

Online Marketing Communications and the Postmodern Consumer in the Museum context

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This paper focuses on the use of online communications and user-generated content in the discussion and sharing of information in the museums and heritage sector. The paper takes a marketing communications perspective and examines the role of the postmodern consumer in sharing, creating and contributing to stories and conversations which can form part of an online archive as part of a museum collection.

The paper reviews the literature on marketing communications strategy and the postmodern consumer in the museum context. A series of case study examples are used to illustrate the role of online communications and the types of online communication used. The paper presents suggestions for marketing communications practice in the museum context.

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Introduction

The museums and heritage sector in the UK is substantial and is estimated to generate over seven billion pounds of expenditure by visitors to museums and heritage attractions (D C Research, 2010). Like the majority of organisations, museums have been affected by technological change over the last two decades, particularly by developments in digital technology which have made heritage accessible in new forms and to new audiences. Visitors have always had the opportunity to become involved in museums and heritage

through activities such as re-enactments, through storytelling, by working as volunteers in museums and through contributions to collections. In the digital age those contributions can take different forms and this has significant implications for museum offerings; “the familiar architecture of knowledge has dissolved” (The British Museum, n.d, online) and this is leading to new and innovative ways of communicating with and engaging with audiences. Taking a marketing communications perspective, this paper examines the technological changes affecting museums and the implications for marketing communications activities and the development of user-generated content. Specific examples of practice are presented from a variety of museum types and the implications for the sector and marketing communications are presented.

Context for the research: The Museums sector

Originally museums started out as private collections collated by a wealthy elite as an expression of “a position of superiority through the display of wealth and status” (Hooper-Greenhill, 1992, pg 72). These collections were accessible for viewing by a select group of visitors who met the criteria of wealth and class (McLean, 1995); the first private collection in Britain is acknowledged to be the bequest by Elias Ashmole to Oxford University in 1683 which provided the foundation for today’s Ashmolean Museum (Scofield, 2000; Kotler et al 2008; www.ashmolean.org, n.d.). The first public museum in England was the British Museum established in 1759 through the patronage of Sir Hans Sloane (Kotler et al, 2008, pg 10). In Victorian England museums developed and became more accessible to the public as “centres of wisdom, respectability and national pride dedicated to the democratic development and production of universal knowledge” (Kräutler, 1995). The growth of museums in the UK accelerated throughout the 20th century; between 1901 and 1979, eight hundred and thirty new museums opened and between 1980 and 1996, seven hundred and thirty new museums opened.

The museum sector in Britain is diverse featuring a huge range of organisations ranging from large national collections through to small, local collections of village history and artefacts. Some museums are focused on a specific subject, for example the National Media Museum which specialises in collections and exhibits associated with the subject of photography and all types of media. Others are activity focused such as the Museum of Childhood which offers events and activities for families. Collection focused museums such as the National Waterways Museum focus on the preservation of historic boats and a large collection of

artefacts associated with life on the waterways over the centuries. Research focused museums, for example the V&A National Art Library, provides access to a large range of research resources for the public, educators and specialist researchers (Kotler et al, 2008). The majority of museums are to some extent object centred with the main focus being on the collection but in addition they provide narrative to add contextual meaning to the artefacts as well as community activities and educational activities. Large national collections, which are usually supported by national government, are also a substantial research resource for schools, universities and curators from across the world.

Increasingly museums have attempted to contextualise their collections by setting the artefacts into their cultural and historical contexts (Kotler, 2008, pg 14) to enhance meaning and interest for visitors. The 1980's brought a "heritage boom" to the UK as urban regeneration and change brought about increased interest in stories of the past, particularly in family history, an interest which has boomed in the internet age. During the 1990's, marketing vocabulary and concepts began to be formally included in museum planning and strategy; the tension between curatorial authority and consumer orientation was the subject of ongoing discussion. Dialogue and interaction increased between museums and their visitors as did audience involvement in museum activities including contributions to collections, volunteering and fundraising. Along with an increased marketing orientation, the urban economic role of the museum was increasingly acknowledged from the 1990's onwards as part of the tourism landscape for most towns and cities. As the number of museums has grown, so too has involvement by local enthusiasts and volunteers in their local museum.

The environment of museums has always been dynamic and changing; pressures on funding (Kolb, 2005), changes in social trends and behaviour, technological innovation, legislation and the regulatory environment have always provided challenges (Scofield, 2000). Social change has leading to significant change in consumer behaviour and expectations of the museum experience. Technological innovation in communications has affected every aspect of museum provision; interactive exhibits, computer based information, visual and aural displays are standard in many museums and the tools and media available for museum marketing communications has increased significantly. Museums no longer just offer static collections in glass cases for passive one-way viewing; the development of the internet is arguably the greatest change to have influenced museums in their history, not only providing an online store for information and images of artefacts but also as a method of communication between the museum and its visitors. Against this background of a diverse

sector this paper now examines the social environment of museums and the technological trends in that environment in more detail.

The postmodern environment of museums

Postmodernism is a contested term which suggests the rejection of grand narratives and has influenced marketing activities in many areas of society, particularly in terms of the communication and management of information (Harvey, 1990; Jameson, 2009). Some authors claim that it is a distinct period of time in post industrial society, however in the view of Featherstone (2007), postmodernism is a temporary cultural dominant; it is a distinct period of time coming after modernity, rather than social change including and developing from modernity. “It implies progression, social change, economic and administrative change, the emergence of the “modern capitalist – industrial state” (ibid. pg 3). Postmodernity is characterised by the restructuring of old categories such as segmentation based on age and socio-economic group and also traditional social structures such as lifestyle segmentation (Schofield, 2013). The economic environment is characterised by economic pressures but also evidence of affluence, wealth and increased choice for some consumer groups (Smith and Zook, 2011). Postmodernism is characterised by fragmentation; “postmodern society resembles an incredibly complex labyrinth of “cross-cutting discourses” (Dawes and Brown, 2000 in Simmons, 2008, pg 299). The post modern environment is characterised by three overarching characteristics; *acceleration, complexity and reflexivity* (Scott in Smith and Webster, 1997, pg 43) all of which have a direct effect on consumer behaviour and expectations. Acceleration affects the speed of communication both in terms of sending and receiving information and the expectation of response time; “a compression of time, consumption and production” (ibid) for senders and receivers. The development of Web 2.0, smartphones and tablets have enabled 24/7 communications, and faster expectations of response and supply of information from consumers across all types of organisation. The increased complexity of organisational activities reflects the growth of data produced and consumed due to technology and the growth of knowledge through interaction (Scott in Smith and Webster, 1997, pg 43). The vast increase in the multiple types of online and offline media, the fragmentation of media and its role in communicating information and messages about history and culture has greatly increased the number of media vehicles through which museums can communicate. For example in 2011-12, over twenty four million people visited the British Museum online (British Museum, n.d., online). Reflexivity reflects the interactions between multiple audiences (Trim, 2003) and the contribution of

audiences to conversations via emedia and social networking which is now expected as the norm for most organisations.

The Changing Museum Visitor

The behaviour and expectations of the museum visitor have changed as a result of social and technological change; these developments have led to a reconceptualisation of the organisation–customer relationship (Fuat Firat and Dholakia, 2006) and marketing responses have had to adapt accordingly. The postmodern consumer is more likely to act as “co-producer” rather than the passive recipient of a brand, adding value to the brand rather than being an end-user (ibid). Traditional segmentation classifications have become more difficult to identify due to the “internet chameleon” consumer (Simmons, 2008, pg 300) who expects to be treated as a segment of one and is highly individualistic, reflecting the breakdown of traditional segmentation particularly in the fashion, entertainment and cultural industries. The literature on postmodernism also highlights the importance of *hyperreality* leading to a greatly increased consumer expectation of entertainment provision and a “blurring of the distinction between high and popular culture” (Kolb, 2005, pg 19). This is a challenge for museums when communicating their symbolic capital to multiple audiences and segments (Bourdieu, 1991; Featherstone, 2007); the museum visitor is diverse in terms of age, educational and social backgrounds and “consumers living in a multi media, cross – cultural environment will want more combinations of art forms and new delivery methods” (Kolb, 2005, pg 20). Since the 1980’s, many opportunities have been developed for people to “live” the history experience at heritage attractions with examples such as the recreated Victorian Town at the Ironbridge Gorge Museum and the recreation of aspects of town and rural life in the North East of England during the 1820’s, 1900’s and 1940’s at the Beamish Museum. These are examples of hyperreality, providing the opportunity for visitors to experience being back in time and being in the present simultaneously. The postmodern consumer is also highly individual with a wide range of interests; “postmodern consumers adore being individual, they adore reinventing themselves through their consumption” (Simmons, 2008, pg 303). This is a time for the cultural consumer who is well travelled, carries no preconceptions and rejects elitism. The postmodern consumer expects a wide range of information, available from multiple media sources and has multiple lifestyles made up of work, social and self-development. The postmodern consumer is accustomed to being sold celebrity and media lifestyles, who is offered brands as experiences as part of a lifestyle characterised by excitement and fun. For marketers, the reaction of the consumer is

increasingly difficult to predict; instant feedback mechanisms are a feature of new media and marketing becomes more difficult to plan in a fragmented environment.

Implications for museums

According to McLean (1997), postmodernity “rejects authority, unity, continuity, purpose and commitment” (pg 16); museums are affected by postmodernism which includes the rejection of the institutionalisation of art and elitism. The postmodernism debate also rejects the idea that history is linear and follows a chronological timetable; museums are more likely to refer to “your great grandparents” rather than to a specific time (ibid, pg 17). This is a challenge for museums, as part of their role has always been to set artefacts in a cultural and chronological setting in order to enhance understanding of their significance. This is a particular challenge for “institutions steeped in discourse of authority, authenticity and materiality” (Kidd, 2011, pg 64) as history is being rewritten and reinterpreted in postmodern times through multiple lenses.

The museum is no longer the sole repository of expertise and education in a particular collection or field; the wide ranging availability of information has led to the democratisation of knowledge production (Trim, 2003) and audiences are willing and able to contribute their knowledge and interpretations. This affects museums in terms of types and forms of exhibits, types and forms of information and media used in exhibits and increasing complexity in terms of audiences and activities. Postmodernism has implications for the communication of information, culture and history, the availability and form of information and its transmission and the influence of an increasingly educated and influential audience (Featherstone, 2007).

Having examined the changing social and technological environment of museums, this paper now examines the marketing communications responses of museums to that environment.

Integrated Marketing Communications and user-generated content in the museums sector

Marketing Communications has been traditionally described as advertising and promotion, and classified as the third element of the marketing mix, the tool that is used to send messages about the organisation and its products and services to consumers (Pickton and Broderick, 2005, pg 4). A wide range of elements is used in museum promotions including advertising, sales promotion, public relations and direct marketing for example, but as

Schultz et al (1992 in de Pelsmacker et al, 2007) point out, in practice consumers look at communications as a integrated messages from a brand or an organisation rather than a set of individual tools. The concept of promotion has been criticised for being outbound in nature and for only focusing on consumers rather than a range of audiences (Kitchen and de Pelsmacker, 2004); traditional promotional activities in museums have been focused on adverts, posters and flyers emphasising a traditional one-directional approach to communication. This emphasis has changed due to developments in digital communications which have resulted in a paradigm shift from promotion to integrated marketing communications (IMC) leading to opportunities for greater interactivity for consumer and organisations and for dialogue to develop (Fill, 2009; Smith and Zook, 2011). The concept of IMC is recognised as an integrated, planned, interactive approach to communications which enables communications with multiple audiences using multiple media (ibid). This results in an integrated, consistent message and image from the organisation; museums have increasingly adopted marketing communications techniques including websites and branding activities to build image to compete in the tourism and heritage sectors. IMC enables dialogue between audiences, increases the potential for involvement and relationship building and therefore potentially long term loyalty (Smith and Taylor, 2004). Driven by both marketers and the audiences themselves, IMC enables an ongoing conversation to take place between audiences and the organisation. According to Kidd (2011), it enables the museum to “put the story centre stage” and engage with audiences in a “ “conversation” rather than a lecture” (pg 65) a move from a “broadcast model” to a social media model (ibid).

At a local level, conversations between museums and their audiences have always taken place face to face; communications opportunities through presentations, events, talks, seminars, discussions and outreach projects into schools and communities have lead to growth in dialogue and sharing. Friends of museums, volunteers, community groups and schools have always taken an active interest in museums and worked with them to their mutual benefit. Through developments in communications technology there are multiple opportunities to interact without geographical limits leading to partnerships and exchanges with other museums across the world and the opportunity for visitors to see collections and contribute and engage in dialogue as physical visitors or online.

The development of digital media

“Marketing communications are morphing with customer experiences and product development and distribution, as the impact of digital media is hugely enhanced by social media” (Smith and Zook, 2011, pg. 5). As a result of technological developments the range of media tools now available to museums is huge and limited only by the museum’s own resources and expertise in digital technology; databases, tailored emails, a website presence, online advertising, podcasts, online video, virtual tours, online image banks and social networking can all be used by museums to communicate with audiences worldwide. Digital technology also provides opportunities to access heritage in additional ways; traditionally collections have been the preserve of museums, but now alternative forms such as digital archives and collections are increasingly available.

Since the launch of Facebook in 2006, there has been significant growth in the number of social networking platforms available to marketers. Facebook gives the museum an opportunity to promote events, to start conversations and discussions about interesting objects and to host online image galleries showing artefacts from the collections. In addition to the website, it gives the museum an additional online opportunity to communicate information about exhibitions and make links to other areas of the museum’s activity such as the museum shop as well as to other museums. The visitors to the site have the opportunity to *like*, *share* and *comment* on the site content and to contribute their own information and links. The Facebook page can also host links to Twitter to share comments from online followers of the museum and to the museum’s YouTube site which can feature videos about events, interviews and promotional presentations. The museum can add photos of events and activities to Pinterest to illustrate the work of the museum with various audiences. Detailed information about items of interest can be posted on specialist blogs by the curatorial team and online visitors can be invited to post comments. Specific social networking pages can be managed by the museum and provide a variety of platforms for informing audiences as well as providing an online space for dialogue. Digital technology also provides the opportunity for audiences to independently contribute and share information about the museum through sites such as Flickr, where photos and videos of objects can be posted and shared and Instagram where photos can be uploaded via an app and shared between followers across social media platforms.

“User-generated content comes from regular people who voluntarily contribute data, information or media that then appears before others in a useful or entertaining way , usually on the Web” (Krumm et al, 2008, pg 10). User-generated content can include editing of images or data, the contribution of online materials and sharing of links and contributions to online forums and blogs. Digital technology has also lead to numerous opportunities for museums to engage in crowdsourcing to build information about events and to gain feedback. Crowdsourcing is an online extension of the outreach work that has been carried out by museums for many years. It is an additional opportunity for knowledge exchange and provides an opportunity for audiences to engage and become involved with museums projects (Oxford Internet Institute, 2014) and to build digital history projects. Audiences can be invited to contribute comments and analysis, to upload digital examples of historical documents such as diary entries and photographs and to give feedback on museum projects and their development and implementation. This enables the museum to build and enhance online collections and provides valuable information for decision making and project design (Schweitzer et al, 2012).

The advantages of digital communications are well documented (Fill, 2009; Smith and Zook, 2011); digital communications are immediate and direct, they can be information rich and creative with opportunities for images, music and communication and can take place 24/7 with a worldwide reach. At the simplest level, the website may provide a “shop window” for a small community museum; at the most advanced level a large national museum may use the full range of tools including digital communications, social networking and online forums. Through these digital developments, the museum has enhanced access to audiences, increased opportunities for dialogue, and access to partnerships and resources from across the world.

Audience response: Generation C and Museums

According to Cova et al, (2011) the development of Web 2.0, has resulted in social transformation (pg 232) by enabling the development of user-generated content. This has resulted in the co-creation of value by consumers through their contribution to brands through social networking. Contributions to collections by audiences is not a new idea in the museum context however by adding digital photos to a museum social networking site for example, the audience becomes part of the value chain of the museum rather than a passive viewer of a collection. Referred to as Generation C (C for content) by Cova and Dalli, this is a group who

enjoy sharing, commenting and uploading materials online, reflecting the brands and activities that interest them (2009, pg 317). The co-creation of value through sharing of actual resources is defined as *coproduction* by Akaka and Chandler (in Cova et al 2011). This further develops the concept of the *working consumer*, (Cova and Dalli, 2009) who contributes in a variety of ways to the brand and as a digital development it results in a shift in the relationship between consumer and producer through a shift in the power and role of the consumer who is no longer a passive recipient but who becomes active in creating the museum experience. In addition, Pongsakornrungrsilp and Schroeder (2011), refer to the concept of the *prosumer*; “this active consumer role can be credited with transforming basic economic logic, shifting power from producers to consumers and thereby blurring boundaries between firms and customers” (pg 304).

Cova and Dalli (2009) categorise eight theories of the working consumer; one of these is the theory of the *consumer tribe*, characterised by a community of people with a common interest who come together to contribute, discuss and construct aspects of the brand. In the museum context this is often through an invitation to contribute to a specific project as well as an ongoing commitment to help the museum and the community acts as a “repository of cultural and affective resources” (ibid, 2009, pg 322). The community becomes a co-consuming group through “linking value” in order to “co-construct their consumption, resistance or empowerment” (Pongsakornrungrsilp and Schroeder, 2011, pg 306). The community enables mutual construction of experiences enabling production of meaning (Firat and Dhoklia, 2006) through contribution of experiences and digital images for example.

This section has reviewed the development of digital media in museums in an IMC context and the opportunities for increased consumer involvement. This paper now presents three examples of user-generated content in practice in the museum sector.

Examples of practice

Art History: Your Paintings Tagger

Starting in 2013, the BBC has hosted a digital art collection which aims to collate images of every publicly owned oil painting in the UK which will eventually represent a collection of around 200000 images (<http://www.bbc.co.uk/arts/yourpaintings/>). Described as “ a museum without walls” (Oxford Internet Institute, n.d.), the collection has been digitised by the Public Catalogue Foundation (<http://www.thepcf.org.uk/>) who “aim to make artworks in

public collections more accessible to a wide range of audiences” (ibid, online). In addition to this online collection, the AHRC have funded a project called “Your Paintings Tagger”, a crowdsourcing initiative which invites the public to tag the images (<http://tagger.thepcf.org.uk/>); tagging involves the public identifying items in each painting and giving them a tag which helps to classify the painting and encourages greater involvement by the public in the collection. The idea behind the project is to encourage members of the public to actively get involved online with the collection, to add tags, to discuss their favourites and to encourage interaction between researchers, the public and the arts communities. The website is also supported by a Facebook page which hosts contributions of news, comments and images by the public, discussions about artists and the latest news from the project to together with a Twitter feed. The project enables a single publicly accessible online source to be collated for research and exploration and enables the public to explore examples of artworks which they may not otherwise have access to, thereby forming an important example of an outreach project.

Military History: user-generated digital history

Events to commemorate the centenary of the start of World War One will be taking place from 2014 onwards across Europe to remember the events of the 1914–18 War. The Imperial War Museum (IMW) was established in 1917 as a repository for the stories and experiences of the generation affected by the First World War. As part of the commemoration, the IMW launched a website (www.livesofthefirstworldwar.org) as a repository for contributors to upload information to host their stories of the lives and experiences of the soldiers and civilians of that time based on family history. The project’s aim is to collate eight million stories as a permanent digital memorial of that period. At the time of writing the site hosts an introductory three minute video explaining the nature of the project and its aims. Participants were invited by email to preview the site and to provide feedback on its usability. Eight example online profiles and their stories of that time are provided which new users can explore to learn about the structure and use of the resource and how to navigate the site. The website enables users to share, contribute, explore and research stories and histories of the time and has links to external museums, libraries, census records and national archive sites to enable the building up of digital information. Individuals can upload digital photographs, letters and diary entries and online communities can be created for families or villages based on family histories or local history societies for example. In addition to the website, there is a

Facebook page where users can share stories provide feedback on the usability of the site. There is also a Twitter feed for regular updates and comment about the project and news coverage of the project is featured on YouTube. The project seeks to build a substantial permanent digital record of stories and family histories and also to ultimately provide a permanent substantial worldwide research resource for academics and individuals who have an interest in that period of history.

Science Museums: digital content creation and app development

“The relation between the contemporary science museum and its public is an interactive one.....at the level of the individual display, the museum seeks to develop and employ techniques which encourage greater dialogue with the visitor (Barry in Macdonald, 1998, pg 98).

Almost a decade and a half after the above quote was first published, the development of apps across a wide range of sectors enables users to download relevant information and to create greater engagement with product information. Ross et al published a paper in 2012 reporting on a project in the University College London (UCL) Grant Museum of Zoology, where iPad and smartphone technology was used to enable interaction via digital interactive labels and Quick Response (QR) codes. This allowed visitors to comment, answer questions and take part in online discussions about exhibits and objects in the collections (Ross et al, 2012). The digital content contributed by visitors formed a substantial source of qualitative responses on the visitor experience, their opinions and their feedback on individual exhibits. In another example from a science museum context, the Science Museum in London has invited visitors to take part in the development of an app by taking part in visitor activities and contributing to the development of an app which is intended to provide new ways for audiences to engage with objects and exhibits in the museum. Feedback from the participants provides a valuable source of data to inform the development of digital applications in the science museum context.

The above examples show the application of digital technology in a variety of museum settings. This paper will now consider the implications of these developments within the museums sector.

Discussion

“It should be possible to make the collection accessible, explorable and enjoyable, not just for those who visit, but to everybody with a computer or a mobile device. It can become the private collection of the whole world” (The British Museum, Towards 2020: the British Museum’s Strategy, n.d.)

In all three examples, digital technology has had an important impact in the way the collections are viewed and enjoyed and communicated to audiences. The museum experience is no longer characterised by passive viewing, but by increased involvement and enjoyment in the museum experience (Cova et al, 2011) leading to enhanced gratification (Cova and Dalli, 2009). In the examples from the My Paintings project and the IWM project, consumers have helped to contribute to online collections and to the visitor experience, leading to an enhanced sense of “ownership” (Cova and Dalli, 2009, pg 317). The website can become the focus for this community of interest (Kidd, 2011) which helps to build a relationship between the audience and the museums. The online community provides an opportunity to interact with like minded individuals (Cova and Dalli, 2009) and encourages further contributions and involvement (Pongsakornrungsilp and Schroeder, 2011) as a working consumer (Cova and Dalli, 2009). The involvement of consumers increases engagement, and transforms museum collections from distant objects in glass cases to a personalised individual learning experience.

In the examples the opportunity for user-generated content provided enhanced access to museum collections for many different types of visitor. This widened access reflects the nature of the postmodern environment of the museum where audiences are not categorised by traditional segmentation criteria but through the sharing of a common interest in a museum collection. The interaction is complex; it takes place through a variety of platforms and demonstrates reflexivity through interaction between the museum and the contributors and is not restricted by time or geographical boundaries. Audiences in each of the examples experience greater involvement with each subject, and engage in a conversation in a social media environment if they choose to. Through their contributions, each contributor becomes part of the museum’s value chain and helps to build, enhance and preserve collections through feedback, editing and, in the case of the IWM digital collection, the contribution of digital artefacts that might otherwise be lost.

The adoption of digital technology by audiences will vary and therefore detailed thought needs to be given to enable visitors to use the technology easily. The IWM site is a good example as it ran a pilot to test feedback on usage, and additional guidance was available via the Facebook site. In addition video explanations were also available on the website and on YouTube and sample profiles were made available for new users to explore. The target audience for museums varies widely in terms of age and experience with technology so planning use and access is an important part of the digital media strategy. In addition, clear guidance and rules for use are an important aspect of any online community and social media platform to control content and build and maintain trust.

The postmodern consumer is an individual who expects tailored communications and has a wide choice of museums, heritage and tourism attractions to visit. Developments in technology offer the opportunity for greater participation in museums activities, greater engagement with objects, collections and the museum community and an enhanced sense of ownership through contribution, sharing and following the museum online. In turn, the visitor can become an advocate for the museum, forwarding and sharing information, recommending websites and blogs and in turn gaining an enhanced understanding of the museum's role, activities and curatorial responsibilities. As part of a community, the sense of satisfaction through involvement with the museum is likely to increase, leading to a long term mutually beneficial relationship. The role of the visitor can vary in terms of involvement from a follower on Facebook or a blog through to a fully involved contributor. Further research is needed to examine the roles and types of user over the longer term.

The development of user generated content can potentially increase visitors to the museum, enable greater access, and reach audiences who may not traditionally have been willing or able to physically visit the museum. The opportunities for networking with other museum sites increase and access to experts from across the world is enabled, leading to enhanced opportunities for cooperation, partnerships, research and learning. The building of online archives and other collections has the potential to build substantial online repositories for research and the preservation of artefacts as part of a worldwide heritage community. According to Simon (online, 2008) the development of social media has resulted in a shift from the museum having "authority as a content provider" to the museum having "authority as a platform provider". This implies a change in the curatorial role and raises interesting issues for further research in terms of curatorial power and the availability of digital skills

and resources within the museums sector and reflects the shift from “managed to collaborative marketing” (Firat and Dholakia, 2006, pg 150).

Conclusion

This paper has reviewed the social and technological trends affecting museums and the implications for marketing communications in the museums context. Meeting the needs of the postmodern consumer is a particular challenge for the museum marketer; traditional segmentation variables are now less useful in this context and the “chameleon” consumer has a strong sense of individualism but at the same time enjoys being part of an online community. The resulting changes in consumer behaviour and the identification of new types of museum visitor are a rich area for research. The role of the consumer in the value chain of the museum has implications for the role and authority of the curator; the role of the consumer and the implications for ownership and authority continue to be debated. The further development of user-generated content also requires further research; an understanding of its role as part of a marketing communications and branding strategy and the role that it can play in building consumer loyalty is still at a relatively early stage. As the adoption of the technology increases it will provide additional opportunities to work with consumers and it is likely to play an increasing role in the marketing communications strategy of museums.

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