Similarities and differences in perceptions and motivations of Museum and Temporary Exhibit visitors

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Abstract

Although Italy is a country that possesses an enormous quantity of art work, art institutions often do not attract visitors as much as it could be expected. What motivates people to visit a museum (M) - here defined as a permanent collection of art works - or a temporary exhibit (TE)? To study the perceptions and motivations of M and TE visitors, 269 people were asked to answer a questionnaire after completing their visit to either a M or a TE in Venice - M and TE enjoy national fame and at the time displayed art works from the Renaissance onwards of comparable importance. The results - obtained from factorial analyses of subjects' answers to various questions - showed that M and TE visitors are similar in their judgement of the *gratification* and *satisfaction* values provided by the visit. They instead differ with regard to other dimensions: *interest for art and culture* characterizes M visitors more than TE visitors, whereas *entertainment needs* characterize TE visitors more than M ones. Similarly, as regards the dimensions underlying their semantic associations to the art institution, a *social dimension* (e.g., "crowd") characterizes TE visitors more than M ones, whereas a *reverence* dimension (e.g., "silence", "antiquity") characterize M visitors more than TE ones. M and TE visitors finally differed in relation to a few other variables - e.g., how they acquired information about the existence of the M or TE - but they did not differ in terms of sociodemographich variables- most had at least a high school diploma, lived in nearby towns and regions, etc.. In sum the study highlights aspects of art fruition that have implications, we believe, not only for the understanding of art fruition as a cognitive and social experience, but also for art-institutions' policies and marketing.

1.Introduction

The last decade or so has witnessed, in most western countries, Italy included, a hot and interesting debate as regards how art museums, and art institutions in general, ought to be managed, i.e., what strategies they ought to implement, in order to fulfil their cultural-educational mission, taking however into account structural, or other resource constraints, financial ones included (e.g., Bagdadli 1997; Hooper-Greenhill 1999; Malaro 1994). How to increase the number of art visitors, and how, and in what ways, to satisfy customers' (cognitive, aesthetic, material, etc.) needs constitute shared concerns that, however, are typically and somewhat

necessarily approached in different ways by institutions that differ in their specific 'mission', in the constraints (e.g. personnel) to which they are subject, etc., and therefore differ in their policies - e.g., compare private vs. public museums; large, national museums vs. local, small ones; highly specialized collections vs. heterogeneous ones; temporary vs. stable galleries or collections. For instance, art institutions differ in the extent to which their policy is based on the belief that art ought to be/come a best-selling product, marketed to, *and consumed by*, as many new consumers as possible (e.g., people who do not know/care much about art, or who do not usually visit museums/art exhibits), regardless, at times, of the educational-cultural aspect of the subjective visit experience, or of institutional aims (see Varese '82; Mottola Molfino '99).

Whatever the cultural-ideological beliefs that underlie institutional policies, meeting the concerns outlined above - increased audience and customers' satisfaction - requires knowing visitors' motivations, perceptions, and needs. The study to be presented focused on the meaning that people attach to art visits, by comparing two kinds of art institutions: a (public) Museum (M) that hosts a stable collection, and a (private) art institution that hosts temporary exhibits (TE). On the basis of theoretical and empirical analyses that focus on art institutions' image, advertising modalities, etc., and on visitors' motivations, perceptions, and needs (e.g., Luise & Savoia 1981; Jansen Verbeke, Van Rekom '96; Mc Lean '92), we hypothesized that M and TE might attract somewhat different visitors in that they differ in what they typically 'offer' -e.g., the aesthetic and cognitive experience they induce, the social integration needs they satisfy. In order to minimize the influence of uncontrolled variables, the selected M and TE institutions were located in the same city (Venice), and were comparable both as regards the extent to which they enjoy national 'fame', and the nature of the art works they exhibited when the data were collected (October '99; mostly important paintings related to Venetian Renaissance).

2. Method

Experimental Material, Subjects, Procedure, Data analysis. To collect the data, we developed, and pre-tested with 20 visitors, a questionnaire that comprised checklists and interval-scale questions related to 4 themes: information sources, visit modality and evaluation, visit motivations, and image of the Museum (M)/Temporary Exhibit (TE), in addition to personal information (see the Results section for more details). A total of 269 Italian subjects answered the tested questionnaire - handed to them by a researcher, it asked for their cooperation to a scientific study - at the end of their visit: 149 were TE visitors, 120 were M visitors. Visitors were selected by means of systematic sampling that considered also time-sampling issues (working vs. week-end days). Data were analyzed in various ways (e.g., χ statistics for checklist answers; factorial analyses for interval-scale answers) as detailed in the Results section.

3. Results[1]

Let us anticipate that, in general, the analysis of answers given by art visitors confirmed the hypothesis that M and TE attract somewhat different visitors, *except for their similarity in terms of sociodemographic variables*; that is, M and TE visitors acquired their information about the exhibit from different sources, emphasize different motivations for their visits, 'tour' the visit differently, use different informational 'means' to better understand it, and the exhibit experience induces at least in part different perceptions in them.

3.1 Visitors' sociodemographic profile. Answers given to sociodemographic questions showed that M and TE visitors constitute a fairly homogeneous group: 46% were males, 54% females[2]; the largest age group (47% of the entire sample) was older than 50 years; the mean age of M visitors was 45.5 years, that of TE visitors was 48.5 years. Because most visitors (95.5%) reported having had at least 13 years of education (i.e., finished senior high school), and only 4.5% reported 8 years of education (the mandatory level in Italy), the sample represents

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[1] Asterisks indicate the following probability levels: * p < .05; ** p < .01; *** p< .001

[2] Significant differences between M and TE visitors are explicitly mentioned.

- without significant differences between M and TE - an upper segment of the Italian population. The latter conclusion is partially supported by visitors' occupational status (the original categories were later grouped): 37.8% non-workers , 29.2% intermediate-level workers, and 33% high-level workers, again without significant M/TE differences. Finally, answers showed that geographical distance is crucial: most visitors came from nearby towns (e.g., Padua <u>and</u> <u>Mestre</u>) and regions, such as Lombardy, with numerousness decreasing as distance increased. In sum, the differences between M and TE visitors that we shall report in the next sections are typically not due to their sociodemographic profile.

3.2. Sources of exhibit information. As table 1 shows, M and TE visitors acquired information about the visited exhibit through quite different sources, <u>differences that mirror how</u> <u>M and TE tend to inform the public about their existence and/or activity</u>. Privileged information sources are tourist guide books, and 'intrinsic prestige'-art knowledge (typically acquired at school) for the Museum, but printed media (newspapers, posters-leaflets) and television-radio for the Temporary Exhibit. There are no differences instead as regards information acquired through specialized journals, friends-family-other people, or Internet (the latter is still an under-utilized source). In other words, the data indicate that large-scale advertising campaigns do contribute to the well-known appeal that TE have been shown to have in recent years.

Table 1. Visitors' sources of information about Museum/Temporary Exhibit (% data)

Information sources	M	TE	χ2
tv/radio	1.7	18.0%	18.2*
newspapers	6.8%	54.8%	67.9*
specialized journals	15.3%	18.7%	ns
tourist guide book	29.7%	3.3%	36.0*
Posters, leaflets, etc.	1.7%	14.0%	12.6*
Internet	1.7%	6.0%	ns
People (friends, family, etc.)	33.1%	23.3%	ns
Other(prestige, school, etc.)	35.0%	3.3%	46.3*
Total	100	100	

3.3 Visit modality, and evaluation. M and TE visitors significantly differed also as regards how they looked at the exhibit, that is, in their distribution of focussed attention (table 2). Reported differences reflect on the whole the fact that M shows a stable, huge collection of art works, and therefore visitors pay selective attention to what they like most or to the most famous works, whereas they significantly more often look attentively at all the temporarily-only displayed TE art works.

Table 2. How M/TE visitors looked at the exhibit: distribution of attention (% data)

Art works looked at with attention	All	Most famous	Most preferred	Total	χ2
M	28.8	24.6	46.6	100	10.3**
TE	47.3	14.7	38.0	100	

The informational supports that visitors reported using most (78%) are those freely available at the exhibit, such as informational wall displays, or informational cards you can consult in each exhibit room; visitors rely also on M/TE guide books (48%), and, less frequently, on other means. Within the latter support types, significant differences appeared: audio guides and guided tours, i.e., informational means that, by conveying information in the oral channel, often in an interactive fashion, are probably more pleasant, as well as easier to follow, are more frequently used by TE than M visitors (respectively, 16.6% vs. 7.6%; χ2 = 6.0*; and 19.4 vs. 5.0; χ2= 11.8**).

Whereas both M and TE visitors thought that the read or listened-to information helped them much (47%), or at least to some extent (45%), to understand the art works they saw, TE visitors reported a greater ease than ME visitors in being able to find 'a common thread' among the exhibited art works on the basis of the supplied information - that was judged as "very useful" by 45% of TE visitors, vs. 24% of M visitors (χ2 = 14.8**). The findings might be

interpreted as reflecting the fact that although both institutions supply useful information, the lesser etherogeneity of TE art works (most TE exhibits are thematic in nature, including the one that was here studied) makes it easier for art curators to supply semantic and formal links among exhibited art works, as well as for visitors to perceive the exhibit as a coherent whole.

Finally, the overall evaluation of the visit was on the whole positive for both institutions, without significant differences between them: 22% of all visitors define it "positive to some extent" and 76% as "very positive".

3.4. Visit Motivations. Visitors' degree of agreement, on a 0-3 interval scale (0 = disagree completely, 3= agree completely), with each of ten potential motivations for their visit, were factorially analyzed, using the principal component Varimax method (convergence criterion was achieved with 5 iterations). Three factors were shown to underlie visitors' motivations, explaining 52.6% of the total variance - see table 3 for the items, the factorial loadings, the t-tests on M and TE means for each item, and M and TE means on each factor. (Note that the 10 motives were presented to visitors in one of three different list orders. Because the analysis showed an order effect ($\chi 2$= 12.9*) only for the motive "Cultural enrichment" we may conclude that order on the whole did not affect subjects' judgements).

The first factor - explaining 20,7% of the variance - can be interpreted as referring to the *gratifying character of the visit*, expressed with different connotations by the 4 items loaded by the factor, namely as a not-to-be-lost opportunity (a motive that, strangely enough, is more relevant for M than for TE visitors), a positive behaviour, an intelligent way of spending one's free time, and an emotionally loaded experience. According to subjects, both institutions induce such a gratification to the same extent. The second factor - explaining 19,2% of the variance - singles out 3 motives, all loaded uniquely by it, that might be interpreted as expressing a dimension of *interest for art and culture*. Note that this dimension characterizes M visitors more than TE ones. The third and last factor - explaining 12,7% of the variance - indicates a dimension that we called *entertainment need*: its constituent motives in fact comprise the concepts that visiting art exhibits is fashionable, and art exhibits are a good excuse to take a small trip. This dimension characterizes TE visitors more than M ones.

The very specific motive "It is natural (to make this visit) since one is in Venice", a motive that characterizes M visitors more than TE ones, loads about equally on both the first and second factor, and was therefore not included in any single dimension.

In sum, TE and M visitors' motivations show both common features and a unique tendency to privilege this more than that motivational push.

Table 3. Visitors' motivations and their dimensions (motives, factor loadings, item means, mean scores for factor items, and t-test between means).

Factor loadings				Item means		t-test	Factor means		t-test
Gratifi cation	Culture	Entertain ment	MOTIVES	M	TE		M	TE	
.72	.11	.08	Opportunity not to be lost	2.7	2.5	1.9*			
.69	.13	-.19	Positive behaviour	2.6	2.5	1.6			
.63	.10	.47	Emotionally loaded experience	2.4	2.3	.5	2.6	2.5	ns
.60	.01	.16	Intelligent way to spend one's free time	2.7	2.7	-.2			
.00	**.81**	.06	Profound interest for art	2.2	1.9	2.7**			
.12	**.72**	.11	Interest for the exhibited art works	1.9	1.7	2.1*	2.2	2.0	2.7**
.37	**.55**	-.12	Cultural enrichment	2.5	2.4	1.2			
.10	.19	**.81**	Excuse for a small trip	2.0	2.3	-2.6**	1.5	1.9	-4.7***
.01	-.47	**.51**	Visiting art exhibits is fashionable	1.1	1.6	-4.5***			
.35	.34	.16	Natural (to make this visit) since one is in Venice	2.3	2.0	2.5*			

Related to visitors' motivation, is the distinction between 'habitual' and 'novice' art visitors, and the question of whether people have 'stable' preferences for this or that exhibit kind. The collected data (table 4) allow us to address these issues. The results showed that most art visitors tend to be 'habituées', i.e., visitors reported having seen, in the past year, both museums

and temporary exhibits, thus confirming an often reported finding in the literature, but also that a portion, however small, of the public prefers one above the other exhibit kind.

Table 4. Visitors' reports about art visits in the past 12 months (% data).

Art visits in the past year	M only	TE only	Both M and TE	Neither M nor TE	χ2
M	18,8%	7,7%	68,4%	5,1%	21. 3**
TE	4%	21.3%	70.7%	4%	

3.5. Visitors' image of the Museum/ Temporary Exhibit. How visitors perceived the art institution they visited was measured by two questions: the first asked them to select what institution category (e.g., a church) most resembled the art institution, supplying a category of their own if necessary; the second, a multiple question, asked them to judge to what extent a number of concepts (e.g., boredom, emotion) described in their view the art institution - on a 0-4 scale; 0 = "Not at all descriptive", 4 = Extremely descriptive. Both questions obtained significant differences between M and TE visitors.

More specifically, whereas M visitors associated the art institution almost exclusively to a Church, or to a Library, TE visitors distributed their choice quite evenly among the proposed location categories, including Theatre and Socio-Cultural Club -they supplied own categories too (e.g., art studio and shopping centre; see table 5).

Table 5. Institution categories that visitors perceive as being most similar to the visited art institution (% data).

	Church	Theatre	Library	Socio-Cultural Club	Other categories	χ2
M	45.3%	8.5%	34.9%	8.5%	2.8%	23.1**
TE	23.3%	21.1%	29.6%	15.5%	10.6%	

Answers to the multiple question were factorialy analyzed, using the same method reported in Section 3.4. Three factors were shown to underlie visitors' perceptions, explaining 53.8% of the total variance - see table 6 for the items, the factorial loadings, the t-tests on M and TE means for each item, and M and TE means on each factor. (Items were presented in 3 list orders. Since only the Culture item obtained significant order effects ($χ2 = 20.8**$), we can conclude that on the whole order did not influence visitors' judgements).

The meaning of the 5 items that have high loadings on the first factor - explaining 23.0 % of the variance - can be interpreted as referring to the *satisfying aspects of the visit,* a dimension that includes both the artistic-cultural enrichment provided by the visit, and the experience's pleasant hedonic tone - note that the concept Boredom is negatively loaded by this factor, a result that implies that the visit is associated to its opposite, namely to concepts such as interest, enjoyment, *excitement*, but is also loaded by the third factor and therefore ought not to be given too much relevance. This factor, similarly to what was observed in relation to the motivational factor "gratifying character of the experience", does not differentiate M and TE visitors.

The second factor - explaining 17.2 % of the variance - refers instead to a s*ocial dimension of the visit experienc*e: Crowd and Worldliness are the 2 items loading very highly, and exclusively on this dimension that obtains significant differences between M and TE visitors, characterising the latter more than the former group.

The meaning of the third and last factor - explaining 13.6% of the variance - might be interpreted as referring to a *reverential dimension of the visit*. Three items show high loadings (> .40) in the third factor, namely Silence, Antiquity, and Boredom - the latter gives a negative connotation to the dimension, but, because it has a higher loading on the first factor, ought not to be considered as an integral part of this dimension. This factor characterises M more than TE visitors, thus differentiating them congruently with their differences along the second dimension. Note that the Novelty appraisal - an item that is bi-factorial - again congruently characterises TE more than M visitors.

In sum, art visits on the whole elicit a positively denoted experience. However, the Museum's image clearly is more 'serious' and, so to speak, aesthetically and culturally 'marked' than the TE's image, whereas the TE's image is 'lighter' and more socially-oriented. These conceptualisations, on the whole, are coherent with the previously reported associations

(e.g., the intrinsic reverential, contemplative and cultural meanings of Church and Library, that characterized M more than TE, and the social connotation of Theatre and Club, that characterised TE more than M) and, as already noted, with visitors' motives to visit this or that art institution. In other words, the obtained results show that M and TE visitors have art-visit experiences, motives, and cognitive representations of it that are both quite similar in many respects, and different as regards other aspects, thus pointing out on the one hand the multiplicity of dimensions underlying artistic fruition, and the need to analyze it taking into account its complexity.

Table 6. Visitors' conceptual images of the art-institution and their dimensions (concepts, factor loadings, item means, mean scores for factor items, and t-test between means).

Factor loadings				Item means		t-test	Factor means		t-test
satisfaction	sociality	reverence	CONCEPTS	M	TE		M	TE	
.79	.00	.10	Beauty	3.4	3.4	.5	2.8	2.7	ns.
.74	.02	-.04	Emotion	3.1	3.0	.3			
.66	.11	.10	Culture	3.4	3.2	1.5			
.59	-.06	.20	Art	3.7	3.5	2.4*			
-.51	.26	.41	Boredom	.4	.3	.7			
-.07	**.85**	-.06	Crowd	1.4	2.1	-4.1***	1.1	1.7	-4.4***
-.02	**.78**	.06	Worldliness	.7	1.3	-3.6***			
.13	-.28	**.78**	Silence	1.9	1.4	3.3**	2.3	1.9	3.7***
.07	.27	**.64**	Antiquity	2.7	2.3	2.5*			
.19	.36	.32	Novelty	1.3	1.8	-2.7**			

Conclusion

The results obtained may be interpreted, we believe, as showing that different management strategies on the part of art institutions not only tend to attract visitors that have different motvations, but also to induce different art-visit perceptions, and to satisfy different social and cognitive needs. As regards the study implications for art-institutions' policies and marketing, the results lend themselves to a few suggestions, namely that pervasive mass-media information about an art event/art institution, an emphasis on the art visit as a 'not to be lost occasion', a chance to enjoy oneself in the company of other people, and adequate additional services on the premises - including the availability of *free* (or low cost) *informational* materials- might be effective means in reaching (in addition to 'art habituées') 'not-so-much-art-minded people', and/or 'not so well-informed people', inducing in potential visitors a perception of art visits as pleasurable and socially relevant events, and making the art visit indeed an experience that visitors enjoy because they can master it at the cognitive level. In sum, the results confirm a policy that has already been advocated and not rarely pursued in the art domain, namely that a winning strategy for art institutions to fulfil their mission - have art and people meet - is to pursue management goals and strategies that do not forget the need to actually help people meet art, therefore helping them understand it and develop an intrinsic interest for it.

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