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THE NEW CONCEPTS SHAPING THE MARKETING COMMUNICATION STRATEGIES OF MUSEUMS

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Abstract: *Museums play an important role in promotion of the tourism industries and creating local jobs. Being related with the consumption of the people's leisure time, museums should build marketing communication strategies inspired by the successful activities adopted by other entertainment industries and learning institutions competing for the same people's attention and interest. The aim of all visitor-oriented approaches is to produce an immersive visitor experience and that can be created by using ICTs technologies, creative ideas from digital games and gamification techniques that proved to be successful in other domains. For promoting museums as attractive destinations, guerilla marketing campaigns have become options that museums should consider.*

Key words: *visitor's experience, virtual reality, augmented reality, guerilla marketing, serious games.*

1. Introduction

Influenced by the steadily increasing of living standards and levels of education in the last decades, the interest of the people for heritage goods has grown as well. A museum is a non-profit, permanent institution in the service of society and its development, open to the public, which acquires, conserves, researches, communicates and exhibits the tangible and intangible heritage of humanity and its environment for the purposes of education, study and enjoyment [46].

They are part of a universal cultural system for the dissemination of knowledge and experience. As other representative cultural institutions, museums can attract tourists and have a high potential for increasing their contribution for developing local and national economies through the enhancement of employment and incomes. For example, some studies revealed that the museum industry from the United Kingdom have a greater contribution to the national economy than do the car manufacturing or advertising and film industries and directly supports an estimated 195,000 full-time equivalent jobs state [40, p. 293-303]. From the ability to generate jobs, the Guggenheim museum of Bilbao creates an estimated 1.25 jobs for every 1000 visitors [34, p. 155-162]. Strengthening the relationship between citizens and museums in a local community could represent an effective way of community development using local cultural resources and an instrument for creating networks of civic engagement [37, p. 85-94].

Due to the changes appeared during the last couple of decades, the new museum

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started to be included in the leisure and entertainment industries and defined against a highly self-conscious image of newness and the modes of publicity circulating around the museum, rather than what they exhibit [26].

2. The contemporary communication framework for museums

Museum visiting is a leisure time phenomenon and a form of consumption, so the marketing oriented approach became the rule that should guide the majority of the activities pursued by the museums [36, p. 7-14]. The museums face the competition from the entertainment and cultural points of attraction from cities, restaurants, sports arenas, and shopping malls, and even cyberspace. The reasons for introducing marketing communication strategies and marketing research tools in cultural areas came from the competition for the visitors' time and money spent into the broader area of culture (high culture and popular culture) and the need to get a deeper understanding of visitors' behavior. However, not everyone is convinced of the merits of these strategies. Some analysts have criticized the use of marketing or marketing communication strategies as instruments for regional policy, as they fear a process of manipulation and selling out to the business community. The selling of areas in the market, they argue, brings about a "commodification of places". Considering locations as museums as products, authorities run the risk of neglecting the human or cultural aspects, which may conflict with the public responsibilities of government. In practice, however, the regions (including the cultural institutions) make extensive use of headline-grabbing slogans and promotion campaigns to put themselves on the map. [4, p.10]

The postmodern consumers are into a process of continuous search for experiences and this behaviour determined the heritage site to adapt their marketing approach. Under the relational marketing and experiential marketing approaches, the today's and tomorrow's consumers are targeted using the complementarity of the digital universe in order to promote the actual, in-person experience of heritage goods [9, p. 275-280].

The museum experience has been turned into a commodity which museums and heritage sites are expected to package and deliver, and which the desiring consumer can attain with some help and concentration [17, p. 1-16]. The focus on the experience design and delivery results as experiences have been used as a popular construct in destination positioning [30, p. 119-132].

Another trend is to move the museum message outside of his premises by the means of educational programs in schools or cooperation with other locations [44, p. 65-71].

3. The contemporary museum visitor

Increasingly customers are demanding value for money in terms of both price and the quality of product/service being offered [14, p. 373-387]. It is not enough to only know ''who" is interested in "what" type of heritage product or offer, it is important to understand ''why" this is so. Museums conduct visitor studies and systematically acquire knowledge related to visitors, and apply it to planning and decision-making. According to Liu there are three categories of museum visitor studies: 1) visitor evaluation studies; 2) visitor market studies: collecting visitors' reactions, views and emotions; 3) exploratory academic studies upon different subjects, such as psychology and sociology [21, p. 21-37].

Museums evaluate their visitors and keep the record and target their different segments in various ways. For example, The British Museum use these nine segments: 1) children under 16; 2) persons over 16 from the minorities; 3) disabled persons;

4) children under 16 which were involved in educational programmes; 5) children under 16 which were involved in the activities organized by the museum in different locations; 6) persons over 16 who were involved in educational programs; 7) persons over 16 that were involved in the activities organized by the museum in different locations; 8) foreign visitors; 9) website visitors [45].

The persons with the risk of social exclusion are one of the targets of different programs developed by museums. For Example, Royal National Institute of the Blind (UK) involved blind and partially sighted people in extensive consultation and research for the development and improvements of services such as: one to one guided tours, audio description events, touch tours, trails and handling sessions, tactile images and models, practical art workshops and other hands-on sessions and sensory gardens [15, p. 855-859].

From the perspective of cultural sociology, the postmodern tourists and museum visitors are transforming from the pure receivers and interpreters to active experientialists and even meaningful creators and actors [32, p. 34-45]. They are looking for the immersive experiences and high levels of engagement with the cultural destination. From the depth of experience sought and the level of engagement with cultural attraction, McKercher designed a two-dimensional model with five different types of cultural tourists: the purposeful cultural tourist (high centrality/ deep experience), the sightseeing cultural tourist (high centrality/shallow experience), the casual cultural tourist (modest centrality/ shallow experience), the incidental cultural tourist (low centrality/shallow experience), and the serendipitous cultural tourist (low centrality/ deep experience) [24, p. 29-38].

As resulted from a study conducted in Berlin, the tourists' attention has shifted from historic and architectural tourism model or *bildungsbürgerlich* tourism towards a more complex range of cultural attractions, *unter alia* museums which provide both traditional and contemporary culture [11, p. 313-320]. For the communication strategies in museum sector, this paradigm shift reflects the visitors' cultural pluralism and the use of modern and popular culture in order to promote high cultural point of interests.

In our times, museums are faced with the cognitive style of the generation of new media users, whose perceptual skills have been altered and modified by the exposure to the new media and visual technologies. The exposure to moving images in the media will require that even static images should be interactive [17, p. 1-16].

4. Generating and promoting visitor's experience

Museum's experiences are staged and consumed through interactions between the museum and its visitors [32, p. 34-45]. For museums, Kotler evoked four categories of experiences (excitement, playfulness, contemplation, and learning) by using a scale developed from visceral through emotional to cognitive level [18, p. 30-61]. Kotler and Kotler quoted Hood for listing benefits and values for which visitors are looking for: 1. Being with others and enjoying social interaction; 2. Doing something worthwhile; 3. Feeling at ease; 4. Appreciating the challenge of a new experience; 5. Having the opportunity of learning something; 6. Actively participating [20, p. 271-287].

Based on the visitor-oriented approach and the experiences led activities, the museums have to attract and satisfy new audiences promoting social interaction and the emotional involvement of visitors through edutainment, new technological devices, exhibitions and other 'blockbuster' events [8, p. 20-27]. Kesner quoted Prior about the critics of categorization of the museums as places of mass spectacle and distracted

entertainment, considering that the audience is not a homogeneous mass, and that any contemporary museum legitimately accommodates different patterns of use and experience [17, p. 1-16].

Consumer co-creation

Cultural consumers activate into a plurality of worlds and heritage organizations must consider cultural pluralism in order to implement a relational, digital and personalized approach. Because of the potential offered by the virtual co-creation, heritage organizations should use the popular arts as a mediator to promote the heritage experience. Consumer co-creation can be defined by the following results: a) broadening the access to collections; b) customization of the visit and the reinforcement of the visit; c) increasing interactivity between heritage goods and the public with the mediation of social media; d) in-depth initiation that may be followed by peer exchange, both of which are vectors for long-term participation; e) possibility to anchor visit and experience afterwards by using games adapted to children's and teenagers' cognitive abilities [9, p. 275-280].

Visitors' engagement

An immersive visitors' experience are those that can create visitors engagement. The drivers for creating visitor engagement are: prior knowledge (familiarity, expertise including knowledge and skill and past experience), multiple motivations (self-expression, self-actualization, self-image, enjoyment, satisfaction, recreation, and person enrichment) and cultural capital (the accumulation of cultural practices, tastes, educational capital and social origins which affect individuals' ability to consume cultural products) [43, p. 321-329].

Visitor experience is measured starting from visitor expectations before the visit, then the interaction with the artefacts and contexts during the visit. After the visit, the experience could be examined according to the visitors' memories [39, p. 53-60].

4.1. Technology enhanced experience for museum's visitors

The technological environment of cultural institutions has changed and they need for new strategies for reaching their goals [3]. The integration of IT, and particularly the Internet, into the consumption of cultural products has been identified as one of the most important trends in the cultural sector [35, p. 4-20].

The introduction of multimedia information systems, based on Web and social media use, enables museums to redesign traditional products and promote new cultural experiences by involving a worldwide network of potential visitors, who now take part in the production of the cultural service [33, p. 892-898]. Technologies are increasingly being exploited by all kind of cultural institutions and are expected to be widely adopted in cultural heritage field within two-three years and the same time of adoption is predictable for augmented reality applications [41, 14].

The new technologies provide clear advantages for the museums, but it is not clear whether museum visitors are equally receptive to such benefits promised by emerging ICTs [16, p. 155-163].

The new technologies allow for creation of virtual museum by integrating real and virtual flexible networks, on a multilevel system of governance and on the management of an Internet site founded on interconnected servers and on the use of Cloud computing technologies. Technologies require the collaboration of museums with the big companies of the IT sector, from Microsoft to Google, from IBM to Oracle, in order to be able to have the data processing capacity necessary at limited costs. Creation and adhering to a virtual network came from the need of reduction of costs and for the marketing and development activities based on mechanisms of competition and cooperation, in order to

attract visitors, sponsors and funding, but also to enhance the identity of individual museums that participate in the network [38, p. S75-S79].

The new technologies are used by the museums in order to create virtual worlds for interactive experiences, as well as mixed reality games that combine real and virtual interactions, for serious computer games with cultural heritage applications [1]. Experiences are transforming as (a) consumers now play an active part in co-creating their own experiences and (b) technology is increasingly mediating experiences [29, p. 36-46].

The technical devices like electronic guidebooks use three scenarios for engaging visitors: 1) multimedia role-playing adventure (for increasing the motivation to visit); 2) providing a historical-context-visiting mode in order to immerse visitors in the historical situation of the exhibition and to facilitate the visitors' understanding of the historical and socio-cultural background of the exhibits; 3) exploring cue-embedded exhibits for achieving the goal of visitor–computer–object interaction [42, p. 74-83].

The presence of the technology in museum environments could undermine the purpose of the museums with what is called the "Guggenheim effect" (the appeal of the container pushing into the background the essential element, the content, resulting a distracter rather than an opportunity to convey information) [7, p. 452-458].

Virtual reality

Virtual Reality (VR) became widely used as education, interpretation or storytelling tool, as information is delivered mostly by images, sounds and other sensorial means that are easily understood even by non-specialized users [24].

VR can be properly defined as a complex technology which exploits more low-level technologies (such as computer science, 3D graphics, robotics etc.) in order to create a digital environment which users feel completely immersed inside, and which they may interact with [7, p. 452-458].

The relationship between VR and Cultural Heritage is more than consolidated and some museums would be able to adequately exploit the potential of this appealing technology. For the purpose of historical reconstruction, the ancient Pompeii was reconstructed using VR, populated with avatars (virtual Romans) in order to simulate life in Pompeii in real-time [22, p. 109-116; 27, p. 287-298].

Technology museums are using edutainment and host installations which are interactively accessible by users and, they have more propensities to use VR technologies than traditional museums. In the case of contemporary art museums, VR is often used as a means to produce new forms of art, rather than to communicate existing artworks [49].

Cultural heritage systems which are based on Virtual Reality provide a meaningful and pleasant experience in a very limited amount of time. Based on the level of abstraction of the Virtual Environments (VEs), Carozzino and Bergamasco proposed the classification of VR devices described in fig. 1. These devices are ranked starting from totally abstract VEs (such as Information landscapes), to non-realistic VEs (where abstract and realistic elements are both present), to realistic VEs (either modeled or digitally acquired), to photo-realistic VEs, which may be hardly distinguishable from real counterparts [7, p. 452-458].

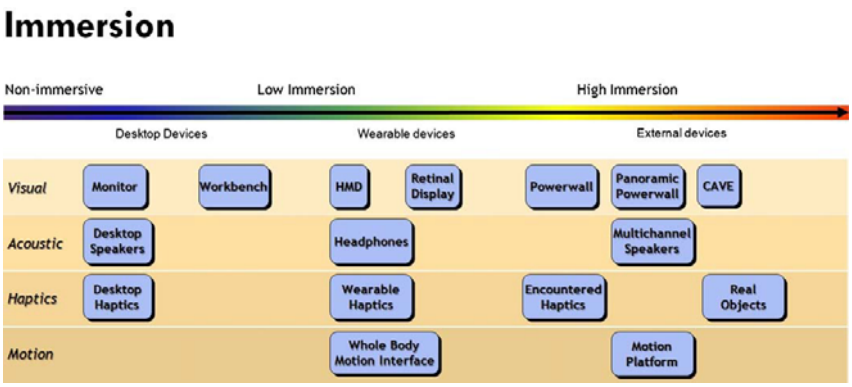

Fig. 1. *Classification of VR devices on the immersion axis. (Carozzino, Bergamasco)*

Virtual museums are not virtual replicas of the real ones and aims to create a personalized experience for the users and to attract more visitors to the physical museum.

Augmented Reality

Augmented Reality (AR) is the combination of real and virtual imagery. There are three characteristics of AR systems: 1) combines real and virtual; 2) are interactive in real time; 3) are registered in 3 D [2, p. 34-47]. Under the concept of Augmented Reality (AR) users can perceive both virtual and real information. Compared to VR systems, most AR systems use more complex software approaches, usually including some form of computer vision techniques for sensing the real world. The basic theoretical principle is to superimpose digital information directly into a user's sensory perception, rather than replacing it with a completely synthetic environment as VR systems do [1].

In Augmented Reality (AR) applications, the players or the visitors can augment the experience superimposing ancient buildings over the real current location [48].

Location based services

The new mobile devices as smartphones and tablets became widely used by innovative museums in order to enhance the interaction between users and cultural heritage. Oomen proposed five categories of location based services that imply the use of smart mobile devices: location aware display of content (allows users to access contextual information about museums or other Cultural Heritage locations and locating them through GPS), contributing content by end-users, QR codes (RFID tags and QR code are used to locate users indoor or outdoor or to access further information, augmented reality application and location based games [31].

4.2. The events as marketing communication tools for generating visitors' experiences

Spiritual and secular festival, which includes street events, food exhibits and stalls, fireworks, and a procession of a saint's relics, like those in Italy (The Cinque Terre region lemon festival, Siena's Palio, the medieval tradition of horse racing dating to the 13th century and others) are good contexts for promoting heritage and museums could be part of these events [19, p. 417-425]. With growing technologies and advertising scenario, events also include media coverage [5, p. 61-67].

Guerilla marketing events

Apart from the strategy of using traditional local festivals as communication vehicle, the museums could think of different creative and unconventional techniques for

promoting their collections and attracting new audiences. In the category of the events that have high impact and generate word of mouth communication are those described by the term of guerilla marketing.

This kind of the campaigns are constructed as visual products and the communication practices themselves become the commodities that are consumed by the public [25, p. 303-305]. In this category could be included the unconventional event organized on 29th of December, 2013, before the Romania's National Day at the *Casa Mureşenilor Museum* from Braşov. The event targeted the young people like students and included workshops on traditional Romanian craftwork and laser projections on the museum front of the building celebrating key historic moments [47].

Ambient advertising

Ambient advertising is a form of guerilla marketing that use the indoor or outdoor space in a way that will raise the curiosity and will produce the engagement of the people [28, p. 114]. In 2010, Visa, sponsor of the exhibition about Pompeii organized by the National Museum of Art from Wellington, New Zealand get a high awareness using the lava flow simulation inside the luggage trailer. The ad execution gain attention from travelers as well as many of mass media [50].

Fig. 2. *www.creativeguerrillamarketing.com/guerrilla-marketing/42-kickass-ambient-advertising-examples-2014/*

4.3. Gamification and Serious Games: the newest challenge for visitor experience enhancement

The term '**Serious Games**' (SG) describes a relatively new concept, respectively the computer games that are not limited to the aim of providing entertainment and are used for learning and educational purposes in many application domains, such as Cultural Heritage (Figure 3) [1].

Fig. 3. *Rome reborn serious game (Anderson et. al, 2010)*

The Serious Games used in Cultural Heritage Interpretation could be structured in the following three categories: 1) cultural awareness; 2) historical reconstruction; 3) heritage awareness (artistic/ archaeological heritage and architectural/natural heritage) [6, p. 81-87].

The concept of gamification is defined as "the use of game elements in non-game context" [10]. Gamification refers to adding game mechanisms into a service, which in turn automatically becomes more engaging and attains a better retention of customers [12, p. 236-245]

5. Conclusions

For the communication strategies in Cultural Heritage sector, the paradigm shift to a marketing approach required to be adopted by the cultural institutions came from the visitors' cultural pluralism and the use of modern and popular culture in

order to promote high cultural point of interests.

The interaction between visitors and museums is a reciprocal relationship that should end into an entertaining, interesting and memorable experience. The communication strategies and the engagement activities adopted on the site have the objective to maximize the experience of the visitors and to attract new audiences through edutainment, new technologies and creative events.

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