Visitor Engagement at Museums: Generation Y and 'Lates' Events at the National

Museum of Scotland

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Abstract

Museums are institutions that collect, safeguard and present artefacts and memories for the non-profit purposes of learning and enjoyment. However, significant changes in the environment in which museums operate have led to the creation of new types of activities to attract different audiences who will contribute to their future economic and social sustainability. One group that has recently been identified as a target is Generation Y (Gen Y) who have been attracted through the specifically created night-time thematic events, or 'Lates'. This study critically evaluates visitor engagement with both permanent collections and activities specifically developed for the Gen Y visitor at a 'Lates' event at a national museum. The paper explores the potential contribution of this type of event in enhancing the future sustainability of museums via balanced use of resources, visitor engagement across a diverse audience and contribution to the achievement of long term goals.

Key words – museums; management; visitor engagement; Generation Y; events.

Introduction

Museums form a significant proportion of the cultural tourism offering in many destinations across the world, operating as non-profit-making institutions that exhibit tangible and intangible heritage to visitors and communities alike. They "serve the functions of collection, research and exhibition, as well as education and recreation" (Sheng and Chen, 2011, 53), resulting in a broad range of objectives and measures of effectiveness (Leask, 2016). Museum management priorities have been subject to a significant shift in recent years, resulting in changes to the visitor offering (Falk and Dierking, 2016). Confronted by intense

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financial pressure and the intertwined imperatives of accountability and social responsibility (Davis, 2013), museums have responded by seeking ways to ensure their future via broadening their visitor appeal to attract a more diverse audience and by enhancing visitor engagement to encourage balanced use of resources (Leask, 2016; Wells, Butler and Koke, 2016; Ambrose and Paine, 2012). One approach has been through the creation of alternative products, experiences and methods of visitor engagement (Gilmore and Rentschler, 2002; Chang, 2006; Leja, 2012; Kidd, 2011). This move towards refocusing on museum visitors as consumers has resulted in a realisation that museums need to be much more than an arena for the display of artefacts (Corbos and Popescu, 2012; Camarero and Garrido, 2009). There is recognition that, in order to meet financial and other objectives, they "must convince all potential audiences in their localities of their relevance and of their ability to stimulate meaningful experiences" (Black, 2016, 13).

Creating and maintaining sufficient visitor audiences to sustain the long-term future of museums has become a key element in their management responsibilities and decision-making (Ambrose and Paine, 2012; MGS, 2012). This shift of focus has resulted in museums reflecting on their core and peripheral products and increasingly considering that future growth lies in sustainable visitor development through the provision of comprehensive programmes of learning and leisure opportunities that appeal to current and future generations (Camarero and Garrido, 2011). Key to this growth is the individual museums' ability to meld learning and social leisure activities (Williams, 2011) and for this to encourage long-term engagement of new audiences without compromising the engagement of existing audiences. These targeted and newly developed experiences are largely geared towards attracting specific sections of the local population as a means of widening the visitor base, whilst maintaining the core offering as a means of meeting the needs and expectations

of traditional visitors and non-local audiences (Mencarelli, Marteaux, and Pulh, 2010; Black, 2016). Recent studies would suggest that some museums have opted to transform themselves into sources of 'edutainment' with the aim of education through the medium of entertainment focussing on the development and promotion of hedonistic activities and experiential escapism (Williams, 2011; Mencarelli, Marteaux, and Pulh, 2010). One approach to attracting under-represented visitor groups, such as Generation Y, has been the creation of night-time thematic events, or 'Lates' (Evans, 2012; Leask, Fyall, and Barron, 2013). However, satisfying a variety of different visitor groups presents a series of challenges for a museum in balancing the use of resources for both existing and new audiences (Leask, 2016). Rather than changing the core product, management might recognise and develop the potential that exists for extending and developing the existing product, as a means of providing experiences that are attractive to new audiences (Mencarelli, Marteaux, and Puhl, 2010). Uniting the core offering with new ideas and experiences has required creative initiatives from museums to develop their cultural tourism offer, with engagement of non-traditional audiences featuring prominently in strategic documents (MGS, 2012, 51).

In a manner similar to other museums (see for example, The Natural History Museum), the National Museum of Scotland introduced 'Lates', themed after-hours events, in 2011. Recognising Mannheim's (1952) introduction of generational theory which 'seeks to understand and characterise cohorts of people according to their membership of a generation, which is objectively assigned according to the year of birth' (Pendergast, 2010 p. 1), the aim of these Lates events was to attract the hitherto non-engaged Generation Y (Gen Y; born between 1980-1995) audience to the museum. Designed to offer an experience that mixes both entertainment and learning, these events encourage this audience to engage with both permanent and temporary exhibitions during the event and to prompt further post-event visits.

This paper explores the level of visitor engagement with museum exhibits during a particular 'Lates' event and determines whether the museum's response in developing these types of events achieve their intended outcomes and contribute positively to the future economic and social sustainable management of museums.

Literature Review

Visitor development at museums

Traditionally seen as places to view the past, museums also have a role in providing communities with the opportunity to understand the present and inform the future (Hebda, 2007; Stylianou-Lambert, Boukas, and Christodoulou-Yerali, 2014). The demands now placed on museums as public organisations entail social, environmental and economic sustainability (Camarero and Garrido, 2012; Ambrose and Paine, 2012; Pencarelli, Cerquetti, and Splendiani, 2016), with earned income from visitors forming a vital part of museum finances (Lindqvist, 2012). This increased engagement from a broader range and larger volume of visitors contributes positively to the museum, both in terms of the actual visit and in continued engagement via membership, subsequent visits and recommendations (Hebda, 2007; Stylianou-Lambert, Boukas, and Christodoulou-Yerali, 2014).

A key driver causing non-profit organisations to seek and develop alternative visitor groups, and to contribute to sustaining their visitor numbers and demonstrating their value, has been a significant reduction in government funding and a requirement for future financial independence (Lovett, 2010; Burton, Louviere, and Young, 2009; Wickham and Lehman, 2015). This appears to be a common phenomenon causing museums in many destinations to examine methods of developing the use of their existing and inherent physical resources as opportunities to develop initiatives and generate new income streams (Brabazon, 2011;

Camarero and Garrido, 2009). This, coupled with a focus on particular market segments, has resulted in the development of revenue streams through the engagement of alternative audiences and attempts to re-establish their relevance to twenty-first-century audiences (Zeidman, 2015; Black, 2016). As discussed by Merriman (2008), museums increasingly need to demonstrate several dimensions of sustainability—social, economic and environmental—through making effective and balanced use of their resources.

Developing museum experiences

Whilst many destinations have become reliant on having 'superstar' museums (Frey, 1998, 113) which provide a multi-dimensional experience package designed to appeal to a mass audience, the success of museums also lies in their ability to attract alternative visitor groups. The Tate Modern provides an example of such a museum that, in addition to attracting regular visitors, also displays blockbuster exhibitions that satisfy both traditional and alternative audiences (Williams, 2011). However, the creation and operation of these alternative types of events hosted within the museums has caused museum management and trustees to reflect on the appropriateness of using museums in this manner (Leask and Barron, 2013; Barbosa and Brito, 2012; Camarero, Garrido, and Vicente, 2015). Indeed, concerns have been raised regarding the very philosophical underpinning of the primary purpose and nature of a museum and the suitability of their use for such events, with a view that these would not be in keeping with the custodial and educational purposes of a museum (Gordin and Dedova, 2014; Calver and Page, 2013). The commitment of museum management to the continued provision of these events remains a concern, with them occasionally resulting in damage to facilities and exhibits (Vaughan, 2015), caused by the provision of alcohol and behaviour of attendees. An additional concern is that the museum will be relegated to a mere venue and that little education or learning will occur, thus moving further away from the purpose of meaningful and sustained engagement with non-traditional visitors, or that no

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additional post-event visits will take place and that longer term engagement is not enhanced (Atkinson, 2012).

Understanding visitor behaviour during visit

In attempting to better understand how visitors engage with museum exhibits during their visit, and demonstrating that these types of events do contribute positively to the overall aims of a museum, several previous studies have monitored visitor behaviour in museums (for example see Bitgood, 1992; Schreiber et al. 2013; Serrell, 1997; Sheng and Chen, 2012). Such studies typically record the time visitors spent with an exhibit and indicate the level of engagement with various types of interpretation, whilst contributing to an understanding of the popularity of specific displays and visitor movement and interaction.

Serrell (1997, 108) has argued that the "amount of time visitors spend and the number of stops they make in exhibitions are systematic measures that can be indicators of learning". Whilst only 60% of visitor's attention is devoted to looking at exhibits (Lanir et al. 2013), a number of studies have attempted to develop an understanding of how visitors behave toward museum exhibits. This interactive behaviour identified a series of traits identified by Bitgood (1992) which included the tendency of people to be attracted to, and approach, moving displays of animals, those involving an aural element and large objects and displays. According to Brida, Meleddu and Paulina (2012), visitors tend to enjoy the museum experience more if they have adequate information regarding the layout of the museum and the location of the major attractions is provided. Visitors tend to turn right when entering a room in the absence of obvious cues and people tend to approach an area containing other people (Bitgood, 1992). Such studies have contributed to a better understanding of visitor motivations and actions by noting behaviour and prompting an exploration of individual

agendas and discovery of how they construct their own meanings within museums (Weidenfeld, Butler, and Williams, 2011). As stated by Taheri, Jafari, and O'Gorman (2014) and Bryce et al. (2015), a greater understanding of engagement can assist museum managers in informing the predictability of visitor behaviour and in enhancing the visitor experience.

Gen Y museum engagement and Museum 'Lates'

Irrespective of the research domain under investigation, all studies on generational cohorts are underpinned by Mannheim's (1952) introduction of generational theory which 'seeks to understand and characterise cohorts of people according to their membership of a generation, which is objectively assigned according to the year of birth' (Pendergast, 2010 p. 1). The central argument in favour of a generational approach to the study of markets, however, is based on the premise that each generational cohort shares similar patterns of behaviour with regard to work, leisure and consumption. Hence, while Baby Boomers (1943–1960) are described as an 'idealist' and 'driven' generation and Generation X (1961–1981) as a 'nomadic' and 'cynical' generation, Gen Y (1982–2002) are frequently described as the 'hero' and 'net generation' in that they are good at learning new things and are technologically advanced with many living a completely immersive online existence (Nusair, Parsa and Cobanoglu, 2011).

Gen Y have been recently identified as a new visitor group for targeting by museums as a means of evolving and extending their brand identities (Leask, Fyall, and Barron, 2013). Although not generally regarded as a key museum audience, there has been a recent push to attract this market group (Evans, 2012), and to encourage this segment to regard museums as places to 'meet, socialise and think' (GLA, 2008). The Gen Y visitor segment creates both opportunities and issues for museums. It has been found that Gen Y has very different characteristics from preceding generational groups like the Baby Boomers and Generation X

with respect to their particular mind-set, attitudes, behaviours and beliefs (Leask, Fyall, and Barron, 2013). For example, Fountain and Charters (2010) emphasised that Gen Y appreciate instant gratification and possess a corresponding short attention span (see also Leask, Fyall, and Barron, 2013). Furthermore, Gen Y's consumption patterns are regarded as fickle (Morton, 2002) and they often seek approval from their peers (Bush, Martin, and Bush, 2004; Leask, Fyall, and Barron, 2013). In research specifically examining Gen Y's behaviour when visiting museums, Moscardo and Benckendorff (2010) found that this group prefer to interact with exhibits as opposed to being passive participants in the experience. In addition, Gen Y are less interested in overtly educational aspects of a visit; can be very socially oriented and, subsequently, are more responsive to word of mouth type communications originating from within their immediate social circle (Gardyn, 2002; Leask, Fyall, and Barron, 2013).

The night-time economy is important for Gen Ys (Bound, Beunderman, and Mean, 2008; Evans, 2012) and it has been suggested that Gen Ys prefer to attend events and activities where they are specifically targeted as the principal visitor group and where activities are based around their characteristics (Muskat et al. 2013). Late night events held within cultural institutions are increasingly becoming a method of attracting younger adult visitors through the provision of attractive experiences, some of which may differ markedly from the institution's usual core offerings (Evans, 2012). Such events have experienced significant development in recent years and museums such as the V&A in London and the Australia Museum in Sydney have engaged with Gen Y through the development of 'Lates' events (Leask and Barron, 2013). Typical characteristics of these events include specific night-time opening hours, an adult–only environment, music performance, the provision of alcohol and food, and experience-driven interactions with existing collections (Leask and Barron, 2013). Such events are increasingly becoming part of a museums offering and studies undertaken

regarding attendees' experiences with this type of event indicate a high level of satisfaction and that those questioned would return to interact with the core offering of the museum (Evans, 2012; Atkinson, 2012). Consequently, the concept of 'Lates' events has been developed and there is evidence of a variety of visitor attractions developing this type of product (see MOMA in New York and London Zoo). These sites have recognised the opportunities that can arise from the creation of such an event to assist in the sustainable use of resources by extending the hours of facility use to engage with this specific target demographic and to assist in meeting the objectives of financial independence through the development of additional and alternative revenue streams.

Case Study description - The National Museum of Scotland and their 'Lates' events

Having been subject to a £47.4 million refurbishment in 2011, in addition to on-going investment in new galleries, the National Museum of Scotland (NMS) is a competitive visitor attraction in Scotland's capital city. Recently achieving the role of Scotland's most visited attraction (ALVA, 2017), the museum attracted 1.8 million visitors in 2016, partly boosted by the reopening of ten new galleries in the museum's 150th year. The National Museum of Scotland is part of the publically funded national organisation that combines the multiple roles of research, audience engagement and building skills for the future (NMS, 2016). Popular with local residents and tourists alike, a key aspect of their strategic plan is to engage with a more diverse audience via a range of partnerships to enhance reputation, popularity and quality.

Based on the findings of research undertaken to identify the needs, wants and expectations of the Gen Y audience (NMS, 2011), a series of after-hours events were developed. These events were designed to allow this audience the opportunity to interact with the exhibits in a

child-free environment, to feel welcome and engaged, and to enjoy activities specifically developed for the event such as live music, creative opportunities and other themed events not normally associated with a museum.

In addition to engaging with this visitor group, a key objective for the NMS was for such events to include a learning element. This was to be considered 'light touch' but important for museum management as a means of justifying the use of the museum as more than an event venue. The first NMS Lates event took place in November 2011 and similar, normally themed, events have taken place on a regular basis ever since. This has developed into an event product which has included activities such as video games, silent disco, animal handling opportunities, expert talks, socialising space with food and beverage facilities, games and activities, face painting, live music and DJ sets, photo opportunities, and acrobatic displays. Digital marketing methods, primarily Facebook and Twitter, were used to communicate the event to the target audience.

Contributing to the 1.6 million visitors and £7.8 million self-generated income recorded in 2014-15 (MGS, 2015) and based on visitor demographics, popularity and attendee feedback, 'Lates' events are considered to be a success. However, little is known about the behaviour of visitors during these events, especially how they engage with the permanent collections and concerning their intention to visit post-event. Consequently, it was felt that evidence was required that developed a fuller understanding of attendees' behaviour and engagement at such events. This study therefore aims to explore event attendees' engagement with activities that were specifically organised for the event and to undertake an analysis of event attendees' engagement with the permanent collections at the NMS by monitoring their use of space and interactions.

Methodology

This study employed a multiple-method approach with two primary forms of data collection used: 1) observation of visitor behaviour and 2) structured interviews with attendees. Both of these techniques were employed on-site during the February 2015 'Game Masters Lates' event at the National Museum of Scotland (NMS) in Edinburgh. This 'Lates' event combined with a long-running video game exhibition held at the museum focussed on a retro arcade game theme. In addition to the activities detailed above, the event provided visitors with the opportunity to experience contemporary video games (such as Halo 2 ™); 80's and 90's video games (such as Pacman ™); activity-based video games (such as Dance Central ™) as well as board games (such as Chess and Ker-Plunk ™). Visitors therefore had the opportunity to become involved in a range of specific event-themed activities; activities that had become common to all 'Lates' events; and to have the opportunity to visit the permanent museum exhibition galleries.

Data collection methods were adopted from previous studies undertaken (Taheri, Jafari, and O'Gorman, 2014; Yalowitz and Bronnenkant, 2009) that focussed on understanding visitor interaction with exhibits. Data was gathered by ten volunteer post-graduate researchers recruited solely to gather primary data at the event. Volunteers received training regarding the data gathering methods and were briefed immediately prior to the event. On the evening of the event the volunteers were split into five pairs and positioned within the various areas of the museum that were open to visitors. These areas included locations where activities specific to the event were occurring and the permanent exhibitions that were open during the event where event attendees were encouraged to visit. See Figure 1. (below) for a floorplan of

the museum, the permanent galleries open during the event, the event-specific areas and an indication of the location of researchers.

Observation

To explore visitors' engagement with activities at the event and with the permanent collections at the NMS, the research team monitored visitor use of the space and their interactions with the activities and/or objects within that space through the 'paper and pencil' method (Yalowitz and Bronnenkant, 2009). The most common form of timing and tracking in museums, this approach involves recording the amount of time visitors spend at specific exhibits using a stopwatch (ibid). Key variables used for tracking and timing the visitors include: 1) stopping behaviours (i.e. total time in area, total number of stops, level of engagement), 2) how visitors behaved (i.e. the route they took, social interactions with group and others, elements which attracted their attention), and 3) demographic variables (i.e. estimated age, gender).

Observation is an established form of gathering qualitative data (Hennink, Hutter, and Bailey, 2011) and this approach involved two specific activities:

1. *Visitor Flow and Exhibit Popularity*: At ten-minute intervals, the researchers recorded, approximately, the number of visitors seen in the gallery space or referred to one of the following categories: empty, quiet, moderately busy, busy, or full. Also noted were the exhibits that were the most popular/busiest and any other noteworthy situational variables.

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2. *Visitor Tracking and Engagement*: Individual visitors that entered the room were selected at random and their behaviour was recorded. This included mapping their route on a floor plan of the area and detailing visitors' engagement with exhibits. These notes detailed the participant's duration of stay at each exhibit they visited or passed, body language displayed, comments made by the visitor and activity or engagement with the exhibit. Based on Yalowitz and Bronnenkant, (2009) these activities were described as:

- Walked passed exhibit without stopping (stop considered here as 2–3 seconds)
- stopped briefly but did not read
- stopped and read
- stopped, read and engaged with material
- Stopped, read, engaged with material and commented to others (pointed, shared through conversation)

Structured Interviews

As a means of more fully exploring visitors' experience of, and engagement with, the event (Brinkmann, 2014), additional data were gathered via a short structured interview. Some 15-20 visitors per space were randomly selected and asked a series of questions relating to their experience at the 'Lates' event. The interviews comprised three sections: participants' previous attendance at 'Lates' events and any visits to the museum between events; which galleries and exhibits had been visited at this event; what activities had been undertaken, or planned to be undertaken at this event. A final question asked respondents if they were likely to visit the museum again before the next 'Lates' event.

Data Analysis

All observation data were entered into a spreadsheet and the identification of recurring behavioural patterns amongst individuals or groups was undertaken (Hennink, Hutter, and Bailey, 2011; Bryman and Bell, 2015; Ryan and Bernard, 2003). In particular, attention focused on the activities and exhibits that were the most popular amongst visitors and the level of engagement and measurement of time spent at these areas. With reference to the interviews, responses were entered into an Excel spreadsheet and descriptive and quantitative data were generated as a means of determining key information on which galleries and activities were most visited, percentage of attendees who had been to a 'Lates' event previously and if they were likely to come again and general feedback and comments regarding the event. These findings were then considered in relation to conclusions drawn from other studies that had focussed on tracking visitor behaviour.

Results

Observation: Visitor Flow and Exhibit Popularity

The three areas containing permanent exhibits (Animal World, Patterns of Life, Level 1, and Patterns of Life Level 3 – see Figure 1.) that were open and available for event attendees to visit were observed. The most popular area was found to be the permanent animal exhibition (Animal World) which was assessed to be moderately busy (approximately 20 – 30 people visiting at any one time) throughout the night with the busiest times at 8pm and at the end of the event from 10pm to 10.30pm. The most popular exhibits in this area were the largest in the room and the interactive exhibits. It was noted that many people visiting this gallery took 'selfies' with exhibits, however, the taking of 'selfies' and group photographs were a common activity at all areas throughout the event. By comparison, the other two open galleries housing permanent exhibitions (Patterns of Life, Level 1, and Patterns of Life Level

3) were observed to be quiet throughout the night and in addition, it was noted that very few people who did enter these galleries engaged with the exhibits. A common observation in these galleries was that people immediately left upon entering, or quickly walked through the space without much, or any engagement with the exhibits.

In general, it was observed that the galleries with permanent exhibits that were open throughout the event were not well visited, as most people remained in the main area (The Grand Gallery – see Figure 1.) or engaged with activities specifically provided for the event. The space providing event-specific activities remained busy throughout the evening, with demand for such activities far outstripping supply. However, it was found that all galleries (including those housing permanent museum exhibits) which involved technology, short attention levels and an element of co-creation were popular and additionally, the more involved activities that required a significant investment of time (e.g. craft activities occurring in permanent gallery spaces) were also popular but for a smaller number of visitors. This might indicate that museums who are keen to develop a sustainable visitor base amongst this generation need to focus on more active means of engagement, perhaps through the use of technology and practical activities that both involve and engage visitors

Observation: Visitor Tracking

Permanent Galleries

Sixteen visitors were tracked in the permanent animal exhibition space (Animal World) and on average, were found to spend seven minutes in this area making an average of three exhibit stops in this area. As observed above, visitors took a path to, and engaged with, the biggest or most noticeable attractions and tended to stop at exhibitions that had an interactive or technological element. Whilst noted that some individual exhibits held visitors attention

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for up to three minutes, interaction and engagement with the majority of these permanent exhibits was limited as most visitors walked through the space, briefly reading information in passing. Twelve visitors were tracked through the other permanent exhibition spaces (Patterns of Life, Level 1, and Patterns of Life Level 3) and it was found that they spent on average only 2.5 minutes in these areas, making approximately three exhibit stops per visit. Again, interaction and engagement with exhibits in these areas were limited as most visitors were only walking around and briefly reading information. Some visitors were denied access to the galleries as they were in possession of drinks. It is suggested that whilst some exhibits were found to be of interest, the level of interaction with exhibits in the permanent galleries varied and was exceptionally limited in the Patterns of Life galleries on levels 1 and 3.

Event Specific Spaces

Visitors were also tracked in areas containing activities and attractions that had been specifically created for the event (Event Specific Spaces – see Figure 1.). In total, an additional 54 visitors were observed by tracking their behaviour in three of the event specific gallery spaces. The space which retained visitors the longest (average of 13.5 minutes) included the interactive Turing Test game, and included various stages of the experience such as queuing to participate, engagement with the game and then again watching others participate. The gallery which received the lowest average time spent in the space contained a passive exhibition and the retail outlet and had no interactive or technologically-based activities.

Observation: Visitor Engagement

On average, this study identified that the number of stops within all galleries was 2.6 with the average time spent in a gallery at 7.9 minutes. The large or interactive exhibits within each

gallery or space were the most popular and visitors were often attracted straight to these when entering the room. In particular, in the permanent animal exhibition space (Animal World), visitors mainly ignored the majority of exhibits and followed a path to the biggest or most noticeable attractions. Beyond the technology-based interactive exhibits, there were few signs of engagement in terms of reading general interpretation panels in most galleries.

The most popular activities at the 'Lates' event were whose which were interactive, involved technology and required low attention levels. This included activities where participants were engaged in a game or activities that related specifically to their individual involvement and an element of co-creation. For example, the 'Turing Test' remained the most popular activity at the event and it was found that the interactive dancing video game (Dance Central ™) and the animal/human weight comparison machine retained interest throughout the evening and due to the opportunities for individual involvement, entertainment and, importantly, peer group engagement. The busiest areas of the event were those with few to no permanent exhibits and instead included the live music, bar area, interactive games and peer group conversation opportunities.

One of the key findings from this study was the limited engagement visitors had with the permanent exhibition spaces. This may in part be due to the museum policy whereby visitors cannot take alcoholic beverages into these spaces in order to protect permanent exhibits, thus limiting the flow of visitors to these areas if they have purchased drinks. However, the availability of alcoholic beverages; the way in which many participants view the event as an entertainment activity; and the fact that the event occurs in the evening, suggest that participants might consider it normal or usual to buy and consume alcohol at the event. Consequently, whilst the museum would like visitors at the 'Lates' event to engage with the

permanent galleries and exhibits, the policy to not allow beverages into these areas appears to significantly restrict participant visits to these areas of the museum. It is suggested that this is a prime example of the tension that exists between the use of the museum as an event venue and the protection and curation of the permanent exhibitions.

Finally, it was noted that a common theme throughout the night was the taking of self-photographs, or 'selfies', by participants to capture various moments of their visit. This occurred predominantly within specific groups of friends, and it was noted that these images were often immediately shared with others.

Structured Interviews

In total, 67 interviews were conducted across the event with this predominantly Gen Y audience. Of those 67, 42% had been to a 'Lates' event previously and participants were attracted to the event with their social group, by the perceived novelty of the experience, by the theme of the event and concept of being in a museum after normal operating hours and by not having to share the experience with other visitor groups, especially children. Out of the 42% who had been to an event before, the majority (92%) had revisited the museum again in between this event and the last and of the total interviews 82% of visitors indicated that they are likely to visit the museum again. In addition, results from an evaluative study that was undertaken by NMS staff at this event identified 72% of attendees belonging to the Generation Y cohort and that only 4% of attendees had never visited the museum before this 'Lates' event (NMS 2016). Therefore, it might be suggested that whilst visitors might not be engaging with the permanent exhibitions during the 'Lates' event, there exists a high rate of return to the museum, subsequent to the event, perhaps to more fully engage with permanent exhibitions.

Further findings from the interviews revealed that participants visited 1.3 galleries on average (out of a possible seven) at the event, with the most popular permanent exhibition space being the gallery housing the animal exhibits (Animal World) and that 63% of participants stated that technology influenced their level of interest in engaging with an exhibit. When asked why they chose to visit specific galleries, the most common response was that there was no formal agenda for the evening and this allowed attendees the opportunity to explore the museum according to their interests. However, it was noted that a minority of respondents (25%) stated that they had experience of prior visits to the museum and considered these permanent exhibit visits to be an essential element of the overall event experience. Respondents were also asked to comment on their level of engagement with exhibits in the permanent galleries. This study found that only 30% of those visiting the permanent galleries stated that they fully engaged with the interpretation material available through reading fully and perhaps sharing and discussing with other visitors. The remaining respondents stated that they only briefly engaged with available material before moving on to the next exhibit. The results of these structured interviews confirmed the findings from data gathered during the Observation phase and revealed that the most popular activities at the event were those specifically created for the event. These included, for example, the silent disco, face painting, video games and live music provided in the main gallery. It was also found from these respondents that although visitors were given a map upon arrival, there was little signage to direct people to the various galleries, spaces and events.

Discussion

Creative museum experiences and visitor engagement

The results demonstrate that there appeared to be limited engagement with the available permanent exhibitions by attendees at this event. This limited engagement was evident both in terms of the number of attendees and in the level of engagement by those who did visit such galleries. This limited engagement might support the notion that the NMS acts more as an entertainment venue than any form of an educational resource during these events. However, a key finding from this study was that the majority of respondents indicated their intention to revisit the museum at a future date and to engage with the permanent exhibitions. While encouraging subsequent visits may certainly be one of their primary intentions, it could be argued that if museum management wish to increase the amount of learning undertaken by visitors *during* these events, more innovative and engaging approaches will need to be considered for future events (Wells, Butler, and Koke, 2016). It is contended that such an approach will allow for, and contribute, to the sustainability of not only the event itself, but the museum as a whole (Black, 2016; Leask, 2016).

Visitor behaviour

A number of behavioural patterns found in this study align with the previous trait characteristics listed for Gen Y. These include low attention levels and a need for instant gratification (Fountain and Charters, 2010; Leask, Fyall, and Barron, 2013), fickle consumption patterns (Morton, 2002) and seeking approval from peers (Bush, Martin, and Bush, 2004; Leask, Fyall, and Barron, 2013). As the results demonstrate, visitors were more likely to engage in interactive activities which are socially oriented (Gardyn, 2002; Mencarelli, Marteaux, and Puhl, 2010), involve interaction, and focus on entertainment rather than having an educational experience (Moscardo and Benckendorff, 2010). These results indicated that the majority of participants had little or no intention of visiting the permanent exhibitions – those that did visit these galleries gravitated towards prominent interactive

displays that involved an element of technology (Bitgood (1992). Therefore, in order to enhance this aspect of the event, management might wish to consider the provision of activities to encourage exploration of galleries, perhaps through the provision of planned 'selfie-spots' at quiet places within galleries to drive visitor flow to certain spaces.

Gen Y and Lates

If the Gen Y consumer is to be targeted by museums, it is essential that opportunities are developed whilst recognising and giving due consideration to any associated management and other stakeholder needs (Black, 2016; Leask, 2016). In turn, this will allow museums to offer an experience that meets their expectations and fits with Gen Y's values (Muskat et al. 2013) whilst attending to their curatorial and social values. For example, the museum may wish to explore the opportunity of collaborating with other locally-based organisations as a means of creating a package of complementary events, activities, products and services intended to attract visitor segments such as Gen Y (Weidenfeld, Butler, and Williams, 2011). Additionally, more innovative management approaches, such as moving popular activities to quiet gallery spaces with no alcohol service provision, might provide solutions to persistent operational issues (such as queues for specific activities), whilst also encouraging visitors to engage more fully with permanent exhibitions (Wells, Butler, and Koke, 2016). Museum management may wish to consider the combination of large exhibits, an element of technology, some interaction, and opportunities for co-creation as a guiding principle when developing methods of engaging this audience. The combination of both consumer and organisation factors required to develop entertaining experiences for Gen Y is discussed in Leask, Fyall and Barron (2013), who propose an audience experience model to enable development of relevant products to target this specific market. Likewise the visitors' extensive use of digital communications pre-, during and post-event could be used further to

develop recommendations to friends and family and encourage the intention to revisit and develop an ongoing relationship with the museum.

Sustainable visitor development at museums – how to engage them further?

The results show that previous 'Lates' visitors did revisit the museum in between events and that in addition to engagement with event specific activities, there was some limited engagement with permanent exhibitions during the event. However, the level and type of engagement identified in this study indicates the need for the development of strategies for encouraging more engagement with educational material. This could be achieved through more effective and direct signage, as Bitgood (1992) argues that visitors tend to have an improved experience and acquire more knowledge if they are given adequate information regarding the location of activities open during the event. Another option is to bring examples of artefacts from exhibitions to the Grand Gallery, thus allowing attendees to have brief but meaningful interactivity with these objects (Black, 2016). Importantly, obtaining peer approval was also a popular activity, highly demonstrated through the procurement of 'selfies' as was the opportunity for group interaction with exhibits (Mencarelli, Marteaux, and Puhl, 2010).

It would appear that NMS 'Lates' have provided a creative experience that achieves most of the intended outcomes in providing the space and experience for visitors to meet and socialise – and to then revisit, repeat and refer to others. By building on their now extensive experience of delivering these 'Lates' events, it is contended that the museum can extend and develop appropriately to meet both visitor and museum needs to enhance future sustainability. The resources at the museum are as such being used effectively to attract a broader audience for both the events and subsequent visits; increase revenue generation; enhance the contribution

of staff expertise across a broader range of audience engagement; and to make greater use of facilities during non-busy periods.

Conclusions and future research

Yeoman (2013) surmises that in the third decade of the 21st century, one of the prevailing shifts will be towards that of an 'ageless society' where age will no longer be a barrier to participation choice. In particular, Yeoman (ibid) suggests that it will become the norm for the Baby Boomer generation to choose to participate in the types of activities that may be considered to only have appeal to younger visitor groups such as Gen Y. This subsequent shift in museum behaviour for all audiences requires understanding in more detail the behavioural traits of these groups within late night museum events, specifically, and the development of new products to engage new visitor groups to museums, in general. The need to develop innovative ways to attract and engage new and traditional audiences is clear for both the sustainable future of the museums sector and for the well-being of individuals and communities (Black, 2016; Camarero and Garrido, 2012; Camarero and Garrido, 2009; McGuigan, Legget, Horsburgh, 2015; Pencarelli, Cerquetti, and Splendiani, 2016).

This paper contributes to a greater understanding of the relationships between particular visitor groups and the future sustainable development of museums. Whilst the museum might be viewed as a mere venue for these events, it is concluded that the 'Lates' events are seen to contribute positively to the social and economic sustainability of the museum via audience development, with the attraction of non-traditional museum visitors, and visitor engagement at the museum both during and beyond the specific event. Whilst it is perhaps not surprising that event specific activities were the main feature for this audience, events such as these are actively contributing to the achievement of aspects of the Museums Galleries Scotland

National Strategy (2012). This is via the development of new forms of visitor engagement with creative interpretation, the use of collections in ways that make them more vibrant and meaningful to a wider range of people, and in increasing the impact of museums by providing a wider range of experiences for enjoyment, development and learning. Therefore it can be argued that the development of such events allows the museum to move beyond venue status and thus assists the museum in achieving objectives in terms of balancing the use of resources, offering experiences to suit a diverse audience and contributing to the achievement of long-term goals.

The authors recognise that certain limitations regarding the approach to gathering data exist in this study. As with all mixed method studies, a key limitation in this study is the subjectivity of the researcher, for example in the choice of respondent and the difficulty in capturing accurate time for different phenomena (Yalowitz and Bronnenkant, 2009). Additionally, participants may have been aware of being observed and noticed researchers using clipboards and taking notes which may have influenced participants' behaviour (Angrosino and Rosenberg, 2011; Hennink, Hutter, and Bailey, 2011). Other, more practical limitations include the fact that data were gathered from a single 'Lates' event (Denzin, 2012) and limitations concerned with validity and generalisability associated with a convenience approach to sampling (Bryman and Bell, 2015).

This trial study on monitoring visitor behaviour through timing and tracking has the potential to contribute to the development of subsequent research. Specifically further studies that evaluate representative expectations about time and level of visitor engagement; and helping better understand visitor paths, motivations and trends (Yalowitz and Bronnenkant, 2009) amongst previously non-engaged visitor groups are suggested. It is suggested that future

research could focus further on how to enhance visitor engagement during the events that have been developed to attract non-traditional visitors; to further explore the requirements and behaviours of both new and existing museum audiences; and to undertake follow-up interviews with 'Late' attendees so elicit further details of their experiences and museum engagement.

Research to develop a greater understanding of how a variety of museums are responding to changing visitor characteristics via the development of new cultural experiences and into how these can contribute to the future sustainable development of museums would be welcomed on an international level.

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