

Creative destruction, resilience, and recovery: exploring the digital cultural value of UK museums during Covid-19

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1. Introduction, aim and objectives

Exploring the extent of potential creative destruction of cultural engagement catalysed by Covid-19, this research will interrogate creative resilience – a direct response to creative destruction – as a vital prerequisite of digital cultural value and the sustainability of the museum in a post-pandemic world. Interrogating shifts in digital engagement and new realities for UK museums via a range of prisms, looking outwards from the arts and cultural sector to provide foundations of strategic knowledge. This research meets the urgency of connecting sparse, fractured literature in the context of the pandemic, to interrogate current museum marketing challenges. It will seek to reveal vital insights of both arts marketing theory and practice via case studies and using the Delphi technique to highlight real-world experiences and approaches to creative resilience throughout the pandemic to provide a framework of digital cultural value.

1.1 Research questions

- (1) How are UK museums adjusting to new realities and rapidly changing circumstances?
- (2) To what extent is Covid-19 a catalyst for the creative destruction of cultural engagement?
- (3) How has the success of digital engagement during the pandemic shaped creative resilience, and embedding of digital cultural value in museum marketing strategies?
- (4) Is creative resilience a prerequisite of digital cultural value?

2. Literature Overview

The value of culture has been a particularly ambiguous pursuit for centuries (Walmsley, 2018), with fractured dichotomy divided across layers of discourse, definitions, policy and frameworks (Belfiore and Bennett, 2007; Crossick and Kaszynska, 2016), but is generally conceptualised within the parameters of the longstanding intrinsic-versus-instrumental academic debate (Belfiore and Bennett, 2008). Its complex nature means that it is problematic to define within the digital age, despite museums now adapting to the needs of a new century whilst navigating rapid cultural engagement practices during the pandemic. The value of digital within culture is not articulated clearly, leaving a significant gap in our understanding (Scott et al., 2014). The cultural and creative industries have been impacted by Covid-19 more traumatically than by any other crisis in living memory (Sargent, 2021). The criticality of this can be witnessed in extraordinary streams of governmental support and emergency funding through support programmes, packages and subsidies. Museums around the world quickly developed activity to continue production and events digitally, and nowhere was the response to the pandemic more spectacular than in the online world, where a digital journey was suddenly exponentially accelerated (Sargent, 2021). Despite devastating financial loss, job cuts, cancellations and ongoing social and economic repercussions, the pandemic has revealed significant cultural value within the digital realm. The accelerated move to online increased urgency for museums to introduce new ways of digitally presenting cultural offers (Samaroudi et al., 2020) and explore innovative ways to provide value. But the Covid-19 crisis threatens the survival and future of cultural organisations (Addis and Rurale, 2020), with 13% of museums not expected to reopen after the crisis (UNESCO, 2020). It is within this tremendous devastation that the research will seek to analyse the extent of creative destruction. Schumpeter's publication *Capitalism, Socialism and Democracy*, published in the immediate

aftermath of the Great Depression, focuses on the process described as “incessantly revolutionising the economic structure from within; incessantly destroying the old one, incessantly creating a new one” (Schumpeter, 1942, p. 83). The concept of creative destruction has permeated throughout history, from the industrial revolution, digital revolution and the present day, and ensures perpetual renewal and production, where innovations continually emerge to render existing processes obsolete (Aghion et al., 2021). The culture sector was already facing challenges of decreasing funding, growing competition, technological changes, and rising costs (McDonnell and Tepper, 2014) before Covid-19, but the crisis placed the sector in a paradoxical situation that warrants exploration to reveal sustainable, innovative solutions. Rapid advancement of digital technologies have fundamentally changed the environment of firms, the competitive dynamics across industries and customer demand (Downes and Nunes, 2013; Porter and Heppleman, 2014), threatening the existence of those whose analogue value proposition can be digitally substituted (Lucas and Goh, 2009). The agility of incorporating digital technologies as an innovation process and external stimulus of innovation is critical to survival (Hall and Williams, 2019), not only in response to competition, but to achieve sustainability in the evolving market. As museums in the UK adjust to new realities and rapidly changing circumstances, there remain research gaps; lacking robust, empirical understandings surrounding the processes, benefits, and challenges of digital engagement in the arts (Walmsley, 2016; Carnwarth and Brown, 2014).

3. Methods and Methodology

Capturing changes over time throughout the global crisis, focusing on museums and their digital engagement activities in the UK, this research will address theoretical gaps and real-world issues to advance and contribute to discussion, combining research techniques to obtain rigorous conclusions (Bryman, 2006). Exploring interactions between museums and audiences on social media, the research will study complex, dialogic content within a web of communities, communications, and channels, to arrive at a foundation of findings useful for the sustainability of arts marketing theory and practice in a post-pandemic world, as well as the development of a framework toward digital cultural value. Using a mixed-method approach to interrogate quantitative and qualitative data, three case studies will collect data via content and digital contextual analysis, investigating organisational complexities within real life context. A Delphi study will structure communications from a sample of 30 individuals who hold expertise on the phenomena under study. Greater depth of understanding and arriving at expert consensus will allow the research to develop and present new frameworks and theory for further analysis in subsequent studies. Purposive sampling will be used to identify both case studies and the Delphi study sample, deliberately chosen to reveal insights and rich findings into experiences (Hasson et al., 2000). Providing a steady movement between the phenomena and data will aid in the constant analysis across types of evidence to control the conceptual level and scope of emerging themes (Lawrence and Tar, 2013).

4. References

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