Title - After-hours events at the National Museum of Scotland: a product for attracting, engaging and retaining new museum audiences?

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Abstract

Cultural heritage is recognised as one of the major contributors to the economy and has traditionally been funded from the public sector. Museums have had to become more commercial as a result of declining core funding sources and changing visitor expectations. Operating in an increasingly competitive tourism operating environment, museums have moved away from their traditional role as collectors and conservators of artefacts of historical importance, to become more audience- focused visitor attractions. This obligation to meet the needs and wants of its visitors has resulted in an improved museum experience, where museums are increasingly offering specially curated after-hours event experiences to attract, engage and retain new audiences such as Generation Y.

This research uses National Museums Scotland as a case study to apply audience development and visitor attraction management theories to explore the effectiveness of after-hours events in attracting, engaging and retaining new museum audiences. Following a comprehensive narrative literature review, it employs qualitative semi-structured interviews and a quantitative on-line self-completion survey to collect the necessary data.

The research findings suggest that after-hours events have been successful in attracting and engaging new museum audiences and encouraging repeat visits, therefore achieving the event and museum objectives. It is also seen that products designed specifically for one new audience may have broader appeal in engaging with other new and established audiences. The research concludes with recommendations that could be adopted by museums and the broader visitor attraction sector to further encourage new and repeat visits.

Keywords   audiences; museums; after-hours; engaging visitors

1.0 Introduction

Museums are an important cultural asset in many destinations, with artefacts of incalculable worth generating tourist interest, providing resources to deepen knowledge, and inspiring talent and creativity in future generations (Scottish Government, 2010). As collectors, conservators and custodians of historically important artefacts, museums traditionally make their collections available to the public through interpretive display (International Council of Museums, 2007). However demographic and generational change has led to recognition by museum professionals of an obligation to meet the needs, expectations and demands of its visitors, resulting in the development of strategies to not only re-engage core museum visitors, but to attract and engage new audiences (Black, 2012). In response to changing operating environments and declining sources of public funding museums have altered the way in which they present their collections to the public, becoming more audience focused and providing improved visitor experiences through digital media and more creative interpretation of exhibits and displays (Black, 2016; Leask & Barron, 2013). Trott (2008) maintains that product innovation may satisfy an individual's needs and desires, and museums are increasingly using specially curated after-hours (also referred to as Lates) event experiences as a product to attract and engage new audiences. These are often directed at Generation Y (those born between 1982 and 2002), who possess a particular set of needs and desires (Barron & Leask, 2017) and who are often unable to visit during the day (Museums Association, 2012). Morgan, Lugosi and Ritchie (2010) suggest that further research is needed into the role that experience management plays in developing and retaining new museum audiences, and the subsequent contribution to the more effective management of museums operating within the competitive visitor attraction sector.

This research paper aims to assess the effectiveness of after-hours events in attracting, engaging and retaining new, young audiences to museums. Both qualitative and quantitative methods were used to gather the primary data with semi-structured interviews with managers, plus an on-line self-completion questionnaire distributed to after-hours event attendees.

2.0 Literature Review

2.1 Museums as Visitor Attractions

Visitor attractions are natural, cultural or built assets that have been created or converted into permanent visitor experiences, where visitor interpretation and engagement is a core purpose of the development and management of the site (Leask, 2018). Key constituents of destinations, attractions offer both the motivation to visit and enhance the appeal for local visitors, workers and students. They operate in increasingly competitive marketplaces, with growing supply, declining funding sources, and constantly changing visitor expectations.

Increasingly accepted as being part of the visitor attraction sector, museums are additionally under increasing scrutiny and financial pressure, facing a variety of commercial and accountability imperatives, whilst working to maintain their curatorial obligations (Davis, 2013).Historically, museums made their collections available to the public through their interpretation of the artefacts on display, however the implementation of audience development strategies; recognition of the diverse needs and expectations of different visitor segments; and an increasing need to evidence their value in light of public funding cuts, museums have had to change how they interpret and present their collections to the public (Black, 2005; Ambrose & Paine, 2012; Wells, Butler & Koke, 2016). The visitor experience at some museums is evolving to be a more innovative and engaging one, beginning before the visitor has entered the museum through interaction with the museum website or social media (Marty, 2007); during the visit via engagement and interaction between the individual and the museum's exhibits (Smith & Richards, 2013); and continuing post visit, as the experience can evoke personal memories and support long-term learning (Falk & Dierking, 2013).

2.3 Museum Audiences

Audience development, a key strategic objective for museums today, is the process of improving the visitor experience for existing audiences as well as attracting and engaging new ones (Waltl, 2006). Museum audiences are diverse, with changing needs and values, and a desire to widen their experiences and deepen their engagement with culture (Falk & Dierking, 2013; Morris, Hargreaves McIntyre, 2013). Historically, cultural attractions conducted visitor research based upon the quantitative analysis of statistical data pertaining

to the population and the diverse groups within it (Christidou, 2010). Demographic data was collected to ascertain which audiences were visiting in order to focus marketing towards these groups, with little effort made to determine the reasons for visiting or to establish what the visitor was looking for (Kolb, 2013). Today cultural organisations are introducing new frameworks to inform and develop their understanding of their existing and potential visitors in order to create strategies to attract new audiences, retain existing audiences, and to encourage existing audiences to engage more frequently (Taheri, Jafari & O'Gorman, 2014).

Whilst tourist interest in cultural organisations continues to grow, the attendance of core museum audiences is declining, and museums must develop strategies to engage and retain these core audiences, namely the well-educated professional, their friends and families (Black, 2016). This is in addition to attracting new audiences such as those hard to reach audiences who do not currently visit (Lehman, Wickham & Fillis, 2016) and new audiences who may not consider the traditional museum product as being of interest to them (Barron & Leask, 2017).

Goulding (2000) maintains that before strategies or products to reach new audiences can be developed, cultural organisations first need to establish an understanding of the characteristics surrounding the museum experience from the visitor's point of view. Pine and Gilmour (1999) relate the visitor experience to the theatre, maintaining that experiences are created when an individual is engaged in a unique and personal way via the four realms of an experience that includes entertainment, education, escapism, and aesthetics. Alternatively, Sheng and Chen's (2011, p. 58) study revealed 'easiness and fun, cultural entertainment, personal identification, historical reminiscence and escapism' as the five factors that determine museum visitor experience expectations. Audiences are looking for more participatory experiences (Mencarelli et al., 2010) and cultural attractions are increasingly designing experiences to involve visitors in co-creating their own experience. 'The process by which products, services, and experiences are developed jointly by companies and their stakeholders, opening up a whole new world of value' (Ramaswamy, 2009, p. 11), co-creation can link to a visitor's own unique personal, cultural and social values (Ferrari, 2013). This can be used by event managers to design experiences that include co-creative opportunities pre-event, during the event and post-event in order to engage audiences (Crowther & Orefice, 2015). This can help develop the transformative

(Soren, 2009); shared (Mencarelli, Marteaux & Pulh, 2010); and 'unique and personal' (Packer & Ballantyne, 2016, p.133), experiences most valued by different groups of visitors.

Wilkening and Chung (2009) maintain that in order to better understand audiences it is important to be aware of their generational characteristics, with each cohort growing up facing unique experiences and surrounded by different political, economic, social and technological influences. A confident, relaxed and well-educated cohort, Generation Y individuals are technologically competent, and prolific users of the Internet, e-mail and social media (Pendergast, 2010). This generational cohort seeks consumption experiences that are fun and memorable, preferring to attend events and take part in activities that have been specifically devised and intended for them as a particular audience (Benckendorff & Moscardo, 2010; Calver & Page, 2013. Generation Y (born in the 1980s and 1990s) are not traditionally key visitors to museums, although they are considered to be the next large generational cohort and a key target audience for many visitor attractions (Leask & Barron, 2013)), and thus they are an ideal group for museums to target as a new audience.

2.3 Attracting and engaging new audiences via after-hours events at museums

Museums can, in addition to their core learning programme, use special events as a product to attract and engage new visitors and encourage repeat visits (Leask, Fyall & Barron, 2014). They are also used as a means to encourage those audiences to engage with other museum experiences such as special paying exhibitions, other events and activities (Veall, 2015). Getz (2012) maintains that the basic foundations of event design consist of setting, management, and people which combine to facilitate unique, satisfying, and memorable, event experiences that will attract and engage visitors. Bowdin, Allen, O'Toole, Harris and McDonnell (2011) maintain that the theming of an event is key to creative design with well-designed themes incorporating the five senses of sight, sound, smell, taste, and touch in order to engage audiences and create memorable experiences (Silvers, 2004; Getz, 2012). Audience engagement tools such as webpages are used by museums to communicate new experience offerings to their audiences (Wilson, 2011), with social media used to enable the co-creation of value (Rihova, Buhalis, Moital & Gouthro, 2013) and to engage with audiences before, during and after an event. Destination-wide initiatives such as *Museums at Night* began in 2002 when Paris held its first 'Nuit Blanche'

event to attract a young audience by encouraging cultural organisations to open their doors after-hours to engage with different audiences (Museums at Night, n.d.). In the UK the V&A was first, in 2001, to curate regular special events with a social agenda designed to attract and engage Generation Y audiences who were unable to visit during the day and to change any preconceived impressions of museums as cultural venues ((Museums Association, 2012; Atkinson, 2012). In 2018 VisitBritain's annual survey shows that 28% of attractions now offer after-hours (Late) events, worth £9.6 million in ticket earnings (Culture24, 2018).

It has been established that audience development is a key objective for cultural organisations today, with museums developing strategies and frameworks to understand and engage with different audiences, who each possess a diverse range of shared characteristics. Engagement with new audiences is critical in the future success of museums as they seek to evidence their relevance, value and contribution within increasingly competitive funding and visitor environments. One such new audience that museums are seeking to attract is Generation Y, young, culturally active visitors. Literature exists on the characteristics of Generation Y (Benckendorff & Moscardo, 2010; Jennings et al., 2010) andthe potential use of specially curated after-hours experiences by cultural attractions to attract them (Leask, Fyall & Barron, 2013). However it appears that little research has been conducted with respect to the effectiveness of the after-hours event product in attracting and engaging Generation Y as a new audience to museums or the role that such designed experiences play in creating repeat visits (Burton, Louviere & Young, 2009; Morgan et al., 2010).

3.0 Case context – National Museums Scotland

National Museums Scotland (NMS) is one of Europe's most important museum groups, with a mission to 'preserve, interpret, and make accessible for all, the past and present of Scotland, other nations and cultures, and the natural world' (NMS, n.d.). A Non-Departmental Public body, NMS is governed by a Board of Trustees appointed by the Scottish Government. The organisation's main source of income is received through Scottish Government Grant-in-Aid, with other income generated through grants, donations and income from commercial activities (NMS, 2016a).

The National Museum of Scotland (NMoS), the largest of the organisation's 4 museum sites, currently attracts in excess of 2.2 million visitors per annum, and is the UK's most popular visitor attraction outside London (ALVA, 2018). To address a priority strategic objective of engaging new audiences with its collections, through the creation of inspiring and memorable visitor experiences, the concept of holding after-hours events at the NMoS was introduced by the organisation in 2011 following extensive refurbishment (NMS, n.d.). This initiative aligned with a Scottish Government national indicator to increase cultural engagement (Scottish Government, 2012). Originally sponsored by the Royal Bank of Scotland (RBS), 'RBS Lates' were designed to showcase the recently refurbished NMoS, and to appeal to, and engage, young (over 18) cultural audiences living locally. Visitors were given the opportunity to explore the museum and try out some of its interactive exhibits in an adult-only environment after-hours, whilst listening to live music performances and silent disco. Other activities included face painting, plus light learning opportunities including expert talks and object handling. Drinks and snacks were also available for purchase, with events generally scheduled twice yearly to tie in with the NMoS special exhibition programme.

A further series of after-hours events were developed in partnership with the List and C Venues in 2013. Developed to appeal to the Edinburgh festivals audience, 'Museum After Hours' stages a variety of Fringe performances in the unique setting of the NMoS, and like the 'Museum Lates', visitors can socialise whilst exploring the museum, its collections and special exhibitions after-hours. In addition to the above are events hosted by NMS but curated by external partners such as Neu! Reekie!

A total of five after-hours events being held at the NMoS during 2016, namely 'Museum Late: Celts', 'Museum After Hours', and Neu! Reekie! Celts. The events attracted audiences of 1,903, 4,184, and 1,020 respectively (NMS, 2016b). The highest proportion of attendees responding to the feedback survey fell into the age bracket 25 – 34 with the least number of attendees falling into the 18 – 24 and 60+ age brackets across all five events. Feedback collected at the time was generally positive, with visitors describing the evenings as interesting, eclectic, and atmospheric, as well as fun and entertaining (NMS 2016b).

However, whilst NMS generally collates feedback on the content of all after-hours events in order to improve future offerings, it has to date not carried out any follow-up research to establish whether after-hour events have achieved the broader aims of light learning via engagement with permanent and temporary exhibitions or led to repeat visits to the NMoS at other times. Further research in this area will help NMS to assess and potentially refresh the effectiveness of the strategies it has implemented to attract, engage, and retain culturally active audiences.

4.0 Research Methodology and Methods

4.1. Research Methodology

For the purposes of this empirical study, an interpretive approach was adopted as this was deemed to be the most suitable method as it provides the researcher with an understanding of their different behaviours, beliefs and reactions (Saunders et al., 2009). It also gives study participants the opportunity to explain their own situation or behaviour, in turn providing the researcher with an understanding of the respondent's point of view (Veal & Burton, 2014; Pansiri, 2006). This research is also evaluative (Bryman & Bell, 2015), as it aims to assess the effectiveness of strategies adopted to attract, engage and retain museum audiences.

Case study research is used to explore a subject or phenomenon within a real-life context (Saunders et al., 2009), and may be limited to a single organisation with evidence from a variety of sources to allow a detailed and in-depth analysis (Yin, 2014). The need for additional research to assess the effectiveness of the NMS strategy to engage young cultural audiences via after-hours events has been highlighted, confirming the organisation's suitability for study. NMS was therefore selected as a single case study, with access to the organisation's archives, databases and management agreed. A thorough narrative literature review (Onwuegbuzie & Frels, 2016; Mair et al, 2016; Bourhis, 2017) critiquing existing research in the areas of visitor experience, experience design, audience development, and audience engagement was undertaken in order to develop an understanding of the existing theories, to identify gaps and to inform the research question. In addition, a thorough review of NMS visitor research studies, including statistical information and documentation on the organisation's different audience segments was conducted.

4.2 Research methods

It has been established (Ritchie et al, 2013) that while the world views of the prevailing positivist and anti-positivist approaches are contradictory, the use of both informs the next stage of research and overcomes the deficiencies of the previous, leading to further understanding of the phenomena under study. This mixed method approach has the added advantage of improved validity by allowing the findings of one investigative method to be tested against the findings from another, in effect a method of triangulation (Downward & Mearman, 2004). This approach offers a way of enhancing the understanding of a very complex social world that confronts tourism researchers (Pansiri, 2006) and to study phenomena with practical value and application. Mixed methods were deemed the most appropriate for investigating the research question, enabling the researchers to gather perspectives from both those designing the new products (the managers) and those engaging with the new after-hours products (audience).

Face-to-face semi-structured interviews were held with managers working within NMS to explore these themes, and to determine how NMS uses after-hours events to attract, engage, and retain new audiences. A series of open-ended questions was developed, based on themes and questions arising from the literature review, and subsequent analysis of NMS documentation. These included aspects such as to strategies adopted to target new audiences such as Generation Y; experience design methods used to enhance co-creation and audience engagement; challenges encountered during the after-hours events; and the effectiveness of the new products in engaging new audiences. The interviews were held at the NMoS on Tuesday 7 March 2017 and Wednesday 8 March 2017. Participant consent was obtained and, to maintain an accurate record and to allow for detailed analysis, each interview was recorded and transcribed within 48 hours (Bryman & Bell, 2015).

An on-line self-completion questionnaire was developed and administered using the survey tool NOVI, in order to evaluate the effectiveness of after-hours events in attracting and engaging audiences with the NMoS. Leading from the key issues identified in the literature review, the survey consisted of 22 questions designed to assess the respondent's motivation for attending an after-hours event at the NMoS; to ascertain their engagement with the event experience itself; and to determine their subsequent level of engagement with the museum. Questions were specifically selected to explore each part of the research

focus, for example, motivations for attending (attracting audiences); details of their experience at the events (engagement); and subsequent interaction with the museum (retaining new audiences). Mainly closed questions were used to ease questionnaire processing (Bryman & Bell, 2015), plus two open-ended questions which were subsequently analysed for recurring themes.

4.3 Sampling and validity

For the purposes of the study, non-probability sampling was used (Saunders et al., 2009). For the qualitative research, interviewees were selected purposively based on their position within NMS, and on the likelihood that they would be able to answer the research questions, and in turn contribute to the overall study (Bryman & Bell, 2015). Convenience sampling is a sample that is accessible to the researcher (Saunders et al., 2009), and this method of sampling was used for the quantitative research. NMS granted access to an e-mail database, and the link to the on-line questionnaire was forwarded to those individuals who purchased tickets for an after-hours event at the NMoS during 2016 through the NMS website, and who had consented to future contact. To minimise the threat to validity, care was taken when designing the survey to ensure that the questions developed could be both understood and answered by the respondent. The research is presented in the form of a case study, and whilst the conclusions resulting from this type of research are not normally considered generalisable (Cooper & Schindler, 2014), the case study approach is the most effective means of determining the effectiveness of strategies and practices (Getz, 2008).

4.4 Data Analysis

The data gathered through qualitative interviews with NMS managers was analysed in order to assess the applicability of the theories and concepts identified in the literature review within the NMS environment. The information gathered was then assessed, evaluated, and compared with those identified theories and concepts, which in turn answered the study objectives (Veal & Burton, 2014).

Different forms of analysis were used to analyse the self-completion questionnaire, which consisted of both open and closed questions. The open questions were analysed by means of content analysis to establish recurring themes (Saunders et al., 2009). Closed questions were analysed using NOVI survey's integrated analytical tools and Microsoft Excel.

5.0 Results and Discussion

5.1 Data sources

Two semi-structured interviews with museum managers directly involved in the development and delivery of the after-hours events were conducted and transcribed.

For the survey, an invitation to complete the on-line questionnaire was sent to a total of 1,162 individuals who had purchased a ticket (and consented to future contact) through the NMS website to an after-hours event at the NMoS in 2016. The survey questionnaire was open to respondents from 16 to 23 March 2017. Ten responses were invalid, resulting in a total of 143 valid responses and an overall response rate of 12.3%. Please refer to Figure 1 for the breakdown of the respondents by age.

INSERT FIGURE 1 HERE

5.2 The Design of engaging After-hours Event Experiences at the NMoS

NMS managers responsible for this programme consider that the after-hours event visitor has a different experience expectation, having paid to engage with the museum, and therefore design their evenings to make visitors feel as though they've had 'a really unique experience' and 'to ensure attendees can interact and engage with the museum in a way that they would not be able to if they visited during the day' (Respondent 1). Aware that people learn and engage in different ways (Respondent 2), NMS has designed and branded their range of evening events and activities to appeal to different audiences. Each has a clear identity and offers learning opportunities that allow visitors to 'dip into one thing, then move onto another, stay involved in something for quite a while, or just sort of skim across the surface'. Lighting, sound and decoration is also used to change the look and feel of the event space (Respondent 1).

Interviews with NMS managers revealed that they consider the visitor experience to be about the whole customer journey (Respondent 1), encapsulating 'everything rather than the traditional model of a museum which would be come, read, leave, and no real engagement' (Respondent 2). In line with literature, the managers consider the experience to include the visitor's initial interaction with the museum through the website or social

media, the visitor's dealings with staff (Black, 2005);, their interaction with the museum's displays and collections (Smith & Richards, 2013); the use of facilities such as the café (Fyall, Garrod, Leask & Wanhill, 2008); as well as the continuation of the experience post visit (Falk & Dierking, 2013).

Whilst both respondents indicated that they were not familiar with the academic theories and models surrounding experience design, clear links can be found between these and the design of event experiences at the NMoS. Respondent 2 referred to events as being 'curated' as opposed to designed, and related experience design to the visitor's journey over the course of the evening, including their feelings on arrival and departure. Respondent 1 recognised the logistical organisation, and the look and feel of the space as important aspects of experience design and considered theming to be 'central to it'.

Finding enough content to work for large numbers of people and keeping the event fresh were considered to be the main challenges of experience design (Respondent 1), although it was acknowledged that attendees would be disappointed if favourite activities such as face painting and the silent disco were dropped. Considered advantageous is the biannually changing special exhibition, which allows managers to use different spaces and objects to tie in with the event theme, and new partnerships also offer creative opportunities. Operational issues and competition were also considered to be challenges (Respondent 2).

After-hours events were introduced to encourage engagement with the NMoS in a more social way, to appeal to the motivations of people passionate about culture as well as to those who had not engaged with the NMoS as an individual. Links to literature can be found in terms of the setting, theming, and staging of the events, which are designed to appeal to different audiences, and which offer a range of learning opportunities in addition to an experience that is different to that offered during the day.

5.3 After-hours Event Museum Audience Development and Attendee Profile

NMS introduced after-hours events to encourage engagement with the NMoS in a more social way, and to appeal to core museum visitors who had perhaps visited during the day with family, but who may not have had the chance to engage with the NMoS as an

individual (Respondent 1). An audience which was previously under-provided for, NMS also wanted to appeal to the motivations of younger people (Generation Y) who are often passionate about culture, and see the value of museums, but who are very time poor (Respondent 2).

Three after-hours events were held at the NMoS during 2016; '*Museum Late: Celts*', designed to attract a younger audience; '*Museum After Hours*', designed to attract a festival going audience; and *Neu! Reekie! Celts*, a one-off after-hours event held to coincide with the closure of the special exhibition *Celts*. A total of 50 respondents attended '*Museum Late: Celts*', 70 respondents attended '*Museum After Hours*', and nine respondents attended *Neu! Reekie! Celts*. In addition, 10 respondents attended both '*Museum Late: Celts*' and '*Museum After Hours*'. Three respondents attended all three events. The respondents are therefore shown as '*Museum Late: Celts*' 39%; '*Museum After Hours*' 53%; and *Neu! Reekie*! 8%.

In relation to gender, 71% of respondents are female, compared to 29% male. Regarding place of residence, 75% of respondents live in Edinburgh and the Lothians. This indicates that after-hours events have been successful in attracting local residents, which is the audience these events, and particularly '*Museum Late*' events, were initially designed to attract. A total of 15% came from elsewhere in Scotland and 6% from overseas.

As shown in Figure 1, whilst the '*Museum Late: Celts*' event attracted all age ranges, the highest number of respondents fell into the age bracket 18-34, indicating that the event continues to appeal to the Generation Y audience it was originally designed to attract. '*Museum After Hours*' attracted an even number of respondents across all age ranges, except for age ranges 18-24 and over 65, indicating the event not only appeals to the young festival going audience it was originally designed to attract, but to a range of different audiences. *Neu! Reekie! Celts* attracted the highest proportion of respondents from the age range 55-65, however given the low sample size of respondents attending this event, the comparison is not an accurate reflection.

5.4 Audience Engagement with the NMoS

5.4.1 Motivation for engagement with the after-hours event product

To evaluate the effectiveness of the after-hours event product in attracting young culturally active audiences, respondents were asked to indicate their motivation in attending an evening event at the NMoS (see Figure 2). A total of 109 respondents indicated that a particular motivation for attending was to experience music or entertainment in a unique environment. This view is reinforced by one respondent who said that they 'Enjoyed the setting and seeing the museum in a different way', aligning with the view portrayed by Getz (2012) that the event setting is one of the elements of event design that will create a unique, satisfying and memorable event experience for visitors.

The chance to visit the NMoS outside normal opening hours motivated 79 respondents to attend, aligning with the view of NMS Respondent 1, 'Something that's special for grown-ups to be able to come and enjoy all aspects of the museum, without either their children or other people's children in the space'. In addition, one respondent supports this view, indicating that their particular motivation for attending was 'To see the exhibition without children present'.

In total, 63 respondents indicated that socialising with friends was a motivation for attending and 46 respondents were motivated by the events being themed. One visitor said 'As a lover of history and archaeology, the opportunity to immerse oneself in a themed event such as this, after hours and in that sort of adult-only setting, was not to be missed. Let's face it - being able to wander the museum with a glass of wine and themed music is just plain cool. Talk about heightening one's interests in a subject'.

In total, 63 respondents indicated that socialising with friends was a motivation for attending, aligning with the view that museums play a social role (Fleming, 2005; Kim Lian Chan, 2009; Taheri et al., 2014), and 46 respondents were motivated by the events being themed, supporting the view of Bowdin et al. (2011) that event theming is key to creative design.

INSERT FIGURE 2 HERE

5.4.2 Previous Engagement

The survey findings show that that 37% of respondents had visited the NMoS in the previous month, with 9% visiting in the previous week. However, more than half (59%) of respondents were not regular visitors to the NMoS prior to attending an after-hours event, with 42% indicating that they had visited in the previous year. 17% of respondents had not visited for more than a year, and 4% had never visited.

5.4.3 Engagement during the after-hours event experience

To assess their level of engagement with the NMoS and the after-hours event product, respondents were asked what words they would use to describe the event they attended. Aligning with Sheng and Chen (2011) and Lee and Smith (2015), a total of 111 respondents found the event they attended to be *entertaining*, with one respondent saying 'It was such an entertaining night and it was really fun dressing up, getting my face painted and loving the music. Such a relaxing night. An opportunity to do all these things you never get the chance to as an adult'. A total of 105 respondents indicated they had *fun* (Sheng & Chen, 2011; Packer & Ballantyne, 2016); some 89 respondents found the event they attended to be *memorable*, with one respondent saying 'There was a buzz. Great venue, it felt like a party that you had invited yourself to!! My husband was so inspired he became a member of the museum'. And a total of 47 respondents believed they were *educated* (Falk & Dierking, 2000; Lee & Smith, 2015), with one respondent said 'I love the Fringe, and to take the unique atmosphere of the festival, and supplant that into the museum was a simple but effective method to show that Edinburgh culture is a multi-faceted thing, and that learning and fun should always be partners'.

80% of respondents rated the event they attended as either excellent or very good indicating that they were effectively engaged by the after-hours event product, with the same number rating the price to be appropriate. In total, 91% of respondents indicated that they would be very likely to recommend an after-hours event at the NMoS. As word of mouth (WOM) is considered to be one of the most credible sources of information (Schmalleger & Carson, 2008), this response indicates that, in addition to re-engaging respondents, after-hours events may attract and engage new audiences in the future.

5.4.4 Engagement with the NMoS after the after-hours experience

With respect to after-hours events generating repeat visits to the NMoS, NMS managers indicated that they only have anecdotal evidence of this, but recognition that the events attract a range of audiences, and that over time, they have created a product which appeals to a specific audience segment (Respondent 1). Different museum spaces were used across events to engage people with areas they may not have visited before, encouraging them to re-visit (Respondent 1). Respondent 2 said 'We know as well from both events that there's a lot of people who come along who haven't been before, or it's the first time in a long while, and it introduces, it can only introduce them to something which they then chose to come back and see in further detail, then great'. The special exhibition is also used as a hook to encourage repeat visits (Respondent 2), and upcoming events and activities are used to entice visitors, marketed during the evening through promotional posters, flyers and announcements (Respondent 1). Managers consider that Generation Y visitors are likely to be mainly in the age 25-34 age range and assess that the after-hours events do not attract as many people in the age range 18-25 as they would like to (Respondent 1).

In total, 64% of respondents indicated that they had re-engaged with the NMoS since attending an after-hours event in 2016; 21% had visited once, 14% had visited twice, 15% had visited three times, 4% had visited four times, and 10% had visited on more than four occasions. As only 37% of respondents had indicated that they were regular visitors to the NMoS prior to attending an after-hours event in 2016, with 59% indicating that they were not regular visitors, the survey findings appear to indicate that after-hours events have played a role in encouraging respondents to visit the NMoS more regularly, aligning with O'Donnell (2012) who suggest that the event product can be used to encourage repeat visits at other times.

Asked whether respondents would re-engage with after-hours event at the NMoS, the majority of respondents indicated that they were either very likely (58%) or likely (30%) to attend another event in the future. However, more than one third of respondents (36%) indicated that they had not subsequently re-engaged with the NMoS since attending an after-hours event in 2016. This could, perhaps, be related to a lack of time or competing priorities, particularly during the working day (Black, 2016).

6.0 Conclusions

6.1 Conclusions

The main aim of this paper was to assess the effectiveness of museum after-hours events in attracting, engaging, and retaining young culturally active audiences. The literature review highlights that audience development is a key objective for cultural organisations today, with museums developing strategies to understand their audiences' motivations and behaviours in order to engage with them more effectively, to encourage repeat visitation and evidence the museum's value in society. These strategies increasingly include the use of after-hours events as a product to re-engage with core audiences, and to appeal to new key target audiences such as Generation Y.

After-hours events were introduced by NMS to appeal to the motivations of young people passionate about culture and to encourage them to engage with the NMoS in a more social way, both at events and for subsequent visits and activities. The NMS has been seen to have used experience design strategies to design a range of events and activities that combine learning opportunities, such as expert talks and object handling that are both fun and educational, to offer a unique visitor experience that appeals to different audiences and encourages younger audiences to engage with the museum (Pine & Gilmour, 1999; Berridge, 2007; Getz, 2012).

The survey findings reveal that after-hours events were successful in attracting the type of audience they were initially designed to attract, offering attendees the opportunity to explore the museum in an adult-only environment and the chance to socialise with friends in a unique space. Survey respondents described the event experience as entertaining, fun, memorable, unique, engaging, and educational, aligning with research undertaken by Pine and Gilmour (1999) and Packer and Ballantyne (2016).

The findings also reveal an apparent increase in the regularity of visits made by some respondents to the NMoS since attending an after-hours event, thus achieving another museum objective of retaining audiences, some had not re-engaged with the museum, so museums need to be mindful of how they might enhance the continued interaction post-event. Most respondents indicated that they would attend another after-hours event in the future and would recommend the evening to friends, indicating that the events do achieve their aims to re-engage with previous visitors and to attract new audiences in the future.

6.2 Managerial Implications

The main recommendations relate to repeat visits, a key measure of museum and cultural attractions' effectiveness. The survey findings show that respondents would be interested in attending other evening events at the NMoS, with particular interest in evening opening during special exhibitions. A relatively inexpensive option to introduce late opening during special exhibitions may encourage those who had not re-engaged since attending an after-hours event, particularly if commitments prohibit attendance during the day.

The findings also reveal that some respondents felt there was insufficient time during the evening to fully explore the museum's exhibits and special exhibition. It is recommended that attendees be offered discounted entry to special exhibitions for a two-week period post after-hours event attendance to encourage museum re-visits.

Whilst the majority of respondents commented favourably on the event product itself, numerous comments were made with respect to the crowds and queues experienced at the venue. Restricting event capacity could resolve these problems and offer an improved overall experience for attendees.

6.3 Limitations and Further Research

Whilst the survey attracted a 12.3% response rate, extending the survey invitation to after-hours event attendees from previous years may have facilitated a larger number of responses, and would have allowed the authors to measure repeat visits over a longer period. While the findings are not as such generalisable, the increased number of visitor attractions offering 'late' events in the UK would indicate the opportunity to inform their future endeavours in this regard. The research could also be further developed by a comparative study with similar cultural organisations, both nationally and internationally.

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Figures (also attached in editable format)
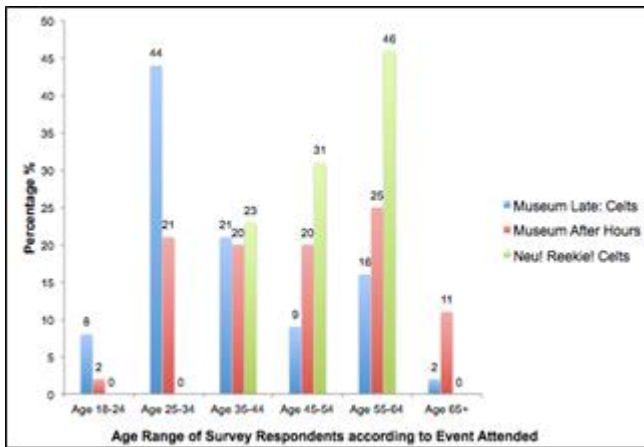
Figure 1 Age Range of Survey Respondents according to Event Attended

Figure 2 Motivations for attending