

## **Segmenting cultural consumers in the experiential perspective: does it make sense?**

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### **Abstract**

The main objective of this study is to cluster museum visitors (Wedel and Kamakura, 2002) using the experiential dimensions of Pine and Gilmore (1999). To attain this goal, first, an exploratory factor analysis has been performed and, second, adopting the factorial scores herein obtained, a cluster analysis with K-Means technique has been conducted on a sample of Italian and Finnish museum visitors. Data has been collected through a survey via face-to-face interviews on a sample of visitors to the National Gallery of the Marche, a state-run museum focused on the Renaissance period, and to the Turku Art Museum, an art museum located in Turku, the old capital of Finland. The empirical research revealed six different clusters of visitors; some clusters may be considered the “classic” museum visitors who are mainly interested in the edutainment and esthetic dimensions of the museum experience, while other clusters represent the “new targets” who are not interested in edutainment or less interested in all the dimensions of the visiting experience. The main managerial implication for museums consists investing resources in all kinds of experiences to satisfy heterogeneous targets.

### **Theoretical background and objectives**

Visitor experience has recently become one of the major topics explored in the cultural heritage management (CHM) literature, in visitor studies, but museum experience segmentation is still under-researched. The literature has shown that the motivation of the visit is not positively correlated with the depth/intensity of the experience, therefore it becomes interesting to understand not so much the reasons for visiting a museum but the visit experience or the dimensions of the experience; the visitor experience is affected by individual attributes (level of education, exposure to art during childhood, level of interest for particular cultural products) and the museum or context attributes (services, location, lighting, visitor’s involvement, the technologies offered) (Poria *et al.*, 2006). For example, there are six criteria for a desirable leisure experience in museums (Chen, 2012): engaging in social interaction; doing something worthwhile; feeling comfortable and at ease in one’s surroundings; being challenged by new experiences; having the opportunity to learn; and participating actively. According to other Authors, the attraction factors of a museum are based on push and pull motivations (Yoon and Uysal, 2005) and most visitors are driven by push factors (e.g. relaxation) and seek new experiences and the possibility of learning new things. It seems that museum visitors do not search knowledge enrichment but recreation, entertainment, and social interaction (Nowacki, 2010). Poria *et al.* (2009), stressed the importance of customized information, emotional involvement, and a strong connection with the cultural location. In addition, visitor experience and engagement is today enhanced by the use of technologies (Marthy, 2007). In general, the literature on measurement of museum experience is still scarce and museums still do not measure this important factor which is fundamental to improve their offer and visitors’

satisfaction. However, to increase the desirability of a museum and increase the visitor's satisfaction and revisit intention, museum managers should customize information for different clusters of visitors and create emotional involvement and a strong connection with the cultural site (Poria *et al.*, 2009), focusing their attention on the experience-based approach (Pine and Gilmore, 1999; Brida *et al.*, 2016). Few studies adopted the Pine and Gilmore's scheme (aesthetics, learning, entertainment and escapism) to segment cultural consumers, in particular museum visitors (Petkus 2004; Conti *et al.* 2017), and also few studies developed museum items scale to measure the visiting experience (Brida *et al.*, 2016; Radder and Han, 2015). This study aims to go one step forward, as it suggests a segmentation of visitors using the experiential factors, derived from the Exploratory Factor Analysis (EFA) applied to a sample of Italian and Finnish visitors. The research questions are therefore the following: RQ1. *Does it make sense for museum managers to cluster visitors based on the experiential dimensions identified in the literature?* RQ2. *If yes, what clusters may be identified based on the experiential dimensions?*

### **Methodology**

The study adopted as a survey technique the personal interview, based on a structured questionnaire consisting of two sections. The first section serves to identify the following visitor information: gender, education (secondary school, bachelor, postgraduate), geographic origin (national, foreign), economic status (employed, unemployed, student, pupil, retired, other) number of previous visit to the museum (no one, one, twice or more) and visiting party (alone, partner, family with children, group). The second part of the questionnaire asks the visitor to evaluate on a scale from 1 to 5, the importance of each items of the experiential dimensions proposed in the Pine and Gilmore (1999) framework: aesthetics, learning, entertainment and escapism. Following Churchill (1979) and Kline (2005), all constructs in this study were measured with multiple items generally adapted from previous studies. The scales used to measure the four dimensions of experience (i.e. education, entertainment, escapism and aesthetics) were generally adapted from previous studies that focus both on experience and specifically on museum experience. More clearly the scale was built on Radder and Han (2015) scale (20 items) integrated with 5 items taken from Oh, Fiore (2007) scale: Education (*Enhance my skills, A real learning experience*) and Esthetics (*Just been there was pleasant, The setting was pretty bland, The setting was pretty attractive*). As a consequence, a final list of 25 items were administrated. Principal components analysis was used at the extraction stage with Varimax rotation to identify the underlying dimensions of museum visitors' experiences. Kaiser's (1960) eigenvalue rule (i.e. retention of factors with eigenvalues greater than one) was primarily consulted to determine the appropriate number of factors. Three criteria, namely, a high factor loading ( $>0.5$ ), low cross-loading ( $<0.4$ ) and high communality ( $>0.5$ ) (Costello & Osborne, 2005) were taken into account in deciding to retain an item. EFA was conducted to identify the underlying dimensions of museum visitors's experience, using the scores of the 25 items scale. To achieve the goal of the study and to answer to the research question, on the basis of the classification proposed by Wedel and Kamakura (2002), a post-hoc classification technique (in particular a cluster analysis)

that defines groups based on data was chosen. In particular, a non-hierarchical classification method was selected as non-hierarchical methods can be applied on quantitative variables and are optimal in the case of large samples (unlike hierarchical methods that prefer narrow samples). Another advantage of non-hierarchical methods is that they are less sensitive to outliers (Ketchen and Shook, 1996). In this study, the segmentation of visitors was achieved by applying the k-media algorithm (Hair, *et al.*, 2010). The variables used for segmentation are represented by the factorial scores in the EFA. In order to articulate a more complete explanation and avoid what has been pointed out in the literature regarding the fact that sometimes socio-demographic descriptors may be of little significance (Miceli *et al.*, 2007), other descriptive variables of consumer behavior were used during the experiment, to better understand the characteristics of the different segments. In particular an analysis of contingency tables to cross the cluster membership with the selected quality variables has been performed.

### Findings and discussion

The final sample is composed of 128 respondents. In the sample, there were more females (71.1%) than males (28.9%). The majority of respondents have a high level of education (71.9%) and have previously visited the museum once or more times (80.4%) in couple (48.4%). The sample contained a variety of occupational groups, including 53.9% occupied and 16.4% of students. 77 of the respondents are from Finland and the remaining part (51) are from Italy. For the clustering of visitors to the Italian and Finnish museums the six-cluster structure appeared to be the one which most represents a useful compromise between the different selective criteria mentioned (Table 1). The segments were labeled based on the centers of the different clusters as follows: Edutainment lovers, Beauty and culture seekers, Esthetics, Escapists, Global experientials and Nihilistics.

**Tab. 1 Final Cluster Centers**

	Cluster						
	Edutainment lovers	Beauty and culture seekers	Esthetics	Escapists	Global experientials	Nihilistics	
EDUTAINMENT	0,77	0,70	-1,82	-0,34	0,70	-0,56	
ESTHETICS	-2,27	0,54	0,64	0,47	0,06	-1,02	
ESCAPISM	-0,23	-1,03	-0,38	0,65	1,23	-0,40	
Numerosity of cluster	8,00	32,00	12,00	31,00	23,00	22,00	128,00
%	0,06	0,25	0,09	0,24	0,18	0,17	1,00

The first cluster was called *Edutainment lovers* as they are highly sensitive to the edutainment factor (which have the highest positive value among all groups) with negative values to the other factors, especially to esthetics (which is the lowest value in all the groups). In terms of number, it is the smallest cluster (6.0% of the entire distribution). The second cluster is the largest one (25% of the total). It was labeled *Beauty and culture seekers* as visitors are sensitive to both learning and entertainment (edutainment) in a world to culture, and – differently to the first group - to esthetics, in a word to beauty. The third cluster belongs to those who pay extremely attention to the esthetics factor but do not care at all to edutainment (it scores the most negative value of all groups) and to escapism. That's why this group was labelled *Esthetics*. It is the second smallest group. It seems that they are only interested to admire the beauty of the museum itself, included the architecture of the building/the palace which hosts the artworks collections. The fourth group labelled *Escapists* presents positive and high value for escapism, a lower value to esthetics but a negative value to edutainment. It is the second largest group (24%) and it seems a “new target” interested to get out of everyday routines and stressful life and to enjoy an unusual dimension of life. The fifth group show positive value to all factors, that's why we call it *Global experientials*. This group seem to represent “the classic” museum visitor with attention to all the dimensions, especially to learn and to entertain. However, it is not so large as one could expect, but only 18% of the entire distribution. Finally, the fourth group – the *Nihilists* - presents three centroids of discriminating factors with negative values especially for escapism. Surprisingly this group is quite large (17%) nearly as the fifth one. It seems that these are visitors by chance, they have no expectations in museums and visit it most probably as part of a generic visit of the city. In conclusion, it seems that three clusters are more “traditional” (first, second and fifth) which represent half of the sample and the remaining half are the “new segments” third, fourth and sixth groups).

### **Conclusions and managerial implications**

The study allowed to answer to the research questions: first, it makes sense to use the experiential dimensions as a base to segment clusters of visitors. The Pine and Gilmore's (1999) scheme is not only a theoretical framework but could be a useful managerial tool to identify heterogeneous segments with different preferences in terms the most important experiential dimensions of the visit. Second, the study shows an interesting and unexpected picture of the museum, as six segments emerged: Edutainment lovers, Beauty and culture seekers, Esthetics, Escapists, Global experientials and Nihilistics. Managerial implications: 1) invest both in “classic” and “new” segments of visitors with similar dimensions in order to improve the different desired experiences; 2) invest in edutainment to satisfy the classic groups, and to invest in technologies and in new services/internal communication instruments to attract the modern groups and get them closer to edutainment and other experiential dimensions which are less appreciated to some of the groups (e.g. escapism) 3) use different communication messages and means for the different segments, 4) develop different partnerships with different stakeholders/partner. To generalize results to all guest of the Gallery of Urbino and Art Turku Museum it is necessary to test again the profilation

on various samples over time. The research is in progress as data collection still continues in the two museums examined and also other museums will be added.

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