at gathering information about the users profile, their attendance in the on line space (frequency of the visit, time spent in the web and social network linked to the museum, etc.) and the activities carried on (reading, downloading, chatting, posting, commenting, etc.). Responses helped us to better understand who was the on line users and what were its habits and also to adjust the design of the next questionnaires.

In this respect the six months in which users were asked to respond to the survey could be considered sufficient to capture different audiences. They also covered the Christmas and Easter festivals, low season months in which the museum expects a lower volume of tourists, and which partly cover the spring vacation. After an initial investigation had been made into the identity and practices of on line visitors, a questionnaire was designed to gather qualitative information which would provide more depth and detail on web users' experiences. In this case, even though participation required a higher level of involvement, between April and October 2010, 33 open questionnaires were received from a representative part of the 135 Mart Museum users, as well as 39 questionnaires from the Thyssen Bornemisza Museum, 36 from London's Victoria & Albert Museum, and 32 questionnaires from the Indianapolis Museum of Art.

The topics that the open response questionnaire touched upon covered the public's characteristics, its practices (applications used, activities developed, etc.), and the implied and explicit motivations that conditioned them. Indeed the questionnaire aimed to obtain in a direct and indirect way information on:

- ▲ the main reasons that encouraged the user to visit the space.
- ▲ the relationship between self-rated personal skills and activities carried out in the on line space.
- ▲ the satisfaction experienced in the online experience.
- ▲ the importance of other members of the community and of the interaction with them.
- ▲ the propensity to repeat the visit and to engage in some activity in presence of a reward from the institution.
- ▲ the relationship between participation and expectations of a benefit and the characteristics of such benefit.

Finally, interviews were undertaken between October 2010 and April 2011, and to carry these out, a guide was drawn up, which was modified during conversation, according to each user's response.

3. RESULTS: FACTORS THAT IMPACT POSITIVELY ON THE USE OF ONLINE SPACE

3.1. Control over the Experience and Personal Skills

Even through participation is generally a marginal phenomenon in museums, there are criteria that might incite a greater level of public participation in the site, and through that, the emergence of a greater protagonism in users' diffusion of information.

Throughout the analysis, for example, it was possible to detect that the public's participatory response seemed different when faced with structured proposals—when contributions are facilitated by an experience that is controlled and guided by a series of signs—as opposed to completely open spaces—in which users freely self-direct their own creativity.

Indeed, analyzing information from the 140 open response questionnaires it was noted that users (103) who were active in the development of content and etiquette, who published feedback

and other materials, who recommended documents and notices etc., had involved themselves in activities that required a higher level of commitment when they encountered an incentive that came from the institution or perhaps from a community that had also established rules for participation.

In this case public expectations about the benefits of direct involvement correspond to what (Shirky, 2008) identifies as a bargain, where the benefit offered by the institution to support and sustain participation is able to generate a type of negotiated benefit capable of motivating the public. To this extent, then, whether it is the achievement of a personal or a social gain that motivates participation, the presence of a clear and specific, previously defined objective would be needed to foster visitor involvement, as well as the presence of external indicators that guide its expression.

Projects always have a reason and a goal and for this reason the people involved should have a well defined role. I think it is necessary to understand the purpose of an action to decide first if I really want to support it and then if I have the resources to do it.

(User of Mart on line space)

I decided to participate in the project because I thought it had a meaning beyond collecting objects or works. The mission of collecting life and stories of a community was very brave, helpful for us and those who came after even if the problem of how to preserve the long-term digital information is always debated.

(User of IMA on line space)

It is also necessary to consider what the public brings to the page—expectations and needs that it is looking to satisfy through using it. Moreover, these requirements are not just related to the completion of a task or the search for information. Indeed, when users land on a page, they are also inspired by needs that relate to their interests and personality (Hood, 1993); (Falk, 2009).

According to Falk (2009) for example, people participate in an activity due to a wide range of objectives and personal interests that relate to the way in which they see themselves, or to their identity. Moreover, this identity need not be unitary, but is made up of “little ‘i’ identities” (73), which give rise in their turn to a series of needs. In this way also, museum visitors construct meanings based on cultural experience, which they engage in based on the possibility that it will offer them a way to satisfy needs linked to their identity, that is to say, their self perception (Falk, 2009). In this respect, for example, a direct relationship between participation and the presence in the space of strategies and elements that could reinforce the user’s inclinations, was noted throughout the inquiry. These inclinations would tend to play a greater role in the user’s tendency to actively involve themselves than the concrete intentions that led to them accessing and using the space. I have not done what I wished. In Mart website there are just few initiatives for those who want to produce artistic content. (...) I dedicate to photography. The Mart organized a competition years ago about photography and then has not returned to propose anything interesting for those who have my ambitions. For this reason when I want to experience my abilities and make people know me I check on the Metropolitan or MoMa website.

(User of Mart on line space)

I would have liked to find a space for interesting conversations. However I fail to feel really protagonist, there is any forum where opening new discussions or any blog where addressing issues that are interesting for me (...) Unfortunately I feel active and creative but hardly find the right space for it.

(User of Mart on line space)

Therefore, the manner in which visitors perceive themselves influences their expectations of the space, in the same way that the characteristics of the environment exert an influence through their potential to confirm this perception. Moreover, when investigating this aspect of museum experience the aim was to try to ascertain how users perceive themselves in relation to the space being explored—what they prefer to do in it, for example, when they feel most competent, and the aims that they want to pursue when they make contact. This has allowed for a overview of the different things that motivate users, which according to analysis are a) the tendency to affirm their own creativity through producing things individually or through community collaboration b) the propensity to discover new content and satisfy their own curiosity c) the inclination to create networks, make contacts, exchange and disseminate information, and d) the tendency to search for educational resources, and to assimilate new concepts. Here it can be observed that the same space can be constituted as the backdrop for very different experiences depending on the specific need that has given rise to the visit, as well as personal inclinations, and therefore the perception of its particular role in the overall context.

The lack of elements needed to stimulate participation would limit active involvement in the space because, for example, users who are inclined to be sociable would hold back in the absence of elements that allow for communication; creative types would tend to become more passive without initiatives that allow for creativity, etc. It is also worth pointing out that up to now only the objectives of users who visit the space on a more or less regular basis have taken into account, without looking into those interests that the museum cannot satisfy, which push people towards other types of experience.

3.2. Inclusion in a Group

Another factor that can kindle the wish to participate actively in an institution's campaigns, and in the diffusion of its brand, can begin as a feeling of gratitude, and an attachment to the museum community, which in this case is defined as group awareness. Group awareness would correspond to a type of consciousness of belonging to a community that offered the possibility of gaining benefits by giving something in return, following a principle of reciprocity.

In the cases analyzed, for example, almost all the participants in the study who consider themselves loyal users maintain relationships with other members of the community and intend to look to these contacts also in the future. Indeed, when detailed user responses to the question of why the possibility of sharing and exchanging with others is key to their decision to maintain links in on line space are analyzed, it can be noted that the majority records similarities with the

real world. The virtual environment, for example, turns—in respondents' descriptions at least—into a village square in which citizens maintain relationships despite the fact that their friends are identified with their own network of contacts in the case of social networks, readers in the case of a blog, or followers in the case of a micro blogging program like Twitter or Tumblr. This feeling of being part of a community, which is experienced through maintaining contacts, effects the public's level of satisfaction and ultimately also its propensity to get involved in the space and to make repeat visits. I do not remember how many times I have shared information with the group. I have also invited other friends who live near the museum to share the Facebook page. I think social networks make feel IMA as more than a museum of traditional art, but as a way to experience art. I'm committed in sharing information with my contacts because all we are part of a group. Since I can benefit from useful information published by others it is also right to lend a hand to other members when they need. If the museum provides us these new environments will be advisable to use them for the common good and to benefit the institution that provided such space to discuss.

(User of IMA on line space)

I share information because many times I took advantage of the materials published by others. Maybe also my documents helped other users and this makes me feel very excited. (...) some of them also thanked me for sharing my presentation slides about the use of metadata. (...) It is also clear that exchanging information carries no real benefit but allows the creation of a common space, a repository of news, where to look when searching for something that can not be found elsewhere.

(User of Mart on line space)Moreover, the practice of sharing with other community members, as well as being useful in adding to available information, presents an opportunity to kindle a sense of inclusion, which in turn increases an inclination towards altruism and excellence, or even the search for group approval. The sense of being included in a group is boosted by the use of strategies that promote exchange and collaboration through initiatives that get the community involved. This signifies that in order to add value to the individual's experience, the user needs to sense the presence of a group, because the greater the presence of shared dynamics, the greater the satisfaction experienced, and the greater the impulse to make a repeat visit. In addition to this, the sense of inclusion in a community is ratified when the differences between various types of users are taken into account, and a strategy put forward to ensure that everyone feels included and accepted. For example, to this end, users speak negatively about the use of expert language, because of its exclusive nature.

At the same time, it needs to be taken into account that different networks inspire a particular communicative style, and privilege some forms of participation over others. For this reason it is not productive, for example, to use web networks such as Facebook or Twitter on the home page, without also facilitating a space for those who want to develop debates that are deeper and more highly elaborated, as this can cause some users to feel excluded from the community.

For this reason, for example, the space needs to include a blog or forum at least, that can allow for a more sophisticated form of exchange. In the case of MART, for instance, the lack of a blog has led to dissatisfaction among some users who would like to engage with experts, and develop more extensive discussions. And so, awareness of a group, as well as the need to feel part of it, and to take on a role that might be a motivation for participation, could be stimulated by strategies that favor cohesion and exchange. In addition, in this case, the introduction of functionalities that allow digital posts to be sent or a shared web gallery to be created could boost group contact and lead to a higher level of bonding between users and community.

3.3. Interaction with the Institution and Personal Recognition

Questionnaires and interviews that address this issue, highlight the fact that the use of 2.0 applications promotes satisfaction and loyalty among users when they foster a more fluid encounter with the institution, actively allow for public participation, and when it is possible to discover its internal workings. Sustaining feedback, for example, as in offline life, has positive connotations for the user, and also boosts the affective dimension, which—according to visitors—brings “warmth,” “friendliness,” “trust,” and “familiarity” to their relationship with the museum. After posting the photos of a trip I did in London in my Flickr account, I was contacted by the community manager of the V&A who encouraged me to post them on the museum's Flickr account. I did and then I started to visit the V&A group. This increased my interest in the museum, until I felt I had a personal connection with it still in time.

(User of V&A on line space)

My relationship with him is warm, inviting, attractive, exciting. I especially like being able to contact those who work there as this opens many doors to those who have interesting things to say. (...) I feel part of their community and when I can not go I visit it virtually and I talk with others by mail or chat. The museum looks sleek and modern and familiar at the same time. In these years I have managed to turn my friends that were not interested in art in its fans.

(User of V&A on line space)

Loyal visitors also recognize how important the possibility of having a channel of communication with the museum is to them, which can be observed to have an affective dimension. Furthermore, users who were asked about this aspect when interviewed confirmed that contact with the institution has the benefit of making them feel bonded to the museum, and it is precisely this feeling of closeness that gives them the feeling that they that their learning is being enriched.

They also talk a great deal about the “human face” that the museum gains, thanks, for example, to the possibility of identifying with behind the scenes employees through information published in public profiles. Indeed many interviewees, for example, mention the photographs that these professionals publish on the networks, along with information, tastes and preferences, as being elements that feed the perception of real closeness. In this way, the fact that the museum emphasizes its more human side (as represented by its staff) entails the approval of its public.

Little by little, the informality made possible by the participative web is modifying the perception of the museum which, in the imagination of those visiting, tends to become associated more and more closely each time with a social network of professionals engaging in different occupations to achieve a common aim, as opposed to a container for art works, which seems difficult to access at times. At the same time, social networks—marked out as informal spaces—have drastically curtailed the use of institutional language, as it is feared it might confuse the public. In fact if institutional language is used in these social spaces, where human conversation takes place, the public tends to feel that they have not really understood its character (Cordero, 2009). However, one of the most important factors is the desire to listen to the opinions and needs of users. To this end, it is apparent that the public is generally pleased when the institution is open to questions, likes to take part in its conversations, and is happy when its views are taken into account.

The Mart and Thyssen museums' social network administrators also confirmed the importance of listening and of learning to listen. They claim that the new audience, especially its younger members—which in this case are defined as a community—demand more and more active forms of involvement and participation, as well as demanding to be listened to, and to be taken into account in decision making. One example is the debate produced on Thyssen's Facebook page in response to the question posed by the museum: What do you think about the idea of getting rid of the Anglicized web “Newsletter” and replacing it with “Bolétin de notices”? This query, one where the museum took a great deal of interest in user opinion, received almost seventy comments as well as generating preferences expressed by 80 users who pressed the “like” button.

Similarly, the “Work of the Day” initiative, which allowed users to designate their favorite work, and publish on the Facebook page in the Mart Museum's “Our Choice [Scelti da noi]” and “Your Choice [Scelti da voi]” sections, which were dedicated to works in the permanent collection, proved to be extremely popular among interviewees, and effectively led them to participate more fully.

It has been possible to discern two factors that can boost satisfaction and so generate affective bonds with users: the first arises from the confidence that the museum instills in users during decision making, and the second concerns the visibility that the museum accords its own point of view.

In addition to these, it is important for users to feel that they are treated like regulars, and that they receive recognition—ideally public recognition—for what they bring.

The surveys also highlight the fact that users who make repeat visits, alongside a channel of communication with the institution, are looking for the opportunity to cast a sidelong glance at the museum, and go backstage, in order to observe things that are not possible in a physical visit. Because of this, users who were interviewed stated that they especially appreciated it when the institution itself spoke in a transparent manner.

As far as these cases studied are concerned, the IMA, for instance, has created the IMA Dashboard⁴, which allows users to look at information that the museum has collected from different sectors, including data relating to economic inputs and outputs, visitor numbers, the average time that they spent on the website, the number of fans, energy consumption, the number of students who have taken part in educational visits, etc. What is noticeable in this case is that the “transparency” that the dashboard offers is available more or less in real time.

Nevertheless, when users speak about transparency, they are referring more to the visibility of what occurs inside the institution, who works there, what professionals think, who has designed an exhibition and how they view the result. In short, users are interested in intriguing things that cannot normally be discovered during a physical visit. Their diffusion tends to foster perception of the institution as somehow being more accessible, as facing problems that are familiar to all—as normal people do—(reducing outgoings, taking decision, trying to be successful, and to avoid failure, for instance.)

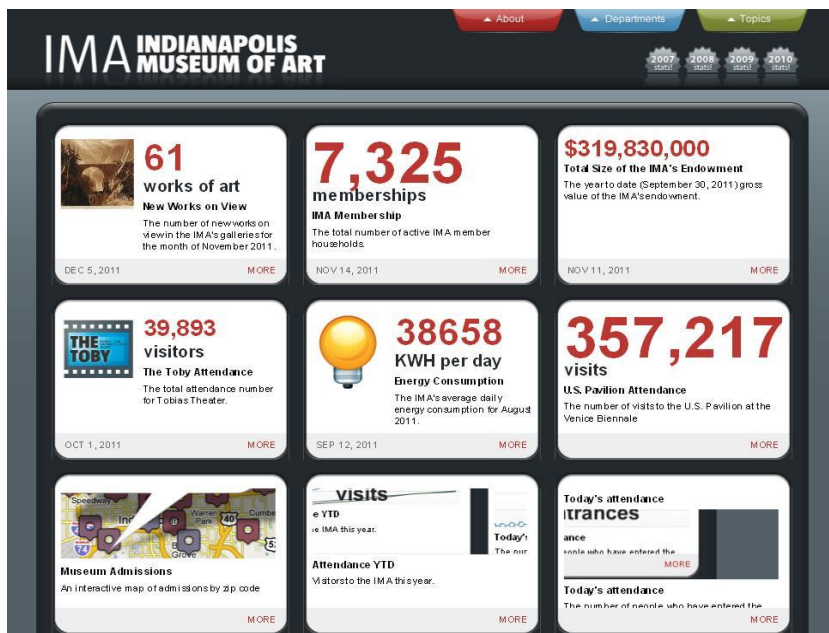


Image-1. IMA DASHBOARD

In this respect, for example, monthly or weekly columns in which different professionals present their favorite works, or which offer an opportunity to gain an insight into the work, passions and opinions of the museum’s internal community of individuals, are very much appreciated. At times, when these opinions are made visible, it gives rise to a sense of surprise, through the discovery of points that users have in common with members of the staff team.

4 <http://dashboard.imamuseum.org/recent>

To some degree such museum-led tendencies and initiatives offer users an opportunity to engage in cultural voyeurism, or to gain access to what goes on behind the scenes, get to know the professionals and consume arts-related news alongside interpretations provided by concrete people whose tastes and preferences sometimes give rise to shared emotions.

This phenomenon entails the sharing of content previously considered a little irrelevant or destined to be hidden in the archives. Indeed one can see the spread, for example, of videos of interviews with artists, lecturers, museum directors, curators, etc., reports that document the different phases of exhibitions, which lead to tangible results in the exhibition spaces, staff-edited articles that give a day-to-day account of what happens in the museum, and in which staff share their opinions. The net is the ideal space for exploring all of these possibilities, which—for now at least—are not practical during in situ visits.

4. DISCUSSION

The design of the virtual museum and the strategies that are used in it to elicit a positive response from the general public must take into account a series of factors that are linked implicitly, for example, the desire for inclusion, the urge to feel competent, and the longing to stand out from the rest of the members of the community.

Indeed the things that motivate web users and come to mold their practices are found to be closely intertwined, and can be effectively identified with a range of implicit needs—like feeling useful, gaining recognition of personal skills, being part of a group—as well as pleasurable aspects like control over one's own experience. In short, users seek to gain satisfaction through their online cultural experience. For this reason, the use of strategies capable of promoting the feeling of being part of a group, for instance, or of offering a certain degree of visibility, or of gaining recognition via collectively-produced attribution processes, prove attractive to members of a community as they act on their desire for excellence, for example.

Similarly, initiatives that foster exchange, and the creation of connections between users promote the feeling of being included in the community, which boosts the formation of an affective link with it, and results in a greater degree of altruism towards its other members.

Moreover, in the case of cultural and social spaces, it is inadvisable to simply stop at giving the public tools, as a great number of users—as well as using such tools for a variety of personal reasons—are motivated by the wish to make contact with the institution, to sense its presence, and, at the same time, to gain some recognition for their participation.

Judging from the data collected it would also be advisable to design environments that aim to give everyone the option of putting into practice their own perceived skills in order to allow them to have that experience as users, given that these feelings turn out to be more important than the proportion of completely new experiences that are designed to get the public to conform to unanticipated objectives.

Based on the data gathered in this study, it is also possible to assert that the tangible benefits associated with being part of the museum community (discounted entry charges, invitations to

special events, discounts in the museum shop or on online purchases, access to certain information, etc.) are strongly conditioned by the intangible benefits.

4.1. Significance of the Results Related to Research Work

The importance and relevance of this study lies in the fact to be focused mainly on the audience and on the strategies for designing and/or redesigning communities and communication processes according to the users needs.

In the past few years - in fact - the IMLS has insisted on several occasions on the need to conduct assessments and surveys on users preferences and on the importance of taking into account their perspectives about the digital content and online resources. Also, many authors and professionals (Hooper-Greenhill, 1999) highlight the same needs and the importance of understanding the public with the aim to design digital environments and initiatives more appropriate to their needs and expectations.

Given these assumptions, the results obtained in this study represent an attempt to approach the strategies adopted by the institutional domain to the current needs of the public in relation to the new social media. This approach does not necessarily imply that one of the parties involved have to adapt to the trend set by the opposing party. If users are looking for informal learning and entertainment does not mean that the institution does not have to invest effort in digitizing their heritage but that it is crucial to understand the most functional way to present it in order to reach its goals.

5. ACKNOWLEDGMENTS

I would like to thank all the participants in the study for their crucial contributions and also to express my profound gratitude and deep regards to Guillermo Miranda of the Thyssen Bornemisza Foundation for his support.

REFERENCES

- Abrams, C., J. Falk and M. Adams, 1997. Art around the corner: Year 3 evaluation report. Technical Report. Annapolis, MD: Science Learning.
- Castells, M., 1997. La era de la información: Economía, sociedad y cultura. Madrid: Alianza Editorial, 1.
- Cordero, P., 2009. Museos 2.0: Las redes sociales como enlace directo entre los museos y su público. Paper Presented at the IV Congress on Cybersociety, Barcelona [Accessed November, 11, 2009].
- Csikszentmihalyi, M. and E. Rochberg-Halton, 1981. The meaning of things: Domestic symbols and the self. New York: Cambridge University Press.
- Durbin, G., 2004. Learning from amazon and EBay: User-generated material for museum web sites. Museums and the web 2004: Proceedings. [En línea]. Reino Unido: Archives & Museum Informatics. Disponible en. Available form: <http://www.archimuse.com/mw2004/papers/durbin/durbin.html> [Accessed 25 de Octubre, 2007].
- Falk, J., 2009. Identity and the museum visitor experience. Walnut Creek, CA: Left Coast Press.

- Giacoma, G. and D. Casali, 2009. Mo.De. - motivational design - versione 1.5. Ibridazioni. Available from <http://ibridazioni.com/2009/06/17/mode-motivational-design-versione-15/> [Accessed June 14, 2009].
- Hood, M., 1993. After 70 years of audience research, what have we learned? Visitor studies. Theory, Research and Practice, 15: 17–27.
- Hooper-Greenhill, E., 1999. Communication in theory and practice. In E. Hooper-Greenhill (Ed.). The educational role of the museum. 2nd Edn., London: Routledge. pp: 28-43.
- Luke, J., L.K. Buchner, D. Dierking and B. O’Ryan, 1999. Creative world summative evaluation: California science center. Annapolis, MD: Institute for Learning Innovation.
- Manovich, L., 2008. Software takes command. November 2008, unpublished edition. Available from http://softwarestudies.com/softbook/manovich_softbook_11_20_2008.pdf.
- Norman, D., 2004. Emotional design: Why we love (or Hate) everyday things. New York: Basic Books.
- Santacana Mestre, J. and F.X. Hernández Cardona, 2006. Museología crítica. Gijón: Trea,S.L.
- Shirky, C., 2008. Here comes everybody: The power of organizing without organizations. New York: Penguin.
- Simon, N., 2010. The participatory museum. Santa Cruz: Museum 2.0.
- Universal, M., 2008. Power to the people. Social media tracker wave 3. Available from http://universalmccann.bitecp.com/wave_3.pdf [Accessed February 10 , 2014].
- Von Appen, K., B. Kennedy and J. Spadaccini, 2006. Community sites & emerging sociable technologies, en J. Trant and D. Bearman (eds.). Museums and the web 2006: Proceedings. [En línea]. Toronto: Archives & Museum Informatics. Disponible en. Available from: <http://www.archimuse.com/mw2006/papers/vonappen/vonappen.htmleditor'snote> [Accessed 4 de Enero, 2008].
- Wood, D., J. Bruner and G. Ross, 1976. The role of tutoring in problem solving. Journal of Child Psychology and Psychiatry, 17(2): 89–100.

Views and opinions expressed in this article are the views and opinions of the author(s), Journal of New Media and Mass Communication shall not be responsible or answerable for any loss, damage or liability etc. caused in relation to/arising out of the use of the content.