



Keeping your audience: Presenting a visitor engagement scale



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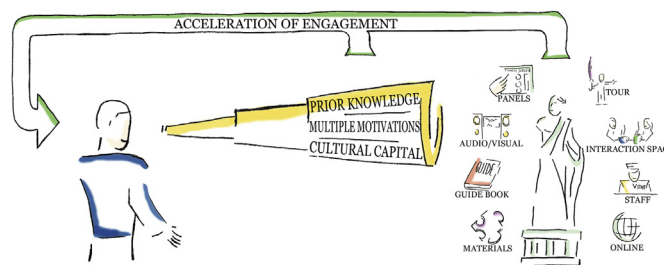
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HIGHLIGHTS

- Develops a new visitor engagement scale.
- Establishes a relationship between the drivers and level of engagement.
- Tests a structural model using formative and reflective scales.
- Provides a tool for managers to assess engagement systematically.

GRAPHICAL ABSTRACT



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ABSTRACT

Understanding visitors' level of engagement with tourist attractions is vital for successful heritage management and marketing. This paper develops a scale to measure visitors' level of engagement with tourist attractions. It also establishes a relationship between the drivers of engagement and level of engagement using Partial Least Square, whereby both formative and reflective scales are included. The structural model is tested with a sample of 625 visitors at Kelvingrove Museum in Glasgow, UK. The empirical validation of the conceptual model supports the research hypotheses. Whilst prior knowledge, recreational motivation and omnivore-univore cultural capital positively affect visitors' level of engagement, there is no significant relationship between reflective motivation and level of engagement. These findings contribute to a better understanding of visitor engagement in tourist attractions and a series of managerial implications are proposed.

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1. Introduction

Engagement is an established topic within tourism literature. Better engagement with an attraction's context and contents optimizes the overall visitor experience and also enhances its value proposition. Greater understanding of engagement can inform the predictability of the visitor's behavior (Black, 2012; Sheng & Chen, 2012). Engagement in this paper is perceived as involvement with and commitment to a consumption experience (Brodie, Hollebeek, Juric', & Ilic', 2011). Previous studies (Falk & Storksdieck, 2005; Serrell, 1998) have used observation

techniques and experiments to understand visitors' engagement. However, such studies have focused mainly on the length of time visitors spend in the tourism attractions rather than their involvement with and commitment to the experience. Moreover, these techniques do not fully capture visitors' level of engagement.

Using museums as a research context, our first objective is to investigate the relationship between the drivers and levels of engagement to develop a scale to measure visitors' level of engagement; to our knowledge, such a scale does not exist in the extant literature. This instrument can add value to tourism research and management practice as it can be used to predict tourists' behavior in terms of their engagement. Such predictability relates to the key drivers of engagement (i.e., prior knowledge, intrinsic motivations and cultural capital) and better understanding of these drivers can inform better management of engagement. Previous

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research has called for empirical work to document the relationship between visitors' level of engagement and their: prior knowledge (Black, 2005), multiple motivations (Prentice, 2004b), and cultural capital (Kim, Cheng, & O'Leary, 2007). Our second objective relates to measurement issues in general. We echo Žabkar, Brenčić and Dmitrović's (2010) call for advancing scale development and measurement in tourism studies as a majority of scales in business research use reflective scales (i.e., based on classical test theory where the measured indicators are assumed to be caused by the construct) instead of formative scales (i.e., indicators cause changes in the construct) (see also Diamantopoulos & Winklhofer, 2001; Wiedmann, Hennigs, Schmidt, & Wuestefeld, 2011). Building upon this argument, we test level of engagement and prior knowledge formatively and multiple motivations reflectively.

The contributions of the study are threefold: 1) the development of a new scale, with a high applied value to managers and researchers, to measure level of engagement; 2) contribution to the extant literature by establishing a relationship between the 'drivers' and 'level' of engagement; 3) from a methodological perspective, it tests a structural model including formative and reflective scales.

2. Literature review

2.1. Engagement

Engagement is context and discipline bound and defined in different ways (Brodie, Ilic, Juric, & Hollebeek, 2013; Higgins & Scholer, 2009; Mollen & Wilson, 2010): attachment (Ball & Tasaki, 1992), commitment (Mollen & Wilson, 2010), devotion (Pimentel & Reynolds, 2004), and emotional connection (Marci, 2006). It also features in the social science including sociology (civic engagement), psychology (task engagement), marketing (customer engagement), and organizational behavior (employee engagement) (Brodie et al., 2011). Brodie et al. (2013) argue that engagement goes beyond involvement to embrace a proactive consumer relationship with specific objects of engagement. Wang (2006) highlights that measuring the time consumers spend with service offerings is pivotal to understanding their engagement. For the purposes of this study engagement is conceptualized as: a state of being involved with and committed to a specific market offering (Abdul-Ghani, Hyde, & Marshall, 2011; Higgins & Scholer, 2009).

In marketing, engagement is a two-way interaction between subjects e.g., consumers, tourists and objects e.g., brands, tourist attractions (Hollebeek, 2010). As a multidimensional concept, engagement includes cognitive, emotional and/or behavioral elements (Brodie et al., 2011; Hollebeek, 2010). This varies across engagement actors (i.e., subjects and objects) and/or contexts (i.e., consumption situations) (Brodie et al., 2011). For example, the relationship between the consumer and service provider is built upon the engagement of both parties in a constant process of exchange. That is, the service provider attempts to deliver the experience the consumer seeks (Hollebeek, 2010; Mollen & Wilson, 2010).

Not all consumers enjoy the same level of engagement, and engaged consumers derive more benefits from their consumption experience (Brodie et al., 2011; Higgins & Scholer, 2009). New and repeat purchasers have different levels of familiarity with a specific service offering and their level of engagement may vary (Hollebeek, 2010; Mollen & Wilson, 2010). Similarly, consumers' level of motivations and knowledge influence their engagement with a service offering (Brodie et al., 2013; Hollebeek, 2010). Motivated consumers are normally more committed to and involved with service offerings (van Doorn et al., 2010). Also those with higher knowledge of the context demonstrate higher levels of engagement with their

experience (Holt, 1998). Whilst such relationships between engagement and its influential factors have been extensively studied in the literature of marketing, they have received little attention in the realm of tourism research (e.g., Ballantyne, Packer, & Falk, 2011; Falk, Ballantyne, Packer, & Benckendorff, 2012); our study addresses this gap in the literature.

2.2. Drivers of engagement in tourism

The literature identifies three drivers of engagement: prior knowledge, multiple motivations and cultural capital, these are summarized in Table 1. Prior knowledge influences tourist behavior and decision making, in particular familiarity, awareness and specific knowledge of target attractions determine preference for particular destinations (Baloglu, 2001; Gursoy & McCleary, 2004; Ho, Lin, & Chen, 2012; Prentice, 2004a). Prior knowledge is a multidimensional construct comprising of: familiarity with the attraction (awareness of the product through acquired information) (Park & Lessig, 1981), expertise (knowledge and skill) (Mitchell & Dacin, 1996), and past experience (endurance of previous visits) (Moore & Lehmann, 1980). However, as Kerstetter and Cho (2004) stress, previous studies have not examined prior knowledge in its entirety. That is, familiarity, expertise, and past experience – which essentially form the construct of prior knowledge – have been studied in isolation. Therefore, we argue that prior knowledge should be conceptualized as an 'aggregated' construct simply because dropping any dimension(s) of the construct alters its conceptual meaning.

Demographic, socio-economic characteristics and multiple motivations affect consumption behavior, however, only multiple motivations are directly related to intention because they are not situation dependent (Park & Yoon, 2009). Comprehending motivation is key to understanding tourists' decisions and behaviors (Iso-Ahola, 1982; Kolar & Zabkar, 2010; Park & Yoon, 2009; Prentice, 2004b). The prevalent dichotomous view of motivation distinguishes between push (i.e., motivations that drive individuals' interest in tourism) and pull (i.e., attractiveness of a destination that draws individuals to a specific place) factors (Baloglu & Uysal, 1996). Push factors emerge from intrinsic (behavior for its own sake) and/or extrinsic (behavior for external rewards) grounds (Iso-Ahola, 1982). There is need for empirical investigation to better understand the impact of multiple motivation benefits on the level of engagement (Ballantyne et al., 2011; Black, 2005, 2012; Falk, Dierking, & Adams, 2011; Stebbins, 2009).

Table 1
Engagement drivers.

Driver	Content	Authors
Prior Knowledge	Familiarity, expertise including knowledge and skill and past experience of the site	Baloglu, 2001; Gursoy & McCleary, 2004; Ho et al., 2012; Kerstetter & Cho, 2004; Mitchell & Dacin, 1996; Moore & Lehmann, 1980; Park & Lessig, 1981; Prentice, 2004a
Multiple Motivations	Self-expression, self-actualization, self-image, group attraction, enjoyment, satisfaction, recreation, and person enrichment.	Ballantyne et al., 2011; Baloglu & Uysal, 1996; Black, 2005; Falk et al., 2011; Iso-Ahola, 1982; Kolar & Zabkar, 2010; Park & Yoon, 2009; Prentice, 2004b; Stebbins, 2009
Cultural Capital	Social origins and the accumulation of cultural practices, tastes, education.	Bourdieu, 1984; Holt, 1998; Peterson, 2005; Stringfellow et al., 2013

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