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*Attitudes, Motivations, and Emotions Toward Museum Visits for Undergraduate University Students in New Zealand*

ABSTRACT:

This research explored attitudes, motivations, and emotions toward visiting museums for undergraduate university students in New Zealand. It was part of an international grant on factors affecting museum visitation funded by and based at the University of Roma Tre, under the direction of Professor Stefano Mastandrea. Nine countries were represented. The primary research question for the New Zealand study was: What are the perceptions of students in a college of education regarding museum experiences? We explored this by asking: What is the relationship between personality traits and type of museum visited? What is the relationship between art education and museum visits? What motivations and emotions are associated with visiting museums? Participants were  $n = 78$  undergraduate students, who completed an online survey that was created for the grant. Results yielded significant correlations between the number of museum visits in the previous 12 months and (a) whether the participant had had art education outside of a school setting, (b) whether the participant had visited the museum alone or had been accompanied by parents or friends, and (c) the level of interest in the artist/scientist/exhibit; The intentions to visit a museum in the next 6 months was predicted by the number of museum visits during the previous year, wanting to have fun, and a pursuit of emotional wellbeing. A factor analysis of emotional reactions to museum visitation loaded on 2 factors that explained 60.49% of the variance. The first factor comprised items concerning wonder, pleasure, aesthetic enjoyment, fun, interest, wellbeing, and curiosity. The second factor involved items related to melancholy, distress, and boredom. Results are discussed in terms encouraging museum attendance for this age group.

This research explored attitudes, motivations, and emotions toward visiting museums for undergraduate university students in a college of education in New Zealand. It was part of an international grant on factors affecting museum visitation for young adults. The grant was funded by and based at the University of Roma Tre, under the direction of Professor Stefano Mastandrea, with 9 countries represented (in alphabetical order):

Austria, France, Germany, Hungary, Italy, New Zealand, Portugal, Taiwan, and the USA. An underlying premise for this research was that undergraduate university students, as a group, should have intellectual curiosity and motivation for knowledge, and therefore have interest in museums and toward museum visits. An objective for the study was also to offer suggestions on how to improve communication among students, universities, and museums, to enhance visitation, enjoyment, and learning – whether formal or incidental – on the part of the students.

### *Background*

In the past 10-15 years, little research has been conducted on *why* young adults choose not to visit museums. There is a popular perception that young adults find museums boring, that they do not «speak» to the interests of young people but rather that they engage in didactic presentations about the past (Bartlett & Kelly, 2000). In a study in Auckland, New Zealand, Mason and McCarthy (2006) found that those aged 16 to 26 did not visit art galleries in the same numbers as the general (older) population. They argued that correcting this situation will require more than museums presenting exhibitions that appeal to young adult audiences, concluding that at the base of the issue was a lack of fit between cultures, that those who present art in museums are not in touch with those who might view it, at least for the age group in question.

In contrast, Mokhtar and Kasim (2011) reported that in Malaysia, a large sample of university-aged students held positive attitudes toward museums. Reasons given for not visiting museums included a lack of time, followed by lack of interest in a given museum, not being familiar with what the museum had to offer, other activities being more attractive, and admission fees being too high. They advocated for more information being disseminated to young adults through brochures, the web, and by in-museum guides. They also suggested lowering admission prices and being attentive to how museum collections are displayed, to entice visitors in this demographic.

Similarly, Shrapnel (2012) surveyed young adults aged 18-26 in Australia and concluded that although 74% of respondents reported that museums are fun and exciting places, to actually encourage visitation some changes directed at this age group need to be introduced. Suggestions included night-time museum events; special exhibitions, especially about cultures other than their own, that are presented in new, unique, and

entertaining ways (the descriptors «edgy» and «underground» were used; Shrapnel [2012]: 29); lower admission prices; and, opportunities for social gatherings that included alcohol, musicians, and comedy acts. Clearly, for the sample in that study, it seemed that «museum as night club» would increase attendance.

### *New Zealand context*

It is important to note that in New Zealand, there is no entrance fee for museums or galleries. Certain special exhibitions may have an admission price, which is usually nominal and is used to support any extraordinary installation costs or maintenance associated with that exhibition. In addition, many rural towns throughout New Zealand have small local history museums with eclectic artefacts related to the founding of the particular town and its history. Given that New Zealand was officially founded in 1840, the history can be thought of as recent, when compared to Europe or even the United States. Nevertheless, these museums often comprise fascinating objects, pictures, and stories that are treasured by those who care for them and those who visit them.

The Museum of New Zealand Te Papa Tongarewa (Te Papa), the national museum of New Zealand, was opened in 1998. Demographic profiles for Te Papa are different from what is considered the norm at other museums. A wide range of education levels, professions, and cultural groups visit. The 2014 Annual Report (Museum of New Zealand) showed that 21% of the visitors were between the ages of 16 and 24. This contrasts with other findings that young adults do not attend museums.

Putting together the objectives of the grant, the background from the literature, and New Zealand's somewhat unique context, the primary research question for this study was: What are the perceptions of students in a college of education in New Zealand, regarding museum experiences? To explore this, we posed three research questions, which were:

1. What is the relationship between personality traits and type of museum visited?
2. What is the relationship between art education and museum visits?
3. What motivations and emotions are associated with visiting museums?

## *Method*

### *Participants*

A total of  $n = 78$  undergraduate students completed an online survey that was created for the grant. All students were from a college of education on the South Island of New Zealand, and were in three-year programmes for initial teacher education. There were  $n = 61$  female and  $n = 17$  male participants, who had a mean age of 21.16 ( $SD = 6.62$ ), ranging from 18 to 48 years. This ratio of female to male students is common in teacher education programmes in New Zealand. None of the students worked full time;  $n = 29$  reported working part time. Only 12 of the participants had not attended at least one museum in the past 12 months.

### *Materials*

The materials for this research were an online survey developed for the grant, which went through extensive editing across the languages of the countries involved to assure comparability of the findings while attending to aspects of individual items, especially with regard to demographics, that might be idiosyncratic to any individual country. A set of hypotheses were supplied by the team at the University of Roma Tre by way of guidance for analysing the data; however, these hypotheses were not required to be used by the other participating countries.

There were 27 items on the survey, comprising:

- A short version of the Big Five personality inventory;
- Items regarding prior museum experiences;
- Items exploring expectations for future museum visits;
- Items probing affective reactions toward various types of museums and museum experiences;
- Demographic Items.

### *Procedure*

Ethical permission was obtained by the University under Departmental Review. Māori Consultation also was completed in accordance with University requirements. Participants were solicited in all three year levels, with one class each at the first, second, and third years of study. The students were given information sheets that explained the study and provided the URL for participation. Once online, the introductory survey

instructions indicated that submission of the completed protocol constituted agreement for participation.

Completed surveys were collated centrally in Rome for the study. Data for the New Zealand participants were provided in a format compatible with SPSS Version 20 for purposes of analysis.

### *Results*

The first research question was, What is the relationship between personality traits and type of museum visited? To explore this question, we used the items from the short version of the Big Five. Following the hypotheses suggested from the grant, we expected that openness would predict museum visitation in the past 12 months and that extroverts would report significantly more visits to modern, contemporary art/architecture, and design museums, as compared to other types of museums. Using linear regression, the Big Five items were entered as independent variables with the number of museum visits in the past 12 months, and type of museum visited in the past 12 months (Ancient Art, Months-Modern/Contemporary Art, Science and Technology, Archaeological Site/Museum, History/Culture/Art/Popular Traditions, Architecture/Design/Fashion, and House Museum) used in turn as the dependent variables. Only four significant predictors were obtained:

1. Ancient Art Museum visitation and Calm/Emotionally Stable ( $p < .05$ );
2. History/Culture/Art/Popular Traditions Museum visitation and Anxious/Easily Upset ( $p < .05$ );
3. Archaeological Site/Museum visitation and Sympathetic/Warm ( $p < .01$ ); and,
4. Archaeological Site/Museum visitation and Calm/Emotionally Stable ( $p < .05$ ).

The second research question asked, What is the relationship between art education and museum visits? Using correlation, the data showed that Art education in school was not significantly correlated with museum visits over the past 12 months; however, having engaged in art education outside of school was significant at  $p < .01$ . Given that art education at school was not significantly correlated with museum visitation over the past 12 months, we decided to examine this question further by exploring whether it mattered with whom the museum visit occurred. For this, using linear regression, museum visitation over the past 12 months was

used as the dependent variable. The independent variables were: visited with a school/teachers, visited with parents, visited with friends, visited with an association, visited with one's partner, visited with children, and visited alone. Visiting with parents, with friends, or alone predicted museum visits over past 12 months, all at  $p < .01$ . Visiting with a school/teachers, visiting with an association, and visiting with a partner or children were not significant predictors.

The last research question examined, What motivations and emotions are associated with visiting museums? In terms of which motivators predicted past museum visitation, linear regression was again used to analyse the data. Museum visitation over the past 12 months was the dependent variable. The independent variables were: interest in the artist/scientist/exhibit, pleasure, cultural enrichment, emotional responses/experiences/critical reflection, desire to see original works, learning through practical demonstrations, experiencing multimedia, participating in public events, and opportunity to learn through a close experience. Only interest in the artist/scientist/exhibit predicted past museum visitation ( $p < .05$ ).

This analysis was repeated, this time using the variable, «How eager are you to visit a museum in the next 6 months» as the dependent variable. This time, the significant motivators were cultural enrichment ( $p < .01$ ) and for emotional responses/experiences/critical reflection ( $p < .05$ ). Participants were also asked a series of questions directly related to what emotions they would expect to feel during a visit to a museum/exhibition in the next 6 months. Using linear regression, with eagerness to visit a museum in the next 6 months as the dependent variable, and fun, distress, boredom, and well-being as the independent variables, fun and well-being were significant, both at  $p < .01$ ; distress and boredom were not significant predictors.

Also related to emotional responses to museum visits, participants were asked, «Which of the following did you feel during any visits to museums or exhibitions in the past 12 months? Participants used a 5-point Likert-type scale to rate the following: wonder, pleasure, melancholy, well-being, aesthetic enjoyment, boredom, fun, interest, distress, and curiosity. These emotional reactions to museum visitation were entered in a principal components factor analysis using a direct oblimin rotation. The items loaded on 2 factors that explained 60.49% of the variance. The first factor comprised the following items: wonder, pleasure, aesthetic enjoyment, fun, interest, well-being, and curiosity. This factor had an eigenvalue of 4.48. The second factor was made up of the items: melancholy, distress, and boredom and had an eigenvalue of 1.57. The correlation for the two factors was not significant ( $r = .07$ , *ns*). These factors showed a clear delineation between what would

be considered positive and negative emotional reactions.

In terms of predicted future museum visitation based on past visitation, a correlation was computed between the number of museum visits in the past year and intention to visit in the next 6 months. As might be expected, the correlation was significant and positive ( $r = .43, p < .001$ ).

Although not part of the research questions or suggested hypotheses, some additional items on the survey yielded interesting results and merit presentation. To begin, participants were asked how often they engage in various types of activities when visiting a museum. It was disappointing to find that 62% of the sample responded «never» or «not much» to participating in guided tours. Similarly, 69% reported that they do not take part when asked to complete a questionnaire. More positive responses (much and very much) were obtained for participating with simulation games (33%), graphic and pictorial activities (30%), scientific activities (28%), and multimedia activities (23%). Despite these less than encouraging percentages, 65% of the sample indicated a high level of satisfaction and 35% reported that they have learned a large amount on their visits to museums in the past 12 months.

Participants were also asked to rate possible reasons given for not attending museums. As noted, entrance costs are not an issue in New Zealand. In order, the students responded «much» or «very much» to the following reasons:

- Lack of time - 89%
- Lack of opportunity - 78%
- Lack of others to attend with - 78%
- Lack of information - 44%
- Lack of interest - 44%
- Prefer other cultural activities - 41%
- Limited opening hours - 11%

On a positive note, the majority of the students agreed or strongly agreed that:

- Museums contribute to knowledge - 91%
- Museums develop open minds - 76%
- Museum visits are important in teacher education - 64%
- Faculty should encourage museum attendance - 52%
- Museum visits produce feelings of well-being - 47%.

And, the majority disagreed/strongly disagreed that:

- Museum websites suffice - 80%
- Museums do not provide adequate information - 76%
- Visiting a museum is not educationally effective - 71%

- Reading about topics suffices - 69%
- Museums are boring - 61%

### *Discussion*

This study set out to examine the attitudes, motivations, and emotions of undergraduate university students when visiting museums in New Zealand. The data from this study formed one part of an international grant with 10 participating countries on factors affecting museum visitation.

- The main findings from this research were the following:
- For personality types, participants who self-described as calm and emotionally stable were most likely to visit museums related to visit ancient art or archaeological sites. Visits to archaeological sites were also appealing to those who self-described as sympathetic/warm personality types. Those who were anxious/easily upset were likely to attend museums related to history/culture/art/popular traditions.
- Art education in school and school visits to museums did not predict museum visitation as a university student. Outside experiences had more influence.
- The participants were more likely to visit a museum if they were interested in the museum/exhibition, looking for a fun experience, or wanting to promote a feeling of personal well being.
- Those participants who have gone to museums in the past 12 months are likely to intend to return in the next 6 months.
- Although the top three reasons for not visiting museums were a lack of time, opportunity, or having others with whom to attend, participants indicated that online experiences do not substitute for actually going to a museum.
- For this sample of undergraduate university students, museums evoke positive emotions and perceptions about contributing to knowledge.

Keeping the New Zealand context in mind, the data obtained from the current sample of university students only partially supported the extant literature on young adults and museum visitation. Approximately 2/3 of the sample in the current study indicated a high level of satisfaction with their museum visits over the previous year, which supports Mokhtar and Kasim's (2011) finding of positive attitudes toward museums held by university students in Malaysia. Also in keeping with Mokhtar and Kasim's

results, a lack of time was a major impediment to attending a museum for the current sample. And, similar to Shrapnel's (2012) sample, going to a museum to have fun was a clear motivator for attendance by the young adults in the current sample; however, they were also interested in attending for cultural enrichment, gaining a sense of having an emotional response or experience, and having the opportunity for critical reflection. These reasons suggest a somewhat more sophisticated or mature attitude toward the benefits of museum visitation on the part of the students in the current study.

In contrast to Mason and McCarthy's (2006) finding that older patrons were more likely to visit art galleries as compared to those in the 16 to 26 year old age group, roughly 85% of the participants in this study had attended at least one museum over the previous 12 months. This may be because museums are free to attend in New Zealand and that in Otago, which was the location of the study, there are several exciting options for museum visitation. These include a natural history/science museum with special and varying hands-on exhibitions, an art gallery, a regional history archives, an authentic Chinese garden, and a settler's museum in a very engaging setting that highlights both Māori and Pākehā (non-Māori, usually white New Zealander) origins. The evidence from this sample is also in contrast to Mason and McCarthy's (2006) and Shrapnel's (2012) contentions that museums need to appeal to young adult audiences with more edgy exhibits and «museum as nightclub» venues, as evidenced by this sample's desire to engage in critical reflection when visiting a museum.

There are, of course, limitations to the study reported here. To begin, the sample was small and was comprised of students from a university at the bottom of the Earth in a city where sheep and cows outnumber people by about 7:1. Generalising their perceptions to those of young adults in European or Asian cities would be more than a stretch. However, even with these limitations, the results from this study suggest a few practices that might help to build interest in museum attendance from a young age, and that might increase interest in museum visitation for students who are at or about to be at university now.

Given that outside experiences had more influence than school visits in terms of predicting museum visitation as a university student, it seems that parents need to be encouraged to visit museums with their children from an early age, and to provide opportunities for their children to engage in artistic experiences. Museums might provide more programming and activities for children by way of inviting them to be part of the museum and to build comfort levels and interest in museums and all they

have to offer. As the participants in this study were more likely to intend to visit a museum in the next 6 months if they had gone to a museum in the past 12 months, it would make sense that visiting early, and even often, would develop an inclination toward lifelong museum attendance.

The university students in this sample were likely to visit museums in which they had an interest. A future study might focus on exploring what those interests might be and even how university students might become involved in curating or assisting museum staff in preparing exhibitions of interest to the 18-26 year old age group.

Finally, the students reported that going to a museum had educational value and should be encouraged by faculty members. They also stated that there was no substitute for actually going to a museum. This is interesting, given the current young adults' level of attraction with technology and their facility with it. That is not to say that technology should be ignored in museums or that museum websites are not important but rather that we need to focus on how to use technology and websites to encourage young people to visit.

Clearly, for this sample, and we suspect that this would generalise, there's nothing like the real thing. Although we cannot resolve the top three reasons given for not visiting museums – lack of time, opportunity, or having others with whom to attend – we can work to ensure that when young adults do attend a museum or gallery, they feel welcomed, feel that it was a worthwhile use of their time, and they feel that there is reason to return for another visit.

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