

CREATING COMPETITIVE ADVANTAGE THROUGH THE EFFECTIVE EXPERIENCE ECONOMY IN MUSEUMS

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Abstract

The concept of the Experience Economy addresses trends in economic development with the assertion that there is an economic value to experience. The phenomenon of an increasingly experiential value orientation in both consumer behavior and reactionary business practices has created a revolution in the approach towards competitive advantage. It is found that it is of greater benefit not only to the consumer but, to the organization, to invert the traditional value models based on organizational benefit and organizational processes to that of consumer value and processes. Concepts pertaining to The Experience Economy are of relevance to recreation and tourism organizations such as Museums and their absence on the discussion pertaining to those concepts is unjustified. The purpose of this research is to advance understanding of the role the experience economy plays in a product's value and competitive advantage and explore the possibilities for experiential product development in Museums which will differentiate these organizations from their competitors whilst maintaining the credibility and integrity of the museum product.

The foundation of this research is formed out of recent works on the emergence of the experience economy and roles within our society, practical guides for advantage which have recognized experiential value, and significant texts relating to consumer behavior and competitive advantage. Primary research was undertaken in a case study of the Hopetoun House of South Queensferry and additional insight brought through contact with management of this house museum. The developing analysis has led to further support of the experiential methods investigated and related concepts. In addition, it is found that contrary to traditional assumptions, through these means museums have opportunities create deeper visitor experiences for competitive advantage without sacrificing organizational aims.

Key words: Experience Economy, competitive advantage

The Experience Economy:

Words used in definitions of experience include but are not limited to: activity, encounter, direct observation, participation, practice, personal, knowledge, skill, affection, process of perception of events or reality, and the conscious events of one's life (Merriam-Webster, 2010). Experience is highly personal, as people will experience the same object and event etc. in different ways. Though there is dispute on how to categorize the components or levels of experience, the concept of experience as multi dimensional phenomena is widely agreed to. Intangibility is one of the most recognized aspects of experience and one of the reasons why experiences have always been considered to belong in the service industry whose goods are often intangible or have intangible elements to them. However, intangibility is a quality of infinite concepts and occurrences and does not justly define experience. The conscious, perceptive element of the phenomena which affects one as the result of a personal engagement however, is the most distinct quality of experience. Exceeding the services in intangibility, it is suggested that where services are merely intangible, experiences are memorable (Pine and Gilmore, 1999; Sundbo, 1999).

A dominating theme in western Consumerism is the trend of hyper-consumption, but there are other trends in consumer behaviour that have developed and increased demands which providers must meet in order to become and remain competitive. A factor that has been recently recognized as playing a major role in consumer choice, and therefore product development, is experience. Experience has been utilized in hospitality organizations as a mechanism for dealing with lack of product ownership and intangibility, often placed under the umbrella of various operational departments. However, studies analyzed by LaSalle and Britton (2003), conclude that consumers perceive not just the product, but the entire process from purchase to consumption as an experience of the product. As businesses continue to grow more customer oriented, they are beginning to realize that this means being customer experience oriented.

The flexible term 'Museum' is used in this research to its maximum capacity as a term which describes and Institution, place, or building, which contains objects of historical, artistic, or scientific interest that are exhibited, preserved, or studied, and

is often dedicated to preserving and interpreting the primary tangible evidence of humankind and the environment (Cambridge Advanced Learners Dictionary, 2010; Collins English Dictionary; 2009; Encyclopedia Britannica; 2010).

It appears that only from the late 1990's has experience gained broader recognition as a component in the value of a product. Changes in the way we perceive value in western society have been further altered by developments in the macroenvironment initiating numerous studies from the beginning of the 21st century. Analysis of the results of these studies displays a consensus of support for the current need & effectiveness of experience in the market, though the reasons for such development are debated. This study is spurred out of the desire for fuller and more positive experiences identified in the recent influx of research regarding consumer behaviour, consumer experience, and resulting theoretical insight.

It is expected that with recognition of the importance of experiential value, the service sector will secure a prominent place in future discussions regarding consumerism. Various sub-sectors of service are often left out of dialogue surrounding consumerism which tends to focus on issues of consumption of material goods and ownership. For example: Museums and cultural sites are often viewed as non-profit public organizations. However, in the mind of the consumer they are classified as leisure and the leisure environment is competitive. As such, experience and methods of competitive advantage are extremely relevant. In addition, Fisher (2000) points out a conflict of interest where museums need to be publically accessible yet the organizations and academics fear the popularization and commercialization of art and its damage to the aesthetic and intellectual integrity of art.

Further, as product development for differentiation may be expensive, market research such as this should be undertaken to indicate sufficient demand and investigate the nature of the consumer-product interaction for appropriateness before investment is made. Products of cultural tourism sites have their own unique characteristics. Therefore, the case for further research into the application of theories pertaining to innovation and experience production to these organizations is supported by authors such as Binkhorst & Dekker (2009), Ellis and Rossman, (2008), Morgan, Elbe, and Esteban Curiel (2009), and Sundbo (2008).

On a larger scale, the provision of multiple realms of experience may be a simultaneous answer to multiple product offering for the increasingly fragmented market and variety of consumer needs. Whether the consumer is looking for an educational experience or entertainment, the multifaceted product will satisfy these needs. Effective experience production is an alternate to competing by self sabotaging reliance on price reduction.

A second area of contribution is to further understandings of the application of competitive theories relative to the experience economy to the house museum product. Experience is an aid and possibly an essential component of the visitor's relation to, understanding of, and motivation by the cultural collection. As a result, it is significant to the organization's stakeholders from educators to visitors and from curators to the communities which may rely on the organization. The carrying out of empirical fieldwork which has not been done before and delving into the various aspects of the museum product from this alternate perspective is intentioned to create a forum for discussion of competitive advantage in cultural sites which are often avoided due to traditional ideas of their exemption from commercial activity. This research may serve to shed light on alternative means of competitive product development which would allow the maintenance of the art etc., as what is commonly seen as 'art' or the authentic site in the traditional museum or historical attraction, through expanding the experience of that art or site, thereby reducing the conflict of interest. It is a different approach to addressing the problem of general access to museums and public benefit that museums have addressed mainly by attempting to turn museums into educational centres. As such, this research is a means to answering Fisher's (2000) call for creative and effective ways of designing stimulus material for the visual and creative arts.

In efforts to understanding trends in economic development, a closer look at experience has changed views on the relationship of experience to economic sectors and the industries within. The inclusion of experience in a product is not a new phenomenon as hospitality, services, and the entertainment industry have long been creating and marketing experiences. Lorentzen (2008) suggests that it is exactly this relationship of experience to the industries, in the form of structural context by role in an organization and product development which is profoundly new.

If one agrees to the notion that the greater the differentiation relative to the needs of the customer the greater the economic value, than if experience is proven to fulfil this role to a greater extent than commodities, goods, and services, it may be gathered that experience surpasses them in the value it commands. Numerous testimonies of successful business leaders and results of recent research concerning the consumer experience and the rise in demand have created professional and academic advocates of the experience economy who share their belief that experience does fulfil this role and therefore, incorporating experience into a product will result in the shifting of the product up to a higher level of economic value. Some of these testimonies and results which support Pine and Gilmore's (1999) Progression of Economic Value based on these premises may be found in Ellis & Rossman, 2008; Hoover, 2009; LaSalle & Britton, 2003; Morgan, Elbe & Esteban Curiel, 2009; and Wu 2009.

Additionally, empirical studies and theoretic research support these claims as they indicate the attribution of value to the subjective matter of experience. For example: an analysis of studies of value, formally known as axiology, presented by Lasalle and Britton (2003) indicate that the value of something is ultimately decided upon by the consumer rather than alternate criteria. The consumer criteria may have both symbolic aspects and physical or quantifiable aspects. From this study it can be understood that the subjective criteria of a product may have as much an influence on perceptions of value as the objective. In Foxall's (2005, p.17) timeline of theories surrounding processing of consumer choice, the various methods reflect that there are attentional and perceptual filters affecting interpretation composed of a variety of the individual's attributes such as attitudes, memories, needs, and wants.

The concept of the experience economy addresses trends in economic development with the assertion that there is an economic value to experience. The experience economy recognizes experience as a distinct economic offering not confined to the service sector and identifies experience as the latest stage in the evolution of value and hence, the way products are sold (Smidt-Jensen, Skytt & Winther, 2008; Pine and Gilmore, 1998 & 1999; Smidt-Jensen, Skytt, & Winther, 2009). The experiential product is admitted to be quite varied due to the variety of means to which a consumer may interact with a product. What is definitive is that the relationship between the consumer and the product which produces the experience is the core of

an experiential product (Lorentzen, 2008; Pine & Gilmore, 1999). Therefore, key theories and philosophies circulating dialogue on the experience economy relate to means of engaging the consumer through marrying ideas on experience, need, and value.

Competitive Advantage and the Experience Economy:

The phenomenon of an increasingly experiential value orientation in both consumer behaviour and reactionary business practices has created a revolution in the approach towards competitive advantage. It is found that it is of greater benefit not only to the consumer but, to the organization, to invert the traditional value models based on organizational benefit and organizational processes to that of consumer value and processes. The major observation of the relationship between experiential and competitive methods is that due to shared aims, placement of experience within identified methods of competitive advantage, and recently shared understandings of the viewer's perception of the product, there are a number of shared objectives to meeting these aims. The difference is the revolutionary experience economy view of the product through the experience it is able to offer and the relationship of the product with the consumer as a foundation.

The Role of Experience in Competitive Advantage:

It is a general consensus that competitive advantage is when a firm utilizes the business level strategies of differentiation or cost advantage to win the favour of customers, produce greater economic value than rival businesses, and as a result, triumph over competitors (Barney & Hesterly, 2006; De Wit & Meyer, 1999; Porter, 2004b). Competitive advantage cannot be separated from the value chain; the means of its creation. The value chain's theoretical framework is composed of activities performed by an organization which create cost advantage and differentiation produced through price and performance attributes (Ghobadian et al, 2004; Porter, 2004b; Prahalad & Hamel, 1990). An increasing number of businesses are providing experience which increases perceived value, the organization that refuses to implement a competitive strategy to likewise increase their economic value will have relatively less value and can be understood to be at a competitive disadvantage. With the Impact of the Evolution of Value on Business, LaSalle and Britton (2003, p.25) present the experience economy as the measure of value for the

new millennium where business focus is the customer, model is experiential value, marketplace is the individual, customer role is a participant, point of value creation is the “entire company with customers as co-creators of value”, drivers of profitability are experiences, and the success metrics as customer loyalty. The proactive organization will approach the Experience Economy not as a threat but as an opportunity to develop new strategies which utilize unique performance offerings for strategic advantage. As the Experience Economy asserts that there is an economic value to experience, it may be assumed that there is a place for experience in competitive strategy which creates competitive advantage through increased economic value.

Differentiation Strategy:

Differentiation strategy is the identified place for experience in competitive strategy. Even though it is not always directly stated as in ‘Experience Economy’, experience has been presented in related publications such as ‘Priceless’ and ‘Selling Dreams’ as a form of differentiation and differentiation is one of the identified means to creating competitive advantage. Superiority in the product’s ability to satisfy consumer needs is both a fundamental tenant of differentiation and the experience production.

Differentiation strategy may be divided into two methods: strengthening uniqueness of existing value activities or creating uniqueness through reconfiguration of the value chain (Porter, 2004b). Likewise, concepts surrounding effective implementation of experience include the strengthening of types of experience as a point of unique value and do not conflict with but, at times require a reconfiguration of the value chain. Considering the strengthening of value activities, there are a series of drivers which determine a firm’s uniqueness in a value activity (Porter, 2004b). Identifying these drivers highlights levels of sustainability and areas for further differentiation. Porter (2004b) lists Policy Choices as the most prominent driver to be manipulated for uniqueness. This driver designates the ‘what’ and ‘how’ of performance activities and it is also where the majority of contributions to the development of the experiential product may be found.

The experiential view has the potential to fully address all aspects of the product which make the competitive difference. Product differentiation is seen as one of the

barriers to market entry for competitors who do not possess such customer loyalty. This is because differentiation creates identification of brand and customer loyalties. In concert, the experience engagement process covers consumer experience from factors which influence consumer choice in the evaluative phase to the extension of the product through creation of customer relationships. Porter's organization of strategic management concepts encompasses the more recent view, shared with the experience economy, of the product and desire for the product as multifaceted. Furthermore, in consensus with the experience economic theory, recent competitive strategy concepts embrace the demand theory in which a product is seen as possessing multiple components which create a cumulative value.

Identification of Points of Uniqueness and Opportunities:

Differentiation as a uniqueness which carries value has long been a method for competitive advantage and some standard views have been developed. The resource based view (RBV), is a common way to identify an organization's strengths for exploitation and weakness for minimization. The RBV looks to both tangible and intangible assets and capabilities in a firm's performance to identify sources for competitive advantage. Typically, the organization's Value-Chain would be used for this process. The resource based view acknowledges that, "...a resource is not inherently valuable or not valuable. It depends on the specific market demand for that resource" (Barney & Hesterly, 2006 p.81). With this understanding, it is of no surprise that the process of identifying organizational strengths and weaknesses firstly and then secondly considering the values of the market is now under revaluation.

A variety of resources and capabilities or their combination may contribute to strengths found in a value chain analysis. It is the same with the experiential analysis but, with the difference of the starting point of experiential components that meet consumer needs which are followed up by identified modes of engagement that produce the experiential result. Various models for components of experience such as LaSalle & Britton's (2003) Levels of Operation may be used or adapted and the chosen model will depend on the suitability of the model to the organizational structure and aims. Once the strengths, weaknesses, and unique consumer

experiences have been identified, it is then that the organization will look back to the Value-Chain, for means of enhancement, development, and communication of these.

Creating and Enhancing Points of Uniqueness:

In the process of strategic development, the organization will need to define what changes will be made for the desired performance. Porter (2004b) describes the process of successful differentiation as one which often cumulates uniqueness in distinct activities that the firm performs which compose the value chain, termed *value activities*. Policy choices, linkages, interrelationships, learning and spillovers, Scale, and institutional factors are identified drivers which create uniqueness in a value activity (Porter, 2004b). It is recognized that unless these create value to the consumer they do not create effective differentiation yet; the starting point of the analysis remains internal. In the value activity of Marketing, with methods such as consumer relationship marketing, is where experience is often considered and even then, it is a provider-centric view. For example: Bell's (2002) 7 Es of Customer Love: enlistment, engagement, enlightenment, entrustment, empowerment, enchantment, and endearment. The theory acknowledges of the role of these factors in experience however, each of these experiential components are minimally utilized for direct benefit to the organization such as, educating in the way of keeping customers informed of company activity to foster commitment, engagement for customer 'belief' that they are making a difference because findings show engaged customers, even if it is to complain, spend more, and endearment through generosity that gives the customer the impression that they, not profit, are the concern of the business (West, Ford, & Ibrahim, 2006). The benefits to the organization of customer 'love' such as greater spending, feedback, leniency, social support, and advocacy cannot be denied however, the authenticity and depth of consumer experiences are lacking in the provider-centric approach and as a result insufficient.

Therefore, a starting point of the consumer-product relationship is recommended. The concepts and resulting tenants of the Experience Economy do not conflict with the concepts that organize the process of product production and resulting margins of profit; they are guidelines for creation and good practice and often do not dictate the details of how it should be done. Just as the value chain may flex to the simplicity or complexity of the organization, the flexibility of this approach allows

general application. Any of the value activities identified in the traditional value chain may be utilized in order to meet experiential aims. For example: In inbound logistics, the way a potential visitor would access and experience a museum's archives could be simplified and enhanced; in operations, the connectedness of the project and production management through to human resources for purposeful selection and training of staff could bring an experiential theme to life; in outbound logistics, museum interpretation may connect with visitor's values; in marketing and sales, the uniqueness of the museum product may be communicated; and in services, visitor services can provide opportunities for guest interaction with the product and staff.

From simply making sure guests are provided with the various types of encounters and sensations for fuller experiences to taking on the theatre model of staging themed experiences proposed by Pine and Gilmore (1999), there are numerous options at the organizations disposal. The theatre model is actually not such an outrageous idea, Grove and Fisk proposed creation of customer experiential value through the Service as a Drama concept back in 1983. The difference is the original was service based and did not address the complexity of experience and the process of consumer-product interaction to the depths that are apparent in more recent theories. Keeping the Experience Engagement Process in mind, one of the most straightforward methods is to create experience objectives out of the previous identification of points of uniqueness, weaknesses, and opportunities, and implement a choice of the suggested or organization innovated means of meeting these objectives. As each product and organization is unique, there will undoubtedly be some innovation necessary in the process. It is also apparent that consistency or flow of the consumer experience is one of the higher concerns of the experiential method and therefore it is suggested that the experiential needs to be met derive from unique factors of the organization, part of the identification process, and that the creation and enhancement process should fully integrate needs into the organisational culture, structure, and systems (Longinotti-Buitoni, 1999; Nijis, 2003). An additional uniqueness is that where reduction of consumer experiential sacrifice is seen as one of the means to differentiation in competitive advantage, the experiential view sees this reduction as necessary to produce value. Mass Customization presented by porter or the Experience Engagement Process are two

of the innovative means towards reduction of consumer sacrifice which simultaneously create personal value experiences.

Communicating Points of Uniqueness

In effective differentiation, perception may be just as important as reality (Porter, 2004). In the competitive methods of differentiation, purchase criteria are divided into the characteristics of the product termed use criteria and signals that relate value termed signalling criteria. Likewise, approaches towards experience management break up management of the consumer journey into two sets of cues; functional and sensory emotional (Berry and Haeckel, 2002). It is often the case that there is a failure to comprehend needs that may be met or the lowering of personal costs provided by a product as consumers may glance at single factors, misinterpret the product, or lack knowledge about the product. Therefore, the connection between signalling criteria and use criteria is important in both traditional competitive methods and the experiential method. For instance, an important signalling criteria in an experiential method is the provision of memorabilia, a physical product. This provision signals to the visitor and those they come in contact with that the experience is of value and worthy of remembrance.

Use criteria are not limited to the physical product; therefore organizations should not place sole focus on the physical product. This tendency is seen not only in commodities but, in efforts to materialize an immaterial product rather than capitalizing on the immateriality. Take the museum for example: Often an exhibit's sole prestige is based on the facts; who produced it, what era it represents, the technique that is used, etc., which to many potential visitors, is not high enough on their personal value chain to invoke their attendance. In contrast, intrinsic experiential needs met by use criteria are able to create strong signifiers. The Queens Gallery's 19th March to 31st October exhibition, 'Victoria & Albert: Art & love', is a brilliant example of how an institution may expand the perception of the product to hit on multiple points of value. The collection pieces are presented not just as paintings of Victoria and Albert, but as a documentary of love through the medium of art.

In the experiential approach presented by Pine and Gilmore (1999), the idea of value signals are further transitioned to cues which create positive associations, compliment the product and theme, and lend to harmony, and cues which disrupt the experience of the product or give negative associations. In support, a study by Kollmann, (2007) on “broken” museum exhibits is representative of the influential role of seemingly minute negative cues. For example: 10% of the exhibits identified by visitors as “broken” were functional but had an element of design which hindered their experience. Once the impact of these cues are recognized, they are often not complicated to reduce through addressing value activities within the value chain such as maintenance and design. The number of influential factors in the consumer experience necessitates the integration of consumer needs into a strong organizational culture which supports quality guest experiences for long term success rather than focusing on quantifiable guest and finance data that produces short-term numbers and profit (Ellis & Rossman, 2008; Nijis, 2003).

Now that various aspects of the experience economy and relationship between competitive advantage have been explored, the questions of our first objective which help clarify this relationship may be addressed. The major theories surrounding the experience economy pertain to providing value experiences through engagement of the consumer on multiple levels of the consumer’s personal value chain and have a foundation of the consumer experience and interaction with the products; not industry based competitive methods which are organization-oriented. Though they do not derive from competitive advantage, they are recognized and utilized as methods of competitive advantage by means of differentiation. As such, the production of experience as a means to increasing value appears not to conflict, but resonate with ideas concerning frameworks for organizational evaluation and value production. If presented in a competitive advantage point of view the experience economy may be seen as an inversion of traditional methods to extend beyond the foundations in order to address key areas of consumer value. In conclusion, the experiential view is able to stand alone as a competitive method and if standard competitive advantage processes are utilized to meet shared goals they do so but, in a manner which circulates around the consumer’s experience engagement process.

Methodology:

The purpose of this research is to advance understanding of the role the experience economy plays in a product's value and competitive advantage. There is the additional aim of acquiring knowledge of how to utilize experience to increase value and therefore competitiveness in an immaterial product such as that provided by museums. Ultimately, from the exploration of product differentiation through experience will emerge creative and effective ways of designing stimulus material for the visual and creative arts without compromising the aims of the organization.

The design of this research follows a multiple method approach. Both qualitative and quantitative data collection techniques in a multi-method qualitative study are used to address the questions in this exploration. The findings associated with the qualitative approach are highly appropriate for a detailed study of the phenomenon of the experience economy as Fisher (2000) identified that experience is an aid and possibly an essential component of the visitor's relation to, understanding of, and motivation by the collection.

The questions are derived largely from Pine & Gilmore (1999) and LaSalle & Britton's (2002) suggested components for the enhancement of experience. Though the subject matter is complex, experience is highly subjective and therefore, it is of greater validity to forgo the tempting researchers conducted observational method of data collection in favour of a survey. The answers not only give insight into the consumer experience of the museum product, they highlight areas of strengths and weaknesses in the museum's fulfilment of different aspects of experiential need. From this practice we receive a view of what is actually done rather than said to be done, aiding in validity of the data-gathering process (Davies, 2007).

The interviews with management of the organizations studied follow up the survey to provide deeper analysis and obtain information concerning the organization that cannot be accessed otherwise. The semi-structured Interviews create flexibility which allows for elaboration on issues of greater significance or unaware of by the interviewer.

Findings:

Considering the application of the experience realm concept to the house museum; Figure 1.0 displays that the majority of visitors consider education, atmosphere, and an escape from the ordinary an important part of the memorable museum product yet there is little desire for entertainment. These three are associated with high levels of immersion, absorption, and active participation. From this we understand that there cannot be general application of the entirety of this concept to every industry and that the majority of individuals who chose to visit Hopetoun rather than the simultaneous Fringe Festival shows in the city centre were interested in deeper aspects of experience than entertainment which is significantly passive. Figures 2.0-6.0, indicate the Hopetoun house experience is strong educationally and in certain esthetical qualities and weaker in the escapist experience and entertainment. Figure 9.0 illustrates the strong levels of guest opportunity for interaction which supports Pine and Gilmore's association of active participation and absorption with education which 84% rated above average. Aesthetically, Hopetoun is extremely inviting and comfort is good, but with higher levels of uncertainty and disagreement there is still some room for improvement to comfort. There is a weakness in strength of theme however, the majority of respondents felt there was harmony between the collections, service, and theme for those that perceived one (see figure 5.0).

Figure 7.0 represents levels of sensory engagement which aid in immersion and absorption. Hopetoun visitors perceive engagement of sight as high, hearing secondary, and lower levels of taste, touch, and smell. Positively, other than the usual talking among individuals in nearby group tours and perception of some modern elements, there was little sensory disruption. This is significant as there was a classical quartet on the first day and bagpipe players on both days as part of wedding events. These were not perceived as disruptions and may have even contributed positively to the higher levels of engagement of guest hearing and sight. Considering the ideal country house described by visitors in Table 1.0, high levels of certain stimulation such as sound may be a disruption or negative cue to the peace and quiet perception however, if deemed appropriate to higher ideals such as opulence, magnificence, or historical, there is no detracting. Therefore, there is significant desire for two out of three of the experience realms yet, the means of their fulfilment must be sensitive to the context.

Figure 1.0 The Four Experience Realms: Visitor perceptions of their importance in creating the memorable museum experience.

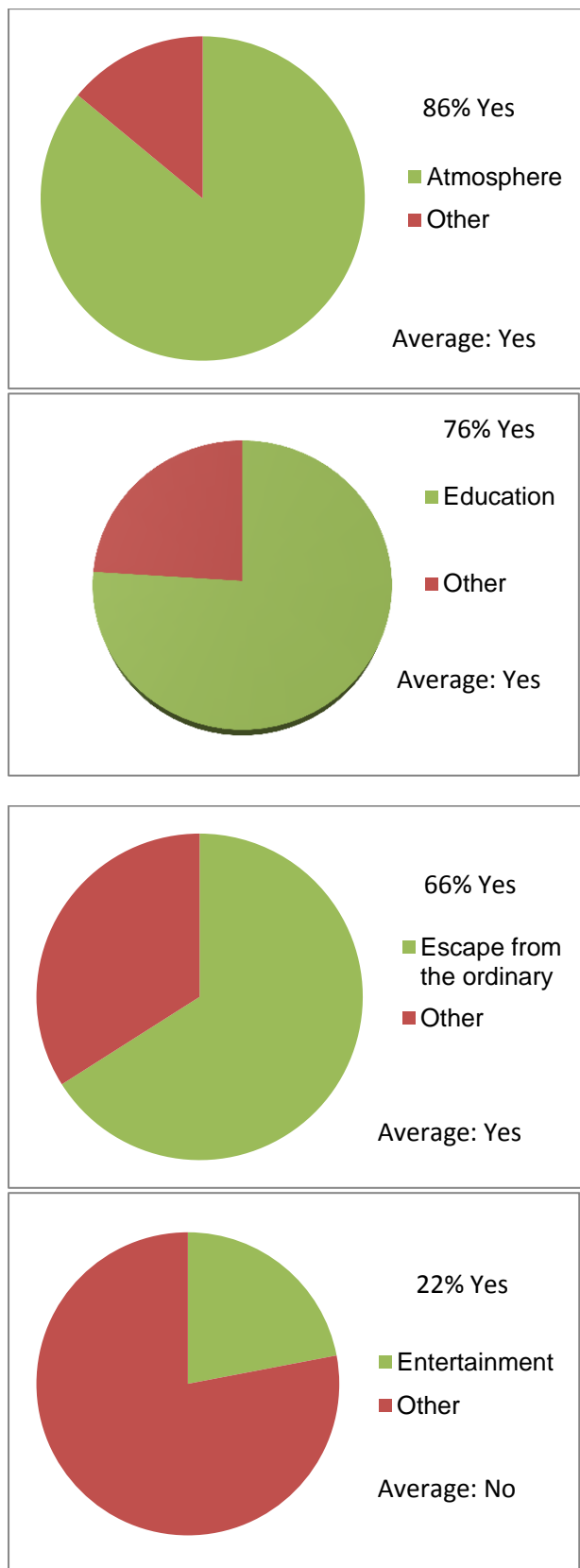


Figure 2.0

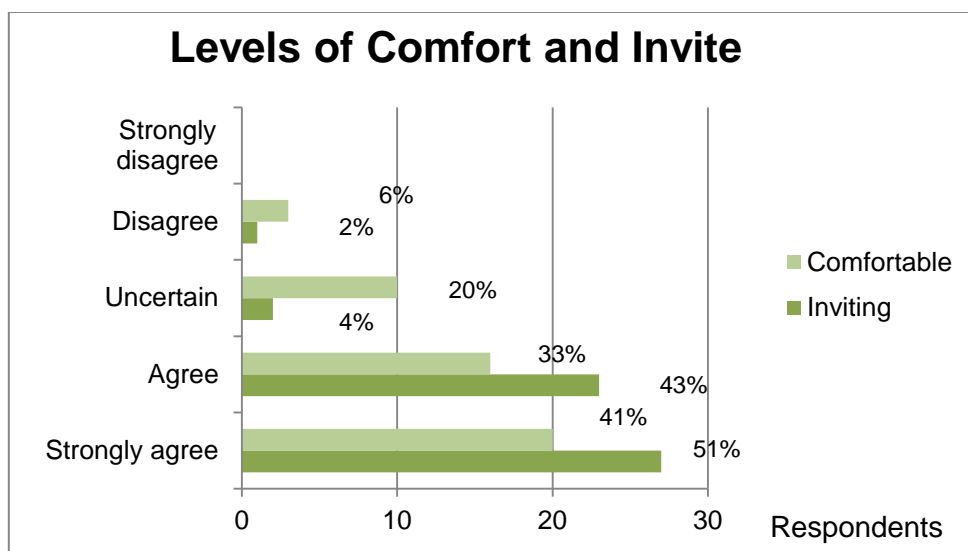


Figure 3.0

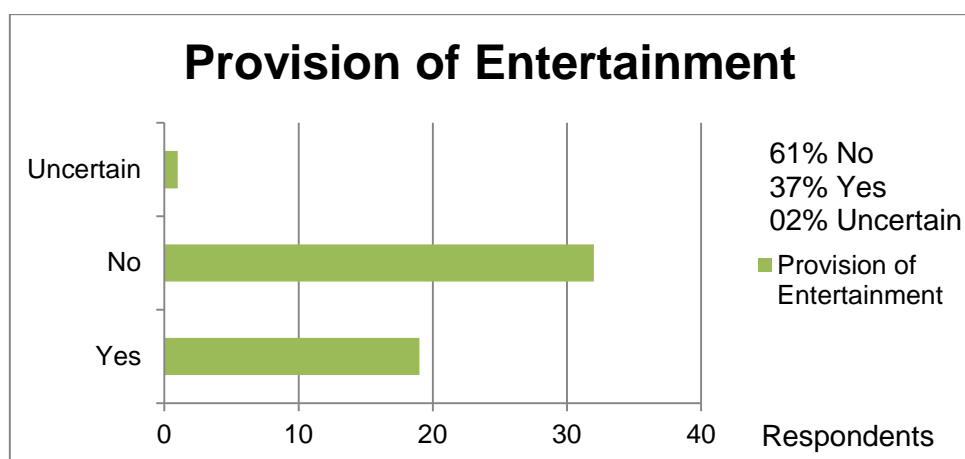


Figure 4.0

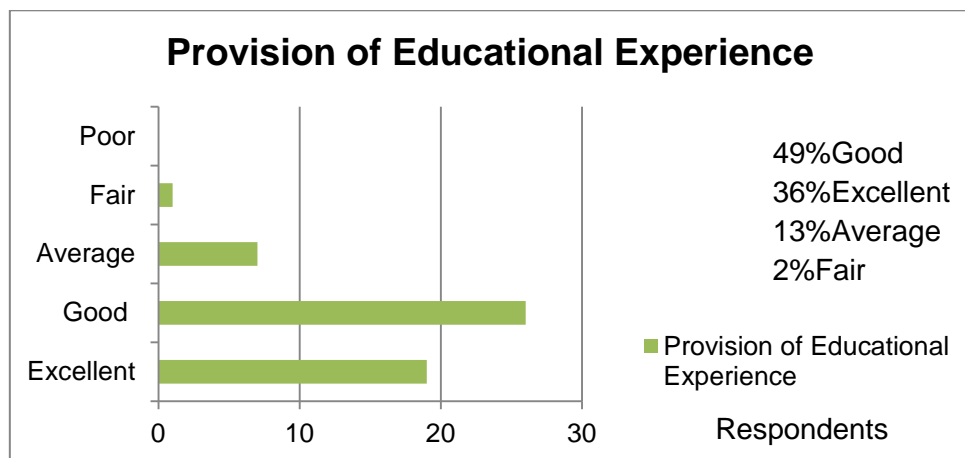


Figure 5.0

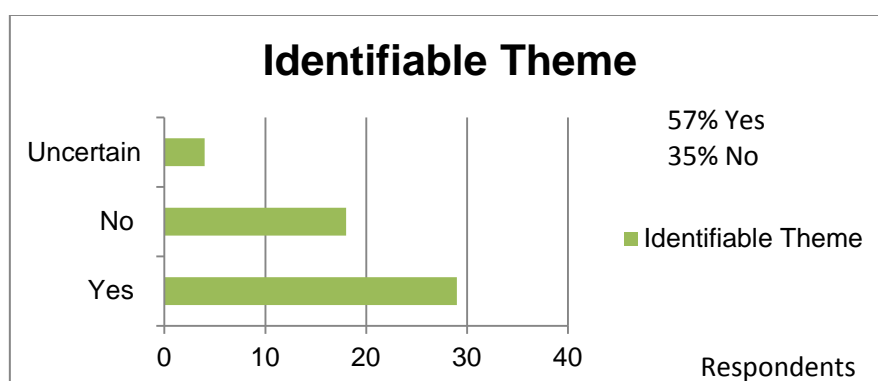


Figure 6.0

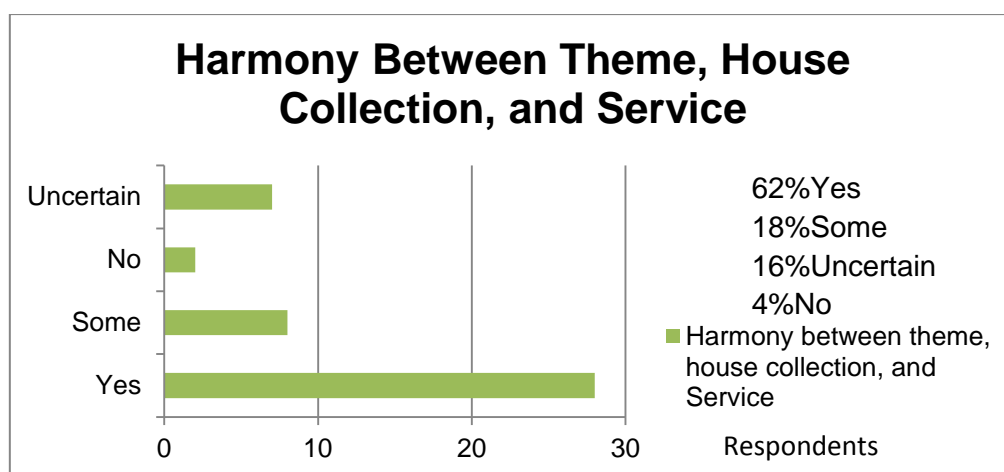


Figure 7.0

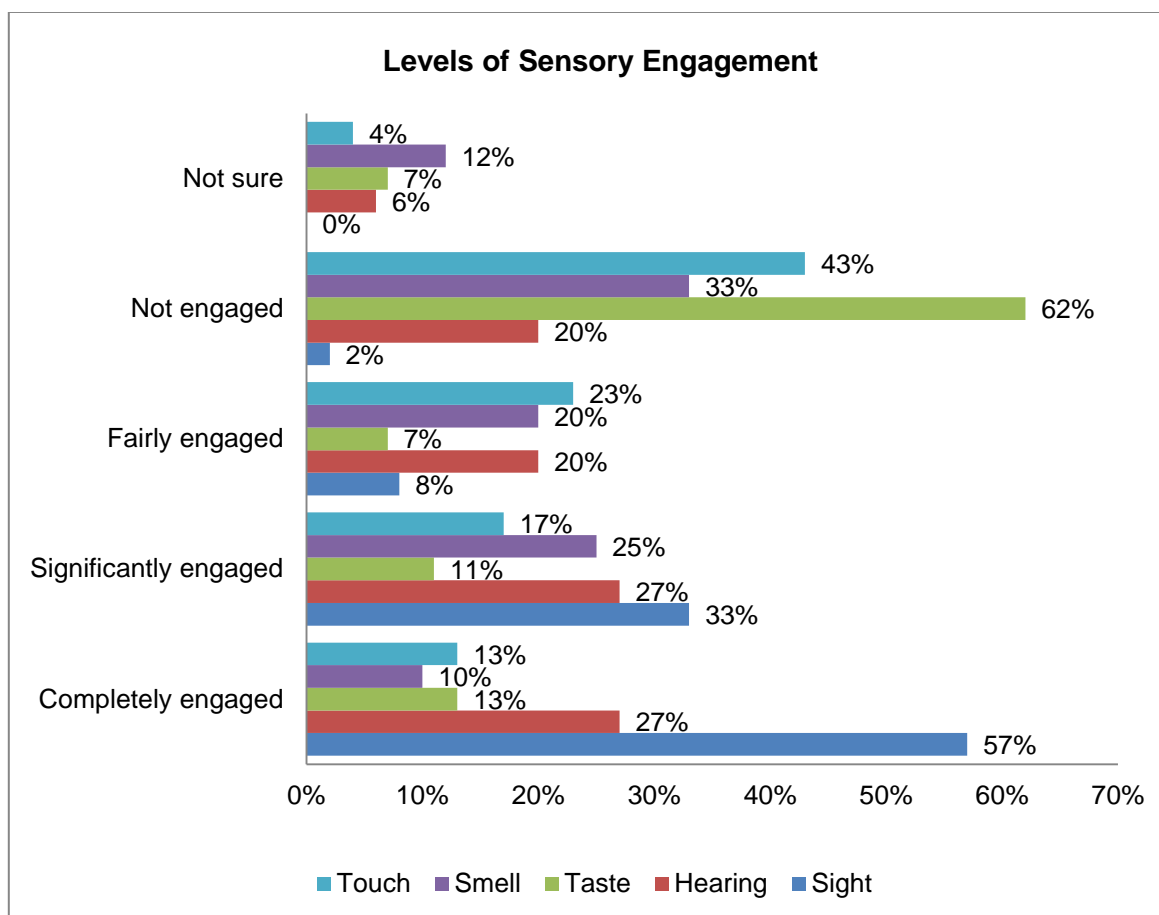


Figure 8.0

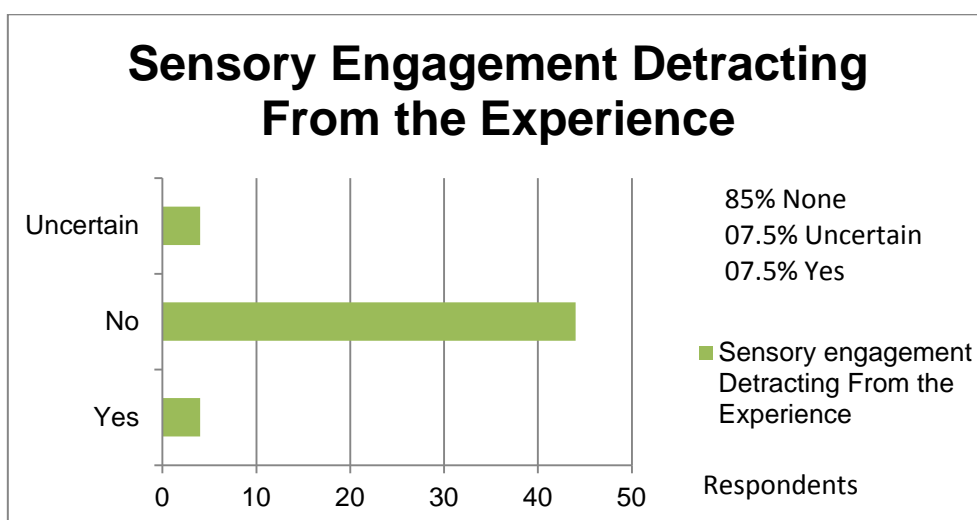
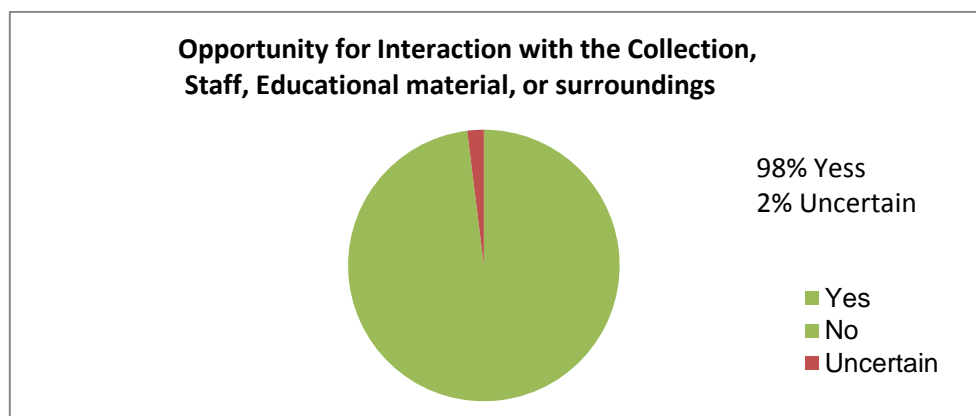
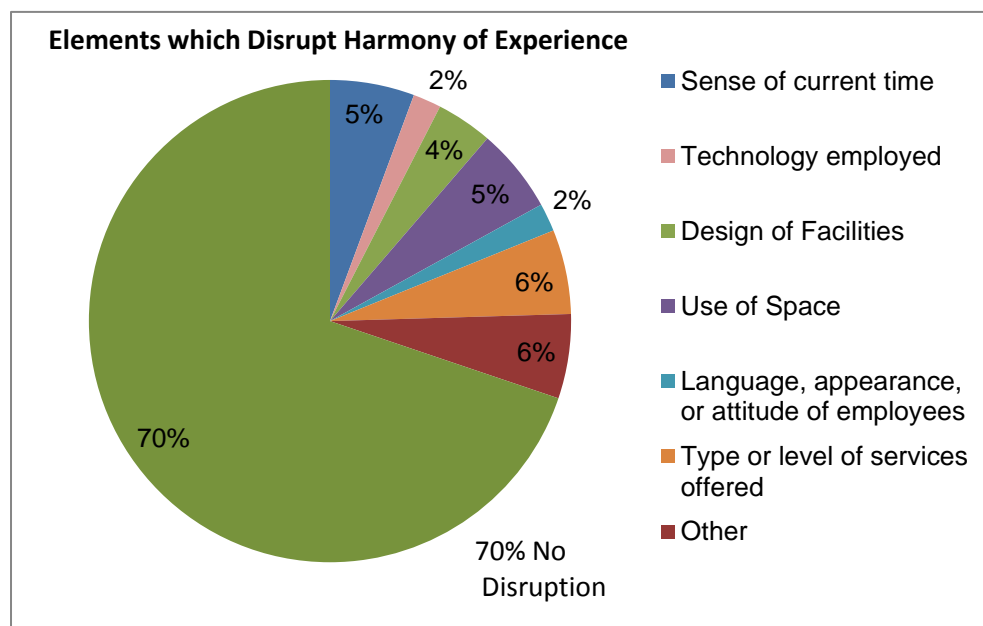


Figure 9.0

Positive and Negative Cues

The harmony inherent in the collections, theme, and services should extend to the consumer experience. Thirty percent of respondents felt there were factors which disrupted the complete harmony of their visitor experience (see Figure 10.0). This revelation gives significant basis for prescribing the reduction of negative cues and enhancement of positive cues suggested by experiential methods. The diversity of the reasons for this disruption supports the theory that the visitor experience is multifaceted and details which may seem minute have a significant impact. As such, a detailed look into the causes of possible disruptions in each area will need to take place. For example: There had been a wedding on both days the survey was taking place and while some guests thought the weddings exciting, others mentioned it as an infringement on their experience. Reduction of such infringement may include steps like refraining from allowing the wedding party to occupy the rooms of the house for photo sessions during open visitor hours or online notification to the visitors the day and hours a certain facility such as the Stables Tearoom will be utilized by an event so they can plan their visit accordingly.

Figure 10.0**Table 1.0 Visitor Perceptions of a Country House**

Perceptions of a Country House	Similar Responses	Percent of Category	Perception Percent
<i>Physical Qualities</i>			41%
Large Scale/Space	9	20%	
Landscape/Gardens	6	13%	
Beautiful/Handsome	5	11%	
Old/Faded	5	11%	
Art/Collections	4	9%	
Elegant	3	7%	
Nature/Green	3	7%	
<i>Associations</i>			24%
History	9	33%	
Wealth	6	22%	
Family	4	15%	
Luxury/Privilege	3	11%	
<i>Descriptions</i>			22%
Grand/Magnificent	16	64%	
Opulent/Extravagant	3	12%	
Interesting	2	8%	
Comfortable	2	8%	
Quiet	2	8%	
<i>Emotions/Feelings</i>			13%
Wonder/Amazement	4	29%	
Atmosphere/Ambiance	4	29%	
Peace/Tranquility	3	21%	

The Experience Engagement Process

For each aspect which represents a positive component of a step in an experience engagement process, the medium is guest agreement to Hopetoun's possession of these (see figure 11.0). This outcome, along with overall consumer experiential satisfaction seen in figure 12.0, shows an overall positive perception of Hopetoun. However, there are still areas of opportunity as the highest percentage of visitor responses for each step peaked at the second highest rating. Appeal of Hopetoun received the highest rating followed by enjoyment of the visit. The lowest levels of agreement and highest levels of disagreement are accessibility. Commentary received included the lack of directional signs on smaller streets, difficulty navigating the route to Hopetoun, and desire for better provisions for those which are mobility challenged. There is a remoteness of public transportation, an absence of the Hopetoun from GPS identified visitor attractions, and inability of some GPS to locate the Hopetoun house. The map provided by Hopetoun house is lacking in detail and Maps provided elsewhere mislead the visitor down roads which are closed to the public. Extension of the consumer engagement with the process in terms of a place they would like to visit again obtained the highest level of uncertainty, 22%.

Figure 11.0

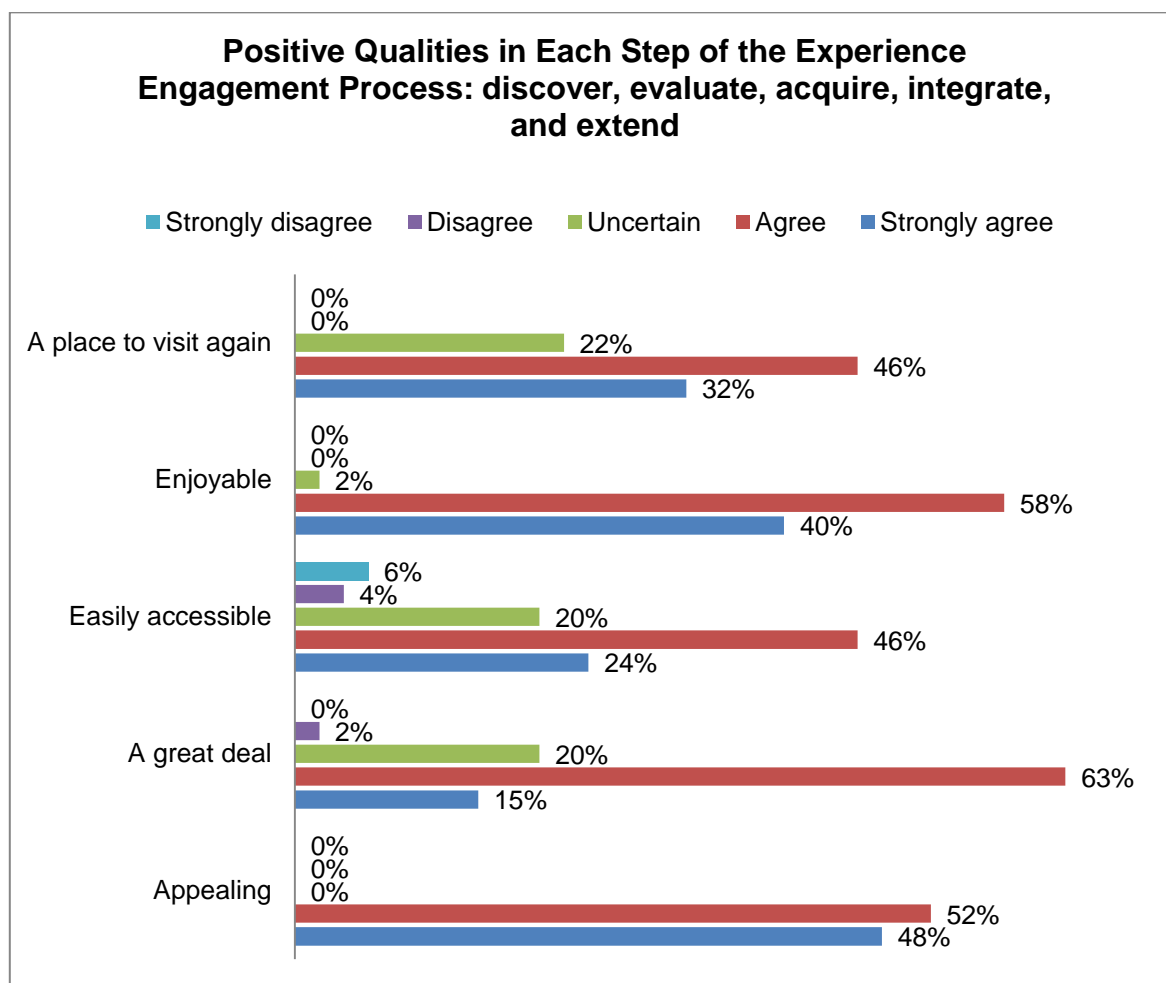
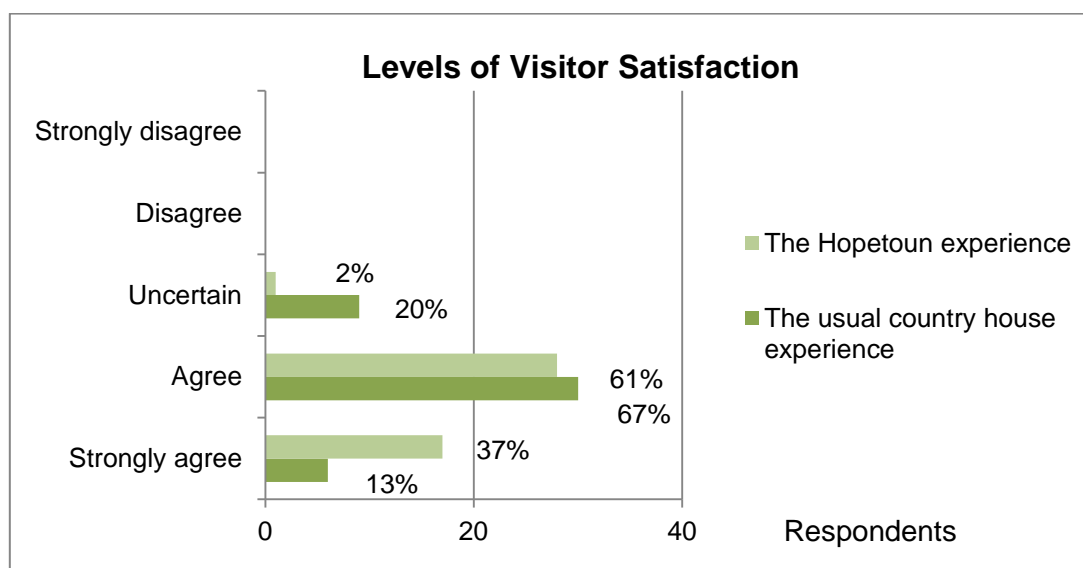


Figure 12.0



Sources of Uniqueness

Positively, figure 13.0 represents an overwhelming majority of 96% of visitors, after their visit to the house, perceived Hopetoun as possessing some unique if not very unique qualities. Surprisingly, 61% marked that a perceived uniqueness was not part of their decision to visit (see figure 14.0). Communication of points of uniqueness is an aim of competitive experiential methods and with this gap it is apparent that there exist further unique aspects of the Hopetoun house which remain to be communicated. When respondents took the time to write what unique aspect motivated their visit, these were the answers: The architects, a private rather than National Trust property, bringing the visitor closer to their Queensferry roots, Forth Bridge view and roof experience, location for an episode on the Antiques Road Show television series, on the British Heritage Pass, and identification as a sight to see before leaving Edinburgh after a period of residency. With the exception of the view from the roof and the specific architects, these descriptions are lacking in unique qualities possessed by the Hopetoun House & experience of it. Rather than holding a spot at the end of the list of Edinburgh experiences as a site to see before leaving, a competitive position would place the destination as a priority site to see when arriving in Edinburgh.

Figure 13.0

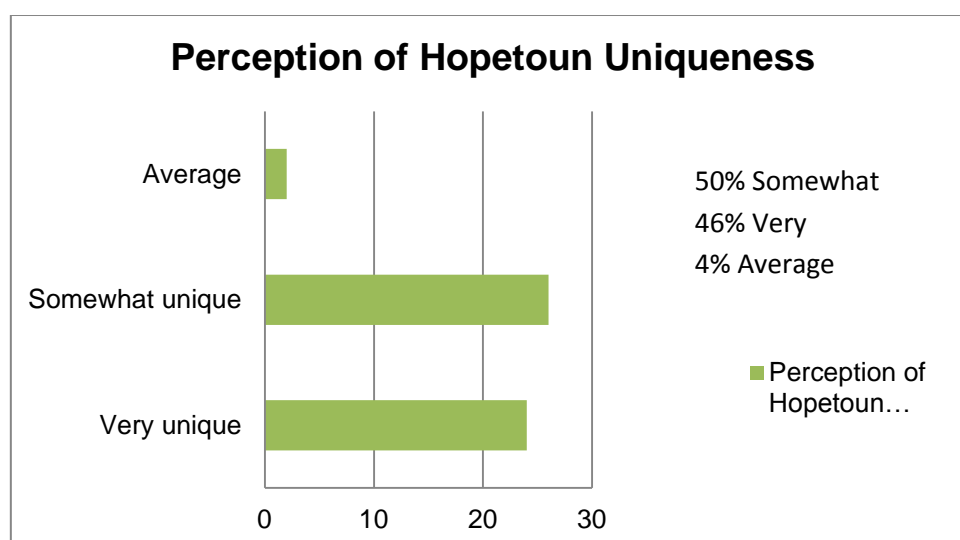
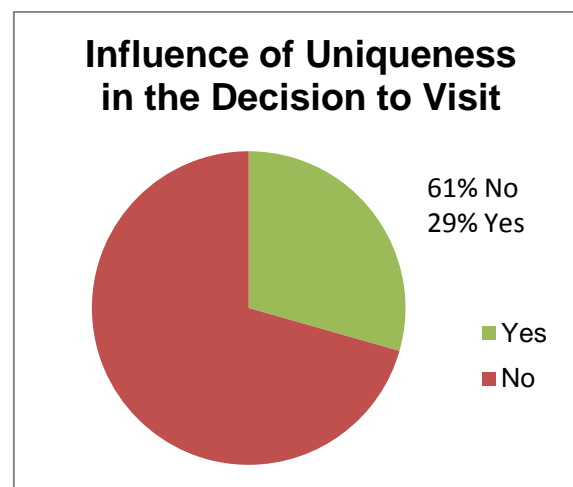


Figure 14.0

Looking at the relative advantages of Hopetoun to the Hearst Castle House and the results of the survey, Hopetoun can do more to improve the harmony of the visitor experience, effectively communicate uniqueness, and communicate ways in which their product reduces visitor sacrifice for greater value. Comfort, strength of theme, and further engagement of senses are additional areas for improvement. A comment was received from one respondent regarding disruption to their visitor experience: "No, Neither disrupted nor enhanced, missed opportunity". Figure 12.0 displays that, not including those who had not been to another country house and were uncertain of their experiential satisfaction, the rate of strongly satisfied visitors for Hopetoun House is higher, 37%, than those of the usual country house, 17%. Achieving this positivity with low levels of deliberate enhancement and visitor perception of further opportunity indicate an underachieved potential for the Hopetown house to create greater competitive advantage through experiences. The typical country house product is lacking in the highest level of satisfaction which indicates demand for greater experiences in these destinations.

Hopetoun has strengths in the provision of educational experience, welcome, and harmony within the property and appears to meet the majority of visitor associations and physical ideals which contribute towards the noted general satisfaction of visitors. From Table 1.0, it is unknown if the Hopetoun House experience had any

impact on visitor perceptions of a country house, but it remains that even after the visit, only 13% of respondents attributed any emotion to a country house experience. Four respondents thought of atmosphere or ambience in connection to their perception even though, as figure 1.0 illustrates, a majority of visitors feel that it would contribute to a memorable experience. There is great opportunity through this provision.

Response by the Hopetoun House Manager

Management of Hopetoun was clear that they were not unaware of other routes towards creating visitor experience, but it was a very conscious decision to not go down these routes due to what they felt was appropriate to nature of the product and aims of the organization. Consideration of the site as a home and conservation of the home are first objectives followed by public access and educational aims, with business as a tourist attraction as a necessity. The other two businesses, hospitality and closely managed, time tabled events, produce the majority of funds necessary and are also deemed to take less toll on the home while easier to assess visitor impact and staffing requirements. Consideration of visitor experience exists, but there is little likelihood of movement towards visitor experience orientation, (VEO). These insights also reveal that organizations which preside over cultural attractions do not necessarily define higher visitor numbers, related profits, and competitiveness as a tourist attraction as success; in some cases there may be little motivation towards a VEO.

Hopetoun agreed that such funds enabling the restoration of an area on the second floor closed due to structural unsoundness to expand the already limited space open to visitors would be a benefit, but remains adamant about not increasing visitor numbers.

Efforts to fulfil the second objective through insight from the interview and results of the survey produce an indication, but are not decisive, as to whether the methods set forth by Pine and Gilmore (1999), for creating a heightened experience have a live relationship with value and competitiveness due to revelation of Hopetoun's lack of desire for competitiveness as a tourist site, intended reduced number of visitors, and therefore related profits of the House Museum surveyed in this case study. The third objective of discerning whether these methods are appropriate to this product is

aided by Hopetoun House management and may give insight into the perceived appropriateness of the methods to other forms of cultural tourism. It was not found that these methods themselves threaten the integrity of the collection or home but that the means of how they are carried out have potential to contradict the aims of the organization and nature of the product. For example: period costumed guides would not align with the progression of time from past to present of the residence and creation of new structures for visitor services would mar the authenticity of the site which the trust strives for. Management believed that the product is naturally static and the feasibility of implementing experiential objectives is limited.

Two additional matters which have arisen are the continued negative perception some museums tend to have on practices associated with business, as such non-profit organizations venture into business reluctantly as a necessity, resulting in the initial impression of incompatibility of these methods with higher aims of the organization. For example: The suggested provision of a multifaceted visitor product was linked to the notion of running the house as an entertainment centre and 'manufacturing'. Entertainment is only one of the realms of experience and as the survey results indicate, the least significant element in creating a value experience in the museum product. One consideration is that in a historical site's drive for authenticity, the term 'create' is seen as a threat to this common aim.

Hopetoun Management has created, and is in the process of further developing, unique visitor experiences in line with the tenants of creating deeper experiences for competitive advantage presented by Pine and Gilmore (1999) without consideration of such developments as competitive advantage or strong efforts to communicate these to potential visitors.

Hopetoun familial progression in a home largely designed and furnished under one concept is unique to other structures which faced constant modification throughout time. Contributing to high levels of perceived harmony between the home, theme, and collection, the trust does not bring in any outside objects and is in the process of removing typical "museum" impact regulation items. In efforts to present the home as it is, there is the intended experience of the visitor to be that of an actual guest in the home like Hearst Castle, but uniquely a willingness to provide deeper experiences made possible by smaller visitor numbers. Late edition pieces are being removed in

favour of original comfortable furniture where guests can sit around the fire and read archive material. In all these efforts there is conscious consideration of comfort, immersion, interaction, education, and engagement of the senses. There are cues that give positive impressions towards maintaining the original familial country home theme desired by the trust such as authenticity and the additional encouragement of natural familial script, appearance and inviting attitude of guides. Though management does not want these efforts to be seen as manufacturing, these are perfect examples of great multipurpose experiential product characteristics which are utterly unique to the industry.

Conclusions

From the review of literature it is understood that experience does have a value and this value is highly subjective. Results of the survey illustrate that subjectivity extends to levels of value placed on various components of experience of specific products such as higher importance of aesthetic factors and lower desire for entertainment in the museum product. The accumulation of value through multiple levels of engagement is given further support by the indication that the concepts such as the experience engagement process which were formed according to related research have a relationship with value. In this support, the concept and management of negative and positive cues is affirmed to be essential as multiple disruptions by factors which deemed to affect experience such as use of space were reflected in the reduction of harmony of visitor experience. Accessibility was identified by LaSalle and Britton (2003) to be the least considered component of the EEP by the organizations, yet important point of value that will alter customer's decisions. This notion was not contradicted by the survey which revealed the lowest experiential scores to accessibility and the largest levels of uncertainty to returning.

Insight into the nature of historic sites such as the Hopetoun House reveal a great variation from priorities of visitor experiences to aims which may have little to do with competitiveness, motivation towards creation of greater visitor experiences, or increasing visitor numbers. However, for those that are interested in these, be it a genuine desire for accessibility and funding or necessity for better business, these methods should not be seen as a direct threat to authenticity and integrity. Agreeably with the management of Hopetoun, there is a fine line and you have to

work with what you have so as not to destroy the very thing visitors come to see. However, there are drastic measures such as reorganization of the organization's value chain into a mode that supports a theatre like production, or there are more tailored and minimal approaches such as simply considering the process through which the consumer will engage with your product. The flexibility through choice and means of implementation of methods available for adaptation of the experiential view to the nature of the product should not be overlooked.

Examination of competitive methods reveals that experience is a means of creating competitive advantage through differentiation. Many components of Pine and Gilmore (1999) and LaSalle and Britton's (2003) tenants find significant support in the case study of the industry leader, Hearst Castle, which is found to possess many of the suggested practices and qualities. However, due to the highly contextual element of experiential production and the great range in the nature of these cultural organizations highlighted by the interviews, there is more of an indication towards effectiveness of a full use of experiential conceptual and practical resources available to an organization through means which fit their aims, market, and are inspired by the nature of the product, than superiority of a single set of proposed guidelines. With flexibility, a sustainable competitive method of utilizing an organization's unique value chain, mass customization which is able to tackle the static nature of a product, widely recognized consumer demand for greater experiences and demonstrated room for improvement in experience of the house museum product, there is more indication of benefit than risk in pursuing these methods for those organizations wishing to improve visitor experience, numbers of visitors, related profits, and ultimately maintain a competitive position in the market.

Pine and Gilmore (1999) prospect a further step in the evolution of value which will extend beyond experiences, and this is the provision of transformations. To touch on the aspirations toward transformations; as the museums are not a physical or psychological service, there are limits to the levels of transformation that may be claimed and it is unlikely that these organizations will be designated as transformation businesses. This does not rule out various forms of transformation which museums may aspire to. An alternative perspective of a culture, spurring of a new appreciation for literature, instilling a fascination with science, fostering

understanding of an era, helping individuals identify with heroes or instil a sense of pride, provision of artistic inspiration, etc... These are not beyond the grasp of the museum.

This case study of a historic home may seem to benefit on a minute scale however, the issue at hand is one which not only reaches heritage sites but impacts cultural tourism on a whole and therefore of importance to the tourism industry which is the backbone of many regional economies. Sundbo's (2008) Taxonomy of Experience Production and Innovation Activities identify organizations like museums as composing the primary experience sector. Commoditization of services recognized by Morgan, Elbe, & Curiel, (2009) among other consumer culture studies means that services are ever more following the trend of experience production to maintain competitive advantage. If what museums and heritage sites have to offer is experience, and visitors perceive that that experience is lacking, how will these place-bound organizations stand against the easier and more popular choice of the pleasure providing service industry?

As Csikszentmihalyi (2003) has discovered, deeper enjoyable experiences are more fulfilling compared to pleasurable ones associated with materialism. These experiences are memorable and attend to higher needs, which from key authors like Maslow, we understand are naturally occurring in our developing society. Furthermore as these needs are higher, they are also more varied and personal. Traditional museums and historic sites are place bound and places, as related by Lorentzen (2008), are social and atmospheric areas which will collect diverse groups of individuals of often conflicting interests. The methods of effective experience production such as mass-customization are able to tackle the difficulties brought on by characteristics of the cultural product whilst placing these organizations into the contemporary leisure environment with advantage. As a final response to efforts towards creating a sharper perspective of the effective Experience Economy production and competitive advantage in cultural sites, it may even be suggested, that there is little else so appropriate.

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