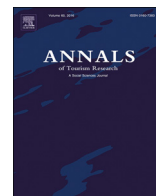




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A journey through the museum: Visit factors that prevent or further visitor satiation



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ABSTRACT

Museums seek to provide visitors with memorable experiences. However, some visitors experience a hedonic decline and satiation after their visit. The present research aims to evaluate how the time spent, the route, and the anticipation of the visit might either prevent or further visitor satiation. A field study and a field experiment are performed. Findings reveal that spending more time in the museum and anticipating the content can increase the perceived satiation and diminish visitors' emotional response, although the attention level diminishes for short visits and when the content is not anticipated. In a real context, following a free route reduces perceived satiation, with visitors following a self-regulatory process and adapting the time spent to the level of satiation.

Introduction

Cultural activities might be deemed as leisure activities which allow individuals to enjoy unique and memorable experiences. One such experience could be a visit to a museum, particularly when the visit constitutes one of the principal reasons or attractions of a tourist trip. Museums are involved in improving the experience design through individual touchpoints, the customer journey, and the physical and social environment (Ponsignon, Durrieu, & Bouzdine-Chameeva, 2017). However, it is not unusual to see many visitors looking tired, exhausted and not as excited as might be expected after a visit to a museum. That visit which has created so much expectation and which has so much been looked forward to may end in boredom and satiation. What goes on during the visit may indeed make it a unique, one-off event, but in the negative sense, in other words by arousing scant interest in any future intention to return. After reviewing the sparse literature, Davey (2005) and Bitgood (2009a, 2009b) conclude there are various phenomena associated with decreased visitor attention during the visit such as fatigue, satiation, competition, information overload, distraction, choice, interactions or poor exhibit design. In the current paper, we focus on visitor satiation. According to Poor, Duhachek, and Krishnan (2012) and Redden, Haws, and Chen (2017), satiation reflects the phenomenon whereby people enjoy something less the more of it they consume. In the context of museums, Bitgood (2009b) defined satiation as diminished attention resulting from a high consumption rate. However, it also involves decreased enjoyment and excitement. Whilst it is clear that visitor satiation after a visit depends on the “content consumed”, it is important to gain insights into which aspects of the visit may either further or offset the feeling of satiation.

Almost everybody experiences satiation on a daily basis. These are moods and feelings which appear frequently, regardless of the kind of experience (food, music, television programmes, art, etc.). Enjoyment decreases with repeated consumption of every experience because individuals grow satiated with their favourite stimuli when exposed to them continually (Sevilla & Redden, 2014).

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Satiation is as much psychological as it is physical and research has often assumed it to be automatic and virtually inevitable, as well as to a large extent an unconscious process. In marketing, it is the area of consumer behaviour literature which has taken an interest in analysing the issue of satiation. Broadly speaking, research has focused on ascertaining how the particular features of a product or experience may impact on satiation. Redden (2015) conducts a detailed analysis of this literature and concludes that “although researchers have often viewed satiation as an automatic meter that tracks the quantity consumed and inexorably leads to satiation, growing research indicates that satiation also has a malleable component rooted in perception and self-reflection”. Having unveiled to a certain degree the complex nature of these experiences, there remains much to be discovered vis-à-vis how they come about and how perception thereof may be influenced.

Although literature on consumer behaviour has studied satiation as a result of relevant physiological, psychological and cognitive processes, this topic has barely been addressed in the context of tourism (Antón, Camarero, & Laguna-García, 2017). Among the articles linking tourism and psychological processes (such as attitudes, emotions, satisfaction, or memory), waning high levels of satisfaction or negative emotions have remained neglected areas in tourism research (Cohen & Cohen, 2012; Pearce & Packer, 2013). Indeed, Pearce and Packer (2013) encourage tourism scholars to study all kinds of mental processes and the embodied actions of those who travel.

Another gap in tourism research is the use of adequate methodologies to analyse tourist psychological processes. Dolnicar and Ring (2014) indicate that experimental studies are required to distinguish between what tourists say and what they actually do. Neuroscience may add value to these experimental tourism studies (Pearce & Packer, 2013) yet few tourism scholars have explored cognitive and emotional mental processes using psychophysiological measures (Kim, Kim, & Bolls, 2014; Li, Walters, Packer, & Scott, 2017; Li, Walters, Packer, & Scott, 2016).

In this context, the current work analyses how repeated exposure to the stimuli and structure of the visit influences the degree of visitor satiation. Specifically, this study proposes the time spent, the route, and the anticipation of the visit as the variables which can prevent or reinforce the feeling of visitor satiation. The work goes beyond merely studying the possible direct effects of the variables considered and also embraces an analysis of the interaction effects. Firstly, as regards the time spent in the museum, satiation is assumed to be related to the amount of consumption. However, consumers of culture may display an insatiable demand and show a greater resistance to satiation. Moreover, the satiation caused by a long visit can be prevented, mitigated, or reinforced by the route followed (free versus ordered) and how the content is discovered (anticipation versus unknown visit). We present evidence from a field study and a field experiment (involving measures of visitors’ unconscious response by means of electrodermal activity) which demonstrate that those who follow an ordered route in the museum as well as those who anticipate the content become more satiated. Although a long visit increases the level of satiation, visitors in a real context adapt the time spent to their level of satiation.

We feel that the work makes a two-fold contribution. First, it focuses on negative visitor experience. At a time when academic literature (and professional analysis) is devoting much effort to exhaustive and detailed inquiry exploring visitor experiences, we note that attention centres on positive experiences (Ponsignon et al., 2017). Yet, whilst it is the positive experience that helps to make a museum visit memorable and which can reinforce the intention to return or recommend the visit, it is no less true that satiation may sour the memory of the visit to such an extent that it becomes unpleasant. Satiation can negatively impact on how much visitors enjoy their visit since, after all, enjoyment is a key goal for visitors. Indeed, entertainment and education are seen as intrinsically linked from the visitor perspective (Packer & Ballantyne, 2004; Packer, 2006). This is why many museums are moving away from being what is an educational establishment and towards becoming a place of leisure in which to spend quality free time.

Secondly, the work adopts a new perspective regarding the notions of visitor satiation, namely that it is not automatically caused by the amount consumed but may depend on visitor perception and on self-reflection of the visit. This fresh perspective, posited by Redden (2015), leads us to include in our proposal the characteristics of the visit itself: the perceptual component (the structure of the visit, i.e., the order or freedom of the route) and the self-reflection component (anticipation of the visit). It also involves including in the study an analysis of how these variables interact with the duration of the visit and exploring all the effects jointly through different methodologies.

Conceptual and theoretical background

Satiation: literature review

Repeated consumption of a single item or repetition of the most affectively relevant stimuli leads to an attenuation of the individual’s response, known as satiation (McAlister, 1982) or hedonic decline (Galak & Redden, 2018).

There are multiple processes simultaneously contributing to satiation (Redden, 2015). Satiation typically results from a combination of mechanisms that reflect physiological processes as well as others that are more psychological and cognitive (Nelson & Redden, 2017). Accordingly, Redden (2015) and Galak and Redden (2018) provide a taxonomy of three kinds of antecedent of satiation: physiological feedback, perceptual changes, and self-reflection. Physiological antecedents result from bodily feedback that reflects the extent of consumption. Perceptual change antecedents (perceptual attention, stimulus type, variety, or social comparison) alter the rate of satiation. Finally, self-reflection antecedents influence satiation by incorporating individuals’ reflection on present and past consumption (perceived past variety, subjective quantity and recency or special meaning). Previous research has shown that these antecedents operate for a broad range of domains (music, art, food, social interactions), although each component’s contribution to satiation varies across the context, and each of the multiple components will likely operate in a simultaneous yet integrative fashion (Galak & Redden, 2018; Redden, 2015).

Consequently, satiation is not simply a fixed physiological process, as a subjective feeling constructed in the moment through

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