

Profiling visitors to contemporary art museums

Home > Insights into arts and culture > Consumer behaviour in arts and culture

This research was conducted by **Laurie Hanquinet** at the **University of York**

Summary

Socio-economic variables (class, education and income etc.) are often seen as the key determinants of attendance at art museums. This article goes beyond this simplistic approach by exploring the 'cultural profiles' of museum visitors (a set of cultural preferences relating to music, reading and art; and creative and leisure preferences and activities). The key findings are that the museums studied had a far more diverse range of audiences than a focus on socio-economic factors alone would indicate. Producing a typology of visitors could help to inform museum audience engagement practices.

The cultural profiles were produced via a survey of museum visitors

The data was collected through the analysis of a survey carried out in six museums of modern and contemporary art in Belgium, with a total of 1900 respondents. The analysis attempted to understand the relations between different tastes and activities, and how the museum visit fitted into this overall 'cultural profile'. The author argues that a museum visit can't be understood outside of the wider pattern of tastes and activities in which individuals participate.

Six cultural clusters were identified

Despite being a fairly homogenous population (older, with a higher than average education level), six different clusters of visitors were identified: classically cultured visitors (who are familiar with high culture and arts), passive cultured visitors (who are similar but visit less often), cultural

progressists (who are creative and participate frequently in a range of different 'high' and 'low brow' cultural activities), hedonists (whose visits are related to socialising with friends/family), distants (who visit only occasionally), and art lovers, who visit regularly. Museum professionals need to respond to this diversity by engaging in a wider range of activities and initiatives in order to appeal to this wider range of audiences.

This summary was written by **Ruth Craggs, King's Knowledge Exchange Associate**

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